

# Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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7/14/24

**Sermon Title:** Passover

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 26:17-29

**Matt. 26:17 ¶** Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?”

**Matt. 26:18** He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”

**Matt. 26:19** And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

**Matt. 26:20 ¶** When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.

**Matt. 26:21** And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

**Matt. 26:22** And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?”

**Matt. 26:23** He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.

**Matt. 26:24** 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 had not been born.”

**Matt. 26:25** Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

**Matt. 26:26 ¶** Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”

**Matt. 26:27** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,

**Matt. 26:28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

**Matt. 26:29** 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.”

**Main Point:** Even as Scripture gives us examples of true and beautiful faith, it also sternly warns us with examples of false faith.

### **Outline:**

1. The Betrayer
2. The Blood and Bread

### **Introduction**

Today’s reading is about the Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. It is monumentally important.

Jesus expresses in verse 18 an important desire. He says, “My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.” Luke 22 tells us that Jesus said something even more strongly: “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15).

So we see two things that set the stage for what we’ve read today. First, Jesus *knows* his time is at hand. In other words, he knows he is about to be put to death. He knows he has come to Jerusalem to die, and he knows that he is on the eve of it.

The second thing is that as his death is so close, he is determined to keep the Passover. He makes detailed plans so that he can do this.

But this meal, because it is important, is also heavy with significance. It’s bittersweet. Because even as he is going to die, the person who will be responsible

for his death is sitting right there and Jesus knows it. Think of the grace and self-control it takes for Jesus to sit here at the same table as Judas, to hand him bread, and to know that he is the one who is even now planning his death.

What I'd like to do is to focus on two features of this Passover observance: the betrayer, and the blood and bread.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is a solemn thing, but also a joyful thing. And for Jesus this was true as well. He knew what he would accomplish with his death, he knew he would save his people, but he also knew the cost and what it would take to get there. And so today let's focus on the betrayer, as well as the blood and bread.

## 1. The Betrayer

First today this passage invites us to reflect upon the betrayer.

It's hard *not* to think about Judas as we read this. In verse 21 Jesus predicts that it will happen: "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

In verse 25, the identity of the betrayer is given to us. It is Judas.

Judas does hold a place of fascination for many Christians. We have so many questions, because we find the man so inscrutable.

"How could he do it? Why would he do it? Why would he not see what he was doing, or why would he not care what he was doing? Was he well intended? Maybe he was just playing 3D chess, and was trying to *help* Jesus in his own strange way?"

And we just want the man to make sense to us. We want to understand.

But we need to see Judas as an example to us of two things.

The first is this: he illustrates for us that unbelief is irrational. Like I mentioned, it's easy to be fascinated by Judas: "Why did he do it?" "What motivated him?" "Maybe he really had good intentions." "Perhaps Judas is misunderstood." We sort of find ourselves wanting to get to the bottom of it all, and thinking that when we

get there we will see that it made sense: “Yes, this man betrayed Jesus. But surely there’s a rhyme and reason to it all. What drove him?”

This might seem like a disappointing answer, but the best we can tell, this was about money.

(1) When he agrees to betray Jesus, that’s the first thing that he asks: “How much?” He wants money for doing this. He seems to have been a man largely driven by his own greed and covetousness.

(2) At one point in John 12 Judas complains that ointment was used, and was not instead sold and given to the poor. And then John includes this illuminating comment: “He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it” (John 12:6).

Now, it's tempting to think that it must go deeper than that. It has to, right? It’s tempting to make Judas more of a complex person than the evidence gives us. We have a modern fascination with the anti-hero. So we make movies about Cruella Deville and the wicked witch of the west, and so on. We sort of assume that deep down, even the villains are really well-intentioned people at heart.

But when it comes to Judas, at the end of the day, he was greedy. He loved money. And he especially loved money more than he loved Jesus. That is as close as you get to an answer from Scripture without slipping entirely into speculation.

