



Setting the Stage

Mark 14:1-26

- 1. The Plot to Kill (verses 1-2)**
- 2. The Anointing for Burial (verses 3-9)**
- 3. The Plan to Betray (verses 10-11)**
- 4. The Preparation for Passover (verses 12-16)**
- 5. The Prediction of Betrayal (verses 17-21)**
- 6. The Celebration of the Passover (verses 22-26)**

Due to the kindness of some corporate sponsors, this past Monday was free admission for Illinois residents at the major museums in downtown Chicago (Shedd Aquarium, Field Museum, Adler Planetarium, and Museum of Science and Industry). As Monday is my day off, it was perfect for our family to take a trip downtown to see the museums in a cheap way. This is especially timely for us, as Stephanie (our 9 year old) is studying aquatic life in her science class. On top of that, our five year-old, David, has been fascinated by sharks and squids and octopi in recent days.

When we told our children, they were excited to go. They were thrilled at the opportunity to travel into the city to see the museums. In fact, my five year old, told several people at church last week, "We're going to New York tomorrow!" He was not quite understanding that we were going to Chicago, not New York, but still very excited!

As we drove in, our two youngest children had an opportunity to see the Chicago sky-line for the first time in a long time. When they saw how large the buildings were, they were amazed. "Look at that building!" they would say. "Look at that building!" And when we walked in the Shedd Aquarium last Monday, oh my were they excited! They were thrilled at the prospects of what they would see. And they weren't disappointed. They loved seeing the exotic fish. They loved seeing the diver feeding the fish. They loved seeing the spider crab. They loved seeing the dolphins. They loved touching the starfish.

And often as we walked through the museum, they exclaimed, "Dad, look at this!" "Mom, look at this!" Great was their enthusiasm for what they saw that day. My hope for you this morning is that you would have a similar enthusiasm for the next few weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church.

In our exposition of the gospel of Mark, we have come to chapter 14, which begins the Passion account -- that is, the account of the suffering of Jesus. The passion account covers less than a week in time. It begins when Jesus was anointed with perfume for His burial. It includes Jesus celebrating the Passover with His disciples and forever changing the ritual. The passion account continues with His prayer in Gethsemane. This is followed by His arrest and trial, including Peter's denials. It tells of how Jesus stood before Pilate and was sentenced to death. The passion account tells of how Jesus was beaten and crucified and buried. Then, it all culminates in the account of the resurrection.

This story is so central to the truth of the Bible, that it appears in all four gospels. The details vary a little bit. But the core of the story is the same. The anointing, the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane, the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, the beatings, the crucifixion, the resurrection. This four-fold repetition of the story is no accident! Indeed, this is the core of the story of the entire Bible!

And for the next six weeks, we will be working our way through the story, culminating with the resurrection on Easter morning! This morning, we will begin Mark, chapter 14. My plan is to finish this gospel over the next six weeks. We began the book a year ago in January. Lord willing, we'll finish this spring on Easter morning in Mark 16. How appropriate for us to be going through the gospel of Mark at this time. This past Wednesday was Ash Wednesday. It signals the beginning of Lent, a forty-day season in the church calendar, when Christians all over the world focus their attention upon the Passion of Jesus Christ.

Now, there is no Biblical command for us to observe Lent. We aren't obligated to do so in any way. Yet, when the majority of the professing Christian world is focusing their attention upon the suffering of Christ during this time, it will be good for us to do the same. I'm excited about it. I hope that you are as well.

One of the traditions that we have at Rock Valley Bible Church is to celebrate the Lord's Supper each and every Sunday morning during the season of Lent. It means that every Sunday for the next six weeks, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together. Again, there is no command in Scripture for us to do so. Nor is there a prohibition, either. But, doing so each week, it will bring us back again to the death (and resurrection) of Christ, which is the hope of our souls! I believe that it will be profitable for us to do so.

Let us read our text this morning.

Mark 14:1-26

Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the

people."

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover? And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We see here six scenes that set up the crucifixion.

