

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 26 (PART 2)

Matthew 26:17-19 - Preparation For Passover

“Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the age-old Passover meal, eaten on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The whole festival was also termed ‘the Passover’. The Passover meal reflected the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, the land that had become associated forever in their minds with cruel bondage.

Exodus 12 tells the story of this meal. On a certain date (14 Nisan) each Israelite household was to slaughter a lamb, put some of its blood on the doorframes of their houses, and eat the meat. That same night the LORD went through Egypt killing the firstborn of people and animals, except where he saw the blood; these households he ‘passed over’. The meal, celebrated annually thereafter, presaged the deliverance of the whole people from bondage and death.

And so Jesus sent his followers to prepare the meal for this Passover that would eclipse all Passovers. The preparations would take them much of that Thursday. The lamb had to be secured and ritually killed. The room had to be prepared. Yeast had to be scrupulously excluded (partly as a reminder of the haste with which they left Egypt, with no time even to put yeast into their bread—it cooked much more quickly without; and partly because yeast had become a symbol of evil, and all evil needed to be swept away before that sacred meal of Passover). Bitter herbs had to be prepared, in memory of the bitter bondage endured in Egypt by their ancestors. Salt water was part of the ritual too, a memory both of salt tears shed in the days of slavery and of the salt of the Red Sea through which they passed. A paste made of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts reminded them of the clay of Egypt which they had been forced to turn into bricks for their masters, and sticks of cinnamon in the paste stood for the straw which helped to make the bricks. All this had to be prepared, along with four cups of wine which were passed round at the feast to recall the four promises of Exodus 6:6–7: ‘I will bring you out ... I will free you ... I will redeem you ... I will take you for my own people, and I will be your God.’

It was at this special commemoration that Jesus decided to institute his meal which spoke of a deliverance far greater than from Egypt. (Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven, The Bible Speaks Today*, pages 271–273)

Matthew 26:20-25 - Identifying Betrayer

Jesus knew that one of his disciples would betray him into the hands of the governing authorities. And yet he shares the passover meal with Judas, and even (according to John

13), washes his feet. In addition to those acts of relational closeness, Jesus says that “he who dipped his hand with me in the bowl is the one who will betray me (v. 23).”

This is an image of friendship and companionship. In fact, the latin foundation of the word “companion” is from the idea of sharing (*com*) bread (*panis*).

The disciples seem to be confused and vocal in their declaration that they aren’t the one! Even Judas joins in with this in an intimate moment that Matthew records (v. 25). But Jesus knows what Judas knows and answers back “you have said it yourself”, an expression that puts the responsibility back on the other person.

Judas’ conscience surely is on fire at this moment. He is being loved and honored by Jesus personally and publicly. But this love will not turn Judas’ heart or intent. You have to imagine each word and moment must challenge and press him. He isn’t even able to use the word “Lord” as the other disciples did (v. 22), but instead calls Jesus “Rabbi” (v. 25).

Matthew 26:26-29 - The Lord’s Supper

Jesus uses the backdrop of the Passover meal to ascribe new covenant significance to the bread and wine. No longer simply a reminder of the sacrifice required to free Israel from Egyptian slavery, but a reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus to free humanity from sin and death. No longer simply a commemoration of the redemption of Exodus, but commemoration of the redeeming work of the cross.

Throughout Scripture we learn that symbols are important and that physical things can be spiritual things. Because Yahweh is the creator and his creation was good, the things he made are good too. Greek and Gnostic thought separated physical and spiritual into two categories - with physical things being bad, and spiritual things being good. Biblical thought has no such division and as a result, God uses physical things to help us understand spiritual realities. Disciples are fully submerged into water and brought up again, symbolic of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Altars and Ebenezers were constructed to memorialize covenants and encounters with God. Candles were lit, incense was burned. And bread and wine are consumed to symbolize and memorialize the body and blood of Jesus.

Beyond that, because our God is a creator of physical things, in the eternal state, Scripture teaches that physical bodies will be resurrected (as opposed to simply a person’s “spirit”) and the creation will be restored (as opposed to the end goal being an aetherial existence alone).

Matthew 26:30 - Singing A Hymn

We probably can't imagine where the minds of the disciples are at this point. They are sad, confused, numb, afraid? But what about Jesus? Where is his mind? We will think about this more in the next section, but Matthew 26:30, a short and easy to read-over verse actually may tell us a lot about the mindset of our Lord this pivotal night.

We don't know precisely which "hymn" the disciples sung, but we do have some clues. There is a collection of Psalms called the Hallel (meaning praise) which the Jewish people sang during the holiest of days, especially passover. They are found in Psalm 113-118 and they are rich with praise and specific references to the Exodus deliverance.

The ancient rabbis gave guidance to how the Passover seder should progress with a liturgy that outlined when to drink which cup, when to tell the story of the Exodus, and when to sing the Hallel Psalms. Most believe the first section (113-115) was sung at the beginning of the meal and the second half at the conclusion (116-118).

So, it make sense that Matthew (and Mark) notes that the disciples ended the meal by singing a hymn and then "they went out to the Mount of Olives" (v. 30).

And with this in mind, we get to consider the thoughts of our Lord in this moment. He is walking toward the Mount of Olives, where he will pray and then be arrested and begin his sacrificial suffering - and we discover the final portion of scripture he will fully recite and sing before the cross. What's on his mind at this hour? Let's read the final Hallel Psalm, Psalm 118.

Psalm 118:1-29

Jesus kept his mind on the word, promises and character of God. Through Psalm 118 he is mindful not only of some words specifically to be fulfilled in this moment, but also words which will give him hope and confidence to face death by crucifixion for the sins of all people.

Jesus doesn't just know Psalm 118, he sings it on the way to the cross. There are so many parts of this Psalm which would have encouraged and empowered Jesus in this moment. And how meaningful it is to consider that his lips would have concluded this psalm with the personal praise to his Father in the final verses:

*"You are my God, and I will give you thanks. You are my God and I extol you.
Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, his loving kindness is everlasting"* (v. 28-29).

Christ heads to the cross with his eyes on the one who he loves and who loves him. The Father's loving kindness had not, nor would fail His beloved son. And because of this love, we too can be called the children of God.