

MBC - 9/2/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“Take Eat; This is My Body”
Matthew 26:17-30

This morning, we’re going to come to the Lord’s Table, and that’s where we come in our study of Matthew’s Gospel this morning. As we read it, put yourself in this story, and prepare your own heart to come to this Table—

- Matthew 26:17-30 ¹⁷Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. ²⁰When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴The 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.” ²⁵Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.” ²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” ³⁰And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

We are just one day before the cross. This is the climax of Matthew’s Gospel, because as I said last Lord’s Day, this is the center of all human history: this is when the Lamb of God is sacrificed to save all of God’s people over all the ages. Spurgeon said in his commentary on Matthew—

- “Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord’s life on earth. This is mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language.”

We see Jesus’ sovereignty, we see His compassion and mercy, and we see His humanity. This is a *Man* about to go through all of this. And He didn’t deserve any of it. “Mine, mine, was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain!” Let’s look this morning at the preparation for the Passover, the prediction of the betrayal, and the proclamation of His death. We will save vv. 27-30 for next Lord’s Day. First Matthew shows us—

I. The preparation for the Passover.

- Matthew 26:17-30 ¹⁷Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

By the time of Jesus, the two festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread had become one 8-day long festival, and Jerusalem was crammed with pilgrims who had come because according to the Law, Passover had to be celebrated within the city limits of Jerusalem. The Disciples must have been wondering where in the world they would find a place large enough to accommodate all of them without reservations, but Jesus has it all worked out.

In Luke's Gospel Jesus says to look for a man carrying a jar of water - he would stand out because normally women carried jars of water on their heads. They were to say to this man, who would have been a servant, that "their Teacher's time is at hand, and He will keep the Passover with His Disciples, at his master's house." And it all happened just as Jesus said. Now either Jesus set this up ahead of time - which would have been hard to do when you read all that has happened during those last few days. Or, I believe this is Jesus exercising His divine authority over people - just like He did at the beginning of that week, when He needed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. Do you remember?—

- Luke 19:30-34 [He told Peter and John] "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³²So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴And they said, "The Lord has need of it."

"Yes Lord!" No questions asked. Amazing! Nothing is going to stop Jesus from accomplishing what He came to do. We see His sovereignty controlling every detail.

But there is another reason that He arranged their Passover meal the way He did: He knows that Judas is looking for an opportunity away from the crowds to betray Him - Jesus has to eat this Passover with His men, we'll see why in just a minute - and then go to the cross. So He had to keep this place secret so Judas wouldn't have time to rat Him out to the Jewish leaders before He accomplished all He had to do.

*We need to stop and appreciate how much Jesus loved His men to go to such great lengths to have this final, precious time with them before He went to the cross, even knowing that Judas would sell Him out, and the others (except for John) would abandon Him—

- Matthew 26:31 ³¹Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

Would you want to spend the final hours of your life with people like that? But Jesus did. He told His men in Lk22.15, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you!" And I love what John says—

- John 13:1 ¹Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (*telos* - all the way home. As Heb.7:25 says, "He is able to save to the uttermost, those who draw near to God through Him.")

If you are a Christian this morning, this is the way Jesus loves you, with a love that will not let you go. And every time we come to His Table, He earnestly desires to share it with us. But now look at—

II. The prediction of betrayal.

- Matthew 26:20-21 ²⁰When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

This really bothered Jesus. John was there, he saw Jesus and he wrote this—

- John 13:21 ²¹After saying these things, Jesus was *troubled* in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

The word for *troubled* means agitated, deeply disturbed, anxious. It’s the word David used in Ps.42:11: “*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?*” It was all over His face. I think He was as upset here as He was when He wept at Lazarus’ tomb. But that night it was the painful grief that this man who had been His friend would sell Him out. John says that Jesus was thinking of—

- Psalm 41:9 ⁹Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

And surely Jesus was also remembering another Psalm—

- Psalm 55:12-14 ¹²For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me— then I could hide from him. ¹³But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. ¹⁴We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng.

These Scriptures were fulfilled in what happened to Jesus. It was the decree of God from eternity: Just as Adam betrayed God in the Garden, so Judas would betray Jesus in a Garden too.

Even though in His divine nature, He knew all along what Judas would do, in His human nature, that didn’t make it any easier. He was devastated. Have you ever been stabbed in the back by someone you thought was your friend, someone you could trust, but they turned on you? It’s a horrible experience. And Jesus felt this as deeply as you or I would feel it. We have a sympathetic High Priest who has been tested in all things as we are.

