

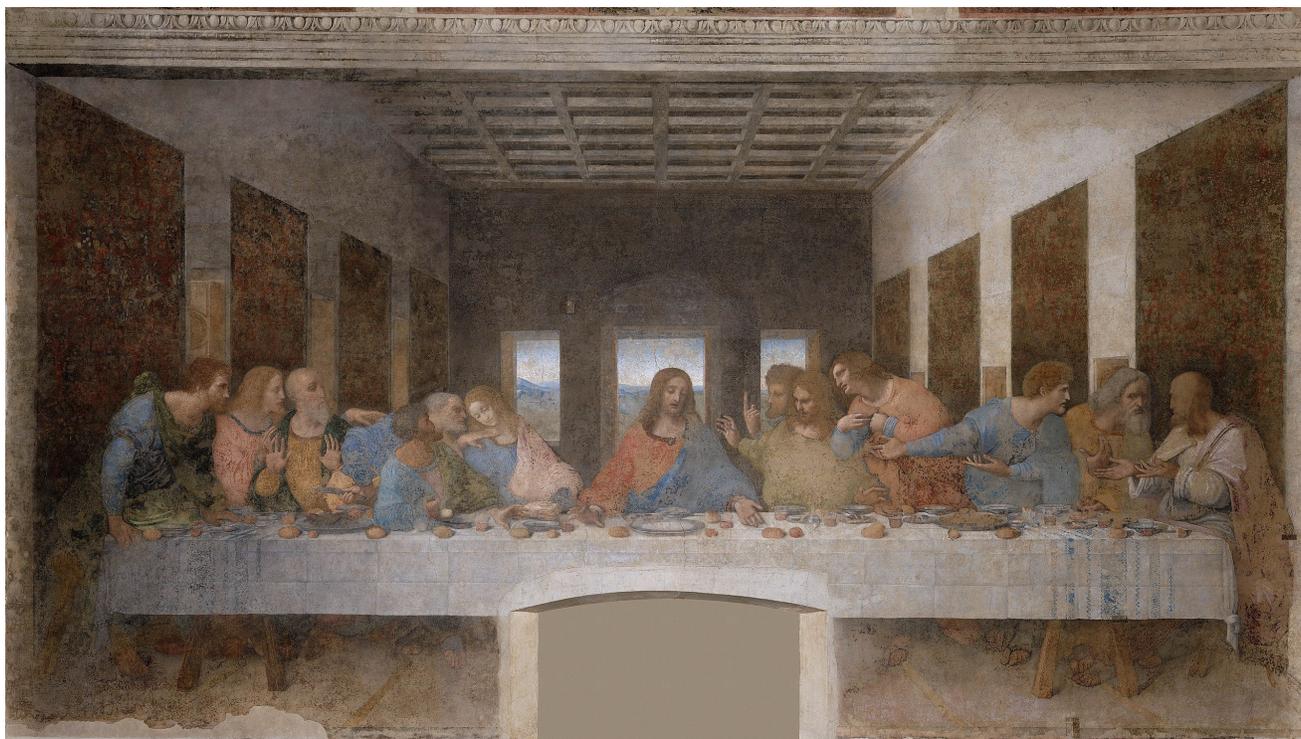
LIFE BIBLE STUDY

SESSION OBJECTIVE: MATTHEW 26:1-30

To understand the significance of the Lord's Supper.

Come to the Table

One of my favorite things to do is try new foods. I admit it. I'm totally a foodie. My idea of a fun and energizing evening out is being with people I love and sharing a meal around a table. I've always found it to be one of the most positive and impacting practices on the relationships I have with others, and as it turns out, there is a



reason for that. Recent studies have uncovered myriads of benefits that stem from sharing meals with other people, specifically in the family. Everything from improved grades in school to a statistical decrease in the likelihood of drug and alcohol usage can be gained from sharing meals. Throughout time, meals have also been incorporated into religious and ceremonial practices, one of which is founded in the Old Testament. Moses, after leading God's people out of Egypt, ushers in the practice of the Passover meal.

