

## Gospel of Mark Chapter 14, Part 1 – John Karmelich

1. I admit that when I started the Gospel of Mark, I was thinking, "OK, there are sixteen chapters, that means I have sixteen lessons to write." Then this past week, I took a good look at Chapter 14, and saw 72 verses. Then I said, "OK, maybe I need to make an exception for this chapter."
  - a) With that said, I present part one of Mark Chapter 14. ☺
  - b) The good news of this chapter (for those who hate prophesy) is there is no more end time stuff. We are off that topic and are now focusing on the events right before Jesus death and resurrection. In other words, we are getting into the heart of the gospel message.
2. OK, now you are probably thinking, "All right, I have heard the Gospel message since I was a child. What new thing can I possible learn here?" Well, that is what I thought too, before I started studying this chapter in more detail. Let's just say we all need to have the attitude that one never stops learning until God tells us it is our time to come home to heaven.
3. This leads me to the title for lesson: "Devotion and Rejection". As I started studying the events of this chapter, I could not help noticing the level of devotion and the level of rejection that people have toward Jesus. In other words, if we are committed to be devoted to Jesus, it should be our goal to increase that devotion through our lifetime. Living the Christian life is not just believing in God and turning from sin, it is also about increasing our devotion and our trust in God in all that we do in life.
  - a) Let me explain devotion a little further: It is one thing to do a nice thing and then let others give us a "pat us on the back" for that good act. It is another just to do something just because we are devoted to serving that God and are not interested in any reward for our actions. That principal can apply to the love we have for others. The importance of devotion affects our relationships with our spouses, our children or parents, as examples.
  - b) The point is, the act of "showing love to one another" is about doing things for which we are not looking for any sort of "payback" or even a compliment. We are doing those loving acts strictly out of our love for God or that person we are close to.
4. I also said this chapter is about rejection. Those who turn from God usually do so because they want to live by their own rules and not God's standards for their lives. In our relationships, rejection starts when we start to focus on what we want versus putting the other person first.
  - a) When it comes to God, it can start with the idea that He is not working the way we expect in our lives, so we in effect "turn our back" on Him.
  - b) In a sense, all our relationships are always moving either closer or father apart any given moment. Either we are working on ways to draw closer to a person or closer to God because we want to be more devoted, or we are moving further away from someone because we are not getting the rewards we crave for the things we are doing for others.
  - c) I have personally learned as I studied this chapter the importance of devotion versus rejection. Not only as it applies to my relationship with God, but also with those around me. This lesson did make me realize that at times I do things for my wife or my children hoping for a sign of appreciation for what I do. That is not what God asks us to do: He wants devotion, because it is what He expects of us. He wants us to trust Him when we don't get a "pat on the back" or worse, things are falling apart. He does not ask us to do it because it feels good or we get rewarded for our effort. He wants us to do it because "He is God" and we are not. God wants devotion from us because that is our purpose in life, "To live for Him and live to make a difference for Him."
  - d) Don't get me wrong. God wants the best for our lives. He wants us to live a happy life full of joy. Happiness is based on our circumstances of the moment. True joy is about "letting go" and trusting that God is working in our lives.

5. OK, now that I've got everybody all paranoid, ☺ I'd like all of us to get our focus off of our lives and onto the text. It might be best to just start describing the chapter and as I come to references to devotion or rejection, I will point out how these stories relate to our lives. OK, everyone take a deep breath, stop analyzing what we may be doing wrong and let's just focus on the text itself.
6. Chapter 14, Verse 1: Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. <sup>2</sup> "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot."
  - a) The first verse says the "Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread" were two days away. The question for the moment is what are these feasts and why is it significant that they are two days away?
    - i) First the feasts: Moses, who lived roughly a thousand years before Jesus ordained seven specific feasts for Jews to celebrate. These are two of those Jewish feasts.
    - ii) Passover is a Jewish holiday that is around the same time as Easter. It is for Jews to remember how they, as a nation were redeemed from slavery. It is considered mandatory for all Jews to celebrate this holiday. (See Exodus 13:3-5). There is an ancient non-biblical ritual (called the "Seder") that is associated with this holiday. That ritual is pretty much in tact today as it was when Jesus celebrated it.
    - iii) The point as it relates to this story, is that Jerusalem is now crowded because of this holiday. Jesus was a popular figure not only among the local population but also among many Jews who traveled there. The religious leaders wanted Jesus killed. There are references to that fact going back to the early chapters of Mark.
    - iv) The Jewish religious leaders feared Jesus popularity as the Jewish people were looking to Jesus as the coming Messiah. Further there was corruption among the religious leaders of that time (this is also a recorded fact in Jewish historical records). These leaders feared Jesus as a threat to their system and exposing the fact they were corrupt.
