

The Final Hours: Preparation
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We are gonna be in Mark, chapter 14, today. So as you're turnin' there just gonna explain a little bit of where we're goin' and what we're going. But before we do, I wanna pray, so I ask that you just join me in prayer.

Lord God,

I do pray that You would just bless our time here together. God, I ask that You would continue to be here in a very real way; that You would open our ears and our eyes so that we can hear and see Your word and Your truth. God, I ask that you would open our minds to understand; help us to understand the truth of Your word. And God, most importantly, I ask that you would give us hearts to hold onto it; that we would grasp it and that it would be a very real part of our lives. We pray this in Your name,

Amen

As you are turning to Mark, chapter 14, I wanna talk through and explain what we are gonna be doing here. See, coming up here in the next few weeks we are getting into the final hours of Jesus' life. Over the course of the year we've been working through the gospel of Mark, reading through it so that we can see and understand and talk about who Jesus is. And as we've been going, we're now getting to the point where it's the final hours of Jesus' life. And before I explain what we're going to be doing over the course of the next few weeks, what I want to explain is something here. If you want to understand the heart of discipleship in the gospel of Mark, you go to chapters 8 through 10. That's where you really see what it means to follow Jesus. What it means is, basically, you throw everything else aside; that you run after Jesus as hard as you can; and along the way Jesus...the thing that He keeps tellin' people is 'Serve others.' You follow God with all you're worth, and as you do that you serve others. That's the heart of discipleship; that's what you see in Mark chapters 8 through 10. However, if you want to understand the heart of the gospel, which is just the good news—that's what 'gospel' means is good news—if you want to understand the heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ, what it is that made it possible for us to be followers of Christ, what you wanna look at is this right here: the final hours of Jesus' life.

And what we'll see is, over the course of the next few weeks, there's this progression. And what we see is in the first half of chapter 14, Jesus is preparing. He's preparing Himself and His disciples for His death. And then what ends up happening is we see a section where Jesus is betrayed. Everybody turns their backs on Him, even His closest followers. And then Jesus is tried. And we'll look at what it is He was convicted of, why was He put to death, what did He do or say that was so bad that it deserved death. And then, finally, what we'll look at is we will look at Jesus' death itself. And that's where we are going over the course of the next...this week and the next three weeks. But today we're gonna focus right here, on the preparation.

Mark, chapter 14: 1-26. And it says this:

After two days it was the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were looking for a treacherous way to arrest and kill Him. "Not during the festival," they said, "or there may be rioting among the people."

While He was in Bethany at the house of Simon, who had a serious skin disease, as He was reclining at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of pure and expensive fragrant oil of nard. She broke the jar and poured it on His head. But some were expressing indignation to one another. "Why has this fragrant oil been wasted? For this oil might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor." And they began to scold her.

Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a noble thing for Me. You always have the poor with you, and you can do good for them whenever you want; but you do not always have Me. She's done what she could; she has anointed My body in advance for burial. I assure you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to hand Him over to them. And when they heard this they were glad, and promised to give him silver. So he started looking for a good opportunity to betray Him.

We're gonna stop right here for just a moment. And I wanna look at this story of the woman. The reason being because it's a very interesting thing to me, what in the world is going on here, because you have this woman...she comes in; and what we find out from the other gospels is this woman is Mary—not the mother of Jesus, but Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus; Mary, the one who is frequently seen listening and seeking to understand who Jesus was and what He taught. And she just wanted to be at His feet, and to listen, and to understand. That's the woman who is here in this story.

And what ends up happening is she brings this jar, and it's a jar of just perfume, basically...expensive oil and everything else; and it cost almost a year's wages just for this one little jar. It would be like if you had this jar of perfume that's...you know...this big or something, and you had to spend tens of thousands of dollars to get this jar. And all of a sudden, what she does...what'd she do with it? She breaks it open and pours it over Jesus.

And the disciples say, "What in the world?!? What are you thinking? Why not go ahead...think of all the good you could do with this. Think of all the good...you could give poor people blankets and food, and you could maybe find them housing...you could do all kinds of things for them." And Jesus said, "Whoa. Stop. Leave her alone."

And the reason that He gives is very interesting to me, because He says she has done what she could to prepare Him for death, for His burial. The interesting thing is, she's...throughout the gospels Mary has been willing to give away, to serve, to do all kinds of things, and she just wants to understand Jesus. But the interesting thing is this: Jesus has been telling His disciples several, several, several times now—"Look, we're headed to Jerusalem now. When I get there I'm gonna be betrayed, I'm gonna be spat upon, I'm gonna be beaten, and I am going to be killed. And you're gonna be throwin' me in a grave." And the disciples just haven't been getting it. They still don't get it.

The interesting thing is...here is Mary, and she's taking this, and this is the sort of stuff that when you are burying somebody, because you put them in the tomb, and to keep it from just being a horrendous stench you would cover the body in these expensive perfumes as one final way to honor that person, and as also a way to make sure that, you know what, it didn't stink everybody out of the whole place. And what Jesus says is, "Guess what? She is doing this to prepare Me for burial. You guys have to take this seriously." That's what Jesus is sayin' to the disciples. "I am about to die. You're about to put Me in the grave. My time has come. She is helping Me prepare for that. You need to prepare for that as well." That's what He tells His disciples.

But then He goes on, Mark does, and we're gonna go on as well. In verse 12 it says

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrifice the Passover lamb, His disciples asked Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare the Passover so that You may eat it?"

So He sent two of His disciples and told them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a water jug will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says "Where is the guest room for Me to eat the Passover with My disciples?"' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make the preparations for us there." So the disciples went out, entered the city, and found it just as He had told them. And they prepared the Passover.

When evening came, He arrived with the twelve. While they were reclining and eating Jesus said, "I assure you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me."

They began to be distressed and to say to Him, one by one, "Surely not I."

And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, the one who is dipping bread with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man will go, just as it is written about 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.

And as they were eating He took bread, blessed it and broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take it. This is My body." Then He took a cup and after giving thanks He gave it to them; and so they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is My blood that establishes the covenant; it's shed for many. I assure you I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in a new way in the kingdom of God."

And after singing psalms, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The rest of our time here this morning, I wanna focus in on just a few verses—verses 22-24. And what is interesting to me about this is what Jesus says. He has what we call the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper. It goes by different names. It's kind of the first Communion. And what happens is they're sitting here, and they're eating...they're eating their meal. And all of a sudden Jesus takes this loaf of bread and He breaks it, and He says "This is My body...eat it!" And He takes this cup and He says, "This is My blood...drink it! This is the new covenant."

What sticks out to me is this—Jesus knows this is the final opportunity He has to give verbal instructions to His disciples before He dies. Of all the things that He thought of that were important in life to share with His disciples, this is what made the cut. Of all the things that He could have talked about, knowing that He is about to be arrested that very night, this is what He decides to talk about. Why? Why does He talk about this? What is so special about this, even more so than where He's talking about serving others, or even more so than telling parables; even more so than explaining the kingdom of God. What is so important about this?

Well, the first thing we have to see is, if we wanna figure this out, is the covenant...the covenant. What is this covenant that He's talking about? He says that His blood is the covenant. What is this covenant that He's talking about? What is this covenant? See, the thing is, as Jesus shares this with His disciples, they've heard a whole lot more of the Old Testament and the scriptures than most of us have. From the moment that they were born, they were brought up learning it in kind of almost musical form, where it would be chanted, and it would be sung, and everything else. Why? Because they didn't all have Bibles to carry around with 'em. And so what they would do is they would sing it, and they would remember it, and they would focus on it so that they could remember it when the time came, even though they didn't have a Bible right in front of 'em. And so they could call to mind all kinds of different parts of scripture.

And there was this one part in scripture that this is a reference to. It's a reference to Jeremiah 31. See, in Jeremiah 31 what ends up happening is God says, 'Listen; My people are in exile. They've turned their backs on Me. But here's what I'm about to do. I'm about to bring them back from exile. And when that happens I'm gonna set in motion a chain of events that will lead to the coming of the Messiah.' And He says that there was this covenant that you've been living under, where you've been sacrificing animals, and you've been doing Temple worship; and if you want to know what God says or God wants you go to this priest in a temple; and God will come and share with the priest some sort of guidance or something. And then you can get that from the priest. You can't directly go to God.

And what happens in Jeremiah is God is telling Jeremiah, 'Look, I'm gonna make this new covenant, and this new covenant...people aren't gonna have to go through some priest.' God is going to write His law, His will, His understanding, His truth on our hearts if we are His people. Not only that, but He says "You can truly know Me. It will be possible for you to truly know Me personally, accurately, intimately.' And He says, to cap it all off, 'All of your sins are going to be forgiven. It's all going to be made possible by this new covenant.'

Of course the thing is, you ask, well why was...if that's the new covenant, well what in the world was up with the old covenant? Was there a problem with it? No, there was not a problem with it. It's something where, from the very first time that man sinned...if you look back in Genesis 3, what ends up happening is when God curses man and woman and creation, what ends up happening is God, in His curse on the woman, gives this promise. And this promise is that one day there will be a descendant from the woman who will come and defeat death. In doing so, He will seem to be killed. He will be stricken. But He will defeat death and sin once and for all, and make life possible. And from that time, God just keeps on developing, keeps on showing more and more and more and more of what that will look like. It's called foreshadowing. The old covenant is part of that. That was part of the process where God was showing what was going to happen. And so what would end up happening is people would look at the old covenant, and they would say, 'Ok, this...I understand that there's a covenant here; but the bigger thing is that God is going to make it right one day. He's going to make this possible, where I can know Him personally. And He's going to make it possible for my sins to be forgiven.' So that's what this covenant is.

But then there's this other part—"My body, My blood, shed for many." Why is that? Why is that part of the covenant? It's a very simple thing. It's a simple math equation. If God is life and sin is rejecting God, rejecting His will for our lives, rejecting...not letting Him rule in our lives, then basically what we are doing is we are rejecting life itself. And as a result, the end result of the equation is death. You reject it...guess what? Here you go—the consequence is death. That's what it equals. That's what it equal.

And what ends up happening...Hebrews tells us this. It's...it tells us that...it's talking about the old covenant, the new covenant, and it explains this. It develops it a little more fully. What it explains is this—that before Jesus came, people had to sacrifice goats, bulls, lambs, sheep, that sort of thing. They sacrificed that. Why? That their bodies would be made ritually clean. It did nothing to clean the heart. What it did is it made people ritually clean so that they could come before God and seek His guidance, so that they could come before God and not suffer death in a spiritual sense. And what it was is two things. One—killing all those animals...why was it done? For two reasons...one, it reminded people of what the consequence of sin is. It made it very real in a very graphic way, is they slit that throat and the blood came pouring out of this animal all over them. This is the consequence of sin—blood, life being shed; and it was a very graphic reminder to them of what their sin costs.

But it was also a second thing. Again, it was a foreshadowing. It was a statement of faith that not only do I understand the consequence of my sin, but I trust that one day the perfect lamb, the Lamb of God, the Messiah, will come and die for me. And through His sacrifice, through His blood, I will be able to be made clean; I will be made right before God. And that's what it's talking about here in Hebrews is this—if all these animals would make us ritually clean but they wouldn't clean our hearts, how much more so will the blood of the Messiah, sacrificed and spilled for us, make us spiritually clean. How much more will that happen?

What ends up...what ends up being is this. Sin—the consequence is death. Why? Well, let's put it this way. And we can't go too far down this track, simply because of time, but let's put it this way. If God always has existed, and always will exist, and He knows everything and always has known everything, then my question to you is this. If you question why blood is required to forgive sins, what I would ask you is this: when was the first time that God saw you lying? When was the first time that God saw you sleeping with that person? When is the first time that God saw you doing this wrong business deal? When was the first time that God saw you being prideful and arrogant? You see, He saw it long, long, long, long before you were ever even born or conceived of, or your parents, or anything else. He saw it from the very beginning of time. And the thing is, He will go on seeing it for all of eternity. Your sin is before Him. And so there is this eternal offense. It would almost be like if you had to sit here and watch for all eternity all of the murders, all of the lies, all of the pride, all of the wars, all of the cheating, all of the adultery, everything else—and you had to sit here and watch it for all of eternity. Probably, if we were in that place, we would say there must be a punishment paid. If you saw over the course of your life, if you saw over the course of my life, and all at one time you saw all of the lies that I've told, all of the things that I've done, all the pride that's in my heart, you would probably say this is the most evil guy I have ever known. If anybody deserves death, he does.

But that's the beauty of the gospel. Because, see, what ends up happening is, because Jesus died, because His blood was shed, what ends up happening is just like the sacrifice there, where people were made ritually clean, if we are willing to have faith in Jesus, if we are willing to say, 'You know what? I understand the depth of my sin as much as I can, and I understand that I truly do deserve death, I deserve whatever punishment God gives me, even though He loves me—that's why He sent His son, the Messiah—even though He loves me, He's also just and fair. And if He's gonna be fair, I deserve whatever death I get. But I also know that God loves me, and He sent His Son. And His Son shed His blood.' And what ends up happening is this...if we accept that, if we understand just how messed up we are and we understand the fact that we can't do anything to save ourselves, that it's all on Jesus, then what ends up happening is we can come before God and we can say, 'God, forgive me. I can't do it. And I deserve every bit of punishment and death You have to offer. But I also know...but I also know that You sent Your Son, and He died for me. He died in my place so that I wouldn't have to, so that I could experience life.'

Then what happens is...scripture uses this picture as though we were standing there at the foot of the cross, and as Jesus' blood is spilled out it covers us. And now, instead of looking at us and seeing—for all eternity, from the beginning of time to the very end of eternity, which will never come—instead of seeing our sin, what God sees is He sees the blood of His Son covering us. And He looks at us and He says, 'That sin has been paid. That sin is no more. I will not remember this sin, because My Son died for this person. This person is Mine.'

That's the gospel. That's why this covenant matters. That's why blood had to be shed. And that's the truth of the gospel.

Two points of application. One—if you are someone who is a follower of Christ, this is a glorious message. There's a reason why it's called the Good News. Because guess what? If you are a follower of Christ, you have been washed in the blood. And all of the sins that you have ever committed, all of the sins that you will commit...and this is not a license to go out and commit all the sins you want. Why? Because if we truly understand the depth of how messed up we are and the cost that it took to make us clean, we won't take that for granted. We won't be perfect, but we definitely aren't gonna take it for granted and presume upon God's grace.

But here is the beauty of it—if you are a follower of Christ, if you've accepted this, right now as God looks at you He sees the righteousness of His Son. He sees the blood of His Son that was shed on the cross. And He looks and He says, 'My Son died for that one. That one is Mine. This is My child.' And He's never gonna let go.

And so what I would tell you is this. If you are a follower of Christ, over the course of this week the challenge that I make is this—don't take it for granted. Try to think, throughout the week, of what your life...starting now, spiritually and for all eternity...cost. And rejoice in the fact that God loves you so much that He made you His, at that price. Don't take it for granted. It's a simple application point.

Second application is this—if you are not a follower of Christ, if you are not somebody who has...who has come to this point, you're not quite so sure about this, or maybe you're right there on the edge, the point of application is this. I read this book recently. It's called "The Trial." It's by Kafka. It's a dark, depressing, sad book. It's about this guy who wakes up one day and finds that he is under arrest. And he's on trial. The problem is, he has no idea what the charges are. He has no idea how to defend himself. He doesn't even know who is accusing him. He just knows that he's accused, and he is on trial. And he doesn't know how to defend himself; he can't figure it out. He tries all kinds of things, but nothing that he tries really works. And he just keeps progressing, and progressing, and progressing without really fully understanding exactly what is going on other than the fact that he stands accused, and he gets the sense that he is being condemned by this court that he can't really put a finger on, until he finally dies this ignoble death.

It's much like us people everywhere. Kafka had quite an insight into human psyche, mind, society. Because, see, if you've never...if you're not in a right relationship with God, then there is a sense of condemnation you will feel; shame, guilt...you may not be able to put your finger on it, you may chalk it up to all kinds of things. 'Well, I haven't earned enough respect from this person. Or maybe I don't have enough self-respect. Maybe I just need to earn...' I don't know. But see, here's the thing. What that shame or what that sense of not measuring up is, is the fact that you stand condemned before God, and you are on trial before God. And what ends up happening is this, kind of like what Kafka writes about—we try to defend ourselves, and somehow be good enough. For what, we don't know. There's not some standard that we may be able to put our finger on. But we're sitting here and we seek approval from people—maybe through our jobs, how good we do. Maybe it's through the parent that I am. I'm gonna pour my life into my family so that I will be the best mother or the best father, or the best whatever in the world. And maybe then I will have that sense of acceptance. Maybe then this sense of emptiness or this condemnation that I sense will be gone. Maybe it's money, and I pursue all these things. Maybe it's fame...I don't know what. I don't know what it is, because it's different for each person. Maybe it's pride. For me, in many ways, it was pride; a sense that if I knew enough, if I had it all figured out, you know, in many ways I would be deserving of whatever love or whatever else...

And really what we're trying to do is we are trying to earn God's respect and favor and honor. And the fact is there is nothin' that you can do to earn God's respect and favor and honor, especially considering the fact that you...as He looks at your life He sees all that you've done, all the evil and everything else. That would be like me saying, you know, I really respect somebody who is just this awful, awful person because they loved animals, even though they treated people terribly, they killed all kinds of people or everything else. I know that we don't have serial killers here in the audience...at least I should hope not...unless if they are redeemed by the blood of Christ. And that would be a beautiful thing.

But the fact of the matter is that scripture tells us that we're all just the same. And, as a matter of fact, if you wanna stack all these evils on top of each other, the greatest evil it seems, according to scripture, is pride—which I'm guilty of on a regular basis.

The application for you if you're here today and you've never experienced this is this—if you come to the point where you acknowledge the fact that you cannot measure up, but the price has been paid and you are willing to accept it, then guess what? It can be yours. God says that's a good deal, even though all you bring to the table is sin.

In just a moment we're gonna pray, and after we pray if you would like to speak to anybody, there's kinda like a little 'prayer zone' up here. If you have something that you would like to pray about, if you have somethin'...whether it's you wanna know about this whole Christian thing, maybe there's some issue in your life, maybe it's just you have a concern or something else that you would just like to speak to somebody with or pray with somebody, feel free to come up here. There will be a couple of pastors and elders up here at the front. But before we pray, if you would just stand with me, and we'll pray.

Lord God,

I thank You so very much for the price that You paid, for the death of Your Son. And Lord God, I ask that You would make that a reality in our lives; that that would be something that truly transforms us; that we don't take it for granted; and God, that lives are transformed here by the power of Your Son and His sacrifice.

And we pray this in Your name, amen.