



Matthew 26:17-30
Jesus, our Passover

Summary: Jesus reveals Himself as the Passover lamb sacrificed for our sin, and institutes communion to remind all Christians of what He has done.

Baptism and communion are the two ordinances of the Christian faith – two activities all Christians should participate in. Baptism involves immersing someone in water as an outward sign of inward commitment to Christ. It represents being buried as you go under the water and then being raised to new life as you come out. It also represents washing all your sin away as you enter the water and emerge cleansed and pure in Christ.

Baptism is like the front door to the Christian faith. It is, normally, the first thing you should do after receiving Christ. And if, for any reason, you have put it off, our next baptism is scheduled for Sunday night, May 5th. We will gather, enjoy a potluck meal, have a little family update on the life, activities, and plans of the church, and then have a baptism where people will publicly declare, “Yes, I have put my faith in Christ alone for my salvation, and by His grace, and with His strength, I hope to live for Him.”

We do that because, at the end of His time on earth, Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you

Baptism occurs once, at the beginning of your Christian life, as a sign of the transformation that has occurred. But the second ordinance is a recurring event. It’s known as communion, or the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist. This morning we’re going to look at where it comes from and what it’s all about.

As a reminder, we’re moving our way through the gospel of Matthew, verse by verse, chapter by chapter looking at the life of Jesus. We’ve come now to the last 24 hours of His life. The things we’re about to read happened the night before He was killed – this is the Last Supper. So, read with me:

Matthew 26:17 Now on the first *day of the Feast* of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

18 And He 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.”’”

19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

The timing of Jesus’ death, during Passover, is very important.

Passover was, and still is, a major Jewish holiday. It celebrates the time when God delivered the Jews out of slavery in Egypt roughly 3500 years ago. God sent Moses to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, insisting that Pharaoh let God's people go. Pharaoh said no, and so God sent a series of plagues to demonstrate His power and help Pharaoh change His mind. But, Pharaoh was stubborn and committed to his own ideas, as we often are, so even in the face of overwhelming, miraculous events, he absolutely refused to let the Jews go.

Things gradually escalated to the point of the tenth, and final plague. This would be the most devastating of all: the death of the firstborn. Around midnight the Angel of the Lord would pass through the land of Egypt and:

Exodus 11:5 all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female servant who sits at the mill and all the firstborn of the animals. 6 Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as never been heard before, nor shall be like it again.

There was going to be a terrible cost to defying God. But, there was also going to be a way to escape. Which is kind of a summary of the grand narrative of life – we all face a judgment for the wrong we have done, but God demonstrates His grace and mercy toward us by preparing a way to escape that judgment, *if* we will listen and receive it.

In this case, God told Moses to tell all the Jewish people to sacrifice lambs. The lambs would die instead of anyone else... but there were several stipulations. Turn with me to Exodus 12 and we'll learn more. Here God gives Moses special instructions for the Passover. He says one lamb had to be sacrificed for every family, essentially, one lamb for every firstborn, but if the family was small, say a young family – a man and his wife with an infant, they could gather with their neighbor.

The lamb had to be less than a year old, without blemish – so, you couldn't use your least favorite animal, the old guy in the corner who can barely see and runs into the side of the fence all the time – no, not him. It had to be a young one, full of life, and without defect.

The animal was to be killed on a particular day, at twilight, and then you were to take some of the animal's blood and put it on the doorframe of your house. Then the lamb was roasted whole and you had dinner together - you ate the meat with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and wine and there could be no leftovers.

Exodus 12:11 And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. 12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD. 13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt.

In other words, when God saw the blood marking the door, it showed that blood had already been shed in that house, so He would Pass Over it.

Personally, I have always found it interesting that the Hebrew word for life is **chai**. And when you see it written, it looks as if blood is about to be applied to a doorframe. 

