

January 1, 2012

All the King's Traitors are Invited

Mark 14:12-31

INTRODUCTION

Last Sunday was Christmas. Today is New Year's Day. These are our holidays. The Jews had a few of their own, but among the most holy was the Passover. It celebrated the night when God had saved them from slavery in Egypt. It was a *redemption* and it required a payment, because even Israel was filled with sinners that deserved God's judgment. Nevertheless God told the people to hide in their homes and to prepare a lamb for a feast, and to "take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat" [Ex. 12:7].

This Passover was at hand and the judgment of God on Jerusalem was at hand. The first time the Passover was celebrated God poured out his wrath on the pagan house of bondage. Now He was going to pour out his wrath on his own earthly house that had made itself a house of bondage. So notice that the wrath that will be poured out on Jerusalem will first be absorbed for those in a narrow room with Jesus, for those whom the blood of the cup is applied. There is the earthly city of God about to go through the motions of the Passover; and then there are those hidden, tucked away in this Upper Room with Christ who will eat of his flesh and drink of his blood in the Spirit.

- PREPARATIONS FOR THE TRAITORS (12-17)
- WARNING TO THE TRAITORS (18-21)
- SUBSTITUTION FOR THE TRAITORS (22-24)
- CELEBRATION WITH THE TRAITORS (25-26)
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The Big Idea is that *all* the King's traitors are invited to a narrow room—*some* of whom will turn to the Lamb, *some* of whom will still be seeking to betray Him.

DOCTRINE

I. PREPARATION FOR THE TRAITORS

A) Christ Prepares an Eternal Place for His Bride {12-13}

1. *And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" (12)* Some people have stumbled over the fact that the Passover is being celebrated on a different day than Jesus was crucified, but they may not realize that the Jewish day began at sundown, not sun-up. However, Mark's agenda is to paint a picture of the intentionality, and so he includes a small detail in the next sentence that Matthew and Luke do not.

2. *And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him (13).* The otherwise small detail was that the man would be carrying a **jar of water**, a slice of omniscience that told them, and us, that this meal would be carefully designed by God beforehand: "the LORD has made everything for its purpose" [Prov. 16:4]. But it is not only the design of Christ that He wants us to see, but the design of the church.

B) The Church Prepares a Temporary Place for a Foretaste {14-17}

1. The church is to be a banquet hall before the actual wedding; and so as Jesus leads his followers into his church, some details actually are important. So about this mysterious man, He says, *wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us" (14-15).* This man is not the **steward of the house** (*oikonomian*) but rather the **master of the house** (*oikodespotes*)—not coincidentally, where we get the word "despot" or "dictator"—so that this is the man who owns an important resource and has total say in what is done with it. The fact that Jesus commands the use of this house tells you that this master of the house really saw himself as a steward of Christ. His most valuable things belonged to Jesus and his kingdom.

2. And the text also says that it was a **large** (*mega*) room: "I thought it was narrow room!" It's both. Compared to the temple where the whole city is going through the motions, it's a very narrow room; but through the eyes of faith there's always room for more. We may remember the king in the parable who was

rejected in his initial invitations to come to his son's wedding, so he says to the servants: "The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find...So the wedding hall was filled with guests" [Mat. 22:8-9, 10].

2. *And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover (16)*. There is no lamb mentioned anywhere in any of the four Gospels. Perhaps it was taken for granted; perhaps someone else had to get it for them, since they were already under suspicion. We don't know. But it's not enough to say, "Jesus made it so that it was just about the bread and wine." That may be, but these were Jews who had celebrated this their whole lives. They would have naturally wondered, like Isaac asked his father Abraham at Mount Moriah, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" [Gen. 22:7]. That son did not know that he was to be that lamb; but this Son did.

3. *And when it was evening, he came with the twelve (17)*. While God was about to visit those in the earthly city with his wrath, He comes inside to visit those hidden in Him with his love. He identifies Himself **with the twelve**, and that includes Judas—for the moment. You will notice that even till the bitter end, when Judas is standing there with his posse to arrest the Lord, what does Jesus call him? "Friend, do what you came to do" [Mat. 26:50]. Sometimes we say that the more *knowledge* we have the more guilt we bear; and that is true. But our guilt is also fixed in proportion to the *charity* and *friendship* extended to us.

II. WARNING TO THE TRAITORS

A) The Form of the Gospel Warning {18-20}

1. *And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me" (18)*. Christianity does not share our modern opinion about injecting life-or-death subjects into polite company. It was while they experienced the intimate fellowship of a holiday meal that Jesus pierces them with what we all need to hear, all the time. This is gospel warning. There is no good news without grasping the warning about the bad news. But notice the form of it. It has three basic elements: 1) it is **done in the company** of the believers together; 2) it **warns** that some who are in this company visibly, are in the process of treason invisibly, and ultimately; 3) it **connects** the first two

elements by pointing out that temporary fellowship with Christ is not the same thing as a saving relationship with Him. John speaks about these secret traitors:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us [1 Jn. 2:19].

