

The Last Mile of the Way
Mark 14
January 8, 2012

What Does the Bible Mean?

All four gospels conclude with an account of Jesus' final days, his execution by the Romans and his resurrection. The final days begin in Mark 14. The greatest difference is between John and the synoptic gospels on the Last Supper where John omits the taking of the Eucharist. The accounts are all close enough to indicate that there was a widely held account and tradition of the events. Particularly in Chapter 15, the text is greatly influenced by the Old Testament.

The passion narrative has two major phases. In Mark 14:1-52, Jesus is aware of his death but continues to teach and lead the disciples. In 14:53-15:47, Jesus is passive and is led from place by hostile forces with little dialogue between himself and the hostile forces.

Read. Mark 14:1-2

Passover was one of the three compulsory feasts and was observed as a Sabbath. It had double significance. It had *historical* significance from Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt. It also had *agricultural* significance the barley harvest. A sheaf of barley was waved before the Lord before the harvest could be sold.

Jerusalem was crowded. Every male Jew who lived within 15 miles had to attend. All Jews had the ambition to eat one Passover in Jerusalem. They came from all the world. The historian, Josephus, in the AD 60s said that 3,000,000 pilgrims were in Jerusalem for Passover.

During Passover, feelings of nationalism ran very high. The Romans had extra troops at the ready. It was in this atmosphere that the Jewish leaders sought to arrest Jesus in secret before people knew what was done.

Read. Mark 14:3-9

People reclined as they ate. It was customary to drop a few drops of nard, a very precious ointment made from a plant from India, on guests. Here the woman broke the vial and poured it all on Jesus. In the east it was common to pour a vial of ointment on a dead body, to break the vial and to bury the pieces with the dead. Jesus said the woman had done this beforehand.

The perfume was very expensive and some bystanders thought the money should have been used for the poor. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 15:11 that the poor were always there to help but Jesus was only going to be with them for a short time. The statement did not excuse continuing poverty. But, generosity to humanity does not substitute for gestures of love for individuals. Both are required.

The story tells us of love's action.

- The act was a beautiful or lovely or good thing depending on the translation. In the Greek *agathos* means morally good, but moral good can be stern or austere. *Kalos* means good and lovely. Love is good but also lovely.

- True love includes a certain extravagance. It does not calculate how little can be *decently* given. It refuses to count the cost.
- Love takes unique opportunities. The chance may not come again. The world would be better if we *acted* in love impulsively more often.

Read. Mark 14:12-16

In this last week of life, we find that Jesus was efficient. He didn't let things go to the last moment. Before the entry into the city, he knew the people would let the disciples take the donkey for his use. Here he knew arrangements were made for the Passover meal. Here we know something was special for the disciples were to look for a *man* carrying a jar of water. Only women carried jars of water so the disciples were sure to recognize who they were to follow.

Days began at 6:00 pm the prior evening so until 6:00 on the day before Passover was the time for preparation. Preparation would include a search to clear leaven from the room. The lamb was sacrificed. They gathered other provisions – unleavened bread, saltwater to remind them of their tears in Egypt, *charosheth* - a mixture of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts – and wine.

Read. Mark 14:17-21

Passover began at 6:00 pm. In Egypt the people ate standing – ready to leave in haste. Now, in their own homeland – they reclined as free people.

Psalm 41:9 must have been going through Jesus' head. “Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” Jesus knew what would happen. He knew Judas was the betrayer, *but the other disciples had no suspicion*. We can hide things from our fellow men, but not from God. He even offered Judas a warning. We have free will. God warns us, but we are free to disregard his warning.

Read. Mark 14:22-26

This Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples was dramatic. The prophets of God were often dramatic. Jesus broke the bread and said it was his broken body. He then offered the wine which was his blood poured out for many. It was a new covenant.

The old covenant was set out in Exodus 24:3-8. It depended upon Israel keeping the law. Jesus offered a new covenant based on his blood and love. We were no longer under the law but were *within* the love of God.

