

"Jesus' Last Interview with the Disciples"
Matthew 26:1-35; Mark 14:1-31; Luke 22:1-38

In preparing for this lesson, I was overcome with awe and reverence for my Savior for what He said and did in His final hours on earth, His foreknowledge of everything that would happen, and that He willingly walked closer to be the sacrifice God required because of *my* sin.

Jesus spent His final hours in the company of His apostles. He was eager to be with them – to prepare them for His absence even though He would deliver grievous news that He would be betrayed, that they would abandon and disown Him and that Satan would try to tear them from their faith. But our Lord also provided comforting words about seeing them again after His resurrection.

Amidst the Old Covenant Passover, Jesus instituted a New Covenant, "Making the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear." (Hebrews 8:13) Everything symbolic in the Jews' religious life – ceremonial and dietary laws, animal sacrifices, rituals, the altars, the priesthood, the holy place – all would end upon Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. This was a watershed, or I should say, a bloodshed event in God's plan for our salvation.

It was time for Israel to celebrate the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread – a week-long, joyous, symbolic festival. But not everyone in Jerusalem was joyful. Jesus had accumulated quite a list of enemies who feared and hated Him – chief priests, teachers of the law, officers of the temple guard, elders of the people, and of course, Satan. While thousands were preparing for the joys of the Passover feast, these unholy religious leaders were planning to assassinate the Messiah.

The leaders, united in their hatred towards Jesus, convened in the home of the corrupt High Priest, Caiaphas, to plan how to get rid of Jesus either by murder or execution. But these evil leaders had a problem. The number of people following Jesus was huge. If they arrested Him, the crowds would riot and they couldn't afford to have that happen. Rome would massacre to extinguish any possible uprising. The committee of killers decided to wait until after Passover when the crowds would be gone.

Jesus knew his death was approaching, but He wasn't going to make killing Him convenient. He was always either among throngs of people or kept a low profile, often in private homes.

A short distance away from Jerusalem, Jesus dined at a home in Bethany. In the Apostle John's gospel, he tells us Jesus was the guest of honor and His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary were there along with His apostles.

Mary, a *devoted* follower of Jesus, brought into the dining area an alabaster jar containing a valuable perfumed oil. Oil was used for anointing priests, kings, and the dead for burial. Custom was that a few drops of oil was poured on a guest's head to refresh them, but Mary didn't just pour a few *drops* on the head of this special guest. The vial contained about a pint of perfume and as Jesus reclined at the table, Mary poured all the costly oil on His head.

Imagine being in the dining room watching this anointing as the rare and wonderfully perfumed oil ran down Jesus' hair, into His beard and if He sat or stood, it likely flowed onto His tunic, even to His feet. John wrote, "the fragrance filled the house." Wherever Jesus went for days afterward, the perfume went with Him. I wonder if He could have carried the fragrance on Him to the Passover, the Mount of Olives, even to the horrendous suffering He would experience.

Mary's act of devotion drew criticism from the apostles. John wrote that Judas led the protest. Judas said the perfume was worth a year's wages and could have been sold to help the poor. John also wrote that Judas didn't care for the poor. "He was a thief. He often stole from the disciple's money." (John 12:6) Clearly Judas had a heart in love with money and not the Savior.

Jesus rebuked them for harassing Mary. She used what she had to honor Him. Jesus said she prepared His body for burial and prophetically proclaimed the memory of her sacrifice would never be forgotten. Mary's act of love sharply contrasted the conspiracy plans of Jesus' killers.

His enemies didn't know how to get Him alone to seize and kill Him. Then the answer walked in their door – Judas Iscariot. Judas offered them a deal they couldn't refuse. He would provide insider information to carry out a quiet abduction. They were delighted. These leaders *had* planned to wait until *after* Passover but Judas' proposal would provide Jesus to them sooner. They decided to carry out history's greatest crime during Israel's holiest festival.

How could Judas spend three years with Jesus and betray Him? We know about the thirty pieces silver thanks to Matthew. Leave it to the tax collector to record the amount it took to buy Judas' loyalty which was not a large amount for such a terrible act. Were there other reasons for his betrayal? Perhaps Judas expected a military-political Messiah to stand against Rome and restore Israel. But Jesus pursued a spiritual agenda, not a political one.

Scripture provides reasons: Luke wrote, "Satan entered Judas." (Luke 22:3) John wrote that at the Passover meal, "The devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus." (John 13:2) and, "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him." (John 13:27) Bit by bit, Satan gained more and more influence into Judas' thoughts and decisions.

Whether he was possessed or influenced by Satan, Judas *chose* to do evil rather than reject it. Martin Luther wrote, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair" which means we don't have to yield to temptation. We can *choose* between good and evil. "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." (James 1:14,15) When one harbors sin in their heart, it gives the devil a foothold.

And Judas did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. When Jesus washed His disciple's feet, He knew Judas was going to betray Him, and that was why He said, "Not every one [of His disciples] was clean." (John 13:11) On another occasion, Jesus said, "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil." (John 6:70) He meant Judas, who was later to betray Him. And lastly, the sin of greed was the foothold by which Satan gained control of Judas. Those seeking Jesus' death had what Judas wanted – money.

From Judas the betrayer we learn that one can follow Jesus, and follow closely, and still not belong to Him. One of the deceptions of Satan and those he uses, is to "disguise themselves as servants of righteousness." (2 Corinthians 11:15)

A little girl wrote a note to her pastor. "Dear Pastor, are there any devils on earth because I think there are some in my class." Yes, the devil is here and "He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

Passover was approaching and preparations for the meal were needed. Of the Twelve apostles, Jesus chose Peter and John to make the preparations. His direction to them sounded very mysterious. They were to go into Jerusalem and follow a man carrying a jar of water. It would have been unusual to see a *man* carrying a jar of water – that typically was women's work. The two apostles were to meet the man and follow him to the house he entered. They were to tell the home owner the Teacher wanted to know about the guest room so He could celebrate the Passover with His apostles.

Why the secret plans? Jesus knew dangerous people were seeking to kill Him. He could no longer move around freely in public and likely wanted to prevent Judas' betrayal from interrupting their celebration meal.

Much was needed to prepare for Passover. The guest room had to be thoroughly cleaned of leaven, or yeast, as it was a symbol of sin. It was to be furnished with a low, u-shaped table, (sorry Leonardo DaVinci, you got the table wrong!), with couches or pillows so Jesus and His Twelve could recline as was the custom when dining.

The elements of the Passover meal needed to be gathered, including unleavened bread, wine mixed with water, bitter herbs, a dipping sauce, and lamb. Every part of the meal was highly symbolic, but it had no meaning at all without the lamb. Peter and John couldn't just run by the Jerusalem Albertsons and grab a package of lamb. On a prior day, they would have chosen a live lamb "without blemish", had it slaughtered in the temple court and roasted it for the Passover meal. Then Thursday, at sunset, just hours before His death, Jesus led His apostles to the room prepared for them.

If Jewish homes in the first century had calendars, one date for certain would be written on it: Passover. When the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt, God's angel of death *passed over* houses whose families had applied lamb's blood to the doorposts, sparing the lives of their first-born sons and ultimately resulting in their exodus from Egypt. The lamb's blood on their doorposts provided salvation which foreshadowed the salvation Jesus provided when He became the sacrificial Lamb of God. "He was chosen before the creation of the world." (1 Peter 1:20) Jesus had anticipated this since before there was time and then through the millennia of human history until finally, He would become the Passover Lamb. All His life He had seen animals sacrificed and now the time had come for Him to *be* that sacrifice.

Jesus was eager to share in the Passover meal with His apostles. He had much to say to them including that He would not celebrate it again until He was with them in the kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, the apostles were at it again. *Again* they argued who among them was the greatest. Whether it was over who should have the best seat at the Passover meal or who would be in charge in the kingdom to come, it seemed they hadn't learned – either from Jesus' teachings or His example, so He patiently taught them – again – to be like Him – and not like rulers who hold their position over others and claim to be a "benefactor" or a "servant of the people." On prior occasions, Jesus taught them the following about greatness:

- “The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:11,12)
- “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.” (Mark 9:35)
- And at this meal, He told them, “I am among you as the one who serves.” (Luke 22:27)

There is a church in Arizona with a sign over their door: SERVANTS’ ENTRANCE. Who’s the greatest in God’s kingdom? Those who humbly serve as Jesus did.

Aren’t you amazed at the character of Christ? Even though He must have grieved over His apostles’ repeated petty quarreling, and He knew soon they *all* would forsake Him, He *commended* them for their devotion – for standing by Him in His trials – and He promised them great rewards in His coming kingdom – positions of authority. What a wonderful promise!

