

# Gospel of Mark—21 Day Challenge

Healdsburg SDA Church, March 10-30, 2024

Week 3

**Date:** March 24

**Repentance:** Proverbs 28:13

*Those who cover their sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*

**Reading:** Read Scripture First: Mark 14:1-11

The last crowded act of Jesus' life was now about to open. The Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were really two different things. The Feast of Unleavened Bread consisted of the seven days following the Passover. It was compulsory for every adult male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem to come to the Passover, but far more than these came. It was the one ambition of all Jews to eat at least one Passover in Jerusalem before they died. Therefore from every country in the world pilgrims came flocking to the Passover Feast. During the Passover all lodging was free.

A passage in Josephus gives us an idea of how many pilgrims actually came. In about ad 65, the high priest took a census of the lambs slain at the Passover in one year. The number, according to Josephus, was 256,500. The law was that there must be a minimum party of ten people to one lamb, so that there must have been close on 3,000,000 pilgrims in Jerusalem. During the Passover, the remembrance of the old deliverance from Egypt made the people long for a new deliverance from Rome. The Jewish authorities knew that in an inflammable atmosphere like that, the arrest of Jesus might well provoke a riot. That is why they sought some secret stratagem to arrest him and have him in their power before the people knew anything about it. It was at the Passover that God's deliverer of all humanity was to be crucified upon his cross.

At that time, Jesus was in the house of a man called Simon the leper, in the village of Bethany. To Jesus there came a woman with an alabaster phial of nard which was a very precious ointment made from a rare plant that came from far-off India. She broke the flask and anointed him with the whole contents. The flask was worth more than 300 denarii. A denarius was a Roman coin which was a working man's daily wage. It would have cost an ordinary man almost a year's pay to buy the flask of ointment.

This story shows the action of love. If love is true, there must always be a certain extravagance in it. It does not nicely calculate the less or more. It is not concerned to see how little it can decently give. If it gave all it had, the gift would still be too little. There is a recklessness in love which refuses to count the cost. This world would be so much lovelier if there were more people like this woman. How that last extravagant, impulsive kindness must have uplifted Jesus' heart. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

**Reflection:**

The woman in this story responded to Christ's love with an extravagant action that shocked the people around her. What would that kind of extravagant response look like in your life?

**Date:** March 25

**Repentance:** Psalm 139:23-24

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

**Reading:** Read Mark 14:12-31

Certain things were necessary and these were the things the disciples would have to get ready. First, there was the *lamb*, to remind them of how their houses had been protected by the badge of blood when the angel of death passed through Egypt. Second, there was the *unleavened bread* to remind them of the bread they had eaten in haste when they escaped from slavery. Third, there was a *bowl of salt water*, to remind them of the tears they had shed in Egypt. Fourth, there was a collection of *bitter herbs*—horseradish, chicory, endive, lettuce, horehound—to remind them of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt. Fifth, there was a paste called *charosheth*, a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts, to remind them of the clay of which they had made bricks in Egypt. Through it there were sticks of cinnamon to remind them of the straw with which the bricks had been made. Sixth and finally, there were *four cups of wine*, which were drunk at different stages of the meal, were to remind them of the four promises in Exodus 6:6–7.

It was at that feast that he who liberated the world from sin sat at his last meal with his disciples. Jesus knew what was going to happen. Jesus could see into the heart of Judas. There may be things we succeed in hiding from other people, but we cannot hide them from Jesus Christ. He is the searcher of human hearts. He knows what is in each one of us. In this passage, Jesus offered two things to Judas. First, he made love's last appeal. It is as if he is saying to Judas, 'I know what you are going to do. Will you not stop even now?' Second, He offered Judas a last warning. He is telling him in advance of the consequences of the thing that it is in his heart to do. Here is the whole human situation. God has given us wills that are free. His love appeals to us. His truth warns us. But there is no compulsion. We hold the awful responsibility that we can spurn the appeal of God's love and disregard the warning of his voice. In the end, there is no one but ourselves responsible for our sins. (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

Christ was standing at the point of transition between two economies and their two great festivals. He, the spotless Lamb of God, was about to present Himself as a sin offering, that He would thus bring to an end the system of types and ceremonies that for four thousand years had pointed to His death. As He ate the Passover with His disciples, He instituted in its place the service that was to be the memorial of His great sacrifice. The national festival of the Jews was to pass away forever. The service which Christ established was to be observed by His followers in all lands and through all ages. (Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 652).

