

PREPARATION

Pastor Phil Christiansen // March 10, 2024

Text: Mark 14:1-26

Big Idea: God will use the plans of people to accomplish His ultimate purposes.

This morning, as we continue in our Mark series: Jesus is for you, were going to take a look at a text that highlights how God will use the plans of people to accomplish His ultimate purposes. As we look at the world, see the health of our country, and the condition of our state, we may be tempted to think that we're in some sort of free-fall; that the wheels have fallen off and 'Where's God when you need Him?' But, what if God, in His sovereignty, is allowing these things to happen, intending to use this 'mess,' to ultimately accomplish His perfect plan?

Today, as we look at Mark 14, I think we'll see this very reality in action. People have their plans, but God has His—and His plans are always realized. We're going to see a lot of planning and preparing in today's text and we're going to see how it all points toward God's perfect plan of redemption. Take a look at the first eleven verses of Mark 14. I'm reading from the ESV. Follow along with me.

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, ²for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people."

³And 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. ⁴There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷For 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.”

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.

The Plot (v 1-2)

That’s a big chunk to look at but it all fits together. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were right around the corner. That meant that Jerusalem was going to overflow with people flocking to the city to celebrate. Old Testament Law required that the Passover be celebrated within the city¹. It’s estimated that Jerusalem was, typically, home to anywhere from 60,000 to 120,000 people. But, during the festival, as many as 300,000 people would be in the city². It was like a host city during the Olympics or Super Bowl...it’s people everywhere. Every nook and cranny is jammed up with people. Everyone is trying to get where they’re going and get what they need. It’s chaotic and, with that many people, the chances of things getting out of control on the streets go way up.

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread went hand-in-hand, and they reminded the people of who and Who’s they were. “Passover commemorated the liberation of the nation from Egypt, when God sent a plague that took the lives of the Egyptians’ firstborn.” The Israelites were spared from the plague by dabbing the blood of a slaughtered, blemish-free lamb above and on the sides of their doorways. They were to go into their homes, stay there, eat that lamb that they sacrificed with their

¹ Deuteronomy 16:5-8

² Garland, David E. *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1996), 513.

families, and be ready to move at a moment's notice. Here's what God said to Moses and Aaron about it:

"For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt."—Exodus 12:12-13

Those who were covered by the blood were safe.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was kicked-off by the Passover. The Feast was a reminder that the Israelites were sent out of Egypt so quickly that they had to pack up their dough before they even had a chance to add yeast (leaven). Eating flat, unleavened, bread for a week reminded them again of how God delivered them from Egypt.

So, a couple hundred thousand Israelites were going to gather in Jerusalem and the religious leaders knew that Jesus would have to show up at some point. For all kinds of reasons, they were sick of Jesus. They were done. His influence had grown way too large. He criticized their traditions and leadership, and He even talked about how the Temple would one day be destroyed. How dare He say such a thing about God's dwelling place! So, they plotted to secretly take Him out. It was an official decision. It wasn't just a couple people. The religious leaders prepared to have Jesus arrested and killed. But they were smart enough to know that they shouldn't execute their plan during the festival because Jesus was incredibly popular and doing anything to Him could cause the crowds to come unglued and start a riot. They couldn't afford to lose control of the people or credibility with their Roman rulers who were watching very carefully.

A Sacrificial Gift (v 3-9)

In classic Mark form, the scene immediately changes to Jesus in Bethany at Simon the (former) Leper's house. Mark doesn't give *any* details as to

why they were there. Most likely, Jesus had healed him, and Simon invited Jesus and the guys over to share an intimate, brotherhood, kind of meal. They were in Bethany, which was kind of their basecamp, just a couple miles east of Jerusalem.

While they're reclining, eating their meal, an unnamed woman arrives with a very expensive jar of perfume or ointment. Nard was "an expensive, aromatic oil extracted from the root of an Indian herb of the same name."³ This woman shows up, unannounced and against social norms, breaks the flask (meaning that there's no putting the cork back in the bottle...there's no turning back) and pours it over Jesus' head. But why? What was she trying to accomplish? We really don't know.

