

We saw last time that Mark 13 speaks of the breakdown of the old order –
the destruction of the Mosaic age.

The temple will be destroyed as a picture of the ending of this age,
and the Son of Man will come in glory to the Father.

Jesus has just told his disciples to “stay awake” –
to be diligent and focused on the coming kingdom.

And with the destruction of the Mosaic age – symbolized in the destruction of the temple –
it is not surprising at all to see Jesus institute a sacrament for the new covenant.

These first two episodes of Mark 14 occur in the context of meals.
And you need to understand the meals of Mark 14
in the context of a whole string of meals in Mark’s gospel.

Table fellowship was an important part of daily life in Jesus’ world.
The Lord’s Supper comes to us in the context of the table meal –
not just the Passover.
To eat with someone was a sign of acceptance, friendship, and honor.

In Mark 2:15-17 we first saw Jesus reclining at table.
With whom did he sit?
With whom did he eat?
With tax collectors and sinners.

And when Jesus heard of the inquiries of the Pharisees, he replied:
“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.
I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

If this is the way that Jesus treated his table when he was on earth,
surely we should have that same attitude toward his table
now that he sits enthroned in the heavens!

In Mark 7:1-2 the Pharisees and scribes observe the failure of Jesus’ disciples
to honor the handwashing traditions of the elders.
Indeed, chapters 6-8 are all about food
as they highlight the feedings of the 5,000 and the 4,000.

While many people want to avoid connecting the feedings with the supper,
Mark does not encourage such a division.

There is a virtually identity of action:
Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives the bread (6:41; 8:6).

Obviously there are differences.
Jesus is not establishing a sacrament when he multiplies the loaves!
But just as Jesus fed the multitudes in the wilderness (like Moses),

so now Jesus is preparing to lead a new Exodus –
and so establishes a new Passover.

It is only here at the Last Supper that the feeding of the multitudes finally makes sense.
This is what the new Exodus – the return from Exile – is all about.

But before we get to *that* meal, we must first stop at the house of Simon the leper
for one final meal with the outcasts!

1. “She Has Done a Beautiful Thing to Me” (14:1-11)

*14:1 It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him,
2 for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.”*

Josephus claims that 3 million Jews came to Jerusalem yearly for the Passover.
One rabbinic account claimed that 1.2 million lambs were slaughtered
(suggesting 12 million participants)
But based on the space available for slaughtering lambs,
a more realistic number is about 180,000.
Jerusalem had a population of around 30,000,
so we are talking about a massive influx of people.

Jesus had arrived with a tumultuous procession and there was considerable danger of rioting.
And so the chief priests and scribes are looking for someone like Judas.

*3 And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table,
a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly,
and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.*

This is an extravagant show of love and devotion.
Myrrh is the general term for perfume or ointment.
Nard was imported from India – and was incredibly expensive –
but this is not just nard, it is “pure” nard –
the adjective clearly heightening the value.
And the value is spelled out very clearly in verse 5.
It is worth a year’s wages -- \$40-50,000 in today’s money.

And not only that, but she breaks the flask.
This was not necessary for getting it out.
The reason why she does it is because this makes the flask unusable.
It guarantees that the whole flask will be used on Jesus.

But then she pours it out over his head.
This is not just an anointing –
this is a drenching!

*4 There were some who said to themselves indignantly,
“Why was the ointment wasted like that?
5 For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii
and given to the poor.”
And they scolded her.*

We are not told who objected.
(In Matthew it is Jesus’ disciples – in John it is specifically Judas).
Mark leaves it open:
there were some who were indignant over this.

And they cite Jesus own words to make their point.
Jesus had commanded others to sell their goods and give to the poor.

“And they scolded her.”
The word here has the idea of growling or snorting.

Obviously Jesus should be offended by this wastefulness!

*6 But Jesus said, “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her?
She has done a beautiful thing to me.
7 For you always have the poor with you,
and whenever you want, you can do good for them.
But you will not always have me.
8 She has done what she could;
she has anointed my body beforehand for burial.
9 And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world,
what she has done will be told in memory of her.”*

Too often we think that love for Christ must be expressed in “doing stuff” for him.
The way that we love God is by loving others.
We demonstrate our faith and love in service.

Jesus blows this to smithereens.
This woman takes an expensive ointment and “wastes it” on Jesus.

“An unnamed woman is held up as a model of true devotion
which even Jesus’ closest disciples are not able yet to appreciate.
As so often in Mark, the first prove to be last and the last first,
when it comes to the values of the kingdom of God.” (France, 547-548)

It all has to do with understanding the occasion.
You may not neglect the poor – that is not an option for the disciple of Jesus –
you can always help the poor!

But you will not always have me.

I suppose that for us, this is irrelevant.
Jesus is now at the right hand of the Father,
and so we should always help the poor – since we don't have Jesus – right?

Whoa!
Helping the poor is not optional –
but that does not mean that everything in life must be oriented around helping the poor.