But even that isn’t very satisfying, is it? “Yes, he was greedy; but still... why betray the Lord of glory for a little money (it wasn’t even a lot of money)?” Surely there is more going on. Surely there is a deeper and better answer than this.

But that’s not necessarily true. There is no answer that Judas could give that is good or true or right, or that actually makes good sense of betraying your innocent brother into the hands of murderers.

There is nothing Judas could say that you’d be like, “Ah. Okay. Now it makes sense. I see why you sold Jesus out.” No. There is no answer that would be accurate or right or good. Every excuse he would ever give would always end in the insanity of killing the Lord of glory!

Here is why it is ultimately impossible to make sense of what Judas does. In fact, why it is impossible to make sense of all of our sin: sin is fundamentally irrational. It is rooted in a lie; either a lie about God, or a lie about his world, or a lie about ourselves. Only when we believe the lie, do we give ourselves permission to sin. Sin is not based in truth, but in a twisted version of the truth – something we've told ourselves that's not the case.

In Judas' twisted world, to have money is better than to have Jesus. That's a lie. The only way you can believe that money is better is by believing a lie and forgetting everything that you have seen of his ministry. And by lying to yourself about the value of money.

We often want to make sense of evil. We want to know why did this person do such a horrible thing? What drove someone to do this or that terrible unimaginable thing. And we think that somehow reading their diaries or their social media will let us in and help us understand. And yet every time we do look at their rantings and ravings what we find makes no sense and cannot justify what has happened.

Or what we find is so banal and ordinary that it terrifies those of us who want to think we are beyond such evil. "Why did this person commit a mass shooting? Why did this person do such a horrible thing? Why did this person have an affair and destroy their family?" The possibilities pile up. You want to make sense of sin or get to the bottom of it? Well, here it is: they believed a lie. It *didn't* make sense. It was evil.

Sometimes the person will use *arguments* to justify what they did, or to justify their sin, but even that is the guise of rationality. Sin is irrational. It's against the universe. It's against the creator. What is more irrational than that!

The person who destroys themselves isn't making any sense when they do it, but that's what sin is. It is irrational self-destruction.

Judas is an example here of the irrationality of sin. That's the first thing I want us to see from Judas. We have to stop giving Judas so much credit.

And the second thing Judas is an example of here is this: there really is a such thing as false faith.

We know that Judas participated in Jesus' public ministry.

It seems that he cast out demons.

He helped distribute the food to the 5000.

He witnessed Jesus walking on the sea of Galilee.

He saw Jesus cast demons out of people, and heal them.

He saw the Lord in frequent communion with God in prayer.

He saw all of the teachings of Jesus.

He heard Jesus' warnings about true and false faith.

He saw firsthand a life that was given and spent for others.

He saw the acknowledgements of Jesus' deity.

He saw people worship Jesus.

He was so trusted that he was given the money bag for the disciples.

And yet each time he saw a miracle, at the bottom of it all, he thought, "How can I profit from this?"

What does this teach us about false faith? It tells us that close proximity to the truth can't take us all the way. It can't make us love the truth.

And it tells us that false faith is a reality in this world, and it tells us that false faith is ultimately destructive to the soul.

This leads to a related question I hear sometimes: "Did Judas take communion?" After all, here you have Jesus identifying Judas as his betrayer in verse 25, and then Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper in verse 26 in what are now very familiar words to us. Matthew, I would suggest, is not interested in whether Judas took the Lord's Supper or not. He makes no effort to tell us whether he received it or whether he didn't receive it.

However, John's Gospel is a little more helpful, I *think*. Because if you read John 13:27 the text tells us that Jesus identifies Judas with the bread just like in Matthew, but then it tells us that after this happened Judas went out. And it is always after identifying his betrayer that the other Gospels portray Jesus as instituting the Lord's Supper. In other words, John seems to indicate that Judas left before the institution of the supper. John makes it possible, but he doesn't make it explicit.

