

Darkness and the Death of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] We are going to come back to Matthew 26. We want to consider... Certainly much of the passage we read from verse 17 to verse 29.

And included in that section we read these words of verse 20, that when it was evening, he, Jesus, reclined at table with the twelve.

And in this time of preparation, this pre-communion service, well, where we've been already as we've read God's Word, we've been in the upper room there with Matthew, who wrote this account of what was under divine inspiration.

And with Matthew, we go to the upper room and there be with Jesus. And there in that evening of the Passover meal, in the physical darkness of that time, it was evening when the Passover meal was celebrated, there in that physical darkness, we see the spiritual darkness.

We see the spiritual darkness of betrayal, of enmity, of the act of Judas Iscariot. And not just, of course, Judas Iscariot, but the high priest, the chief priests, and their, if you like, their collaboration to seek to kill Jesus, to silence Jesus, to have their way with the Lord Jesus in the darkness of their mind, the darkness of their souls.

[1 : 40] But as we'll see, I trust as we go through this passage, that even in the darkness of betrayal, in the darkness of this collaboration between those who were seeking to put Jesus to death, even in that darkness, we see light.

We see the light of Christ. We see the light of Christ's words and His foretelling of His being, that once-for-all sacrifice for sin. We see even in the midst of that darkness, we see light, the light of Christ.

It's a theme we're going to take this evening and, God willing, continue tomorrow morning at our communion service. So we're going to use this time of preparation to be focused, obviously focused on the Lord Jesus and the cost that Jesus paid for your salvation, for my salvation.

And let the Word of God enter into your heart as we do allow the Word to examine ourselves or examine our souls, to allow the Word to probe your heart as you seek to examine your relationship with the Lord Jesus.

And let the Word enable you to rejoice in that great salvation that Jesus won for you. Of course, at that price, the price of His giving of His life for you.

[3 : 01] Even that price that Jesus paid as He entered into the darkness of His sin-bearing, as you say, we'll look at that more closely tomorrow, but even in the darkness before His sin-bearing and the intense darkness of sin-bearing, even in all the darkness surrounding Him, Jesus bringing the light of life to sinners such as ourselves.

So what do we find here in the passage in verse 20? Well, as we said, it's evening, when it was evening. And as you know yourselves, and so many of the time checks that we find in Scripture, this isn't just to tell us that this is a particular time of this particular day.

No, this is surely bringing us to see the horror of what's about to happen and sinners putting Jesus today.

And the very mention of evening then that speaks of, well, Calvary about to happen, Jesus about to bear the sin of many. And with evening, with darkness setting in, as we said, not just the darkness of night time, but the darkness enveloping Jesus, the darkness of betrayal, the darkness of humiliation, the darkness of death, that will not conquer Jesus.

Darkness will not overcome the light. Yes, the intensity of betrayal and humiliation, death itself, they will not be the conquerors.

[4 : 38] Jesus will conquer. Jesus, the light, will overcome the darkness. Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus, even in what he announces there after his betrayal, Jesus announces that this supper

that they're having is pointing to Jesus himself as the Passover lamb, the lamb that will be sacrificed, the lamb that will be the substitute for sinners, so that you, so that I, so that all for whom Jesus came to give his life, so that we might know full forgiveness for our sins.

And what we read here then about the darkness of sin around Jesus, the darkness, the imminence of death, this is real. This is happening. But we see hope.

The hope of Jesus as the light of the world and the hope that sinners have that what Jesus has done on the cross is full redemption, full salvation.

Of course, it's undeserved, undeserved love. But that love that we see even there from verse 26 as Jesus is eating with the disciples, we see love, the light of Christ, love shining in the darkness.

We see Jesus fully in control of events surrounding his death, even surrounding his betrayal. Jesus will go to the cross.

[6 : 08] He will die for sinners. The sinless one will die for sinners. The sinless one will bear the wrath of God so that you, so that I, will not know that wrath against sin.