    - v) Bottom line, these leaders wanted Jesus dead, but didn't want to carry out any sort of plot during the "holidays" as the religious leaders feared a riot and feared they would be exposed if they had Jesus killed at such a time.
  - b) I also mentioned there was a second holiday called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. To make it short, this is a seven-day feast that begins around Passover. The purpose of this holiday is to remember how God will "take care of you" and provide for you. Just as God provided bread for the Israelites for the forty years they were in the desert after the original Passover, it is about learning to trust God to provide for us.
    - i) Which leads us back to our lesson theme of devotion and rejection. This should be a time when one focuses on their devotion to God. The religious leaders, while going through all of the motions of the usual rituals around these holidays, were also focusing on Jesus and saw Him as a threat to their "system".
  - c) So why was Jesus such a threat? After all, Jesus had no intent to destroy the Jewish temple or the current religious system. Yes Jesus did point out the corruption of the leadership, but that was it. Why would these people want Jesus dead, and more importantly, why should I care?
    - i) Remember that these religious leaders did not know what was Jesus intent. All they knew was that the common people of Israel were looking to Jesus and not to them for their leadership. In short, they just saw Him as a threat.
    - ii) OK, now for my "why should I care speech": ☺ This text is not here to teach us that Jesus had enemies. It is to remember that people who are not truly devoted to God are going to get "worse and worse" over time. I'm not saying that everyone who displeases God turns to murder. I am saying that in life, we choose to accept our reject God at any given moment, and the decisions we make in life usually reflect those choices.

7. Verse 3: While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.
- a) If you recall, Bethany is a town a few miles away from Jerusalem. The text does not say why Jesus was here, just that He was.
  - b) The home was of a man known as "Simon the Leper". Most commentators suspect that this is a man Jesus cured of leprosy, but because this man had this "incurable" disease, the nickname stuck. In other words, it was too long of a title to call him "Simon the man who used to have leprosy, but now he is cured", so the old nickname stuck. ☺
    - i) The point of this story is not about Simon, but about a woman who poured perfume on the head of Jesus, who was at this house at this time.
  - c) Let me give some quick technical notes, and then I'll get to the point of this story.
    - i) In the Middle East at that time, bankers existed, but the government did not back them. Therefore, the way people saved money was to find small but expensive things that can be stored in the house. In this case, there was a jar of an expensive perfume. Some commentators say this type of perfume comes from India, but I'm not sure how they knew that or why it is relevant to this story.
    - ii) In this culture, it was a common practice to pour a little oil on the head of a guest. Think of it this way: This is a hot, dry climate. Further, people didn't bathe very often. Therefore, oil on the head of a houseguest is a way to hide the "local smell".
  - d) Now, let's talk about why this event is significant. Yes it is about devotion.
    - i) What is special in this case is the unnamed woman didn't just dab a little oil on Jesus' head. She broke the jar (so the contents would pour out faster) and then this woman poured the entire contents of the bottle on Jesus' head.
    - ii) So why did Mark (the author) want us to know about this event? I believe it is to show what Jesus meant by "devotion". Think about it this way:
      - a) This woman did not ask anyone's permission to do this.
      - b) The woman did not give the bottle to say, one of the disciples and have them do it. Part of the gift was the act of pouring it on Jesus' head.
      - c) The woman did not look to the disciples for approval of this event, neither before nor after it was done.
      - d) The woman did not expect any sort of reward or praise for this act.
      - e) The only reason she did this, was out of her love for Jesus. That is what God desires of us: Praise and devotion to Him. Not because we are getting any sort of reward for doing so, but devotion out of love and gratitude for who Jesus is and for what He has done for us.
    - iii) OK, we are not standing next to "human" Jesus. How do we do likewise?
      - a) The way we show love to others around us is not with the expectation of receiving any sort of sign of approval. We as Christians are to show love and devotion solely because that is what God asks us to do.
      - b) In other words, God wants us to draw upon His love and share that love with others around us.
      - c) Suppose that person doesn't like me or want me to do anything for them. As a suggestion, start by praying daily for that person. Again, the purpose is not to expect anything in return, not even a thank you.
      - d) Jesus said the reason people would know we are Christians is by our love for one another. (See John: 13:34,35.) It is not human nature to do good things without even expecting a thank you. Therefore, people would eventually figure out that we have "changed" if we are willing to act like that at times.
      - e) Meanwhile, we left this woman pouring oil on Jesus' head. ☺

8. Verse 4: Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume?"<sup>5</sup> It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly.
- a) In this house where Jesus was staying, were the disciples as well as other people. The point here is that others (plural) were complaining about what a waste of money it was for this woman to perform this act.