In Matthew 26, the Passover meal practice is still in place. In this passage, Jesus not only celebrated the Passover with His disciples, but showed how His imminent death and resurrection were connected to it. It is truly a beautiful moment. However, in the midst of this seemingly intimate moment, Jesus unveils a shocking truth: "Amen, I say to you that one of you will betray Me" (Matt. 26:21).

Burial Preparations

The next section (vs.6-13) finds Jesus in the home of Simon the Leper and, “a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table” (Matt. 26:7). The disciples, however, disagree with the woman’s actions. They assert that pouring all of the oil on Jesus was a mismanagement of such a costly resource, and that they could have instead sold the oil and used it to care for the poor. In order to rightly interpret the passage, one must be aware of what is going to follow in the coming chapters. This woman’s actions demonstrate her understanding not only of the significance of the present moment with the Lord but also the future events to come.

THE PRESENT (V.11)

Her act of devotion towards Jesus indicates her understanding of Jesus’ limited time on the earth. In verse 11 He says, “For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.” Under normal circumstances, the disciples would have likely been right. She possessed a particularly expensive oil that could have fetched a fair amount of money that, in turn, could have been used to care for the underprivileged. But these were not normal circumstances. Jesus’ life and ministry were quickly coming to a close and these last moments with Him were precious. The present moment held more weight as a result of this.

THE FUTURE (V.12)

This act of pouring oil on Jesus also served to foreshadow Jesus’ death. In the ancient world, oils were used to anoint dead bodies in preparation for burial. In verse 12, Jesus says, “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.” Jesus, at this point, is already looking ahead to the cross. The woman, along with the disciples, didn’t fully understand the things that were about to happen to Jesus, but He nonetheless interpreted her actions in light of them.

There is a shade of *Davidic* foreshadowing here as well. The practice of anointing kings is one well-documented in the Old Testament. A king would have oil poured on his head ceremoniously to anoint him to the throne (2 Kings 9:6). Remember that Matthew begins His Gospel by describing Jesus as, “the son of David.” King David’s journey is unusual, however. He is anointed as king in 1 Samuel 16:13, but then faces intense persecution and suffering for the rest of the book. It isn’t until chapter 2 of 2 Samuel that David finally ascends to the throne. The pattern in David’s life is *anointing* followed by *suffering* followed by *ascension*. This is a typological pattern that is actualized in Christ. Jesus, the son of David, is anointed by this woman, and then suffers for a time, before finally rising from the dead and ascending to the right hand of God on the throne. The difference is, Jesus doesn’t just suffer like David does; Jesus dies. David sits down on the Davidic throne, but Jesus sits not only on the Davidic throne but ultimately the heavenly throne, with all authority being given to Him as well (Matt. 28:18).

The Lord’s Supper

When reading Matthew’s account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper (also known as communion), it’s important to remember that it is only one of three accounts (Luke also records it with additional details, and Paul writes about it as well). In order to grasp the full picture of the Lord’s Supper, one must have a good, working Biblical theology to put the other pieces together. There are details that each author uniquely includes that add meaning and nuance. However, it is also important to remember that each author had a specific purpose in the details that were included their respective writings. Matthew’s purpose of writing his account is perhaps slightly different than Luke’s. Both Matthew and Luke sought to describe the institution of the Supper, whereas Paul sought to teach the church how to continue the practice that Jesus instituted. In other words,

each of these writings, while intricately connected, stand alone as well for their own purposes. This study will first acknowledge the big picture, and then shed light on what *Matthew* intended to convey regarding the Lord's Supper specifically.

The Big Picture

At a base level, the Lord's Supper is a practice instituted during the Passover meal and to be practiced by believers as an ordinance given by Jesus. Below is a brief walkthrough of some commonly asked questions regarding the practice of the Lord's Supper.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD IT BE TAKEN?

Many believers likely grew up in churches that observed communion on a weekly basis, while others only observe it on a semi-regular basis. The question that comes up often is, "how often should we do this?" From the Scripture, the answer seems to be: "At least once a year during Passover." Jesus says in Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11, "as often as you do this, do it in remembrance of Me." The interpretative question is, "As often as we do what?" The context tells us. They were observing the Passover. So a solid case can be made that at least once a year, during the Passover, Christians are to remember the broken body and shed blood through the participation in the Lord's Supper. To be even more exact, it would be done during an *actual meal*. This was likely how the Corinthian church practiced it, as it seems the practice of the Lord's Supper included a full meal (1 Cor. 11:20-22; 33). However, it is not out of line for believers to participate in the practice more of than once a year, and it does not always have to be in a traditional church sanctuary. Home groups, bible studies, and other smaller gatherings are appropriate as well.

