

Matthew 26C

- In the New Testament church, Jesus commanded two rituals or ordinances for His church to observe on a regular basis
 - The first ordinance commanded for every believer is water baptism, which should take place soon after we come to faith in Jesus
 - And the second ordinance we observe regularly is the Last Supper or Communion meal
 - Believers perform this ritual periodically to remember the meal that took place on the night before Jesus was nailed to a cross
 - That's where we are now in the timeline of Jesus' final week on earth, the evening of Passover, the 14th of Nisan
 - On that year the 14th of Nisan began on a Wednesday night, as the entire city of Jerusalem sat down to share the Passover meal together
 - As evening fell, Jesus' disciples asked where they will eat their Passover that evening, and Jesus told them to find a certain man
 - This man would lead them to his home where he had prepared a meal in his upper room for no one in particular
 - In that upstairs room Jesus and His men celebrated the Passover, as Jesus says in v.18, and that's the meal we're about to study
 - But in the process, Jesus instituted something new and different better known as the Last Supper
 - Every Christian since that day has observed a version of this same meal
 - So this meal has united every generation of believers since the first until today
 - But what does this meal mean and why do we still repeat it today?
 - That's what we want to understand as we study it over the next couple of weeks
 - And next week we will celebrate communion together, and that will give us an opportunity to apply what we learn

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- So we begin our study looking at the historical circumstances surrounding that meal and for the third time, Matthew's scene opens with a focus on Judas

[Matt. 26:20](#) Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.

[Matt. 26:21](#) As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me."

[Matt. 26:22](#) Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?"

[Matt. 26:23](#) And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.

[Matt. 26:24](#) "The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."

[Matt. 26:25](#) And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself."

- Evening has come, which means the Passover has started, and Jesus and his disciples are now reclining at a table somewhere in the city of Jerusalem
 - At a point in the meal, Jesus announces that one of His twelve will betray Him to the authorities
 - His men look around the table at one another aghast at the suggestion that one of them could do such a thing
 - Interestingly, no one seems to suspect Judas, yet we know he was a thief and an unbeliever
 - After each man issues his denials, Jesus says He will reveal the identity of His betrayer in a unique way
 - Jesus says the one who dips his hand in the same bowl as Jesus is His betrayer
 - Jesus' comment reveals something about Judas and something about the meal
 - First, the fact that Judas' hand could reach into Jesus' bowl tells us something about the heart of Judas
 - A Passover meal was a carefully scripted event in which everything done happens in a certain order

- In fact a Passover meal is commonly called a “seder” meal and the word seder means “order”
- Even the seating followed a certain order around a rectangular table laying low on the ground
 - Traditionally, the Passover table was arranged so that the most honored person sat at one end of the table
 - Jesus being the most honored sat at one end of the table and the rest were seated according to honor from highest to lowest
 - The one seated immediately to the left of Jesus would have been the disciple of greatest honor and it moved around clockwise
 - So the one seated on Jesus’ immediate right hand would be the disciple of least honor
- To preserve the dignity of the lowest ranking person, a special Passover rule required the youngest at the meal to sit to the right of the host
 - In this way the person seated there could rightly say they were required to sit there without regard to honor
 - And we know from John’s Gospel that John himself sat in this seat, so he was the youngest disciple
 - This may have explained why John supposedly lived the longest of the twelve apostles
- Interestingly, seated on the other side of John was Peter, which means Peter uncharacteristically assumed a place of humility on that night
 - Of all the seats available to him, Peter chose to sit in the place of least honor
 - So we know Jesus was at the head of the table, John was at Jesus’ right hand, and Peter was next to John
- So which disciple chose to seat himself on Jesus’ left hand, in the place of greatest honor among the disciples?
 - Jesus’ comment in v.23 gives us that answer, and the answer may surprise you
 - Jesus says the one dipping bread in His bowl is His betrayer