1. The Plot to Kill (verses 1-2).
2. The Anointing for Burial (verses 3-9)
3. The Plan to Betray (verses 10-11)
4. The Preparation for Passover (verses 12-16)
5. The Prediction of Betrayal (verses 17-21)
6. The Celebration of the Passover (verses 22-26)

These six scenes read like a good novel does. Think about a typical novel. One chapter is devoted to the development of one character: his actions and his thoughts and his experiences and his perspectives. The next chapter takes you to a different place with different people and different events. And then, in a future chapter, some of the characters collide. But at that point, you understand what is going on because the author has developed these characters for you beforehand.

This is what is taking place at the beginning of Mark 14. But, rather than taking an entire chapter to develop each character and event, Mark spends only a few verses on each one. We read of one scene for a few verses, and then Mark's pen flashes to another scene, where we see a different event taking place. Eventually, all of these events will converge upon the arrest of Jesus, which will lead to His eventual death.

What we will see this morning is merely setting the stage for the final conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Hence, the title of my message this morning, "Setting the Stage." Six scenes that set the stage for the death and resurrection of Jesus. These six scenes will form the basis of our outline this morning. Let's look first at ...

1. The Plot to Kill (verses 1-2).

This takes place in the first two verses of the chapter. Look again at verse 1, ...

Mark 14:1
Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away;

This sets the time for us. The Passover takes place on fifteenth of the Jewish month of Nisan, which places it in late March or early April. The Passover meal would take place on Thursday night. The feast of Unleavened Bread would take place right afterwards, lasting for seven days. That places these events sometime near Tuesday evening. The religious leaders had gathered together to scheme.

We read in verse 1, ...

Mark 14:1
... and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him;

This isn't any new thought. After Jesus healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, we read (in verse 6 of chapter 3), "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Mark 3:6). Their attempts to destroy Him were many and varied. They often brought Him difficult questions, to test Him and trap Him.

In Mark 8:11 we read about how "the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test Him." In Mark 10:2, when Jesus was in the region of Judea beyond the Jordan (where John the Baptist had been killed for taking a stand against Herod's marriage to Herodias), they asked him about His views on divorce. It was an obvious trap to get Him in trouble with the authorities. Perhaps Herod might behead Jesus as well! In Mark 12:13, we read of how "they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Him in order to trap Him in a statement." They asked him about paying taxes. The Sadducees later came asking him about the resurrection. This was all in an attempt to get the people to turn against Him.

But now, their strategy took a turn. Instead of trapping Jesus in something that He might say, and leaving it to the people to see the errors of His way, now they were seeking to kill Him outright. But, they wanted to be sneaky. They wanted to capture Him "by stealth" -- that is, by some covert operations where Jesus simply disappears! Yet, they were afraid of the people. So, we read, ...

Mark 14:2
for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."

As these religious leaders thought about the timing of the capture of Jesus, they knew that the upcoming days would be a terrible time in which to kill Him. It was the Passover. At the time of the Passover, crowds ascended upon Jerusalem. The town of 30,000 would have a up to a million visitors coming to town that week.

The murder of Jesus would certainly set off a riot among the people against the religious leaders. As the peace would be disturbed, Rome would get involved and the power of the religious leaders would be decreased. So they decided, "Not during the festival" (verse 2). From a human standpoint of view, it was a wise thing to do. Waiting until the crowds were gone would make it much easier and cause much fewer problems later on down the line.

This is so ironic! For years, they had attempted to find ways to trap Jesus. And yet, He alluded their grasp. But, here, the one moment in which they say that they won't kill Him -- during the festival -- actually turns out to be the very moment in which they kill Him. Such a turn of events shows the sovereignty of God!

It is an illustration of Proverbs 16:9, "The mind of a man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." They made their plan, but it was contrary to God's sovereign design for the life of Jesus. So, God thwarted their plan. Try as you might to escape the sovereign hand of God, and you will never do it.

The story is told of a man who worked as the servant of a wealthy merchant.

