

One of You Will Betray Me

The Sovereignty of Jesus Over Time and Trespasses

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-25

Sermon Series: Matthew

Topic: Jesus, Judas, Betrayal

Introduction

In our journey through Matthew's gospel, we are now in the final week leading up to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Last week we considered the incredible anointing of Jesus by Mary at Bethany. She anointed Jesus with a very expensive perfumed oil in a beautiful act of worship, which Judas concluded was a complete "waste" (Mt 26:8). This so infuriated Judas that he determined to sell Jesus to the chief priests and elders, who had already determined they must "kill" Jesus, but "**not during the feast**" (Mt 26:5) of Unleavened Bread lest a riot break out among the people (Mt 26:4-5).

Matthew 26:3-5 (ESV) ³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴ and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵ But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

Thus, we see the desire to kill Jesus, but the agreed upon timing of his murder is intended by his enemies to take place after the Passover and Feast of Unleavened bread. Judas no doubt presumed he went secretly to betray Jesus to the chief priests, but in the portion of Scripture before us today we learn that Jesus knew all about it. And so we find Jesus revealing to his disciples, "**One of you will betray me.**"

In today's Scripture, Matthew reminds us that **Jesus is sovereign over both time and trespasses**. Jesus is in complete control of the events leading up to his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus determines the time of his arrest and his death, not his enemies. He even controls the means by which he was delivered into the hands of his enemies. All unfolds according to the the divine plan of God and the sovereign will of the Jesus. Thus far in Matthew's gospel he has



repeatedly revealed the authority of Jesus. Now he reveals Jesus' authority over his own death. Jesus is King over the timing of his death and even his betrayal.

There are two parts to the next section of Matthew's gospel. The first is *the preparation for the Passover* (vs.17-19) and the second is *the prediction of his betrayal* (vs.20-25).

The Preparation for Passover (vs.17-19)

This paragraph reveals Jesus' sovereignty over time.

Matthew 26:17-19 (ESV) ¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "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.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread (v.17). It is now the afternoon of Thursday of what we call Holy Week. *Passover* was celebrated each year on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan¹) and then the feast of *Unleavened Bread* followed immediately thereafter, on the next day after Passover and lasting for seven days (15 - 21 Nisan [March/April], cf. Lev 23:5-6).

The unleavened bread was called "the bread of affliction"² since it signified the haste with which the Israelites had to leave Egypt. The two celebrations became so interconnected in the mind of the people—since they always happened together—that they were spoken of as one celebration.³ Both "the Passover" and "the feast of unleavened bread" were sometimes used to refer to the whole eight day celebration (cf. Lk 22:1).

Thus, the "*first day of Unleavened Bread*" was technically the day of Passover and also the day that all leaven was removed from the house in which Passover and the subsequent weeklong feast would be observed.

Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover? (v.17). Apparently Jesus and his disciples were still in Bethany when they asked this question. Celebrating the Passover was the reason they had come to Jerusalem.⁴

Passover was a *pilgrimage feast* and so as many Israelites as were able were expected to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate inside the city walls. The lambs were to be sacrificed at the temple and then taken inside a house where the service was observed after

¹ Called Abib before the Exile.

² Deuteronomy 16:3.

³ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 962.

⁴ Matthew 17:21.

sunset. Josephus reports that more than two million⁵ Jews arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and so space was in short supply.

Passover, as you will recall, is a *memorial*⁶ service that calls to mind the night that God purchased the freedom of Israel from slavery in Egypt at the cost of the life of the every firstborn in Egypt, both man and beast. However, the people of Israel were spared this judgment by killing a lamb and putting the blood of the lamb on the head board and posts of the door of the house⁷ and when the death angel saw the blood, he then *passed over* that house and they were saved from death.

The primary point is that freedom comes at the cost of a life. Death and judgment come to all who are not covered by the blood of the lamb. For those who are covered by the blood, they pass out of judgment and into life.

Passover was a *family feast*.⁸ Israelites were to gather in households, which was according to the instructions originally given on the first passover.⁹ The meal was to be eaten inside houses as families.¹⁰ Josephus tells us that Israelites typically gathered in groups of no less than ten and no more than twenty.¹¹ The meal included various elements that were symbolic of their slavery and deliverance, but at the center was a young boy who was to ask, "what does all this mean," to which the oldest male of the household was to recount the story of their slavery, deliverance, and the Exodus to God's presence at Mt. Sinai. Thus, Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover as a kind of family. Recall that Jesus said that those who do the will of his Father in heaven are his brothers and sisters (Mt 12:50). Thus, they need a room large enough to accommodate the thirteen of them.

