
Two Suppers

Mark 14⁴

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What do you think of as “a waste”?

That’s a waste of money...

What a waste of talent...

What a waste of space...

What a waste of a mind...

And one international: what a waste of a human being...

Mark has been bring up to these climatic days. In the space of a few days, two suppers will take place. They are important moments that lead up to the betrayal of the Servant-King,

So much here in this simple narrative. But let’s see what Mark wants us to see and hear and understand at these two suppers.

The Plot (v. 1-2)

We are reminded of the plotting against Jesus by the religious leaders of Israel.

¹ It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, ² for they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people.”

Its Time

It is the time of the Passover when the departure from Egypt was celebrated. It remembered God delivering anyone who would sprinkle shed blood on the door frame of their homes. The death angel that swept through Egypt would pass over any home where believed the warning and responded in faith.

In the midst of this festival week, there the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was a simple meal that did two things. It commemorated the simple meal that was eaten on the night of the Exodus from Egypt. It also anticipated the coming of the Messiah. Everyone in Israel was to celebrate it.

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Its People

But in this time of remembering redemption and looking forward to the redeemer, the religious leaders are plotting a great evil. They seek to shed the blood of the one this whole week and that meal were all about.

Its Problem

But, they recognized a problem. They really should not take Jesus during this festival. There will be a great outcry from the people. Well, we will see...

In Her Memory (v. 3-9)

Jesus and his disciples spent several evenings that week sharing meals at friend's homes. This is one of those suppers.

³ And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head. ⁴ There were some who said to themselves indignantly, "Why was the ointment wasted like that?" ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them. But you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burial. ⁹ And truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her."

The Beautiful Anointing (v. 3)

They are the house of Simon who had been a leper. Jesus had healed him and now all were gathered around the table for a meal. Remember that in that day and culture, they reclined on pillows or rugs to eat rather than sitting in chairs. In the course of the meal a lady comes into the room and approaches Jesus. She has an expensive flask of even more expensive oil. She pours it over his hair. Now we would react to the act. But this is a culture in which oils and perfumes were common. So while we would think it strange, Jesus simply accepts the outpouring of the sacrifice.

The Ugly Reaction (v. 4-5)

But there is a reaction. And it is ugly. It is a reaction, not to the act, but to its extravagant waste. There were *some*, so not just one. And they didn't just wonder, they were indignant. This ointment was worth a lot of money. It would have been better to sell it and take care of the poor. This is such a waste, this outpouring of sacrifice and love.

It was not enough to just comment among themselves. No, they launched into her. They scolded her. Yes, it is meant to convey the kind of scolding you would give a child. And she must have withered a little bit. The joy was sucked out of the fruit of her sweet gift.

The Sharp Rebuke (v. 6-8)

How do I know the disciples scolding withered? Because of Jesus' sharp rebuke. "Leave her alone!" What she had done was beautiful. Why? Not because she had thought of the poor. The disciples may have been concerned for the poor, but maybe not. Jesus says, "You are more concerned for the poor than for me." You see, this dear lady believed what the disciples all through Mark consistently rejected. She had anointed Jesus in anticipation of His death. I think she believed what Jesus had been saying about the cross.

So Jesus put s the cross at the center of this. It is not waste to sacrifice. Otherwise the cross is a waste. It is not waste to pour out our lives for the gospel. IT is not waste to sacrifice for the cross.

The Wonderful Affirmation (v. 9)

And what a wonderful affirmation. We are here fulfilling this. Her sacrifice because of Jesus' death is being preached at this very moment. And so the gospel, the cross is proclaimed from a supper of sacrifice.

The Plotter (v. 10-11)

But all is not well. This motivates one disciple to plot against Jesus.

¹⁰ Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹ And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.

The Disillusioned Reason (v. 10)

Notice how Mark connects this. Then Judas has had enough. I think it is fairly obvious he was one who was most indignant. HE was the one most concerned about the waste. Why? Because we know from other texts that he was the disciple's treasurer. He carried the money bag. And now Jesus had publicly humiliated him and whoever else around the table agreed with him.