- It’s the setting that makes this so dramatic: Eating a meal together in those days was a mark of friendship and loyalty. You ate with people you trusted. And there sits Judas - eating, talking: criticizing Mary with the others for worshiping Jesus; allowing Jesus to wash his feet! And from what we read in Matthew and Luke’s account, probably even taking the Lord’s Table with the other Eleven! And he had already cut the deal with the chief priests to hand Jesus over to them for 30 pieces of silver. Amazing! Such an evil heart. John says that Satan moved Judas’ heart to betray Jesus, and after this dinner Satan literally filled Judas to carry out this treachery.

Satan was in that upper room on that night.

Jesus had already predicted several times that He would be handed over to be killed, but here He tells His Disciples for the first time, “*One of you will betray Me!*”

Can you imagine how shocked and overwhelmed they were when they heard that? “One of *us*? Jesus’ own 12 hand-chosen Apostles? We’ve been through so much with Him and one of us is a devil?” But look at how they reacted—

- Matthew 26:22 ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?”

We have to give the other eleven credit: instead of hearing Jesus say this and start looking around the room, their immediate response was to examine their own hearts: “Lord, is it me? Could it really be me?” For all their faults, these were humble men. We’ve noted many times that these men could sooner doubt themselves than doubt Judas - which shows what a con he was. But it also shows how humble they were.

*And every one of us here should look into our hearts this morning and ask the question that Jesus wanted His men to ask themselves: “Lord Jesus, could I do something like this? I have the same DNA as Judas, could I be self deceived too? Do I have a log in my eye that is keeping me from seeing sin in my own heart?” And every time we hear of some professing Christian falling into sin, or being exposed for a sin they thought was a secret - we should say, “There but for the grace of God, go !! And if I don’t guard my heart, and constantly confess my sins, it could be me the next time!”

When Paul tells us to examine ourselves before we come to the Table, he is following Jesus right here, isn’t he? Jesus called His men to examine their hearts before He brought them to the Table. Two passages to memorize and pray back to God - daily—

- Psalm 139:23-24 ²³Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
- Psalm 19:14 ¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

So one by one, these humble men look into Jesus’ eyes and ask Him, “*Is it I, Lord?*” And Jesus said to them—

- Matthew 26:23-24 . . . “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.

“*My betrayer is dipping his bread in the dish with us right now!*” And I want you to notice what Jesus says next, it’s one of the clearest presentations of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility in the Bible—

- ²⁴The 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.”

Do you see it? God decreed that Jesus would be betrayed, before time began - but Judas is 100% responsible for his own sin. Both are true. Nothing happens by accident in this universe, and we are still responsible for our choices and our actions. You say, “Can you explain that?” And I say, “Absolutely not. But I believe it because that is what the Scriptures say.

- Nothing was ever more certain and predestined to happen than Jesus going to the cross for sinners. But woe to Judas for turning on Jesus - he couldn’t plead innocent because he was a puppet of God’s sovereign plan - no! He was fully culpable. Jesus says it would have been better if he had never been born. I.e., The torment Judas is experiencing right now is far worse than even non-existence - and file this under scriptural support for eternal, conscious torment in hell. If annihilationism is true, that people in hell cease to exist, Jesus wouldn’t have said this.

So apparently Judas was the last to answer Jesus. Judas *knows* that he is the one who will betray Jesus, and now he knows that *Jesus knows too* - he just heard this pronouncement of judgment - but it didn't faze him. He was so cold-blooded and hard-hearted, he goes on to ask Jesus, "*Is it I, Rabbi?*" And he's careful to use exactly the same words the other 11 used, so he wouldn't draw attention to himself. But he changed one word, do you see it?

- He calls Jesus "Rabbi" instead of "Lord." In Matthew, Jesus' disciples never called Him '*Rabbi*,' only outsiders, and that's what Judas was. Even in His hypocrisy Judas couldn't bring himself to call Jesus '*Lord*.' But 1Cor12:3 says "No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit - and Judas never had the Holy Spirit.

Let me make two quick points here—

1.) Spiritual privilege is no guarantee of salvation. Don't ever think that you are a Christian just because you were brought up in a Christian family or your granddad was a preacher, or you've attended a Christ-preaching church for years. Remember Judas! He walked with Jesus, saw His miracles, saw His compassion for lepers and tax collectors and prostitutes. He heard the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus' own lips! He lived with the Light of the world for over 3 years but none of that saved him. He was never humbled and broken. He never repented of his sins to trust in Jesus. And he is in hell. You have to do business with Jesus person-to-Person. You have to turn from your sins and trust Him, heart and soul, to have Him as your Savior.

2.) Don't make plan to sin! Don't plot evil. I'm not saying it's OK to sin on the spur of the moment - but I'm saying that when you plan to commit some sin; you plan to lie, cheat, steal, commit immorality - and you stay with that plan, *you are hardening your own heart and choking your own conscience into silence*, and that can be deadly. You might think you can get back on track any time - confess it, and get back in the game. But repentance is something God must grant: i.e., it's not under your control to flip on and off like a light switch. If you are planning some sin, or you intend to keep on committing some sin and you can hear my voice, STOP RIGHT NOW! Or you might cross a line that you can cross back over.

* * *

Well it's hard to imagine what the Disciples must have been thinking and feeling during this meal: They are sad, confused - questioning their own hearts (except for Judas), and wondering if they could be the one who would betray Jesus. They've never been more aware of the darkness of sin and evil. And *this is when* Jesus brings them to the comfort and assurance of His Table.

*And there is a lesson here: Scripture is telling us what life will be like for Jesus' followers this side of heaven. It will be filled with suffering, heartache, disappointment - betrayal - along with the overwhelming promise of the Gospel, and communion with Jesus and fellowship with our true brothers and sisters. Life will be both *intensely bitter and incredibly sweet* until we are with Jesus on the other side.

III. The proclamation of His death.

- Matthew 26:26 ²⁶Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

They are right in the middle of the Passover meal - it could be that Jesus and His men were eating the Lamb as He spoke these words. Jesus wants to bring together the meaning of the

Passover meal with the meaning of His death as the Lamb of God. And He wants to institute a brand new ordinance for His people to observe until He returns again.

A major part of the Passover meal was (and still is in Jewish homes) the Q&A between the children and their fathers about the meaning of the meal. They call these the Four Questions. The father explained how the Jews were captive slaves in Egypt, but God set them free by the sprinkled blood of the Lamb on the night of Passover, and delivered them when He parted the Red Sea on their exodus from Egypt.

- Now Jesus is acting as the Jewish father and giving His Disciples His explanation of how He is about to fulfill the Passover. This will be the last Passover ever - it will be *re-placed* for God's people with the Lord's Table which proclaims salvation and deliverance for everyone who trusts in Him. They have been grieving over Jesus' words about His betrayal and death, but now He gives them the good news of the Gospel! They haven't trusted Him in vain!

For centuries, the Jews slaughtered 100's of 1,000's of Passover lambs, but all they all pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of His people forever—

- 1.) The Passover lamb had to be without any spot or blemish - That's Jesus; Virgin born, the only human being ever who was without a taint of sin. Even His enemies, even Pilate, couldn't find anything to accuse Jesus of. This is why He was fit to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was sinless - ready? *From womb to tomb!*
- 2.) The Passover lamb had to be a year old male. You couldn't use any old, diseased lamb. The Passover lamb was a lamb at its peak, a lamb in its prime. That was Jesus! 33 years old when He went to the cross, with none of the scars and consequences of sinful living in His body. He was heaven's best, given up for earth's worst.
- 3.) The lamb had to be killed at twilight. Josephus said it was 3:00 pm. Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 in the morning, and died at 3:00 pm. And it had to happen in Jerusalem, and Janice and I have seen Golgotha, the place of the Skull, in Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified.
- 4.) The lamb had to shed its blood. It couldn't be strangled to death. It had to bleed, its blood was caught in a basin, then it was roasted in fire, and through it all, no bone was to be broken.

Jesus shed His blood. He bled profusely through His scourging, having long thorns pushed into His scalp, nails cut through His wrists and feet, and finally a spear thrust into His side. His body went through the blazing fire of God's wrath while He was bearing our sins; and through it all, not a bone was broken. Listen as I read from John—

- John 19:31-37 ³¹Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. ³²So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. ³⁵He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. ³⁶For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be

broken.”³⁷ And again another Scripture says, “They will look on him whom they have pierced.”

5.) That first Passover lamb’s blood had to be sprinkled. The blood from that lamb was taken by the father and sprinkled on the two doorposts of the household, then on the lintel which is the top of the doorway - which would have formed a cross. When the angel of death came that evening and saw the sign of the blood, it would pass-over that household and the first-born there would be spared.

When you trust in Christ’s death on the cross, as your substitute, His blood shelters you forever from God’s wrath on your sins: “. . . on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, for every sin on Him was laid, here in the death of Christ, I live.”

6.) The Passover lamb had to be eaten. It was their salvation and it was their nourishment. We need to do the same with Jesus—

“Take”

Notice that Jesus *gives* the bread and cup, and He tells us to *take* it. We don’t give Him anything, we *take* what He gives to us - His broken body, His shed blood - for us. Salvation is Jesus’ work for us, not our work for Him. And you receive this salvation only when you *stop* working; you *stop* trying to earn, achieve, be worthy enough for heaven, and you simply *take* Jesus and what He did for sinners.

- Jesus will not compete with you and your works. You cannot come to Him with an offering; something in your hands. You can only come, empty-handed, broken in spirit, contrite in heart, crying out for mercy.

If someone invites you to dinner at their home, generally what is the first thing you say? “What can we bring?” That might be good manners for dinner at your friend’s house, but not for the Lord’s Table. What He brings to this Table is enough. His sacrifice of Himself, is enough to cleanse you from all your sins. Didn’t He cry out, “It is finished!”?

Don’t even offer up your love and devotion, or your self-examination or repentance thinking, “Well now, I’m worthy. Now I’m fit to come!” No. Jesus makes you worthy. “Let not conscience make you linger, nor of fitness fondly dream; All the fitness He requires, is to feel your need of Him.” Just take what He gives. Jesus said, “Take, and—

“Eat”

He didn’t tell us to sit very still and think. He gave us something physical, tangible. Jesus knows us, doesn’t He? He knows that our minds can wander, so He gives us something we can hold in our hands and says, “Eat this bread, drink this cup,” something physical, to help us do something *spiritual*, which is to remember and trust again in what He did, which was very physical.

- *Faith is spiritual eating and drinking!* When you eat something, you take it into the deepest part of your body and from there, it goes to every part of your body. It becomes part of you. Eating is making a commitment: if it’s something healthy, it will nourish you, but if it’s poison, it can kill you, but when you take it into your body, you’re all in.

And that’s what Jesus wants us to do when we come to His Table - Again and again, eat and drink in, who Jesus Christ is and what He has done to atone for your sins and bring you to God. Take and eat. And this is what we take and eat—

“This is My body” Luke adds, ***“given for you.”***

He wants us to remember His physical body and blood because that was the precious price paid for our sins. It wasn't a metaphor hanging on the cross, it was a real, bleeding, suffering Man. Don't we need to remember that? What it cost Him - that we deserved? Jesus wasn't leaving us with some sentimental devotion here. He didn't say, "Take eat, this is My love." Jesus put it all out to purchase His people: His body, His blood. He was physically *tortured* - and He wants us to meditate on the price He paid to deliver us from our sins, because the price He paid = the value He puts on our salvation for His Father's glory!

And when we take and eat that broken bread, it shows that we really do have a sympathetic High priest who feels what we feel because He suffered the way we suffer.

Before we come to the Table, I want to read something my daughter Rachel wrote—

The Crucifix

When we were dating, my husband told me about his love for crosses. This was confirmed on my first visit to his house, which is full of them - above doorframes, on walls - he even carries small, wooden ones in his coat pockets. And he loves to place them in the hands of others, so they have something to hold onto when they need a tangible reminder of Jesus. My friend said her son still carries the cross Evan gave him in his backpack every day to school.

And he doesn't just love the empty cross of the resurrected Jesus. He loves the crucifix. The suffering Christ. When I asked him why - quietly concerned about what it might say about his theology, commitment to Protestantism, etc. - he told me about sitting by his wife's hospital bed as she suffered from cancer. How it was the crucifix, not the empty cross, that became his symbol of hope. Yes, Jesus has risen. But Jesus is also the Man of Sorrows, well acquainted with grief. The suffering Christ was the one he needed as he watched his first wife suffer. The bloody Christ, familiar with pain, is who he clung to in his darkest hour. "How is faith to endure, O God, when you allow all this scraping and tearing on us?" Nicholas Wolterstorff asks in *Lament for a Son*, "We strain to hear. But instead of hearing an answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God."

And this is how I came to appreciate the crucifix - a symbol I had before only associated with Catholicism and an incomplete representation of the gospel.

Next week will look at vv.27-29.

Lord's Table.