This servant had gone into town to shop for the day when suddenly he felt someone brush heavily against his shoulder. Somewhat offended, he turned toward the person who had jostled him, and found himself staring into a pair of eyes that spoke death to him. Panicking, he dropped everything and ran home. His master saw him running breathlessly toward the house, and met him on the front steps.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked the master.

"Oh, sir! Someone in the marketplace rudely brushed me, and when I turned to face him, he looked like the Angel of Death to me. He too had a look of shock on his face. It was almost as if he wanted to grab me but then backed away. I am afraid, sir. I don't want to go back to the market."

"Saddle one of our horses and ride all day till you reach the distant village of Samara," the master said. "Stay there till you get word from me that it is safe for you to return."

The servant rode off, and the master made his way to the market to find the person who had so frightened his servant. As he wound his way through the crowded streets, he suddenly came face to face with this strange looking individual.

"Who are you?" the merchant said. "Are you the one who just scared my servant?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Why did you frighten him?"

"Well, I was truly surprised to see him here. I am the Angel of Death, and I chose to spend the day here before heading to my stop for tonight. You see, it was not so much that I surprised him, as that he surprised me. I did not expect to see him here because I have an appointment with him tonight in Samara." [\[1\]](#)

Just as the Angel of Death had an appointment with this servant in Samara, so also did Jesus of Nazareth have an appointment upon the cross in a mere two days. The schemes of the religious leaders to the contrary weren't going to prevent the plans of God from carrying forward. "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

Let's turn our attention upon the next scene of this divine drama. We have seen, The Plot to Kill (verses 1-2). Now, let's look at ...
2. The Anointing for Burial (verses 3-9)

Mark 14:3

While He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

During the Passion week, Jesus spent His days in Jerusalem. But, each night, He would retreat to Bethany (Mark 11:11). He probably stayed in the home of His good friend, Lazarus, and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. On this occasion, Jesus was in the home of Simon, the leper. We can safely assume that Jesus had cleansed Simon of his leprosy at some point before this. Simon had certainly wanted to demonstrate his great love to Jesus by hosting Him.

The gospel of John tells us that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were also there with Jesus, along with all of the disciples. As it was a fairly large gathering, Martha was serving those who were at the table. Martha's sister Mary was the woman who anointed Jesus with the perfume.

Verse 3 gives the details of what took place. We read, "There came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head." In verse 3, we read that this perfume was "very costly." In verse 5, we read that the perfume was worth three hundred denarii. A denarius was a day's wage for a common laborer. So, three hundred denarii would be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$20,000 - \$30,000 dollars in our day. That's some expensive perfume! Some say that its expense came because it was imported from India.

Now, when the disciples saw what this woman had done and began to calculate the cost of the perfume that she had poured out upon Jesus, they weren't too pleased in the least. Their response is recorded for us in verses 4 and 5.

Mark 14:4-5

But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor."

John tells us in his account that Judas was the ringleader of this complaint, "not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it" (John 12:6). He saw a loss of His own money. This is because he had a love of money, rather than a love for Jesus.

The protests of Judas soon became the protests of the other disciples. For, we read, ...

Mark 14:5

... And they were scolding her.

This poor woman. She was acting in love for her Savior. And all she got was a group of men who belittled her for her actions.

Well, Jesus comes to her rescue, by asking His disciples why they were belittling the woman.

Mark 14:6

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her?"

He said, "Why do you bother the woman?" (verse 10). I'm sure that they easily could have justified their responses. "Lord, think about it. That ointment that she just placed on your head is worth 300 denarii! She wasted it all! It was a terrible thing that she did. Think of the benefits that such a sum of money might do to help the poor. Don't you care about the poor people? It was a waste of money! Doesn't God call us to be good stewards? 'Waste not, want not! Lord!' But, she has wasted it all!"

Jesus defends her. He said, ...

Mark 14:6

... She has done a good deed to Me.

