

Matthew 26:17-29

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Date: 03 May 2020

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[0 : 00] Matthew 26 and verses 17 to 29. Do you know that Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, they all died later in life.

! Shameful death.

He was young. He had only three years of ministry under his belt. And yet Christians look up to the Lord Jesus and we say, yep, that is the man for me.

That is the guy that I am going to follow. And not only that, as Christians, we take the most embarrassing point of his life, the most shameful, the most embarrassing point of his life, the Christ. And we say that is going to be the centre of our faith. And what kind of sense does that make? Well, for the early church, those early Christians, it made perfect sense to them.

[1 : 13] And in our passage, I hope we're going to see why. There are three sections in our passage. There are three movements and there are bombshells in each one.

Let's look at the first one. It's in verses 17 to 19. Verses 17 to 19. The disciples asked Jesus, where are we going to celebrate the Passover?

And Jesus says, look, I've got it sorted. You go to a village. There's a guy there with a room. It's going to be organised. That's no problem. But do you notice in these first couple of verses, in verses 17 to 19, the word Passover is mentioned in every one of them.

Why is that? I hope you've seen as we've gone through Matthew's gospel that that is not a mistake. Matthew is a very careful writer. He's got a very tidy mind.

And Matthew repeats Passover in these three verses because he wants you and I to know that what is about to happen is all happening in the context of the Passover. Now, you might say, well, what is the Passover?

[2 : 18] The Passover feast, which Jesus and his disciples were about to partake, celebrates the Passover event of 1300 BC. The Jews, you read about it in Exodus, they were slaves in Egypt.

And God repeatedly told Pharaoh, the leader of the Egyptians, through Moses, let my people go. Pharaoh is warned nine times and various curses before the Egyptians.

And Pharaoh hardened his heart. He is unmoved. That is until the final curse. The final curse was the death of a firstborn son. The firstborn in every household was going to die.

Except Moses spoke to God's people and he said to them, You slaughter a lamb, you put the blood on the doorpost and on the lintel, and when death comes to the city, it will pass over your household.

Death will pass over a house where a death has already taken place. Do you see that? So a young Jewish boy, the firstborn in his family, let's call him Ben.

[3 : 25] Ben would wake up the next morning and he could say, I live because a lamb died. I live because a lamb died. He purchased me through his death.

He was my substitute. So let's think about that night. Ben, the eldest child in the household. That evening the family have finished dinner.

Homework is done and the children are sent up to bed. At nine o'clock there's the familiar patter on the stairs and a figure appears in the doorway of the lounge in his pyjamas.

And he says, Dad, have you done that stuff with the blood yet? His father says, no, I'll do it in a minute. You go upstairs and you get some sleep. It's a big day tomorrow. Ten o'clock, Dad is shutting down the laptop.

He's checked that the back door is shut. And again, the familiar footsteps on the stairs and the little figure appears. Dad, have you remembered? I'll do it in a minute.

[4 : 28] Get back upstairs. It's a big day tomorrow. Eleven o'clock. The small boy quietly opens his door. And he creeps down the stairs.

The house is dark. And he peers across the hallway to the front door. And there's blood. On the sides of the doorposts and on the little door.

And Ben goes back upstairs to bed and he sleeps safely. At midnight, the Lord struck down all the firstborn of the Egyptians. From the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the captives who were in the dungeon.

And all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh, we're told, rose up in the night. He and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt. For there was not a house where someone was not dead.

Then Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron by night. And he says, go out from among my people. Both you and the people of Israel. And go and serve the Lord as you've said.

[5 : 31] And Pharaoh elinquishes. He lets God's people go. We know, don't we, he changed his mind. He chases them. And God led the Israelites through the Red Sea.

Which closed over onto the Egyptian army. So that's it in a nutshell. And I hope we see that the Passover is more than just the Jews getting out of slavery.

That's a great thing, isn't it? But the Passover is about three things. The Passover, first of all, is about judgment. Secondly, it's about salvation. And thirdly, it's about victory.

It's about judgment. It's about salvation. And it's about victory. And let's look at judgment for a moment. The Jews in Egypt, their biggest problem was not Pharaoh.

Their biggest problem wasn't finding safety from Pharaoh. In the Exodus, it says that death is coming to the whole city. Their biggest problem was safety from God.

[6 : 33] Death was coming to the whole city. Judgment was coming to the whole city. Which meant that without a lamb, the fate of the Jews would have been absolutely no different to the Egyptians.

They would have lost their fierce born too. And so Passover is about judgment. But Passover is also about salvation. So we see in the Bible, from the start of the Bible to the end of the Bible, when God judges, he also saves simultaneously.

He protects his own people from his own judgment through the blood of a lamb. It's about judgment. And it's about salvation. And it's about victory. Because we know, don't we, that the Exodus story is the beginning of God's people's journey to the promised land.

So that is the historic event. And after the Passover, if you keep reading in Exodus, God gives them a meal. He gives them a rite.

He gives them a liturgy to remember what happens. And in the Old Testament, what we know, that one of the great sins of the people of God is forgetting.

[7 : 44] And God says, I don't want you to forget. I don't want you to forget what happened. So you keep doing it. And that is what the Passover meal is about. And so why does Matthew keep bringing up the Passover at the beginning of this little section?

Because everything that is about to happen is happening within the context of the Passover. And during that Passover meal, Jesus is going to say something offensive and something radical.

He's going to say that the salvation of God's people experienced in Egypt 1,300 years ago. And the meal that we're about to eat today is all about me.

It's all about me. That thing that's at the heart of the Jewish faith, the Exodus, Jesus is going to say that is all about me.

The lamb that you eat during that meal, that is me. And it's all pointing to my death and what my death will accomplish. And Jesus comes back to that in 26 to 30.

[8 : 51] So we see the bombshell of the Passover. But in the middle section, in verses 20 to 25, we see the bombshell of betrayal. So the disciples and Jesus have found the guide.

They've found the room. They've got the meal. And they're eating the meal. And they're in the middle of the Passover meal. And Christ drops the bombshell on them. Can you look at verse 21?

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? Which has got the sense, surely not I, Lord.

Jesus doubles down and he says, I like this line. He says, doesn't he, the one who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.

I expect that all the disciples sat on their hands at that point. Jesus drops this bombshell. What does he mean there? The dipping of the hand in the food business.

[9 : 55] He's just saying it's one of us. One of the people sharing this intimate meal with me right now is going to betray me. And it's interesting that just as Jesus says that, none of the disciples turn and look at Judas and say, come on, Judas.

Obviously, no one had any idea today. He has covered his tracks very, very well. Now we look at verse 24. 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'd not been born. There are two really huge things there, aren't there?

One, he's saying that the betrayal on the cross, that is the plan of God and nothing is going to stop that. And then on the other hand, he says, woe to the betrayer.

And so can you see what Jesus is saying there? He is saying that God is in complete control. God is absolutely sovereign. He is in total charge. Nothing is happening without him saying yes to it.

[11 : 17] This is part of the plan. But he's also saying to Judas, you are completely responsible for your actions. Judas was not a puppet of God. Now, how do we resolve these two things?

How do we mush them together so that they make sense? Sovereignty, God's sovereignty and human responsibility. And the Bible does not tell us how they work together.

It proclaims both strongly. It holds both these truths that God is sovereign and you and I are responsible.

And it holds that right the way throughout the Bible. So in Acts chapter 2, in the first sermon preached after the resurrection, Peter says in verse 23, Jesus is delivered according to the definite plan and the foreknowledge of God.

Crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. So the very first sermon after the resurrection raises this issue again. God is completely in charge and what you do matters.

[12 : 26] And you might have intellectual problems with this idea. But can I say that believing the Bible's teaching regarding this, holding both these truths firmly in our lives is incredibly practical.

Let's think about if you don't hold these truths. Two reasons. If you really believe that your actions can change the plan of God, if you really believe that, well, a couple of things happen.

One is that you have a very, very high view of yourself. And two, you would be constantly fretting and worrying. On the other hand, if you believe that what you do doesn't really matter at all because God is in control, it doesn't matter what you do, you will have no incentive to live well.

You will have no incentive to seek after God and live for him in your life. So verse 25, Judas answers. Do you see what he says?

He asks, is it I, Rabbi? And Jesus says to him, you have said so. Do you notice the difference between the other disciples and Jesus?

[13 : 42] What did the other disciples say? Verse 22, just look down, they say, is it I? And they call Jesus Lord. But in verse 25, Judas answered, is it I, Rabbi?

Which means teacher. Either something has happened in Judas' estimation of who Jesus is, or perhaps more likely Judas couldn't bring himself to call him Lord, knowing what he'd done.

John's Gospel gives us an extra little detail which is helpful. Jesus is the host of this meal, and he gets to choose who sits where, and he sits Judas in the place of honour.

Judas, in John's Gospel, is sitting right beside Jesus. Why has Jesus done that? Because he's giving Judas an opportunity to change.

He wants Judas to know, I know it's you, Judas. And it doesn't have to be this way, but Judas refuses to. Judas can feel the weight of those pieces of silver in his pocket.

[14 : 53] And he's having this conversation. He can feel the weight of that money he's betrayed Jesus for in his pocket, and it feels good. Surely you don't mean me, teacher.

Surely you don't mean me. It is such an ugly and cynical thing to say, because Judas thinks that he can fool Jesus. Judas thinks that he can fool Christ, which we think sometimes.

And so if you're watching this this morning, and you're doing churchy stuff, but you have concrete plans to disobey God today or this week, and you're here, and you're saying the right things, but you can feel the money in your pocket, and your plans are set, I need to remind you that you cannot bluff God.

You cannot bluff God. You cannot fool Jesus Christ. And so you need to repent.

You need to turn from your sin, and you need to hear the words of God, and you need to see yourself in Judas, and make a different decision. Charles Spurgeon said, a man may get very near to Christ, may dip his hand in the same dish with the Savior, and yet betray him.

[16:26] We may be high in office, and may apparently be very useful, as Judas was, and yet we may betray Christ. Heed the warning. The first section, it's all about the Passover.

The second section, it's all about this bombshell of betrayal, in verses 26 to 29. But in 26 to 29, the third section, we're back to the Passover. And the disciples are doing the meal.

There are words and actions, regarding the deliverance from Egypt. And here is what is amazing. That point of the meal, where Jesus should have pointed them back to Egypt, we see he again points them to himself.

And he says, my death is a central thing. Every deliverance in the Old Testament is pointing to me and my death. My death on the cross is going to be the exodus of all exoduses.

And in Christ, he creates a new meal for us, a new rite. And he gives us words by which we remember these.

[17:32] Jesus took bread and he broke it. What does that mean? It is pointing, isn't it, to that violent death that Christ will experience.

And he takes wine, a common cup of wine, and he says, this is my blood, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. So here, Jesus points to the meaning of his death.

He's going to die, but it's not going to be a violent, pointless death. Jesus' death is not the result of his enemies weaving and scheming and a plot that he could not escape from.

He would die because God willed it. And there was a purpose in his death. The death was for many, for forgiveness.

Now, do you notice what's missing on the table? Or in the narrative? That the main course of the Passover meal is not mentioned. For us, it's bread and wine.

[18:41] But for a reader who first read Matthew's Gospel, it's a shock. Sometimes Claire will go out for dinner with friends, and she'll come in, and I'll say, what did you have for dinner?

And she will sometimes say these remarkable words. What did you have for dinner? I had vegetarian risotto. At which point, I will say, that's not a dinner. That's not a dinner.

What did you have for dinner? Where's the main bit of the meal? Where's the meat? Where's the main bit of the meal? And that's what you should be thinking as you read this narrative.

Where's the main bit of the meal? Where's the main bit of the Passover? Why doesn't Jesus mention the Lamb? He doesn't mention the Lamb because He is the Lamb. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so remember what I said about the Passover. It's about three things, isn't it? The Passover is about judgment. The Passover is about salvation. And the Passover is about victory. So what is the cross about?

[19:49] Judgment comes to the city, but it passes over the house where the Lamb was slain. And death passes over the houses where a death has already occurred.

And that little firstborn little boy, Ben gets up in the morning, do you remember? And he says, I'm saved because the Lamb has died. And judgment comes to this world, but we say, I am saved because Jesus died.

He died in my place, and that is the basis for the new covenant. And so Christ interrupts the Passover meal. He changes the liturgy, and again He says, it's all about me.

There will be judgment, but it will fall on me. There will be salvation, but it will be for you. And there will be victory, verse 29.

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. And Jesus picks up this meal idea again, and He points to that day when He will come with all His holy angels, and He will defeat every evil.

[21:04] And what will it be like? It will be like a banquet. What will heaven be like? What will the new creation be like? It will be physical. Can you see it? I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it anew with you.

It's a picture, isn't it, of eternal joy and victory, of feasting, of abundance, of rich relational goodness. And that is what communion is all about. Do you notice that Jesus specifically speaks here about eating and drinking? It's a way of saying we get to appropriate what Jesus is going to do, what Jesus has done.

Let me explain that. He doesn't just break the bread and say, His body was broken, and then put it over there, and then you can go and look at it. It's going to get broken.

He doesn't just pour the wine and say, this kind of looks like blood, doesn't it, and I'm going to bleed. You look at it. No, He says, doesn't He, very clearly, eat and drink.

[22 : 17] Why does He say that? Because He wants us to take on the benefits of the cross into our lives. That is the picture.

And so communion is more than just remembering. It's not like when we remember a great holiday and we get the holiday snaps that we went on and we reminisce.

It's not like that. It is remembering what God has done and how He has provided and what has happened to us and for us and living in that and acting on that and taking that to ourselves and living in the light of that and internalizing it.

And so we are given this tangible meal. I want to finish with a scene from the Lord of the Rings. It's book five, chapter five, sorry, in book three and it's the final, the return of the king. And it looks terrible. Death seems absolutely certain.

[23 : 26] It looks really bad and Pippin, the little hobbit, is standing at the gate of the fortress and this huge demon king breaks through the gate and Pippin realizes he's going to die and he's staring death in the face and suddenly, what does he hear?

He hears the horns. He hears the horns and it's the riders of Rohan. It's the cavalry and he is gloriously and wonderfully saved.

And let me read to you what Tolkien says of this moment. He says, when the dark shadow at the gate withdrew, Gandalf still sat motionless.

But Pippin rose to his feet as if a great weight had been lifted from him and he stood listening to the horns and it seemed to him that they would break his heart with joy.

And never in after years could he hear a horn blown in the distance without tears starting in his eyes. the bread and the wine, it is our horn.

[24 : 44] It is this living memory. That is what the cross means, that we are free, that we are delivered, that we are forgiven, that judgment has taken place and we now know salvation and victory is ours and we will be with Christ forever and we will banquet him with him forever.

and we will be with Christ