Rather, everything in life must be oriented around Jesus.

The point here is not only that he is anointed for burial,
but also that she has understood something that they have missed:
her utter devotion to Jesus – to his person – is beautiful.

“She has done a beautiful thing.”

Why?

Because she loves me more than anything else.
She has done what she could.

Jesus point when he says, “you always have the poor,”
is that you will never be able to end poverty.
And so if you lose sight of who Jesus is
you will become disoriented – you will not understand your purpose.

Your mission in life is not to end poverty.
Your mission in life is to love Jesus – with everything.

(And it is worth pointing out, that you can only *really* help anyone
when you love Jesus with everything!)

And so this will be told in memory of her wherever the gospel is preached.
Jesus already anticipates the message of the good news about *him*.
He knows that the disciples will go forth
and preach the good news of his death and resurrection.
And so he calls them to remember this anonymous woman
and her utter love and devotion to him.

The contrast with verse 10 could not be more striking:
“what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

*10 Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve,
went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them.
11 And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money.
And he sought an opportunity to betray him.*

This anonymous woman will be praised throughout all nations –
(in other gospels we are told that her name was Mary) –

but Judas will be excoriated for all generations as the traitor!

And so they offer him money, because they recognize that they needed someone who would know where Jesus would be at night – when they could arrest Jesus without a fuss.

2. “Until That Day”: The Eschatological Meaning of the Lord’s Supper (14:12-25)

12 And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him,

“Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?”

13 And he sent two of his disciples and said to them,

“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him, 14 and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house,

‘The Teacher says, Where is my guest room,

where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’

15 And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us.”

16 And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

Verses 12-16 highlight the fact that this was a Passover meal.

It is the first day of Unleavened Bread.

It is the day when they sacrificed the Passover lamb.

The disciples ask where they should go to make preparations for the Passover.

And Jesus gives them instructions as to how to find the place.

And they prepared the Passover.

Mark gives us these “little” predictions as a means of showing us that Jesus knows the future – he knows what will happen – and so since Jesus has said three times that he will die and be raised from the dead, we ought to believe that as well!

17 And when it was evening, he came with the twelve.

18 And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said,

“Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”

19 They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another,

“Is it I?”

20 He said to them,

“It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.

21 For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him,

but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!

It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

All through his ministry, Jesus has been eating with tax collectors and sinners.

He came to call them to repentance.

But now Jesus is eating with the man who will betray him.

If it was a stranger, it would not have been so bad.
But this is one of the twelve – one of his closest followers.

Again, we see the contrast between the devotion of the unknown woman
who gave selflessly to show honor and devotion to the person of Jesus;
and the flagrant disregard for Jesus shown by the one who would betray him.

And yet, notice that Jesus has table fellowship with Judas.
It is true that it would have been for Judas if he had never been born –
and yet Jesus allows this apostate to sit at his table
and break bread with him.

But why did our Lord admit Judas to his table?
Because in spite of what Judas *was going to do*,
Jesus judged based on Judas' profession.
He knew Judas' heart,
but when it came to table fellowship,
he operated based on profession.

And in verse 22 we come to that familiar passage:

*22 And as they were eating, he took bread,
and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said,
"Take; this is my body."
23 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.
24 And he said to them,
"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.
25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine
until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

What is Jesus doing here?

When Jesus says, "this is my body...this is my blood of the covenant,"
he is saying that he is the sacrifice.
Jews are quite familiar with the idea of participating in the sacrifice.
They did it regularly.

And here at the Passover, they are used to thinking of the lamb in terms of the sacrifice.
They partake of the lamb and so the death of the lamb covers their death.
The angel of death will "pass over" their house because of the sacrifice.

Jesus claims that he is the sacrifice – he is the Passover – in which they must participate
if they are to escape the angel of death (Ex. 12:12-13).

But Jesus doesn't take only the parts of the Passover meal that were of divine origin.

He does take the bread,
but he doesn't take the lamb.

He takes the cup.
God had said nothing about drinking wine at Passover!

But then again, Jesus is not just taking a Passover meal
and turning it into the Lord's Supper.

He is taking imagery from all the covenant meals of the Old Testament.

Throughout the scriptures the covenant meal mediates the blessings of God.
And the images presented in the Lord's Supper blend together much
that would have been familiar to an audience steeped in the OT scriptures.
The setting of the Passover would have presented the images of the Paschal lamb
and the release from bondage in Egypt, which that sacrifice represented.
The blood of the covenant is a clear reference
to the Old Testament idea of the sacrifice which accompanies covenant-makings,
and would have drawn their attention to Exodus 24,
where Moses uses this phrase.
The phrase "blood of the covenant" is also used in Zechariah 9:11,
two verses after the famous passage regarding the triumphal entry,
in the context of the redemption of Judah and Israel.