And so, having the quote of Jesus before you, even in this passage, well, yes, rejoice and use what we have here this evening in preparation to confuse your anticipation that we are to have, God willing, another communion fellowship with the Lord and with one another tomorrow.

None of us know how many more communion services we'll share in this side of eternity. So, we look forward then tomorrow. We look forward to the privilege that God is giving us even now to prepare and the privilege God willing to participate in the sacrament.

Of course, word and sacrament, we don't just have the sacrament to remind us of the death of the Lord Jesus. We have God's word there in conjunction with the sacrament. And we have this privilege that we look forward to even tomorrow by word, by sacrament to remember the Lord's death.

To remember what that death means, what it signifies, what it tells of the victory that Jesus, the light of the world, the victory that Jesus won over darkness.

[7 : 44] The darkness of sin, the darkness of Satan and the darkness of death itself. And of course, the victory that Jesus won on the cross over sin, over Satan.

And three days later, the victory that Jesus won over death itself when he rose from the grave. Jesus, as we've seen here in this passage, anticipates his death.

But he anticipates it in full control of the events that are happening even in that room, even before he goes to the cross. So what do we see? We see that the Lord Jesus in his preparation to offer himself up as that once for all sacrifice for sin.

He's in complete control. He's in absolute control of what is happening there in order that he wins salvation for his people. And even the details that we've been reading here, the details of Judas Iscariot's betrayal, the details of what we see happening in that upper room there in Jerusalem. Nothing's happening by chance. This is no accident or haphazard event that somehow happens, that circumstantially is going to happen without the knowledge of God, without the knowledge of the Saviour.

[9 : 09] No, our Lord is in absolute control. And so, you know, he should help us this evening in our time of preparation to remember that we're not just thinking of sovereignty in relation to one evening in the life of Jesus.

We're drawn to see sovereignty in the eternal perspective because your salvation, you who know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, your salvation was planned from all eternity.

And yes, in the events leading up to the cross, within that great plan of God, all under God's sovereign control, even these very last moments before Jesus' death, Jesus wasn't any kind of passive victim of evil.

God wasn't a hapless bystander watching on as the events were unfolding in betrayal and humiliation and death. No, it was all under the sovereign control of God.

And you can see that in the evidence even in the passage here, I mean, you go to verse 18, for example, and Jesus knows what's going to happen. He tells his disciples the very place where they're going to eat the Passover.

[10 : 29] Well, that's already determined. He knows that his appointed time, the hour of his betrayal is near. He knows that the time of his death is near.

And, you know, even when the disciples and Jesus are reclining at the table, Jesus announces to them that one of them is going to betray him. Now, Jesus knows who it is.

The other disciples, they can't figure out which one of them it is. And, you know, Jesus knows he's in full control. Now, of course, we have to remember that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus out of his own free will.

Judas Iscariot took it upon himself to betray Jesus. You see that? That's why we read there from verse 14 to 16. But that doesn't take away from the fact that the act of betrayal was a sinful, wicked act that would lead Jesus to his death.

again, all under the sovereign control of God. What Judas meant for evil, God meant for good. And Jesus says, well, this was what was prophesied.

[11 : 39] You see that in verse 24, the Son of Man goes just as it was written, just as it was written in Scripture, in the Old Testament Scriptures. And quoting from Psalm 41 verse 9, Jesus quoting from that Psalm where David wrote, even my close friend whom I trust that he who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.

Now we know, you know, this is mystery, this is the mystery of God's sovereignty. But here we're seeing the will of God being carried out even in the midst of darkness.

And none of us can fathom, fully fathom the depth of, you know, God's overruling work, overruling the works of evil in order to bring about the good for his people.