  - b) There is a classic comment on this verse that says in effect, "I am grateful for those who thought this was a waste of money. Those complainers taught me how much this gift actually cost. If it wasn't for those people, we never would have known the actual cost."
  - c) The text says the perfume cost a year's income. The literal text says "300 denarii", which is 300 days' wage, but the point is the same. Just remember that this was expensive.
  - d) These critics rebuked her for the act and said it was a waste. Remember that fact. When we show devotion to God or devotion to others, we can expect criticism by those who say it is a "waste". The lesson here is to do what God calls us to do, or do what acts of devotion we feel is appropriate by using "what is ours" and ignore the critics who suggest we do other things. Remember that this woman legitimately owned the ointment and she had the right to do with it, what she wished.
    - i) Believe it or not, that leads me to why I write these studies. Sometimes I complain in effect (to myself) that I am not rewarded for all of the years I do this. That is the wrong motivation for the time I give to God. I should do it (and I am still learning that the reason I should do this) is solely because that is what God called me to do and I should not expect or desire any "pats on the back" for doing this service.
    - ii) My point is, if God calls us to do something, we should just do it and not worry about the rewards or consequences of what He has called us to do.
    - iii) If we want to show devotion to God, just do it and don't worry about what others might say and don't expect rewards for such actions in this lifetime.
9. Verse 6: "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me."<sup>7</sup> The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.<sup>8</sup> She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial.<sup>9</sup> I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."
- a) First of all, notice that Jesus was well aware of why she did this act. Jesus was aware of the fact He was about to die and Jesus realized what she did was an act of devotion.
    - i) Jesus did not announce this in order to give her a "thank you", but to teach the disciples (and us) what true devotion is all about.
    - ii) Jesus also said this story will be known throughout the world. This story is recorded in three of the four gospels. Think of it this way: When Jesus stated this fact, the disciples didn't fully comprehend what the "Gospel was", let alone have this story spread around the world. Jesus is predicting the growth and spread of the Gospel message even before that message fully sank in to those in the room.
  - b) The other thing to notice is Verse 7 says in effect there will always be poor people and we can choose to help the poor anytime we want to.
    - i) If we believe Jesus' words to be true, then we have to accept the fact there will always be poor people, despite our best efforts to alleviate that problem.
    - ii) This verse is not an excuse to ignore poor people. If anything, it is a reminder to dedicate part of our time to helping the less fortunate.
    - iii) So does that mean I have to help the bum who asks me for a donation? The true answer is to ask God and do what you believe is right for the moment. There are times in life when we should help out and do what is best. The related point is Jesus does not expect us to ignore who are suffering, but to make a difference for Him in the world around us. That too, is a sign of devotion.

10. Verse 10: Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.  
<sup>11</sup> They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.
- a) One of the classic questions in Christianity is why did Judas betray Jesus? After all, the man was hand picked to be one of Jesus' twelve disciples. What was his motivation?
    - i) If I had to guess, I would say that Judas was impressed by Jesus' miracles. However, Judas thought that Jesus was going to overthrow Rome.
    - ii) Judas liked the idea of having a king that would rule the world from Jerusalem and he wanted to be close to Jesus to have a part of that ruling and reigning.
    - iii) Another gospel mentioned that Judas was a thief. (John 12:6). If someone believed that Jesus was going to rule the world, why steal from His money supply? That fits my theory as well: Judas was "in this" for the financial rewards and was stealing and simply waiting for the day when Jesus would overthrow Rome.
  - b) Therefore, when it "sunk in" that Jesus was going to die, and not overthrow Rome, Judas decided it was time to turn Jesus over to the authorities. In other words, Judas wanted to force Jesus to either "rule or be killed".
    - i) The mistake we make as Christians is we try to force God to do things our way. For example, we may pray for a miracle and expect God to work through the particular miracle we want Him to do. I cannot recall one time in my life where I asked God to work a particular way, and He did. God always works best when we truly let go of the situation and pray in effect, "OK, God, You are in charge and not me. However You want to work this out this situation, is ok by me."
    - ii) Judas gives the prime example of wanting God to work out "his way" in life.
  - c) Remember that the religious leaders of Jerusalem feared Jesus' growing popularity and were happy to work with Judas to betray Him. So why did the religious leaders need Judas for their plot? In short, because Judas knew Jesus' "schedule" and where He hung out. Judas had the knowledge to lead these men to Jesus.
    - i) These verses also teach us that not all 12 disciples stood next to Jesus at all times. We tend to have this picture of Jesus walking from place to place with exactly 12 men following behind Him. ☺ This verse teaches us there were times when one or more disciples were not with Jesus. It was not a shock to the other disciples that Judas left for a short time period, although they did not know Judas' purpose.
