

The Passover With The Disciples

Printed Text • Matthew 26:17–30

Devotional Reading • Zechariah 9:9-12

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will UNDERSTAND the last meal Jesus shared with His disciples in light of the Jewish Passover, AFFIRM the new meaning Jesus gave to the bread and cup, and REJOICE in the freedom that comes through faith in Christ.

In Focus

Brittany grieved the recent loss of her mother. She had been the neighborhood “Nice Old Christian Lady,” always inviting the kids to Sunday School and telling the teens to walk straight; she would be missed.

After the funeral Brittany had the role of taking care of her mother’s estate. While cleaning out her mother’s bedroom, she came across a Bible. She opened the Bible and found a beautiful cross, one her mother always wore on a beaded chain around her neck. The pain of seeing the cross was unbearable. She hid the Bible among the belongings in her basement.

One day a good friend invited Brittany to her church’s revival. The pastor talked about the resurrected life of Christ and how the Cross represents new life for the Christian believer. Brittany remembered her mother’s cross, but tried to see the Scriptures in the light of new Christian life, rather than through the lens of her own sorrow.

She began reading the Word of God and regularly attending Bible study. Her perspective of the Cross changed. The Cross no longer represented the memory of her mother’s death but the resurrecting power of Christ. What had represented fear and pain became a symbol of joy and liberation.

In today’s lesson we will examine how the Passover gives us freedom to rejoice. What Christian symbols remind you to rejoice?

Keep In Mind

“But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthew 26:29, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Betray (Matthew 26:21) paradidomi (Gk.) – To surrender, yield or give up

B. Remission (v. 28) aphesis (Gk.) – Freedom, pardon, forgiveness

Say It Correctly

Sedar. SAY-der

Sanhedrin. San-HEE-drin

Eucharist. YOU-kar-ist

Hallel. Hah-LELL

KJV

Matthew 26:17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

NLT

Matthew 26:17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?"

18 "As you go into the city," he told them, "you will see a certain man. Tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" 19 So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there.

20 When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table[a] with the Twelve.

21 While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

22 Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?"

23 He replied, "One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me.

24 For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!"

25 Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, "Rabbi, am I the one?"

And Jesus told him, "You have said it."

26 As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body."

27 And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it,

28 for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant[b] between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.

29 Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

30 Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

The People, Places, and Times

Son of Man. A reference to a prophecy from Daniel (Daniel 7:13), “Son of Man” is a Messianic title Jesus used to express His heavenly origin, earthly mission, and glorious future coming. Jesus uses the term to refer to Himself throughout the Gospels about 80 times. As the Son of Man, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:69), and will return to earth from heaven in the glory of His Father with the angels (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26). Jesus’ coming will restore righteousness in the world (Matthew 19:28; 25:46). In these passages Jesus’ focus shifts from the provisional victory, passion, and resurrection to the final victory of the Son of Man at His second coming (Acts 17:31).

Judas. Surnamed Iscariot after his city of origin, Judas was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus during His public ministry. Judas managed the treasury of the group (John 13:29), from which he was known to pilfer money (John 12:4). As a betrayer, Judas contracted to turn Jesus over to the chief priests for 30 pieces of silver. He accomplished this act of treachery by singling out Jesus with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:14–47; Mark 14:10–46; Luke 22:3–48; John 18:2–5).

What do your nicknames say about you? Are they like “Iscariot,” looking back to your origin, or like “Son of Man” looking forward to your purpose?

Background

The Passover held supreme theological and historical significance for the Israelites. The Passover represented one of the most significant acts of divine involvement and commenced their liberation from Egyptian oppression. The primary reason for removing all leaven from bread was paralleled to the fundamental practice of draining blood from animal flesh; the underlying belief is both leaven and blood had life-giving power. The first and seventh days of this period were marked by a holy assembly during which the only work permitted was the preparation of food (Exodus 12:16). By the New Testament times the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were well-attended celebrations, as all practicing male Jews were supposed to gather at Jerusalem during this festival. The week was known as the “days of unleavened bread” (Luke 22:1; Acts 12:3).

What symbols are metaphors of life today? Blood? Yeast? Seeds?

At-A-Glance

1. The Preparation (Matthew 26:17–19)
2. The Betrayer (vv. 20–25)
3. The Partaking (vv. 26–27)
4. The Promise (vv. 28–30)

In Depth

1. The Preparation (Matthew 26:17–19)

According to biblical scholars, the disciples who were sent to make provisions for the Passover meal were Peter and John (Luke 22:8). The disciples prepared the Passover according to Moses’ ancient instructions (Exodus 12:1–20). The Passover lambs were to be killed on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan. The festival itself began with the ritual meal on the evening of the 15th of Nisan. The Festival

of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th and continues for seven days, during which no leaven should be found in the house.