From a logical standpoint, certainly, it was a waste. I wouldn't argue with the disciples. They have a point. But, what they don't understand is that love is extravagant. What appears to be waste in the mind of some is a gift willingly offered in love by others. This is shown in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15). The father is extravagant in his love when his lost son returns. We see this also in a gift of flowers. Flowers are rather wasteful. Sure, they are beautiful, but only for a time. Then, they die. But, gifts given in love are extravagant.

Love is willing to sacrifice greatly for the good of others, even when it seems unreasonable. Dating couples do this. They lavish each other with gifts, even when it seems unreasonable. Even when it costs your most precious possession, love will willingly sacrifice.

That's what this woman did. She was acting out of love to Jesus. To her, \$20,000-\$30,000 wasn't too much to spend on her Lord. The disciples objected on logical grounds. To them, they considered it a waste.

But notice in verse 6, what the disciples call a "waste," Jesus calls "a good deed." "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me" (verse 6). Jesus goes on to explain, ...

Mark 14:7-8

For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial.

By these words, Jesus says, "I'm leaving soon. My days are numbered. I will be with you for only a few more days. Your opportunities to demonstrate your love directly to Me are almost over. Regarding the poor, you will have abundant opportunities. Regarding Me, you will have few opportunities."

Whenever a loved one leaves, we all focus our attention upon the one leaving. Your kids leave for a trip, and you kiss them goodbye and tell them that you love them. You see your out-of-state relatives. You tell them good-bye and that you will keep in touch. You vacation with some good friends. When you leave, you thank them for the time and say, "We have to do this again sometime."

This is what was taking place with Jesus. He was leaving soon. His disciples seemed clueless. But not this woman. She knew he was leaving. She expressed her love to Him by covering his body with sweet-smelling perfume, whose aroma covered the entire house. I'm sure that for weeks that the smell continued to permeate Simon's house, as this ointment certainly spilled on the table and onto the floor. Long after Jesus died and rose again, the sweet smell still lingered. Perhaps every now and then, Simon would have been at home and caught a whiff of the perfume that had been poured out upon Jesus. At that moment, all of the wonderful memories of what this woman had done would flood into his mind. He would think of her great love for her savior.

This sweet smell continues today, even for us. Oh, we may not smell the fragrance of the perfume. But, as we hear the story repeated again, we can experience many of the same emotions that Simon experienced as he reflected upon this woman's great act of devotion. Jesus said,

Mark 14:9

Truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Such Scripture is being fulfilled at Rock Valley Bible Church this morning. Her act of love continues to have its effect down until today. Her example is a great model for us to follow. We ought to love the Lord in this manner. No sacrifice ought to be too great to demonstrate our love for Him.

Paul said, "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1). Why did Mary sacrifice this perfume for Jesus? It's because of His great kindness and mercy to her, which gave her reason to respond to Him. This is what Paul says. Because of God's great kindness and mercy towards you, you ought to respond in whole-hearted sacrificial love to Jesus.

Do you know anything of this? Do you know anything of complete sacrificial dedication to the Lord, where no sacrifice is too great?

My 13 year-old daughter is involved in a volleyball league at Sportscore. Yvonne and I were talking the other day about the level of commitment of those involved. Yesterday, she had to be there at the gymnasium at 7am! She was there for 6-7 hours. And everyone there was glad to make such a commitment.

And yet, when it comes to God and Jesus and the church, how small is the commitment of many. The sacrifice of time is too great. Oh, we have much to learn from this woman's sacrifice.

Let's move on. Now we look at ...

3. The Plan to Betray (verses 10-11)

Mark 14:10-11

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

Now, Mark doesn't give us much here by way of detail. He simply says that Judas met with the religious leaders. And they made a deal to betray Jesus. He went out looking for an opportune time.

When you look at Matthew's account, you find out that they gave Judas thirty pieces of silver, somewhere around \$20 in today's currency. My guess is that the entire discussion took place in less than ten minutes. How quickly do the plans of man change. The religious leaders had planned on waiting in capturing Jesus. But here was their opportunity. They were going to take it. Within a few hours, Judas will betray Jesus into the hands of the priests and elders of the people (Matt. 26:47).

