

This week I finally found myself into the topic of discussion that I'm sure was popular this morning in the lobby—the question of what you're doing for the summer. It's the time of year for a change in activities and even for enjoying some time away. In our house, Owen picked up his soccer jersey on Wednesday and Becky has already started playing on Friday nights—Simon and I, as the non-athletes of the family, will concentrate our efforts on which solid foods we're going to eat next! We're going away to Sauble Beach in July and to Sherskton and Chicago in August, and while we're home we plan on turning our empty garden beds into something beyond a desert. Basically, those are our summer plans. How about you? What do you have going on for this new season? What plans do you have for your life and family these next couple months?

In asking that question, I'm really interested in knowing two things. The first is: how do you think your summer plans line up with the plans that God might have for your life over these next couple months—have you given any thought to that? And second: what would happen if God's plan for your summer differed from the one you would describe today, and the next couple months played out differently than you planned?

In Mark chapter 14 we enter a new season for the life of Jesus—if you brought a Bible along you can turn there with me—because in Mark 14 what we refer to as Jesus' 'public ministry'—His teaching, healing and miracles—is essentially over, and His journey to function as the Saviour of the world has begun. And the reason I ask about summer plans this morning is because in today's passage, Mark describes a sharp contrast between the behaviour of Jesus and of those who followed Him: as God's redemptive plan begins to carry itself out, we see two very different reactions to it. And the question this morning is: what's the difference between Jesus and His disciples?

The first of three contrasts takes place as Jesus prayed in a garden called Gethsemane. As He shifts gears from explaining God's redemptive plan to actually implementing it, Jesus had become overwhelmed. He had regularly described how the restoration of humanity would happen—through the sacrificial death of a Saviour, the promised Jewish Messiah. That was now more than just trivia—it was His destiny—and if you think the backup goalies from the Edmonton Oilers have been sweating,

try to appreciate the intensity of the situation that caused Jesus to literally sweat blood.

And yet, Jesus took this time to reflect on and reorient Himself around His future:

***“Jesus went on a little farther and fell face down on the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine.’”***

Confronted with the imminence of His death, Jesus embraced God’s plan as His own.

As all of this was happening, one of Jesus’ disciples named Judas was wondering what had happened to God’s plan, because it was nothing like his own. Judas believed that Jesus was in fact God’s promised Jewish Messiah, but in his mind the Messiah was to be an earthly king, someone who would restore Jewish prominence in his society. And by following Jesus, he figured he would have an inner circle position. By now though, the whole idea of Jesus’ death was starting to sink in. There would be no earthly kingship to connect with. Judas’ vision for a Messiah was being abandoned.

So as Jesus sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane, Judas abandoned Him:

***“Up, let’s be going. See, my betrayer is here!”***

While Jesus was surrendering Himself to God’s purpose, Judas was bailing out on it.

With this betrayal of Jesus, a second contrast emerged. Judas had brought with him a crowd of people armed with swords, clubs and other weapons to capture Jesus and bring Him to the highest Jewish authorities. This would be the moment in the movie where a guy like Jesus would leap behind a rock—or better yet, a phone booth—and change into His superhero costume to battle the forces of evil. After all, that’s what He came to earth to do right—to push back the forces of evil on the planet?

Instead, Jesus reacted to this militia with an eerie calm, wondering why they’ve prepared for violence:

***“Jesus asked them, ‘Am I some dangerous criminal, that you come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But these things are happening to fulfill what the Scriptures say about me.’”***

Just as Jesus had surrendered to God, He gave himself over to the thugs before Him.

This was a markedly different tack than His disciples had prepared to take. They were on board with Jesus because of the opportunity to push back evil in their world, and they were prepared to give their lives for that cause. One of them even pulled a sword and sliced the ear off one of the goons in the crowd. Picture the movie *'Braveheart'*—these guys were ready to give their lives for a fight. What they realized in Jesus though, was that there would be no fight—that somehow a blockbuster battle against the religious establishment of their day wasn't the way this flick was going to play out. And as their plans for a glorious epic drifted away, so did Jesus' disciples.

So in the very next verse after Jesus gives Himself to the armed crowd, it says:

***"Meanwhile, all his disciples deserted him and ran away."***

While Jesus submitted Himself to the Jewish authorities, His disciples deserted Him.

That walks us into Mark's third contrast—the most stark of all of them in chapter 14. Jesus' voluntary surrender launched Him into a trial by the high Jewish authorities called the Sanhedrin. They had the capability of giving Jesus a death penalty—so long as they had a little detail we know as evidence. Jesus had lived such a spotless life that even the false witnesses couldn't make a compelling case—imagine CSI meets Royal Canadian Air Farce! The only way that they could pin a death sentence on Jesus was if He would refer to Himself as God, committing the crime of blasphemy.