Purchasing and preparing the food probably took the greater part of the day. Preparation for the Passover involved locating an appropriate place within the city walls of Jerusalem. The room had to be cleaned of all items containing leaven to include removing bread as well as bread crumbs. The lambs had to be ritually slaughtered by the priest in the Temple, then roasted and prepared with the additional items for the meal.

How do we prepare ourselves and our spaces for worship and remembrance?

2. The Betrayer (vv. 20–25)

When evening came, Jesus entered the prayer room (Luke 22:12) and partook of the Passover supper with the 12 disciples. Jesus takes the opportunity to state that someone within His inner circle (who had even eaten out of the same bowl as He did) would betray Him. Astonishingly no disciple pointed to another with an accusing finger, but each became very sad and asked if he would be the betrayer. Jesus mentioned that He would die just as it had been written by the prophets (Isaiah 53:4–8; Matthew 26:24, 56).

Jesus' interaction with Judas also lets us know God is not surprised by the betrayal that leads to the crucifixion. God's divine plan, expressed throughout the Scriptures, tells us that salvation would come to humankind through the shed blood of His beloved Son.

Do verses 22 and 25 signify that Judas truly did not believe his actions—accepting money to bring the priests to Jesus when He would be alone and pointing Him out for them—constituted betrayal?

3. The Partaking (vv. 26–27)

The taking of bread and drinking of the cup occurred during the course of the meal and not as a separate ceremony. This is the way the earliest Church celebrated the Lord's Supper until excesses at the common meal required the meal and the Eucharist (meaning service of thanksgiving) be separated (1 Corinthians 11:20–21). Today this sacrament is only a metaphorical supper, with just the bread and the cup. The bread symbolizes Jesus' total self which is given for humankind. The cup represents the life of Jesus, which is offered up to seal the New Covenant.

The Eucharist meal highlights the life of Jesus Christ and reveals His openness and acceptance of all people. The meal represents Jesus Christ, as a gift to all, unconstrained and undeserved. This meal exemplifies the love and selflessness of Jesus, the Holy One, who gave His life for the redemption of sin. The meal emphasizes the unspeakable joy Christians will experience during the Messianic banquet when God's Kingdom is finally revealed.

4. The Promise (vv. 28–30)

Jesus instituted a new meaning for the Eucharist by stating the cup of wine was His blood of the New Covenant and the bread was His body. This was done in keeping with the remission of sins promised in the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–37; 32:37–40; Ezekiel 34:25–31; 36:26–28), a covenant that would replace the old Mosaic Covenant. Jesus' blood would be shed for sinners for the forgiveness of sins.

This ritual of the Passover Supper has been followed by Christians and is called the Lord's Supper or Communion. Jesus committed this ordinance to the Church to be followed as a continual reminder of His work in their salvation. It is to be remembered until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Celebrating the Eucharist had great importance for Jesus and the early Christian community. It represents a foretaste of the full fellowship to be experienced when the Kingdom of God has come and all God's people are gathered into one.

What reason for joy in the Eucharist does Jesus describe?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did the disciples respond to Jesus' statement, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me" (vv. 21–22)?
2. What warning did Jesus give His betrayer (v. 24)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. After reading this lesson, how can Communion give us cause for celebration?
2. What are the important things we need to remember?
3. Can we celebrate when we remember the cup represented Jesus' innocent spilled blood and the bread symbolized his beaten, battered, bruised, and crucified body?
4. Is it possible to celebrate when we know God paid the ultimate sacrifice not for Himself but for our sake?

Liberating Lesson

Some Christian holidays are overly commercialized and have lost their spiritual importance. We go into debt and forget the true meaning of the season. In some Christian circles the ritual of taking communion has become underrated and has lost its spiritual significance. Some just go through the motions of drinking from the cup and taking the bread and forget what it really means spiritually. The ability to experience liberating power to deal with life's issues comes from Jesus Christ. And we must never forget this freedom comes with a hefty price, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Application for Activation

Many of us live in abundance. However, there are many people around us who have nothing to eat and no place to live. The Passover supper was not just drinking from the cup and breaking of bread; it was a time of fellowship. How many opportunities have we neglected to break bread and enjoy fellowship with those less fortunate than we are? Jesus was cordial and giving. He shared all that He had with others. Pray for God's guidance, wisdom, and opportunity. The next time you have a family dinner or get-together consider those around you in want. Commit to inviting someone from your church, work, or neighborhood to join you.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 26:17–30

17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?

