

# Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

## Session Twenty~Three – Mark 14:12~31

**For a detailed analysis of Mark 14:1-12, please refer to the sermon of March 27, “Why, Judas?”**

*Mark 14:12-31* **12** *On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”*

Passover commemorated the liberation of the nation from Egypt, when God sent a plague that took the lives of the Egyptians’ firstborn. As detailed in the Book of Exodus, the Israelites were spared by dabbing their doorways with the blood of a slaughtered lamb.

*Exodus 12 (selected verses)* *“On the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.*

*“That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.*

*“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.*

*“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses. Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come.”*

Many in Jesus’ day saw this first deliverance as the model for their final liberation. Pilgrims came to commemorate this event filled with hopes and expectations that the Messiah would eventually come to deliver Israel from foreign oppression and economic

misery during the night of Passover. Not that the disciples ask Jesus, ***“Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”*** Not “us;” You!

On the eve of Passover, 14 Nisan, work normally ceased at noon and the ritual slaughter of the Passover lambs began around 3:00 P.M. as the heads of the household brought their animals to the temple. The priests sprinkled the blood against the base of the altar and offered the fat on the altar. The animals were dressed with the legs unbroken and the head still attached to the carcass and returned to the worshipers.

Because of the great number of people, the slaughter had to be separated from the place of eating. The only stipulation was that the lamb had to be eaten in Jerusalem, whose borders were expanded to accommodate the crowds. During the Passover festival, an estimated 85,000 to 300,000 pilgrims flocked to the city of Jerusalem, which had a population estimated at 60,000.

***Mark 14:13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14 Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”***

Note the similarity with the Palm Sunday arrangements:

***Mark 11:1-3 - As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”***

Who is this mysterious “man carrying a jar of water?” Archaeologist Bargil Pixner surmises that this identifies the man as an Essene, the same sect who famously preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls. They often followed a strict segregation of the sexes, leading to this man carrying water, normally a task reserved for women. Water was an important part of the Essene washing rituals.

Notice also that the text says, “a man carrying a jar of water ***will*** meet you.” The meeting is prearranged, as is the room. Was this some sort of divine foreknowledge, or has Jesus been making preparations in the days leading up to this, unbeknownst to the disciples? It seems to me the latter, as a large vacant room on Passover weekend seems highly unlikely! And Jesus does tell them to say, ***“Where is my guest room?”***

Where was the guest room? Tradition places it in the section known today as Mount Zion, but earlier known as the Essene Quarter, on the southwest hill of the city. There is archaeological evidence that the current Room of the Last Supper, dating to Crusader times, is built on the foundations of that earlier original building.

There is also the possibility that this room became “headquarters” of the early Christians – where Pentecost happened (described in Acts 1:13 as “upstairs to the room where they were staying”). If so, it was a large space, able to hold 120 people (per Acts 1:15). Early church tradition points to Acts 12:12, as evidence that it was the home of John Mark’s mother Mary, “where many people had gathered and were praying.”

***Mark 14:16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.***

What was involved in preparing the Passover? As we read in the Exodus passage, a lamb, herbs, unleavened bread, and other traditional items would be required. It is difficult to say how many would have been at the meal. The following passage specifies that Jesus arrived with the Twelve – were there others already present, preparing the meal?

***Mark 14:17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating...***

Jesus arrives with the Twelve in the evening, implying that the meal had been already prepared and the table set. They reclined while eating, as per tradition. While the famous Leonardo fresco shows a long table, more common would have been a u-shaped arrangement of tables and cushions, called a Triclinium.

***Mark 14:19 ...he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”<sup>20</sup> “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”***

At this point, Judas is still concealing his betrayal, which Mark revealed a few verses earlier. “***one who dips bread into the bowl with me***” stresses the nature of the betrayal, as an offense against the most sacred rules of hospitality. John expands upon this as a distinct sign, revealing exactly who the betrayer is; however, in John, when Judas leaves to effect the betrayal, the others think he has gone to buy bread or make a Passover donation.