So, here's the point of Passover: if you are marked by the blood, you will escape the judgment and God will lead you out of captivity and into the promised life He has planned for you. That's why they had to eat with their shoes on, ready to go.

So, going back to Exodus 12, God says,

14 'So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

This is why, when we come to Matthew 26, we find the disciples asking Jesus, where should we prepare the Passover for You? They have to find a place to host the dinner, gather bread, herbs, and wine, buy a lamb, take it lamb to the Temple to be inspected and then sacrificed, and then go roast the lamb so it's ready for dinner by sundown.

Fortunately it appears Jesus has already made arrangements for *where* they will celebrate: at the house of a man who goes unnamed. And though we don't know his name, I just have to say something about him, because what he did was tremendously important. He used what he had – a home in Jerusalem – to serve God.

Last week we saw Mary make this tremendous offering to the Lord by breaking open a bottle of perfume that was worth a year's salary. Opening up his home didn't cost the man anywhere near that, but it was still an important and valuable use of his material resources. And it should remind all of us to be open-handed with our physical possessions. Jesus wasn't just anointed with Mary's oil, He rode into Jerusalem on someone else's donkey, He celebrated Passover in someone else's home, He was buried in Joseph's tomb. Serving the Lord isn't always just spiritual; sometimes it is very material and practical, like opening up your home. And think of the memory that created for this man and his family for the rest of their lives as they recalled what they were able to be a part of by simply opening up their doors to host a holiday meal.

Matthew 26:20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. **21** Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."
22 And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?"
23 He answered and said, "He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. **24** The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had

not been born.”

25 Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?”
He said to him, “You have said it.”

Last week we spoke about Judas and considered some of his possible motives. We decided it’s impossible to determine exactly why He betrayed Jesus, because the Scriptures don’t say. But we can know this much – he had one idea about what should happen and Jesus had another and Judas chose his opinion over Jesus, which is the root of all sin. There is a little Judas in every one of us. We all choose to do things our way at times instead of obeying the Lord.

But what I want to point out here is Jesus’ attitude toward Judas. When Jesus announced He was going to be betrayed, they all asked, “Is it me?” No one knew it was Judas. No one said, “Alright, finally, He’s going to say something about Judas – I’ve seen how Jesus has been treating him recently and wondered what was going on.” You might even picture all the disciples sitting around the table and munching on some pita bread while Judas is sulking over in the shadows of the corner of the room with a nefarious look in his eyes. But no, Judas is actually sitting next to Jesus, in a place of honor, at the head of the table. All the way up to the end Jesus is showing mercy and kindness to Judas.

At any moment, Judas could change his mind, but he doesn’t. Just like Pharaoh, he persistently rebels against God until finally God simply accepts the rejection and affirms it. We’re told Pharaoh hardened his heart toward God until the moment when God finally hardened Pharaoh’s heart. And we see Judas resisted Jesus until the point we’re told by John that Satan entered him and completed the act of betrayal (John 12:29).

Now, that provokes some people to do a lot of internal wrestling – like, what does that all mean? Did Pharaoh, or did Judas really have free will, could they really have made a choice to do differently? What if they had changed their mind? Well, friends, it’s all speculation, we can’t clearly know. It’s like asking who would win – the immovable object or the irresistible force? It’s a fascinating problem, but how are you going to work it, how are you going to solve it? Fortunately, God has more perspective than we do and we can ask Him in Heaven.

But the practical point of application is – why ask how far can I go away from God and still be OK? Why ask how long can I resist God before I can’t repent? Why ask how far I can go in my sin? Why do you want to keep going in that direction? Why don’t you turn around 180 degrees and ask, how close can I get to God? How much can I know Him? How can I please Him? You know the saying, if you play with fire you’re going to get burned – don’t be the kind of person that insists on exploring the outer limits of God’s patience and presence, turn around and come enjoy Him. Stop trying to find life on your own, and let God give it to you, through Christ. Watch what we see happen next:

Matthew 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”

Jesus is giving while Judas is going. This is what Judas misses by going his own way.

