

Matthew 22-09-18b

We're ready to resume our study here in Matthew chapter 26. We've gleaned a few details from Luke and from Mark and have referenced John, but we're going to follow this primarily in Matthew. And when it says in verse 18 of chapter 26, the disciples have said, where do you want us to prepare for you to eat the Passover? Do you remember that Jesus just told them in verse two, after two days is the Passover.

The son of man will be delivered to be crucified. The disciples do not seem to have gleaned this particular detail. After two days, he can't eat the Passover if he is in the process of being crucified.

So what is the, what is the upshot here? Someone's microphone is on. With the Passover coming and Jesus saying, go into the city to a certain man. None of the gospels name this man.

And isn't it interesting that we have just had Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus anonymized to most likely protect her identity. This man lives in Jerusalem is evidently prominent because he has enough space to accommodate not only his own family and perhaps out of town visitors in his extended family during this assembly feast time, but he has a room where Jesus and his disciples can prepare the Passover by themselves. They will not be sharing a traditionally a group of at least 10 people would share a Passover lamb.

And in many cases they could assemble in large rooms and have multiple groups in the same location. Jesus interestingly is going to have this large room furnished and ready and only he and the 12 will be there. Only he and the 12, not his mother, Mary, not Mary Magdalene, not Martha, Lazarus or their sister, Mary.

Evidently they will be celebrating Passover in Bethany. Jesus is not doing it in Bethany. He is in Jerusalem and he and he alone, the requirement for 10 is met because there are 13 total in his group who are preparing the Passover.

But I asked a question before the break regarding Jesus allowing himself to be handed over, allowing himself to be arrested. You have that scene in the garden that we will soon be viewing where when he affirms his identity, the arresting party falls down and yet he goes with them willingly. He didn't have to, but he chose to.

This is a really interesting idea because it goes back to, oddly enough, free will, free will. This is a point that Greg Boyd makes and elaborates in his books, his book, Letters from a Skeptic, the correspondence he exchanged with his father back in the late 1980s with regard to his father's atheistic stance and his own Christianity and identity as a professor of apologetics. And he thought, who better to debate and discuss and explain with than his unbelieving father? And it's a very illuminating book.

I've listened through it many times. But here's one of many points that are made there. And it goes to God's decision to create creatures, both angelic and human, that have free will.

His father asked Greg Boyd this question. If God is all powerful, why doesn't he stop the evil that is in the world? Is your God all powerful or not? And the reply and the principle behind it are quite interesting because when he was asked the question by his father, is God all powerful? Greg Boyd said, I want to answer yes and no. Yes and no.

And he makes a very cogent point of the fact that as soon as God created free agency, as soon as he created creatures that have free will, God gives up a measure of his absolute control. If God absolutely controls every decision, then will is not free. If will is free, then God has to allow decisions to be made that are not in keeping with his will, with his desire, with his perfect notions.

He has to allow choices that are antithetical to his values and to his character that are opposed to his plan and purpose. If God prevents those, then will is not free. So God limits himself while God has the ability to control every single thing that happens in this created universe.

God chooses to not control everything. He chooses to allow the function of free will, and in so doing, he limits the exercise of his sovereignty. He limits the exercise of his righteousness, of his justice, of his love, of his omnipotence, and so on.

God limits himself. And so when you look at the Lord Jesus and you read Philippians chapter 2, the Lord Jesus not treating equality with God as a thing to be held on to, emptying himself, taking on the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men, this is the extreme example of God's self-limitation, limiting himself to a human body with its capacity for fatigue and thirst and hunger and pain, limiting many of his divine attributes of his own choice and of his own will. But we often recognize this in the Lord Jesus, and we don't as often think about God the Father limiting the exercise of his divine power to allow the function of free will.

The outworking of this, as an illustration, is when a disaster happens, a catastrophe, a drunk driver swerves into the opposing lane and a young life is snuffed out, a family is taken out of the world, and we say, why did God allow this? What is God's purpose? What is God's point in allowing this to happen? And we look for answers in the immediate circumstance of the person whose life was lost, or the immediate outworking and impact of that fatal accident, and we don't always stop and think many of the negative things that happen in this life are a necessary concomitant to allowing free will. There is enough food in the world to feed everyone. There is enough food produced that if it was properly distributed, nobody would be hungry.

