



# THE FINAL PASSOVER

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 Mark 14:12-31  
 39th Message  
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Many among us will celebrate the gift of motherhood over a meal on this Mother's Day. Families tend to experience their most intimate times during meals, especially festive occasions. This is why the theme of feeding and eating is so prominent in the gospels. Indeed, the Lord Jesus and the disciples shared their most intimate moments over meals.

In our studies in the gospel of Mark we come now to the most intimate meal that has ever been shared, an occasion that is recorded in all four of the gospels. So significant is this meal it is to be participated in by every Christian, in every age and on all occasions, in anticipation of the great Messianic banquet (Is. 25:6-9) at the climax of history. So today our Lord humbly requests your presence at a meal to be held in his honor. The occasion is Israel's final Passover, the supper of the Lamb.

Our text has three divisions. First, the preparations for the meal (Mk. 14:12-16); second, the actual meal, which was held in the upper room (14:17-26); and finally, the writer has us view the significance of the meal, from the top of the Mount of Olives (14:27-31).

## I. Preparations for the Passover (14:12-16)

**And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room in which I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared; and prepare for us there." And the disciples went out, and came to the city, and found it just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. (Mk 14:12-16, NASB)**

Mark introduces the scene by indicating that the occasion was the first day of Unleavened Bread. (The entire eight-day celebration, including Passover, was sometimes referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.) "There was no time to lose because the Passover meal had to be eaten within the walls of the city (Cf. M. *Pesachim* 7.9) between sundown and midnight, the first hours of the 5th of Nisan."<sup>1</sup> The disciples inquired of Jesus as to where he would like them to make preparations<sup>2</sup> to celebrate the feast. This was no small task.

They had to find a hospitable home in hostile Jerusalem (and thereby placing the homeowner in jeopardy), and it had to be large enough to accommodate thirteen dinner guests. Then they had to purchase all the groceries—unleavened bread, bitter herbs, wine, a special sauce and, most importantly, the lamb.

Jesus' answer to their question piqued their curiosity. The home had already been prearranged; all they had to do was go there and carefully follow instructions. They were to travel directly from Bethany into the city; there they would be greeted by an anonymous man who would secretly take them to a guest room that had already been prepared. The sign that would mark this man out from the crowd was rather odd: he would be carrying a pitcher of water. In the ancient world, women normally performed this task, most often, slave women who would wash the feet of guests before they entered the home as a sign of welcome. So the disciples were commanded to find that man who was taking on the role of a female slave, and follow him to the hospitable home in Jerusalem. There they would learn the mystery of how kings become slaves and slaves become kings.

Arriving at the home, should announce that they had the authority of the teacher who sent them: "The Teacher says, 'Where is my guest room?'" The power of those words would set everything in motion. "Jewish custom required that if a person had a room available, he must give to any pilgrim who asked to stay in it, in order that he might have a place to celebrate the Passover."<sup>3</sup> The owner would take them to a large upper room that had already been readied for them. There they would prepare their provisions for the final Passover and await the arrival of Jesus.

The two unnamed disciples followed Jesus' directions, and when they arrived at the home they found everything to be just as he had said. Someone else who was unknown to them had already made preparations for the intimate meal. Some scholars speculate that the owner of the home was John Mark's father, but Mark preserves his anonymity, as he does that of the mysterious man. This has the effect of drawing us into the story, inviting us to play their roles.

## II. The Passover Meal (14:17-26)

### A. Announcement of Betrayal (14:17-21)

**And when it was evening he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at the table and eating,**

**Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” They began to be grieved and to say to him one by one, “Surely not I?” And he said to them, “It is one of the twelve, one who dips with me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go, 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 not been born.”**

In the evening, when dusk had given way to darkness and the night air had grown cold, Jesus arrived with the twelve. The dinner proceeded normally until, out of the blue, Jesus suddenly said, “...one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” This would be like announcing at a dinner attended by a number of married couples that one of the husbands present was about to embark on an adulterous affair. But this betrayal in the upper room was even worse. “To betray a friend after eating a meal with him was, and still is, regarded as the worst kind of treachery in the Middle East.”<sup>4</sup> This would be akin to a pastor announcing at a wedding ceremony that the groom would commit adultery on his honeymoon, just hours after he had spoken his wedding vows and placed the first bite of the wedding cake in his bride’s mouth. How did Jesus know what was about to happen? It is because he had studied David’s Psalms (Psa 41:9). He knew that David’s story would become his story as the greater David.

