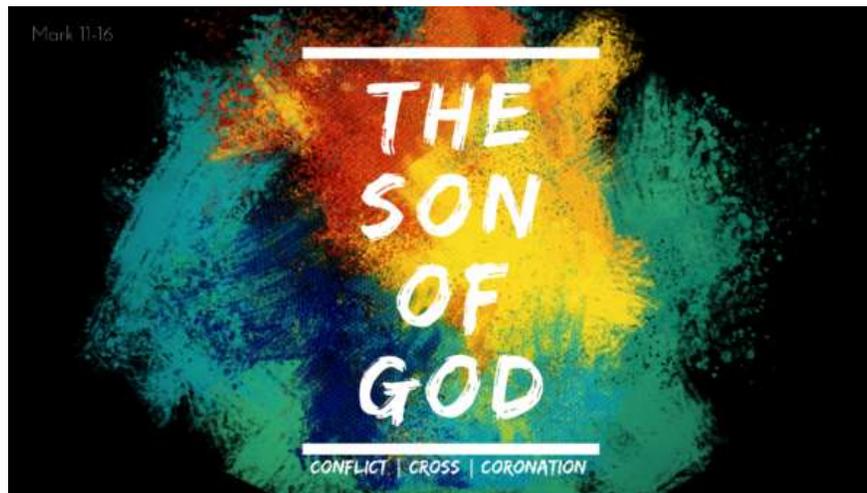


Never Say Never



Mark 14:17-31

Open to the gospel according to Mark. Tomorrow is Veteran's Day. I hope as citizens, we never take the freedom we have for granted. There have been a lot of men and women who paid the ultimate price so that you and I might enjoy the freedoms we have as citizens of this great country. So thank you to the veterans who have served and those who are presently serving.

We are going to be looking at verses 17-31 this morning. As Kory made mention of last week, this is another passage called a Markan sandwich. I've loved feasting on these sandwiches as we've studied Mark, but you've got to realize I'm a sandwich guy. Whether it's a hot sandwich or a cold sandwich, I'm satisfied. Kory and Katie flew out this morning from Nashville to go to Nicaragua. We've got the kids this week, which meant yesterday Celisa went to the grocery to buy groceries for all of us for this entire week. Let me just say the ton truck was full of groceries. Because it was cool yesterday, I didn't have to unload the groceries quite as early as we normally would, but there came a time last night when Celisa just said, "Would you mind unloading the groceries and I will put them away." I

packed in sack after sack after sack. All of a sudden, I got to the sack I was really looking for, and that was the bread sack. If you're a sandwich guy, especially if you're a plain with nothing on it guy, it means you're going to get the true taste of the meat, true taste of the bread, and you're not going to add anything to it to take away from that great taste of a true sandwich. Bread makes a difference. So I have the bread sack in my hand, and when I looked into the sack, wow, my favorite loaf of whole wheat bread was there. But as a bonus, there was this package of Hawaiian rolls. For years, I've been eating sandwiches on Hawaiian rolls. You just break it apart, put your favorite meat in between it, and close it up. Did you know that Arby's is finally selling Hawaiian roll sandwiches?

This morning, we've got a great sandwich. But normally, the meat of this sandwich that Kory talked about last week, the institution of the Lord's Supper, completely takes away from the bread. Because of time last week, Kory stressed the meat of this sandwich. My responsibility this morning is to serve you the top and the bottom pieces of bread so that you understand, not just the historical facts of the life of Christ, but we understand why Mark, in writing a gospel to a church during the days of the Roman Empire, at a time when Christians were getting ready to be persecuted, you understand the purpose of this gospel. I hope by now you will never read the gospel the way you used to, just believing it's an historical diary of the life of Christ. No, the author had a purpose in putting these stories together the way he did, and especially in these little Markan sandwiches. Let's note that verses 17-21 is the top piece of bread, the meat is 22-26, and the bottom piece of bread is 27-31. I want you to see this sandwich in its entirety before we discuss the top and bottom pieces of bread.

Scripture

"And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. 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." 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. 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." And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 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." 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."

(Prayer)

Father, this changes everything when we see Mark's intent, which is the faithfulness of Jesus is really seen in light of the betrayal of Judas and the denial of the other eleven of Him. When He says this is the blood of the covenant which is shed for many, He's not shedding it for the righteous, because there is none righteous; He's shedding His blood for those who are sinful. Mark wants us to grab hold of that, so Father let us grab hold of that because if we really understand who this God-Man is that we follow it will not cause us to run to sin; it will cause us to run from sin. Father, open our eyes this morning because we just sat at the table with You last week, help us look into the life of these twelve and see Mark's purpose, then to make application for our lives and let us not be hearers only, but doers of Your Word. In Your precious Son's name we pray, amen.