**Reflection:**

Spend time reflecting on God's extravagant grace and mercy to you. Ask him to search your heart and thoughts to see if there is any wicked way that is in need of his renewal.

**Date:** March 26

**Repentance:** Psalm 103:8-9

*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not strive with us, nor will he keep his anger forever.*

**Reading:** Read Mark 14:32-72

In spite of the exceptional trauma of the moment and the certain future that lay ahead, Jesus trusted in God as His loving Father and in His will. What's more, the "cup" that He prayed might be removed was not the physical pain He would endure on the cross. Indeed many Christian martyrs have gone to their death with thanksgiving and joy with no evidence whatsoever that they wished to avoid the hour of their martyrdom. No, the cup that so distressed and troubled Him was the spiritual suffering He would endure as He would bear the sins of the world and drink to the last drop the fierce wrath of God as our substitute. Tim Keller says,

In the garden of Gethsemane, he turns to the Father and all he can see before him is wrath, the abyss, the chasm, the nothingness of the cup.... Jesus began to experience the spiritual, cosmic, infinite disintegration that would happen when he became separated from his Father on the cross. Jesus began to experience merely a foretaste of that, and he staggered. (Keller, *King's Cross*, 176)

The anguish and pain of the cross was not what concerned His soul. It was knowing that He would be abandoned by and separated from His Father as He answered "for every sin and crime and act of malice and injury and cowardice and evil in the world." That is what brought Him to His knees and moved Him to make His poignant plea.

It is the beginning of the end for the great King. Religious and political authorities will conspire to put Him to death. And His closest companion will draw near only to deny that he ever knew Him. He is all alone. How will things go for Him? The kangaroo court of the chief priest and Sanhedrin sought witnesses against Jesus but struck out! Still, as far as this tribunal was concerned, Jesus was guilty until proven innocent, and He was not going to be found innocent.

Peter failed the Lord three times in the garden of Gethsemane (vv. 37-42). Now he fails Him three times in the courtyard of the high priest. Initially, he failed Him by sleeping when he should have been praying. Now he fails Him by denying Him when he should have confessed Him. The rock named Peter crumbles and is pulverized under the pressure. "Immediately, a rooster crowed a second time" (v. 72). Peter then "remembered" that Jesus had predicted his denial. This broke him, and he, overwhelmed by this betrayal and cowardice, "began to weep." At the very moment he was voicing his third denial, Jesus "turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61). Sinclair Ferguson says, "That look was to be his salvation, for he saw in those eyes not condemnation but compassion. That was the turning point in his life.... Now, in this most painful and memorable of ways, Peter saw himself as he really was, repented, and was remade into the great apostle." (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*).

**Reflection:**

What does it mean for you, to confess Christ, no matter how much shame you might feel? How is this present in your life?

**Date:** March 27

**Repentance:** Psalm 103:10-11

*He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him.*

**Reading:** Read Mark 15:1-15

It is early Friday morning. Our Lord has been betrayed, abandoned, interrogated, beaten, spit on, and denied throughout the night with no rest. He will soon be beaten nearly to death by Roman scourging (15:15) and crucified. He will die around 3:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon (15:33–37). What sinful man did to the Son of God can only make us weep. What the sinless Son of God did for man can only make us shout with joy for a “Savior King” who would suffer everything He suffered for you and for me.

Pilate was the Roman procurator (imperial magistrate or governor) of Judea from AD 26–36. This information is helpful in dating Jesus’ public ministry and is further confirmation of the Bible’s historical accuracy. Pilate was a cruel and harsh governor who despised the Jews and enjoyed antagonizing them. He was also an expedient ruler who would gladly make compromises to keep the peace and stay in the good graces of Rome. Apparently Pilate held Jesus’ fate in his hands.

Only one accusation concerned Pilate, so he asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (v. 2). This title has obvious political overtones for Pilate and Rome. Jesus responds in a cryptic fashion to his question: “You have said so.” This is neither a direct affirmation nor a denial. At this point the chief priests “began to accuse Him of many things” (Mark 15:3). To Pilate’s amazement, Jesus still did not answer anything. Once more the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7 is being fulfilled: “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth.” Here is the great King’s silence in the face of His accusers. Sinful men can only watch in amazement. No defense. Not a word. He will see to it that He goes to the cross.