Notice the huge contrast between Judas and the woman who anointed Jesus. This woman loved Jesus. Judas hated Jesus. This woman was willing to lavish upon Jesus an abundance of very costly perfume, some tens of thousands of dollars. Judas was willing to betray Jesus for a mere thirty pieces of silver, which wasn't much, probably around \$20. This woman was giving of herself to Jesus. Judas was using Jesus to get money for himself. This woman had spent but little time with Jesus. Judas had lived with Jesus day in and day out for three years! This

woman expressed her love to her Savior. Judas turned his back on his own salvation.

The obvious point of application here is to ask: is your love to the savior like that of Judas? Fickle. Cheap. At your convenience. Or, is your love like that of the woman who lavished her love upon the savior? Extravagant. Wasteful. At His service.

We won't linger here, as Jesus will comment on the betrayal of Judas in verse 21. Let's move on.

4. The Preparation for Passover (verses 12-16)

Mark 14:12

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

The Passover is a feast of remembrance. It is the time in which the Jewish people were to remember how God delivered them out of their Egyptian bondage. It is a bit like our Independence Day that we celebrate every Fourth of July. The Jews celebrate their independence from Egyptian slavery.

But, the Passover is much bigger than our Independence day. We might have a picnic and watch some fireworks. But, God gave the Jewish people very explicit directions in how they ought to celebrate the Passover.

On the fourteenth day of the first month of the year, the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered and its blood put on doorposts of their houses (Ex. 12:7). By this action, the Hebrew houses were spared when the LORD came throughout all of Egypt to destroy the Egyptians. When He saw the blood, He would "pass over" that house. Thus, the name, "Passover."

When the lamb was cooked, it was to be "roasted with fire" and "eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs" (Ex. 12:8). It had to be eaten as soon as it was cooked (Ex. 12:10). If any wasn't eaten on the night of the Passover, it was to be "burned with fire" (Ex. 12:10). In other words, you couldn't take doggy bags home from your Passover feast.

So, when the disciples asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" it was a good question. It was the 14th of Nissan. Many pilgrims had come up to Jerusalem, intent upon celebrating the Passover. Preparations needed to be made. The question was "where are we going to celebrate the Passover, Jesus?" Apparently, the disciples didn't yet have a plan as to where they were going to have the Passover. But, Jesus did.

Mark 14:13-15

And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there."

At first glance, this appears a bit strange. Why would Jesus be so cryptic? Why didn't He give the name of this man? Why didn't He give the address of where room was? Why was Jesus so vague about these things?

Here's why: Judas was there. Had Judas known where Jesus was planning to celebrate the Passover, certainly it would have been easy for him to prepare an ambush. Verse 11 tells us that Judas was "seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time." What a better time than during an evening meal, when Jesus would be defenseless, eating with His disciples. But, if Judas didn't know where they would eat the Passover, then no ambush could be planned. Jesus could be assured that He could have His last meal in peace.

But, it was greater than that. Jesus was going to reveal some great things about Himself during this feast. He was going to change the entire ritual. Rather than being a memorial of the Exodus event, Jesus was going to transform the Passover to be a memorial of the Passion event. That's why Luke records the words of Jesus, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).

The plan worked just as Jesus described it.

Mark 14:16

The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

They entered the city. They saw a man carrying a pitcher of water. They followed him. They said, "The Teacher says, 'Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" He showed them a room. They began to prepare the Passover.

Now, the Passover was far more than simply a meal. It was a religious service that took place with Scripture readings and blessings and prayers and symbols and discussions about what took place in the days of Moses. So, there was a lot of preparation that these disciples had to do. By verse 17, the preparations were finished. This leads us to our fifth point, ...

5. The Prediction of Betrayal (verses 17-21)

Mark 14:17-18

When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating, ...

This is the Passover that all of the disciples imagined. Surely, it was a festive time.

Food was shared. Scripture was read. The soft murmur of discussion filled the air. Certainly, there were moments of laughter. Certainly, there were moments of joy. And then, Jesus drops the bombshell.

Mark 14:18

... Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me."

It was as if the life was taken out of the party. Suddenly, the conversations stopped when they realized what Jesus had just said. What was joy and mirth was suddenly turned into a somber reality.

I remember such an occasion at my house. It was almost twenty years ago. It was a Sunday afternoon. We had a bunch of people over at our house. I can't even recall whether it was friends or family that was over. But, I can remember sitting at the dinner table, receiving a phone call from an old college buddy. For four years we had played soccer together. He was our goalie and MVP of our team my senior year. I hadn't spoken with him for quite some time. It was a bit strange that he called. But, I was excited to hear his voice for the first time in years.

I said, "Hey, Stump! How are you doing?! Boy it's been a long time." On the other end of the phone, he wasn't quite as upbeat as I was. He had some sad news for me. One of our teammates, Burney Dunn, who started at sweeper for us on our championship team, had been brutally murdered.

I believe that Burney was in Alaska, studying for his doctorate. He was in bed one night. His landlord came upon him and murdered him. It took the joy of the moment into a complete turn-around. Moments earlier, I had been excited to speak to a long-lost friend. But now, the reality of the phone call had begun to sink upon my heart. It was a bit difficult to continue in the festivities and fun, knowing what had happened in recent days.

Surely such news wasn't pleasant for these disciples to hear, either. Certainly, they knew what Jesus meant by these words. Jesus, Himself had told them on several different occasions that He was going to die. [2](#) They sort of understood. But, I don't believe that it ever crossed their minds that the way in which Jesus would die would be because one of His close disciples would betray Him.

Here for the first time, Jesus revealed the way in which He would be captured: a betrayer from within. Certainly, they were stunned! These disciples knew of His great love for them. They knew of His care and concern for them. They responded in love for Him. These disciples loved Jesus. These disciples followed Jesus.

And now, to think of one of the disciples actually turning Jesus in to the authorities to be killed was almost unfathomable.. They were a tight band of followers. They could say with the Three Musketeers, "All for one and one for all!" And then, to hear the words of Jesus that one them would betray Him?. It boggled their minds. But, this is what Jesus said. He said, ""Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me -- one who is eating with Me." (verse 18).

We read their response in verse 19, ...

Mark 14:19

They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?"

Initially, their response was grief. This was only natural. More and more the reality of His upcoming death was sinking in upon their hearts. It was causing them greater and greater sorrow. And then, one of the disciples began to think in his heart (perhaps it was John, the one with a tender heart), "If one of us is going to betray Jesus, it might be me! Oh, shudder the thought! That I would betray my Lord. No! Never! Surely not I, Lord?"

When the first disciple asked this question, the hearts of the other disciples would have begun to pound in their chests, lest they be the one to betray Jesus. Perhaps Thomas, the one who doubted, was the next who said, "Surely not I, Lord?" And then Andrew, "Surely not I, Lord?" And then Peter and the rest, "Surely not I, Lord." "One by one" they asked this question to Jesus. I believe that, even Judas, himself asked this question, "Surely not I?" In verse 20, we see Jesus press the point, ...

Mark 14:20

And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl."

Indeed, it will be one of the disciples. Jesus knew that this was the way that it must be. In Psalm 41:9, David lamented when those who devised his hurt were his closest of friends. He said, "Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

It is one thing to be captured by your enemies. That is bad enough. But, it is entirely another thing when it is your friend that turns against you! That is far more hurtful! You expect for your enemies to turn against you. You don't expect for your friends to turn against you.

But, it was all part of God's plan. Verse 21 says, ...

Mark 14:21

For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him;

The death of Jesus upon the cross was an event that was fore-ordained from the foundation of the world. The early Christians acknowledged that the death of Jesus was "predestined to occur" in accordance with God's purpose (Acts 4:28). Peter and Paul both acknowledged how our salvation was determined before time began, according to the good pleasure of God. Paul is very clear about this in the first chapter of Ephesians. Peter is very clear about this in his first epistle, as well. Jesus continued with some strong and hard words in verse 21.