11. Verse 12: On the first day of the Feast 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?"
- a) OK, it is time to return to the discussion of Jewish holidays at this time. Remember that the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" was a seven-day feast that occurred at the same time of the year as Passover. Also remember that Jerusalem was crowded during this time as many Jews traveled to Jerusalem to go celebrate these feasts.
  - b) I also mentioned a few lessons back that a Jewish historian named Josephus wrote (some years after this Passover) that a million lambs were killed for this event. The "Sunday" before "resurrection Sunday" is when the lambs were chosen. The "Thursday" of that week (my view, some argue Friday) is when the lambs were killed. I believe the actual holiday of Passover was that Thursday evening. A Jewish day begins at sundown. At that time, the calendar was different. That is why I put the days of the week in quotes.
    - i) The point is that is the day the lambs were killed, they were to be cooked and eaten as part of the Passover meal for dinner (after sundown) on that holiday.
  - c) Remember that the disciples were Jewish and they expected to participate in this annual ritual of Passover. I'm sure the previous years they spent with Jesus, they also celebrated this event. They asked Jesus in effect, where were they going to celebrate Passover this year? The answer is in the next few verses.

- d) By the way, even though Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the symbolic reason behind Passover, it did not stop Jesus and the disciples from participating in this event.
- i) The book of Exodus teaches that all Jews (not all Christians, but all Jews) were to perform the Passover ritual forever. (See Exodus 13:3.) Do I believe Christians who come from a Jewish heritage should still celebrate Passover today? I would argue yes, but only for the reason of remembering that God made unconditional promises to the Jewish nation to take them out of slavery into salvation.
- a) In other words, the Christian-Jew does not perform this ritual today for the forgiveness of sins, but to remember God's promise to the Jewish nation.
- b) That is also why I believe non-Jewish Christians don't have to practice this holiday tradition, because our sins were taken care of at the cross.
- c) However, if you ever get a chance to be a part of a Passover dinner, (again called a Seder), we should do so for the learning opportunity.
- e) Which leads me back to the text: The disciples asked about preparing Passover, because they believed they were "good Jews" and were required to celebrate this event.
12. Verse 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. <sup>14</sup> 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?' <sup>15</sup> He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."
- a) In the Jewish culture of that day, women carried jars of water. To see a man carrying such a jar would be an unusual sight. To see such a man carrying a jar of water would be a sign of where the disciples were to go for the Passover ritual.
- b) This verse is also proof that Jesus had contact with people outside of His disciples. Obviously Jesus prearranged this event without the knowledge of the disciples.
- c) An interesting side note is that some commentators believe this is the home of Mark, who wrote the Gospel, but didn't include his own name out of humility. If that is true, it is another sign of "devotion" without expecting anything in return.
- d) If you recall from some of the early lessons on Mark, Jewish people usually had one-story houses, but they also lived on "rooftops" on hot days. Anyway, wherever this place was, it was an upstairs room, furnished and ready to go.
- e) Time for a quick explanation of a "furnished room". Let me just say the table used was not a big long table with huge chairs. Da Vinci's famous painting of the Last Supper was not historically accurate in terms of how people actually ate this meal. The table was probably "u" shaped and was low to the ground. People would sit on the floor or on pillows and leaned on each other as they relaxed and ate this meal. The Jewish view is that because the Israelites were now in the Promised Land, they could sit and relax and enjoy the Passover meal as they have already been rescued from slavery in Egypt.
- f) So was all the food and plates already there? I would argue no, and that is what Jesus meant by "go make preparations for us there". It means that Jesus sent out two of his disciples to pick up a lamb for the supper and to get the required foods that are normally served as part of a Passover (a.k.a. "Seder") dinner.
13. Verse 16: The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.
- a) I wondered, why did Mark include this verse? This verse essentially says that the disciples obeyed Jesus' order and prepared for this meal. Also remember that Jesus first called the disciples three years prior to this time. Since the Passover is an annual event, the disciples knew what Jesus expected them to do, based on past experience.
- b) Personally, the more I study the bible, the more I realize that God loves "obedience". It is fairly common in the bible for God to say in effect, "This is what I want you to do" and then the text essentially repeats the same story, showing obedience to God's command. It is another sign that God "likes" when we are obedient to His wishes.

14. Verse 17: When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. <sup>18</sup> While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me." <sup>19</sup> They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely not I?" <sup>20</sup> "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me.
- a) Now comes the big moment when Jesus announces that one of the twelve disciples would betray Jesus. What crossed my mind was "Why did Jesus publicly make this statement?" Why not just say quietly to Judas, "I know what you are going to do". Why did Jesus alert everyone in the room that someone was going to betray Him?