And the rabbis had connected Zechariah 9 with Exodus 24 and the exodus from Egypt.
So three biblical themes come together in the Lord's Supper:

- 1) the idea of sacrificial death
- 2) the table fellowship of the covenant meal
- 3) an eschatological perspective that looks forward to the heavenly kingdom

If you think back to Exodus 24 you can see the same thrust there as well:

The covenant ritual of Exodus 24 involved blood sacrifice,
after which Moses read the Book of the Covenant,
and sprinkled the blood on the people, saying:
"This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you
in accordance with all these words."

Then the elders of Israel went up on the mountain
and ate and drank in the presence of the LORD.

Mark's audience would quickly recognize
that the "blood of the covenant" was intimately connected with the sacrificial meal,
both from this passage, as well as from the Passover context.

Eating the sacrificial meal bound the participants to the terms of the covenant
and symbolized the self-maledictory oath:
"If I ever break this covenant may I die even as this animal has died."

The actual eating of the animal "internalized" this oath in a particularly graphic way,
and united the participants with one another in the shared meal.

Jesus is saying that he has come to bring a new Exodus:

- 1) through his sacrificial death he will bring his people out of bondage to sin and death;
- 2) in this covenant meal his disciples are knit together as one people before God;
- 3) and all of this is done in anticipation of the coming feast of the kingdom of God.

By connecting sacrifice and eschatology,
we see how the Lord's Supper both points back to Christ's death
and points forward to his coming in glory.

The Passover pointed the Israelites back to the deliverance from Egypt,
but also forward to the Great Deliverance that was to come.

Jesus now declares that his body and blood are the sacrifice
which will accomplish the Great Deliverance,
but he also focuses their attention on the future meal in the kingdom of God,
when all will be fulfilled.

But we should also reflect on what it means that Christ's blood is poured out for "many."

This language is rooted in Isaiah 52:15
which speaks of the Servant "sprinkling many nations."

But when you look back at the context in Isaiah,
it is not at all clear that Isaiah thinks of this "sprinkling" in salvific terms.

In fact, the rabbis generally took the "many" of Isaiah as the wicked
(whether Jews or Gentiles)
who are silenced by the Servant of the LORD.

Jesus here gives a radically new interpretation:
his blood will *atone* for many.

The blood of the covenant is *poured out* for many.

The Jews were eagerly anticipating the eschatological banquet.

They longed to see the coming of the feast of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Passover liturgy itself helped to create expectation among the people.

Jesus sets out the Lord's Supper as the initial participation in the eschatological feast.

Jesus *is* the eschatological feast,

because his body is real food and his blood is real drink,
and so in one sense the eschatological feast is "already" here – in him;

but at the same time the feast is "not yet" here

because Jesus must himself abstain until the coming of the kingdom.

People sometimes get preoccupied with the question of whether Jesus partook himself.

After all, if "this is my body," could Jesus partake of his own body?

It certainly appears that Jesus partook of that Last Supper.

I would simply point out that when Jesus ordains this feast,

he is setting a pattern for the disciples,
a pattern that will gain its true meaning and power after his resurrection.

The power of the sacraments is the resurrection life of Jesus.
This is why we say that while the OT sacraments and the NT sacraments
are all fundamentally similar, pointing to the same reality –
namely, the death and resurrection of Jesus –
the difference is found in the greater power, glory and efficacy
of the NT sacraments –
which is solely due to the resurrection power of Jesus.

So if Jesus *ever* partook of OT sacraments –
such as the Passover, the various peace offerings, etc. –
then he partook of something that signified his own sacrifice.

And what Jesus did at the *Last Supper* was take various aspects of OT sacraments
and weave them together into a new sacrament
that would only gain its *new covenant* power and efficacy
through his resurrection from the dead.

So there is no reason why Jesus could not have partaken of the Last Supper.
But he will not partake again until the kingdom of his Father,
because in his death and resurrection
he will pass through death and judgment.
When one enters the kingdom glory of the Father,
one does not need those sacraments that are intended for the pilgrim!

Jesus is not merely claiming to be the Passover lamb.
He is claiming to fulfill the whole sacrificial and covenantal system of Israel.
“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”

It is a staggering claim!
Jesus calls his disciples to take and eat,
and participate in this “new covenant” sacrifice.
He will no longer partake of this,
because after this day, this cup will no longer simply *prefigure* his sacrifice,
from now on, this cup will be a *participation* in his sacrifice.

After this day, the final corner in the history of redemption will be turned.

Jesus shows here that his death is a redemptive death,
bound up with the fulfillment of the covenant, first made to Abraham,
deepened on Sinai (Ex. 24:8-11), and now definitively accomplished in Jesus.
Jesus’ declaration of abstinence, therefore, is an eschatological statement:
this inaugurates the coming of the kingdom,
and declares that the next covenantal meal—

in other words, the next redemptive moment of covenantal significance—
will occur at the final fulfillment of the kingdom.

Therefore we come to the Lord's Table
in order to partake of the resurrection life of Jesus –
that we might taste and see his goodness.

We are called to be utterly devoted to his person –
because his person gives life to our mortal bodies by his Holy Spirit.