Read. Mark 14:27-31

As we noted earlier, Jesus was prepared. He was prepared for opponents, misunderstanding, orthodox religious leaders, betrayal and the pain of the cross. He also knew his friends would abandon him. That must have hurt him the most.

Jesus said the disciples would, “fall away.” The Greek meant meant they would be, “lured into a trap.” Peter insisted that he could be counted on. At least his heart was in the right place! Even though his love failed, it rose again!

Read. Mark 14:32-42

They left the upper room for Gethsemane – an olive garden on the Mount of Olives. Jesus must have gone there before because Judas knew he could find him there. Jesus desired human fellowship and God's fellowship. In the beginning God said that man should not be alone. When we're in trouble we need someone with us, not necessarily to do or say anything, but just to be there. Jesus called on Peter, James and John to be with him while he prayed. These men who on the same evening had proposed a willingness to die with him, couldn't even stay awake.

Jesus prayed. He didn't want to die. Perhaps he didn't fully understand, but he knew he must submit to God's will. He addressed God as, "Abba, Father." He spoke with God as a child intimately talks to his father. When the time came he said, "Enough!" Enough was the same word used to declare that a bill had been paid in full. Jesus' ministry was complete. He went to face his betrayer.

Read. Mark 14:43-50

Here is drama involving several characters.

- Judas is the traitor. He identified Jesus with a kiss. The greeting was used as a sign of respect for a well loved rabbi or teacher.
- There was the mob. They came from the chief priests, the scribes and the elders from the Sanhedrin. The Romans allowed the Sanhedrin certain police duties in Jerusalem. They had swords and were ready for bloodshed. They were nervous and tense.
- There was the man who cut the ear off the servant. John identifies him as Peter. Mark may have left the name off because at the time of his early gospel it was best unsaid. John wrote much later. The act may have been wrong but somehow we may be glad that at least someone was prepared to defend Jesus.
- There were the disciples. They fled.
- There was Jesus. He is the only calm character. The struggle was over. Jesus would follow the will of God.

Read. Mark 14:51,52

This passage is not in Matthew or Luke. Mark must have included it for a purpose. The young man was likely John Mark himself.

Read. Mark 14:53,55-65 – The Trial

The Sanhedrin had religious authority but they had no power of the death penalty. The trial must have been something like a grand jury preparing charges. The Sanhedrin broke many of its own rules.

- They were to meet in the Hall of Hewn Stone in the Temple precincts otherwise the decisions were not valid.
- They could not meet at night.
- They could not meet on feast days.
- Witness testimony had to agree in every detail.
- If death were sought, an additional night must pass to give the tribunal a chance to change the verdict.
- The vote was to be taken individually, member by member.

- One could not be asked to condemn himself.

They broke all the rules.

Again we see Jesus as a man of courage and confidence. He was willing to die and he will sit at the right hand of God in the Kingdom.

Read. Mark 14:54,66-72

We often read this passage and fail to give Peter justice. Earlier he was brave to defend Jesus. Later, it was brave to go to the courtyard of the High Priest's house.

Then some human nature took over. Someone recognized Peter – three times. Peter denied he was a follower. The final time he cursed, but not Jesus' name. He brought curses upon himself if he were lying.

We must be careful if we are too severe on Peter. Everyone has a breaking point. Many reach theirs long before Peter did. In addition, Peter was the only disciple there. He must have told of the denial on himself. Peter's cowardice and shame became a tale of glory.

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. What “beautiful thing” would you like to do for Jesus that some might see as wasteful?
2. How do you balance giving to the church and giving to care for the poor?
3. What is your focus when you partake of Communion? Why is Communion important to the body of believers?
4. How do you feel about Jesus knowing about your weaknesses and failures, too?
5. Have you ever faced a Gethsemane?
6. What determines for whom and what you pray?
7. When are you tempted to make hasty judgments based on vested interests?
8. Have you ever thought your failures had made it impossible for Jesus to use you?