Anointing wasn't uncommon at feasts.⁴ Maybe she was doing something customary in an over-the-top way. Maybe she believes she's anointing the Messiah (the anointed one) to set Him apart for His office. Maybe she's hoping God will intervene in the affairs of Israel with this king. But she's not a priest or authorized prophet. This isn't how anointing kings happens.⁵

Whatever she was thinking, the Jesus cleared it up by saying that her [The woman's] act of sacrificial devotion prepared Him [Jesus] for burial. Once again, Jesus lets His followers know that He's going to die.

Did you notice the response of the men around the room. They were indignant toward her. Literally, their nostrils flared they were so angry. They rebuked her! Look at verse 4 again, "Why was the ointment wasted like that?" It could have been used for the poor, blah, blah, blah. Wasted on Jesus? Is that what they're asking? *Why would she **waste** something so*

³ Edwards, James R. *The Gospel of Mark: The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2002), 413.

⁴ Luke 7:46, for example.

⁵ See Edwards, p 516 for more.

valuable on Jesus? Have you ever said something stupid...? Is it possible for devotion to Jesus to be so extravagant that it's too much?

Gone too far with this Jesus/religion thing...

My unbelieving father-in-law thought so. When Nancy was a young believer in high school, she committed to only date Christian guys. She was thoroughly devoted to honoring Christ with her whole life—including her dating life. When she was in college, her dad said something like, 'You're taking this church thing too far. There are a lot of good guys out there that don't go to church.' Friends, "The world has never had a problem with religion in moderation. It has no problem with too much wealth or power or sex or influence, but it has a problem with too much religion."⁶ You're too religious. You're too Christian. How much is too much devotion to Christ? I'll let you wrestle with that like I have this week. Take that home. Talk about it at lunch and dinner and in your prayer time.

Is there any chance that this woman went too far? After all, that perfume was worth about a year's wages. That could have fed a lot of people. Two hundred denarii could have fed 5000 people⁷, and this alabaster jar was worth even more.

An Inside Job (v 10-11)

Now, notice what Mark does. He immediately pans the camera to look at Judas. It seems like Judas gets up from the meal and heads to the chief priests. We don't know if that's the case, but that's definitely how Mark makes it seem. Judas, one of the twelve, an inner circle guy, was ready to work with the religious leaders to hand Jesus over when the time was right. The chief priests couldn't have dreamed of a better opportunity! One of Jesus' closest friends could guide them right to Him...even in the dark of night when it's hard to see faces by the light of a torch. Judas could get them there. Judas was prepared to betray Jesus.

⁶ Garland, 517.

⁷ Mark 6:37

Verse 11 says that they were glad, delighted; they rejoiced. And they promised him some money. Matthew tells us that they gave him 30 pieces of silver.⁸ That's about four months' of wages. That's all Jesus was worth to Judas. What a contrast to the woman who he watched anoint Jesus.

Mark was strategic in his layout of these three scenes: the religious leaders want Jesus dead. The woman prepares Jesus for His death. Judas is ready to help facilitate His death. The people have plans...

The story of the woman is sandwiched between two smaller stories as a contrast between them. Hers is a story of adoration and devotion. Theirs are stories of malice and betrayal. And all three of these scenes point to Jesus' death.

Now, take a look at verses 12-26.

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.

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

⁸ Matthew 26:15

Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

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.”

A Quiet Plan (v 12-16)

Passover is about to begin. The sacrificial lambs have been slain and everyone’s getting ready for the evening meal. Understandably, the disciples wonder where they’re going gather. Jesus tasks Peter and John⁹ to head to Jerusalem and find the *man* carrying a jar of water. That guy will get them connected with all they need. Picture the scene: people are crawling everywhere. Peter and John are playing Where’s Waldo looking for a guy carrying a jug of water.

Here’s what’s awesome about this: most of the time, men didn’t carry pitchers or jugs of water, the women did. This guy would have stood out in the crowd. We aren’t given more information, but they managed to find him, and he took them to the house. They found everything to be just as Jesus told them. The place was ready to host a group, and had everything they needed.

