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\Matthew 26:17 - 26:25



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Steve Gregg reads from Matthew chapter 26 and notes that the account is greatly compressed without much detail. He explains that although the stories leave open the possibility of miracles, they do not necessarily imply it. Gregg also highlights the humility of the disciple who asks Jesus whether he will be the one to betray him, recognizing that he could fall despite his commitment to God. Finally, he notes that Judas' betrayal and subsequent suicide fulfill prophecy and that while he may have lost, it is never too late for others to turn back to God.

Transcript

Today I'm reading from Matthew chapter 26, beginning at verse 17. Now, when evening had come, he sat down with the twelve. Now, as they were eating, he said, assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.

And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to him, Lord, is it I? Then he answered and said, he who dipped his hand with me in the dish will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.

Then Judas, who was betraying him, said, Rabbi, is it I? And Jesus said to him, you have said it. Now, the first three verses we read are Matthew 26, verses 17 through 19, and this greatly compresses the narrative of how Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare the place for him to have the Passover. Now, the Passover was a full feast.

It was not a church service, it was a meal. It had an elaborate ceremony related to it, and Jesus and his disciples had taken Passover together on many occasions before in all likelihood, since this was done annually, and most of his disciples had been with him probably for the better part of three years, and therefore had had the Passover with him, and knew him to be one who kept the Passover. Now, that does not mean that we keep the Passover in the same way.

I sometimes have encountered people who feel, for example, that when they keep a Saturday Sabbath, I've asked them why they do this, and they say, well, I do it because

Jesus kept the Sabbath. Well, maybe he did. I don't know that he did.

I think it would have been disputed by those who criticized him in his day, whether he kept the Sabbath or not, because he was continually accused of not keeping the Sabbath. But even if Jesus did keep the Sabbath, that's not really an answer that satisfies as to why we keep the Sabbath. Jesus also kept the Passover, which was a Jewish festival, and we do not keep it.

Yes, I realize we have a counterpart to it, but I believe we also have the counterpart to the Sabbath. But the point is that the counterpart that we have to the Passover does not really in any way resemble the actual Passover that Jesus kept, because that Passover was a lamb meal followed by an elaborate ceremony that had to do with taking matzos, an unleavened bread, and dipping it in certain bitter herbs and so forth, and passing around several cups of wine in a ceremonial fashion with certain symbolic meaning attached to each thing. We certainly don't do that.

But the fact that Jesus did it does not mean that we do it, because Jesus was living as an observant Jew for the most part. There were things that he did come to change, or to fulfill, as he put it. But for the most part, Jesus observed the festivals that the law required Jews to observe.

And one of those was the Passover, and the disciples knew this, because they had no doubt kept the Passover with him on other occasions. And two of his disciples asked him, you know, where should we have the Passover this time? This makes it very clear that Jesus did not have any regular home in the area. On one occasion, someone came to Jesus and said, Lord, I'll follow you wherever you go.

And Jesus said, foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man does not have anywhere to lay his head. And that meant, of course, that he didn't really have a regular home when he was in the ministry. He had come from a regular home, of course, in Nazareth, but he left it behind to begin his itinerant ministry of preaching and gathering and teaching disciples.

So there was no obvious place where he would keep the Passover. You need usually a shelter for that. You need some kind of a home to do it in.

And so Jesus told them to go into such and such a place. And in Matthew's account here, it's a greatly compressed narrative with not very much detail. It simply says, 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. Well, other accounts, for example, that in Luke chapter 22 and that which is found in Mark chapter 14, give much more detail that Jesus tells them. Now, you go into the town there and you'll see a man carrying a pitcher of water on his head.

And you follow that man. And when he goes into a house, you go in there and then you go upstairs and look for the owner of the house and then tell him, say, where is the place that the master is going to keep the Passover? Now, this was something that Jesus described to the disciples, and it happened exactly as he described it. And yet it is clear that they were not privy to it in advance.