WHO SHOULD TAKE IT?

The command is given to the disciples for the disciples to be done *with other* disciples. The Passover itself was a meal observed by believing Jews. To try and argue that non-believers should take the Supper is an impossible task. Beyond that, Paul gives some guidelines regarding the spiritual health of the participant. First, it shouldn't be done in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27). Instead, he should examine himself (1 Cor. 11:28). If these precautions are not followed, Paul says that person is, "eating and drinking judgement to himself" (1 Cor. 11:29). There is perhaps an echo of Jesus' words from Matthew 5:23-24 here as well. Jesus says, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go." The practice of offerings, worship, and communion should be done by a believer and with a clean conscience.

WHAT DOES IT DO FOR ME?

There are many thoughts on the *effects* of the Lord's Supper. The prevalent thought of many reformed churches is that the elements of the Supper (the bread and wine) are vessels that channel God's grace to the believer (a so-called, "means of grace"). This concept, however, is found nowhere in the text. The context, once again, of the Lord's Supper is the Passover meal. The Passover carried no special transference of grace in it. It was merely a meal that the Jewish people participated in to *remember* how God broke the chains of slavery to Pharaoh through the blood of the sacrificial lamb. With this in mind, the simplest and most likely answer is that the Lord's Supper is given to *remember* how God broke the chains of sin through the blood of the Lamb of God.

Matthew's Account

Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper is especially rich in Old Testament imagery, specifically in verse 28: "For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the many for forgiveness of sins." In this one

verse, there are several subtle flags that would have caught the attention of a believing Jew. Below is a breakdown of some of the unique phrases that indicate a deeper, Old Testament typological fulfillment.

BLOOD OF THE COVENANT

The first phrase that finds Old Testament significance is the, “blood of the covenant.” This is a phrase that is only used one other time in the Bible, and it is found in Exodus 24:8. In Exodus 24, God confirms the covenant He makes with Moses, and ratifies the covenant through the sacrifice of burnt offerings and a sacrificed oxen. Moses is to take the blood from the sacrifice and put it into basins and cleanse the altar with half of it. After reading from the book of the covenant and hearing the people affirm their commitment to the covenant terms, verse 8 says, “So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Jesus is in some way connecting the confirmation of the covenant between God and His people in Exodus 24 to a new covenant that is being made between God and His people. It’s a greater covenant. The mediator is not Moses, but Jesus Himself. The blood is that not of an oxen, but the Son of God.

POURED OUT

The second phrase that points to the Old Testament is, “poured out.” Once again, this is a rare phrase that is also found in Leviticus 4:7-34. In Leviticus 4, instructions are given for how to perform a *sin offering*. Leviticus gives instruction on how these different sacrifices are to be made, and includes burnt offerings (chapter 1), grain offerings (chapter 2), peace offerings (chapter 3), sin offerings (chapter 4), and guilt offerings (chapter 5). Each offering had a purpose and specific way it was to be carried out. Chapter 4 outlines the sin offering by instructing the priests to sacrifice, “a lamb, female, and without blemish” (Lev. 4:32). Verse 34 says, “Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out all the rest of its blood at the base of the altar.” The blood of Jesus not only serves to usher in a new covenant between God and His people, but to serve as a sin offering, and it is a greater offering. Instead of the blood of an unblemished lamb, it’s the blood of the spotless Son of God. It is also a sacrifice that is only needed one time, whereas the one described in Leviticus 4 needed to be repeated.

FOR THE MANY

The last Old Testament reference is found in the phrase, “for the many,” an echo of Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 is known as perhaps the most significant Messianic chapter in Isaiah. The suffering servant is clearly a picture of Jesus. He was, “despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief” (Is. 53:3). He was, “pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Is. 53:5). It was, “the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt” (Is. 53:10). Verse 10 contains a reference to the guilt offerings found in Leviticus 5. All of the chapter is very clearly a prophetic picture of the work and suffering of Jesus Christ. Verse 12 says, “Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many; and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.” Jesus is implying that His broken body and shed blood being presented in the Lord’s Supper is a fulfillment of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53.