But we're absolutely convinced and we have absolute faith that what God is revealing here in Scripture is telling us that even, even the darkness of rebellion and betrayal, even these acts of wickedness were used for God's glory.

and bring that to what we're doing in our preparation and anticipating the supper tomorrow. You who know the Lord Jesus will celebrate the Lord's supper, will remember the Lord's death through the supper and that you will be there by the perfect will of God, the salvation that was won for you by the Lord Jesus for you according to his perfect will, according to his perfect electing love.

[13 : 28] Nothing of your salvation, nothing in your salvation is by chance. Nothing is happening to Jesus even here before his death.

Nothing's happening to Jesus here by chance. all that's happened to Jesus here, all that happened in his life and his death, all for your salvation.

So we can even now, in the quiet of your hearts, give thanks to God for his perfect wisdom, that even in the midst of darkness here, even in the midst of darkness, the light of Christ's love we see shining through.

even though Jesus knew that the scriptures would be fulfilled in the particular way that Jesus would be betrayed and the way that Jesus would die, we know that Jesus submitted fully to God's will, not my will, but your will be done.

And even here, Jesus doesn't somehow seek to stop Judas betraying him. He doesn't try and stop Judas from leaving that upper room.

[14 : 41] No, Jesus is in full control of events, he's in full control of his life, he's in full control of his death, so that you might have life, so that you might know the light of life and not face the eternity of death.

But, while we do have to see God's sovereign control and all the events there in that upper room, as we say, we can't take away from Jesus his responsibility for his wickedness.

And, you know, and again, I think we do have to see how devastating that act of betrayal was.

Remember what we read, this is the first day of unleavened bread, this is the time of Passover.

Passover was, as you know, the annual celebration, the feast that the Israelites celebrated, the Jews celebrated, they remembered the time when God passed over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt, when the firstborn were put to death, the homes weren't daubed in blood, but yet, because the Israelites had taken the lamb and daubed blood in their homes, God passed over these homes.

The time then to celebrate was Passover time annually. It was a time of fellowship, it was a time of joy, it was a time when the people of Israel were glad and they rejoiced, they used this opportunity to come together, to come together in fellowship and enjoy an intimate meal, a fellowship meal, a time for families to gather together, quite a large number of families gathering together, I think it was a minimum of ten people would gather around the table, so this was a time of celebration, this was a time for family, this was a time of fellowship, and in that context of Passover, of fellowship, of family, it's then that Judas betrays Jesus, bringing out the horror of the act of betrayal, and the fact that this meal was a close, we might say a close family occasion, this is so crucial for us to focus on, because we might say in that upper room,

[17 : 06] Jesus and the twelve disciples, in the context of Passover, they made up this family unit, and the meal, if you follow the process of Passover meals, the meal, well, there's a sharing meal, you see in verse 21, they're eating, they're eating together, and Jesus breaks the atmosphere, if you like, with words that horrified the disciples, or certainly the eleven of the twelve disciples, truly I say to you, one of you will betray me, you know, if the disciples are eating in this fellowship meal, in this intimate meal, the peace is shattered, because Jesus announces there's a traitor, and of course, Judas Iscariot had already gone to the chief priest, and got his thirty pieces of silver to hand over Jesus, but you can't you see the intensity of the darkness of this betrayal, this disciple who'd shared with

Jesus and Jesus' ministry for three years, this disciple who'd shared even in that Passover meal, this meal that was supposed to emphasize thanksgiving and fellowship, and so you can see why in verse 22 we're told that when Jesus says one of you will betray me, they're very sorrowful, you know, this is happening when they're supposed to be at this height of gladness and rejoicing, and none of them can take in what Jesus is saying, in this fellowship meal there's a traitor, no one admits to being the traitor, and no one suspects any of the others, but Jesus knows, the one who's dipped his hand into the dish with me will betray me, one of these very disciples who shared the Passover meal is going to betray the Son of God, betray the Son of Man, Jesus is condemning that individual and so much so he says it would be better if that person hadn't been born, and so what we're seeing here in Judas Iscariot is unimaginable evil, this is the betrayal of the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Lord