Remember, Jesus was popular and was already a target, so He didn’t just walk into the city with His disciples in the middle of the day. The Passover plan needed to be discrete—needed to be kept on the down-low. Peter and John couldn’t just wander up to *anyone* on the street—they needed to find *the* guy. I think this scene highlights that Jesus knows everything that’s going on and has total control of the situation. He even tells the guys what to say to the master of the house: ‘The Teacher wonders where

⁹ Luke 22:7-13

His guest room is so He can celebrate the Passover with His disciples.' They don't name-drop or anything ('the Teacher is Jesus, just so you know...'). The master gets the word and jumps right to it. Everything is ready to go. So, the disciples prepared the Passover.

Betrayal Revealed (v 17-21)

Evening comes and everyone arrives at the house. They're reclining at the table. Reclining at the table together was an intimate demonstration of trust, peace, and brotherhood. You're lounging with your closest friends and family. The Passover meal is presumably in process when, out of nowhere, Jesus says, 'One of you will betray me.' The whole room gasped. It's important to know that it probably wasn't just Jesus and the twelve in the room. Custom would have included women and children, too. We don't know how many people were in that upper room, but Mark's repeated use of 'the twelve' in this section (v 17 & 20) suggests that there were others and 'the twelve' narrowed the field of view. 'It's not everyone else...The betrayer is one of the twelve, one of My closest ones, who will betray Me.' The betrayer ate the Passover with Him. It was the height of disloyalty and betrayal to share a meal with someone before turning on him.¹⁰

One by one, the guys asked, 'It isn't me, is it?' They're forced to examine themselves. Even Judas asked the question. That dude didn't even flinch. That could have been his moment where he came clean, 'It's me! It's me! I blew it.' But he didn't. One of Jesus' closest followers turned on Him. And here's what gets me about that: Judas heard all of Jesus' sermons. He saw the miracles. He went to the places, and he did the stuff. He heard the declarations of Jesus being the Messiah. He could have told all the stories. But clearly, he didn't trust Jesus.

Caution & Opportunity

Similarly, though not identical, going to church doesn't mean you've placed your faith in Jesus and have been saved. Church, Sunday school,

¹⁰ "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me." Psalm 41:9

youth group, and small group are all great things—but they can only help you understand why you need to be saved, or what it means to place your faith in Jesus and help you in your journey once you are saved; but they can't save you. Only Jesus can save you through faith—trust—in Him. Judas didn't have that. The question is, have you placed your faith—all your trust—in Jesus and what He's done or are you relying on something else? I'll give you a chance to respond to this in a minute.

For all of us, this is a good reminder to check our hearts and be honest about where we are in our relationship with Jesus. You may love and trust Him, but you've grown distant. You haven't nurtured your relationship and things have kind of grown cold. Be honest with Him about that; it's not like you're surprising Him with the news. But honesty and repentance can bring healing and refresh your desire to walk intimately with Him. If you're angry, tell Him. He loves you. If you've been hurt, pour that out to Him. He's close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18). If you need someone to pray for you before you leave today so you can start fresh with Jesus, do it. Grab your spouse or a trusted friend who loves Jesus too and ask them to pray with you, to pray over you, to pray for you.

If you've been going to the places, doing the stuff and can tell all stories, that's great...as long as you've truly placed your faith in Jesus. Remember, it's not about what you've done or are doing that saves you. Only Jesus saves. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works..." (Ephesians 2:8-9), not by what *you* do.

Some of you may have just realized that you've never trusted Jesus; you've never placed your faith in Him. Maybe you didn't know you needed to. Maybe you thought that going to church meant that you were covered. But now you understand that you need to place your faith in Jesus—you need to trust Him as your Leader and Forgiver—and that's the only way you can be. If that's you this morning, and you want to place your faith in Jesus today, to receive His grace and forgiveness, so that you can live your life right in step with Him, just raise your hand and look at

me. I want to see you so I can pray for you. And I want those around you to see you so they can pray for and encourage you as well. [Pray. Connect card. Talk afterward.]