The disciples were “grieved.” They were absolutely horrified. How ironic! They had yet to show grief over the many announcements of Jesus’ death, but now they were grieved, because they feared they might be implicated. Overcome with the enormity of Jesus’ charge, they responded uniformly, one after another, “Surely not I.” But Jesus emphatically pressed the point home, saying, “One of the twelve, one who dips with me in the bowl.” Carson suggests that the bowl was most likely the one containing the “herbs and a fruit puree, which was scooped out with bread” to be eaten with the lamb. This did not narrow the circle, but it heightened the enormity of the betrayal. Jesus said that he and his betrayer had shared a common dish.

How could Jesus be so calm in the midst of such treachery? And why would he allow Judas to play out all his evil cards unhindered? He knew that he was “acting out the drama into which he has been cast in the central role, but within the drama Judas and the other actors are the responsible causes of events.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, free will, sprung by evil intentions, was allowed play itself out fully, while the secret, divine hand directed all toward that great end. Jesus remained calm in the midst of betrayal and death, for all had been divinely predetermined (see Isa 53:7-9; Dan 9:26). Yet those who had caused what was about to happen would be held absolutely responsible. Carson puts it succinctly: “The divine necessity for the Sacrifice of the Son of Man, grounded in the Word of God, does not excuse or mitigate the crime of betrayal. Divine sovereignty and hu-

man responsibility are both involved in Judas’s treason, the one effecting salvation and bringing redemption history to its fulfillment, the other answering the promptings of an evil heart.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus’ bold announcement of betrayal renders the scene that follows dense with emotion, and his sparse words all the more significant.

#### **B. The New Covenant Meal: The Bread and the Cup (14:22-26)**

**And while they were eating, he took some bread, and after blessing it he broke it; and gave it to them, and said, “Take it; this is my body.” And when he had taken a cup, and given thanks, he gave it to them; and they all drank from it. And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.**

During dinner, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread and gave the traditional Hebrew blessing: “*Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth.*” After the blessing it was customary for the host “to retell the story of the Exodus, interpreting the actions and the elements of the meal in terms of that story, thereby linking the present company with the children of Israel as they left Egypt...According to the Mishnah, the unleavened bread of Passover was explained by Gamaliel (a contemporary of Jesus) as signifying the redemption from Egypt.”<sup>8</sup> On this occasion, as Jesus took on that role, he gave the story new meaning, saying that the bread was his body, and the breaking of it in death would be the source of life for his disciples. From this day forward, wherever his disciples lived they could experience his real presence whenever they celebrated this Supper.

Then Jesus took the cup (probably the third cup of four taken during the Passover meal, drank after the meal was eaten), and spoke the traditional Hebrew blessing: “*Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who brings forth fruit from the vine.*” When they had drank from the cup, Jesus explained its new significance. This was the blood of the covenant which was poured out for many (Exod 24:8; Isa 53:12). With those few words (eleven, in Greek) Jesus announced what the prophets long ago had only dreamt about. Jeremiah and Ezekiel said that a day was coming when God would permanently forgive Israel’s sins and establish a new covenant by writing his laws on her heart (Jer 31:31-33; Ezek 36:24-27).

Jesus concluded with an amazing second statement, one that was as emphatic as the first: “Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

When Jesus drank the cup he was declaring that this was Israel's final Passover. No longer would there be need to look ahead to a new Exodus, for the new age had dawned in his suffering and vindication.<sup>9</sup> What an epoch-making pronouncement! Imagine you were living in East Berlin prior to 1989, and in the fall of that year you were invited to a ceremonial meal attended by a corps of elite NATO commandos. During dinner it was announced that these select few were going to sacrifice their lives to demolish the Berlin Wall. The Iron Curtain would be no more! Their death would result in your freedom! A new era in history was about to dawn!

