

Matthew 26:17-30

I. Matthew 26:17 — Now 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?”

What a wonderful, joyful time this was for every Jew. In fact, this was easily the high point of the entire year. We’ve already seen that Jesus and His disciples have not been the only ones making the journey to Jerusalem. Throngs of pilgrims have accompanied them on the road, and only recently, many of them had escorted Jesus into the city with shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (21:9) That seems like ages ago, now – but it was really only three or four days ago.

Matthew says that this is now the “first day of Unleavened Bread.” This is traditionally understood to be Thursday (cf. Carson), but there are some who argue for Wednesday (cf. France). The crucifixion itself is traditionally understood to happen on Friday, but there are some who argue for Thursday, or even Wednesday. There are only two things that really matter here. First of all is the historical fact that on a particular day in the history of this world, Jesus suffered and died on the cross in the place of sinners. And very much related to this is the symbolism of Jesus’ death in light of the Passover feast and the Passover lamb. If someone feels that only one chronology can allow this symbolism to work, then I leave that to them.

Passover was a one day feast followed by the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread. But by the time of Jesus, Passover was usually thought of as the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. So if you were a Jew, what did Passover mean to you? Was it just a time to remember something that happened long ago? – The day the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelites that had blood on the doorposts – the day that God delivered the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt? This would all be true, as far as it goes. But if this was all we could say for Passover, then we would have missed the entire point. At every Passover meal, it was tradition to recite these verses from the book of Exodus:

- ✓ Exodus 6:6–7 — Say therefore to the people of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

Israel’s exodus from Egypt was not simply a wonderful and miraculous deliverance out of slavery. Israel’s exodus from Egypt was the day that God began the work of redeeming Israel *for Himself* – to take them to Himself as His own special, treasured possession. “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.” When the believing Jew celebrated the Passover, he was not just remembering something from long ago, he was rejoicing most of all in the *present reality* of his privileged relationship to the one, true God of all creation. He was rejoicing in the fact that this one, true God of all creation had chosen the people of Israel to be His *very own*. You can imagine the joy on this day. Of all days in the year, this day was the best.

“Now 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?’” The disciples *want* to eat the Passover with Jesus. This is why they ask where He wants them to prepare the meal. But on the other hand, they must remember the words of Jesus in verse one: “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.” On the one hand, the disciples had always know the Passover as a day of joy and celebration over their special relationship to God as His redeemed people. On the other hand, Jesus was now speaking of the Passover as the time of His own crucifixion.

“The disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?’” It was expected that the Passover meal should be eaten within Jerusalem. But Jesus and the disciples were from Galilee, and so far they had been lodging in Bethany. The city was spilling over with people – with other groups and households, just like that of Jesus and the disciples – all needing a place to celebrate Passover. Where were they to find any room?

II. Matthew 26:18–19 — 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.’” And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

Apparently, just like with the donkey in Matthew 21, Jesus has already arranged for a room in Jerusalem to eat the Passover meal with His disciples. Jesus goes purposefully... willingly. At no time in Jesus’ life more than in these final days and hours do we see that He is *truly* the sovereign Lord of all. 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.’” The final hours of Jesus’ life will play out not according to the will of His enemies, but according to His own sovereign word. Men plot and scheme, but all the while, it is Jesus who *willingly and purposefully* offers up Himself as a sacrifice for us.

III. Matthew 26:20–22 — When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?”

The word for “*betray*” is the exact same word that Jesus used in verse two when He said to the disciples: “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be *handed over* (NASB) to be crucified.” It’s hardly possible for us to imagine the feeling in the room at that moment. The ESV says that the disciples were “very sorrowful.” The NASB says that they were “deeply grieved.” The NET Bible says that “they became greatly *distressed*.” One of them, Jesus says, one of *them* will hand Him over to be crucified.

And they began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” (cf. NKJV; NLT) Or probably better, “Surely not I, Lord?” (NET; NASB; NRSV; HCSB; cf. NIV) For the disciples, at this point, the entire Passover meal has lost any semblance of joy or celebration. Their minds must have literally been reeling. Their hearts must have felt like lead. On the one hand, they want to

deny that what Jesus has said could ever be true, but on the other hand, they can see that Jesus is in deadly earnest. “*Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.*” “Surely not I, Lord?”

Why say something like this to all twelve of the disciples? Why not just take Judas aside and speak to him in private? I think that Jesus wanted to instill in each one of His disciples a proper and healthy *distrust* of themselves (Hagner; Bruner). Jesus said, “one of you,” because He wanted all of His disciples to realize that they were each one *capable* of doing what Judas will do. And that means that we, too, should learn to tremble and to ask along *with* the disciples: “Surely not I, Lord?” Calvin writes: “Nothing prevents believers from being afraid and at the same time possessing the surest consolation; according as they turn their eyes now upon their own vanity, and then bring the thought of their minds to bear upon the truth of God” (quoted in Bruner). In other words, may we never, not for one single moment have any confidence whatsoever in ourselves. May we entrust ourselves always and only to the keeping, and preserving, and guarding grace of God. “Surely not I, Lord?”

IV. Matthew 26:23–25 — He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The 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.” Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” [Not, “Lord”; v. 22] He said to him, “You have said so.”

The sovereign Lord of all *knows* who will betray Him. He answers Judas clearly, but without revealing him to the rest of the disciples. He makes sure that Judas will remain free to carry out his plan. Men plot and scheme, but all the while, it is Jesus who *willingly and purposefully* goes to the cross for us.

In the secret mystery of His sovereign will, God has given Judas over to a debased mind so that he will now freely and willfully do what ought never, ever, ever to have been done (Rom. 1:28–31). Judas is fully responsible and answerable for what he does because he does it freely, and of his own will. This is the nature of *all* our sin – it is always committed freely and of our own will – never under compulsion, never forced. Therefore, we are *all* at *all times* fully responsible and answerable to God. We are *all* at *all times* **without excuse**. And yet Jesus can also pray with these words:

✓ John 17:12 — While I was with [the disciples], *I kept them in your name*, which you have given me. *I have guarded them*, and *not one of them has been lost* **except** the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

This is a great mystery – that God should ordain one of the most wicked and evil deeds ever committed without Himself being morally responsible for that sin and without ever contradicting Judas’ freedom to act according to his own desires... and that God should then take that most wicked, and evil, and vile deed, and use it to bring about His own eternal plan for the salvation of sinners like you and me. What shall we say to these things? All that we can do is fall down and *worship*. And as we lay there with our faces to the ground, we are reminded again to never, ever

have any confidence whatsoever in ourselves, but to entrust ourselves always and only to the keeping, and preserving, and guarding grace of God.

In verse two, Jesus connected the Passover with the time of His own crucifixion. Now, in the very midst of eating the Passover meal, Jesus tells His disciples: “One of you will hand me over.” Passover meals were not supposed to be like this. This was supposed to be a time of joy and celebration. This was supposed to be the time when Israel feasted their hearts and minds on these wonderful, beautiful words: “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ***I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.***” But how can they celebrate this now? What’s the use of this Passover meal?

V. Matthew 26:26a — Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples.

“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.” It was tradition for the head of the household to say the blessing over the bread. After saying the blessing, the head of the household would then explain the meaning and symbolism of the bread. The bread on Passover was to be unleavened. The Lord had commanded Israel:

✓ Deuteronomy 16:3 — Seven days you shall eat... unleavened bread, *the bread of affliction*—for you came out of the land of Egypt *in haste*—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.

The unleavened bread was a reminder to Israel of the day when God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt to be His own treasured possession. As they ate the bread they would hear again God’s word to them, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God,” and they would be filled up with such peace and *joy*. But on this Passover, on this night, in this room, Jesus will say what no head of household had ever said before.

VI. Matthew 26:26 — 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.”

Here are words far too wonderful and far too high for us to ever fully comprehend. For one thousand four hundred and seventy years, the bread in this meal had represented the bread that Israel ate in haste when God delivered them from Egypt. Now that same bread is the body of Jesus. “This is my *body*,” Jesus says, and that means *death*. “Take, *eat*,” Jesus says, and that means *life and nourishment*. “Take, eat; this is my body.” But how can it be? How can this bread suddenly be what it never was before?

VII. Matthew 26:27a — And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to [the disciples].”

“Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.” It was tradition for the head of the household to give thanks for the cup. Traditionally, there were four cups, with each cup pointing Israel in some unique way to their redemption from Egypt.

There's no way to know for sure which cup this was, but that doesn't really matter. We know that when they drank the cup, they would taste again the goodness of the Lord, and the wonderful joy of hearing these words: "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. *I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God.*" We know that even though they had heard the explanation of the cup over and over again, they would all be waiting with baited breath to hear it once more. But on this Passover, on this night, in this room, Jesus will say what no head of household had ever said before.

VIII. Matthew 26:27–28a — And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood."

We *feel*, now, that we are standing on holy and sacred ground. For as long as there had been a "cup" in the Passover meal, that cup had always represented Israel's deliverance from Egypt. But now, this same cup is Jesus' blood. "This is my *blood*," Jesus says, and that means *death*. "*Drink of it, all of you,*" Jesus says, and that means *nourishment and life*. "*Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood.*" How can it be? How can this cup suddenly be what it never was before? What does it *mean*? As they reclined around that table, in that upper room, Jesus explained – and we still hear and treasure His words today.

VIII. Matthew 26:27b–29 — "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I 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."

Now we can understand – even if we can never fully comprehend. That phrase, "blood of the covenant," would have resonated in the hearts and minds of every believing Jew. When God redeemed Israel from Egypt and entered into a relationship with them as His very own treasured possession ("I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God"), He did this by means of a *covenant*. The writer of Hebrews says that "not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood" (Heb. 9:18).

✓ Exodus 24:5, 8 — [Moses] sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings... And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold *the blood of the covenant* that the LORD has made with you."

But through sin and rebellion Israel broke that covenant – time, after time, after time. And so God, in His mercy, promised a *new* covenant.

✓ Jeremiah 31:31–34 — "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their*

God, and they shall be my people... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Oh brothers and sisters! – How is it that God should desire to be *our* God? How is it that He should want us to be His people? But this we can now understand. When Jesus said that the bread and the cup were His body and His blood, He was *not* making the bread and the cup to be something that they never were before. Instead, He was unveiling for the first time what they had always truly been *meant* to be. The writer of Hebrews says that if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second, but in speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete (Heb. 8:7, 13). It was ultimately only through the sacrificial death of Jesus that we could be what we are now, *today* – His own treasured possession. “This [bread] is *my* body... this [cup] is *my* blood of the covenant, which is *poured out* for *many* for the *forgiveness of sins*.” And now Jesus’ words remind us of the prophet Isaiah:

- ✓ Isaiah 53:11–12 — Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make *many* to be accounted righteous, and he shall *bear their iniquities*. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the *many*, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he *poured out* his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet *he bore the sin of many*, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

In the distress, and anguish, and grief of this Passover supper, the Passover supper is finally being *fulfilled*. And so now, as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we can taste for ourselves the goodness of the Lord, and the joy of hearing these words: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people... for I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more.”

Deliverance from Egypt gives way now to a far greater deliverance from *sin and death*. The blood of the Old Covenant gives way to the infinitely more precious and powerful blood of the New Covenant. The people of the Old Covenant so often characterized by rebellion and unfaithfulness now give way to a New Covenant community whose sins are fully and finally forgiven and who delight to walk in God’s ways. The blood of the Old Covenant was only sprinkled on the people. But the blood of the New Covenant has been given to us to imbibe and to drink through true faith in Jesus. “Take, *eat*; this is my body.” “*Drink* of it, all of you,” Jesus said, “this is my blood of the covenant.”

“I 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.” In that day, a loud voice will be heard from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be *his people*, and God himself will be with them as *their God*.” (Rev. 21:3)

IX. Matthew 26:30 — And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

From the words of this last hymn that they sang together:

- ✓ Psalm 118:1, 14-16, 22-24, 28-29 — Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s

doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

Conclusion

Have you tasted the goodness of God? Have you *tasted* the bread and the cup? This morning, will you *taste* again the rich joy and assurance of hearing these wonderful, beautiful words: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people... for I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more.” And who, having once tasted of these things, could not be wonderfully encouraged and strengthened to live a holy life of *glad and joyful* obedience to the will of God?