The Passover lambs were to be killed just before sundown because that was the actual time of day that the children of Israel departed from Egypt (Dt 16:6). The original command specified that the lamb was to be sacrificed at "*twilight*," which literally meant "between the two evenings."¹² Josephus reports that the lambs were killed between 3:00 - 5:00 p.m.¹³ The Passover meal was then eaten just after sunset.

⁵ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 749.

⁶ Exodus 12:14.

⁷ Exodus 12:7.

⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 963.

⁹ Exodus 12:3-4.

¹⁰ Exodus 12:7.

¹¹ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 749.

¹² See ESV footnote at Exodus 12:6.

¹³ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 749.

Go into the city to a certain man (v.18). The Greek phrase “*to a certain man*” is equivalent to what we might say as ‘Mr. So-in-So.’¹⁴ This kind of phrase is used when one does not know or want to give away the name of a person. Luke tells us that Jesus sent only Peter and John on this errand (Lk 22:8). Mark tells us that Jesus told the disciples that Mr. So-in-So could be identified by the fact that he would be “carrying a water jar” (Mk 14:13). This would be unusual for women, not men, carried water.¹⁵ When they identified this man, they were to follow him into the house he enters and then speak with the master of the house.

Why the secrecy? Evidently it was because Jesus knew the chief priests and elders wanted him dead and, as we know, Judas was already “*seeking an opportunity to betray him*” (Mt 26:16). Jesus did not want to allow Judas the opportunity to betray him too soon. The timing was under the control of Jesus. Therefore, he allows only Peter and John advance knowledge of the exact location of where they would keep the Passover.

Say to him, The Teacher says, My time is at hand (v.18). In keeping with the air of secrecy, Jesus instructs his disciples not to use his name, but rather to simply refer to him as “*the Teacher*.” Evidently Jesus has already made prior arrangements with this man and so he would know about whom the disciples spoke.

In saying, “*My time is at hand*,” may at first seem to refer only to keeping the Passover, but there’s much more here than meets the eye. These are words that “only occur in this gospel.”¹⁶ However, we cannot help but be reminded of the language found in the Gospel of John where we find Jesus often referring to “my hour” or “his hour.”¹⁷ Jesus has been and is still now in sovereign control of the timing of all that is unfolding. The religious authorities had previously wanted to kill Jesus, but it was the wrong time.

- John 7:30 (ESV) So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come.
- John 8:20 (ESV) These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.
- John 10:39 (ESV) Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.
- John 13:1 (ESV) Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father...

¹⁴ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 370.

¹⁵ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 388.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 655.

¹⁷ John 2:4; 7:8, 30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1.

Now his "time at hand." Now is Jesus' appointed "hour of destiny."¹⁸ The word 'time' (*kairos* *καιρός*) "refers to a decisive moment in the course of history or an individual's life."¹⁹ Here it "refers to that decisive moment in salvation history that God has appointed for his sacrificial death."²⁰ The use of the word reveals Jesus' "conscious fulfillment of a predetermined plan."²¹

Jesus knows the Father's plan and he is willingly walking into it. Jesus is in full control here. He is leading the way and his disciples are following (i.e. they "...*did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover*" v.19).

Summary. We see Jesus is here exercising his sovereignty over time. His time is at hand. The divine plan is unfolding and Jesus is directing it.

The Prediction of Betrayal (vs.20-25)

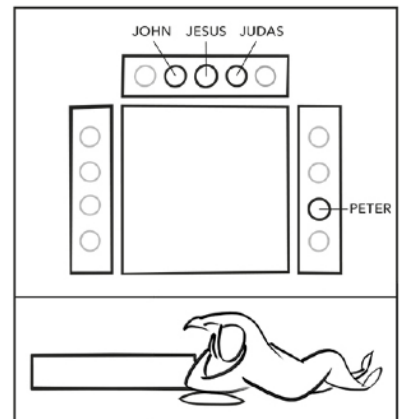
As we have seen Jesus' sovereignty being exercised over time, now we will see his sovereignty being exercised even over the trespasses that will lead to his betrayal and death.

Matthew 26:20-25 (ESV) ²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴ 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 better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve (v.20). As we have already said, the Passover meal could not be eaten until after sunset. Now, in the *evening*, we join Jesus and his twelve disciples around the table. Andreas Köstenberger and Justin Taylor, in their book *The Final Days of Jesus*, have a helpful diagram of the table of the Last Supper.²²

"*Reclining at table*" refers to the traditional U-shaped triclinium which was comprised of three couches that surround a low center table on which the food was placed. Guests leaned on their left elbow toward the table with their

Seating Arrangements at the Last Supper



¹⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 963.

¹⁹ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, 388.

²⁰ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, 963.

²¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 371.