Jesus, the Saviour, the Messiah, the Christ, to betray Jesus in the context of a fellowship meal, you know, this is treasurer, I mean, you know, in everyday, not really everyday life, but there are times, of course, as you know, in human history, when you read of times of treason, traitors in the midst, treason is still a capital offence, even in this country, you go to examples in World War II, for example, think of our own country, think of France, for example, and traitors that were found, they faced the full rigour of the law because treason was, still is considered such a heerness offence, but how much more heerness, how much more severe, infinitely severe, the offence of Judas Iscariot on this very occasion, when fellowship should have been at its height, darkness, darkness around, but Jesus isn't going to be swallowed up by the darkness, he's not going to keel under this horror of betrayal, but what do you notice

Jesus does, as we said in verse 26, he turns, as it were, that darkness, he turns that darkness into something wonderful, something absolutely wonderful, because the Passover meal is transformed, it's transformed even from its, you know, immediate purpose, the purpose, remember to remember the exodus of God's people from Egypt, Jesus is going to turn this meal into anticipating a greater exodus, a greater deliverance, the deliverance of God's people from the oppression, not of Egypt, but the oppression of sin, because of the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God. And if you like, what we're seeing when Jesus announces his death, and what that death is going to bring to his own, we might see Jesus restores family fellowship.

[21 : 48] Jesus is showing that, yes, God's wrath will be appeased once for all when Jesus offers up himself for others. So in complete contrast to the hatred of Jesus that we read of from verse 14, and again in the betrayal of Jesus, in contrast to the hatred of man against Jesus, we see the love of Jesus towards man, the love of Jesus towards sinners, we see the light of Jesus shining there in the darkness if we look particularly from verse 26 to 28, because, you know, again, we may well have read this many times, this passage, even in our context of communion service, and I'm sure, whichever congregation you've met to celebrate the Lord's Supper, this passage will have been read and proclaimed, but let's never, you know, let's never take for granted what we read here, because something extraordinary, something wonderful happens in that upper room, because from the depths, from the depths of horror, the horror of betrayal, from the depths we see light, the light revealed in

Jesus announcing what he will do, as he says there, for many for the forgiveness of sins. So, what do we see? We see eleven disciples now in the Passover, Jesus Iscariot has left the room, so he's away, Jesus is now left with eleven disciples, and again, Jesus does something there, as we read from verse 26, something that again, would have been unexpected, something certainly was startling, he took bread.

Now remember, this is happening in the middle of the meal, even in our own culture, when we give thanks, we give thanks at the beginning of the meal, I know in some cultures that thanks are

returned at the end, but normally thanks given at the beginning of the meal, and that's it, we carry on eating, as was the case in the Passover, but notice Jesus in the middle of the meal gives thanks, and breaks the bread, and passes the bread around, take, eat, this is my body, so Jesus is doing something new, something new that would not have happened in an ordinary Passover meal, but Jesus is doing something new to reveal that something new is going to happen, new light, you might see new lights being shone in the midst of darkness, Jesus is going to do something new to bring salvation through his finished work on the cross, light will overcome darkness, and Jesus, you know, makes this announcement, and Jesus is showing here that his body will be given for sinners, and you see