- And only the seats immediately to the left and right of Jesus were close enough to reach into Jesus' bowl
- Since we know John wasn't Jesus' betrayer, that only leaves the person seated in the place of highest honor
 - So Judas placed himself in the seat of greatest honor on that night
 - Can you imagine the nerve of this guy? He's about to betray Jesus and yet he takes the place of honor at the table
 - This tells us even more about the heart of this man...his shamelessness, his arrogance, and his self-deception
 - This man was not merely some wayward prodigal-son disciple or a misguided believer tripped up by greed
 - This man was a calculating enemy of God who somehow believed himself to be the most honored of Jesus' disciples
 - Judas had never been physically closer to his Creator than he was on that night and yet never had he been so far spiritually
- This reminds us that sometimes we can be in the company of those who mimic Christian culture but aren't truly born again
 - Judas' 3 years with Jesus is proof that association with other believers isn't enough by itself to bring saving faith
 - They participate in the gathering and sit under teaching, but the truth never penetrates their hearts
 - They aren't believers, but even they don't realize what they lack because until you're born again, you don't know the difference
 - Unbelievers aren't necessarily present in every gathering, but if one of the twelve could be an imposter, we should expect a few around us too
 - But this isn't a problem we solve through witch hunts or by asking people to show their "Christian" card at the door
 - The way to find a Judas among us is to simply do the same thing we've always done...preach the word
 - As we proclaim the Gospel and teach the Bible consistently, any unbelievers in our midst will show themselves in one of two ways

- Either they will be driven to their knees in repentance from the conviction of the word and the kindness of God's grace
- They will become Christians, and that is the solution we hope for since we were all once in their shoes
- Or they will be driven out the door in disgust over what they hear... because you can't sit still under the conviction of God's word
 - If your heart isn't submitted to the authority of God's word, then you will chafe and ultimately rebel under its demands
 - There is simply no standing still when the word of God is preached with authority
 - In Judas' case, Jesus' teaching eventually provoked his unbelieving heart to rebel and betray his brothers and his Lord
- While seeing unbelievers bolting out our door is not our first choice, it's better than having them sit still in our midst indefinitely
 - Because if an unbeliever can feel comfortable in our company without a changed heart, then we're doing something wrong
 - We've left behind the message of the Gospel and the power of the word of God, and we're failing at our mission
- So Jesus' method of revealing Judas showed us his prideful, arrogant heart, and it also reveals something about the timing of this meal
 - As I said, the Passover meal closely follows a script, so we can know where we are in the meal by noting the events taking place
 - But to appreciate that timing, we need to know the script for Passover, called a *haggadah* which means a "telling"
 - Here's a simple summary of the steps in a Passover seder meal
 - The meal is arranged around three activities: drinking wine, eating various food items and reciting liturgy
 - These three activities are spread out over the course of the meal in the following order:
 - ▶ 1st cup of wine, washing, vegetables eaten, a third of the bread is broken & hidden

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- ▶ 2nd cup of wine, washing, prayer, bread and bitter herbs eaten
- ▶ The roasted lamb is eaten, then the hidden bread is “found” and eaten as dessert
- ▶ 3rd cup of wine followed by the grace recited
- ▶ 4th cup of wine as a door is opened for Elijah’s return
- Every one of these details contains symbolic meaning to help tell a story
 - Primarily, the symbols of a Passover meal tell the story of Israel’s release from slavery in Egypt and their exodus under Moses
 - But Christians today also recognize that these symbols tell the story of Jesus’ death on the cross as the Lamb of God
 - So the meal looks backward to Israel’s flight from Egypt and it looks forward to the Messiah’s sacrifice for Israel’s sins
- In v.23, Jesus mentioned dipping bread into herbs, and that event takes place roughly between the second and third cups of wine at this meal
 - More specifically, it happens after the second cup is poured but before the lamb and bread are eaten
 - Jesus dismisses Judas at this point because what follows in the meal after this point wasn’t something Judas could share
 - All the events of the Passover meal up to this point symbolize the slavery of Israel in Egypt and humanity’s slavery to sin
 - For example, the bitter herbs represent Israel’s bitterness for the harsh treatment they experienced under the Egyptians while in bondage
 - And the 2nd cup of wine is called the cup of deliverance because it represents the Lord’s promise to free His people from slavery
 - These symbols pertain to every Jew whether believing or unbelieving, because all share this history of slavery
 - Like the rest of the disciples, Judas’ Jewish heritage included enslavement in Egypt and the Exodus under Moses
 - Moreover, the story of the Exodus is also a story of every human being being sold into bondage to sin by Adam