    - i) Jesus wanted Judas to know that He (Jesus) was aware of his (Judas') plot to betray Him, and Jesus wanted all the disciples to know that this plot was at hand.
    - ii) If you recall, the Jewish religious leaders did not want Jesus to be killed during the big holiday. They wanted it done quietly when the big crowds were gone. Now that the plot to kill Jesus has been revealed, it forces Judas to act quickly knowing that Jesus' followers know there is a betrayer in their midst.
    - iii) It just goes to show that Jesus is aware of all things and in control of all things. Even the date and time of Jesus' death and resurrection was known by Him.
  - b) Notice the text points out that all of the disciples said out loud "It is not I". This is our "ego talking" where all of the disciples wanted to point out their loyalty. The problem is not the statement, but the problem is our ego rarely (if ever) lives up to our actions.
  - c) I need to describe part of how the Passover meal was eaten. It was common for people to take a piece of unleavened bread and then dip it in a sauce and then eat it. The sauce was probably from the cooked lamb. Most likely, if the table had at least twelve people, there was more than one bowl for dipping. I suspect the moment Jesus made that statement, he just dipped his bread in the same bowl that Judas just dipped in his bread.
    - i) The text does not mention Judas leaving, but this had to be the moment. To use an old American cliché here, "The jig is up". Judas had to leave now and go arrange the betrayal as Jesus knew his intent. Instead of changing his mind, Judas now has to do this before word got out about his desire to betray Jesus. Therefore, Judas needed to act fast.
15. Verse 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."
- a) One of the principals we as people have to accept about God is
    - i) 1) If God is perfect, then He cannot learn. (See Isaiah 46:10). If God knows all of human history in advance, He knew Judas would betray Jesus.
    - ii) 2) We as humans are held accountable for our actions. In other words when we are judged by God we can't say "You knew in advance I was going to do this, therefore, how can you possibly find me guilty of that sin (or crime)?"
    - iii) In other words, we are still held accountable to God even though He knows all things. We can't use God's knowledge as an excuse before Him.
  - b) Which leads us back to Judas. Jesus is stating that Judas will suffer for his betrayal, even though God was aware of what will happen before that betrayal.
  - c) OK, and what does this have to do with you and me? The answer is that God holds us accountable for our actions. When we sin, it is something that needs to be confessed even though God knew in advance what we were going to do it when we sinned.
    - i) Judas' sin is the rejection of Jesus as payment for his sins. Judas wanted Jesus to just "rule" and that's it. Therefore, Judas will be in hell for the same reason everyone else gets sent there: For rejecting the free payment for his sins.
    - ii) If you think about it, the main reason people reject Jesus is because they want to prove to God how "worthy" they are before Him. In other words, those who reject Jesus want to come to God and say in effect, "Look how my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds" as if God judges on a "scale".

- iii) Since we can't know how good we have to be in order to be saved, the only standard we can grasp is "perfection". That is why we have to accept the idea of God Himself paying the price for all of our sins, past, present and future. God still wants us to confess our sins when we do sin, as to draw closer to Him, but that is different from the idea of eternal forgiveness of sin, which can only come by accepting Jesus payment for our sins.
  - d) Some wonder if Judas suffers a worse fate in hell than everyone else who rejects Jesus? Personally I don't know and I don't want to get close enough to have a good look. ☺
    - i) My view is that the price of a lifetime rejection of Jesus is "people get what they want" in that they get to spend eternity away from the presence of God. As to those who die young and people who never heard of Jesus, that is God's problem and not mine. I just take by faith that God will judge such people fairly.
  - e) Remember that my lesson theme has to do with devotion and rejection. Once people make up their mind to reject Jesus, their "lifestyle" usually follows that commitment. Judas is only one of millions (or billions) of examples of that choice.
16. Verse 22: While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."
- a) First notice that Jesus didn't stop the Passover meal just because Judas has left the scene. Jesus didn't go running after Judas and say in effect, "Don't do it." Jesus understood His own destiny and understood that He still had to partake in the Passover meal prior to the trials leading up to His crucifixion.
    - i) The Passover meal took on a whole new meaning from this point onward as Jesus initiated the "communion" ritual that is commonly observed in almost all Christian churches on a regular basis.
  - b) So why did Jesus compare His own body to bread? Why couldn't Jesus simply say, everyone is to occasionally eat a wafer and think of Me (Jesus) while you are doing that?
    - i) The view in the Roman Catholic Church (and some other denominations) is that Jesus' body literally becomes part of the bread wafers that are eaten today.
    - ii) The common view in Protestant churches is that Jesus is not being that literal, but simply saying that we should remember Him when we have take communion.
