

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

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THE LAST SUPPER

Reading: Matthew 26:1-35

We are coming to the very last days of the Lord's life. The circumstances of these days are recorded by all the Gospel writers in great detail. John devotes seven chapters to it in his gospel so we must carefully try and piece together the details.

It was an anxious time for the elders of Jewry. Ever since Jesus had been in Jerusalem his popularity with the common people has increased, and when they sang his praises on his entry to the city it fired envy into the chief priests and scribes and elders. They all gathered in the house of Caiaphas (the High Priest) to map out a place of murder. The Passover Feast was only two days away and they feared that Jesus might be exalted even more in the eyes of the people so they must take Jesus before the Feast to avoid protests from the people.

An Act of Love

In contrast to all this hatred Matthew tells us of an act of grace that took place in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. Jesus was there sharing a meal and while he sat a woman called Mary came and poured a very precious ointment on his head. Here the action was like an anointing of his body and was therefore very remarkable as no other person, not even among the twelve disciples, realised the need for his death to fulfil the role of Messiah. Jesus was touched by what Mary did – she had obviously listened and understood more of the teaching of Jesus about his sacrificial death than any of his disciples.

Led by Judas the disciples began to criticise her action as being wasteful and neglectful of the poor. The beautiful odour of the ointment, so like the spirit of Mary, had filled the room, but now it had become contaminated with strife and greed. We know that Jesus was well aware of this strife, and he clearly told the disciples that she had done it for his burial and the act would always be remembered as one of faith.

This telling off for Judas appears to have been a final straw. He went out to betray Jesus and made an agreement for 30 pieces of silver if he was delivered up to be killed. Having made the promise Judas went back to the twelve and awaited an opportunity to betray the Son of God.

14th Abib

It now being 6pm on the 13th Abib, the 14th was now beginning. Jesus asked Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover so that he might share the Passover with his disciples. But to the frustration of Judas, Jesus did not give the location of the Passover room but gave vague instructions as to where they should go to be given the use of a room. This meant that Jesus had a few more hours with the disciples.

It was most important that Jesus shared this feast with his disciples uninterrupted as he still had many lessons to teach them. The Passover having been prepared Jesus came and sat down with the twelve. They were terribly upset when Jesus announced that one of them would *betray him*. As much as the disciples loved the Lord surely he was wrong this time – surely not one of his close followers would betray him? One by one they began to ask, “*Lord, is it I?*” Jesus answered, “*The one who dips in the cup.*” He would betray him. Jesus knew quite well who it was who was to commit this crime. Long before, it was foretold in the Psalms

that “*mine own familiar friend in who I trusted which did eat of my bread hath lifted up his heel against me.*” (Psalm 41 v 9).

The Broken Bread

In the midst of this meal Jesus introduced the *Breaking of Bread* to his disciples. As they were eating Jesus took bread, blessed it, and break it, and gave it to his disciples saying, “*Take, eat, this is my body.*”

They were all familiar with the details of the Passover but this was a new approach. In place of the Passover Lamb Jesus was now setting his *body* before them to eat.

Later he took the cup of wine and said, “*This is my blood of the NEW covenant.*”

The old covenant, or agreement, was made in Sinai when Moses took blood and sprinkled it on the people when they agreed to serve God and be obedient. Yet man never can be completely obedient so the prophets spoke of the coming *new covenant*. It was to be *new* because it was different and provided *forgiveness of sins*. This was the new covenant which Jesus was teaching his disciples.

Cup of Wine

Jesus continued with the cup of wine saying it was a symbol of his blood. The blood is a symbol for our life, so Jesus is showing through the poured out blood that he was to pour out his life *unto death*. In John ch 6 vs 53 we are told that Jesus told his disciples to “*drink of his blood if they would live.*” To a strict Jew this must have seemed awful because God had forbidden under the law the eating of blood. (Leviticus ch17 vs 10-11)

Here then was a deliberate and dramatic contrast: the blood of sacrifices of the Law could not take away sin, but Christ’s blood *could* do so and also give life. What does it mean to *drink of his blood*? If the blood is the life of a person, and when we drink we *take this into our body*, Jesus is asking us to *take* the laws and principles of his life *into ours*, taking richly into our minds the teaching of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus on the eve of his suffering gave these two emblems, the bread and the wine, as a remembrance of his sacrificial death (1 Corinthians ch 11 vs 23) that every time we do this we should remember what has been done for us. We are commanded to remember the Lord’s death until he come. Why should such pre-eminence be given to the Lord’s death and not his life? In his death we see the final victory over sin. As he died, he said, “*It is finished.*”

What should we think about during a breaking of bread service? It is so important that we remember the life of sacrifice which was given and it gives us the opportunity to *examine ourselves*. We must compare ourselves, and think of all that has been done for us and make a clear determination to do all we can in his service. Crucifying in ourselves the things we do which we know are not pleasing to God and making every effort to live our lives as he did.

1 Corinthians 11 tells us much about this feast. We must take it very seriously, and we must remember what Jesus did for us and his commandment to remember his death until he come.

From here on this feast was to be the most important occasion in the believers’ life and the temple sacrifices which had pointed forward to the Lamb of God were now unnecessary.

Judas realised he must act quickly and he went out into the night of death and darkness to betray the place where Jesus was so that his enemies might take him.

Extra work: Read 1 Corinthians ch 11 vss 23-28. What are these verses teaching the Corinthian church, and what do they teach us today?