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May 24, 2026

OUR ATONEMENT: MATTHEW 26:17-30

Introductory Activity (Adapted from ETB LG, 135)

“Ask: *How does death [or serious illness] sometimes sharpen our focus on the things that really matter in life?* (PSG, p. 114)

Read: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 114 of the PSG. [None of us knows the precise time and date of our death. We do know, however, that death is a certainty for all. Consider this scenario: you know the exact day of your impending death, but no one else knows. You throw a dinner party for your family and friends, knowing this will be the last meal you will have with them. What emotions do you think you would experience if this scenario played out in reality?]

Discuss: Encourage the group to consider the ‘final dinner party’ scenario. Encourage a few volunteers to share whom they might invite and what they might say to those gathered. “

Summarize and Transition: In our lesson today, we will continue our look at Holy Week, the last week before Jesus’ death and resurrection. We have spent most of our time on Tuesday. The Bible does not give an account of Wednesday. It was probably a day of rest for Jesus and His disciples in Bethany. Our lesson today picks up on Thursday, the day before Christ’s crucifixion. On the night before His death, He celebrated the Passover meal with the disciples. Matthew’s account of the meal can be broken into two parts. Verses 17-25 focus on Jesus’ announcement that one of the twelve will betray Him. Verses 26-30 focus on Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s supper. To understand what is going on, we will have to look at the Passover and its meaning. Then we will see what the Lord’s Supper is all about. Looking at both of these, we will see that “Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins.” (ETB LG, 135)

1. COMING BETRAYAL (MATT. 26:17-25)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew 26:17-25.

Explain: Here we see, first, the Preparation for the Passover and Jesus Announcement of His Coming Betrayal. Let’s begin by breaking the passage into two parts and see what it can teach us about Jesus and those who follow Him.

Preparation for the Passover

Jews were required to come to Jerusalem for three major religious celebrations: Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. Passover celebrated the Lord’s rescue of the nation from bondage in Egypt as recorded in the Book of Exodus. We will talk more about the religious significance of this holiday later, but one aspect of the celebration included a meal. The meal was called Unleavened Bread because it celebrated the quick exodus of the people, which did not allow time for baking bread that included yeast.

Matthew tells us that the day of the meal had arrived, and the “disciples” asked Jesus about making preparations. This might seem like a minor point, but I think it shows us the **Disciples’ Submission to the Lord’s Will**. Luke 22:8 tells us that the two disciples who made preparations were Peter and John. Matthew and Mark both record that the disciples took the initiative to ask Jesus about making preparations, while Luke simply

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Matthew* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Matthew* (NAC)
- *Exalting Christ in Matthew* (Exalting)
- *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 14-28* (ACCS)
- *The King Has Come* (Spurgeon)

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records that Jesus told them to go. Again, this is a minor point but, it appears to me that the two men either took the initiative on their own or there was a discussion taking place about the coming meal. Regardless of who took the initiative, the disciples began the process in the correct manner. Instead of going into town and setting things up, they went to Jesus for instructions. Note two important details:

1. They saw something or were informed about something that needed to be done, so they determined to do it.
2. They sought guidance from the Lord before doing it.

We can apply this verse to our lives in two ways. We often need to do things related to our personal or business lives. We also have to do things related to our personal ministry or the ministry of the church.

Discuss: The disciples went to Jesus for guidance. What steps do you take when making a decision or determining how to go about completing a task for the Lord?

Explain: In our personal lives, we might take more time or give more thought to the “big” things, but we see here that the “small” things should drive us to the Lord as well. These men were able to go straight to the Lord and ask what He wanted. We do not have it that easy. When making a decision, we should (1) go to the Lord in prayer. We should (2) endeavor to adhere to biblical teaching. We should (3) seek wise counsel from trusted brothers and sisters. We also make decisions in our personal ministries. We should have a personal, informal ministry in which we are attempting to build relationships or minister to others. In our personal ministry to friends, family, and colleagues, we should appeal to the same three sources for guidance: prayer, Scripture, and the Body of Christ. In church-related ministry, we should add a fourth source of guidance: church leadership. We do so not because they are the “end all be all” decision makers of all church matters, but because they generally have a broader understanding of church life, upcoming events or initiatives, and the life situation of church members. So, when making decisions about your small group, your ministry to kids and students, or outreach ideas, you should at least “bend the ear” of church leadership before moving forward. That is what Peter and John did. They saw a need and set out to address it, but they did so by first taking the initiative to ask what would please the Lord. Jesus answers them.

