



Storm Clouds Over Jerusalem

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In (Mk. 14), we read of another significant shift in the narrative of Mark's Gospel. From this point, Jesus will not be speaking and teaching publicly. Mark will not record any more miracles. Here is a shift to the final steps in the mission of Jesus, the mission to the cross.

Mark 14 is a chapter with so many references to the Old Testament and God's deliverance of Israel from the hand of Egypt. This background provides much of the context for (Mark 14).

STORM CLOUDS OVER JERUSALEM

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread was a time of remembrance for Israel. The Passover, a time when Israel remembers how God spared the lives of the firstborn

and God's deliverance from the hand of Egypt. It is a time of fellowship as families gathered around tables and bonds strengthened. All of this sets the background of the text and where Mark is leading us in his gospel.

As Mark begins this section, it is also a time when storm clouds are swirling over Jerusalem and Jesus. There is a plot underway to kill Jesus. One of His closest friends will betray Him. It is also a chapter where we will see extreme contrasts, and these contrasts are where I would like for us to spend some time today.

A PLOT TO KILL

We notice how this section of Mark's gospel begins.

"After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

MARK 14:1-2 (NKJV)

As I mentioned, the plot to kill Jesus is well underway. Only they do not attempt to take His life now due to the Passover and the large crowds gathered in Jerusalem.

Jesus is just outside of Jerusalem in Bethany, at the house of Simon, the leper, when a woman comes bringing a bottle of expensive perfume in which she uses to anoint Jesus.

"And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply."

MARK 14:3-5 (NKJV)

This bottle of perfume would have been the equivalent of one year's wages, a very costly and expensive gift. Some saw this as a waste. *"Why would such a costly perfume be broken and poured out on someone's feet."* They criticized the woman for what she

did. However, what is seen in the passage, is that they are not tracking with Jesus. Jesus is far ahead of them. Jesus asks, *"Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me."* (ref. Mk. 14:6). She has come, Jesus says, to *"anoint My body for burial."* (ref. Mk. 14:8).

What Jesus understands is that the cross is before Him, and the time is soon. There, very well, will not be time to prepare His body for burial, and this woman has done all she could. Did she realize what she was doing? More than likely, she did not. No more than the disciples understand what she is doing.

JUDAS & JESUS

The next scene recorded for us is Judas and his plot to betray Jesus.

"Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him."

MARK 14:10-14 (NKJV)

Matthew records the plot was carried out for 30 pieces of silver (ref. Matt. 26:14). In comparison to the woman, Judas would betray Jesus for about a months worth of wages. Here is one of our first contrasts. One person, the woman, gave all she could to serve the Lord. The other person, Judas, did not give but instead sought how he may gain from following Jesus. It seems as if Judas was here to get what he could from Jesus. Judas was seeking personal gain.

It's a contrast that causes us to pause and reflect. Why are we following Jesus?

- Why are we here?
- Why have we come to Jesus?
- Why are we following Him?
- Are we here for personal benefit, for personal gain, or have we come to serve Him with all that we have?

Following Jesus to the cross, that's where we are in Mark's Gospel. Following Jesus is not an easy road. But time and time again, Jesus calls to follow Him. Followers of Jesus will learn to follow Him. Like Jesus, followers of Jesus will learn to sacrifice as servants following in the Master's steps.

THE PASSOVER

On the first day of unleavened bread, when the Passover lamb was sacrificed, Jesus sent His disciples into Jerusalem to prepare a place where they would share the Passover meal. The disciples went into the city and found things just as Jesus said they would be.

"In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

MARK 14:17-21 (NKJV)

This passage hyperlinks us back to (Mark 11) where Jesus had sent the disciples into the city. Earlier, in (Mark 11), Jesus enters Jerusalem in the daytime and is greeted by large crowds celebrating and praising God's Messiah. In (Mark 14), our mind is drawn to another contrast. This time as Jesus enters Jerusalem, it is not in the daytime. As He entered this time, it is not with large crowds celebrating and praising God's Messiah. Jesus enters in the cover of night.

Storm clouds are swirling over Jerusalem and Jesus. There is a plot underway to take His life. There is darkness over Jesus as He steps towards the cross. You can almost picture the disciples secretly bringing Jesus into Jerusalem, checking each corner and alleyway as they make their way to the Passover meal. The final steps to the cross are a stark contrast to earlier when Jesus had entered Jerusalem.

The meal itself, as they recline around the table, is a scene filled with tension. One of Jesus' closest friends will betray Him. The disciples, one by one, begin to question their intentions. Who will betray Jesus (ref. Mk. 14:19)? Following Jesus to the cross will not be easy.

FOLLOWING HIM?

Why do we follow Jesus? Some come to Jesus for their gain. It could be about status, perhaps influence? Do we come to Jesus so that He can fix all our problems? Following Jesus is a life of hope, it is a life of promise. But, we are not following Jesus to the cross if we are here merely for our gain.

Are we here to give all? The woman, in Mark's account, gave all. She brought her most expensive perfume and anointed the body of Jesus for burial. She came to sacrifice. She came to give. She came to serve.

Mark gives images of stark contrasts. Mark is leading us forward in the Mission of Christ. Mark is also challenging us to ask a few questions of ourselves. Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."* (Matt. 16:24-25).

Are we willing to follow Jesus to the cross? He gave His life so that in Him, you and I can have life. New life begins when we start following Him.

BLESSINGS!

Steve E.

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