That is, before Jesus told them about it, they did not know about these arrangements. In fact, there is some question as to whether these were arrangements previously made by Jesus or not. It's very much like the case where he told the disciples to go get the donkey.

And he said, you'll find this donkey tied here. And if somebody says, what are you doing with that donkey? Just say the master has need of it and they'll give it to you. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened.

Stories like this leave open the possibility that there may be a miracle involved, a miracle of prediction or even a miracle of causation that Jesus may have miraculously foreseen prophetically that there'd be a donkey at a certain place or that there'd be a man with a picture on his head at a certain place. And he predicted to his disciples that they'd find such a man and that he would cause the people to release the donkey or he'd cause the owner of the house to be favorable toward Jesus staying there. That is a possibility.

This could have been a miracle, although the Bible does not say it was a miracle. And we certainly do know injustice or irreverence to the scripture or to Jesus to say that these may be cases where Jesus had prearranged situations. The man who owned the donkey may well have been one of Jesus' supporters, one of his disciples.

If this is so, it does not take anything away from the deity of Christ to say that he had supporters that his disciples were not aware of. How Jesus would have become aware of them or made such arrangements without his disciples knowing is perhaps a question that we'd have to leave unanswered because we don't know to what extent Jesus was accustomed to going out without the disciples, on which occasions he could have made these kinds of arrangements in advance. We do know that the disciples spent most of their time with Jesus, but even people who travel together, and I know this from experience, don't spend every moment of their time together and they often go out and do things in town alone or whatever.

And on one of those occasions, Jesus may have made arrangements with one of his followers to have a place ready. When Jesus said, if you go into the city and see a man carrying water on his head, from what I understand, this was not generally speaking what male servants did, this is what woman servants usually did. So that it would be somewhat obvious which person Jesus was talking about.

It would be sort of like the counter sign that secret agents have when they're trying to contact somebody and decide whether a particular person is the person they're trying to contact. Sort of a sign was given, I'll be the guy in the pink carnation, you know, the man with the pitcher of water on his head, he's the guy, follow him. And it's possible that Jesus had made these arrangements because we know that Jesus had disciples other than those that followed him around.

And the homeowner or the servant of the homeowner or both may well have been among those that counted themselves among Jesus' disciples. In any case, the disciples went there apparently early the same day, that evening the Passover was going to be eaten there. And so they made the preparations, probably had to do with cooking or at least getting the servants of the household involved in cooking and setting things up, making sure that when Jesus would later arrive with the rest of his disciples, they could get right down to it and not be bothered about initial set up and so forth.

Now, when the evening had come, it says in verse 20, he sat down with the twelve. These twelve, of course, included Judas. Although in the course of the meal that night, Judas did depart.

And one of the first things that Matthew tells, actually one of the only things that Matthew tells about Jesus' conversation with the disciples at this Passover meal is his prediction that one of them would betray him. He just brings it up. As they're eating the food, it says, and as they were exceedingly sorrowful, excuse me, now after they were eating, he said, assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.

And they were exceedingly sorrowful. And each of them began to say to him, Lord, is it I? Now, it's interesting that these men were as humble as they were. They didn't say, Lord, it will not be I, certainly.

Although there was one who did say that. And we know that, you know, from later on that Peter said, Lord, even if the others betray you, I won't betray you. If they deny you, I'll never deny you.

And Peter was more self-confident than the others. And of course, his self-confidence, as we see later, was not well justified. He turned out to be the one who did deny the Lord, though he was not the one who betrayed him.

And it's interesting how that Jesus said, one of you will betray me. And yet the disciples were not certain whether each one was not sure whether he would be the one. They said, Lord, is it I? Is it I? Now, I think that's, in one sense, a commendable humility, because we should realize that if we think we stand, we may yet fall.

So the Bible warns us in 1 Corinthians 10, if any man thinks he stands, let him take heed lest he fall. And there are many who would say, I would never deny Jesus. And I will tell

you quite honestly, I am inclined to think that way myself.

I can't imagine the circumstances under which I would deny the Lord or betray him in any sense that I recognize to be that act. Of course, every time we disobey him, every time we are less bold than we should be in speaking up for him, I suppose in some sense one could call that a betrayal or a denial of Christ. But as far as a deliberate betrayal, where one knows himself to be renouncing Christ and working against Christ deliberately, it's hard for me to imagine that I would ever come to such a place.

And yet Peter didn't believe that he could come to such a point as to deny the Lord. And the other disciples were not sure whether they could possibly be the ones who would betray him. I think it's commendable that they had no confidence in themselves in this matter.

On the other hand, I do think we should have at least such a commitment and know we have such a commitment that we are determined to be faithful unto death by the grace of God. That although we realize that we are no better than other men, and some have betrayed and denied Christ, and we are not any better than they in our own flesh. Yet by the grace of God, we trust that God will enable us to be strong to the end and to be faithful to the end because that's what he commands us to do.

And when he gives a command, he gives also ability. And it is simply ours to trust in him as little children and to keep our hand in his. And we can know that so long as we are doing such that we will not slip away and we will not betray him.

So on the one hand, I think it's commendable that they were so humble as to not put themselves above it. But on the other hand, I would hope that you and I would have such a commitment to Christ and such a trust in his enabling grace that we could say, by the grace of God, I will never betray him. By the grace of God, I will not deny Jesus no matter how much torture I'm subjected to.

Not because I'm strong, but because he is strong. And in my weakness, his strength is made perfect. And I am determined.

I've decided to follow Jesus, no turning back. And that is the commitment that every Christian is to have. And it should not be a matter of question in your mind whether you will be one who will deny the Lord.

The Bible does warn that in the last days, many shall depart from the faith. The Bible does talk about, it does warn us in Hebrews about not departing from the living God with an evil heart of unbelief. There are some who do that.

The Galatians, Paul said, had fallen from grace, he said, and they were estranged from Christ. When we hear about such things, we need to realize that such a possibility is a real danger. But at the same time, for our own selves, we should be able to say along

with Joshua, as for me in my house, we shall serve the Lord.

Not because we have great self-confidence, but rather because we have great confidence in God and we know the nature of our own commitment to him. I can, I think, say with great deal of confidence that neither I nor my wife will ever be sexually unfaithful to each other. Not because either of us are superhuman and beyond the capability of falling to temptation or experiencing temptation, but simply because we have a commitment and we know the nature of our commitment.

We know how serious we are about that commitment. We did not get married tentatively. We got married with the full understanding that we were in this for life and that it involves making every sacrifice necessary to remain faithful to each other and to the vows we've made.

And if a person has made such a commitment, that doesn't mean that such a person could never fall. But it does mean that that commitment includes a trust that God will give the grace in every situation to overcome the temptation to be unfaithful or to defect or to betray the trust that's been given to us. And so, the disciples, of course, might well be forgiven for not being sure of themselves.

After all, they had not received the Holy Spirit yet. They were not yet operating in the kind of grace that came to them at Pentecost. And so, quite humbly, each one says, Lord, is it I? Am I the one who will betray you? What an awful thing it must be to be wondering that.

Will I turn from Christ? Will I betray him? If any of you are out there today wondering that about yourself, when you hear, for example, as we sometimes do, that Christians are tortured in some parts of the world. When we hear that the clamps are being tightened upon Christians even in the United States, and we wonder whether there will be persecution, even torture for the faith, even martyrdom in this land, it may come to our mind, will I be firm? Others have been faithful, although not all have, but most that we read of certainly are people who were faithful throughout great tortures. Would I be faithful through great tortures? Obviously, it's probably not a healthy thing to entertain those things in your mind too long at any given time.

It is good, though, to reflect on the fact that we may be called upon someday to pay the ultimate price in laying down our lives for Jesus. And we should be asking ourselves, is that the nature of my commitment? Am I committed to be faithful unto death, even through torture? Now, the question is not, do I have the strength? Because the answer to that question is, no, I don't have the strength. But that's not the issue.