Reread verse 18 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: Here we see that Jesus is **Sovereign over the Situation**. He tells them to go into town and find a “certain man.” When we look at all three of the Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we learn a few more details. First, they were to find a certain man carrying a water jug. They were to follow him home and ask the owner of the house for a place to have the meal. The homeowner would then show them to a large room they

Notes:

Matthew 26:18
“Go into the city to a certain man,” he said, “and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My time is near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.’”

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could use. Matthew's inclusion of the instruction to "tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time is near'" is unique to his gospel.

This event, like the one of the previous Sunday, in which the disciples were to go find the young donkey, reveals Christ's knowledge and sovereignty. Regarding the man carrying a water jug, we should know that men in that time did not generally carry water. That work was usually reserved for women. Jesus was also aware that the man would know "the teacher." Again, this is a minor detail in the life and ministry of Jesus, but it shows that even in the minor areas of life, Jesus has knowledge and authority.

Silently consider: Ask the group to silently consider how often they go to Jesus with the "minor" things in their life.

Explain: We do not have to ask Jesus where to buy milk. But we should abide by the principle given by Paul in I Thessalonians.

Have someone read I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Explain: When we pray to the Lord consistently, we will discover that even the small things in life can lead to big opportunities for gospel impact. When the disciples followed through on Jesus' instruction in verse 19, we can see **The Man's Apparent Submission to Christ's Authority**. This small detail can be encouraging to us. This man's actions are recorded in Scripture, and his hospitality made way for one of the most important events of Holy Week, yet his name is not present. We see here the importance of **Anonymous Obedience**. Sometimes the Lord will ask us to do some things that are important for His purposes, but go unseen and unrewarded by others.

Between verses 19 and 20, we skip a very busy day for Peter and John that included preparing for the meal. These preparations would have included securing a Passover lamb and having it sacrificed. Verse 20 picks up at the dinner table. While at the meal, Jesus makes the surprising announcement of His coming betrayal.

Jesus Announcement of His Coming Betrayal

Explain: Now, we should note that the Jews had adopted the Roman way of eating at formal meals. They would arrange short tables in a U-shape. During the meal, they would lie on cushions on their side and eat. This seems like a difficult way to eat, but they might also find our customs odd as well. For example, they would never have had a "kids' table" at this holiday meal because they were supposed to use the meal to teach the next generation about the work of God in the past. So, we should forgive their odd way of eating, but we can take note of something important here. The Passover meal was traditionally a meal taken by families. It seems that Jesus and His cohort were traveling without their families. So, they took the meal together as a family. This small band that travelled

Notes:

I Thessalonians 5:16:18
¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray constantly,
¹⁸ give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

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around Israel for about three years declaring the coming of God's Kingdom with the Messiah, was **reclining Together at the Table with Jesus**.

Silently Consider: When was the last time you "reclined" with Jesus? (When was the last time you sat in silence with no distractions and just sought the presence of God?)

Explain: There are two spiritual practices that we seem to have lost in the modern, Western church: Solitude and Silence. We do not often find ourselves alone. Even when we are "by ourselves," we have our phones to give us company. Moreover, silence is something that is almost nonexistent. From the TV to the radio to our AirPods to the phone, we always have something drowning out our thoughts, either through music, podcasts, the news, reels, or social media updates. It is not often that we sit alone with the Lord. We need to find time to just sit with the Lord. You might start with just five minutes on the back porch each night or early in the morning. Just you and the Lord, no phone, no Bible, or as they say, "no nothing." Just stop and say, "Ok Lord, here I am," and let Him speak. Honestly, you might have to do this several days or weeks in a row until your body, brain, and heart are ready to hear from the Lord. The disciples were reclining with Jesus, and then Jesus spoke to them.

Reread verses 21-24 (See Notes Box)

Explain: This was probably one of the most shocking things Jesus could have said to the disciples. They had heard Him talk about betrayal before. But they probably imagined it coming from outside their little group. Here, Jesus says that one of the people in the room, one of the chosen 12, was going to betray Him. It would have been alarming and rather disconcerting. Eleven of the 12 ask, "Surely not I, Lord?" One of them asks, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Even in his question, Judas reveals his unbelief. The other 11 acknowledge Jesus as Lord, but he calls Jesus "teacher."

Application: Here is what I want us to get from this interaction: **Jesus is Sovereign Over the Most Important Situations**. We saw earlier that Jesus is sovereign over the small things. Here we see that He has authority even in the most important things. You see, Jesus knew what Judas had done. Matthew records this in the paragraph just prior to the one we are studying. He tells us that Judas went to the "chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?'" (see 26:14-16) Matthew tells the reader so we will know, but no one at that dinner knew. Jesus did know, and He reveals it here. We should know that Jesus is aware of the bad situations we get ourselves into. That should cause us to examine our actions, but it should also give us hope. If Jesus knows about the bad situation that I have gotten myself into, He can help me get out of it.

You see, Judas had Free Will in this Situation. When Jesus calls him out in verses 22-24, he had the opportunity to repent and make things right.

Notes:

Matthew 26:21-24

²¹ While they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

²² Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, "Surely not I, Lord?" ²³ He replied, "The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born."

Instead, he continued with his plan. We always have an opportunity to repent of sin and turn back from a bad path. Judas did not, and in His foreknowledge, Jesus knew he would not. Nevertheless, Jesus gave him the opportunity.

Summarize Transition: In preparation for this meal and the taking of it, we can be reminded that Jesus should be our go-to when making decisions. Peter and John did that; Judas did not. We can also know that Jesus has authority in the small areas of our lives and the big ones. We should involve Him in both.

As the meal continues, Jesus does another shocking thing. It is something important for us because it reveals the means by which Jesus will save “many.” Let’s look at that.

2. COMING ATONEMENT (MATT. 26:26-30)

Read (or have someone read) Matthew **26:26-30**.

Explain: Without going into a great theological treatise, we should quickly remind ourselves of the history behind the Passover meal. As we said before, it celebrates the exodus of the people from bondage in Egypt. That exodus was a rather dramatic event. It came after the final plague poured out on Egypt by Yahweh God. This plague was the death of the firstborn in every house in the land. God gives very detailed preparation instructions for His people. They are recorded in Exodus 12, but I will summarize. To prepare for and avoid the effects of plague, the people of God were to take a “unblemished animal, a year-old male... from either the sheep or the goats” (Ex 12:5) and kill it. They were then told to “take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat” the animal (Ex. 12:7). Later, God instructed His people to celebrate this event through an annual feast, and He gave them instructions on how to do so. The meal was orchestrated in a way that would enable the people to worship the Lord and teach the next generation about His faithfulness. The nation first observed the Passover feast on “the first month of the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt” (Num 9:1) while camped at Sinai. The Passover celebration was closely connected to the covenant between God and Israel that was established at Sinai. By the time of Jesus, it was a well-crafted event that everyone knew well.

It is during this familiar, well-orchestrated meal that Jesus breaks the rhythm. In so doing, He established a new tradition for His post-resurrection followers and the church to come. This new tradition symbolizes the establishment of a new covenant. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. There he says, “‘Look, the days are coming’—this is the Lord’s declaration—‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ³²This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.’” (see Jer 31:31-32, Heb 8:7ff)

Notes:

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Just as the elements of the Passover meal were to remind the people of the Lord's work in rescuing the nation from bondage in Egypt, the elements of the new meal, the Lord's Supper, are to remind God's new people of the work Christ did to rescue them from sin.

Ask: What are two elements instituted by Jesus to be used in the Lord's Supper? (Bread and Wine, or if you are a Baptist, bread and the fruit of the vine 😊)

Explain: These two elements are meant to symbolize the torturous death of Christ and the establishment of the New Covenant. As we will see next week, the death of Christ was horrific. He was brutally beaten and then hung on a cross. The bread represents, "his body to be broken on the cross, his life offered that we, in and through him, might have life."¹ The wine represents Christ's blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). Traditionally, a covenant was established through a sacrifice. Jesus was the sacrificial "lamb" of the new covenant.

In Luke's rendering of the events at this last Passover meal, Jesus tells the disciples to "do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) For 2000 years, the Body of Christ has done this. We call it the Lord's Supper, and it is a time of remembrance, like the Passover meal was for Israel. It is to remind us of Christ's work for us. It also reminds us that Christ died for "many." Not only should it cause us to look backward to Christ's death. It should cause us to look around and share the news of that death (and resurrection) with others. Jesus words on that night also cause us to look forward.

Reread Matthew 26:29 (See Notes Box.)

Explain: Here, Jesus alludes to the second coming that He had taught the disciples about on the previous Tuesday during the Olivet Discourse. His words can provide us with great hope. At the cross, He rescued us from the bondage of sin. This rescue was foreshadowed in God's rescue of the people from Egypt. He will come again and usher us into His Kingdom, foreshadowed by the people's entrance into the land of Israel.

Summarize and Transition:

In the institution of the Lord's Supper, we see again Jesus' sovereignty over the events surrounding His death. He knew it was coming, and He freely gave Himself up for us.

CONCLUDE

This passage records the events of the day before Christ's death. It is a great reminder of Jesus' sovereignty in all things. He is sovereign over the small things and big things. He is sovereign over the events leading to his death, the greatest thing to ever happen in human history. He gave Himself up for us!

Notes:

Matthew 26:29
²⁹ But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Lord's Supper, The," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1353. J. Cardinell, 2026