

**DATE:** February 1, 2009  
**SERIES:** The Good News, as Reported by Matthew  
**SERMON:** *The First Supper*  
**SCRIPTURE:** Matthew 26:14-30  
**SPEAKER:** Dick High

**INTRODUCTION:** As I begin this morning I want to give full credit to Pastor Phil. Today's message is his; it is built from his research and it is 95% his text. Only some of the personal illustrations have been changed. On Wednesday he slipped on the ice and spent the night in the hospital as a precaution for head trauma. Under the advice of physicians he handed this baton to me.

One month ago today was New Year's Day. It is one of the annual holidays that is part of our culture. Among the holidays that we celebrate each year, do you have a favorite? Perhaps it is Christmas; because you're a student and can enjoy vacation from school. Perhaps it is Thanksgiving; just thinking about it stimulates my taste buds! Or perhaps it is July 4<sup>th</sup>; you enjoy the fireworks.

During our study in the Gospel of Matthew we've encountered a number of holidays that were part of the Jewish culture of Jesus' day. In December Pastor Mike highlighted aspects of Hanukkah, the Feast of Lights, detailing many ways in which Christ is its ultimate fulfillment. Today, in Matthew 26, the context is one of the most loved Jewish holidays, The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which included the Passover meal, is still observed today in Jewish homes.

Before we proceed, I want to ask again if you have a favorite holiday. I would guess that for the one you select it would not be unusual to learn that there are predictable routines in the way you observe that holiday. It would not be surprising if those are parallel to or reflect the way in which things were done in your home when you were a child. That familiarity may be one of the things each of us loves about our favorite holiday.

Regardless of familiarity and history, time and circumstances sometimes influence the redefinition of a holiday. As we grow older, as we marry and establish our own families, we find that our holiday celebrations often undergo change.

As we trace the life of Jesus in the Gospels, we observe that on more than one occasion He redefines some of the central holidays or festivals of His day. Those holidays or festivals were significant days in first century Israel. We could call them "Holy Days." The Gospels reveal how He places Himself firmly in the center of their focus. For example, at the Feast of Tabernacles, in which water and the lights of many candles played a crucial role, John recorded Jesus as saying, "I AM the living water", and "I AM the Light of the World". These were bold assertions, and likely left many people pondering their full intent. In today's text we will observe that Jesus does the same thing with the most important annual festival in Israel: the Passover.

What we'll soon observe is that for His disciples, the Passover will be infused with a radically new meaning. Jesus will place himself in the very center of this meal by saying that He is the bread and the cup. We will examine that revolutionary redirection shortly, but let's first set some context.

Matthew leads into this season of celebration with an important piece of background information, beginning in verse 14 of chapter 26. As the time for the Passover approaches, Judas makes his offer to become Jesus' betrayer. "*Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief*

*priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over."*

It was no secret that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews were jealous of Jesus. Earlier in Matthew 26 we are told that they had gathered with the intent and purpose of developing a sly plan to arrest and kill Him (verses 3-5). It may have been during that very meeting that Judas made his deal with them. The Jewish rulers were probably amazed but likely thrilled as well that the betrayal would be carried out by one of the disciples. The price is set. What a stark contrast between that which was the minimal price for a common slave versus the lavish and extravagant sum expended in worship of Christ by the woman mentioned earlier in verse 7.

With that as background, let's look now at verse 17 as Jesus and His disciples prepare to observe the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and the Passover. *"On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?'"*

### **What was the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover?**

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which included the Passover, was the central feast of the Jewish Year. Put side by side these two feasts made for an eight-day celebration that began with the Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan (the first month in the Jewish year) and concluded on the 21<sup>st</sup> day. As a point of reference, in 2009 the Jewish Passover is April 9, three days before we observe Easter.

These two feasts celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was named after the type of bread the Israelites ate at their final dinner before they hurried out of Egypt. Most bread is made with yeast which when added to the flour makes the bread rise, and makes the bread soft. But since it takes several hours for bread to rise, they made bread without yeast, which could be baked and eaten as soon as it was cool.

Like the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Passover also reminded the Israelites of their deliverance from Egypt. Initial instruction regarding the Passover is recorded in Exodus 12. I will read a number of verses from that passage. The screens will give an overview of the prominent points.

*1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4 If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. 5 The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. 6 Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. 8 That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. 9 Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts. 10 Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover."*

12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

Later in the chapter God asks His people to remember this great deliverance every year with these two festivals. Of interest is the projected calculation that during Jesus' day over 250,000 lambs were killed during the Passover Feast. Since tradition required that one lamb was to feed no less than 10 people and no more than 20, the number of people celebrating in Israel was probably more than 2 million, which happens to be close to the population of Houston, TX.