At Passover, Pilate was in the habit of releasing a prisoner, a condemned man, to gain the support and goodwill of the people. The people began to petition Pilate for his annual Passover amnesty gift. Things did not go as Pilate hoped, though we know God’s plan is proceeding exactly as He intended. Sinclair Ferguson says,

Without knowing it, the religious leaders and Pilate and Barabbas were all part of a tapestry of grace which God was weaving for sinners. Their actions spoke louder than their words, louder than the cries of the crowds for Jesus’ blood. Jesus was not dying for His own crimes, but for the crimes of others; not for His own sins, but the sins of others. He did not die for Himself, he died for us!

Ferguson then asks a most important question: “Have you ever seen what they were all too blind to notice?” (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*).

**Reflection:**

Jesus sacrifice affects sinful people in one of two ways: It drives them away or it changes them. How has his sacrifice affected and changed you recently?

**Date:** March 28

**Repentance:** Psalm 103:12-13

*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who love him.*

**Reading:** Read Mark 15:16-32

In the Gospel's record of the passion of the Christ, the emphasis does not fall on the physical suffering of Jesus—as great as it was. Still, we would be negligent if we passed over too quickly the scourging and physical abuse He suffered.

William Lane details what being “flogged” entailed: “A Roman scourging was a terrifying punishment. The delinquent was stripped, bound to a post or a pillar, or sometimes simply thrown to [the] ground, and was beaten by a number of guards until his flesh hung in bleeding shreds. The instrument indicated by the Marcan text, the dreaded flagellum, was a scourge consisting of leather thongs plaited with several pieces of bone or lead so as to form a chain. Men condemned to flagellation frequently collapsed and died from the flogging.”

Following this life-threatening beating, they clothed Him in a purple cloak, probably a faded military garment serving the purpose of a mock robe of royalty. They twisted together a mock crown, one made of thorns, and pressed it down on His head. They began to mock Him again, this time with derisive salutes: “Hail, King of the Jews!”. They hit Him again with a stick, a mock scepter. They continued spitting on and insulting Him in this manner. They knelt down in mock worship. When they had finished ridiculing Him, they “led Him out to crucify Him.”

Crucifixion was the cruelest, most painful, most humiliating form of capital punishment in the ancient world. And Rome had perfected the technique to ensure maximum suffering. What King Jesus endured on the cross took place right on schedule, exactly according to divine plan. The horror of it is also the glory of it. Jesus is dying the death we should have died that we might live now and forever. *Jesus is our Substitute*. He died our death. *Jesus is our Propitiation*. He endured our condemnation and bears the full wrath of God on our behalf. *Jesus is our Reconciliation*. He suffered our separation that we might be brought back to God. (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*).

The Jewish leaders flung one last challenge at Jesus. ‘Come down from the cross,’ they said, ‘and we will believe in you.’ But it is because Jesus did *not* come down from the cross that we believe in him.’ Jesus came to tell people of the love of God; more, he was himself the incarnate love of God. If he had refused the cross or if in the end he had come down from the cross, it would have meant that there was a limit to God’s love, that there was a line beyond which it would not go. But Jesus went the whole way and died on the cross, and this means that there is literally no limit to God’s love, that there is nothing in all the universe which that love is not prepared to suffer for us, that there is nothing, not even death on a cross, which it will refuse to bear for us. When we look at the cross, Jesus is saying to us, ‘God loves you with a love that is limitless, a love that will bear every suffering earth has to offer.’ (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

**Reflection:**

Spend some time quietly reflecting on what Jesus endured for your salvation.

**Date:** March 29

**Repentance:** Isaiah 53:5

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.*

**Reading:** Read Mark 15:33-47

Here comes the last scene of all. As the end drew near, Jesus uttered the terrible cry, 'My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?' Now if there is one thing sin does, it separates us from God. It puts between us and God a barrier like an unscalable wall. That was the one human experience through which Jesus had never passed, because he was without sin. That is why he can understand our situation so well. That is why we need never fear to go to him when sin cuts us off from God. Because he has gone through it, he can help others who are going through it. There is no depth of human experience which Christ has not plumbed.

Jesus died at 3 pm on the Friday and the next day was the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathaea acted quickly. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. When he saw Jesus die—and he must have been present at the crucifixion—his heart was broken in love. It is an amazing thing how soon Jesus' words came true that when he was lifted up from the earth he would draw all people to himself (John 12:32). (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*).

And so it is over. He is finished. Or ... is He? I know it's Friday. But Sunday is coming! S. M. Lockridge (1913–2000) was a powerful and passionate African-American preacher. He captured so well what just happened ... and what's coming in just a few days:

It's Friday. Jesus is praying. Peter's a-sleeping. Judas is betraying. But Sunday's comin'!

It's Friday. Pilate's struggling. The Council is conspiring. The crowd is vilifying. They don't even know that Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The Disciples are running like sheep without a shepherd. Mary's crying. Peter is denying. But they don't know that Sunday's a-comin'.

It's Friday. The Romans beat my Jesus. They robe Him in scarlet. They crown Him with thorns. But they don't know that Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. See Jesus walking to Calvary. His blood dripping. His body stumbling. And His spirit's burdened. But you see, it's only Friday. Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The world's winning. People are sinning. And evil's grinning.

It's Friday. The soldiers nail my Savior's hands to the cross. They nail my Savior's feet to the cross. And then they raise Him up next to criminals.

It's Friday. But let me tell you something: Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The disciples are questioning, what has happened to their King. And the Pharisees are celebrating that their scheming has been achieved. But they don't know it's only Friday. Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. He's hanging on the cross. Feeling forsaken by His Father. Left alone and dying. Can nobody save Him? Ooooh, it's Friday. But Sunday's comin'.

It's Friday. The earth trembles. The sky grows dark. My King yields His spirit.

It's Friday. Hope is lost. Death has won. Sin has conquered. And Satan's just a-laughin'.

It's Friday. Jesus is buried. A soldier stands guard. And a rock is rolled into place. But It's Friday. It is only Friday. Sunday is a-comin'!

**Reflection:**

When you see the cross, do you think of it as "glorious" or "horrible"? Explain.

**Date:** March 30

**Repentance:** Acts 2:38-39

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."*

**Reading:** Read Mark 16:1-20

If the resurrection is true, then so are a number of other things: (1) There is a God; (2) Jesus is that God; (3) the Bible is true; (4) heaven and hell are real; and (5) Jesus makes the difference whether you go to one or the other. Christianity stands or falls on the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. No resurrection, no Christianity. (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*).

One thing is certain—if Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would never have heard of him. By far the best proof of the resurrection is the existence of the Christian Church. Nothing else could have changed sad and despairing men and women into people radiant with joy and aflame with courage. The resurrection is the central fact of the whole Christian faith.

Jesus is not a figure in a book but a living presence. It is not enough to study the story of Jesus like the life of any other great historical figure. We may begin that way but we must end by meeting him. Jesus is not a memory but a presence. The dearest memory fades. The Christian life is not a matter of *knowing about* Jesus, but of *knowing* Jesus.

One of the most precious things in this passage is in two words which are in no other gospel. 'Go,' said the messenger. 'Tell his disciples **and Peter**.' How that message must have cheered Peter's heart when he received it! He must have been tortured with the memory of his disloyalty, and suddenly there came a special message for him. It was characteristic of Jesus that he thought not of the wrong Peter had done him but of the remorse he was undergoing. Jesus was far more eager to comfort the penitent sinner than to punish the sin. Someone has said, 'The most precious thing about Jesus is the way in which he trusts us on the field of our defeat.'

The Gospel of Mark ends by highlighting certain tasks that Jesus committed to the church. The Church has a preaching task; to tell the story of the good news of Jesus to those who have never heard it. The Church has a healing task; Jesus wished to bring health to the body and health to the soul. The Church has a source of power. The Church is never left alone to do its work. Always Christ works with it and in it and through it. The Lord of the Church is still in the Church and is still the Lord of power. And so the gospel finishes with the message that the Christian life is lived in the presence and the power of him who was crucified and rose again.

**Reflection:**

Christ has defeated death! If you abide in Christ, you are a partaker of His resurrection life. This is good news that Jesus has commissioned you to share with others. How do you see His commission playing out in your own life? What steps will you take to fulfill it?