

The Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:17-30

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Symbols are important in our culture. If you go to a Cyclone basketball game, you will see images of the mascot and large faces of the players behind the goals that are held up to cheer on the players and mess with the opposing teams. If Iowa State wins, you hold up your index finger to let people know you're number one. If you want someone to know you are okay, then you give the thumbs-up sign. If you are done texting someone and you want the conversation to be over, you give the thumbs-up emoji or some other emoji that symbolizes that you want the conversation to end.

However, symbols are not limited to informal settings or conversations. We use them in formal and sacred settings as well. When two people get married, they give each other their wedding rings. They may say something like, "*I give you this ring as a symbol of my commitment and covenant with you.*" The ring is a symbol of their marriage covenant.

We do the same thing in our church. I have often said that baptism is like putting on a wedding ring. It symbolizes a believer's profession of faith and covenant with Christ. Baptism is a public, formal profession of faith and declaration of love for Jesus. It is like a wedding ceremony in that way. In a wedding, the vows may say that you are keeping yourself for you alone; a baptism says that you have rejected the world and committed to Jesus alone.

The text we will study today institutes one of the great symbols of our faith – the Lord's Supper. It is a powerful symbol or what we call an ordinance. It is an ordinance that we practice every other Sunday at Grand. Baptism is the public initiation of the covenant. It is like taking wedding vows. The Lord's Supper is a regular renewal of our covenant with Christ.

The text we will study this morning is infamous not only because of the dark shadow of the cross that is on it but also because these fourteen verses have led to hundreds of divisions within the church and persecution of the church by the church. A few hundred years ago, how you answered questions like: "*What did Jesus mean by 'This is my body.'*" and "*Who can participate in the Lord's Supper?*" were questions of life and death if you gave the wrong answer.

We still wrestle with the same questions today, but thankfully, we can state our belief about the Lord's Supper and baptism, and we shouldn't be persecuted. By the grace of God, now we can disagree on certain matters without being tied to a stake and set on fire.

As Jesus moves toward His crucifixion, He displays more of His sovereign attributes as God incarnate. In this text, He was calling the shots and showing that He was Lord. He showed that He was not being ground up in the gears of politics, power, and history. He was not a victim. Fate was not in control. Everything in this text is guided by the sovereign hand of God.

Sometimes, we will use the phrase *divine appointment* to describe an event that occurred when, in hindsight, we realize God was in control. Jesus doesn't recognize divine appointments after the fact. In this text, we will see that Jesus arranges His *divine appointments*.

In Matthew 26:17-30, we see God's long plan of redemption of His people is being worked out as Jesus prepares to give His life as a ransom on the cross. Our text breaks down into three sections. Let's get to work on our text. I will make some applications as we work through it, but at the end, we will make our final application.

In vv. 17-19, we see Jesus' divine appointments of the *right time* and the *right place* for the Last Supper. Galatians 4:4 tells us that Jesus was born at the exact time God appointed. Likewise, Jesus will die at the exact time God had appointed. Friends, Jesus was governing the events leading up to His crucifixion.

In vv. 17-18a, we see how Jesus chose the appointed right time:

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?"¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was an annual feast for the Jews, which began with the Passover Meal in the evening and then continued for seven days. This particular year, the Passover meal fell on a Thursday evening.

Verse 17 tells us that sometime during that day, the disciples approached Jesus and asked him where He wanted them to prepare the meal, but before Jesus gave them instructions on the place, Jesus first pointed to the event's timing. He said, *"My time is at hand."*

It is crucial that we understand Jesus chose the time for the Last Supper to be at the time of the Passover feast. The Last Supper is the Last Passover because He was about to fulfill the Old Covenant requirements and establish the New Covenant.

The Passover meal was designed to remind Israel of God's great deliverance from Egypt. It pointed back to the night of the final plague when God took the lives of the firstborn of Egypt.

But God's instructions would protect Israel during this plague. To protect them, He commanded each household to slaughter a lamb, take some of the blood, and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses. In Exodus 12:13, God said:

The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

The Last Supper in the Upper Room pointed back to that Passover, which was God's great act of redemption. However, it also pointed toward God's great act of redemption that would come when Jesus died on the cross. God had been moving redemptive history to the true deliverance and redemption that would come when the Lamb of God would give His life to deliver His people. This was a divine appointment for Jesus.