Let's return now to Matthew 26, now at verse 18. "He replied, 'Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.' So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.'"

In the Gospel of Luke we learn that Peter and John were given this assignment of locating the room. This secretive way of identifying the place for this meal may have been a necessary precaution to keep Judas from knowing in advance where it would be held. Jesus desired an uninterrupted time alone with His disciples.

### **What was involved in preparing for the Passover?**

As mentioned above the lamb would have been selected several days earlier, but there were many other preparations to make:

1. The selected lamb would need to be slaughtered by a priest at the temple.
2. Unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and the dip for the Passover meal would need to be purchased.
3. Each of the articles of food had special meaning of remembrance of God's actions on their behalf:
  - The Lamb – Its blood on the doorposts of homes in Egypt had had saved them from the angel of death. The lamb was roasted whole and eaten.
  - The Unleavened bread – signified the hurried manner in which the meal was eaten.
  - Four cups of wine – reminded them of the four promises God made to them just before they left Egypt.
  - Charoset - Paste-like mixture of finely ground apples, pomegranates and nuts – symbolized the mud and clay used to make bricks for the Egyptians. It was placed in a bowl and the bread, herbs and bare hands were dipped into it.
  - Bitter herbs (horseradish) – reminding them of the bitterness of bondage contrasted with the sweetness of deliverance.
  - Some people included a roasted egg and some parsley as well.

### **What would be different about this Passover meal?**

- Someone at the meal would betray Jesus.

Verse 20 "When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

Literally, Jesus states that one of these men will hand Him over to His enemies. Interestingly, it is the same word Judas himself uses in verse 15; *“if I hand Him over to you?”*

While this announcement must have stunned the disciples, it is possible that the use of this very term would have had an even stronger intended impact on Judas’ heart. It is as if Christ had been listening to his conversation.

The reaction of eleven of these men is given in verse 22. *“They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord”* In making this observation Matthew chooses words that indicate a very strong, almost vehement, heaviness of heart. Eleven of the disciples in turn voice the same almost haunting question. The flow of the text will soon reveal that Judas is the last to speak.

Last Lord’s day Pastor Mike drew our attention to Judas’ critical spirit. In his observations he stated that *“A spirit of greed and materialism is very often the first step toward betrayal.”* Jesus knows the heart of Judas. Why does He involve the other disciples in this inquiry? Even the statement in verse 23 initially seems puzzling. *“The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.”* Ah, there’s that word again, the one from Judas’ conversation with the chief priests!

I believe that Christ’s communication here with the disciples is at its deepest level focused on the heart of Judas. I believe these words of Christ convey to Judas that Christ has always known his heart; it would be a significant step toward freedom if Judas’ pretension stops! I believe these words also convey Christ’s continued compassion for Judas; here is another opportunity to surrender his heart and will to Christ. The evil intent of the chief priests did not necessitate the sinful participation of Judas. Their desire would be accomplished without his involvement. Could Judas, even at this moment grasp the awful personal consequences of his actions? Was there any small corner of his heart that would consider the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit to turn away from this ultimate act of rejection of Christ?

I believe that is the intent of Christ’s word in verse 24. *“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*

At this point Judas speaks. Verse 25 – *“Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’”* We quickly notice the difference in his response to that given by the other disciples (in verse 22)? It is just one word, but oh how different. They had said, *“Surely not I, Lord?”* Judas replied, *“Surely not I, Rabbi?”*

As Pastor Mike said last week, *“Judas was one of the chosen Twelve, who walked with Jesus for 3 ½ years, saw Him perform mighty deeds of mercy, and heard His great discourses! And still he would betray Him! The lesson in this seems to be that one may be very close to the Lord *and* to other Christians, yet far away spiritually.”*

There is a profound difference in calling Jesus sovereign Lord and Master in contrast to acknowledging Him to be a good teacher, a respected person.

Now that Judas makes this honest statement of his heart, Jesus responds, *“Yes, it is you.”*

It is quite likely that this exchange between Jesus and Judas was whispered, or perhaps not fully grasped by most of the disciples, due in part, to their own self-focus at this time. From John's Gospel it seems evident that Judas' identity as the betrayer at this moment was only known by Judas, Jesus, and John who was seated next to Jesus and overheard this conversation. Soon after the brief exchange of words between Judas and Jesus, John records that Jesus sent Judas out to do what he had chosen to do. It was after Judas left and Jesus was now alone with the eleven disciples that He continued to lead them in the Passover meal.