Before we begin to exegete this passage, let's just say this together: Never say never. There are just some things you hear about and you just don't believe you could ever do what they did. Please be careful...never say never.

The meat of this sandwich is during the Passover meal, a meal for family, a meal that commemorated Israelite families' exodus out of Egypt and a journey that would take many of them to the Promised Land is still being observed by Jesus and His disciples, so why weren't they eating the meal with their families? See, in the biblical world, it was very common for a rabbi to choose followers and then begin to train those people, so in a real sense, they became his family. On multiple occasions, Jesus would talk about who his mother, brother, or sisters really were, and it wasn't those He was physically kin to; it was those who were following Him. So Jesus is sitting down at a table with His "family" and in the midst of that meal that commemorates freedom from Egypt, He begins to talk about how now the bread and the cup represents Him and His death for them on a cross that's going to take place very soon. That's the meat. As Kory said, it wasn't Jesus' last supper; it was His first supper with His family. We anticipate a last supper and we're going to continue to have middle suppers, so to speak. Think about this. Especially in the biblical world, if you sat down and ate with someone that meant there was an acceptance of, an intimacy with. It's not like going into a restaurant today and being seated by somebody that we don't know. To share a meal was to identify with that person. That's why when Jesus ate with the sinners it blew the minds of the pharisaical world. How could He fellowship and be intimate with people like them?

So Mark is wanting us to see a family meal, and all of a sudden, during this family meal Jesus makes the statement that one of the family members, one of those who associates with His family will betray Him 'as it is written.' Whoa! Get this picture. It is you and your family, and Dad looks around and says one of you will betray me. As the reader, we already know who the betrayer is. Early in the gospel when the twelve apostles were named, we were told right off the bat that Judas Iscariot would betray Him. So if you've never heard the story of Christianity before, if you

read Mark's gospel you will know there is a betrayer before he ever betrays Jesus. Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't just say, 'Judas, are you really going to do what you're going to do?' Have you ever wondered why He left the possibility open to cause all twelve to wonder if it would be them? You don't hear the twelve start saying they wouldn't betray Him; when He announces a betrayer, they're sad. They start having the emotion of sorrow to think about one who's sitting at the table right now eating with Jesus actually betraying Him.

So Mark said one by one they begin to say, "Is it I?" Chances are even Judas said, "Is it I?" Jesus never identifies the betrayer. Then He makes this clear. Jesus wants to make sure the disciples understand when He is betrayed that they don't think the reason He dies is because one of them betrayed Him. He said, "For the Son of Man goes at it is written." Jesus is coming to this event called the cross in which He clearly believes and understands that He is going to a cross because this has been foreordained by God Himself. You understand that, right? I want to make sure we understand this. Mark is telling us Jesus is living His life according to God's will. As the Son of Man, a man just like you or me, He left Heaven and laid aside the prerogative of using His deity to make His decisions, and as the perfect man, He has saturated Himself with the Word of God to the point that He understands God's will for His life, and He's going to be obedient to it. Did you get that? That's why He's faithful. He believes in God's Word. He believes in God's will, and He has come to do the will of God. He realizes that in a sense His life is not about Him; His life is about God. He wants to make sure we understand He is dying, and He has to die because it's already been prophesied. Isaiah 53 will clearly say it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He didn't just die at the hands of the Romans and the Jews, He didn't just die because Judas betrayed Him; He died because it was God's will to put Him on a cross and put our sins on Him. It was God's will for Him to die for sinful mankind, and He's telling this to His family.

Then He says, "...but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" You and I know who He's talking about. He's talking about Judas. You have to believe Judas, sitting there, knows He knows. I want to believe if I had premeditated to betray Christ and now He is pointing it out

before I actually did it, which means I can stop, I wouldn't do what Judas did. But Judas did it anyway. Then Jesus said, "It would have been better for that man if he had never been born." There is a lot of controversy about Judas and if he was a follower or not a follower. Is he in Heaven? Is he in Hell? I don't believe there is any chance he is in Heaven. If he were in Heaven, Jesus would not have said it would be better for him to have never been born. Jesus knew the fate of Judas, not because he betrayed Jesus, but because he was a sinner who never repented of being a sinner. He was a man who put his will above God's will. Because of that, he will be separated from God forever and ever. Can I just say this about this man? It is my opinion that he ate with Jesus, but never ate of Jesus. That symbolic meal that we still take today called the Lord's Supper is a meal that says we have eaten of Jesus. We have consumed His blood; we have consumed His body. We're leading our lives in total trust of Him as our Lord and Savior. But there was one in the midst who no one knew. There were never actions of Judas that caused Peter to go say 'it's him Lord.' I don't know about you, but if Peter thought it was Judas, he would have said it. Can I tell you what scares me to death? Last week, some of us sat at the table and ate with Jesus but have never eaten of Jesus. In a real sense, it would have been better that we had never been born. There's a possibility that some of us who sat at the table and will sit at the table in the future will spend eternity separated from God forever and ever because our heart is just like Judas' heart. It's an unrepentant heart of sin where we have thrown us as lord of our life and everything is about us.

