



Our Atonement

JESUS CAME TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS.

Scripture Passage: Matthew 26:17-30 Memory Verse: Matthew 26:28

This lesson from Matthew 26:17-30 is set around the final Passover meal Jesus ate with His disciples just before His death. The first part (vv. 17-25) focuses on Jesus's announcement of His betrayal. This revelation left the Twelve—or at least eleven of them—in shock, wondering which of them was the betrayer.

In the second part (vv. 26-30) Jesus used the bread and wine to introduce a new symbolism into the ceremony that originally commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The new element Jesus introduced has become known as “the Lord's Supper.” Jesus explained that His body would be broken and His blood would be poured out not only for these disciples but also for all who would become His followers in the future—the “many.” All of this would be “for the forgiveness of sins” and to establish the New Covenant.

As you study this passage describing the night before Jesus's crucifixion, write a brief summary of your salvation experience. Include a prayer of gratitude to Jesus for His sacrifice. During the session, help the group gain a better understanding of what the Lord's Supper is and what makes it so important for believers.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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None of us knows the precise time and date of our death. We do know, however, that death is a certainty for all. Consider this scenario: you know the exact day of your impending death, but no one else knows. You throw a dinner party for your family and friends, knowing this will be the last meal you will have with them. What emotions do you think you would experience if this scenario played out in reality? (PSG, p. 114)

How does death sometimes sharpen our focus on the things that really matter in life?



Understand the Context (Matthew 26:1-75)

On Tuesday afternoon of Holy Week Jesus left Jerusalem with His disciples and rested on the Mount of Olives. In response to His disciples' questions in Matthew 24:3, in chapters 24–25 Jesus explained the coming destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and His future return. That night, Mary anointed Jesus with an expensive, fragrant oil. Those present at the dinner were shocked by what they considered a waste (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).

On Wednesday, Judas completed a bargain with the religious leaders to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6). On Thursday, Jesus sent two of His disciples into Jerusalem to complete the arrangements for the Passover celebration. That evening, Jesus and the disciples entered a large upper room to share their last meal together before His death (Matt. 26:20). This Passover meal was important to Jesus. In his Gospel, Luke wrote that Jesus “ferverly desired” to share this meal with His followers (Luke 22:15).

The Feast of Passover commemorated Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, as the death angel passed over the homes that were marked by the blood of a lamb. It was observed on the fourteenth day of Nisan, which is late March or early April on our calendars. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, which recalled the urgency of the exodus, immediately followed and lasted for seven days. These festivals were back-to-back celebrations of God’s deliverance.

By the first century, Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread had merged into a single, eight-day celebration (Ezra 6:19-22; Luke 22:1). These festivals occurred at the beginning of the barley harvest in the spring (Lev. 23:10-14) and were among the three pilgrim festivals (along with Pentecost and The Feast of Tabernacles, Ex. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16) when all Jewish males living in proximity to Jerusalem were required to travel to the temple and present their offerings.

Jesus and His disciples had been staying in Bethany on the far side of the Mount of Olives (Matt. 21:17; 26:6). Jewish law required that the Passover meal be celebrated within Jerusalem’s city limits, so Jesus identified a place in the city where they could gather for this special celebration. They met in “a large, furnished room upstairs” (Luke 22:11-12).

Such spaces would have been difficult to find in the city because it was flooded with thousands of pilgrims, all looking for places to eat the Passover with their families or households. But, as always, Jesus was able to provide exactly what was needed at exactly the right time.

Read Matthew 26:17-30 in your Bible. What emotions do you think the disciples felt at this “final meal” with Jesus, especially considering the statement about betrayal? (PSG, p. 115)

ENGAGE



PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*) on a focal wall. Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*).

ASK:

How does death sometimes sharpen our focus on the things that really matter in life? (PSG, p. 114)

READ:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 114 of the PSG.

DISCUSS:

Encourage the group to consider the “final dinner party” scenario. Encourage a few volunteers to share whom they might invite and what they might say to those gathered.