The Passover meal had been celebrated annually for 1500 years. THIS Passover meal that Jesus shares with his disciples would be the last divinely sanctioned Passover ever to be observed. It will be superseded, as we'll observe shortly. But not everyone understands or accepts that.

Imagine being invited to a lavish dinner prepared by your friends for your birthday. Just as you are leaving to attend the phone rings. You are informed that someone has brought a recent picture of you and set it at your place around the table. You don't need to come. How would you feel?

Although celebrating deliverance from bondage in Egypt was a significant and meaningful event, it also was a prophetic picture of a greater deliverance that was to come. The one who would accomplish that greater, and ultimate, deliverance was here. It would be completely inappropriate to settle any longer for the picture of that which was to come. HE is the honored guest and the focus of attention. In a matter of hours He will hang on the cross as He accomplishes deliverance from sin; that of which all are in desperate need.

Besides being the last divinely sanctioned Passover, this meal is at the same time the First Supper of the Lord Jesus. In this one meal Jesus did away with the old and brought in the new. It was a meal of transition. In this meal with his disciples Christ instituted A NEW MEMORIAL MEAL TO HIMSELF. It would not focus on the lamb slain in Egypt but on the Lamb of God slain on Calvary. It would not recall the blood sprinkled on doorposts so that firstborn sons were spared. It would call us to remember the blood of God's Lamb, echoing the words of John the Baptist, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

In verse 26 and following we read the very words of Christ as He establishes the new focus of and purpose for this meal. "*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'* Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, '*Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*'" With these words Jesus places Himself squarely as the focal point of this meal! He reinterprets the elements of the meal making Himself the center of the meal.

The bread he took was the unleavened bread, and after giving thanks, he broke it. Those actions were typical for a Passover meal. But then Christ said something new; "*Take and eat; this is MY body.*" In the Passover meal the unleavened bread reminded the Jews of their deliverance from Egypt. Now Jesus says the bread is His body, promising that true deliverance will come through Him. The greatest and most needed deliverance that all of us need is not from a country or any human conqueror, but deliverance from the bondage of sin.

Most of us were born into an established family as sons or daughters, but the Scriptures tell us that none of us were born free. We were born with a sin nature, which we demonstrate early and often, giving witness to the words of Romans 3:23 which states that "*all have sinned and fall short of the*

*glory of God.*” The Scriptures tell us that we are slaves to sin and that we cannot get free. Only God can set us free. He made our freedom possible through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross.

What are we saying to God when we take and eat of the bread? We are acknowledging the need of a substitute, someone who gave Himself on our behalf, for the forgiveness of our sin. We are acknowledging that we have placed our trust in Him as that one and only acceptable substitute. We are telling Him that He is our Deliverer and we trust Him as the source of all we need to sustain our spiritual lives. By eating the bread we say that we are sharing in or benefiting from what happened on the cross. We are enjoying forgiveness and restored fellowship with God.

What about the cup? At this time Jesus took one of the four cups that we part of the Passover mean and said, *“Drink from it, all of you. This is MY blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*

A covenant is the agreement by which two parties enter into and maintain a relationship. In the Bible covenants were made official by killing an animal and using its blood as a seal of the covenant. Here Jesus announces a new covenant, one in which blood is involved; but it is HIS BLOOD! It’s no longer the blood of animals but “MY BLOOD.”

On the cross the blood of Jesus Christ has been shed; it was “poured out.” Ephesians 1:7 makes this statement; *“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.”* Colossians 1:13 & 14 echo this truth by stating, *“For he (God) has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

The effect of the shed blood of Jesus Christ is “forgiveness of sins.” For the believer the Lord’s Supper is a time to be reminded that our sins are forgiven and that we now stand before God through the redeeming work of Christ. It is all because of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus.

In later Scriptures we are instructed to continue to gather together for this time of remembrance. The frequency is not specified, but it is always to be in remembrance of Christ. Interestingly, Christ states that He will not share this newly established meal with them until a later reunion in the very presence of God the Father. Verse 29 and 30 – *“I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.”* When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

We have made the choice to incorporate the Lord’s Supper, often called Communion, into the first service of every month. That is not a rigid, unbreakable decision. But it is a purposeful and regular decision to give focus attention to the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He is the Blessed Redeemer, our Living Lord. His invitation to each of us as believers, and as a corporate body today, is to share in this meal with Him. He wants to break bread and drink wine with us, his closest friends.

The Son of God requests your presence at a dinner that is expressly held in His honor.

We are His guests, and He’s telling us, “Please come. Everything is ready.”