

Mark 14:26-52: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Mark chapter 14 verses 26 to 52 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 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.

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not. And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

But he said emphatically, If I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same. And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray.

And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.

And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

[1 : 0 8] Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. And he came and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.

And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?

It is enough. The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.

And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, The one I will kiss is the man.

[2 : 1 0] Seize him and lead him away under guard. And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, Rabbi. And he kissed him. And they laid hands on him and seized him.

But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, Have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day I was with you in the temple, teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled. And they all left him and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body.

And they seized him. But he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. We have now arrived at the middle section of Mark chapter 16. Jesus makes three predictions in this chapter, and there are three fulfillments.

Judas' betrayal, the disciples' desertion, and Peter's denial. And each of these three predictions is fulfilled in order by the end of the chapter. After singing a hymn, they go out to the Mount of Olives.

[3 : 13] The hymn was presumably one of the psalms that ended the Passover meal. Psalms 113 and 114 were traditionally sung beforehand. And afterwards, Psalms 115 to 118 would have been sung.

So presumably these are the things that Jesus would have sung at this point. They go out to the Mount of Olives. This continues the movements back and forth between the Temple Mount and the city and the Mount of Olives.

Jesus quotes Zechariah chapter 13 verse 7 to speak about the way that his disciples will forsake him. Strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. As usual, it's important to hear the stories behind the stories.

This is another allusion from the one that we've seen in the triumphal entry to Zechariah. The rejected Messiah will be wounded and killed, but the end of Zechariah is one of great deliverance and blessing to the nation and the wider peoples.

Perhaps notably, the last chapter of Zechariah begins with key references to the Mount of Olives. Jesus foretells what's going to happen in his disciples' forsaking of him, but he also foretells the resurrection and the fact that he will meet them again in Galilee, returning to where he first called them.

[4 : 28] The scattered sheep and the struck shepherd will be reunited again. Peter, however, told that they will forsake Christ, has an excessive confidence in his own abilities.

He insistently denies that he will deny Christ. Puffed up, he presents himself as the most faithful disciple, and perhaps we should see a connection between the proud crowing cock and Peter himself.

In Mark, we're told that the cock will crow twice, and many have seen a contradiction between this and other Gospel accounts. I think it's quite natural to think that the other Gospel accounts removed one of the references to the crowing of the cock, because one is enough to get the point across.

The reference to the cock crowing twice here probably occurs because Mark's source is Peter himself, and Peter has the most vivid memory of the event. However, most cocks that crowed would crow multiple times and would likely be joined by others.

It's a rather strange detail to camp out on as a contradiction. Peter is the lead disciple. He recognises that Jesus will die, but he thinks he is faithful enough to die with him.

[5 : 35] Perhaps he doesn't realise just how much pressure he will be put under, or perhaps he doesn't realise the type of pressure he will be put under. Either way, his pride at this point will soon be deflated by events.

Jesus goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays three times for the cup to be removed, and is joined by Peter, James and John. These are the same three disciples as were present at the Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter.

They're probably near enough to hear what Jesus is saying. They have an intimate view into Jesus' prayer life at its most remarkable and powerful moment, and yet they fall asleep.

Jesus challenges Peter in particular for his failure to watch one hour. Peter, the one who had been so proud and boastful about his ability to stand with Christ, his ability to stand when all others would forsake, and now Peter has failed just to keep awake.

Jesus charges them, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation, into the trial or the testing or the tribulation that would test them beyond their capacity.

[6 : 41] Jesus, at the very beginning of the Gospel, had been brought into temptation by the Spirit, cast out into the wilderness, facing the temptation of Satan, in a position where he lacked the resources that he needed to eat, and was tested to the limits of his strength.

A similar time of trial and testing and tribulation is opening up now, and he will once again face off with Satan himself. And the disciples are on the brink of that moment, and they're falling asleep.