    - iii) So which is it? However one views this tradition, I believe the important thing is for all Christians to regularly celebrate this event (i.e., take communion).
  - c) So is Jesus also saying that all Christians should celebrate communion through Passover? No, and let me explain quickly: When Paul talked about communion (in 1st Corinthians 11), Paul did not say to wait until the Passover holiday to have communion. Paul taught us that whenever we celebrate the Lord's "last supper" (i.e., communion) here is how we should do it. Paul focused on our attitude when having communion, but also implied in effect, we can have communion whenever we want to.
  - d) OK, onto the important question: Why eat a piece of bread or a "wafer" to remember Jesus sacrifice? Jesus could have just said, "think of me when you eat the Passover"? The important idea is that we spend regular time (whatever that means to us) to remember the sacrifice that Jesus made. Believe it or not, this leads us to my theme about devotion.
    - i) I'll leave the "how often" debate up to individual churches. What I believe is important is that when we do observe communion, we take it seriously enough that we are showing our devotion to God.
    - ii) Does that mean we can't smile when we take communion? ☺ No, you are missing the point. Think about the woman mentioned earlier in the chapter who poured the oil on Jesus' head. She didn't get anything personal out of it. She just did it to show her devotion to Him. On the same lines, we need to regularly remember that Jesus died for our sins and perform this ritual to show our devotion for the price that He did pay for our sins.

17. Verse 23: Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.  
<sup>24</sup>"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.
- a) Again, I can get into the debate about the Roman Catholic tradition of drinking wine that literally becomes Jesus blood versus the symbolic act of drinking either grape juice or wine to remember the event. Personally, I don't think the "how" is nearly as important as the "why". I don't think God cares so much about our methods of remembering this event as much as the fact we take the time regularly to perform this ritual and remember what Jesus did on the cross for us.
  - b) This leads me back to the ritual of Passover. Mark's Gospel is written for a non-Jewish audience, so Mark minimizes the connection between the specific rituals surrounding Passover and the fact that Jesus compared the wine in his cup to His blood being shed.
  - c) So, why did Jesus choose this specific method and why do we have to remember it?
    - i) For starters, notice that Jesus does not say his blood was "spilled for all", but just says "many". Jesus still wants everyone to come to Him out of faith. The word "many" means that only some chose to accept Jesus' payment for their sins.
    - ii) Notice that Jesus shared the same physical cup with all of His disciples. This is a Middle Eastern custom to say in effect, "we are one" when one shares out of the same cup. The same principal applies to everyone sharing the same loaf of bread.
    - iii) Which reminds me, my wife has a tough time sharing her water bottle with me or anyone else to drink out of. My point is Jesus was not afraid of "sharing his germs" as He is physically sharing this cup with others. The idea of Christians sharing one cup is in effect what Jesus wants us to understand about His blood being shed. It is not meant to be something "gross", but the idea that all believers share in the concept of believing that Jesus died for our sakes.
    - iv) It is something God wants us to do regularly as a sign of our devotion to Him.
18. Verse 25: "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God."
- a) Jesus is saying to the disciples that this is His last Passover meal, as He won't have another drink of wine until He has it in heaven with his disciples. The point is Jesus is trying to teach that this is "it" and He is about to die.
  - b) In the next chapter, someone offers Jesus some wine on a sponge when He is on the cross. Was that a violation of what Jesus said here in Verse 25 about not tasting wine again?
    - i) The answer comes from Matthew's gospel, which says that when Jesus tasted that wine on a sponge, He would not drink it. (See Matthew 27:3). Mark's Gospel just says that Jesus was offered this wine (Mark 15:36). My point here is that Jesus did not violate his oath made here in Verse 25 with what He did on the cross.
  - c) So why did Jesus say He would not drink wine again until He does it in the "Kingdom of God"? In other words, why even mention never drinking wine again? Is that some sort of command to avoid wine (and for that matter, avoid any alcohol) in this lifetime? ☺
    - i) One has to remember that the Passover meal is a time to celebrate to remember that God had delivered the Israelites out of bondage from Egypt. At the same time, Jesus is saying that by drinking this wine, it is a time to celebrate in effect, by remembering that the price of sin has been paid for.
    - ii) The related point is that Jesus wants to celebrate "again" with believers in heaven.
    - iii) In other words, some Christians are so worried that drinking wine is a bad thing, they fail to see this as a time of celebration.
    - iv) Some Christians argue that Jesus was only drinking grape juice and not wine. The counterargument is that this holiday is the springtime and grapes are harvested in the summer. Fresh grape juice did not exist this time of year.

- d) Does that mean no celebrating is allowed until we get to heaven? Of course not. It just means we won't get to celebrate God's complete devotion to us (and in return our complete devotion to God) until we get to be with Jesus in heaven.