- We came into this world already enslaved to our sin nature, and we need a Savior, our own Moses, to set us free from that slavery
- Here again, this part of the Passover story is certainly representative of Judas, since he was an unbeliever in sin
- But after this point in the meal, the symbols move forward to the solution God will bring to His people
 - After this point in the meal, the lamb was eaten with the bread and the final two cups of wine called redemption and praise were consumed
 - These symbols represent Israel's exodus from Egypt under Moses
 - But more importantly they also represent our personal exodus from sin through our faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ
 - The lamb in the meal is a picture of Christ, the Lamb of God, Who is sacrificed to take away the sins of the world
 - The bread is striped, pierced and broken to represent the body of Christ scourged, crucified and broken for our sins
 - The 3rd cup of wine called the cup of redemption represents God's promise to redeem His people
 - And the 4th cup of wine called the cup of praise remembers God's promise to bring His people into glory in the Kingdom
 - None of these symbols and the events they represent pertain to Judas or any unbeliever
 - Moreover, the new ritual that Jesus will institute after this night, which we call communion, is *only* for believers
 - Because the symbolism of the communion celebration are only relevant and true for believers
 - So for all these reasons, Jesus sends Judas away at this point so the meal may continue without him
 - And as Jesus dismisses Judas, Jesus says in v.24 that the Messiah will go as the Old Testament prophecies foretold He would
 - In other words, Judas was not changing God's plan one iota, and in fact, he was the means by which God was enacting that plan

- The OT prophets foretold that the Messiah would “hang on a tree,” be “pierced for our sins,” and be betrayed by someone close
- Those things were written long before Judas and the religious leaders hatched their plans against Jesus the day before
- In fact, Jesus even determined the timing of Judas’ betrayal, so Judas has no control over these circumstances
- Nevertheless, Judas was still to blame for what happened to Jesus, and in v.24 Jesus pronounces woe on this man
 - Woe is a biblical term of eternal judgment indicating this man is being condemned at this moment
 - How can God hold Judas accountable if he’s just doing what God expected and ultimately uses to bring a great blessing for all?
 - The answer is simple: Judas is acting of his own volition to sin, and all who sin are accountable to God
 - Judas participated in a conspiracy by taking a bribe to pervert justice and bring harm to someone he knows to be innocent
 - So Judas will be held accountable for his sin by a just God, Who can also turn Judas’ sin to good for His eternal purposes
 - But just because God has the power to turn our sin into something good doesn’t lessen our guilt before Him
 - Nor does it give us license to sin more, as if by sinning we make it easier for God to produce more “grace”

Rom. 6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?

Rom. 6:2 May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

- God is using Judas’ sin to accomplish something good, but Judas’ sin still deserves severe consequences
 - Has anyone been granted more privileged than Judas to live with Jesus for three years, see His miracles and hear His teaching
 - And yet, has anyone done more harm to Jesus than Judas did?