2. *They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me (19-20).* If only we responded this way to every convicting word from God! This should be the heart cry of every true Christian when the word of God is heard or read—"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" [Ps. 139:23-24]. Yet it was another Psalm that this moment fulfilled:

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me [Ps. 41:9].

Children of Christian homes be warned: God has not commissioned your mother and father to save you. They are sinners just like you, and therefore they will make a poor shield to hide behind on Judgment Day. If God has put you in this world and chosen for you Christian parents, who pray with you (however little), read the Bible to you (however simply), and discipline you (however hypocritically), then God has made you a friend and brought you into his narrow room, for a little while. And if you eat this bread and drink this cup, and in your heart, lift your heel against Jesus, your punishment will be far worse than someone who never called Jesus his friend. You cannot blame your parents.

B) The Context of the Gospel Warning {21}

1. *For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! (21a).* Judas did what God "determined" him to do—Luke says it stronger—and Judas is to be blamed, coming under the curse of God, signified by that word, "Woe!" There is a "going" and a "woe-ing" here. Note that when the gospel was first preached in this very city, this is something people had to get right, because these people were guilty for Jesus' death in a much more tangible way than we are. They couldn't play games with their thinking.

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men [Acts 2:23].

For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place [Acts 4:27-28].

It would have been better for that man if he had not been born (21b). When people think there is a “tension” between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, here are the main words they simply don’t want to hear—**It would have been better for that man.** God is the first cause of all things; everything else that causes is a secondary cause. That is so irrefutable when you start drawing it out that people prefer to change the subject rather than admit that they haven’t thought very seriously about it. What makes the action of a secondary causes (if they are persons who are flammable) so much “better” or “worse” is that eternal judgment is makes flammable things like secondary causing persons burn. The idea that you and I not getting to be the primary cause to some act takes all the meaningfulness out of it is evidence of a megalomania that is tolerated in the church only because the church is under the same Judas spell. We cannot ever preach hell or heaven until we get this straight. What makes heaven so good, hell so bad, and life worth living is not your pretension that you’re the first cause of your action! And you can be certain that the person who wakes up in hell will finally agree with Jesus that it would have been better that they were never born—because of how horrible hell is!

III. SUBSTITUTION FOR THE TRAITORS

A) The Bread and the Body of Christ {22}

1. *And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them (22a).* This **blessing** (*eulogesas*) is the word from which we derive the eulogy when someone has died. This practice has the authority, the blessing of Christ—it is not empty ritual—*not* because the bread is identical to his body, as Rome teaches, *nor* because it is just a symbol of nothing in particular, as modern Evangelicalism has taken for granted, but because by the power of the Spirit, when we are assembled, Christ says about the Passover meal, ‘Remember Me; Remember that I did this!’ or as Paul said, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” [1 Cor. 5:7].

2. As Jesus administered this first element, He *said*, “*Take; this is my body*” (22b). The bread we will break in just a little while is the first element of this ordinance.

It represents **the body of Christ**: “And the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh” [Jn. 6:51]. Now after blessing it, secondly, He broke it, and, thirdly, He gave it. If you want to get to the body of Christ it will be through his body being broken first. You are not a member of his body unless you accept that first. If your old person is not crushed and put away in His broken body, then you are not a Christian, but, “Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever” [Jn. 6:58].

B) The Cup and the Blood of Christ {23-24}

1. *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it (23)*. They “all drank the same spiritual drink” [1 Cor. 10:4], Paul said about Israel in the wilderness. And it was the same here about Judas dripping from his lips the same blood he was about to have on his hands. How guilty we are when we eat and drink in unbelief! In raising the cup to our lips that don’t mean it, the author of Hebrews says, we are “crucifying once again the Son of God...and holding him up to contempt” [6:6]. In the Old Testament this cup was filled with blood, which symbolized the blood of those who would be judged by God, so their blood was synonymous with God’s wrath. Therefore it was thought of as the cup of his wrath. But, praise God, that wasn’t the cup that Jesus gave them, and it is not the one He offers today! He gave thanks (*eucharisteo*), which is made up of the words for a true rendering, as in thanks, and then grace. Jesus has turned the poison cup of the curse into the fountain of eternal life. He does this by **his blood**: “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” [Eph. 1:7].

2. *And he said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (24)*. The new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31, poured out on those who God would write his law on their hearts, is initiated right here, established, ratified, by the blood of the covenant. The blood seals a divine promise. Can you honestly think of a better sign of a guarantee of God’s pleasure with us! “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” [Rom. 8:32].

