

Jesus' Work and Our Work

Mark 14:12-26

Introduction

How many people at the University of Queensland does it take to change a lightbulb? Just one, the person at UQ holds it in place and the rest of the world revolves around the University of Queensland.

I am not someone who is anti-intellectual nor am I anti- the academy. I personally see value in promoting and supporting in-depth study of many subjects. Mind you, I do find it tiresome when people doing study believe that their study or their intelligence makes them better people than others. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been bored by meeting a big-talking know-it-all but been humbled by the selfless care and consideration of someone who never finished school.

As I was preparing today's message I was thinking about when study, and the people doing the study, become removed from real life. When important ideas and principles are worked out in a dry academic way without consideration for how such ideas and principles impact others and are worked out in practice.

You may be aware that two years ago was the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, taking its date from when Martin Luther nailed his list of criticisms of the Catholic Church to the door of the church in Wittenberg. The reformation was a response to horrible abuses and some terrible twisting of God's Word by the established church, which we today call the Roman Catholic Church.

One of the major concerns of Martin Luther and the other protestants was the place of works in the Christian life. Critically, are people saved by grace alone thorough faith alone, in Christ alone, or are people also required to do works to receive salvation?

Anyone who has talked to me about this topic will know that I hold strongly to the reformed perspective in that I trust, I put my faith, only in God's grace and what Jesus has accomplished. However, this topic is not really presented in the Scriptures

as a theoretical issue devoid from real life implications. This morning we're going to have a little look at Jesus' work and our work from this section of Mark 14 and consider what this means for our day-to-day lives.

This will be a slightly different message in that we're going to look at small parts of the reading spread though the service. We'll now listen to the first part of the reading, Mark 14:12-16.

Working With Jesus (vv. 12-16)

In this first section read to us we see the disciples working with Jesus. There are a few things for us to notice. First, it's interesting that the disciples approach Jesus with a desire to serve him, "Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"' However, in Jesus' response we see that it's very clear that Jesus already has plans in mind and also that he instructs his disciples to follow his directions and so participate in his plans.

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

So then, what does this little section tell us about any work that Jesus may want his disciples to do?

To start with, let's be clear that this conversation is with Jesus' disciples. Jesus is instructing people who follow him and find their identity in him. If you're visiting us today and you don't know yet whether you can trust Jesus with your life now and forever, these words aren't really directed to you. This is not how you come into a relationship with Jesus, this is what you do when you're already following Jesus.

Having made that proviso clear, we see here that the work that Jesus calls us to be involved in is the work that he has already begun. If we want to shine a light to our neighbourhood by putting on Christmas lights we do this in response to Jesus being the light of the world. If we're involved in supporting those who are finding life so hard

because of the drought we do this in response to Jesus sending his Spirit, the Comforter and so we join in with what Jesus is already doing.

Not only is our service a joining in with the work that Jesus is doing, we see here that we're to serve by obeying the explicit or implied directions of Jesus. In this section we read some explicit instructions which Jesus gives but when he tells the disciples to speak with the owner of the house they are to declare their connection to Jesus, "the teacher", and so they are representing Jesus and thus should be acting in line with his character. This challenges me when I find myself getting impatient with people who seem to make the same mistake again and again. As we've read through Mark's Gospel we've seen Jesus be patient with his disciples so many times, even while he is strong in correcting them.

We're going to respond to the work that God is doing now by taking up our offering. The offering is joining in with God's promises to guard and provide for his people and so we have a chance to join with this work and to do it joyfully as God's character is to give joyfully and in abundance to us.

Working Against Jesus (vv. 17-21)

This second section which has been read to us surely doesn't teach us about working as a disciple? Judas can't be an example for us, can he? In one sense of course, Judas is not presented as an example to us except as a bad example but we can still learn from this bad example.

First we note that it is possible to be viewed as a follower of Jesus, even considered to be someone of high standing, and still work against Jesus. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me."

Judas was indeed one of the twelve, Jesus close group of disciples, and someone who had shared meals and companionship with Jesus. The warning for all of us here is that just because someone is a member of a church, someone who says

that they're a Christian, someone who may even have a role in a church, even a pastor, it is possible for such a person to still work against Jesus.

This warning works in two ways. On the one hand we take this as a warning to be careful about following the teachings of others, even other Christians, blindly. This is why I regularly encourage you to check what I am saying against what you read in the Bible. If a pastor ever sets you the bad example of working against Jesus, please don't follow such a pastor.

On the other hand, this warning should challenge all of us, no matter how long we've been in the church, or what role we may have, to ask Jesus, "Surely you don't mean me?" What I mean by asking this question is that we must remain acutely aware of how weak and prone to failure we are. The solution to this is not to trust in our own discernment or grading of our behaviour but to look to Jesus and seek guidance and assurance from him.