- Well, actually there *was* one actor who was closer to God and turned that access into even greater harm...Satan
- In Ezekiel 28 you can read how Satan served in the Heavenly tabernacle before he rebelled and began a war with God
- So I guess it's no coincidence that Satan is now indwelling Judas to bring down Jesus...
- Therefore, Jesus says Judas' punishment will make him wish he had not been born, which sounds like something your parents say when they're upset
 - But Jesus means it, and this is the perspective of all who come to know God's wrath for sin
 - Every person, when faced with the prospect of an eternity in punishment, will wish they had never been born
- But more than that, Jesus is saying that Judas' personal experience in judgment will be worse than most
 - Scripture indicates there are varying levels of punishment in Hell for unbelievers
 - Just as God makes distinctions in rewards for believers based on our service, so God also makes distinctions in punishments for unbelievers based on the nature of their sins
 - In a way we don't understand, some unbelievers receive greater punishment, but according to Jesus, none worse than Judas
- After Jesus identifies Judas, the traitor tries at first to maintain his innocence in v.25 saying surely it is not me?
 - To which Jesus replies you have said it yourself, meaning Judas had made a confession of sorts
 - Jesus never identified His betrayer by name, yet there were two men at that table close enough to dip their bread in Jesus' bowl
 - But only Judas spoke up to defend himself, and in so doing, Judas unwittingly identifies himself as the guilty party
 - So Judas, the unbeliever, has been exposed, and now that he has been dismissed, the rest of the meal can continue

[Matt. 26:26](#) While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

[Matt. 26:27](#) And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you;

[Matt. 26:28](#) for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

[Matt. 26:29](#) "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

[Matt. 26:30](#) After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

- With Judas gone Jesus can now move ahead with the rest of the Passover meal, except that Jesus departs from the normal seder
 - Instead Jesus strikes out in a new direction making changes to the normal Seder meal
 - And Jesus makes these changes because in this year the Passover feast would be completely fulfilled
 - We've already noted how the symbols of the Passover meal picture Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the Lamb of God
 - So every year as Jews gathered to observe Passover, they were unknowingly declaring Jesus' atoning death on the cross
 - But during this year's Passover in Israel, that prophecy will be fulfilled as the true Lamb of God will actually be sacrificed on Passover
 - And so now Jesus makes sure that His disciples will not miss that the symbolism of this meal is pointing to Jesus
 - And for that reason, there can only be one Lamb at this table
 - To explain what I mean, let's consider again where we are in the order of the Passover meal again
 - We know we're somewhere between the 2nd and 3rd cups of wine
 - The bread and herbs were eaten before Judas was dismissed
 - And the next thing required in the seder script is eating the Passover meal, consisting of the lamb and the bread together

- But notice Matthew makes no mention of the disciples and Jesus eating a lamb...and in fact *none* of the Gospels mention a lamb at the table
 - Every other element of the Passover meal is mentioned except the lamb, which strongly suggests that no meat was present
 - In John's Gospel, we can see how this confused the disciples because they indicate something was missing from the table

John 13:27 After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."

John 13:28 Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him.

John 13:29 For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor.

- After Jesus dismissed Judas, the disciples try to explain why Judas would leave the room in the middle of the Passover meal
 - And the reason they land on is that Judas had gone out to buy supplies for the Passover meal, since he had control of the funds
 - Now at this point, they are already halfway done with the Passover meal
 - So why would they assume Jesus sent Judas on an errand to buy more food for the meal that was already underway?
 - The obvious answer is that something was missing from the table that evening...something like the roast lamb
 - Jesus didn't provide a roast lamb because seated before them *was* the Passover Lamb for that particular year, the Lamb of God
 - Until Jesus dies on the cross the next day, the lamb won't be sacrificed, so there can be no lamb eaten at this table
 - So without a lamb at the table, the men resort to eating the bread alone along with the herbs and vegetables already there
 - So in v.26, Jesus takes the bread, begins breaking it and handing it out