IV. CELEBRATION WITH THE TRAITORS

A) The Place of Longing {25}

1. *Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God (25).* The backdrop of looking forward is sorrow, at least in this life. In this one statement, Jesus made it clear that the hour had come, which naturally made them sad; yet in the same statement there is an “until” and a “new day.” There is death and resurrection in every single moment where any human being has ever hoped. The work of Christ is the only answer to what everyone is thinking and feeling at every moment. Someone can be a Christian for years and have what G. K. Chesterton called “the secret...joy” even if we never fully understand why. It is because we have heaven growing in our hearts and we sense that the world we live in does not have the final say. Remember that the Passover commemorate another great escape. Now Luke tell us about “his departure (*exodus*), which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” [Lk. 9:31]. Today this is called ‘escapsim’ by mission theology, that the world is a place to be escaped—but that is exactly part of the work of the cross. Paul speaks of “the Lord Jesus Christ...who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age” [Gal. 1:3, 4].

B) The Place of Singing {26}

1. It is interesting that Mark adds that *when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (26).* It may seem odd that they could sing at a time like this. But the work of Christ brings singing back into the world. The world cultures were musical to begin with and in the religions that developed the tunes began to drown out, following the serpent’s initial syncopated beat. There are the mantras of the Buddhist, the droning of the Muslim, the darkness of stain-glassed cathedrals in before the Reformation, but “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” [Col. 3:16] were fuels to the gospel from the beginning: they are unique to the Christian story. That’s why at the center of all of the European cities that took the church out of the Dark Ages, there is a university, and in the center of that university there is a chapel, and in the center of that chapel there is a pipe organ.

V. DENIAL OF THE TRAITORS

A) The Good Shepherd Struck Down and Raised Up {27-28}

1. *And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’ (27).* This is the fulfillment of a prophecy from Zechariah 13, and notice that it is God who will strike the Man seated at his

right hand for the purpose of purifying his people. But for some reason, they must first be scattered. In one sense this is a very literal prediction about these disciple's reaction to what looked like the end of their Master's kingdom; in reality it is the common experience of the offense that Jesus presents.

2. *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee* (28). Jesus would be for his church what God was for the old covenant community. In the past it was as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. But this last resurrection prediction should have been what they clung to; instead they chose to cling to themselves.

B) All We Like Sheep Have Gone to Betray {29-31}

1. *Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not"* (29). I am sure you have considered the question before: What would you do under persecution? What would you say about Jesus with a gun to your head? That is essentially the question that Peter is answering. And yet what do we tend to do all of the other moments when a gun is not to our heads? How well do we perform under the "pressures" of affluence? In other words, what really separates Judas from *any* of us? "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" [Is. 53:6]. Falling away, going astray, is our nature—betraying Christ with our words or for money: those are just the symptoms. But a traitor is as traitor does; he does because he first is.

2. *And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times"* (30). It is a wonder why we do not say about Peter what we say about Judas. How could his heart have been so hardened! How could he not be on moment-by-moment rooster patrol! It was not a long time to stay paranoid. He said it would be "this very night." But Peter had bigger fish to fry, namely, saving face. No doubt he was sincerely zealous. Mark makes the point to add, in Peter's version of the Gospel story, remember: *But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you."* *And they all said the same* (31). All the disciples shared in this traitor's heart. All the disciples were in denial. But Jesus knew the heart of all these disciples and He invited them to that narrow room anyway and He spilled his blood for many anyway.

APPLICATION

To You Parents (preparing the feast) – Consider everything about Jesus here. God commanded all the heads of Israel to take great care to observe this meal and instruct their children, and constantly remind his children. Do you? This isn't about some legalistic checklist to beat yourself over the head with. This is about beholding Jesus and asking what He is like in spreading the feast out like this, and wanting to be like Him.

To Our Children (receiving the feast) – It says that at the beginning of this day, at the beginning of this celebration with the family, he came with the twelve, which included Judas. When they sat down, Judas was there, as much of the family as anyone else. No one except for Jesus knew what was going on in his heart. So as we get ready to eat and drink of the very same meal as them, are you Judas? How do you know?

It's a new year, young people. Have you asked Jesus yet, "Is it *I* Lord" like these disciples when they were warned? Have you seen your sins as something that God is angry at and that He is right to be angry at? And have you seen Jesus going to your place of punishment, taking on his back and in his hands, the whips, the nails, the displeasure of God poured downward from heaven to his cross, that was really your hell?

Communion (revisit 14:22-25)

In this bread and this drink He says to us, I love you so much, I am so determined to bring you home to glory, that I crushed my beloved Son with the full weight of hell and pierced my Son with the nails that would have locked you up forever and taken the cup reserved for you and poured it out on Him instead. And I have filled all the glasses in the wedding hall with the blood that flow from him, and its power will never run out.