So did Judas take communion? Well I'm going to give a frustrating answer: since we still don't know exactly when Judas left, it's possible that he left before or after the institution of the Lord's Supper. But I suspect that the fact that the Gospel writers don't attempt to make it clear that Judas did or did not take the Lord's Supper tells us that it is not ultimately an important question. We might be curious. We might think it's important, but they don't seem to think so.

We are sometimes curious about things which the Lord doesn't intend for us to know. We're tempted to pray just a bit. We often times want the bible to answer questions that God does not give us the answers to. God reveals to us what he is pleased to reveal, not what we demand of him. And so part of what we need to learn is to be content with what God tells us, the way he tells us.

But why might this not be important to the Gospel writers? Part of the issue is that whether Judas does or does not participate doesn't do anything to our doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

Consider this: Jesus invites his disciples to participate with him. If Judas did participate even though he is a hypocrite and a liar, that is not a problem. Jesus fences the table by inviting those who are truly his disciples. If Judas partakes, it is because he ignores the call to faith in Christ. And if Judas does participate, it illustrates the fact that on its own, apart from faith the Lord's Supper does nothing for us. It has no power in itself. Those are the implications if Judas did participate in the Lord's Supper here.

But if Judas *did* leave prior to the institution of the Supper, that is also suitable because it shows that the true intention of the Lord's Supper is that it should be for God's people, and not for those who only pretend to follow the Lord. I think

that debates about whether Judas received the supper come out as a wash. Either it is showing us that some do profess false faith, in which case he's also showing us that the Lord's Supper has no benefit apart from faith, or it is showing us that Jesus does his best to avoid letting false professors partake. And these are both good lessons, either way.

Now, another question I sometimes receive about Judas is this: "Do we really know what happened to Judas with regard to eternity? Is it possible that he had some sort of deathbed confession? Could Judas be in heaven? After all, the Scriptures do say that he was sorrowful after he betrayed Jesus. We also know that Jesus is gracious and forgiving."

It is true that Jesus is gracious. All sin can be forgiven. The problem here is not a lack of grace on the part of Jesus. The problem is a lack of repentance on the part of Judas. If Judas Iscariot had repented, Christ would have forgiven him. After all, Jesus forgives and restores Peter, who betrayed him as well. The problem is not that Jesus will not forgive the worst of sinners. The problem is that Jesus will not forgive the unrepentant.

You might say, "But Judas was repentant! Later Matthew will say that he changed his mind and he returned the money." But that passage is a good illustration of the difference between repentance and regret. We may regret a sin or wish we'd never done it, but that is not the same thing as repenting.

Real repentance means:

Seeing our sin, seeing the grace of Jesus, and turning from our sin so that we can take hold of Christ. Regret is merely the wish that we could turn back time and undo what we did. Judas has regret, but not repentance.

So what happened to Judas? Well Jesus tells us. We don't have to guess. In verse 24 he says of Judas, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." It is not hard to see what Jesus is saying there. If someone goes to heaven, you would never say this about them. This is a word of the harshest condemnation one could ever hear.



Never one to put too fine a point on it, Jonathan Edwards once wrote a sermon. The title of it was “Judas Iscariot has been in hell for more than seventeen hundred years.”

What we see is that Jesus identifies his betrayer – a sad tale that has so much to teach us not only about faith, but about false faith.

## 2. The Blood and Bread

Second today, we would make a mistake if we thought this passage was really about Judas. I think Judas helps us to reflect on the false faith that he represents.

But Jesus has something important that he’s doing at this meal. And in only one sermon point it’s hard to do this justice, but I won’t let that stop me, I suppose.

And so our second point today is the Blood and Bread. Remember what Jesus does: on the eve of his death, he says to his disciples that this one very important thing needs to happen. He says, “I will keep the Passover.”

Why? Why is he so determined? He’s made these plans. He’s given directions. Matthew goes to the trouble of enumerating the plans that Jesus has made. Why? He’s about to tell us that the Passover is the key to understanding his death.

