

Discipleship According to Mark

The Last Supper (Mark 14:12-31)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at Houston Chinese Church on September 20, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ One of the most famous paintings in the world is **Leonardo DaVinci's *The Last Supper***. Housed in a Catholic church in Milan, Italy, the painting is essentially a huge mural on the wall. Fifteen feet high and almost twenty-nine feet across. It depicts the very scene we just read about in Mark's Gospel. **Where Jesus is observing the Passover with his disciples and surprises them all by announcing that one of them will betray him.**
 - The painting depicts their varied reactions. All of them shocked and looking suspiciously at one another. Each of them self-assured that it surely couldn't be me. The one disciple most taken aback is Judas, who can't believe Jesus just exposed his plans. And yet, for some odd reason, Jesus didn't single him out or try to stop him.
 - DaVinci's *Last Supper* is memorable whether you've seen it in person or not. Whether you're a believer or not. It's just one of those indelible images recognizable by practically everyone in Western civilization.
- ❖ They say a picture is worth a thousand words, but in the original Greek, our passage only contains 315 Greek words. **315 words inspired by God; recorded by man; preserved for us. To provide an authoritative picture of what happened in that Last Supper.** Which became the model for the Church's understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper. Otherwise known as the Eucharist or Holy Communion. That's what our passage is all about.
 - In this series in Mark, we noted how this fast-paced Gospel immediately slows down in chapter 11. And from Mark 11-16, we move at a snail's pace walking through the final days of Jesus's earthly life, in the final week before his death and resurrection.
- ❖ Chapter 14:12 tells us that we're in Thursday of that week. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is starting. For that entire Thursday afternoon, Passover lambs were being sacrificed at the temple. **People were then taking those paschal lambs and gathering together that evening, throughout the Holy City, to eat a Passover meal.**
 - And that Passover would commence a seven-day festival, The Feast of Unleavened Bread. Looking back in remembrance of God delivering his people from Egypt and pointing forward in hope of a future salvation through God's Messiah.
- ❖ Suffice it to say, this Passover meal was to be a joyous occasion. **But the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples that evening carried a distinctly somber tone.** Like last week's passage, the main section is sandwiched and surrounded by two smaller sections highlighting opposition to Jesus. **Notice how the main section of our text, focused on the Supper (vv22-26), begins with a revelation of betrayal by one of them (vv17-21). Then it ends with a prediction of desertion by all of them (vv27-31). "You will all fall away."**
 - It's somewhat surprising that Mark would sandwich the joyous celebration of the Passover with the somber warning and prediction that even Jesus's most devoted followers will fail and fall away. And yet I believe this ordering is intentional. **For it's a needed reminder that the Lord's Supper is a table of grace—not merit.** Betrayers and deserters are invited. **Holy Communion is not a meal for those who think they're worthy, but for those who know they are not.**

- ❖ As we walk through this morning's text, I want to show you three things Jesus is doing. First, we see him preparing the Passover with sovereign control. Nothing surprises him. Nothing catches him off guard. Everything happens as he predicted. Second, we see Jesus redefining the Passover meal with reference—not to a paschal lamb—but to his own body and blood. And third, we see Jesus concluding the Passover with words of warning and of hope.