- e) Which leads me, believe it or not, to the book of Revelation. One of the things that happens in that book is Jesus has a "big dinner" with all Christians, who in effect become one "being" as we all become the bride of Christ. (See Revelation 19:7-9.) In other words, one of the things that happens in heaven is that Jesus gets married to Christians. All of us Christians become "one" and become married to Christ.
- i) So if we are the bride, does that mean we are all converted into "one female" in heaven? Not exactly. ☺ I believe that in heaven, we exist in more than three dimensions. (That is how Jesus could walk into a locked room after He was resurrected. See John 20:19 and 20:26 on that idea.) At the same time we are all individuals but again can occupy more than one space at a time.
  - ii) So if all Christians are somehow in one space, being the bride of Christ, who are the "guests" at the wedding? I suspect it is all saved people prior to Jesus coming in the world and I hold that view it is also those who are saved during the final seven-year tribulation period that I discussed in the last lesson. My point is at this wedding, there are Christians, who all united as Jesus' bride and there are others who are saved "not during" the Christian era, but still make it into heaven.
  - iii) So does that mean we all sexually, become a single woman who is married to Christ? No it does not. It just means that it is a time of celebration to commence the mutual devotion between God and those who put their trust in Him.
  - iv) Think about my theme of "devotion": What is a better picture of "intimate devotion" than a husband being united with his bride? That is what is being described in Revelation 19, and that is the type of intimacy Jesus wants with those who make the decision to follow Him as their Lord and Savior.
- f) So, what does any of this have to do with the Gospel of Mark? The answer is Jesus says that He will not drink wine again, until He does so in heaven. What Jesus is specifically referring to, (in my opinion) is the time when He is uniting with His bride (the church) so they can spend eternity together being "one".
- i) Let me put it another way: Why does Revelation mention a single "wedding supper" between Jesus and His bride (the church) and no other meal in heaven? What I do know is that there is nothing like the intimacy of a newly wed husband and bride, and that symbolizes the beginning of a new relationship together.
  - ii) That is why there is a "wedding supper" in heaven to begin that new eternal relationship of Jesus and those that call Him both Lord and Savior as we are intimately united with Him.
  - iii) Which again, leads me back to the Gospel of Mark. Jesus is saying that this is the last time on earth He will drink wine, but at the same time, Jesus is giving a strong clue that He will drink it again in heaven as part of a celebration of Jesus being united with those who are His (The Christian church) forever.
- g) You have to admit, all of this is a little strange. ☺ The "traditional" way most people think of heaven is living in some large house that we all have to ourselves. If that is the case, we are missing the point about intimacy with Jesus. The idea of "eternity" is that we as Christians are eternally united with the one who loves us and the one we love.
- i) In other words, heaven is about eternally expressing our love and gratitude to God for what He has done for us. God spends eternity showing us how much He loves us and we in turn, show our pure devotion to God for all of eternity. I'm sure there is a lot more to heaven than "just that", but that wedding in heaven is a great way to symbolize the start of our new eternal relationship with God. I am tempted to end this lesson, on that high note, but I want to take on a few more verses.

19. Verse 26: When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
- a) Part of the traditional Jewish ritual of Passover is to sing a few of the Psalms. It does make me wonder what Jesus singing ability sounded like.
  - b) Does this verse mean that Jesus sang praise to Himself? No, it just means Jesus and the disciples sang praises to God the Father for this plan of redemption. Just as Jesus took this moment to thank God the Father for this "eternal plan", so we should regularly sing praises to God to thank Him for the wonderful eternal plan He has laid out for our lives.
  - c) When the hymn was over, and effectively the Passover meal was over, Jesus led the disciples to a mountain area that overlooked Jerusalem. It is called the Mount of Olives as to this day olives grow in this area.
  - d) So besides the fact that Judas knew this location, why did Jesus pick it? Did Jesus just want to make it easy for Judas to find Him? That is one possibility and probably one reason why Jesus picked this place, as Judas would know Jesus liked this spot.
    - i) The other reason for this spot is given in the next few verses. In short, Jesus is going to explain to the disciples how they will be scattered, and later, Jesus will meet them in the Galilee area, which is north of Jerusalem. By sitting on the Mount of Olives, Jesus could overlook Jerusalem. It was a good way to have a visual picture of the disciples being scattered.
20. Verse 27: "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: " `I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' <sup>28</sup> But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."
- a) Verse 27 is a quote from Zechariah 13:7. This is an Old Testament prediction about how the people of Israel will be scattered once the leadership is gone. Jesus is saying that this verse also applies to Him and the original disciples. Jesus is saying that after He is taken into custody, the disciples will run away and separate from each other.