The Negotiated Betrayal (v. 11)

So Judas knows whose Jesus' enemies are. He goes straight to the top, to the chief priests. He seeks them out to explore possibilities. And finally, they have someone in Jesus' inner circle who will hand him over. This is worth some money. So they promised to pay when they had Jesus in their custody.

The Opportune Moment (v. 11)

This is not going to be a long term project. Jesus has had three years of habits on this Passover week. Judas just needs to anticipate the right moment. So he begins watching their planning.

In His Memory (v. 12-25)

Now the story picks up probably two days later.

The Surprising Preparation (v. 12-16)

Celebrating the Passover with a large group of people would have required significant preparation. So Jesus two of his disciples as an advance team.

¹² And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

These two disciples will meet a man with a water jug. That would be unusual because usually, the women carried the water. They were to follow him and make arrangements to use the large upper room in the house. It seems the host would know who Jesus. The disciples were then to make sure that everything was arranged: the room setup, the meal, and all the provisions necessary for 13 men to celebrate the Passover.

The Disturbing Accusation (v. 17-22)

As they gather for the meal, Jesus begins with a disturbing accusation.

¹⁷ And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

Talk about a supper starter. Here they were to celebrate God's redeeming them from Egypt. They have been under increasing opposition. They have just gone through a couple of days of intense debate with the religious leadership. Now Jesus announces that they have a traitor at the table.

They hear this as a prophecy, not as current history. They are incredulous. And their "Is it I?" really says, "Can't be me..." Jesus points out it is one of them and at that very moment, the disciple who has his bread in the dipping bowl with Jesus. Jesus chose that moment to make the announcement.

Jesus turns their thinking on its head. What is about to happen with the betrayal and crucifixion has been ordained by God and prophesied in the Scriptures. It is not a

surprise. God is working out His eternal plan and His revealed will in the Old Testament. But, the person who commits that betrayal is not only accountable, but will suffer for it.

The Shared Meal (v. 23-25)

Having dealt with the traitor, the meal carries on.

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

The Passover meal had become an elaborate affair encrusted with many traditions that had no basis in Scripture. Jesus appears to radically depart from those traditions. It is a simple meal of roasted lamb and unleavened bread. In the midst of the meal, Jesus interrupts. The meal itself is looking backward remembering redemption from Egypt. But Jesus, with the bread and cup looks forward to the redemption from sin.

Jesus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, the Messiah, the Servant-King, the Son of Man, the Passover lamb, stands with one foot in the Old Covenant and one foot in the New. He lifts a piece of bread and a wine filled cup. One. Through them He points to His broken body and His out poured life in His blood. He is at the center of redemption.

In this is also a promise. It is a promise that encourage us during the long hard years until Jesus comes. But He will come. Because there will be a day, a certain future day, when Jesus will lift the cup with His people once again.

The Closing Departure (v. 26)

And then it was time to depart.

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

They sing and they go. Twelve voices raised in a hymn. Shuffling as they stand. Down the steps and out into the night. Familiar steps along the way to the dark looming mass of the Mount of Olives.

Reflect and Respond

What do we learn about ourselves?

We are so prone to be critical of others, even those whose love for Jesus motivate costly, sacrificial service. Our critical words too often come from idolatrous and convicted hearts.

We often do not see our own blindness. "Is it I?", is such a common question from people who are on a path to folly and sin. God has placed us among believers who help us see with new eyes.

We can be moved by God's Spirit and grace to give up all for Jesus and the gospel. It is not waste to do so.

What does Mark show us about Jesus?

He moves with kindness and acceptance toward those who love with sacrificial joy.

He will correct those who scorn the glorious waste of sacrificial love.

He gladly submits even to the hard providences of His heavenly Father.

He is often betrayed by those who misunderstand His mission and message. While we say we embrace a cross kind of life, we often actually reject it in daily living.

He is our Redeemer. Never forget. We are prone to self-salvation projects. But He has given Himself for us and to us.

There is an incomparably glorious day coming. A cup lifted up... I can't wait!!!

Sola Deo Gloria