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” 30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

This is why we close our services by singing a song, especially after receiving communion, which we see Jesus instituting here.

For thousands of years the Jews had been offering animal sacrifices – but now Jesus, the Lamb of God, would be put to death and His blood would provide one final sacrifice – the ultimate sacrifice that all the others pointed toward and the reason why we never sacrifice with blood today. His one, perfect, life was given for us – one all-sufficient sacrifice for all time. His blood would be **shed for many for the remission of sins**.

Thanks a technical theological way of talking about this great exchange where we receive His purity and He takes on our pollution, suffering on the cross for us because He had no reason to suffer for Himself, He had done nothing wrong.

Early in Jesus’ ministry John the Baptist had announced Him **as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1:29). Paul later refers to him as “**Christ, our Passover**” (1 Cor 5:7). And in the book of Revelation we see Jesus in heaven described as “**the lamb who was slain**” (Rev 5:12).

At the original Passover, the people of Israel found shelter behind the blood-covered timber frames of their doors. Today, we find shelter behind the blood-covered timbers of the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so, today when we receive communion two things are missing from the Passover meal: the lamb, which provided the blood, because Jesus is our Lamb and the bitter herbs, reminders of suffering in Egypt because in Christ, we have no need to remember our past. We are left with only the bread and the cup.

Jesus said the bread should now remind us of His body. Yeast is often a picture of sin in the Bible, and the bread of Passover, now communion, is made without it. In the same way, Jesus was without sin. He lived a perfect life, never doing any wrong.

The cup reminds us of His blood: deep, rich, and red. During the Passover meal there are actually four cups of wine consumed at different points. Each represents a different promise made by God to the people of Israel in Exodus 6 before all the plagues began to unfold.

The first is the cup of Sanctification to remember that God said:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, in Christ God has brought us out from under the burden of sin

The second, the cup of Judgment to remember that God said:

- I will rescue you from their bondage, in Christ, God sets us free from the bondage of sin

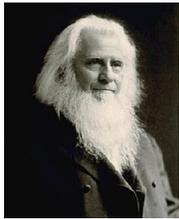
The third, the cup of Redemption to remember that God said:

- I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments; God redeems us through the outstretched arms of Christ and promises judgment on all those who persist in their wickedness

The fourth, the cup of Praise to remember that God said:

- I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. In Christ we adopted as sons and daughters of God.

So, all of these promises find their fulfillment, ultimately, in Jesus who has made them possible by shedding His blood.



Now, as a side note for all you history buffs – historically communion, like Passover, has been celebrated with wine, though it may have been cut with some water to make it go a little farther. But during the era of prohibition, when the United States outlawed alcohol, a minister and dentist by the name of Thomas Welch pioneered a way to pasteurize grape juice and stop the natural fermentation process that happens when you crush grapes. This new product was specifically invented to be used by churches in celebrating Holy Communion. Today we call his product Welch’s grape juice.

Whether we use wine or juice, the point is the same – to remind us of the blood that was shed to bring us new life.

We call all of this the Eucharist because Jesus gave thanks for the cup and in Greek to give thanks is eucharistēsas. We call it the Lord’s Supper because it reminds us that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of everything the Passover meal represented.

Catholics call it the mass because mass is derived from the Latin missio – to go. After receiving the meal, they went out. So too, we receive this reminder of what God has done for us and then go out into the world living a new life and pointing others toward the joy, hope, purpose, and forgiveness they can find in Christ.

We call it “communion” because receiving it reminds us of the relationship we have with God – we can commune with Him, or be with Him.

But there is a strong and clear warning about communion in Scripture. Paul tells the

Corinthian church we need to inspect ourselves before receiving. He writes:

1 Cor 11:27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Now what does this mean, to receive in [an unworthy manner](#)?

Well, at it's most basic, it means don't receive communion if you have not received Christ. How can you celebrate His sacrifice if you don't believe it was for you?