Preparing the Passover with Sovereign Control

- ❖ Let's begin in v12 and see how Jesus prepares for the Passover with sovereign control over the circumstances. **Jesus and his disciples were just at the temple to sacrifice the lamb they would eat together that evening for Passover.** There would've been a priest who slaughtered the lamb; sprinkled its blood on the base of the altar, and burned its fat on the altar itself. The priest would've returned the slain lamb, drained of all its blood, legs unbroken, and head still attached. That's what the Law required (Ex 12:9, 46).
 - And the Law also specified that the Passover had to be eaten in the place where the LORD God makes his name dwell, which in those days meant Jerusalem (Deut 16:5-6). So they needed a place in the city to eat the meal. That's why his disciples ask, in v12, *"Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?"*
- ❖ Jesus's response is reminiscent of his entrance into Jerusalem back in chapter 11. In both instances, Jesus sends two disciples to make preparations. **And in both instances, he demonstrates divine foreknowledge and providential control over circumstances.** The colt is exactly where he said it would be, and the owner is more than willing to let him use it. Similarly, the man carrying a jar of water leads them to the right house, which is already furnished and prepared. And the master of the house is more than willing to let him use it.
 - What's interesting about the *"large upper room"* in that house is that later in Acts 1:13, a large upper room in Jerusalem served as the initial meeting place for the fledgling church. **And that room is later identified in Acts 12:12 as belonging to a Mary who was the mother of John Mark.** The very author of this Gospel. So while much of the Gospel is the Apostle Peter's testimony, what's recorded in chapter 14 is likely eyewitness testimony from Mark himself.
- ❖ Some have even suggested that Mark was the man carrying the jar of water who led them to the house. Regardless if that's true, the point is Mark was intentional with these verses. **He was reinforcing the point that Jesus is in complete control as his "hour" approaches** (14:35, 41). His enemies are closing in. There's a traitor in his inner circle. But Jesus is *not* caught in a trap. He's *not* a victim in their devious schemes. **He is in control of every detail of every moment on his road to Calvary.** That's the message these verses are sending.
 - And that means Jesus's timing is deliberate. **It means he intentionally chose the Passover meal as the backdrop for his self-disclosure.** What better way to illustrate the sin-atoning nature of the Messiah's mission than the Passover?

- ❖ **The Passover meal was established to commemorate the Exodus event.** That pivotal moment in redemptive history when the LORD delivered his people from slavery. His work of salvation cumulated in one memorable night when divine judgment visited every home in Egypt, calling for the death of every firstborn son.
 - I think we often assume this was a plague directed squarely at the Egyptians. **But the text tells us that the angel of death visited every home in Egypt that night, including every Israelite home.** Because every Israelite was as guilty of sin as any Egyptian. They all deserved judgment and death.
 - **God didn't give the Israelites a pass. But, in his mercy, he did give them a way of salvation.** He made a way for their sins to be judged and yet somehow for their firstborn sons to be spared.
- ❖ **That way of salvation had nothing to do with the righteousness of those inside the home. But everything to do with the blood of the lamb outside the home.** If an Israelite family trusted the God's word and painted their doorposts with the blood of a lamb, their entire household would survive. **Judgment would surely visit their home that night, but it wouldn't rest there. It would pass over.** Hence, the name of the meal.
- ❖ So by Jesus's day, the Passover (aka Seder) had taken a customary form. The meal would consist of a roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and four cups of wine drunk at four moments. **The meal would begin with the head of the family pronouncing a blessing over the first cup of wine.** Which was shared among everyone. And that was followed by eating **bitter herbs**, which recalled the bitter years of slavery their ancestors endured in Egypt.
 - As the second cup was readied, the youngest child present was to ask why this night is different from all other nights. Then the head of the family would retell the Exodus story and lead in singing Psalms 113 and 114. Then they would drink the second cup.
 - At this point, between the second and third cup, the head of the family would bless the **unleavened bread**, break it, and share it with everyone. Then they would eat the bread along with the Passover lamb. So it was at this point in the meal, in v18, *"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.'"*
- ❖ **Commentators note that there were likely more people present in that large upper room.** More than just the Twelve. DaVinci's painting gives the wrong impression. The Passover was eaten with women and children present. So in v18, when Jesus says, *"one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me,"* that implicates everyone in the room.
 - The text goes on to say that everyone began to be sorrowful and were saying to Jesus one after another, *"Is it I?"* The NASB translates it, *"Surely not I?"* Which I think is better since it's a rhetorical question expecting a negative response. **In other words, they each say to Jesus, "There's no way it's me, right?"** Apparently, instead of worrying about Jesus being betrayed, they're each more concerned to prove their own innocence. That they're not to blame.