They're not prepared. Three times they are tested, and three times they fail, in contrast to Jesus in the wilderness. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

They're zealous, particularly Peter, but they lack the ability to carry it through in practice. And I think Jesus' words here reflect his own struggle. He himself knows what it is to feel temptation, the struggle to persevere with his vocation, when his flesh is crying out against what the cross means, against the pain and the agony, and all the other things that the cross represents.

If anyone's spirit is willing, Christ is. But if anyone is facing a battle with the flesh, and its instinctive desire to avoid suffering and pain and hardship, Christ is facing that struggle.

[7 : 59] In this, we're seeing a contrast between Christ and his disciples. Christ, who watches and prays, as he prepares for the temptation, this testing, that he will go through, and the disciples, as the weakness of their flesh overcomes them, and they cannot stand in the hour that they need to stand.

Christ is tempted in every way as we are, tempted to fall back, tempted to divert from the path that the Father has set before him, tempted to give up the cup that had been handed to him.

But he perseveres. He faces temptation and does not sin. And in this, he provides not only a contrast with us, but also an example to us. After returning the third time, Jesus says, It is enough.

The matter for which he wanted their presence is now settled, and his betrayer is at hand. Judas comes with the mob. We're told he's one of the twelve. We know that Judas is one of the twelve already, but it tells us that, to underline the point.

This is one of his closest friends. He's been betrayed by someone he's invested the last three years of his life in. He's been close to this person. He's trusted this person. He's given power to this person to do miracles in his name.

[9 : 13] This person has witnessed all that Christ has done, and now he's turning against him. And he betrays Christ with a kiss, an act of greeting to single him out from the others.

But the cruelty and the wickedness of the betrayal is heightened by the manner in which it occurs. This act of greeting and love and tenderness and friendship is exploited as a means to destroy someone.

Betrayal with a kiss might remind us of the story of Joab and Amasa in 2 Samuel chapter 20 verses 9 to 10. One of those who's with Jesus, a bystander, identified as Peter elsewhere, strikes the high priest's servant.

And Jesus points out that they could have taken him in the temple. He was teaching there openly by day. And yet here they are, arresting him like some criminal, like some brigand.

This, of course, is all part of the plan of the chief priests and the scribes. They wanted to arrest Jesus by stealth because they didn't want the crowd to have notice of it. They wanted this all to go down as quietly and behind the scenes as possible so that there would not be unrest at the time of the feast.

[10 : 22] This, however, happens in order that the scriptures might be fulfilled. Christ is numbered with the transgressors, it says in Isaiah chapter 53, and the disciples now all flee.

There's a reference here to a young man in a linen garment who was seized but ran away naked. It's rather surprising in the context and a bit comical. None of the other Gospels record this detail and many different suggestions about the identity of this figure have been put forward.

Perhaps it was a disciple of Jesus who witnessed the event, later became a witness to the event, and was known among many in the early church. Others have suggested it was Mark himself.

Mark had a house in Jerusalem which some have identified with the site of the Last Supper. And so maybe he was a witness to this event himself and he writes himself into his Gospel without putting himself in by name.

Others have seen some symbolic import here. In Amos chapter 2 verse 16, He who is stout of heart among the mighty shall flee away naked in that day, declares the Lord.

[11 : 25] When God judges and this event of crisis comes, people will flee away naked. Perhaps there is some reference here to the previous chapter. Mark chapter 13 verses 15 to 16 reads, Let the one who is on the housetop not go down nor enter his house to take anything out and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

Maybe we're supposed to hear the events of the previous chapter being played out in some way here. A question to consider. In the disciples falling asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the cock crowing bringing Peter to his senses, we should be reminded of the centrality of the charge to be wakeful in the previous chapter.

In Mark chapter 13 verses 33 to 37 we read, Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. Reading Mark 14 against the backdrop of Mark 13, what parallels do you notice? What do these parallels suggest?

[12 : 53] And what can they teach us?