In like manner, Jesus said that this cup was the final drink before the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth. The next time he drank it would be at the feast of the new, redeemed community. So, just as the Passover looked back to Israel's Exodus, and ahead to the new Exodus (her return from exile), so also the Lord's supper looked back to the death of Christ and ahead to the Messianic banquet of all nations at the end of the age (Isa 25:6; 1 Enoch 72:14; Matt 8:11; Luke 22:29-30). The disciples, shell-shocked from Jesus' earlier announcement of betrayal, were left with little capacity to take in the significance of his words. Only later, after the resurrection, as they relived the memory over and over again, the full implications of what Jesus had done came into focus.

Following the cup, they concluded their dinner by singing the second half of the *Hallel* hymns, Psalms 115-118 (Pss 113 and 114 probably preceded the meal). Imagine the impact these verses had on our Lord as he sang,

**The LORD is my strength and my song;  
And He has become my salvation.  
Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the  
righteous:  
The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!  
The LORD's right hand is lifted high;  
The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!  
I will not die but live,  
And will proclaim what the LORD has done.  
The LORD has disciplined me severely  
But He has not given me over to death.  
(Psa 118:14-18)**

Millions of pilgrims had sung Israel's salvation songs for over a thousand years, but now the One for whom the psalms were written had arrived. What emotions do you think Jesus felt, knowing he would not be spared from death, but through death? Then, following the resurrection, he would return to the people of God with resounding praise, "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things!" No words are adequate to describe his emotions.

After they had sung the hymns, Jesus led his disciples from the upper room, ascending high above the city to the Mount of Olives. From that vantage point he gave them a vision of things to come.

### III. The View from the Mountain (14:27-31)

#### A. The Announcement of Denial (14:27-28)

**And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."**

It is astonishing to think that Jesus kept the disciples abreast of not only every detail of what was about to happen, but its significance and how it would affect them. He had led them through his betrayal and death, and now he tells them of the impact which his death will have upon them. Literally, he said it would scandalize them. As they watched their king being seized, and then tried and crucified, they would be gripped with terror and every last one of them would run away. This was foretold in Zechariah,<sup>10</sup> the same prophet who spoke about Jesus' royal entry into the city on a foal of a donkey (9:9). But after the death of the Shepherd there would be a glorious resurrection and a reunion of both Shepherd and sheep, in Galilee. This clearly shows that the stability of the kingdom of God is based on the bedrock sovereign rule of God, not the fickle resolve of men. At the very instant when Jesus' disciples sided with unbelieving Israel, God was at work, making them the true people of God. And notice where that would occur—not in Jerusalem but in Galilee. That was where he would begin the creation of his new temple!

The prediction of the disciples' imminent disloyalty provoked a powerful rebuttal from Peter.

#### B. Peter's Denial (14:29-31)

**But Peter said to him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that you yourself this very night, before a cock crows twice, shall three times deny me." But he kept saying insistently, "If I have to die with you, I will not deny you!" And they all were saying the same thing, too.**

Peter was adamant: all might fall away, but he was made of different stuff. Jesus responded to his boast with an even more emphatic and painful revelation: "Truly I say to you, you yourself, this very night, before a cock crows twice...shall three time deny me." "Apparently it was usual for roosters in Palestine to crow at 12:30, 1:30 and 2:30 am.; so the Romans gave the term 'cock-crow' to the watch from 12:00 to 3:00 am."<sup>11</sup> The denial was not only certain, it was imminent. Within hours Peter would disown the Lord, not just once, but thrice, despite the double warning of the rooster. The cock's crow strikes the imagination as an appropriate symbol of one who was strutting about in arrogance but would soon be beheaded and served up on a platter.