- ❖ Jesus goes on to say in v20, *“It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.”* He narrows it down to the Twelve. To one whose hands were in the same dish. **So the Twelve realize its one of them, but they still don't know who.** Listen to what Jesus says next, *“For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”*
 - Jesus implies that this betrayal was prophesied in the OT. It was written of him. He probably had in mind **Psalm 41:9**, *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.”* **So Judas's betrayal had been prophesied and foreordained centuries earlier when David wrote Psalm 41.** It was going to happen by God's sovereign decree. And yet that in no way exonerated Judas's guilt.
 - Woe to him. He's still responsible for his sin, and he'll still face the consequences. It would've been better for him if he had never been born. Yet, at the same time, it was God's will for Judas to be born, knowing he would grow up to betray Jesus. **Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are apparently compatible with each other.**
- ❖ **But the main point is that Jesus was in control of every detail as he prepared to celebrate the Passover with his disciples.** He was deliberate in his choice of a Passover meal to vividly illustrate what would soon take place in his suffering and death. And he was intentional to share this meal with traitors and deserters in order to communicate the gospel message that sinners such as these are invited to his Table.

Redefining the Passover with His Body and Blood

- ❖ So the first thing we see in the text is Jesus preparing the Passover with sovereign control. Now the second thing we see him doing is redefining the Passover with his body and blood. Thanks to DaVinci, everyone knows this event in the Gospels as the Last Supper. **But perhaps we should be calling it the Last Passover.**
 - Because if the Passover was intended to point back to the Exodus and point forward to the Messiah, then the Passover's purpose is fulfilled once Jesus the Messiah has come and secured a redemption greater than the Exodus. **That's why God's people gather around a new table eating a new meal.**
 - While its origin is in the Jewish Passover, the Lord's Supper has taken on new meaning and significance, redefined by the suffering of the Lamb of God. That's why the Church doesn't eat a Passover meal. We eat the Lord's Supper.
- ❖ If you look at v22, this is where Jesus begins to redefine the Passover and transform the Jewish meal into a Christ-centered Supper. *“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.”*
 - So this would've taken place during that third section of the Passover meal, when the unleavened bread was broken and passed around, and everyone would've eaten it along with the paschal lamb. **But in the Gospel account, there's no focus given to the roasted lamb. Just to the bread and the body of Christ.** Because Jesus himself will fulfill the role of the Passover lamb.

- ❖ Now those particular words, ***“this is my body,”*** have been historically debated between Catholic authorities and Protestant Reformers. And even between the Reformers themselves. Catholics take that statement literally, and believe that, during the Mass when the priest consecrates them, the bread and the wine literally become the body and blood of Christ. Protestants disagree. We deny that a miraculous change occurs in substance. We insist that the elements remain as bread and wine.
 - But while we say, ***“this is my body,”*** shouldn’t be taken literally, at the same time, we can argue that Jesus was giving us more than a metaphor. More than a helpful illustration. He was offering us physical signs that point to spiritual realities.
- ❖ In the case of the bread, it points to the reality that Jesus still has a body to this day. At the Incarnation, the Son of God became flesh, and he’s still in a body as he sits in the heavenly places at the Father’s right hand. And those words remind us that it was *that* body that he gave over to suffering and death. Luke’s account says, *“This is my body, which is given for you.”* (Lk 22:19). That’s substitutionary language.
 - Jesus lived the life you should’ve lived and died the death you should’ve died. He gave his body for you. That’s what the bread points to. Every time we eat it, we are bringing to mind the body that Christ gave in sacrifice for us and our salvation.
- ❖ For those who’ve been in the church long enough, the symbolism of the Supper seems obvious enough. But that wasn’t so for the Twelve. They needed Jesus to be explicit about what the bread represents. **Because remember, throughout Mark’s Gospel, his disciples consistently failed to understand whenever Jesus spoke of bread.**
 - In Mark 6, when he fed the five thousand, and later in Mark 8, when he fed the four thousand, it says his disciples didn’t understand about the loaves (6:52). They didn’t get it. **That Jesus is the Bread sent from above to feed and nurture God’s people.** In Mark 8:14, while crossing the Sea of Galilee, the disciples bemoan the fact they forgot to bring bread. **Failing to understand that the Bread of Life is with them in the boat.** Jesus says to them in v17, *“Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?”*
 - So here in the Supper, Jesus makes it explicit. This is my body. He makes it clear that the bread refers to him. And the breaking of the bread symbolizes the suffering he’ll experience. While the eating of the bread, on our part, communicates the benefit we’ll get from his suffering. **We will be nurtured and strengthened by the very thing that breaks him.**
- ❖ And then there’s the cup. Listen to v23, *“²³And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”* In a Passover meal, this would’ve been the third cup of wine. And again, like with the bread, Christians are all too familiar with the symbolism and the wine’s connection with blood. **But think of how those in the upper room would’ve reacted to being told this is Jesus’s blood they’re drinking.**

- ❖ The OT teaches that the blood of a creature is the life of the creature, so God's people were forbidden to consume the blood of an animal (Gen 9:4). **So imagine how scandalous it would've sounded in the ears of the early Jewish Christians to speak of drinking Jesus's blood.** Even if it wasn't meant to be taken literally.
 - Notice Jesus says, "*This is my blood of the covenant.*" In Scripture, God established covenants as a way to secure relationship and to assure his people of his commitment to his promises. It's similar to a wedding couple making promises to each other and sealing them with a marriage covenant. They're securing that commitment.
- ❖ The Old Covenant that God originally made with the Israelites was sealed by a ceremony described for us in Exodus 24. **When you read that chapter what stands out is how much blood was involved in that covenant-making ceremony on Mount Sinai.**
 - Moses collected the blood of many sacrifices into a large basin and threw half of it against the altar. And the other half of the blood he threw *onto* the people (Ex 24:8). It must've been a gruesome sight. Blood dripping everywhere. Everyone's clothes stained blood red. **But the gruesomeness was meant to convey the gravity of our sins and the greatness of the sacrifice required to forgive those sins.**
- ❖ Throughout the OT, bloody sacrifices continued under the Old Covenant. But this covenant had an expiration date. **In Jeremiah 31, the LORD declared that, one day, he will make a new covenant with his people** (v31). Where his law would be written on our hearts (v33); where we will all know him, from the least of us to the greatest (v34); where our iniquities will be forgiven and our sins remembered no more (v34). So when Jesus says, "*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,*" he's saying this cup of wine is another physical sign. **Pointing to a new covenant-making ceremony on Mount Calvary.** And like before, blood was everywhere that day.
- ❖ But here's the difference. **Unlike in that first ceremony where blood was thrown *on* you, the blood of the new covenant has to be internalized.** You drink it in. Because in this new relationship with God, through the New Covenant, **the focus is *not* on external cleansing but internal transformation.** The gospel is about forgiving your sins, changing your heart, cleansing your soul, filling you with the Spirit so you're new and clean from the inside out.
 - If it was just about keeping our hands clean, some of us might be able to pull it off. We can earn a seat at the table. **But if this new covenant relationship expects pure hearts, then none of us are worthy to sit at the Lord's Table.** None of us are righteous, no not one. When we think about wicked traitors and faithless deserters, we like to tell ourselves, "Surely not I?" There's no way that's me, right? **But the truth is—that *is* us. We are wicked. We are faithless. We are *not* worthy of the Table.**
- ❖ But thank God it's a table of grace not merit. **Praise be to God that the Lord's Supper is *not* for perfect saints but for repentant sinners.** Those worthy to eat the Supper are those who realize they're *not* worthy and yet believe that the Worthy One has poured out his blood for many. For us and for our salvation.