Jesus commanding the disciples, take, eat, they're going to benefit, all who take and eat of the bread are the beneficiaries of Christ's work of salvation, in the immediate context of course was disciples, there in that upper room, you who take and eat tomorrow when you take that which represents the body of Christ, you are a beneficiary of Christ's salvation, and then again, the cup of wine, drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins, again, you who take the cup of wine tomorrow, you know the power of Christ's love and the forgiveness of your sins, so what's Jesus doing here, he's showing by his word, and by this act of breaking bread and passing the cup, he's showing that he will be the once for all sacrifice for sins, and even as we read there of the cup, the blood of the covenant, it's not just the bread that Jesus passes, but the cup as well, and that's important, because of course in the time of sacrifice in the Old Testament, the animal's blood was spilled to indicate that life had been given for another, the substitute animal for the one who'd given the animal in order that the substitute animal take the punishment that that individual deserved, and so when Jesus tells of the blood of the covenant poured out for many, he's telling in this graphic way that his life will be given, the blood that Jesus sheds will indicate that his life will be given, just as the substitute animal gave his life, its life, for others, but that animal sacrifice repeated again and again, no, for Jesus that blood will be shed once, his body will be broken once, Jesus will die once, and the act of that once for all sacrifice, well that act has been announced, the about to happen act has been announced, it's happening, you know when darkness threatened to overshadow even the Passover meal, but Jesus shines his light, even in that upper room, when Jesus announces his death for others, and you know in the darkness of sin around in a world that hates

[27 : 31] Jesus and seems increasingly to hate the Saviour, well let's rejoice, let's rejoice that yes the light of Christ's love was revealed even in that upper room, even in the midst of darkness, even before his trial and crucifixion, salvation, so we can rejoice in our hearts, we can rejoice even in anticipating a remembering of Christ's death, even as we prepare to do so tomorrow, so yes as we are about to leave this room, this building, keep before you in your hearts and minds what we've considered this evening in that act of Jesus, the light of Christ, overcoming even the darkness of betrayal that we saw there.

Be reminded yes of what it cost Jesus even before the ultimate cost of giving of his life, of being sin for us, the one who knew no sin, who has made sin for sinners.

But don't just look back at that room there in Jerusalem, look forward. Because Jesus directed his disciples to look forward.

As we saw there in verse 21, 9, I tell you I'll 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 is telling his disciples, he's telling us, he's saying look forward, look forward to what I'm promising, look forward to that communion in the kingdom of God and the glory of heaven and look forward to that eternal banquet when the Lord's people will feast with him eternally.

You who opened your heart to him, you who by faith have given your life to Jesus, give that promise of that eternal communion with him when you meet with him face to face and have that perpetual fellowship with him in glory.

[29 : 44] Because we're promised that eternal feasting with Christ, we're promised of the glory of the kingdom of God and the fullness of the kingdom of God, we're promised that our souls will never go hungry, we'll never be thirsty, we're promised that darkness will have fled from the light of the Lord Jesus us, when there'll be no more tears and no more pain, when there'll be eternal perpetual fellowship with one another as we enjoy that eternal perpetual fellowship with our Saviour, the Redeemer.

I suppose we might say this in closing, that the recent passing of many saints and to glory, it's certainly been the experience of a number of us here, even in looking at this passage again, that in fact it should heighten our expectation of this eternal communion that Christ promises.

So even in celebrating the communion as we pray we do so tomorrow, tomorrow morning, that in itself anticipates an eternal communion. communion. You have that prospect even when you, in these very seats here, take the bread and take the wine.

You have a prospect, an eternal prospect before you that should fill you with hope. The hope of the glory of eternity to come as you prepare even in your heart to remember the Lord's day and anticipate communion with him now and eternally.

So we prepare our hearts this evening. We prepare to remember the Lord's death till he comes, when he comes, when the Lord Jesus comes in judgment, when he comes to bring his people into the glorious eternal New Jerusalem, when light will shine and not be overcome by the darkness.

[32 : 00] Amen. Let us pray. Lord our God, our Heavenly Father, we praise you for your word. We praise you, Lord, for the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

We thank you, Lord, for this time of preparation. We pray, Lord, that as we have been given and blessed by this time, that we will not abuse the time that you have given us, but give you the glory, give you the praise, and that truly we will be preparing to remember the death of your Son, the Lord Jesus.

So help us, Lord, that we pray, because we know, Lord, that by our own selves we cannot and would not prepare. But we ask, Lord, for that enabling, to so prepare, to remember what it cost the Lord Jesus for our salvation.

Continue then with us, we pray, and go before us, we ask in all things. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.