18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

19 And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

The exact location of Jesus' final Passover celebration is not designated in any of the Gospels; however, they do all agree it took place in Jerusalem (Matthew 26:1), more than likely in the home of one of Jesus' disciples; a follower of Christ, who not only freely opened his home, but also had knowledge of Jesus' messianic claims.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is celebrated for an entire week and begins with a solemn assembly and day of rest. The evening meal on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened bread will be the Passover Sedar during which a lamb is slaughtered, roasted, and eaten completely in each household. After the Passover Sedar meal is observed, the Feast lasts six more days and involves eating bread only if it has been prepared with no leavening. Afterward, they hold another solemn assembly and observe another day of rest (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23; Numbers 28). These days of rest are not necessarily Sabbaths, though they might overlap some years. The Passover is celebrated on the 10th day of the Jewish month Nisan, no matter what day of the week the 10th lands on.

In Jesus' day, it was actually an honor for a renowned rabbi like Jesus to invite Himself over to someone's house for dinner. Jesus honored Zaccheaus in this way, and could expect hospitality in Jerusalem as well. This feast is one of the Pilgrimage Feasts, which means every Jewish male who was able was supposed to try to celebrate it in Jerusalem. Many people living in Jerusalem were likely used to sharing space with travelers for this feast.

20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

“Verily,” translated from the Hebraic expression amen (Gk. amen, ah-MAIN) means “truly” and is a word that Jesus often uses to emphasize His words. He will use the word again, at this same meal, to insist that Peter will indeed deny Him. Jesus used it notably in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16). Matthew records Jesus introducing His teachings with “verily” at least 30 times. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus as often saying, “Verily,” John records His sayings as starting with “Verily, verily.” Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We can trust that His word is always true, and should strive to follow His example in our own words.

The word “betray” gives the picture of handing over someone or something. It can be used in a good way, as Jesus Himself does in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:20, 22), where it is translated as “deliver.” However, when someone is handed over to their enemies, it is an act of betrayal.

Matthew has recorded three previous times Jesus told His disciples He would be betrayed. Each time Jesus reveals more information. First He simply says He’ll be betrayed (Matthew 17:22), then He gives more details of the harsh treatment He will endure from His betrayal (20:18–19). Finally, He reveals it will occur that very Passover (26:2). Now He gives one more clue to narrow down this looming prophecy: one of them will betray Him.

The entire idea of Jesus being betrayed is alien to the faithful disciples. They cannot imagine how or why it would be done, so they have no idea which one of them would do it. Each one wonders if maybe he will be the one to somehow betray Jesus. The faithful disciples might have thought that they would accidentally betray Him. Each of the Twelve asks, “It isn’t me, is it?” Each one calls Jesus “Lord.” Not a single one of them jumps to conclusions and asks if it is another disciple, but each questions himself.

23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

Jesus answers all 12 men by saying that the betrayer is one who has already begun eating with them. The tense of the participle “dippeth” in Greek indicates this action has already taken place. No doubt each disciple tried to recall the evening in great detail, wondering if their hand had been in the communal dish at the same time as Jesus’ that night. This hint about Jesus’ betrayal does not add any new information as the other hints had. Jesus had said one of them there that night would be the betrayer, and now only adds that they are eating the meal with Him. Betrayal at this point would certainly add insult to injury. Being false to someone with whom you had shared a meal was severely taboo in Jewish society.

24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

Later that night, Jesus would call Himself the “Son of Man” before the Sanhedrin. This is a reference to the prophet’s vision in Daniel 7 in which “one like the son of man” appears bearing heavenly news. This messenger has divine attributes and is understood to be a reference to God. The Sanhedrin certainly takes it this way, as Jesus continues to identify Himself as the Son of Man, which the Jewish leaders of the Sanhedrin take as blasphemy. Interestingly, the phrase “son of man” in Aramaic was used to mean “anybody.” Thus Jesus retained what is called the “messianic secret”; He does claim to be the Messiah, but He does so in such a way as to allow for ambiguity and doubt.

Jesus pronounces woe upon His betrayer. From Judas' point of view, it would have been better if he had not been born, rather than suffer the agony of crime, guilt, and condemnation that he did after he betrayed Jesus. From an eternal point of view, some poor soul was going to have to be the one to betray Jesus. Still, even though Jesus had to die to work out our salvation as had been planned since before time began, those who killed Him are responsible for their evil actions.

25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

Some believe Judas did not see himself as a betrayer. Rather, he might have thought he was forcing Jesus' hand to show His divine powers to all so that they would follow Him. Many awaited a messiah to overthrow the Roman government oppressing the Jews. Judas could have been planning to hand Jesus over to the Romans in hopes that He would raise up against their tyranny. Today, too, we often make excuses for our sinful behavior, convincing ourselves that what we are doing does not really betray our God whom we have sworn to as our Master. By God's grace, we can see ourselves in the light of all truth, as God Himself sees us. He will show us if our actions truly are sinful, but He will also show us our innate worth as His children.