²² Andreas J. Köstenberger and Justin Taylor, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Most Important Week of the Most Important Person Who Ever Lived* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 59.

feet then facing far away from the table. The conversation unfolds around this table. Matthew passes over other portions of the conversation reported by the other gospel writers and goes quickly to the most salient portion of the conversation.

Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me (v.21). Again we find Jesus directing the conversation. Jesus initiates. "*Truly*" (*amēn ἀμὴν*) communicates seriousness and certainty. What Jesus is saying is intended to get their attention. He is stating a serious and certain fact that will happen. In fact, it had already *begun* to happen. If Judas had previously assumed his meeting with the chief priests and elders was unknown, he now knows that Jesus is fully aware of his evil intentions. Will this knowledge alter Judas' plan?

They were very sorrowful (v.22). The result of Jesus' words is "shattering; nobody had expected that there would be treachery in this tightly knit little group."²³

Very *sorrowful* is a rather weak translation for a phrase which contains Matthew's favourite word for violent emotion, even shock (used in 17:6, 23; 18:31; 19:25; 27:54). They are so shaken that they cannot even trust their own self-knowledge—though the form of their question might be better translated, 'You can't possibly mean me, can you?'²⁴

Their response is very interesting for at least two reasons. First, they do not immediately begin blaming each other. They do not begin doubting one another, but rather they begin doubting themselves. Jesus' words so stun them that they assume that Jesus is correct and that he knows them each better than they know themselves. They each went around the table asking him, "It isn't me, is it?" Second, no one says, Ah ha! It's Judas I knew it! This is the most stunning fact to me. No one has evidently seen in Judas anything that would lead them to conclude that he was a fraud. Up until this moment, over the past three years or so of ministry life, Judas has looked just like all the other disciples.

He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me (v.23). This somewhat cryptic answer actually isn't very helpful at all in identifying the betrayer. Given that they all would have dipped bread into a common dish at some point during the meal, this says nothing more than identifying the betrayer as one who presently with him at the table. It still could have been any of the Twelve. But Jesus issues a severe warning.

The Son of Man goes as it is written of him (v.24). There are at least 113 specific²⁵ details of the Messiah and his life that are predicted in the OT and are fulfilled in the life of Jesus. Many

²³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 656.

²⁴ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 371.

²⁵ Marsha A. Ellis Smith et al., *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 58, chart "Messianic Prophecies of the Old Testament."

scholars would list even more than those 113. However, it seems here that Jesus is referring to something written specifically about his betrayal. John (13:18) tells us that Jesus here quoted from Psalm 41 which says,

Psalms 41:9 (ESV) Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

Here we see the *pain* of betrayal. The worst kind of betrayal comes from those who sit at the table with you, pretending to be your friend while sharing a meal, and yet they are plotting your destruction. The presumed "*close friend*" is the one who most painfully "*lifts his heel against*" you. That this pain was "*written*" in advance reveals that this was *planned*. Jesus knows that he will be betrayed first because it has been written long ago in Scripture. All of these unfolding events are part of God's plan.

Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born (v.24). This is a stunning statement. Yes, this betrayal was planned by God and yes it will be fulfilled by a man, but woe to the man through whom it is fulfilled. This reminds us of what Jesus previously said,

Matthew 18:7 (ESV) "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"

Sin is a necessary part of God's plan for this world, but no one who sins is thereby considered guiltless. Judas had heard Jesus say this (some months before). God's divine plan will unfold, but no sinner or evildoer will be excused saying, Well, it was all part of the plan. The apostle Paul notes this argument in his letter to the Romans, "*Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?*"²⁶ Paul answers saying, How dare you talk that way to God! Judas will be condemned because Judas did what Judas wanted to do. Judas chose to deliberately do what he knew to be wrong and therefore he will be justly punished accordingly. Judas chose to betray Jesus and he is therefore guilty. Judas knew exactly what he was doing because he confessed with his own mouth, "*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood*" (Mt 27:4). Judas knowingly condemned an innocent man. That is wrong. Judas willingly betrayed a righteous and holy man and therefore he punishment will fit the heinous nature of his crime. Judas will suffer greatly for the seriousness of his sin.

Jesus on Annihilationism. Jesus here denies what those who teach annihilationism affirm. Annihilationism affirms that eventually all those in hell will cease to exist—they will be annihilated. In other words, it will be the same as if they were never born. However, what Jesus here says about Judas, that "*it would be better if he had never been born,*" says the exact opposite. Thus, the punishment Judas will receive in hell will make him wish that he had never been born. If, as annihilationism affirms, all the souls

²⁶ Romans 9:19.

of the damned will one day cease to exist, then there will come a day when it will be the same as if they were never born. This is not the case since Jesus confesses that Judas' punishment will be worse than never existing.

You would think the such knowledge would turn Judas away from his greedy love of money and that he would at that moment abandon his suicidal aim at betraying Jesus. Jesus makes clear to him that nothing but a terrifying and tortuous eternity awaits him. It is a incomprehensibly evil thing to live three years with a holy man, to witness his holy power, his righteous authority, and his divine demeanor, only then turn around and chose a few thousand dollars over the gift of eternal life. But Judas does not change his will or his ways. Judas is unmoved by these disastrous words. Matthew now tells us what Judas said to Jesus.

Is it I, Rabbi? (v.25). Judas almost responds the same as the other eleven. There is one word difference. Whereas the others say, "*Is it I, Lord,*" Judas says, "*Is it I, Rabbi?*" The eleven call him 'Lord,' while Judas calls him only 'Rabbi.' The other eleven confess Jesus as 'master,' while Judas can only acknowledge him as 'teacher.' Here we have insight into Judas' heart. His truest and deepest thoughts regarding Jesus are revealed. To Judas, Jesus is nothing more than a teacher.

You have said so (v.25). This is somewhat akin to us when we say, "You said it." Or perhaps like when we say, "Those are your words, not mine." It is an oblique way of affirming what has been said. In this instance, it was cryptic enough that no one fully understood that Judas was the one who would betray Jesus.

Conclusion

Let's conclude with three observations.

1. ***Passover points to the necessity of shedding blood in granting the gift of salvation.*** From the beginning of time the shedding of blood was required to cover sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, God killed an innocent animal in order to provide a covering for them. The entire sacrificial system pointed to the fact that the shedding of the blood of the innocent was required in order to forgive the sins of the guilty. The writer of Hebrews rightly concludes, "*without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins*" (9:22). Hear the words of John the Baptist when he watched Jesus of Nazareth walk before him, "*Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jn 1:29, 36). If you have faith in the death of Jesus—the shedding of his blood—then, God will grant you the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus said to the Jews, "*Unless you believe that I am [God's holy Son & man's only Messiah] you will die in your sins*" (Jn 8:24). But if you believe that with all your heart and confess that with your mouth, then you will be saved (Rom 10:9-10), for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [Jesus] will be saved" (Rom 10:13). If Jesus is your Passover lamb, then all your sins are forgiven and eternal life is yours.

2. **Jesus is in sovereign control of time.** "My time is at hand," he said. All that unfolded in the final week of Jesus' life was unfolding according to the sovereign plan of God. The enemies of Jesus often sought to kill him, but they never did because it was not right time. Finally, when the fulness of time had come, then Jesus allowed himself to be betrayed, arrested, crucified, and buried because of all this was according to sovereign plan of God. Jesus chose the time of his death, not his enemies. David said it well, *"I trust in you, O LORD; You are my God. My time is in your hand; rescue me from the hand of my enemies... Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!"* (Psalm 31:15-16).
3. **Jesus is in sovereign control of trespasses.** No one's sin will prevent God from accomplishing his sovereign plan to save. Trespasses are willful sins. Trespasses are the intentional crossing of forbidden boundaries established by God. Judas' sin was willful and he knew that what he was doing was wrong. However, through his willful sin, God accomplished a wonderful salvation. Through the willful sin of Joseph's brothers, God worked a wonderful salvation for Israel. If you repent of your willful sin, then nothing can stop God from his intention to save. Jesus died to save from eternal death those who place their faith in him. God's sovereign power is greater than your and my willful sin. Jesus' shed blood can cover even the most willful and wicked trespass. But the repentance must be real. The murderous, blasphemous, abusive, violent, arrogant apostle Paul said this, "

But I received mercy... and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost [of sinners], Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. **1 Timothy 1:13-17 (ESV)**

Paul is explaining that Jesus saved such a wicked person as Paul in order to prove that he can save anyone. Jesus chose Paul to be an example that he can save anyone.

Paul chooses to call Jesus Christ and Lord. Judas called him only Rabbi! What will you call him?

Discussion Questions

1. How would you summarize the meaning of Passover? How many days did Passover last?
2. What is the meaning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread? How many days did this feast last?
3. Who is Jesus to you? Lord or teacher?
4. Why did Jesus prearrange a place for Passover?
5. What did Jesus mean when he said, "My time is at hand?"
6. Why do you think Jesus chose to reveal that he knew one of them would betray him?
7. What does this passage reveal about Jesus?
8. What does this passage reveal about God the Father?
9. What does this passage teach about the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man?
10. What is the significance of the disciples calling Jesus Lord, while Judas called him only Rabbi? What does this reveal about Judas? What does this reveal about the other disciples?
11. What is one thing from this text that you learned and wish not to forget?