Verse 61 says:

***"The high priest asked Jesus, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?' Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven.'"***

Jesus walked right into the mouth of a lion that was admittedly hungry to devour Him!

Now while this was happening someone else was being asked some questions about his identity. One of Jesus' disciples had actually stuck around, even though Judas had abandoned Jesus and the others had deserted Him. Peter was watching this trial from a distance, probably frantic to figure out a way to get Jesus out of this mess—surely Jesus didn't deserve to die. As he strategized though, a servant of the Sanhedrin saw him and asked whether he was one of those buddies of Jesus

—the partners in ministry called His disciples. Considering Jesus’ near-suicidal answer though, it says:

***“Peter denied it. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ he said, and he went out into the entryway.”***

As Jesus was walking Himself into a death sentence, Peter walked away. For Peter, this was not a cost he was prepared to pay. For the disciples, this was not the way the story was to play out. And for Judas, this wasn’t even the story he had bought into.

The question that emerges in Mark 14 is: why the contrast? Why is there such a stark difference between the disciples of Jesus and Jesus Himself when it comes to the implementation of God’s redemptive plan? In studying the passage, one of the clues you discover is the number of references to what Jesus calls “the Scriptures”—the Old Testament prophecies describing how God would restore humanity through His Saviour.

One of the passages Jesus refers to was from a prophet named Isaiah. He said:

***“It was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and fill him with grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have a multitude of children, many heirs. He will enjoy a long life, and the Lord’s plan will prosper in his hands.”***

When Jesus prays, “Not my will, but God’s” He knows what God’s will is all about.

He also refers to the Scriptures when He’s arrested. Look what Zechariah says:

***“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, the man who is my partner, says the Lord Almighty. Strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn against the lambs.”***

When Jesus surrenders Himself to the armed crowd and His disciples scatter, He knows that every detail is a part of God’s long-awaited sovereign and eternal plan.

Same thing when He’s on trial. When Jesus states that He, in fact is the Son of God, He also says that He will return in power on a cloud from heaven. Daniel predicts:

***“I saw someone who looked like a man coming with the clouds of heaven... He was given authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His***

***kingdom will never be destroyed.”***

Jesus answered the way He did because He understood how God’s plan played out.

That’s the difference between Jesus and those who followed Him: He was clear on the redemptive plan of God, so as God played it out, He could remain committed to it. In fact, Jesus could even accept the betrayal, desertion and denial of His friends, because even those behaviours were described in the Scriptures—in Mark 14 Jesus forecasts those events, because He’s so familiar with how God’s plan is going to work.

For a while I really struggled with this, because Jesus appears superhuman—calm under life-and-death pressure and predicting the future—it doesn’t seem like He’s a real person. In His biography though, Mark anticipates that others may feel the same, so at the very beginning of this series of contrasts in chapter 14, he recalls an episode just before Jesus went to the garden and was arrested and then was on trial for His life.

He and His disciples were having dinner together, when a woman shows up with an expensive jar of perfume. She took the bottle of Chanel Number 5 and poured it all over Jesus’ head. The disciples freaked out—not just because they had to eat a meal at a fragrance counter, but because the year’s worth of money that the perfume cost could have been put to much better use, so they scolded her in front of Jesus.

But in this initial scene in Mark chapter 14, it’s Jesus who did the real scolding:

***“But Jesus replied, ‘Leave her alone. Why berate her for doing such a good thing to me? You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them whenever you want to. But I will not be here with you much longer. She has done what she could and has anointed my body for burial ahead of time.’”***

This woman understood that as the Saviour of the world, Jesus was going to have to die. So she gave what she had to support that purpose, and prepared Him for the plan God had. Like Jesus, she was both clear on and committed to God’s redemptive plan.

The point is: it didn’t take superhuman divine capability to contribute to the eternal purposes of

God. All it took was clarity on and commitment to what God was up to in the world. And if you think about it, in each case with Jesus' disciples, it's one or both of those two things that they lacked. That's what separated them from Jesus.

In Judas' case, it was the *purpose* of God's plan that he was stuck on. He was cool with the Jesus-as-Saviour part; he had just defined Saviour in an earthly, kingly kind of way—in his own way. The Scriptures defined the Saviour as a suffering servant, one who would give His life up for others. Judas couldn't stay on board because he had miscalculated the purpose of what the promised Saviour of God was intended to do.

For the rest of the disciples, they may have understood that Jesus would eventually die; they just assumed that it wouldn't happen without a good fight. The arrest of Jesus played out the end result in a fashion that they weren't expecting, so they abandoned the cause that they were prepared to fight for because the *methods* of God and the means by which His plan unfolded were not what they had bought into.

For Peter, it was simply a matter of how much things would *cost*. He didn't seem to shy away from a plan that included Jesus dying instead of establishing an earthly kingship, and he continued to stick around even when the battle strategy changed. It was when Peter was forced to personally weigh in—to personally risk his life—that the plan, purpose and methods by which God was redeeming humanity became too much.

The difference in Jesus was not that He was a supernatural fortune teller, or that as God incarnate He was immune to the fears, struggles and temptations of humanity. Jesus was just clear on God's purpose. And He was clear on God's methods. And He was clear on the costs to engage in the methods of fulfilling God's purpose for His life.

The question Mark asks us in chapter 14 is simply: are we? Do we really have a firm grasp of the redemptive purposes that God has for followers of Jesus Christ to fulfill while on planet earth? Do we really have a handle on the ways in which these purposes get implemented—the kind of lifestyle that it involves? And do we really appreciate what the effective fulfillment of God's purposes demands

from people? Basically, do we live like Jesus or the woman with the perfume—clear on and committed to God’s plan for our lives—or do we live like the disciples: bailing out because we can’t accept that purpose, skipping out because it isn’t playing out the way we want, or selling out because the cost is more than we’re prepared to pay? The question Mark asks is: are we living in a way that’s fulfilling God’s redemptive plan?

The best way to assess this is to reflect on your earlier answer regarding your summer plans. For most of us, the question of our summer plans is just that: it’s an inventory of *our* plans for the next couple months, without giving much consideration to what the God of the universe would actually intend from our lives in redeeming the world around us. If someone asked you what the purpose of the next couple months was, would your answer contain anything beyond the idea of R&R? If you are seeking to see God’s purposes expressed in your life this summer, does your summer schedule coincide with the way God would seek to affect other people through you—are you retreating from people at cottages or golf courses, or exposing yourself to people so you can share God’s love? And are you clear on what the next months would demand of you if you were to have an eternity-altering affect on other people? Is your time, energy and money being saved for home renovations, garden designs or swimming pools, or being stewarded to see God’s Kingdom realized in the lives of those around you?

Today, we’re going to take some time to reflect on the degree to which our lives are oriented around fulfilling God’s redemptive plan. In your programs, I’ve created a ‘summer inventory’—a report card of sorts that we can use as an assessment tool to evaluate our lives in light of the eternal plan that God has for them. And I’ve included with the assessment questions some action steps that we could take depending on where we’re at this morning, to help us align our lives more closely with God’s plan.

For some of us, simple awareness of what God has for us is the starting point—as it says on your outlines: **realizing the purpose of God’s plan**. Maybe we’re new to the Bible or to Christianity, and could use some help in reading the Bible for ourselves or understanding the purposes described

in it. Maybe a book like Rick Warren's *'The Purpose-Driven Life'* or the Southridge Membership workshop we're offering this Wednesday night would be helpful, to gain clarity about the lifestyle God has for you.

Beyond that, this may be a great time to consider whether we're engaging in that lifestyle—on your outlines: **embracing the methods of God's plan**. It may even be appropriate for us to open our day-timers and let a close trusted friend check them out, to see how much we're really involving ourselves in developing relationships with people in need or people far from God, or with other believers in authentic ways that build us up. Are we actually doing the kind of things that serve a lost and hurting world?

For some of us, it's the degree to which we're engaged in that lifestyle that's the rub—**accepting the costs of God's plan**. Maybe we understand it generally; we just don't see how we specifically fit into it. Maybe the step for us is a resource inventory—evaluating the time, talents and financial treasures that God has entrusted to us—and considering how we can steward those in God's direction in a fuller and deeper way.

The truth is: over the next couple months, the God of the universe actually desires to advance His plan to redeem humanity—to heal hurting people, reach lost people and build up believing people in their faith. And just because it's summertime doesn't mean that God's eternal purposes go on vacation; in fact, the summer season is a super opportunity for each of us to assess and realign our lives around what God intends to do with and through them in order to make a difference in people around us.

That doesn't mean that it's bad or dishonouring to God to take a holiday. I'm going away for a few weeks this summer to experience the gift of rest that God intends and to enjoy the blessing of family that He's given me. At the same time though, I've had to reflect this week on whether my summer plans have really started with the purposes that God wants to accomplish, and whether I'd really be OK if God had other things in mind for me than the things that are written on our kitchen calendar. I've had to look Mark 14 in the face and ask the tough question of how much my life is really

supporting the divine plan and purposes of the God who sent Jesus to die for me.

And as much as I can affirm rest and relaxation in the summer months, you know what's made this passage tough for me? Realizing that there's some Judas in me, and some disciples in me, and some Peter in me, because a part of me would love to just enjoy the summer according to my plans, in my way, at my comfort level. And yet, thanks to the ultimate faithfulness of God, there's a Jesus in me that wants to shine through like never before, and I've got to consider whether I'm actually going to let Him, because as it says on your outlines, God's redemptive plan only gets fulfilled **WHEN I'M CLEAR ON GOD'S PLAN, AND I'M TOTALLY COMMITTED TO IT!** Let's consider whether the plans God has to redeem humanity this summer will actually include us.