Mark 14:21

... but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

In recent days, I've been reading through the book of Job. When he lost everything that he owned and was afflicted with sore boils, he lamented the day of his birth. He cursed the day of his birth (Job 3:1). "Why did I not die at birth? "Why did I not come forth from the womb and expire" (Job 3:11). Job felt that such would have been better for him. In reality, we find out that such wasn't the case, and God rewarded Job's patience. But, such is the reality of the life of Judas as well. "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

When Dante wrote his famous work, "The Inferno," describing his understanding of hell with its various degrees of punishment, he put various types of sin on the outer reaches of hell. As the sins became worse and worse, the people were placed closer to the center of hell, where the suffering was greater. Right in the center of hell, in the worst place of all, was Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

Judas committed the worst crime ever committed. The extent of the crime is measured by the value of the offense. It's one thing to steal a candy-bar worth a dollar. It's far worse to embezzle millions of dollars in a Ponzi scheme. It's far worse yet to take a human life. It's far worse yet to betray the king of the universe! This is what Judas did. Judas knew Jesus in all the glory of His flesh. He witnessed how Jesus was indeed "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). And yet, to Judas, thirty pieces of silver were worth more than Jesus.

The sin of Judas ought to haunt us. If it were possible for Judas to be with and around Jesus for three years and then betray Jesus, then certainly it is possible to be with and around the church of Jesus Christ for decades, only to find yourself to be a Judas. I'm not talking about losing your salvation. I'm talking about being with an among the company of His followers, while all the while, pilfering from the money box as Judas did (John 12:6). I'm talking about pretending to be an upright member of the church, all the while, living in unrepentant sin. I'm talking about making professions of your faith, but in the end, found wanting, as the hypocrites who Jesus so often confronted were.

My advice and counsel to you is this: never presume that it won't happen to you. You need to be fighting for your faith constantly. You need to be praying for the Lord to strengthen your faith on a daily basis. To be sure, the Christian life will have its ups and downs. Seek the Lord to be found true in the end.

Let's look at my last point this morning, ...

6. The Celebration of the Passover (verses 22-26)

Mark 14:22-26

While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

These are very familiar words for us. We go over these words every four to six weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is appropriate for us to do so. In Luke's account of this scene, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). We often celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus.

But, before it was the Lord's Supper, it was the Passover. Jesus transformed the ritual into a celebration of His own death. You need to reflect upon how radical Jesus was in what He said at this meal. He took a tradition that had been celebrated for nearly 1500 years and changed it!

We don't know everything that was said during this Passover meal, but if it is anything like their celebration today (which is somewhat of a good assumption), we have some clue. If you would go into a Jewish home next Passover, you would most likely be confronted with a fabulous spread of food and different ornaments around the table. Everyone has a nice spread of dishes, with a cup of wine in front of them. An extra place is set for Elijah, in the hopes that he would come that very night. In the center of the table would be a plate with various different foods that would remind the Jewish people of their slavery in Egypt. A shank bone of a lamb reminds them of the sacrifice offered during the Passover. Several types of bitter herbs reminds them of the bitter slavery that they experienced in Israel. An apple-cinnamon mixture reminds them of the mortar that the Jewish people would use to build the bricks for Pharaoh's pyramids. Matzah (or unleavened bread) would be the only kind of bread permitted, reminding the Jewish people that they left Egypt in haste, with no time for the bread to rise.