Please, read this gospel according to Mark and understand how important it is, if you're in the family, to make sure you're really in the family. It's not your physical presence at a table that causes you to be in the family. It's a spiritual union that you have with God through His Son Jesus Christ because there's been a time in your life when you've truly been convicted that you're a sinner, you have turned from that sinful lifestyle, put your faith and trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and you're trusting nothing but the finished work of Christ. As evidence of that repentance and faith, you have received a new nature. While that nature can be deceived from time to time and you commit an act of sin, you cannot live a lifestyle of reigning over your own life. I believe Judas followed God and Christ

because he hoped Christ would bring to him what he really wanted, and that was for Rome to get out of Israel, but his life was not about God; his life was about himself. I don't know that Judas really knew, but God knew, and he wouldn't even listen to God's assessment of himself. You will not know whether you're in Christ or outside of Christ unless you allow God's Holy Spirit to assess you. It would break my heart to know you thought you were in the family, but you really weren't.

Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, they sing a hymn, the hallelujah hymns in Psalm 113-118, and then they went out of the upper room and head toward Gethsemane. Jesus makes this statement, "The shepherd will be struck and the sheep will be scattered." He quotes Zechariah 13:7, and then He looks at the disciples and says all of you are getting ready to be trapped, ESV says, fall away. Then He tells them after the resurrection He will lead them into Galilee. God bless Peter...here is a guy who has just been at the table with Christ. It's a band of brothers. It's a band of followers of Christ. And he has the audacity when Jesus talks about the sheep being scattered because the shepherd is going to get struck, meaning when He goes through what He is going to go through, they're all going to abandon Him, Peter says yep, they'll let you down. All of them are going to fall, but I never will. Can you believe that? I want to be honest with you, authentic with you. If Jesus told me that this man right here was going to fall away, I would think if he could fall away, I could fall away. But not Peter...he said Lord, if they all fall, if they all let you down, if they all get trapped, not me. Then Jesus says the most alarming words you can say to somebody...before the cock crows twice; now, Mark is talking about the crow around midnight and the one right before dawn. He gets so specific that during this time, you will deny Me three times. Then Peter said, 'I would die before I would deny,' and the other ten said the same thing because Peter was so emphatic.

What is Mark doing? Mark is writing to a church that's getting ready to be trapped. He's writing to a church that understands they sit down at a meal that represents their fellowship with God through Christ. He's writing a story of these disciples, not to offer an excuse for them to sin because the first disciples sinned, but to say you don't want to be like them. They lived

on this side of the cross; you live on this side of the cross. This is why Mark is not going to really let us know who Jesus is until we see Jesus dying on the cross, because it's only at the cross you can truly understand who the Son of Man is. Why? So that you understand who you're following. We are following a man who gave His life to God. Because He had given His life to God, He fulfilled God's will by going to a cross so that we could be redeemed. What is Mark wanting us to understand? If we're going to be a follower of Christ, know you're following a man who did not live life for His glory, but following a man who lived His life for God's glory. He believed God's will was best. Do you believe God's will is what is best? Then, can I say this? Never say never, because it is possible for a true follower of Christ to deny Christ, to live so close to the edge, to get so close to the fire that they get burned, that we fall. The next time you hear 'I can't believe I would ever' you have to believe and understand that potential to be deceived during the trap is possible to everyone who names the name of Christ.

Now, in practical application, could I just give us some hope here? How do we get through the trap, so to speak so that we don't deny Christ? Could I jump to the book of Hebrews just a moment? I believe the book of Hebrews is the backdrop for the church that Mark is writing to. It's not the same church, necessarily. It's during this time when persecution is beginning to come upon the church that's primarily Jewish that's bringing the Gentile people into it, and many of the Jewish believers are struggling with really putting their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. In Hebrews chapter 3:6, it says, "But Christ is faithful over God's house, and we are His house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." Now look at 12-14. "Take care brothers lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." This is saying just because someone says they're a believer doesn't really mean they're a believer. You don't really know who the real believers are until you see the totality of somebody's life. Those of us who are God's house, who are in Christ, we hold our confidence firm to the very end. Because

not everybody that's at the table is really in the family, the writer is saying you had better beware. It's possible some of us are sitting here right now and we really have an evil heart of unbelief. Guess what will happen...life is so designed to one day reveal that unbelieving heart you have. The writer of Hebrews goes on to talk about the children of Israel and how many came out, but they didn't all go in. The reason they didn't all go in is because they didn't believe. Then he offers a salvation rest to us, a Sabbath rest for us that you got to quit working and putting confidence in yourself, and put your full confidence in Christ and believe what He did and enter that salvation rest. That salvation rest changes your life forever.