Next, in vv. 18b-19, we learn that Jesus chose the place for the Last Supper. He told His disciples:

"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.'"¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

Mark 14:13-14 gives a little more details concerning Jesus' sovereign control over the appointed place. Mark writes:

"Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him,¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

Jesus has been looking forward to this meal. He sovereignly worked out the details. He told the disciples to go into the city, and they would meet the man carrying the water jar. They were to follow him to where he entered and ask the owner of the house where His guest room was.

He knew exactly where they would eat and all that would occur. Jesus was in control. The religious leaders may plot to take his life, and Judas may conspire to betray him, but because of the joy set before Him, Jesus willingly goes to the cross. He chose the *time* and the *place* of His Last Supper with His disciples. He had a *divine appointment* to keep on the cross, and, thanks be to God, He kept it.

The second block of text is vv. 20-25. Here, we see Jesus continue to display His control over His own death by announcing to His disciples that one of them would betray Him. Look at vv. 20-22:

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?"

So, picture the setting. By the way, the setting was not like *Leonardo da Vinci's* painting, where they all sat in chairs around a long table. They actually were on the floor in a circle and sort of leaned on large cushions with the food in the middle of the circle so that everyone could reach the food and drinks.

Now, Jesus was eating with His disciples. They had been His closest friends on earth. They had been with Him from the very beginning of His ministry. They had left everything to follow Jesus. They had walked many miles together and eaten many meals together, but this Passover was different from the other Passover meals they had shared.

During this meal, Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him, and they were stunned. This Passover meal had just turned painfully sad and dangerously serious. So, stunned, eleven of them go around the circle and ask Jesus, "*Is it I, Lord?*"

You can't tell this in English, but in the original Greek, the grammatical structure of the phrase, "*Is it I, Lord?*" anticipates a negative response from Jesus. They wanted a negative response, but they were painfully unsure of themselves. Each one feared being the traitor.

Well, Jesus didn't identify the traitor. His answer was ambiguous. All He said was,

"He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me."

The fact is all of them had dipped their hand in the dish. They ate from a common dish, so His answer didn't reveal anything.

While eleven of them were stunned because one of them might betray Jesus, Judas was stunned for a different reason. At this point, Judas realized that Jesus knew it was him.

So, Judas' response to Jesus was different than the eleven. He asked,

Is it I, Rabbi?

The title *rabbi* is a humbler title for Jesus than *Lord*. Bottom line: For Judas, Jesus was just a radical teacher and not the Messiah. So, he either wanted to force Jesus' hand to overthrow the Romans, or perhaps he wanted out. Regardless of Judas' motive, we know that Jesus controlled His betrayal. Judas and the religious leaders were not forcing His hand. They were not in control—Jesus was.

The in vv. 23-25, Jesus gave an ambiguous identification of His betrayer. Jesus said:

"He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me."

Jesus words remind us of King David's words in Psalm 41:9,

*Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*

Then Jesus said:

The Son of Man goes as it is written of him.

Friends, Judas' betrayal was written in the Scriptures long before it happened. It was going to happen. However, that doesn't absolve him of his responsibility. Judas was a willing participant. No one forced him to betray Jesus. He betrayed Jesus due to the darkness in his own heart. Judas willingly betrayed Jesus.

Dr. Don Carson writes in his book *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*:

The divine necessity for the sacrifice of the Son of Man [is] grounded in the Word God [and] does not excuse or mitigate the crime of betrayal.¹ Nor is this an instance of divine "overruling" after the fact. Instead divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both involved in Judas' treason. The one effecting salvation and bringing [redemptive] history to its fulfillment the other answering the promoting of an evil heart. The one results in salvation from sin for [the] Messiah's people, the other in personal and eternal ruin.²

¹ Acts 1:16-18; 4:27-28.

² Don A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 130-132.

Judas' betrayal of Jesus ought to frighten us all. How can a man walk with the Lord of Heaven for three years and then walk away from Him? How could His eyes be that blind and his heart be that hard?

Because of this betrayal, Jesus gave the frightening word of judgment to His betrayer in front of the whole group in v. 24:

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.

So, yes, Jesus will be betrayed as foretold by Scripture, but woe to that man who betrays him. There is no darker deed than betraying the Lord Jesus. Some things are worse than not being born—betraying the Lord of Glory.