Transition

Imagine how sweaty the room was as Jesus tells them that a betrayer is at the table. Each guy wonders if it could be him. But one guy knows it *is* him. Then, as they're eating the meal, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them saying, "Take; this is my body."

A New Understanding (v 22-25)

They're in the middle of the Passover meal, eating the lamb that was sacrificed that day. They're remembering how the Israelites needed to put blood, from a perfect lamb, over the top and sides of the doorways of their homes and how they needed to take shelter inside those homes. Since they trusted God and obeyed His instructions, they were protected by the blood of the lamb, so judgement and death passed over them. They recalled how Israel had to quickly depart when the plague of death hit the Egyptians and how their bread didn't even have yeast/leaven in it when they hit the road.

In the middle of all that, Jesus says, "Take; this is my body." Jesus is bringing a new layer, a new understanding, to the Passover. Jesus broke the bread. Once again, He's letting His followers know that He's going to die. "This is my body." He's still in the room. Clearly, it's not *really* His physical body. But He's planting an idea in their hearts and minds. And, in less than a day, they'll understand what Jesus meant when He broke the bread and gave it to them.

The original language of "this is my body" suggests far more than just flesh. It's like Jesus is saying, 'This is all of me. Every bit of me. My whole being.' As they receive the broken bread, He wants them to know that they're receiving all of Jesus. He's reinterpreting the Passover. The perfect lamb that died to save the people, that's what Jesus is about to do. He will be the once-for-all, perfect sacrifice, fulfilling all the ceremonies

related to the Passover and the entire Old Testament sacrificial system. Jesus will be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of all people. But Mark is short and sweet. "Take; this is my body." No fluff.

Then Jesus took one of the Passover cups of wine, probably the third of four cups in the Passover meal, the cup of redemption. In Exodus, where we see the story of God delivering Israel out of Egypt, chapter 6:6-7, God makes four promises to His people. "I am the LORD, and **I will bring you out** from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will deliver you** from slavery to them, and **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ **I will take you to be my people...**" - Exodus 6:6-7. The third of the promises is to redeem. So, the third cup, is the cup of redemption. Redemption is connected to the need to be freed from bondage or slavery. The captives can't be freed by their own efforts. Only through intervention can slavery be broken, and freedom established. Israel was in bondage to Egypt. They were slaves. They were hopeless to free themselves, so God steps in to redeem His people. To set them free to live a good life in the Promised Land and to be bright lights to the world around them that point to the true and living God.

Jesus took that cup, gave thanks, gave it to them and said, "This is my blood of the covenant [or new covenant], which is poured out for many." The blood of the lamb that was dabbed on the doorway, the blood that covered them so that God's judgment and death would pass over, so they could be freed from bondage and free to live fully as God's people...Jesus says, 'That's me.' His blood will satisfy God's wrath. His blood will make it possible for everyone, not just the Israelites, to be saved, rescued, redeemed, delivered, from slavery to sin.

Jesus is, again, preparing His followers for His death. And His death will open the way to a new covenant relationship with God. A relationship that's available to anyone and everyone who wants to be free from the penalty and power of sin and to live the life that God built them to have. BUT the only way to be redeemed is to be covered by the blood. The

Israelites did that by painting their doorways and getting in their homes. You and I do that by putting our faith in Jesus and what He accomplished through His broken body (as the perfect Lamb) and shed blood on the cross. Jesus took the penalty that we deserve. His blood covers us so that God's wrath, His judgment, the death penalty, passes over us! So again, have you placed your faith in Jesus and what He's accomplished on the cross? That's the only way you're covered.

Close

Jesus concludes by telling His friends that He won't share the cup again with them until His Kingdom comes in its fullness. When Christ returns there will be a huge feast that the book of Revelation calls the wedding supper of the Lamb.¹¹

The religious leaders plotted to kill Jesus. The woman anointed Him for burial. Judas made his plan. The disciples prepped the Passover. And Jesus, again, reminded them that He was going to die. Every piece of today's text points to Jesus' death so that you and I can have life. Are you covered by the blood?

¹¹ Revelation 19:9