

March 29, 2026

BETRAYAL, THE NEW COVENANT, AND GOD'S PERFECT PLAN

Mark 14:12-31

*(10 of 15 in a series through Mark 10-16)*

“This is not the way it was supposed to be.” That’s a line that has occurred in several movies and novels over the years when everything in the story is suddenly going wrong. Perhaps you’ve said that as well when something that seemed so good turned out so bad. I know I’ve felt that and probably even said that with the death of a little one. It’s one thing to watch a man or woman full of years breathe their last after experiencing a life full of memories, but to watch a little one—who should have a lifetime in front of them—die, it makes us all feel like this isn’t right. Again, we’ve all probably uttered in the face of such circumstances, “This is not the way it was supposed to be.” And there may be no scene in the Bible where we’re tempted to think that more than in the text we’re looking at this morning, Mark 14:12-31.

As the text opens, it’s the night of the Passover—the day that kicks off the feast of Unleavened Bread. The disciples approach Jesus about where they’re going to eat the Passover meal together, he gives them instructions, and it looks like this is going to be a magical night. I mean, can you imagine eating the Passover meal with Jesus? Imagine him reminding you what God was doing when he delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery as you eat together, noting what each element symbolizes. Again, this was going to be a sacred night, a night of remembrance, a night of sweet fellowship, and a night of worship. But by the end of the night, Jesus would have used this platform to tell them that one of the very ones in the room with him would betray him, all of them would fall away and scatter from him, and Peter—who seemed to be the strongest and boldest—would deny him and would do it three times. By the end of the night, you find yourself wanting to scream, “Wait. That’s not the way this is supposed to end. Jesus has only done the most amazing things, performed miracles, cared for people, taught in amazing ways, and this is how it all ends?” The reader of this episode in Mark’s gospel may well be tempted to feel like saying, “That’s not the way it was supposed to be.”

And yet, at the same time, you find that Jesus doesn’t say this with shock. His heart isn’t racing. He’s not scrambling to figure out what to do in light of everything that’s unfolding. He cannot even be described as *reacting* at all. He’s absolutely in charge. The text reads like Jesus is a director, calling out what will take place next as he speaks to the actors on stage. That’s the main element this story communicates. What is unfolding is the fulfillment of God’s perfect plan. So, what I want to do is show you that and then note a few things that means for us. First, then, let’s note that what this story shows us is the unfolding of God’s redeeming plan.

### **The unfolding of God’s redeeming plan**

I’ve already made note of this, but in this night where it looks like everything is spiraling out of control, everything is happening according to God’s perfect plan. Let’s look at this a little bit more in detail to illustrate all the ways that we see this truth.

First, Jesus' plan for the Passover meal is being carried out. The text opens with the disciples asking Jesus where they'll eat the Passover meal together. Jesus' response is to tell them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, 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" (vv. 13-15). Then, we're told they disciples set out and found everything just as Jesus told them, and so they prepared the meal.

Now, it may be that Jesus just knew in his omniscient divine mind all that would happen, and so he tells his disciples ahead of time. But, I think it makes more sense to say that Jesus had arranged this ahead of time. The main reason for that is because Jesus tells his disciples to ask the man, "Where is *my* guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" If you were just trying to find a room to meet with your disciples, you'd probably say, "Where is *a* room?" Only if you've arranged to claim a room ahead of time would you say, "Where is *my* room?" So, I think Jesus had this arranged beforehand.

I think prior to this night, Jesus wanted a private meal with his disciples, but he knew that would be hard to pull off in the midst of people coming and going and trying to find arrangements, and so he set up a plan. He met with a guy beforehand and arranged everything, and he told him, "On the day of the Passover, carry a jar of water at this time, and my disciples will know to approach you." And the reason this would have stood out is because women were the ones who usually carried water. And so this plan of arranging the room ahead of time was set in motion by Jesus days earlier, and it's being carried out precisely as he planned.

But it doesn't stop there. In verses 17-21, we're told that Jesus announces his betrayal. Now, again, you'd think that this would be shocking and unsettling. And it is shocking and unsettling to his disciples. They are caught off guard and begin questioning whether they're the one he's talking about. But it's not shocking at all to Jesus. He's the one who announces it.

We know, as the readers of this gospel, that Judas has already arranged with the chief priests and scribes to betray Jesus. But what we see here is the Jesus knows this as well. He declares, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me" (v. 18), adding, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me" (v. 20).

This is one of the vilest things imaginable. One whom Jesus has taught, cared for, and performed miraculous works in front of is going to betray him. And yet, this doesn't catch Jesus off guard. He's declaring it will happen before it happens. Mark is showing us through Jesus' prediction that everything is happening according to God's perfect plan.