Remember Judas' response in v. 25:

Is it I, Rabbi?

He acted as if he was innocent. He tried to conceal his betraying heart by playing dumb. However, as I mentioned earlier, there's one significant difference. The other disciples addressed Jesus as *Lord*. Judas just couldn't bring himself to call Jesus *Lord*.

Surely not I, Rabbi?

Jesus' answer is deadly:

You have said so.

The original Greek indicates the pronoun "you" is an emphatic "you." Essentially, Jesus said,

You have said it yourself.

Judas' betrayal of Jesus should strike fear in our hearts. It should cause us to fall on our faces and pray for God's sovereign protection over our lives. We should never believe that we are incapable of that kind of treachery. I've seen too many people walk away from the faith after serving Jesus for years. It is scary. We should continually cry out for God's protective grace and strive to guard our hearts from the deadly mistake Judas made.

Let's continue to drill down into Jesus' sovereign governance of His betrayal this way. If you look back at v. 5 you will notice that the religious leaders planned to wait until after the Passover to arrest and kill Jesus. But here's the deal: Judas realized that Jesus knew he was the betrayer. He panicked. He had to do something, so he set his plan into motion. He went to the priests that very night and betrayed Jesus. He acted just as Scripture had written and just as Jesus had foretold.

Friends, the fact is Jesus had a divine appointment to keep, and by identifying Judas as his betrayer, He actually set in motion the events that led to his arrest that night and death on the cross the next day.

Jesus had come to earth to reconcile the world to Himself. He had come to give His life as a ransom for His people, and nothing would stop Him.

Finally, in vv. 26-30, Jesus appoints a New Covenant. We have looked at Christ's appointed time and His appointed betrayal. Now, in the final block of text, we pull everything together by looking at His appointed death.

When Jesus shared the bread and the wine with his disciples, He transformed the annual Passover festival into the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. It is an ordinance that churches would begin to celebrate as often as they choose.

So, let's walk through this text and examine the meaning of the bread and the wine and how the ordinance works is applied in the church.

First, let's examine the meaning of the bread in v. 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."

When Jesus said the bread was His body, He was speaking figuratively. Look at how the Apostle Paul understood Jesus words in 1 Corinthians 10:16,

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a

participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

Paul knew Jesus was speaking figuratively. Jewish people often spoke in parabolic language. So, what did the symbol mean?

First, the bread was symbolic of the life of Christ. In Bethlehem (The City of Bread), the Bread of Life was incarnated into flesh and blood. In a human body, Jesus lived a perfect life. He lived the life we should have lived. Then, on the cross, His sinless body was broken for our sins. The punishment that should have been put on us was put on Him, and when it was laid on Him, it broke His body. Then His body was laid in the grave, and three days later, He was raised to life in a glorified body. *So, when we take the bread in the Lord's Supper, we proclaim that we are participating in the resurrected life of the Son of God.*

Second, the bread also refers to participation in one another's lives in the church. In 1 Corinthians 10:17, the Apostle Paul writes:

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

So, to participate in the life of Christ is to participate in the body of Christ, the church. When Paul says the church, he primarily means a local church. The Lord's Supper is celebrated in the context of a local church. It is within a local church that we participate in each other's lives, and by extension, we are participating in the life of Christ.

Think about 1 Corinthians 10:16, the Apostle Paul said:

*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

The Greek word *participation* is the Greek word *koinōnia*, which means *fellowship*. *Participation* is a great way to define this word because it means more than just hanging out. It means *gospel-centered fellowship*, and that kind of fellowship is only made possible through the broken body of Christ on the cross.

Next, let's examine the meaning of the *cup* vv. 27-28:

*And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying,
"Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured
out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

It is the blood of Christ shed on the cross that establishes the New Covenant. Communion wine corresponds to the covenant that is established by the once-and-for-all atonement of Christ on the cross for His people.

The blood of the covenant has its roots in the story of Exodus, in which God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage. In the final plague that was inflicted on Egypt, the Lord sent the Death Angel to kill all the firstborn in Egypt. However, the angel was to *pass over* the houses where they had smeared the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their houses.