Scholars tell us their Passover meal would have lasted hours. There would have been many conversations, readings, prayers and eating foods that symbolized the celebration. But in the midst of their fellowship, Jesus delivered a shocking statement – one of them would betray Him. His announcement grieved them – well, all except Judas. They asked each other who would do such a thing. The answer to their question would be answered in a few hours. *All* of them would desert Him. One would betray Him for greed – the others would desert Him in fear.

Jesus said He must die as prophesied and then pronounced a chilling warning. It would be *better* for the man who betrayed the Son of God if he had *never even existed*. Judas could have stopped his evil plan at that moment, but he did not. When they asked Jesus if *they* were the betrayer, eleven apostles called Jesus, “Lord”. But Jesus was not “Lord” to Judas. 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, “No man can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” Judas called Jesus “teacher” when He asked Jesus if it was him. Jesus did not expose him as the betrayer but simply answered, “Yes”, and then, perhaps in a whisper, said, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” (John 13:27) Judas left the meal, doubtless to complete his traitorous plans. What heartbreak Jesus’ *human* nature must have felt knowing what Judas was leaving to do, yet His *divine* nature allowed Judas to leave.

John wrote that after Jesus predicted His betrayal, He told them, “I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.” (John 13:19) “I am” is God’s name. Jesus was saying, “I want you to know that I am God, and I knew this would happen.”

When you answered the question in today's lesson about temptations testing loyalty to Christ, did you list any *you* struggle with? There's not enough time in my lecture to share all of mine! While each temptation tests our loyalty to Him, praise God that as believers, when we call upon Him, we can experience His grace and forgiveness.

There was much to share with His apostles at the meal, yet, the most momentous was that Jesus brought an end to the Old Covenant and inaugurated a New Covenant.

The Old Covenant failed because man failed. Man was unable to keep from disobeying God's Law. "The people of Israel who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded." (Romans 9:31) The Old Covenant could not permanently remove sin and its consequences. "Again and again [priests] offered the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." (Hebrews 10:11) The Old Covenant was only a temporary measure to lead us to Christ. "The law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised." (Galatians 3:19)

The New Covenant is superior because God required a perfect sacrifice for our sin and only Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. Jesus was, "A lamb unblemished and spotless." (1 Peter 1:19) Jesus was "Tempted in every way we are but He did not sin." (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus' shed blood provides eternal salvation. "Christ is the mediator of a New Covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant." (Hebrews 9:15) It is only because the Son of God shed His blood that our sin is atoned for. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)

Jesus then instituted a sacred meal, an observance we know today as the Lord's Supper or Communion. He took two symbols associated with the Passover meal and gave them new meaning. The unleavened bread and fruit of the vine became emblems of His sacrifice. Luke records these words of Jesus: "And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way, He took the cup saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.' (Luke 22:19,20)

Jesus used the bread as an illustration of His earthly body. Just as the bread was "broken", so too would Jesus' body be beaten, bruised and pierced. Yet, as required by God for a lamb sacrifice, "Not a bone of Him was broken." (John 19:36)

Jesus used the wine to symbolize His violent death and shed blood. Crimson colored fruit of the vine represents His crimson colored blood that would flow freely on the cross.

From Scripture, we learn the Lord's Supper is a time of:

- Thanksgiving for our salvation: "The cup is the cup of thanksgiving." (1 Corinthians 10:16)
- Remembrance: "Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24)
- Proclamation: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death." (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- Self-examination: "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:28)
- Communion or fellowship: "When we drink from the cup we ask God to bless, isn't that sharing in the blood of Christ? When we eat the bread we break, isn't that sharing in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16) The Greek word for *sharing* is *koinonia*. It means fellowship or communion with other believers. "By sharing in the same loaf of bread, we become one body, even though there are many of us." (1 Corinthians 10:17) The "breaking of bread" is a time of *koinonia* or fellowship with believers.

One of *the* most important concepts in the entire Bible is *substitutionary death*. Jesus said, "This is my body given for *you*." (Luke 22:19) Jesus Christ died as a *substitute* for *us*. His death substituted the death *we* should experience because of our sin. John MacArthur wrote, "God treated Jesus on the cross as if He lived *your* life so He could treat you as if you lived His."

The Last Passover meal was over. Matthew 26:30 in the *Complete Jewish Bible* says, "After singing the Hallel they went out to the Mount of Olives." The Hallel were the Psalms 113-118. Imagine our Lord Jesus singing! With His tortuous crucifixion just hours ahead, what was in His heart as the 12-voice ensemble sang these words?

- "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." (Psalm 118:22)
- "The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" (Psalm 118:6)
- "I will not die but live." (Psalm 118:17)

Jesus led His Eleven to His customary spot on the Mount of Olives. On the way there, He stunned them again. Before the middle eastern sun rose in the sky, each would desert Him – His sheep would scatter. Then He told them something that should have *thrilled* them – they would have a post-resurrection get-together with Him! He said, “After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” (Matthew 26:32) One wonders if they understood the magnitude of His promise to see them again.

Strong-willed and impulsive Peter pledged he would *never* fall away. But Jesus got very specific with Peter. Using his “birth” name and repeating it to stress the importance of what He was about to say, Jesus said, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you like wheat.” (Luke 22:31) As He often did, Jesus explained with a visual illustration. Using a sieve, wheat is sifted to separate grain from useless material. Sifting Peter and the others was Satan's attempt to make them fall away.

This too applies to us. Imagine a sieve for sifting grain – only it's Satan's sieve. Satan aims to toss believers around until they are so torn and weak they let go of their faith and fall through the sieve right into Satan's company. If he can do it by suffering, he'll try that. If he can do it by wealth, he'll use that. He'll use any weakness or temptation to sift out one's faith. However, our God is infinitely stronger than Satan. If we hold on to our faith, we can't fall through into Satan's hands. We need to, “Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.” (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Jesus knew what was ahead for Peter – agony and regret would eat at him for betraying the One he loved. Jesus said He prayed for Peter's faith and when Peter turned back, his responsibility would be to strengthen his brothers. Not *if*, Peter turned back, but *when* Peter turned back. What an amazing exchange between Jesus and Peter and what an amazing responsibility Jesus knew Peter would fulfill.

Listen to what Peter later wrote about strength: “And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Peter 5:10) Sounds like Peter knew what he was talking about, right? But there was still more Peter needed to hear.

Jesus told him he would deny he ever knew Jesus – and not just deny Him once, but three times. Peter said he was ready to go to prison, even to death for

Jesus and would *never* disown Him. Caught up in a frenzy of loyalty, the other ten apostles insisted they too would stand by Jesus. They had no idea what they would face within the hour. The Lord knew when He called Peter out of the fishing boat that he would deny Him, but He still called Peter to follow Him. What was true of Peter is true for us. The Lord chose every one of us knowing every sin we would commit. What amazing grace!

In preparing His apostles for their future ministry without Him, Jesus reminded them they lacked nothing when He sent them on their first missions. But conditions will change in ways they never dreamed. People will be hostile towards them and they will need to be self-sufficient, to take provisions including funds and a traveler's bag. Oh yes, and buy a sword.

What? Jesus preached peace, not violence. His mission did not involve armed resistance and soon would need to tell Peter, "For all who take up the sword, will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52) If Jesus wasn't advocating the use of weapons, what could He have meant? Perhaps He was warning His apostles, in His attention-grabbing way of making a point, they needed to be prepared for a spiritual battle. Perhaps He meant a *spiritual* sword – the sword of the Spirit.

In this lesson, we learned Jesus would become the Passover Lamb; that at the *Final* Passover, Jesus instituted the *First* Lord's Supper; symbols of the New Covenant were given; and the plan of redemption was set in motion. His last meal was bursting with conversations of monumental importance, of instructions, warnings and encouragement.

With Judas' betrayal, the religious leaders thought they would finally be rid of Jesus – or so they thought. And although Satan couldn't divert Jesus from the cross, he was making His last few hours as heartbreakingly painful as possible with a betrayal, by using the apostles' pride to disrupt their unity, to undo Peter, and to try to separate Jesus' apostles from their faith. The forces of evil would now push the Lord toward His redemptive destiny, just as God had intended from the very beginning.

Through this lesson, Jesus reminded me that God is omniscient. Before there was time, He knew man's sin nature would require a sacrifice of the only One who was perfect, His Son, Jesus the Christ. Jesus reminded me that God chose me even though He knew I would fail Him – and not just three times. In John 1:29, John the Baptizer saw Jesus walking toward him. Let's read aloud together what John said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"