Sadly, not even this direct confrontation penetrated Peter's heart. He was the master of denial. "The language of Peter's protest suggests that he does not really think that Jesus' death is likely; and even if it were, he still has visions of heroism."<sup>12</sup> As he reasserted his bold

vows, everyone else joined in as well. The “all” who would be scandalized and scattered now “all” say the same thing, too. Jesus refused to confront this denial with another word. The only appropriate rod of correction left was the painful silence of consequence.

What then shall we make of the events of the upper room and this final Passover? Few texts in scripture capture our Lord’s longing to have intimate fellowship with us. Every aspect of this text cries out for intimacy.

#### IV. Will You Join Him in the Supper of the Lamb?

The first sign of Jesus’ longing for intimacy is indicated by all the prearranged details. Jesus has arranged everything. All we have to do is come. Such thoughtful care, crafted down to the last detail, endows us with a sense of privilege as honored guests. Everything is waiting for us. All we have to do is arrive in obedience. For much of my life I have felt a sense of wonder at this. From my early teens to the present I have lived with that sense that I am traveling on a highway where things are pre-arranged before I arrive. I merely show up in obedience and sit down to a meal I had nothing to do with.

Secondly, once we are drawn into that secluded place it becomes even more intimate. Jesus is going to tell us beforehand everything about his destiny. How does he know everything? you ask. The answer is, because he knew the Scriptures, and he was the only Jew who could bring all of this to pass. He knew how Psalm 41 foreshadowed Judas, and how the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isaiah 53) fit together with the glorious Son of Man in Daniel 7. He had read all of the imagery of shepherd, sheep, and city in Zechariah and saw it all coalescing in this one moment. And, with even more genius, he collapsed it all into two symbols, the bread and the cup. Then we become the privileged guests to hear the most intimate details of his agony. How ironic this is! Usually, we see ourselves as unloading our burdens on God, but here at this table the Son of Man wants us to enter into his agony. Every detail is told beforehand: betrayal, death, denial, and resurrection. One sits at that table for whom all of history has waited, and he wants us to enter into that moment with him.

Thirdly, not only do we learn everything about Jesus’ destiny, we discover that he knows everything about us. He knows that his sufferings are of such magnitude that we cannot comprehend them. He knows that we are more moved by our own failure than his death. He knows that our holy vows of loyalty are but dust in the wind. He knows that a mere few hours after attending church we will probably lack the courage to proclaim his name. He knows all that and yet he still wants to eat with us. It is because he loves us.

Finally, we learn that his commitment to us is much deeper than our own gut determination. He knows that at the height of our failure, when we learn what he already knows about us, it is then that we will be swept up by the wind of his resurrection and be qualified to carry the real presence of him everywhere. For, as often as we drink this cup and eat this bread we celebrate his death until he comes. At this hour, he has signed his whole estate over to us. The future is completely ours. Come, O come to the supper of the Lamb. Amen.

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1. Walter W. Weasel, “Mark,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 758.
2. The word “*prepare*” is the key word of this scene, used four times (14:12, 15 [2x], 16).
3. Wessel, 758.
4. Wessel, 759.
5. D.A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 534.
6. G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 203.
7. Carson, 534.
8. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 561.
9. “Within several Jewish retellings of Israel’s story, the great themes of exile and restoration and of the kingdoms of god and the kingdoms of the world, would reach their climax in a great moment of suffering and vindication. The night would get darker and darker, and then the dawn would come. Israel’s tribulations would reach their height, and then redemption would arrive. Daniel would face the lions, and then be exalted...The son of man would suffer at the hands of the beasts, and then be lifted up to the right hand of the Ancient of Days.” Wright, 465.
10. “Jesus in short, was constantly telling a particular story, in which the true king of Israel arrives to search for his wayward sheep. This is one sharply focused point of the kingdom-message, in which Israel is to be restored at last after suffering exile at the hands of pagans and misrule from her own leaders.” Wright, op. cit., pg. 534.
11. Hans Kosmala, “The Time of the Cock-Crow,” *Annual of Swedish Theological Institute 2* (1963) 118-20; 6 (1967-68) 132-34; quoted by Carson, 542.
12. Carson, 542.