- The unleavened bread Jesus hands out is like a hard cracker, and He declares that as this bread is broken so will His body be
 - He tells the men that as they eat the bread, they are eating His body
 - This is symbolism, obviously, because Jesus is still alive before them, so Jesus isn't saying they should eat Him in any literal way
- Jesus means that we must take Him in spiritually, like we take in food, which happens when we believe in Him as Messiah
 - His Spirit enters our body and we become born again spiritually, so in that sense we take Jesus in as someone eats bread
 - Once more, Jesus has changed the seder meal to picture Jesus' body broken by taking the wrath of God in their place
- Then Jesus changes the seder a third time at the third cup of the meal, the cup of redemption
 - In the Passover celebration, the 3rd cup represented God's promise to redeem Israel from slavery in Egypt
 - But now Jesus says in v.28 that the cup represents His blood poured out to forgive us of our sins
- And then finally, Jesus alters the Passover meal one more way: He declines to drink the fourth cup of wine that customarily ends the meal
 - In v.29 Jesus says that the 3rd cup will be the last time He drinks the fruit of the vine until He drinks it in the Kingdom
 - The term "fruit of the vine" is significant because it specifically refers to the pure wine without additives served at Passover
 - So Jesus wasn't saying He won't taste *any* wine again, and in fact we know Jesus is given a small amount on the cross at one point
 - Jesus is referring specifically to the 4th cup of Passover wine which He will not drink until He does so with us in the Kingdom
- From these details, we know Jesus has clearly departed from the normal seder script on this night by making a total of four changes
 - He substituted Himself as the Lamb, He declared the broken bread was His body and He said the 3rd cup was His blood

- But perhaps most significantly, Jesus delayed the drinking of the 4th cup of wine until the Kingdom
- Which means that Jesus never brought that Passover to a close
- In effect, Jesus suspended that Passover meal so that it never finished, not even to this day, it will not finish until we all join Jesus in the Kingdom
 - Remember what that 4th cup of the Passover meal represented? It is called the cup of praise representing the fourth promise God gave Israel

Ex. 6:7 'Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Ex. 6:8 'I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession; I am the LORD.'"

- This cup represents God's promise to bring Israel into the land He promised to their forefathers
- And that promise is not fulfilled until the Kingdom, so now we can see why Jesus is waiting to drink that fourth cup
- He will not drink it until the meaning of that cup will be fulfilled in that future day
- But rather than just stop the meal unfinished, Jesus suspended it, as if He put that Passover on pause
 - And then He commanded His followers to continue repeating that same moment to remember that it has never completed
 - Every time we pick up the bread and the cup at communion, we are jumping back in time to that same moment with Jesus
 - We are eating the bread of that Passover meal and we are drinking the third cup, the cup of redemption
- It's like an instant replay running over and over, so that each year more believers can be included in that moment
 - And that cup of redemption keeps being shared because the time for the forgiveness of sins is still open and available
 - Today remains a day of salvation for all who believe in Jesus as Messiah, and as long as that day remains, the meal continues

- Until a day to come when the Kingdom arrives on earth, and all of us will be gathered with our Lord after His Second Coming
 - And on that day the Bible says there will be a great feast to inaugurate the start of the Kingdom
 - And at the start of that feast, the Lord will raise the fourth cup from that long ago unfinished Passover meal, the cup of praise,
 - And all of us will raise a cup with Jesus, and we will all drink the cup with Him to praise God for our redemption and glory
 - And in that way, the Lord is bringing everyone in the Church and Israel with Him into that moment in the upper room one generation at a time
 - We are there with Him each time we celebrate communion, and we will continue to be there until we see Him face to face
 - That's why the meal is called a remembrance, yet no longer is it a remembrance of the Exodus
 - Now it's a remembrance of the fulfillment of Passover, of Christ's death for the forgiveness of sins
 - And that's why Paul ends his instructions on the communion meal this way

1Cor. 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

- This is a meal for those who know Jesus, because the symbols of this meal only apply to those who share Jesus' future
- That's why we limit participating in the meal to those who are believing, just as Jesus limited his group to believers only
- Next week we will conduct our normal monthly celebration of communion
 - And as we do, I hope you will approach it with a better understanding of its meaning and its significance
 - We proclaim Jesus' death until He comes again to finish the meal with us
 - And what we proclaim is that the third cup of redemption is still available to everyone who will come to the table with Jesus