The issue is not how strong I am, but how strong God is. You see, we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time, Peter said in 1 Peter 1.5. We are kept by the power of God, not by our own strength. However,

that keeping through the power of God is through our faith as we continue to trust God.

You see, our commitment does not, we don't have to make a commitment to be strong. We have to make a commitment to be faithful, to trust God. As a child does not have to be strong.

At least he doesn't have to be any stronger than he is in order to carry out his father's wishes. But he has to trust that his father will give him only such commands as either the father knows he can carry them or else will help him to do so. And God will not give us any command or require anything of us that he is not going to enable us to do.

And that faith and that faithfulness of God is what will bring the grace in the moment of need if we are facing great trial or torture or whatever. So the disciples, when they asked the question, Lord is it I? He didn't answer directly. He answered and said, he who dipped his hand with me in the dish will betray me.

Now, you might say, well, that is a direct answer. Shouldn't they all be able to look over and see whose hand was with him in the dish? Well, actually, all of the disciples probably dipped their hand in the dish. And he's not necessarily trying to single out the one in that statement, but rather pointing out the irony of the fact that one who is even at this table, one who has dipped his hand in the same dish with me in this gesture of friendship and mutual worship and trust, that one of those who has done such a thing as this is going to betray me.

And then he says, the Son of Man goes as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.

Now, on one hand, the betrayal and the crucifixion of Christ is a fulfillment of prophecy. The Son of Man goes even as it is written of him. It was in one sense a necessity to fulfill prophecy that the Messiah would die and fulfill those predictions.

However, that does not alleviate the responsibility of the man who betrayed him. Some people have really puzzled over this. They say it's not fair.

Judas was predestined to deny Christ and to betray him, and yet he's lost. And he's punished for this and remembered in impunity, or not impunity, but in infamy, you know, for what he has done. And that is bothering to some people.

It should be pointed out, however, that the Old Testament never names the man who will betray Christ. It only indicates, in the Psalms especially, that the Messiah would be betrayed by a close friend, or by somebody who was a trusted confidant. That did not point the finger directly at Judas.

Judas had every choice, as much as anyone else, to decide whether he would be that

one. If Judas had chosen to be faithful to Christ, the prophecy could be fulfilled through some other. There were probably a number of people who had been friendly toward Jesus, who were corruptible, and who could have been persuaded by money to betray him.

If Judas had chosen to be faithful, the scripture could still be fulfilled. It would not be necessary for Judas to be the one, since the scriptures didn't name him specifically. But Jesus knew Judas.

He knew that Judas had already at this time even begun to make plans with the chief priest to have Jesus arrested. So Jesus knew who it was, and indicated it was one of those who sat at the table with him. Interestingly, Jesus said it would be better for that man who betrayed him if he never had been born.

Now, that certainly eliminates any question we might have as to whether Judas, in the end, got saved. We read later on in Matthew 27 that when Judas saw that Jesus was arrested and condemned, that he felt remorse, and he gave the money back, and he went out and hanged himself. And the fact that he felt remorse and repented in one sense has made some people think, well, maybe he's going to heaven now because he did repent.

Well, he didn't repent in the way that saves a person. The Bible says there is a worldly sorrow that leads to death, and there's a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. And if we say, well, Judas obviously had some remorse and sorrowful, well, we could ask, was it the kind that led to repentance or was it the kind that led to death? Obviously, the fruit of his repentance was suicide.

His repentance was not genuine. It was not a saving repentance. And Jesus, therefore, was able to say it was better for that man if he had not been born.

If Judas had gone to heaven and was there today rejoicing with the saints for all eternity, it could hardly be said of him it would be better for him never to have been born. Now, Judas, I'm afraid, was lost, but he was lost not because of the necessities of predestination. He was lost because of his own wicked choices and his own complicity with the enemies of Christ.

And if you are ever lost, it will be because of that too. We need to make our choice. Will we betray Christ or will we be faithful unto death as we are commanded to do? I hope you make your choice on the right side.