So why is there hunger? Because of the choices of people, the choices of people who run

companies and who want to sell for a profit and not give away, who want to hoard, who want to limit distribution, who have other aims and other goals. God could override and see to it that every particle of grain, every specimen of food was distributed so that no one goes hungry, but it is in the control of people who make choices. And because of that, there is hunger and there is famine.

There are those who will co-opt and steal donated food. This has been happening to the Red Cross for decades, sending food and medical supplies into warlord countries and corrupt government areas where whatever it is being sent is squirreled away and used for other purposes or sold in the black market or whatever. And it is a necessary outworking of this that because of the decisions of people, others suffer.

And this example, Jesus allowing Judas, choosing him, have I not chosen you and one of you is a devil? Allowing this is a reminder to us that bad things happen to good people and it isn't always the proactive purpose and will of God that it happens. You think of the blind man in John chapter 9 and the question that the disciples ask, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? What is Jesus' response? It has nothing to do with sin in the life of the parents or in the life of the man himself. Yet he was born blind as a natural outworking.

God didn't come down and say, make this individual blind so I can have my son heal him later on. It is for the glory of God. And in that example, think about this.

It's certainly not a blessing to be born blind or born handicapped in any way. All of us enter into a corrupt and fallen world with a corrupt and fallen nature surrounded by other corrupt and fallen natures who abet and aid the corruption that is in the world. All of us are dropped into this situation.

What is the rectification? What is the solution? It is not that God prevents it. It is that God solves it. The greater the problem, the more we see the power of God, the grace of God, and the love of God in its resolution.

The demonstration of love is difficult where there is no occasion to manifest it. If everything is great, if we are wafted to heaven on flowery beds of ease, if there is no challenge, there is no hardship, there is no difficulty, love is an abstraction. If there is difficulty, and challenge, and hardship, and God sustains us, in some cases it seems as though the adversity has won.

We are about to see one of the greatest examples of that, if not the greatest in all of human history, where the Lord Jesus is going to die on the cross at the hands of men. Isn't there some other way? Couldn't there have been a wonderful ceremony in heaven where Jesus bravely and resolutely walks forward to a golden altar set before the throne of the Father, lays himself down, and sacrifices himself for the sins of the world, rather than being put there by being given over by Judas into the hands of corrupt, self-

interested religious leaders, ultimately handed over to the Gentiles, and killed in an alarmingly cruel and painful way? Couldn't it have happened some other way that didn't involve the ugliness, the blood, and the pain? And it is the outworking of human decisions that God permits. Jesus is going to tell his disciples, do you not know I could call 10,000 angels? It's the chorus of a great song.

He could have called 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set him free. Instead, he died alone for you and for me. But this idea of God limiting the exercise of his power, his attributes, even his character to make a point is nowhere more clearly manifest than here.

And it is useful for us to remember that in the same way that God is not going to intervene to forestall every challenge, to solve in advance every problem, to smooth every rock and crack and wrinkle out of our way, isn't necessarily because he has an intentional purpose in so doing. As that he will allow the free will of people and the corruption of nature to be manifest. And the exercise of his power is going to be in fixing it, in working it together for good.

And so when there is a tragedy, when there is a catastrophe, when there is a horrific shock to our system and we say, why would God allow this little children to die? What purpose could God have in this teenager just on the cusp of life with so much potential, such a beautiful person with such a great character and personality, and in many cases, a love for the Lord is snuffed out. What possible purpose could God have? It can sometimes be a very fruitless search to try to figure out in the immediate environment, in the immediate periphery of that person, where is the good? How did this benefit the parents? How did this benefit the friends? How did this benefit the family or anyone else immediately associated with it? The vindication and the justification of the plan and purpose of God are largely future. And it is in what God is going to do in bringing people back and giving in hundredfold measure what they might have lost in this life.

We've seen Jesus tell the disciples this, whatever you've given up in this life, you're going to have a hundredfold in the coming life. God limits himself and God allows a great deal of pain and hardship for a greater purpose. And those who get discouraged and even deflected away from the faith, those who fall away because they suffer a tragedy and say, there can't be a God who would allow this.

How can there be a God who allows the Holocaust? How can there be a God who allows babies and children to starve in faraway lands or in our own land? How can God allow these tragic accidents, these senseless shootings, these random acts of violence that take good people away? How can there be a God who allows this? We have the short-sighted view that there's got to be vindication, justification and a visible purpose in that immediate circumstance. Oh, well, because this person got shot, their father came to the faith or because this set of people died. How can you look at the thousands and tens of

thousands of children that have died of starvation in places like Afghanistan and say, well, but God worked that together for good.