The same thing is seen in the next scene, which we find in verses 22-25. Jesus takes a couple of elements in the Passover meal—the bread and the wine—and he reinterprets them to represent his body and blood, noting that his blood will be "poured out for many" (v. 24). Again, what this means is that Jesus is not going to die by accident. His life isn't taken from him. He knows ahead

of time that he will die. He's announcing in this moment that his blood will be shed, and he's telling them that this is done in order to fulfill the Father's promise of a new covenant (v. 24). Again, the Father's plan of redemption is being carried out precisely as planned.

And, finally, we see this reality in this last section. In verses 26-31 Jesus once more declares something that you think would shake Jesus and everyone else. He announces that all those in the room would abandon him and Peter—again, the boldest of the group—would deny Jesus three times. Now, they all protest, but note that Jesus insists this will happen. And we know as we continue in the story that it does happen. So, again, Mark isn't giving us a picture of Jesus' followers abandoning or denying him and Jesus looking at this terrible scene unfolding while thinking, "Are you kidding me, guys? After all I've done for you, what is going on?" No, he dictates ahead of time what will take place. This is all part of the Father's redeeming plan.

But it's not just that, note something interesting in how Jesus tells them that they'll all abandon him. He says, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" This is a quotation from Zechariah 13:7. In other words, these things will happen not just in accord with Jesus' proclamation that they will happen—though that's certainly the case—but they will take place in fulfillment of centuries-old prophecy that was given by God through the prophet Zechariah. Moreover, Jesus also declares ahead of time that he'll rise from the dead (v. 28), showing once more that nothing is unfolding by accident.

The way the Mark presents all of these events that could feel so shocking and unsettling, sends the message that the Father's perfect plan is being carried out. All things are happening just as they're supposed to.

But when we say that God's perfect plan of redemption is being carried out, what do we mean? Well, we mean two things. First, all the new covenant promises God made to his people are becoming a reality. Here's what I mean. Under the Old Covenant, God's people were given the law, and they were told to obey it. In fact, it was a simple and straightforward system. God told that if they obeyed, they'd receive blessings, and if they disobeyed, they'd be cursed. I mean, that seems simple, straightforward, and clear, so what's wrong with that?

Well, here's what's wrong. God's people under the Old Covenant—like all mankind—were sinners. They were bound to disobey, and they did. A reading of the Old Testament will make you cringe as they disobey God's law, suffer his promised curses, and profane the name of their God again and again. By profaning God's name, I mean that every time the nations saw them suffering under God's judgment, or disobeying their God, or even worshiping the false gods that these pagan nations worshiped, these nations could conclude, "Well, I guess the God of Israel isn't that great. He must not be worth obeying. He must not be satisfying enough so that they have to seek our gods as well." Do you see? God's name is profaned because the Israelites keep disobeying.

But the problem is, there was nothing in the law that could change their hearts. You see, they weren't disobeying God's law and bearing his promised curses for doing so because they didn't

understand the terms. They disobeyed and bore God's curses because their hearts were wicked, and they needed something to transform their hearts. Otherwise, they'd keep disobeying, bearing God's curses, and profaning his name.

Therefore, God made a promise. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord declared that he was about to act for the sake of his own name. He didn't want his name profaned any more among the nations. He said, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. . . . I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek 36:22-27). And he'd add through the prophet Jeremiah this would all be done in a new covenant that God was making with his people—not like the old covenant he'd made that the Israelites repeatedly broke—and in this new covenant, he'd also forgive their iniquities and remember their sins no more (Jer 31:34).

So, think about the glories of this promise. God was going to establish a new covenant, new terms to his relationship with his people. Whereas in the Old Covenant they were told to obey but had no transformation of heart to do so, in this New Covenant he was making, he'd give them new hearts, put his Spirit within his people, and cause them to obey him from the heart. He's change them at the level of their very desires. No longer would his name be profaned because he's transform their hearts and wills by his Spirit. And he's forgive their sins.

Brothers and sisters, this is what we experience. If you and I are believers, then we have new hearts and the Spirit of God indwelling us. God has changed us from the inside. He's changed our desires, hasn't he? If you're a believer, you know that you can't be content in sin. You hate it. It doesn't mean you perfectly obey, but when you don't, you find it disgusting and want to repent. And when you repent, you can know that you're forgiven. All of that is because God has fulfilled these covenant promises he made through the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

But here's the thing. None of those covenant promises could become a reality apart from Jesus dying and being raised for us. If Christ doesn't shed his blood and die, we can't be forgiven, we can't get new hearts, and his Spirit doesn't come to indwell us. These covenant promises are enacted through the shed blood of Jesus, which is why he says in verse 24, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." So, when we say that this was all part of God's perfect plan of redemption, we mean that this was all part of God's perfect plan to bring about the redeeming promises he'd declared he would do with the New Covenant. Jesus' blood made that a reality.

But this brings us to the second note I want to say about Christ's death and the New Covenant. Let's address it by asking a question. Why did Jesus have to die for the New Covenant to be enacted? Well, two reasons. First, covenants were always ratified with the shedding of blood.

The author of Hebrews tells us that even the Old Covenant had been ratified with blood as Moses took the blood of calves and goats and declared, “This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you” (Heb 9:20). And so this New Covenant also had to be ratified by the shedding of blood, but because it was so much more glorious than the Old, with much better promises (as we’ve already noted), it had to be purified with the perfect blood of the Son of God himself.

But there’s a second reason Christ had to die in order for us to receive these promises, especially the forgiveness of sins. God is just. If you read the Old Testament, God says again and again that he’ll not just overlook sins. He had declared in Exodus 34:7 that he wouldn’t let the guilty go unpunished and in Proverbs 17:15 that acquitting someone who is guilty is an abomination. And that’s a problem for us because we’re sinfully guilty before our just and holy God.

Yet here’s what God does. He sends his Son, who assumes a fully human nature, becoming a man so that he might bear the punishment for our sins in our place. In other words, on the cross, the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus so that we might not have to bear it ourselves. That’s why Jesus had to die, so that God might be just and be able to justify us. For God to justly justify us requires Christ to bear the payment for sins by his death on a cross.

But, we might say, that would suggest that God is the one somehow who is the author of the cross. That is to say, if God pours out his wrath on the cross, and Jesus bears that wrath in dying, then is it fair to say that God is the author of this event? I mean, didn’t evil men put Jesus to death? The answer here is, “Yes”—to all.

Notice in the text how Judas is held responsible for betraying Jesus so that he’d be arrested and executed. After prophesying that Judas would betray him, Jesus says, “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! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (v. 21). In other words, just as all of this is part of God’s plan, Judas is still responsible and will still bear punishment for his betrayal of the Lord. God’s sovereignty never functions in the Bible to eliminate or even lessen our responsibility as humans. We make significant responsible choices, and we’ll face the appropriate consequences for them.

And at the same time, yes, Jesus dies because God pours out his wrath at the cross. Notice when Jesus quotes that Zechariah text what he says. Now, by way of reminder, this is a quote where God is speaking through the prophet Zechariah, and he says, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (v. 27). Now, Jesus makes clear that he’s the shepherd who will be struck. But who, according to Zechariah, is the one who will do the striking? God is the one who declares through the prophet, “I will strike the shepherd.” Jesus dies on the cross because God is pouring out the wrath on the Son, the wrath that you and I deserve to bear as sinners. That’s why Jesus’ blood is necessary to bring about the New Covenant promises. God had to justly deal with our sins, and that requires the wrath-bearing substitute of the Son of God dying for us on the cross. In other words, God’s love for us is why he bears his own wrath against our sin for us.

Again, all of what we're seeing in Mark 14:12-31 is the carrying out of the Father's perfect plan of redemption.

Now, we noted a similar reality last week when I said that the text revealed to us Jesus' absolute control. And now we're seeing it again. And just as I noted last week, Jesus' control isn't some exception where Jesus was in control of that week of human history but the rest is just carelessly spinning along. He's always in control. Well, I want to say the same thing about God's plan of redemption. The Lord's plan to redeem us involves much. He's promised to conform each of us to the image of his Son. He's promised to sanctify us, making us more holy. He's promised to preserve us, holding onto us by his power. Guys, this ends really well for us.

So, realize this. The God who had a plan to accomplish redemption through the death and resurrection of his Son is the same God who has a plan to fulfill everything in you that he has purposed to make you like his Son, holding onto you until that day. He wrote down the days of your life before you were ever born because there's a story he's written for you. Now, you'll make significant choices and be responsible for those choices, but you can also rest in knowing that God's redeeming plan for your life will be accomplished. And so just as we've walked through this story and noted all that God is doing in each of these crazy circumstances in order to fulfill his plan of redemption, I think it's good for us to stop and ask—as we look at the (crazy?) circumstances of our lives—“What might God be doing in these circumstances?” And because of what we see in this text, we have no reason but to answer that question in a very hopeful and encouraging way.

So, let's come and eat that meal together that Jesus instituted on that night. He had a chance to give them another annual meal, but remember his death and resurrection is too important. And so he reinterpreted an annual meal that the church began celebrating weekly as they gathered together every Sunday to praise the risen and reigning Lord. So, let's do that now. Amen.