During the meal, the Jews do many things today. The entire meal is a hubbub of activity and symbolism. They begin with lighting a candle and saying a blessing. They ceremonially wash their hands. They eat of the bitter herbs, to remind them of the bitterness of their slavery. The children will ask questions of the father of the family to enable the father to tell the story of how God redeemed Israel from Egypt. The story of the ten plagues is told. They eat of the main course, the lamb. During the meal, they drink four different cups of wine, each of which describe

a different aspect of the deliverance from Egypt. One represents sanctification. Another represents deliverance. The third cup represents redemption. And the fourth cup represents acceptance. Each of these cups celebrate the promises of God as found in Exodus 6:6-7). They take out some special, unleavened bread and distribute it to all to eat. Throughout the meal, there will often be blessings that are stated, such as, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who created the fruit of the vine." Or, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." At other times, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who sanctifies our lives through the commandments and commands us to eat the bitter herbs." Then, they finish with a hymn. We could spend much time explaining the details of everything that they do. But, the point is this: the whole entire meal is filled with symbolism. Everything in the meal reminds people in one way or another of God's kindness to the nation of Israel when they were in slavery. Jesus inserted His own symbolism.

When Jesus said, "Take it; this is My body" (verse 22), the disciples would have been surprised and perplexed. When He did the same thing with the cups of wine, saying, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (verse 24), the disciples would have been surprised again. Everything up to this point was directed back toward Moses and what God had done through him. But now, Jesus is focusing the attention of the evening upon Himself.

These are some of the most debated words in all of the Bible. It's the meaning of these words that are debated. Roman Catholic theologians believe that the substance of the bread and wine actually change into the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine is called, "Transubstantiation." If one would attend a Roman Catholic mass, you would be able to see how deeply the Catholics believe this. After the change in substance has taken place, the priest will kneel before the wafer, believing himself to be kneeling before Jesus Christ, Himself. So central is this doctrine to the Roman Catholics that if you attack this doctrine, you attack the heart of their religion.

I believe that such an understanding is entirely wrong. The Passover meal is filled with symbolism. The elements eaten all symbolize something that took place in the past. Never would a Jew have thought that any of the substance of the food actually changed. But try as you might to persuade the Roman Catholics, much will be in vain. They will repeat like Luther did when debating Zwingli during the Reformation, "This is my body." They may even quote the Latin as did Luther, "hoc est corpus meum." However, I don't believe that this is how the disciples would have understood Jesus. Everything in the meal was highly symbolic. So also the words of Jesus.

Regarding the other views of the Lord's supper, there are essentially three others. First is the Lutheran view, which Martin Luther held to. He was able to see the difficulties of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, but could never rid himself completely of their error. He maintained a view of the Lord's Supper often called, "consubstantiation." He maintained that the presence of Christ was "in, with, and under" the host (i.e. the bread). I believe that this is an erroneous view as well.

The two other views of the Lord's supper are represented by other key figures in the Reformation. Ulrich Zwingli believed that these words were symbolic and nothing else. John Calvin believed that though these words were symbolic, the importance that Jesus placed upon the Lord's Supper promised a real presence when the supper was celebrated. Not that there was anything inherently changed in the elements, but that Christ would "commune" with us in a special way during the Lord's Supper unlike any other time. If you would push me to the wall, I would probably be somewhere between Zwingli and Calvin. But, I digress.

The great reality of the Lord's Supper comes in verse 24, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." It is at this point that Jesus would certainly have spoken about the lamb. We sacrifice the Passover lamb to remember how the Lord passed over the people of Israel. It is a perfect picture of how God forgives sin: through the shedding of blood. But from now on, it's not the blood of bulls and goats that take away sin. It is the blood of Jesus that will take away sin. When He was on the cross, He became the Passover lamb. Jesus was saying, "it is my blood that will be poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." This is the message of the gospel. Do you want to be forgiven of your sins? Believe upon Jesus, the true Passover Lamb.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are to look back upon the death of Jesus. Though I entitled my message this morning, "His Last Meal," we see here another meal to which Jesus alludes. In verse 29, Jesus said, "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" He's talking about the day in which Jesus will fully consummate His kingdom. Though the Lord's Supper looks back, it also looks forward. The Lord's Supper looks back to the death of Christ and looks forward to the kingdom of Christ. This is what Paul alluded to when He said, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Those who love Him now will be with Him in His kingdom one day. Will you be there?

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For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Found in "Light in the Shadow of Jihad: The Struggle for Truth" by Ravi Zacharias (Multnomah Publishers, 2002).

[2] Mark 8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:33-34