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

All of these things take place, “for the forgiveness of sins.” Remember back to Matthew 1. Joseph is visited by the angel and told that Mary is indeed with child by the Holy Spirit. The angel says in verse 21, “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, *for He will save His people from their sins.*” Everything Jesus did was leading up to the purpose for which He came: “to save His people from their sins.” This is what Paul was talking about when he wrote, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

The Lord's Supper is a simple practice of remembrance, but the question is: "A remembrance of what? What does it call to mind?" It calls to mind the covenant promises of God to His people with Moses as His mediator. It calls to mind the forgiveness of sins found in the sin offerings described in Leviticus 4. It calls to mind the suffering servant who would be crushed by God for the many for the forgiveness of sins. The bread and the wine are powerful elements, not because they have some mystical power, but because they bring to remembrance *the faithfulness of God* through His Son Jesus Christ.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Matthew 26:1-2. What words had Jesus finished speaking? What is the context? What is going to happen in two days? What is the significance of the Passover? What is the significance of the title, "Son of Man" (Hint: See Daniel 7:13-14)?
2. Read Matthew 26:3-5. Who is involved in the plot described here? Where are they gathered? Who is Caiaphas? What prohibits them from carrying out their plan and why?

Day Two

1. Read Matthew 26:6-13. Write down all of the people involved in this passage. What does the woman do? What is the disciples' response to her? What is Jesus response to both of them? What is the reasoning He gives for why her actions are good (Hint: See verses 11 and 12)?
2. Read Matthew 26:14-16. Who betrays Jesus? Who is he? What kind of deal does he make?

Day Three

1. Read Matthew 26:17-19. In your own words, describe what happens in this passage. What does Jesus mean by, "His time?" Read Galatians 4:4. Do you think Jesus had the cross in mind during this time? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 26:20-25. What shocking news does Jesus deliver to the 12 disciples here? Describe the conversation in your own words. Who is Jesus talking about?

Day Four

1. Read Matthew 26:26-29. What practice is instituted here? What were they in the middle of celebrating? What is the significance of Jesus' words in verse 27 (Hint: See above)?
2. Read Matthew 26:30. In your opinion, why does Matthew include this verse? What does this say about the importance of worship during communion?

Week 29 Discussion: The Lord's Supper

Matthew 26 unveils one of the accounts of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper (communion), a practice that has been in place in the church since the evening described in this passage. The Lord's Supper is an important practice for believers because it reminds us of so many of God's faithful acts on behalf of His people. Talk as a group about the Lord's Supper, and then when ready, observe it together. As you take both the bread and the wine, read this passage. When finished, either pray or sing a hymn or song together.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever taken the Lord's Supper? If not, why? If so, talk about a favorite memory.
2. Is the Lord's Supper an enjoyable and meaningful experience to you, or is it more of just a religious practice that has lost some of its sacred value?

3. What do you think it means to take the Lord's Supper, "in an unworthy manner?" What types of things could prevent a Christian from taking the Lord's Supper?
4. Are you a visual learner? Do the visual elements of bread and wine make it easier to remember Jesus' broken body and shed blood?
5. Practice It: Take communion together as a class. Have the teacher lead the Scripture reading, or volunteer one or more person to read the passage as you take the elements. Be sure to give people the option to not take the Supper if they are not spiritually prepared or have unresolved sin in their lives. Remember the importance of having the right heart.
6. Finish your time by singing together a song or hymn. If you have a phone and would like to play a song to sing with then do so, or just sing a cappella. Some recommended songs are: *How Great Is Our God*, *Amazing Grace*, *How Great Thou Art*.

Takeaways:

1. The Lord's Supper includes many Old Testament allusions that increase the significance of Jesus' words and actions.
2. The Lord's Supper is a practice for Christians who are spiritually healthy to remember the finished work of Christ on the cross.
3. The consequences for ignoring such guidelines are many and they are difficult.

PRAYER REQUESTS: