

The Passion of Our Lord

KING OF THE JEWS, OR MESSIAH, SON OF THE BLESSED ONE?

Mark 14:1 – 15:47

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; ²for they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

³While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money.

So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

12On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

17When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" 20He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

22While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

26When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of

Olives. 27And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written,

*'I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep will be scattered.'*

28But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." 30Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

32They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. 34And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." 35And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." 37He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? 38Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. 41He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

43Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and

clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders.
44Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard."
45So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. 47But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? 49Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled." 50All of them deserted him and fled.

51A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, 52but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

53They took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. 54Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. 55Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. 56For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. 57Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 58We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.' 59But even on this point their testimony did not agree. 60Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" 61But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62Jesus said, "I am; and

*'you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of the Power,'*

and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'"

63Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "Why do we still need witnesses? 64You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?" All of them condemned him as deserving death. 65Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" The guards also took him over and beat him.

66While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. 67When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, "You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." 68But he denied it, saying, "I do not know or understand what you are talking about." And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. 69And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, "This man is one of them." 70But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, "Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean." 71But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." 72At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." And he broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. 2Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." 3Then the chief priests accused him of many things. 4Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." 5But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

6Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them,

anyone for whom they asked. 7Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. 8So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. 9Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" 10For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. 11But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. 12Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" 13They shouted back, "Crucify him!" 14Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" 15So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

16Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. 17And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of

the Jews.” 27And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.

29Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30save yourself, and come down from the cross!” 31In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

33When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

35When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” 36And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” 37Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. 38And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

40There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

42When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, 43Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also

himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. 44Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. 45When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. 46Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. 47Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

DIAGNOSIS: If You Want to Know Who Someone Is, Ask Him

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Not Hearing the Truth*

Two titles are applied to Jesus in the course of Mark's passion narrative: "Messiah, the Son of Blessed One" (14:61-62; see also 15:39 for a comparable title) and "King of the Jews" (15:2, 9, 12, 18, 26, 32). On only one occasion does Jesus acknowledge either of these titles; when asked by the high priest, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus said, "I am; and 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,' and 'coming with the clouds of heaven.'" This statement of truth is received by the high priest as clear evidence of blasphemy; worthy not only of their derision, but Jesus' condemnation.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *You Can't Handle the Truth*

Jesus spoke the truth, but the chief priests and the scribes and the elders couldn't handle it. In fact, they treat Jesus' acknowledgement of his true identity like a hot potato -too hot

to handle but too potent to be left alone. So they drop Jesus into the hands of Pilate. They can't handle Jesus, because the law will not allow them to kill him, but Pilate might be forced to handle him. Instead, even Pilate is mystified by Jesus; and assuming that Jesus must have political ambitions he tries a different identity on Jesus for size: "Are you the King of the Jews?" he asks. To this question Jesus answers enigmatically, "You say so"—as if to hold up a mirror to Pilate, reflecting back to Pilate only what Pilate has claimed.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *You Don't Get the Truth*

But as much as Jesus' identity is bandied about, not one of the questioners has any intention of trusting in Jesus or his word. Pilate and the religious leaders are looking for Jesus to condemn himself. And, with or without his help, they are determined to land a conviction; somebody needs to suffer for their inability to reach any real conclusions—and Jesus, it seems, is the man. They cast him out of the religious community for what he is—but what they think he is not (Messiah, Son of the Blessed One), and condemn him for what he never claims to be (King of the Jews). They convict Jesus for telling the truth, bury the truth of God's Messiah, and thereby deprive themselves of that very same Messiah. That makes them god-less; or, if you prefer, "god-forsaken."

PROGNOSIS: If You Want to Know Who Someone Is, Watch Him

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *You Get the Truth Where You Least Expect to Find It*

But the truth has a way of coming to light, even when we have done all we can to bury it. So, we shouldn't be surprised that it is neither the chief priests nor Pilate who recognize the truth of who Jesus is, as he hangs from the cross; it is a Roman

centurion who realizes: “Truly, this was God’s Son” (15:39). This soldier, sent to see to the death of a criminal, looks at a man convicted of political treason (or, in religious terms, blasphemy), and he calls Jesus what he truly is: God’s Son. This One who is mocked for failing to save himself, instead chooses to save others by his conviction (15:31-32). This One who cries out his own knowledge of feeling god-forsaken, does not forsake the world that crucifies him.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Truth You Can Hear and Handle*

When Jesus sat with those first disciples at the Passover meal on that fateful night before his death, he seemed to anticipate where he’d end up-bearing the brunt of the world’s sinfulness; still even with that knowledge, he did not shrink from offering himself to his disciples. There, at table, with bread in hand and cup lifted he offered his whole self to his followers: “This is my body given for you; my blood is the new covenant for you” (14:22-25). And, in bread and wine, he still places himself in our hands; and through the cross he accomplishes what he promises: he gives himself to us as a truth we can handle, taste, embrace, and be nourished by. And, with empty hands thrust forward, and lips parched for God’s merciful truth in Jesus Christ, we cry out in longing and hope for what Jesus has to give: Life. And receiving what Jesus alone has to offer, we acknowledge him for who he is: God’s Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Speaking the Truth*
Once you’re ears have been opened to the voice of God’s Messiah and you’ve heard the song of his salvation, once you’ve partaken of this life that gives itself freely and had it placed in your hands again, there is no denying its power. This Jesus, on the cross, in bread and wine, is a blessing; potent, yes, but meant to be handled, tasted, embraced, and spoken. Jesus, like the

bread and wine he held up, is not meant to be buried, but to be shared. So, emboldened by his mercy, and freed by his death and resurrection, we speak the truth of him into a hungry, desperate world. We do that knowing full well that the world that receives him, still may not welcome his Truth. But we cannot help but speak it, because unlike those rulers of the world who fade in and out of our favor, Jesus' messianic reign of mercy, forgiveness, and resurrection needs to be heard.