

The Lord's Supper – Matthew 26

I remember the day well. Thursday, October 31st, 1985. After school that day, me and some friends got in my 1975 Dodge Stepside pickup and decided not to go home. It was Halloween so, hmm, what to do, let's go steal some pumpkins. That'll be fun. What could go wrong with a truck full of 16-year-olds that have been cooped up in a classroom all day on Halloween, huh? So, that's what we did. Three of us in the front and 3-4 in the bed and off we went and we had a blast. For hours, we stole pumpkins off people's porches all over the west side of Ft. Worth. We filled up the bed of the truck with stolen pumpkins. Then we took them to the school and lined the walkway of the cafeteria with our trophies. Then we all had a good laugh as I drove everybody home.

The next day, we all went to class as usual, laughing about our great heist every time we saw each other in the halls. But then we had English class and several of us were together in that class including my friend Chris who had been sitting next to me most of the night before and had participated many times by jumping out of the truck and running up to a house to steal the pumpkins on the porch.

The teacher started the class by walking up to Chris who was sitting in his desk and she asked him, "*Chris, do you have your English book today?*" Chris looked through his stuff and said, "*Well, actually, no I don't have it with me today.*" The English teacher said with great drama, "*Well, where do you think it is, Chris?*" He said, "*I don't know. Probably at home.*"

Her voice got louder when she said, "*Or maybe this is it! Is this your English book, Chris? It has your name in it.*" He agreed that it was. "*Do you want to know how I have it? I found it in my driveway last night when you dropped it as you stole my daughter's pumpkin that she had just carved. She cried all night because some jerks thought it would be funny to steal her pumpkin.*" And she threw the textbook at him.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been guilty and everybody knows your guilty? It's been proven that you are guilty and there is no denying it. That's an humbling place to be...or it should be.

In **Matthew 26**, Jesus tells His disciples, "*One of you is going to betray me.*" And you can imagine the shock to the eleven disciples that were not going to betray Him as they all said, "*Surely it's not me, Lord?*". And we can only imagine the hypocrisy of Judas who had

already planned it and looked Jesus in the eye as he smugly said, **“Surely not I, Rabbi?”** He’s guilty. He knows it. Jesus knows it. And yet the betrayal continues.

Oftentimes called the Last Supper, the occasion for Jesus to be eating with His disciples is supposed to be a celebratory one. We are reading today from **Matthew 26** and we will start with **verse 17** and that verse tells us that it was the first day of the weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. And on that first day was the Passover celebration. It was a remembrance and celebration of when God saved the Israelites from the Egyptians and brought them out of slavery.

It is an incredible God story that you can read in **Exodus 12** about how God promised the Israelites that if they would slaughter a lamb and put the blood of that lamb over their doorposts that He would not kill their first born. But anybody that didn’t have that blood over their door would have their firstborn child killed. And you remember it was finally the last straw that made Pharaoh let them go.

So, ever since it happened the Israelites celebrated God passing over their houses and giving them freedom by celebrating the Passover meal. It was a command but it was also a custom and all good Jews would celebrate it every year in Jerusalem. The terms “Feast of Unleavened Bread” and “Passover” were basically synonymous. They always went together. Leaven, the yeast that made dough rise, was left out of the Passover bread because originally the Israelites didn’t have time to add it. They had to leave Egypt in too much of a hurry to wait for the dough to rise and also the Jews taught that leaven was synonymous with sin. They even made kind of a game out of making sure there was no leaven in the house before they ate the Passover meal.

So, for probably 1500 years the Israelites had celebrated this day and there was a lot of custom and tradition and pride in doing so as they should. But this time...this time is going to be different. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is about to be killed and sacrificed and His blood spilled out and so as Jesus did with so many things, He changed the Passover celebration to be about Him. Let’s read it in **Matthew 26:17-30**.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”¹⁸ He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’”¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.²¹ And while they were eating, he

said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"²³ Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" Jesus answered, "You have said so."²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ 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."³⁰ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

For the Jewish people, Passover was the highest holiday. It was a celebration with spiritual overtones and so it was done with reverence but done with your closest family and friends. And we see from other scriptures that while celebrating Passover, the disciples were acting...well...like family. **John 13** tells us that Jesus had just washed their feet but **Luke 22** tells us that some of them were discussing who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom. So, Jesus rebuked them and I'm sure that had to dampen the mood for them but don't you know Jesus spent most of the evening with his palm on his face, shaking His head?

They had no idea what was really going on. They had no idea this would be the last time they would do this together. They had no idea that Jesus was just hours away from being arrested, tried and killed. And then Jesus dropped this hand grenade on them saying that one of them would betray Him. They knew Jesus was hated by the authorities and could possibly be arrested or even killed but to hear that the betrayal would come from one of them had to be shocking. They were family.

While they were all wondering if maybe in their heart of hearts it could possibly be them, Judas was sitting there plotting the arrest of his so-called friend and wondering what he was going to do with the 30 pieces of silver he had gotten for doing it. And Jesus knew full well what was going on in the mind of Judas. I don't know about you but I would have a hard time washing that guy's feet. I would have a hard time pretending to enjoy a meal and a solemn celebration with Judas.

In **verse 24**, Jesus said, *“But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”* I have an idea Jesus was looking straight at Judas when He said it but Judas had already made up his mind. The thing is, I really believe that if Judas had said even right then, *“Lord, forgive me of these evil thoughts. I admit it is me. Please forgive me!”* And if he meant it that Jesus would have forgiven him and loved him and shown him grace and mercy and Judas could have lived many more years. But that’s not what happened.

In **John** we read that Jesus gave Judas one last piece of bread and then said, *“What you do, do quickly.”* And Judas got up and left. So, it wasn’t that Jesus fell into the trap of Judas. But Judas became part of God’s plan decided before the world began to make this the day that everything started to change. And the first thing to change was Passover.

See, the Passover was very scripted. You had to do the right thing at the right time and say the right thing all in order. Most of it was written down. And everything was symbolic of something else. As I said, the leaven was symbolic of sin. There was a bitter dip that symbolized the bitter work the Egyptians had forced them to do. There was a small bowl of saltwater that represented the tears of the Israeli slaves and on and on. You can look up the seder meal and see what all was there.

But in our scripture this morning, Jesus changed it. Jesus takes some bread and He takes some wine and He holds them up and with a huge break in tradition, He says, *“This symbolizes my body and this symbolizes my blood.”* And don’t you know the disciples were like, *“Wait...what now? It’s never been that way before.”* They didn’t know what He meant. There’s no way they could have known. It hadn’t happened yet. And this was not like any other Passover they had ever celebrated before.

Now, if you would, permit me some dramatic license as I give my explanation as to what happened. Many thousands of years ago, before God created the world and before He created time and space and light and darkness, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were all in their office working one day and thought all this through. They designed it to work exactly as it has worked.

They decided that Joseph would be thrown into the pit and be sold in Egypt and ultimately prosper there. So much so that his family would move there and prosper for many years but that Pharaoh would make them slaves for 430 years. They determined that Pharaoh would harden his heart until God killed all the firstborn. But then God would miraculously

bring them out of Egypt, they would cross a huge river, walk around Jericho until the walls fell down, then go into the Promised Land.

They would have judges and kings and great and awful stories would come out of it. The Trinity decided that the way for this special people to show their repentance of sin was for them to sacrifice valuable animals when they sinned and they said that would cover over the sins of the people. But that would only last so long. Then the plan was to change. God knew the day, the date, the time and even factored in the evil that was in the heart of Judas, way before Judas was ever born.

That is where we are in **Matthew 26**. Do you know that today you can still celebrate the Passover? You can have a rabbi prepare a seder meal for you and explain all the significance. I have done that one time at a church years ago and it was interesting. But we don't normally celebrate that holiday because it is a shell. It is hollow. It's a shadow of what was to come and what was to come was Jesus. And He changed everything. And here in **verse 26** – look at it – is where it all comes to a head. This is the defining moment, the crescendo, the dénouement. Jesus holds up the bread and wine and says, *“This is my body.”*

There's no point in celebrating the Passover. The Passover did its thing. But now it is obsolete. Like some electronics, it was planned to be obsolete. See, we're doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43) Do you think it was a coincidence that God told them to use the blood of a lamb to paint the door posts? Do you think it was a coincidence that when John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, *“Behold the Lamb!”*?

The good news is that the blood of this Lamb doesn't just cover over our sins. It dissolves them. It removes them completely and when we have a relationship with God through our faith in Jesus, then God the Father views us like He views Jesus. We are that clean! We are that special and even co-heirs with Jesus to all that Jesus has in Heaven for eternity.

(Romans 8:17)

Ooh! Here's some more good news. You may be thinking that you have done a lot of bad stuff in your life and you don't know if God can really forgive you. I hear you. I understand that thinking because in my mind, I have that same question. In fact, I'm not just a bad person. I am Judas. I'm worse than Judas! Judas betrayed Jesus once for 30 pieces of silver. I've betrayed my Savior many times just because it was convenient. I have done what He told me not to do and I haven't done what He told me I should do. I have neglected to say His name when it would have helped someone. I've blown the Ten

Commandments apart and lied about it. I've done way worse than stealing pumpkins and I bet you have too. I'm a bad person. And I'm guilty. I know it and God knows it.

That's bad news. I know I said I had good news but first the bad news. The bad news is that God said that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of my sin. (Heb. 9:22) He said that what I deserve for my sins is eternal death in Hell. (Romans 6:23) Now, for the good news I would normally go to **John 3:16** that says that God so loved Todd that He sent His Son to die in my place and all I have to do is believe it. But that's not where I'm going today.

I wish I had a band here to play a fanfare. I need a drum roll and some cymbals to crash. Maybe I can at least get an amen coming from someone in a place of victory today as I read **verse 28** again. Look at it where Jesus says, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* This is a new thing, a new covenant, a new promise. The old is gone. The new has come and so we don't celebrate the Passover. The Passover was a shadow of what was to come.

Music

Today we still celebrate but our celebration is different. We celebrate the sacrifice of the Perfect lamb who willingly gave up His life, His body and His blood. And all we have to do is believe. Let's do that right now.