CONTEXT:

Draw attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of Matthew 14–28*). Point out that this session examines the last supper, which is part of Jesus’s trial and crucifixion. Summarize this information from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 115) to give an overview of Matthew 26.

“Passover began on Thursday evening at sundown. . . . Also on that day, or perhaps a day earlier, the chief priests met to initiate Jesus’s arrest (26:3-5). Sometime that afternoon, while Jesus spoke of end times under the olive trees on the Mount of Olives, Judas the betrayer sold Him out (vv. 14-16). Sometime on Thursday, Jesus sent John and Peter to prepare for the Passover celebration (see Luke 22:8). Following the Passover meal, Jesus returned to the garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, where He spent an agonizing time in prayer as He faced the coming event of the crucifixion (vv. 36-46).”

TRANSITION:

Today’s session focuses on Jesus’s Passover meal—His “last supper”—with His disciples. Through Jesus’s words around that meal, we’ll get a clear view of our own sins and what Jesus’s death means for our sinfulness.



Group Activity Option

Music

Provide lyrics for the song “No Greater Love” by Chris Tomlin (Sparrow Records, 2025). Play a recording of the song, inviting adults to listen prayerfully to the lyrics. Provide a few minutes for them to pray, focusing on a word, phrase, or idea drawn from the song. Open the session with prayer, asking God to give every person a clear understanding of Christ’s death and what it means for us.

Coming Betrayal (Matt. 26:17-25)

17 On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” **18** “Go into the city to a certain man,” he said, “and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My time is near; I am celebrating the Passover at your place with my disciples.’” **19** So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover. **20** When evening came, he was reclining at the table with the Twelve. **21** While they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” **22** Deeply distressed, each one began to say to him, “Surely not I, Lord?” **23** He replied, “The one who dipped his hand with me in the bowl—he will betray me. **24** The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.” **25** Judas, his betrayer, replied, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” “You have said it,” he told him.

(vv. 17-19) *Where do you want us to make preparations for . . . the Passover* implies that Jesus already knew where they would celebrate the festival. Luke 22:8 named Peter and John as the disciples Jesus sent *into the city* to get things ready. Jesus told them to locate *a certain man* and to tell him that the Teacher’s *time is near*. This referred to Jesus’s impending death and seems to indicate that Jesus had shared what lay ahead for Him with this unnamed man.

Prepared the Passover involved arrangement of the room and the food for the meal. It also could have included sacrificing the lamb at the temple and transporting it to the site where it would be roasted and eaten. Other parts of the meal included greens, bitter herbs mixed with stewed fruit, wine, and unleavened bread.

Key Doctrine

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming. (See 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:23-29.)

(v. 20) That *evening*, Thursday night, Jesus and *the Twelve* were *reclining at the table* in the upper room in Jerusalem. The Jews adopted the Roman arrangement called *triclinium* for their formal feasts. This involved couches arranged in a U-shaped pattern with a low table in the center. Each guest reclined on his left elbow and took food with his right hand.

(vv. 21-22) During the meal, Jesus made a startling announcement: *One of you will betray me*. Even though Jesus previously had referred to His coming betrayal (Matt. 17:22; 20:18; Mark 9:31; 10:33; Luke 9:44), this time He suggested a member of His inner circle would be involved.

The disciples were *deeply distressed*, especially since this revelation came during a meal that symbolized close relationship.

Four items are noteworthy in the shared response: *“Surely not I, Lord?”* First, the Greek structure expects a “no” from Jesus. Second, eleven of the disciples acknowledged Jesus as *Lord*. Third, Judas spoke up last, probably to avoid attention. Fourth, when Judas did speak, he called Jesus “Rabbi,” rather than Lord (v. 25).

(vv. 23-24) *Dipped his hand with me* probably does not mean their hands would be in a bowl at the same time. Instead, the betrayer was present at the meal. This hint was ambiguous since Jesus referred only to *the one* and because all the disciples had shared the dinner bowl with Jesus.

Using His favorite term, *Son of Man*, Jesus tied His betrayal to both Scripture and human responsibility. This betrayal was *written about him*. However, He added a *woe* to the betrayer (see Matt. 11:21-22; 18:7; 23:13-29). Jesus said it would be better if the betrayer *had not been born* than to face God’s wrath for this duplicity.

(v. 25) Finally speaking up, Judas used the same construction as the others, expecting a negative reply. As noted, he called Jesus his *Rabbi*, rather than “Lord.” He would address Jesus the same way in Gethsemane (26:49). Jesus’s reply, *You have said it*, let Judas know that Jesus was aware of his disloyalty.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must recognize their own capacity to betray Jesus.

READ:

Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 26:17-25 aloud as the group highlights the setting and significance of the event.

EXPLAIN:

Briefly summarize verses 17-20. Use information from verses 17-19 on page 136 of the Leader Guide to explain the background. Note that the secrecy about the location would keep Jesus and His disciples hidden from the Jewish leaders.

ASK:

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’s announcement of betrayal? How do you think He felt in that moment?

RECAP:

Allow adults to discuss their responses. Point out that Judas spoke last and that he called Jesus “Rabbi,” while the others called Him “Lord.” Explain the meaning of verse 24:

While the impending death of Jesus was the fulfillment of both prophecy and the plan of God, the actions of Judas arose from his own willful choice. There is no conflict between God’s sovereign will and Judas’s free will. Jesus was not a victim of some political process but the center of God’s plan for the salvation of humanity. Judas was not merely a pawn in God’s plan but someone who acted out of his own decisions and perhaps flawed thinking. Because of this, Judas would suffer the consequences for his decision. (PSG, p. 117)

SHARE:

Emphasize that Jesus knew exactly what was going on. Point out that His response showed that He understood how Judas had given himself over to sin.

ASK:

What can we do to resist becoming immune to the dangers of sin? (PSG, p. 118)

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Bread

Bring an unsliced loaf of bread to the session and allow each adult to pinch off a small piece. Say: **Jesus explained that the one who would betray Him had dipped bread in the bowl just as Jesus had done.** Point out that while Judas was the betrayer, each disciples’ sin would send Jesus to the cross. Emphasize that our sins played a role in Jesus’s betrayal and crucifixion as well. Challenge adults to examine their lives for sins that might be hindering a fuller relationship with Jesus.

Coming Atonement (Matt. 26:26-30)

26 As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take and eat it; this is my body.” **27** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, “Drink from it, all of you. **28** For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. **29** But I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” **30** After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

(v. 26) In verses 26-28, Jesus explained the theological reason for His death. As **Jesus took bread** and **broke it**, He prayed a blessing over it. In giving it to His disciples to eat, Jesus also introduced a new meaning to this ancient ritual.

Jesus’s command to **take and eat it** allowed each disciple to be an active participant in His **body**, which the broken bread represented. By this simple act Jesus transformed the Passover memorial into “the Lord’s Supper.” To be clear, Jesus’s words were symbolic.

(vv. 27-28) The lamb’s blood was a major feature in the Passover ritual (Ex. 12:7,13,22-23). But now Jesus focused on His own **blood**, represented by the wine in **a cup**. Four cups were used during the Passover meal. Taking this one, possibly the third, Jesus gave **thanks** and urged His disciples to **drink from it**. That Jesus had them drink from a common cup symbolized their unity.

Poured out indicates a violent death and reflected Old Testament sacrificial language for atonement (see Ex. 29:12). The promises of God to Moses were central to Judaism and the Passover, but Jesus was initiating a new **covenant** based on His sacrifice (see Jer. 31:31-34).

For many points to the substitutionary nature of Jesus’s death. It also emphasizes that the redeemed community would be larger than just those followers of Jesus in the room at that moment. Meanwhile, **for the forgiveness of sins** goes to the heart of Jesus’s death (see Matt. 1:21; 20:28). Ultimately, that is why He came.

(v. 29) **But I tell you** again called for hearers to pay close attention. Then using a strong double negative, Jesus emphasized that this was the last Passover—but not the last meal—He would share with them. He simply would abstain from the **fruit of the vine** (either diluted wine or grape juice) until His return. On that day, He would **drink it new with you in my Father’s**

kingdom. Jesus’s emphasis was not on His abstinence but on the coming of the kingdom. *With you* reassured the disciples they would be present.

(v. 30) The Passover meal was required to end before midnight. To conclude the celebration, the host would lead the guests in **singing a hymn**. Normally, Psalms 115-118 (called “Hallel” psalms”) were used.

From the upper room, Jesus and His disciples left the city and walked east to the **Mount of Olives** and Gethsemane. Sometime later, Judas arrived, and Jesus was arrested (v. 47).

Praying Scripture

Matthew 26:28

Spend time praying Scripture using Matthew 26:28. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

Example: Thank Jesus for the sacrifice of His body and His blood. Ask Him to remind you of His sacrifice each time you take the Lord’s Supper.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 71 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



APPLICATION POINT: We find forgiveness by accepting Jesus’s death as the payment for our sins.

READ:

Direct the group to read Matthew 26:26-30 silently, underlining the meanings of the bread and the cup.

ASK:

What was the significance of the Passover meal? How did that meal connect to Jesus’s mission?

CONNECT:

Summarize this content from pages 118-119 of the PSG to highlight how Jesus redefined the Passover in light of His sacrifice:

“At this point in history, the Passover had been celebrated for over 1,500 years. Now Jesus was going to change everything. . . . The Passover meal included prayers, blessings, and sharing a variety of dishes with different meanings. One of those dishes was the *matzah* bread, a flat, unleavened piece of bread that represented the bread eaten in haste in Egypt as the Israelites prepared to flee. Jesus broke and gave this bread to each disciple with the instructions to take and eat. With this action, Jesus changed the meaning of this bread. The breaking of the bread pointed to His death. No longer was this a reminder of the exodus event; now it would serve as a reminder of Christ’s atoning death. Four cups of wine were used in the Passover ceremony. The sharing of each cup was accompanied by prayers and blessing. . . . Jesus called this cup ‘my blood of the covenant.’ A covenant is a binding agreement or an oath-bound promise between two parties. God’s covenants in the Old Testament were ratified through blood sacrifices. In the death of Jesus, a new covenant was instituted through His blood, giving a new pathway to a right relationship with God.”

ASK:

Why is it important for believers to remember Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross? (PSG, p. 120)

PRAY:

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew’s Gospel*) and invite adults to pray this session’s memory verse, Matthew 26:28, back to God as noted on page 138 of the Leader Guide.



CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 121 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers must recognize their own capacity to betray Jesus.*
- *We find forgiveness by accepting Jesus's death as the payment for our sins.*

CHALLENGE:

As a group, consider why it is important for all believers to regularly remember Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Remind adults that regularly celebrating Jesus's death through the Lord's Supper should challenge them to reflect on their sin and His atonement.

DISCUSS:

Direct adults to the first set of questions on page 121 of the PSG. Guide the group to consider how they personally prepare for the Lord's Supper and how they might encourage one another the next time the ordinance is observed. Point out the second set of questions on page 121 of the PSG during the week. Urge adults to reflect on these questions and to ask for God's help in eliminating false steps that could lead them to deny or betray Jesus.

PRAY:

Encourage adults to continue using **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Matthew's Gospel*) to pray Scripture back to God during the week ahead. Close the session in prayer, thanking Christ Jesus for offering His body and blood so we can find forgiveness and avoid the wrath we deserve.

AFTER THE SESSION

Text or email your group this week with a phrase, verse, or thought from this week's lesson. Challenge them to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 120 of the PSG. Enlist a few volunteers to be ready to share what they learned when you gather for Bible study next week. Remind adults that the coming session will be the last in the study of Matthew's Gospel.

LEADER BLOG



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