

STUDY 2 – MATTHEW 26:17-29

In the first study we saw the plotting of Jesus' death by the chief priests and Judas and we were left on a cliff hanger with Judas seeking an opportunity to betray Jesus (verse 16). However we also saw that Jesus is completely in control.

Now we move into a moving account of Jesus last supper with his disciples. Unlike other gospel writers (notably John) Matthew's account of this meal is brief, but the important points are stressed – the announcement to the disciples that one of them will betray Jesus, and the institution of the Lord's Supper.

VS 17-19

In verses 17-19 we see the preparations that were made for Jesus to eat the Passover meal with his disciples. Matthew's account of these preparations is brief, we get more detail in Mark's account (14:12-17) and in Luke (22:7-14). Jesus has previously made arrangements with a "certain man" (verse 18) and sends disciples (Peter and John) to meet a man carrying a jar of water who will take them to the house. The disciples arrive at the house and prepare the meal – and later on Jesus came to them and began the meal.

What is the point of these elaborate preparations? It seems that Jesus wants to eat in secret – a wise thing considering the rising hostility. He is going to his death, but wants this time with his disciples, and also with Judas (a final offer of mercy?).

What preparations has Jesus made for this Passover meal with his disciples (see also Mark 14:12-17 and Luke 22:7-14)?

Why do you think he has made these elaborate preparations?

Vs 20-25

During this meal Jesus makes another prediction of his coming death, but one which affects the disciples personally. Jesus has already spoken about the fact he will be "betrayed" and "handed over", but now he makes the point explicitly that it will be done by one of the twelve – "you", one of his closest companions. The fact that they are sharing this meal together makes the statement Jesus makes even more shocking – this scene of intimacy and love is in stark contrast to what Jesus says.

Although as readers we know who Jesus is talking about (remember verses 14-16), the disciples do not. 11 of the disciples react with real sorrow – they cannot believe any of them would do such a thing (Judas was not an obvious villain), and they are distressed that it may be them ("is it I?" – although the way the question is expressed implies that they expect the answer to be "no").

Jesus does not leave them in suspense though. He makes clear who it is. Jesus and Judas are sharing a bowl which is part of the preliminary dish in a Passover meal (a bowl which would include herbs, and a sauce). Jesus quotes from Psalm 41:9 to make his point about Judas, again underlining the extent of the betrayal .

Jesus then goes on to make clear once again that although the betrayal is great, Judas is not in control. Jesus is going in fulfilment of God's word. But we should not misunderstand this. Judas was doing what he wanted to do – he remained responsible for what he was about to.

Notice that Judas asks the same question as the rest of the disciples in verse 25. However the difference was that he knew the answer. His shock would have been different to the rest of the disciples – they were shocked that betrayal should happen at all. He would have been shocked that Jesus knew.

We mustn't miss the fact that this painful exchange was a great act of love by Jesus to his disciples, and to Judas in particular. Verse 24 is a warning as well as a threat. This was Judas' last opportunity to stop what he was about to do. Jesus made sure he had that opportunity, and that he very clearly knew the consequences.

The scene in verse 21 is one of wonderful intimacy between Jesus and his disciples. How does that contrast with what Jesus says next?

What are the disciple's reactions to what Jesus says?

How does Jesus clarify what he has just said?

Why do you think Jesus says these things to Judas?

With these verses in mind (particularly verse 24) how would you respond to these opinions about Judas

- *He didn't really know what he was doing.*
- *He didn't have a choice in what he was doing.*

Vs 26-29

During the meal Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper.

One thing to notice is that Jesus and his disciples are actually eating the Passover meal a day early. It would be on the Friday evening that Jews would gather for the Passover meal. It was strictly incorrect to celebrate the Passover outside the official time. Jesus is deliberately hosting a meal for his disciples to anticipate what is about to happen. Some writers use this discrepancy of timing to downplay the links between Passover and the Lord's Supper. However it enhances the connection. Jesus wants his disciples to look forward to what he is about to do (at the cross on the Passover – see verse 1), rather than back to what has been done (at the Passover in Egypt). This link becomes stronger when we realise that there would have not been a Passover lamb for Jesus and his disciples to eat at this meal as they had to be slaughtered in the temple on the official date. Where then is the sacrifice? Jesus himself will be the sacrifice.

In verse 26 we see Jesus taking bread, giving thanks to God (the ESV says "blessing it", but a better translation would be "having said the blessing" – not doing something magical to the bread, but giving thanks to God), breaking it and giving it to his disciples. The bread was the unleavened bread used in the Passover meal. The emphasis in this verse is not in the blessing but the giving. The words Jesus uses underline this. There is simply no way these Jewish disciples could have ever understood

that the bread Jesus gave them somehow became Jesus' physical body. The phrase "this is my body" must be understood in the context of the Passover meal itself –

"As the bread has just been broken, so will Jesus body be broken; and just as the people of Israel associated their deliverance from Egypt with eating the paschal meal prescribed as a divine ordinance, so also Messiah's people are to associate Jesus' redemptive death with eating this bread by Jesus' authority" D.A Carson

In verses 27 and 28 he takes the wine and again gives thanks and passes it to his disciples to drink stating that it is "the blood of the covenant". Again, it is inconceivable that the disciples would have ever thought it actually became blood – rather that Jesus is saying that his violent death will be the only way God and his people can be in a covenant relationship. His blood will be poured out for "many" (note the wide scope of what he is about to do), and the result will be "the forgiveness of sins". There are many Old Testament allusions in what Jesus says and does here – not least in Exodus 24 when the covenant is confirmed at Mount Sinai, and Jeremiah 31 which points forward to the new covenant.

Although the Lords Supper looks to the cross, it also looks beyond the cross to the return of Christ and the consummated kingdom. In verse 29 there is a great promise that there is coming a day when Jesus and all his disciples will eat and drink together again.

Why is it important to remember that this is the Passover meal that Jesus and his disciples are eating together?

What is Jesus saying when he says to the disciples "Take, eat, this is my body"?

What is significant about the fact that Jesus' blood is "the blood of the covenant?" What does it achieve?

How does the Lords Supper look forward beyond the cross? (verse 29)