  - b) OK, other than knowing a bit of bible trivia, why should I care about this? All of us know that the disciples rallied around Jesus after He rose from the dead. Why is it important to state the disciples ran in fear once Jesus was taken prisoner by the Jewish leadership?
    - i) Here's why: There are going to be moments in our life when we disappoint God. Further, there are going to be moments when we disappoint those around us and other people will disappoint us. When do such moments usually happen? That is when we get our focus on ourselves and not on God. The point here is not that we do turn from God. The point is that there are going to be times when we do what is wrong, and God is waiting for us to return.
    - ii) Let me put it this way: As long as we are trusting in Jesus as both Lord of our lives (i.e., He is in charge) and the one who paid the price for sin, we can't sin enough to lose our salvation. We can't become "unborn again". We may and will mess up in life. Be aware that God knows all things including how we messed up.
      - a) That is why Jesus tells the disciples in advance, "even after you are scattered, I will gather you all to myself at this location". It is Jesus' way of saying that even after we turn from God, He is waiting for us to return.
      - b) What does God say to us when we mess up? He says in effect, "I know all the things you are currently going through right now. I will lead you down the path I want you to go and will help you through this situation. You may not like what you have to go through in the meantime, but know that I am there to lead you through this situation."
      - c) That in effect, is why Jesus gives this prophecy about the "sheep being scattered" after He was crucified. In a similar fashion, we too as believers become "scattered" when we don't have God as our central focus.
  - c) The point I am trying to make in these verses is the times when we feel we are "scattered away" from God, He is still there and He is still willing to lead us back to Him if we trust in Him and let Him work through our lives to make things work out for His glory.

21. Verse 29: Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." <sup>30</sup> "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." <sup>31</sup> But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.
- a) Peter says in effect, "Lord, You are wrong in this case. I won't forsake you". Coming up in a matter of verses is Peter's famous denial of Jesus (three times). Most people don't know that he makes this statement how he claims he will never disown Jesus.
  - b) The point of these verses is simply to show how our mouths (and our ego's) are usually much bigger than what we are capable of doing.
  - c) Again, my theme of this chapter has to do with devotion and rejection. The times we usual reject God and reject people usually start when our ego's want to do something that causes us to reject those that are around us.
  - d) Peter's problem in this verse is that he is not being dependant upon God's strength to get through the next set of events coming up, but his own ego.
    - i) Let me put this another way: I have no idea what God has in store for me today or tomorrow and neither do you. The only way we can have the strength and courage to face whatever is going to happen to us is to put our trust in God. A good way to start our day is to pray in effect, "Lord, I don't know what You have planned for me today, but You do, so prepare my heart and my attitude for whatever is going to happen today".
    - ii) I have learned that "worrying" is the opposite of faith. In other words, when we are not trusting in God is when we worry about things. When life is "falling apart", that is when we have to remember that God is there, He is in charge of our lives and He still is going to work out our lives for His glory.
    - iii) Getting back to Peter, the point is Peter is going to deny Jesus three times coming up in a few verses. I suspect (but cannot prove) that if Peter prayed the way Jesus wanted Him to pray, that denial may not have happened. We need to rely upon God's strength (and not our own ability) to get us through any situation.
  - e) I can just hear some people say, "Yeah, but I know this person who is very successful or very happy and they don't believe in Jesus dying for their sins". There are people who do have a great ability to focus during tough times and such people don't realize that God gave them that gift in the first place.
    - i) My response to that question is in effect, "Yes, such people do exist, but God is not talking to that person, God is talking to you and me. Since we are putting our trust in God for our lives, He is asking us to put that trust in Him every day so He can give us the strength to get us through the problem of the moment.
    - ii) Also remember the classic expression that, "The only people I know that are really happy are the people I don't know very well".
  - f) Which, surprisingly, leads me back to the topic of devotion. God wants an intimate relationship with those that trust in Him. God doesn't get anything "out of that", but it does help us not only draw closer to Him, but also to increase our faith in Him by learning to trust Him more and more. Further, God wants us to have intimate relations with others, not by drawing upon our own strength, but by drawing upon His strength to reach out to others around. That is the type of love God desires for our lives and that, in turn, leads to a life far happier than anything we can possible do on our own.
22. As I stated in the beginning of this lesson, this chapter is too long for one lesson. Therefore, I'm going to end this lesson on this "happiness note" and we will finish Chapter 14 in the next lesson.
23. Let's pray: Father, help us to become more devoted to You. Help us to rely upon your strength and your grace to handle whatever this life "throws at us". Let others around us see Your love as we grow in our devotion to You and to those You want us to share that love with. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.