Matthew first mentions Judas in his initial list of Jesus' 12 disciples (Matthew 10:4), and he does not reappear until this chapter when he makes his deal with the high priests (26:14). Similarly, in the other Gospels, Judas is named in the list of the Twelve and does nothing of note during Jesus' ministry until he agrees to betray his master (Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16; John 6:71). The only exception is John, who also mentions that Judas is the disciple who objects to Jesus' feet being anointed at Bethany (John 12:4). Each Gospel writer says that Judas will betray Jesus from their very first mention of him. No Gospel writer tries to keep their audience in suspense.

Some understand Judas' address of Jesus as "Master" to carry great significance. While the other disciples just called Him "Lord" (v. 22; Gk. kurios), Judas instead here calls Him "Master" (Gk. rabbi). The only other time Matthew uses the title Rabbi is in recording Jesus' admonishment that His disciples not desire to be called Rabbi (which is related to the Hebrew word for "great one"), and claiming the title solely for Himself (Matthew 23:7-8). In John, "Rabbi" is the common way His disciples address Him. "Master" is likewise common throughout Matthew and the other Gospels.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

The bread eaten at this meal had to be prepared without yeast. This was to remember how when the Israelites left Egypt, they did so in such a hurry that they did not have time to wait for the bread to rise, but baked it without the leavening agent of yeast. Such unleavened bread was called the "bread of affliction" because it reminded them of their time as slaves in Egypt (Deuteronomy 16:3). As the Jews celebrated this feast year after year, yeast began to be a symbol for sin, as every bit of yeast was to be removed from the house before observing the holy celebration of Passover and the entire weeklong Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus reinforces this understanding with His warning against the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:6). In establishing a new covenant with His followers, Jesus identifies Himself with the unleavened bread, revealing Himself to be the sinless sacrifice for our sin.

The communal cup of wine that Jesus presents to His disciples is re-imagined not just as the normal beverage for a meal, but as a new covenant between God and His people. Jesus calls it a “new testament,” translated with a word meaning “covenant,” which is now only used in the phrase “last will and testament.” This new promise between them is made with Jesus’ blood to remit our sin. Without blood to symbolize the death of the sinful self, there is no way to atone for sin (Hebrews 9:22).

This meal is a reminder of the fulfillment of Christ’s work in the kingdom of God. As we anticipate the joy of participating in God’s heavenly banquet, we can remember Christ’s life and the sacrifice He made for us. Every Eucharist is an assurance of the ultimate victory of God’s Kingdom. The Eucharist represents a prophetic celebration of indisputable triumph.

Each participant who partakes of the Eucharist is invited to self-examination. As we read these Scriptures and examine the actions of Judas and the 12 disciples, we must also examine our own actions. We can ask God to take inventory of our own hearts. We can ask for forgiveness and know we have assurance of His divine grace and mercy.

The meal reminds us of the heavenly realm where the risen and exalted King is enthroned. The symbols of the body and blood of Jesus give us a glimpse of the unparalleled dominion of God. When we share in the taking of the Lord’s Supper we know this ritual is celebrated beyond our own church; others are sharing along with us in our neighborhood, city, state, country, and around the world. It is a meal taken by a community of believers. The Eucharist is our testimony that reaches beyond the dimensions of our faith. It is a testimony to others, to those who know Christ and to those who have not yet been introduced to Him.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.

Jesus promised His disciples He would not eat this meal again with them until the institution of His Father’s kingdom on earth. He drinks with them after the Resurrection. God’s Kingdom is inaugurated in the Resurrection, even though its coming has not yet been fully consummated.

30 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

After the Passover meal, Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn, then left the disciple’s home and went to the Mount of Olives. It was Jewish tradition then, and still is today, to sing the Hallel psalms (Psalms 113–118) during the Passover. These songs remember the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt and praise God joyously.

Mount of Olives was in an area east of Jerusalem, just on the next hill over. It is still producing olives to this day. Most recently, Matthew had mentioned the Mount of Olives as the location where the disciples asked Jesus to tell them more about the end times (Matthew 24); this teaching is even called the Olivet discourse. Luke records that one night in the last week of His life, Jesus avoided the large crowds of the Jerusalem Temple and slept the night in the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37). He also records that it is the place where Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:12). Knowing He will soon be arrested, Jesus chooses to go to this peaceful area and pray.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God Is Gracious, Righteous, and Merciful
(Psalm 116:1-15)

TUESDAY

Keep the Festival Where God Chooses
Deuteronomy 16:1-8, 15-17)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Anointed and Betrayed
(Matthew 26:1-2, 6-16)

THURSDAY

Jesus Institutes the Lord's Supper
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

FRIDAY

Love One Another
(John 13:31-35)

SATURDAY

God's Steadfast Love Endures Forever
(Psalm 118:1-9)

SUNDAY

Jesus Shares Passover with His Disciples
(Matthew 26:17-30)