But what if you have received Christ, what if you are born-again, but you're currently overwhelmed by some sin that seems to be dominating your life? Well, in both cases you need to examine yourself, and remember the truth.

We always encourage you to use the time when the elements are passed out to reflect on your life - to think of the things you need Jesus to forgive, to examine your life and get right with God. And that might mean declaring to God for the very first time - "This is true, and I believe it. I don't fully understand all of it, but I believe it. I believe I need forgiveness from You. I believe I need Your help. I believe this is true, help me and save me God. Make me a Christian!" You can pray that right now, in your chair, this morning, as the elements are passed out and then you can take communion for the first time!

Maybe you are saved, but this morning you need to take time to remember what you've lost sight of and praying: "God, thank You so much for Your patience with me. I see the things in my life You're trying to draw attention to. I see where I need Your help, Your strength, I see the things I need to let go of."

Communion is also a chance for you to turn to God for help. To pray something like, "Father, I am so hungry, so thirsty for You. I am so broken and I'm in so much pain. God, I am starving spiritually and I need You!"

Whatever your need, examine yourself this morning, and use the time when the elements are being passed out to do your business with God.

Jesus said in John 6 that whoever eats His body and drinks His blood has eternal life. Now, that doesn't mean there's any magic in this gluten-free wafer or little cup of juice, but it reminds us that life is more than just the clothes we wear, the job we work, the car we drive. The Word of God and the Holy Spirit can nourish us in our spirit when we turn to God as the source of our true life. Do you remember Jesus telling the disciples, I have food you don't know about, my food is to do the will of God. Receiving communion reminds us of the nourishment that is always available for our souls.

It also reminds us, we are part of a community, something bigger than ourselves, a point we already mentioned, but worth repeating again – you're part of a family that stretches back through generations and spans the entire world. You are not alone. No one ever received the Passover alone. Under normal circumstances, we shouldn't receive communion alone either – it is meant to be a corporate act; it's meant to be something we celebrate together – it's personal, for sure, but it's not private. The community part of communion is important – it reminds us we have a family we belong to and it reminds us we are headed for heaven where others who have also received Christ's body and blood will surround us.

But to have all of this, *you* must receive what He has for you, individually, personally, no one else can take communion for you.

When you receive communion, you affirm your faith in Christ. You remind yourself of what is true – you really are needy. But you have found hope, forgiveness, and blessing in Christ. By picking up the bread and the cup you preach the gospel to yourself again – yes, *this is for me*. This is what I was and this is who I am.

Some of you might say, well, I'm not ready, I'm not worthy to receive communion. So, let me ask: what's your get well plan? By saying you're not ready to receive the elements, you're saying you're not ready to die. You're not ready to meet Jesus. What more are you waiting for? What more do you need to figure out? Why do you resist the clear call of God to come to His table and receive what He has done for you? Do you think He got your name wrong on the invitation? He knows who you are, He knows what you have done, and He's offering you a fresh start and a new beginning – a way to escape judgment and find new life by letting Him cover you with His blood. If you want to change, or if you want to find healing from the past, it all starts now.

So we're going to ask the ushers to come forward, to make the bread and the cup available to anyone who feels the weight of their sin, who loves Jesus, and who wants to serve God. And as they come around the room, as we wait to enjoy this meal together, take a moment to examine yourself, to get right with God, do not eat in an unworthy manner. But also give thanks and rejoice for all that has been done for you, gives thanks for our Passover lamb and what we escape.

Let's pray.

Receiving communion often runs the entire emotional spectrum. We remember what we were and we remember what lies ahead. We feel the weight and conviction of sin, but we also feel the hope and joy of knowing Christ and being possessed by Him, pronounced innocent, and promised a future so we can leave here rejoicing and encouraged. Let's do that now as Phill leads us in a song of praise just like the first disciples in that upper room.