Concluding the Passover with Words of Warning and Hope

- ❖ So we've seen Jesus prepare the Passover with sovereign control, and we've seen him redefine the Passover with his body and blood. The third and final thing we see Jesus do is to conclude the Passover with words of warning and hope.
 - The traditional Passover meal would've concluded with a fourth cup of wine and the singing of Psalms 115 to 118. That's probably the hymn mentioned in v26, "*And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" **And while on that mount, Jesus issued a word of warning to his disciples.** Predicting that all of them will fall away from him. Look at v27, "*And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'*"
- ❖ That's a quote from **Zechariah 13:7. There the LORD prophesied that his shepherd—the chosen leader of his people—will be struck down.** And now Jesus applies that prophecy to himself. He plans to fulfill it.
 - All is predetermined. All is foreordained. Just as we said earlier with the Son of Man's betrayal, this wicked act is allowed to take place under God's sovereign wisdom and will. So that an ultimate good can be achieved.
- ❖ **But before his disciples experience it all as good, they will initially scatter.** They will all fall away. They'll desert him one by one. A sad prediction that's fulfilled by the end of chapter 14. But out of the Twelve, Peter tends to think of himself as the exception to the rule, so he speaks up in v29, "*Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.'*"
 - "These others may fall, Jesus, but not I. I will stand firm." That's the kind of boldness and pluckiness that Peter thought Jesus wanted out of him. But to that attitude, Jesus says in v30, "*Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.*" ³¹*But he said emphatically, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.'* And they all said the same."
- ❖ Peter was probably confused at this point. Because earlier, at the end of chapter 8, he was rebuked for opposing Jesus's talk of suffering and dying. So he thought he had learned his lesson. **This time around, Peter's willing to accept Jesus's fate and to even join in it himself.** "I'll die with you, my Lord."
 - But once again he's rebuked. Because he doesn't understand the Messiah's mission. **Jesus doesn't want to die *with* Peter but *for* Peter.** And for the rest of his disciples. Jesus is not looking for the bravest to join his band of warriors. He's looking for the humblest. Those who have been brought low by their sin. Who admit their weakness. **Who confess their proneness to leave the God they love.**
 - His Table of Grace is not for those who think they're worthy but for those who know they're not. This is a warning to those who think too highly of themselves.

- ❖ **But notice how Jesus concludes the Passover—not just with a word of warning—but a word of hope.** Yes, his disciples will all fall away and be scattered. But then listen to what he says in v28, *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”*
 - **Yes, he’ll be struck down. But then he’ll be raised up.** And notice he didn’t say, *“If I am raised up.”* He said, *“But after I am raised up, I will go before you.”* Jesus predicts both his death and resurrection on behalf of his sheep. And like a Good Shepherd, he will gather his scattered sheep into one flock and go before them. Leading them once more to Galilee.
- ❖ And notice another word of hope in v25, which I skipped over earlier. **As we’ve been stressing, the Lord’s Supper is not a meal for proud achievers. It’s a meal for humble receivers—with nothing in their hands to bring; simply to the cross they cling.**
 - But while it’s a meal that points back to the cross, reminding us of how sinful we are—the Lord’s Supper also points forward to our hope, reminding us of the next time Jesus will feast with us. Look at v25, *“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.”*
 - He’s talking about that future meal when all the Redeemed will dine together with Christ at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, when the kingdom of God comes in all its fullness (Rev 19:9). That’s a good reason to rejoice.
- ❖ And that’s why I think the sorrowful tone that’s predominant in the Last Supper back then should not be mirrored in our observance of the Lord’s Supper today. **I think many Christians approach the Supper like they would a funeral.** Their mood is so somber. They have a grave expression on their face like someone died. And, yes, Someone did.
 - But we’re not just dwelling on the past. We’re looking to the future with the knowledge that that Someone rose from the dead; ascended on high; and he’s coming back again for the Church his Bride. That’s a cause for celebration.
 - **So rather than treat the Lord’s Supper like a sad funeral, I encourage you to carry the same enthusiasm and joy you’d bring to a wedding.** Because that’s what the communion meal is pointing to. That Wedding Supper of the Lamb that we get to enjoy with the Bridegroom and all the saints in glory.