The other thing to note from this account of Jesus announcing that he would be betrayed is the affirmation that this betrayal does not take Jesus by surprise. The double-edged sword here though is that while Jesus is not taken by surprise, and indeed this situation is actually part of God's plans, the betrayer is still responsible for his own actions. In verse 21 we read, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.""

Put simply, we're not to play games with God. Don't try, "God would want me to sleep with this woman because she makes me feel happy and God wants me to be happy." Don't say, "I can tell lies on my tax return because I'll be able to be more generous to others and I don't think you can trust the government anyway."

Whether it be Joseph being sold into slavery to provide food for Jacob and his family when the famine struck, or the Assyrians attacking Israel in punishment of their rebellion against Yahweh, and so on, it is clear that God is able to use evil plans for his purposes but we must never fall into the trap of thinking that God's over-all control

means we don't have to take our own actions seriously or take responsibility for when we do the wrong thing.

We're going to sing a song based on one of the great psalms of repentance, Psalm 51. I wonder if Peter or the other disciples would have said this Psalm when they failed Jesus. During this song hand to Jesus the times when you have failed. Ask God to forgive you when you haven't taken your sin as seriously as you should. We'll remain seated for this song.

Receiving Jesus' Work (vv. 22-26)

This final section of the reading brings us to Jesus inaugurating what is now called The Lord's Supper. These verses are rich in meaning but I mainly want to hone in on our theme of our work and Jesus' work.

we're first told:

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Jesus gives to his disciples possibly the most common and every-day food that was available in the Middle East at the time, bread. By Jesus giving his disciples this food which would have been a staple part of the disciples' diet, he is assuring the disciples of his continuing presence with them.

Next, we're told:

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them.

Jesus' words here look back to his words previously in Mark 10:45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus now says that his blood is "poured out for many." Jesus is here describing the giving up of his life, as shown in the reference to blood, to be for the sake of others, for the sake of many. In this drinking together Jesus inaugurates a new covenant

which is based upon his death for the sake of others and so invites his disciples to receive and share in this new covenant.

In this message we've considered how we can work with Jesus and how some may work against Jesus. In this final section we see that we are to receive Jesus' work. Jesus' work, his work of giving up his life, creates this new covenant. This covenant creates a relationship with God based upon God working within his people rather than them receiving teaching and instructions from outside and Jesus guarantees his continued presence with his disciples.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the start, Yahweh doesn't really present the works expected of his people in theoretical terms, divorced from real life. Rather, Yahweh shows his people through his scriptures what a relationship with God looks like both in terms of faith and grace as well as in terms of expected activities.

In verses 12-26 we saw that being a follower of Jesus will mean that we will desire to serve Jesus. In serving Jesus we find that Jesus is already at work in our world and our work is to join in with what Jesus is already doing and so engage with that work in ways that are obedient to Jesus' directions as well as in line with his character.

However, we've also been challenged to see that disciple, even those close to Jesus, can work against him. The reality of how weak we are should prompt us to come to Jesus and seek guidance and assurance from him.

Finally, we've seen that Jesus' assurance to us is based on what he accomplishes for us by giving up his life as a ransom for many. Jesus not only achieves the establishment of a new covenant with us but he also assures his followers of his continued presence with them.

The take home message should be that we're totally reliant upon what Jesus achieves for us if we're to have any assurance and hope and it is from being in

relationship with Jesus that service to him is natural and to be expected, not to earn something from Jesus but to partner in what Jesus is already doing.

We're going to remember what Jesus achieved for us by joining in what Jesus established by eating bread and drinking wine (or in our case grape juice) together. Just as the disciples and Jesus sang at this meal, let's sing a song which looks back to what Jesus' did and also looks forward to the great banquet that Jesus also looked forward to. [The Table - Chris Tomlin]

We'll now have a psalm that was traditionally read at the Passover meal, Psalm 113 and we will follow that by praying the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

Our Father in Heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us today our daily bread

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one

For the kingdom the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen

Lord, we come to your table,

trusting in your mercy

and not in any goodness of our own.

We are not worthy

even to gather up the crumbs under your table,

but it is your nature to always to have mercy,

and on that we depend.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels
and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

With this bread and this cup
we do as our Saviour commands:
we celebrate the redemption he has won for us.

Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ.

Through your Son, Jesus Christ,
in your holy Church,
all honour and glory are yours, Father almighty,
now and forever.

Amen.

**Blessing and honour and glory and power
are yours for ever and ever. Amen.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Let us pray:

We thank you, Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all people.

Amen.

We're going to conclude our service with a great song for this message but also for the first week of advent, "O come, O come, Emmanuel."