Exodus gives further clarity to the practice of the Passover festival. In Exodus 24:6-8, God told Moses to throw the blood of the sacrificial lamb against the altar for the forgiveness of sins. Exodus 24:6-8 says:

"And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Friends, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross is directly connected to the blood that was marked on the doorposts of the Israelites during the Egyptian exodus. It is also directly connected to the blood of the lamb that was killed to provide the blood that was thrown on the altar and thrown on the people to establish the covenant.

Jesus is the spotless lamb of God who was crucified on the cross. By our faith in Jesus and repentance of our sins, Jesus applies His blood to us. We are covenanted with Him, and our hearts are cleansed by His blood.

Just as the death angel passed over the houses of the Israelites that had the blood applied to the doorposts, when we come to Jesus in faith and repentance of our sins, the Holy Spirit applies Jesus' blood to our hearts. In that way, the wrath of God is satisfied and turned away from us. Wrath is turned about from us because the wrath of God fell on the Lamb of God whose body was destroyed, and blood was poured out for our forgiveness of sin.

Brothers and sisters, when we take the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that we are really forgiven because the wrath of God fell on Jesus. But listen to me very closely: You are not saved because you take the Lord's Supper. You take the Lord's Supper because you have been saved.

The Lord's Supper is the reminder of our forgiveness. It is our covenant renewal. It is part of our spiritual participation in the body of Christ. It reminds us that we participate in the life of Christ as we participate in the local church. We are reminded that we participate in the lives of one another.

Next, in v. 29, Jesus reminds us there is another appointed time and another appointed feast in the future when He says:

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.

Jesus looked beyond the cross to that time when all things will be made new. He looks forward to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:9.

Verse 29 is a ray of hope and light in an otherwise dark and gloomy scene in the Upper Room. Yes, Jesus will be betrayed. Yes, Jesus will die. But then Jesus will rise victorious, and He will bring in the kingdom of God.

Finally, in v. 30, the scene closes in the Upper Room, where Jesus and His disciples weep and wail over His impending death. Right? Wrong. Verse 30 says:

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus knew what He was about to do, and it would be excruciatingly painful and horrific, but He didn't despair. Instead, He trusted in God, and while His heart was breaking—He sang a hymn of trust and confidence in His Father in Heaven.

Before we celebrate the Lord's Supper, let me pull the message together for us.

First, the Lord's Supper is the visual proclamation of Jesus' sacrifice for sin on the cross by the whole church. In this ordinance, we proclaim that Jesus' body was broken for our sins, and His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

It proclaims the gospel and calls anyone who has not been saved to confess their sins, turn away from their sins, and place their faith in Jesus as the Son of God who died in their place in order to pay for their sin.

Second, in the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of the sovereign hand of God. When you trace all that God did in all of Scripture, you understand that God had been moving history up to this point so that in Christ, He would reconcile sinners to Himself in the death and resurrection of Christ. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the dead is not Plan B but Plan A, which God has been moving history toward since our eviction from the Garden of Eden.

Third, I want to answer the question: *Who may take the Lord's Supper?* Since we are about to celebrate the Lord's Supper, it is appropriate to remind ourselves of who may participate. Different churches and denominations have different positions on who may take the meal.

We put our doctrinal position in our Service Guide each week we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but we don't always announce it.

So, just as a reminder, Grand Avenue believes the Lord's Supper is only for Christians who have been baptized by immersion. You don't have to be a member of Grand, but you need to be a member in good standing of a local church and have been baptized by immersion.

So, you may be asking why is it so important to be baptized by immersion before you take the Lord's Supper. Here's why: Baptism is the initial proclamation of your public faith in Jesus. It is like putting on wedding rings in marriage.

The Lord's Supper is our covenant renewal with God and one another. It would be backward to take the Lord's Supper when you have never been biblically baptized. It would be like celebrating your wedding anniversary, but you never actually got married.

So, if you have never been baptized by immersion and you want to take the Lord's Supper, I want to ask you to let the bread and juice pass by you this morning. Then, I want to invite you to come to the membership class this morning, begin the membership process, and prepare for your baptism.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we *look back* at the cross and what Christ has done for us. We look *inward*, confess our sins to God, and remember what Jesus did to purchase our forgiveness. We *look around* at those with whom we have covenanted our lives in Christian fellowship. We remember that we belong to one another. In Christ, we are members of one body. Finally, we look ahead to the time when Jesus will serve us in Heaven at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb.