

Sing Psalm 42 as well as 88

Mark 14 is knit together by the themes of betrayal, desertion, and denial.

Jesus predicts three things in verses 18-31

- 1) one of the twelve will betray him (18-21)
- 2) all twelve will desert him (26-28)
- 3) and Peter will deny him (29-31)

Verses 43-72 then show the fulfillment of Jesus’ predictions:

- 1) Judas betrays him (43-49)
- 2) The twelve desert him (50-52)
- 3) Peter denies him (66-72)

Mark’s gospel has focused our attention on how Jesus predicts what will happen to him, and it happens just as he says.

Jesus is Lord.

The cross is not an accident.

The cross was no surprise to the Lord –
and neither were the events surrounding the cross.

Tonight we look particularly at the betrayal and desertion of Jesus.

Matthew’s account of this night is loaded with scripture.

Mark does less – which calls attention to the scriptures that he does quote –
and especially to Zechariah 9-14.

1. “You Will All Fall Away”: The Uniqueness of Christ (14:26-31)

26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

27 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.’

28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.”

This is a quote from Zechariah 13:7,

but there is a lot from Zechariah 9-14 that all fits in this passage.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem he enacted Zechariah 9:9

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your king is coming to you;

righteous and having salvation is he,

humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

But then in the institution of the Lord’s Supper he echoes Zechariah 9:11,

which spoke of the blood of the covenant in the context of the new Exodus –
the redemption from exile –
and the promise of grain and new wine that would make his people flourish (9:17)

The theme of shepherds and betrayal runs throughout chapters 10-13 of Zechariah,
as Zechariah speaks of the thirty pieces of silver as the price of the Lord's shepherd,
which he throws into the temple "to the potter" (11:13).

Chapter 12 of Zechariah speaks of how they will "look on me, on him whom they have pierced,"
which will be applied to the cross,
and how "on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David
and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." (13:1)

And Zechariah had said that the final battle would begin at the Mount of Olives (14:4).
And on the day when the LORD triumphs over his enemies,
"living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea
and half of them to the western sea." (14:8)

So Jesus is not just coming to fulfill one isolated verse in Zechariah.
He has come to fulfill the *whole* of Zechariah.

But [to our great surprise!] the disciples don't seem to get it.

*29 Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not."
30 And Jesus said to him, "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.*

Mark is the only one who refers to the second crowing of the rooster
(though if you know anything about roosters, you know that a single cockcrow
is almost unheard of).

Also, there is a common Hebrew pattern of connecting numbers:
before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me thrice –
you will raise your voice three times in darkness and apostasy,
before the lower creation speaks twice of the coming dawn.

And Peter vehemently protests against such a thought.
I would die with you before I would deny you!
And all the disciples sound forth in a chorus of assent.

Let us not be too hard on the disciples.
They do not realize what they are up against.

I do not doubt that they meant what they said.

And if this was any other battle –
if this was any other foe –
then they would surely have gone to their deaths with him.

But they have no more chance of surviving this battle –
nay, they have no more chance of *entering* this battle –
than did David’s brothers have a chance against Goliath.

Think back to David and Goliath.
Goliath is bigger, stronger, and meaner than anyone else.
No one in all of Israel can tangle with Goliath.
If Eliab, or any of David’s brothers, had volunteered to go out against Goliath,
they would have been squashed like a bug.

ONLY David – and David alone – can go out against Goliath.
(Which makes the whole “you can defeat Goliath if you trust God like David did”
utterly ridiculous!)

Do you think that you could have succeeded where Peter failed?
No.

No one will be able to go with Jesus to face Goliath’s master.

ONLY Jesus – and Jesus alone – can go out against sin, death, and the devil.

2. “The Spirit Is Willing, but the Flesh Is Weak”: A Failure to Stay Awake (14:32-42)

32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane.

And he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

*33 And he took with him Peter and James and John,
and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.*

These are very strong words.

“greatly distressed and troubled”

are used to refer to people who are shocked at what they see.

34 And he said to them,

“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

The word “sorrowful” here (*perilupos*) is the word used of Herod Antipas
and his sorrow over killing John the Baptist.

It is also the word used in the LXX of Genesis 4, referring to Cain’s mental state
before he killed Abel!

But perhaps more appropriate for this case is its use in the refrain of Psalm 42:
Why are you downcast O my soul?

Jesus soul is downcast.

Jesus has reached the agony of Psalm 42.

He remembers the procession –
just a few days before he *had* led the procession into Jerusalem.
But now the waves and breakers engulf him,
and he is overwhelmed by the torrents of judgment
that are coming crashing down upon him!

Remain here and watch.”

Literally, “stay awake.”

Jesus had told them in 13:37, “stay awake.”
Now he says to them, “remain here and stay awake.”

The idea is that they must be watchful –
just like he had said they should be watchful concerning “that day.”

*35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground
and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.*

What is Jesus saying?
Jesus knows that his hour has come.
Why is praying that the hour might pass from him?
This is why he came!

36 And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Jesus addresses God as “Father” –
a highly unusual (and probably unique) practice.
You can find plenty of Jews referring to God as “our Father” –
after all, God had said that Israel was his firstborn son!

But no one *addressed* God as “Father.”

You may have heard preachers say that the Aramaic, “Abba” is like a child saying “Daddy.”
That is *false*.
Certainly children spoke of their father as ‘abba’ –
but so did grown children,
and for that matter, disciples would address their rabbis as ‘abba.’
It is *simply* the Aramaic word for “Father.”

As numerous linguists have pointed out,
“The term conveys the respectful intimacy of a son in a patriarchal family.” (France 584)

The real point of this form of address
is that Jesus is claiming a unique relationship to the Father –
a unique relationship that he will share with those who are united to him.

But notice what he says to his Father:

“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Is it possible that God would do things a different way?
Is it possible that God would now, at the last minute,
change the plan of salvation?

Sometimes we get so used to the history that we know,
that it takes on an aura of inevitability.

What if the British had won the Revolutionary War?
What if the prophet Mohammed had been run over by a camel on his way to Mecca?
What if Luther recanted at Worms?

What if the Father changed the plan?

I think what we see here is that until this moment
there is nothing inevitable about the cross for Jesus.

After all, God had told Abraham to sacrifice his own son.
And we know from the previous chapter
that the incarnate Son does not know the hour of “that day,”
which indicates that Jesus does not know everything that the Father knows.
Will this turn out like Abraham?
Is God going to let Jesus go all the way to the cross –
and then rescue him, as he provided the ram as a substitute for Isaac?

Remove this cup from me.

The cup is a familiar image of wrath and judgment from the OT.
Jesus understands that the cross will be his cup,
where he will be given the wrath of God to drain to the dregs.
And so Jesus asks his Father to remove the cup.
Isn't there any other way?

The role of Isaac is hard to fill.
Especially because Jesus seems to understand full well
that this time there will be no substitute –
because he *is* the substitute.

He is the one who will die in place of Isaac.

Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

This is a marvelous statement:
the Son of God humbling himself before the Father.

What we see here is not a battle between the “human will” of Christ
and the “divine will” of Christ.
While there *are* two principles of willing in Jesus
there is but one who wills.

There were never two voices in his head –
it was not as if the human will was saying “run away”
and the divine will was saying “stick to it!”

That would be the Nestorian heresy of dividing Jesus into two Sons.
Rather the one person of Jesus willed according to the principles of willing
found in his two distinct natures.
If you think about it, he had to have two distinct principles of willing:
it does not pertain to the divine nature to will to eat.
If he had no human principle of willing he would have starved to death!

And certainly, the ability to fear, to tremble, to be “sorrowful even to death”
is something that very definitely pertains to his human nature.
There is nothing in his divine nature that would cause him to tremble before death,
because death can have no power over the eternal Son of God –

except that the eternal Son of God has taken to himself a true humanity.

And so according to the properties of his human nature,
and according to the genuine weakness of the mortal flesh that he took to himself,
the eternal Son of God speaks honestly to his Father:

“Not what I will, but what you will.”

*37 And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter,
“Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?”*

Again, the word here is “stay awake” from 13:37.
Could you not stay awake?
Could you not obey my simple command?

And so he tells them again:

38 Watch [stay awake] and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

They had testified just hours before that they would stick to him –
but now they cannot shake the slumber from their eyes.

The spirit indeed was willing –
they wanted to stay awake and be watchful –
but the flesh is weak.

This phrase gets used so often to describe the struggle with temptation!

And that’s fine – but there are two things that we need to understand about this:

1) Jesus is referring to the disciples in their current state.
The disciples have not yet received the Holy Spirit.
They do not watch – they do not pray –
because they are still dominated by the flesh,
they are still in the flesh,
and the flesh is weak.

2) But after the Holy Spirit is poured out,
the disciples *will* watch and pray –
they will become a new man and will be both willing *and able*
from now on to live for Christ.

So you need to understand that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”
is no longer an excuse for giving in to temptation.

It is still true that the flesh is weak.

But, as Paul says, “You are not in the flesh, but you are in the Spirit,
if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9)

The key is to understand the uniqueness of Christ.

The sleepiness of the disciples can be seen as the power of this age.

Darkness has fallen upon the earth.

The flesh cannot escape the fatal lullaby of this age.

Watch?

Stay awake?

Israel never has before!

And against the hypnotic powers of Morpheus (the god of sleep)

no one else can stay awake.

So do not condemn the disciples for their soporific stupor.

They are not the Spirit-empowered Son of God!

Jesus is preparing to do battle against the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

And the powers are sending forth all their efforts to stop him.

Only one who is God-in-the-flesh –

only the Christ could endure that night awake.

39 *And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.*

40 *And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy,
and they did not know what to answer him.*

Sleep has clouded their wits –
they are dazed and drowsy,
and speechless they watch him walk away again,
and again they join Cain in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

41 *And he came the third time and said to them,*

*“Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?
It is enough; the hour has come.*

Notice that Jesus does not condemn them.
He called them to watch and pray –
that *is* what they were supposed to be doing –
but he is not surprised that they failed.
You can hear sadness in his voice,
but not surprise.

Indeed, it might be better to translate this,
“Go back to sleep – it’s all over.”
It’s too late.

The hour has come.

The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

42 *Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”*

He knows full well what is coming –
he has received his answer.

The Father is not going to release him from his mission.

There will be no ram caught in the thicket.
He has come to take the place of Isaac,
to fulfill the calling of Israel, the suffering Servant of the Lord.

The hour has come.

3. “The One I Will Kiss”: The Fulfillment of the Scriptures (12:43-52)

43 *And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve,
and with him a crowd with swords and clubs,
from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.*

One of the twelve had stayed awake.

The power that sapped the strength of the eleven
energized Judas and the murderous mob that accompanied him.

44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying,

“The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.”

Notice that Judas receives scant attention from Mark.

After these three verses here in chapter 14

Judas will fade out of the story.

Mark is not interested in Judas.

He wants to keep our attention focused on Jesus.

45 And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!”

And he kissed him.

46 And they laid hands on him and seized him.

In the dark it might be easy to mistake one Galilean for another.

The kiss – the normal greeting of a disciple and his master –

is an especially ironic close to Judas’ relationship to Jesus.

The holy kiss – the kiss of peace –

will be a regular part of Christian worship for centuries after,

and every time the kiss of peace is practiced,

there is always the threat of betrayal –

always the danger of apostasy.

We hear this regularly at the Lord’s Table when we hear

that it was on the night when he was betrayed that the Lord took bread...

47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword

and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

It is curious that Mark does not identify this person.

We know from John’s gospel that it was Peter who cut off the servant’s ear.

And we know from Luke that Jesus healed the ear.

But Mark tells us only that someone standing there did this.

This word refers to a bystander –

someone who is not really a part of the action,

but someone who is just standing around.

If you did not know the other gospel accounts,

what would you make of this?

All you have to go on is what Jesus himself says:

48 *And Jesus said to them,*

“Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?”

Armed conflict is not what I am about!

I am no robber!

Though Jesus will be crucified between two robbers.

49 *Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.*

But let the Scriptures be fulfilled.”

What Scripture is he referring to?

There are many.

Luke refers to Isaiah 53:12,

but Mark prefers to leave it open-ended.

Jesus is saying this for his disciples:

he *will not* resist.

He understand that he is headed for the cross.

He knows that he is headed for all the worst parts of Psalm 88.

50 *And they all left him and fled.*

This is why we sang Psalm 88.

*“You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.*

*I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.” (88:8-9)*

Jesus sings Psalm 88 as “my life draws near to Sheol.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit.”

“Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together.” (88:16-17)

51 *And a young man followed him,*

with nothing but a linen cloth about his body.

And they seized him,

52 but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

This is one of the most puzzling stories in Mark’s gospel.

It is unique – none of the other evangelists tell us of this.

Some have thought that maybe Mark is the young man.

Maybe so.

But there is another reason for this story.

Because there was one who did not succumb to the lullaby of the flesh.
There was one who sang Psalm 88,
and kept the faith.

There was one who denied himself, took up his cross and followed Jesus.

The young man who follows Jesus when all others have left him
is wearing nothing but a linen cloth.
This is the word that will be used later for Jesus' burial shroud.

This anonymous young man –
like the anonymous woman at the beginning of chapter 14 –
sees more clearly than the disciples.
And, as she anoints him for his death,
he shows forth Jesus' burial clothes.

But when they seized him,
when the seductive song of sleep gave way to the brutal grip of death,
he fled.

He wanted to be different from the disciples –
“the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.”

And so Jesus is left alone with his captors –
with only a linen garment –
a burial shroud –
to remind him of his disciples.

Truly, “you have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness.”

Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.
Only the Christ can walk this path.
No other flesh could endure the path that the Word incarnate now treads.
No other man could accompany him on this road.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!