Now, make sure you're not a Judas. Make sure you have a believing heart, not an unbelieving heart. You say you have a believing heart, but you want to be humble. You don't want to be like Peter and believe that what happened to the other ten will not happen to you. In closing, I want to draw from Hebrews chapter 12. Please hear me. If you were at the table last week, or you will be at a future table with us, listen to these verses. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." That is a reference to the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, what we call the hall of faith. This does not mean that people in Heaven see us; it means that through the biblical record, we already have testimony of people who have run their race for God and have sat down in the grandstands and their life is an example to you and me. Learn from Moses. Don't try to do something on your own strength and be banished to the wilderness for forty years! Even though God is going to use you the last forty, don't waste the middle forty because you didn't learn in the first forty. Learn from David, and don't go up on your rooftop when you ought to be in the war! The results are disastrous to your family. We can just go on and on. You're a part of a family. You've got brothers and sisters who did this before you; let's learn from this. Let's draw strength from them. Let's be people of faith, not people of unbelief.

Secondly, realize the Christian life is a marathon. The word that's used in this passage for this race is 'the race of agony.' It's not a sprint; it's a marathon. Did you hear that? There are a lot of people who start marathons, but not all of them finish marathons. It's the people who finish

the marathon that are the true children of God. You're not just in this until you get your kids saved, or your circumstances change, or just until...no, you're in this forever! We're not going to give you a ribbon for you successfully teaching for two years. This is forever. It's until the end of your life. The writer says, "Run the race that's set before you." Quit running somebody else's race. God doesn't want you to emulate any of these guys sitting in the grandstand; God wants us to learn from them, but He wants us to emulate Christ. Christ didn't make us all feet, or all arms; He made us part of a body, which means each one of us is different. You have a different race to run than I have, and I have a different race to run than you have. I must run my race and you must run your race. I can't run my race at your pace, and you can't run your race at my pace. We've each got to run our race at our own pace. It's got to be a pace that we can sustain for the rest of our lives.

Then he says, "Let us lay aside the weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us." I believe the biggest hindrance to being a Christian in America is all the excess weight we pick up because of the blessing of a Christian life. How many of those things that you now have did you once thank God for and thought it was a blessing from Him to you, and now, it takes you away from Him? Let me remind you that He is the head, and He has a body. You can't be faithful to Christ unless you're faithful to His body. Do you hear me? Some of us need to go home and lay aside some of the excessive weight. We really need to deal with the sin, that sin which so easily ensnares us. You men know what it is; you ladies know what it is, and you just keep making excuses for it. No.

I'll never forget this. I was on the Calloway County track team. I did the distance running and there was a guy who did the hurdles, and he was really good. He was running down through there, one of those hurdles caught him, and it showed his momentum down and he just face planted. Our track was a cinder track, so when he got up, it was ugly. We kidded him for years about that. You don't want that to happen to you. You don't want to be this great marathon runner and there is a sin you haven't dealt with yet. You don't want, at some point in your life, for it to trip you up and you fall on your face and be humiliated because you wouldn't deal with

what God's Holy Spirit was convicting you about. You've hid it from your wife, hid it from your husband, hid it from your children, and hid it from the world, but you haven't hid it from God. The writer says 'lay it aside.' If we're going to run 26.2 miles, we want to be a light as possible.

Then he says, "...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." Please, don't run the race with your eye on a fellow Christian. Let's run this race with our eye on Jesus Christ. He's the founder of your faith. He's the one God used to birth faith in you, and it's He that will bring your faith to perfection. As you look at Him, you realize there had to be moments when it was really tough to go to a cross as the holy one of God and let God put all the sin of humanity on you. How did He despise that shame of dying a death of crucifixion? It was for the joy set before Him. I think that joy that was set before Him ultimately was us. With you and I on His mind and His heart, He did it. He did what God wanted Him to do. Why can't we have that same joy and life not be about us? Let life be about God. What He desperately wants more than anything else is for His will, His purpose for me to be my joy. It will help us through any trap, any shame, any tribulation, any test. I wish I could say and one day we'll be seated with Christ. No, we're already seated in Christ right now! This joy that we have just reveals that those of us who sit at the table don't just eat with Jesus; we eat of Jesus. Mark is giving you the invitation before you ever get to the cross because you're a reader of the gospel, but you already know the gospel. Never say never.