The book of Exodus tells us of God’s rescue of the people of Israel from Egypt. But before Pharaoh released the people, we know that God told all of the Jews to sacrifice a lamb and to place the blood of the lamb over the door of their home so that their home would be spared. Only because of the blood of the lamb could they be spared of the judgment of God.

By the time of Jesus, the Jews have been celebrating the Passover for a millennia. Here’s the thing: whenever Israel observed the Passover, who did they see themselves as in the Passover story? They see themselves as the ones being *delivered*, right? Every time they observed the Passover, they remembered that God rescued them.

And like them, Jesus also sees himself in the supper. Except for one big difference, and you can see it in what he says. Look at the shift here: when Jesus sits down to

observe the Passover here, what does he say? He says, “I’m the *lamb*. I’m not Israel.”

Israel was never the lamb when they celebrated the Passover. Israel was the one protected by the lamb. But Jesus says, “My blood is the blood in the Passover. My body is the food in the Passover.” He’s not the one who gets saved. He’s the one who gets sacrificed. No one in all of Israel’s history before this ever observed the Passover and saw *themselves* in that position.

And for the first time in Israel’s whole story this *man* steps forward and says, “I’ll tell you what you’ve been doing for a thousand years: you’ve been getting ready for me. Getting ready for my blood, which will never need to be shed again. Getting ready for my death, which will happen once for all. I’m the lamb, and the lamb is a man.”

Why not just keep sacrificing lambs? The lambs were always a foreshadowing and a picture of the real sacrifice. The book of Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could never deliver us from sin, they could only picture the sacrifice that was coming.

The once for all sacrifice for sin is a man because though a lamb has the blood of *life* in it, it wasn’t lambs that sinned and needed forgiveness. Lambs were not guilty. *Mankind* was guilty. The sacrifice had to be a member of the guilty class: the sacrifice always had to be a fellow man. One of Adam. A true man. A full man. A real man. And that was Jesus.

Just think of this. He’s sitting around the table with these men. Who knows how many times these men have observed the Passover before. But they’ve never done it like *this*. Because Jesus passes the cup to them and says, “I’m about to die. If you don’t drink the blood I’m about to shed you’ll have no life in you. If you don’t eat my flesh, you will never have peace with God, and the judgment will not pass you by like the Passover has been promising.”

He not only tells them to drink and eat, but he tells them to do this action repeatedly into the future. According to Paul, Jesus also commanded them to remember his Passover death by repeating the Lord’s Supper. “Do this as often as

you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

It's meant to be repeated. So the plan of Jesus was always that his church would *keep* having this ceremony, that we would keep eating his flesh and drinking his blood until he returns. That we would live upon him for all of our existence until he comes back.

Just like on the night of this Passover, Jesus knows that for all of us, we can have no life in us if we will not partake of the Lord's Supper by faith.

We don't observe the Passover any more. We have no future sacrifice to look forward to. We don't sacrifice animals in future hope of a coming Savior. Instead, we look *back* to the death of Christ in the Lord's Supper. There is a reason that we as Christians do not observe the Passover. It's because we don't live in the shadows. Now that Jesus has come, we live in the light. Now that Jesus has come, we have the substance, not the shadow. We look back at the objective, real, perfect sacrifice of Jesus. What need could we possibly have of the shadows anymore?

But here is my challenge to you: Jesus is not driving you to look at a lamb, or to look at an animal, or some other sacrifice. He doesn't even really want us fixated on the bread and on the wine itself. He wants us to look *through* the bread and wine to him.

You see, just as he did with his disciples, in the Passover of today's passage, and just as he does in our own observance of the Lord's Supper each week, Jesus is forcing our gaze back onto himself. He says, "My blood. My flesh. My life. If you won't find your life in me, then you can have no life at all."

Will you do what Jesus wants? Will you look to him? Will you appreciate that his death fulfills the promises of God for you? Will you cast yourself upon the mercy of the lamb who was slain?

*Let's pray.*