***Mark 14:27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written:***

***“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”  
28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”***

I have taken the unusual step of mixing the Scriptures up, as the Last Supper narrative interrupts the Betrayal story. Predicting betrayal by one, Jesus heightens the tension by saying that the others will abandon him, quoting Zechariah, whose writings are appearing repeatedly in this chapter. This particular quote (13:7) indicates that the suffering to come is part of the divine plan. Chapter 13 begins and ends with significant words:

*Zechariah 13:1 “On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.”*

*13:9 “They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”*

Jesus predicts his Resurrection for the fifth time (8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:34). His post-Resurrection ministry will resume where it had its beginning – in Galilee. While Mark does not detail the post-Resurrection events, the others do – after a brief week in Jerusalem (Luke), it is to Galilee that they go. John, in his concluding chapter, tells us of the miraculous catch of fish there; Matthew seems to have Jesus proceeding directly to Galilee.

***Mark 14:29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” 30 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.***

Peter, stung by the implication that Jesus will be betrayed and abandoned, leaves the others out in the cold, declaring that he will stand by Jesus when they drop away. We know the sad result of that boast, as does Jesus, who predicts Peter will “disown” him (NIV). “Deny” is a better translation; the same Greek term is used in 8:34, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

The cock crow may refer to an actual rooster crowing or to the bugle call of the gallicinium, which signaled the beginning of the fourth watch. The second cock crow was connected to the dawn or rising sun. Jesus may simply mean “before the next dawn.” Note that while Peter takes the brunt of criticism, “all the others said the same.”

***Mark 14:22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”***

Jesus now revolutionises the Passover tradition, changing the ritual of the remembrance of deliverance from slavery and bondage to the Egyptians into a ritual of remembrance of deliverance from slavery to sin and bondage to death. Note that Jesus “gives thanks” – he would have “baruched”, or “blessed God” for the bread, according to the traditional prayer.

“Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of Matzah.”

“While they were eating” indicates that this took part during the Passover Haggadah, or recitation of tradition. Several “prayers of blessings” are recited during this meal. I believe Jesus’ words, “this is my body,” were said at the beginning, transforming the entire meal into something different.

***Mark 14:23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25 “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”***

The covenant – the declaration that God is God, and the Hebrew nation is the people of God, ratified by the following of the Commandments, features throughout the Passover. Now, Jesus declares there is a new covenant; rather than sealed with the blood of a lamb spread over a doorpost, it is sealed with the very blood of Jesus, the new Passover Lamb.

Remember the meal began with the statement (Luke 22:7), “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.” It is now Jesus who will be sacrificed, delivering people not from slavery in Egypt, but from the bondage of sin and death.

What do Jesus’ statements, “This is my body. ... This is my blood” imply? Wine was considered to be the blood of the grape, plucked from the vine and crushed. The blood of the sacrificial animals was poured out by the priests on the altar as a sin offering to atone for the sins of the people. When Jesus makes his statements, he is saying that his death is a new sacrifice offered to God. No more sacrificial victims need be killed, only bread broken and shared, wine poured out and shared.

Blood sealed or inaugurated a covenant. In Exodus 24, Moses took the blood and sprinkled it over the people saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words”. Jesus’ sacrificial death is also a covenant-making event. It marks a new act of redemption and begins a new relationship between God and the

people — one that supersedes the old. It creates a new community gathered around his table. (David Garland)

*Exodus 24:1-8 When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.*

*Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."*

*Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

***Mark 14:26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.***

The Passover is at an end; the hymn that is traditionally sung to conclude Passover is known as The Great Hallel, Psalm 136. Pope Benedict wrote that Psalm 136, "*unfolds in the form of a litany, marked by the antiphonal refrain: "for his steadfast love endures for ever". The eternal love of God, is a love which, in accordance with the Hebrew term used, suggestive of fidelity, mercy, kindness, grace and tenderness, is the unifying motif of the entire Psalm.*" Here are some selected verses:

*1 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever.*

*4 to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.*

*5 who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever.*

*10 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever.*

*11 and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever.*

*12 with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.*

*16 to him who led his people through the wilderness; His love endures forever.*

*23 He remembered us in our low estate; His love endures forever.*

*24 He freed us from our enemies; His love endures forever.*

*25 He gives food to every creature; His love endures forever.*

*26 Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.*

**Next Week: A Special Presentation on Mark 14, 15**