He has not yet worked it together for good. And to look for vindication, justification and rationale in this life is what causes many to stumble and fall. This is why we live by faith and not by sight.

I don't understand how God is going to justify, vindicate, rectify many of the things that take place. Bad things happen to good people all the time. What I do know is I know whom I have believed and I know that he is able to keep what is committed unto him against that day.

I am persuaded that in that future day, God will rectify, God will set right what has gone so wrong due to the choices of people in this life. And God works these things together for good. It doesn't excuse Judas.

These things must come, but woe to him by whom they come. There is justice, there is righteousness, but we don't always see it in the short term. There are large purposes that don't seem to reflect in small circumstances.

If God were to intervene in some cases, it would be unjust, it would be unfair, and it would limit the ultimate revelation of his glory. These things are necessary. This is why the Lord Jesus is going to pray in the garden, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me.

But if this is a necessary part of your plan, not my will, but thine be done. And this doesn't look like it is going to end well for the Lord Jesus during the scourgings and the mocking and the crown of thorns and the crucifixion. But Jesus puts his faith in his Father and the ultimate outworking.

Jesus, for the joy that is set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame. So, this is why Jesus allows himself to be delivered over. He knows it's coming.

He knows who's going to do it. He knows how it's going to be done. He does not seek to avoid it.

He doesn't say, well, you know, I think there might be a better time for this. There might be a different way. He knows this is his Father's will.

And even with his eyes wide open, seeing when and how and by whom it is going to happen, he submits himself under the mighty hand of God so that he may be exalted in due time, in the right time. Only God knows the right time. This is why the time of the Lord's return is unknown, even to the Lord Jesus himself.

Only God knows the right time and the right circumstance for these events to take place. So, in verse 18, when Jesus says, go into the city to a certain man and say to him, the

teacher says, my time is near. My time is at hand.

That's all this man needs to hear. Matthew, although he knows the story, leaves out the detail that Peter and John are to go and look in the city until they find a man carrying a jug of water, follow that man, and then speak to the master of the house these words. It is summarized here.

I will do the Passover. I will make or do Passover at your house with my disciples. So the disciples, and we know this is Peter and John from Luke, did as Jesus had directed them.

And they prepared the Passover. They prepared for the entire feast. Now, what is an essential part of Passover? If you go back to Exodus chapter 12, all of the details, what is the central item in Passover? What's the most important thing without which you can't do Passover? It is the lamb, right? Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

It is the lamb's blood that is splashed on the doorposts. It is the lamb that is eaten with bitter herbs. It's all about the lamb, right? What else do you know about this lamb? It's going to be killed between the evenings.

This is between 3 and 6 p.m. on 14 Nisan. Just before 14 Nisan ends, this lamb is slain. What else do you know about this lamb? Where did this lamb come from? To be more specific, when was this lamb obtained? How many days prior? Four.

Four days. Four days prior. Now, taking my authoritative word that Passover, Nisan, 14 Nisan, is Thursday of this week, what they call Passion Week or Holy Week.

Thursday is when the lamb is going to be slain. Thursday is when the Lord Jesus himself is going to be slain. He's going to die on the cross just as they are slaying the Passover lamb down at the temple and everyone else is slaying their Passover lamb to be prepared and eaten after sundown with their clothes, staff in the hand, and so on.

Unleavened bread, right? So 14 Nisan is Thursday. This is when the lamb is slain. When was the lamb selected? Would Jesus send his disciples even just the day prior and say, go find a lamb and get the Passover ready? It violates the word of God, does it not? The word of God says four days prior you will get the lamb.

What is four days prior to Thursday? One day prior is Wednesday. Two days prior is Tuesday. Three days prior is Monday.

And what is the fourth day on which the Passover lamb was to be chosen, examined, and kept to ensure that it is pure and qualified? Sunday. What happened on Sunday? 10 Nisan. What happened on that day? What we call Palm Sunday, the tragic entry into Jerusalem, where the lamb was paraded in front of all the people.

And they had the opportunity to select him. He was presented as the lamb. And he remained there in the environs of Jerusalem, between Jerusalem and Bethany for all four days.

But now let me ask you another question. The lamb that ostensibly Jesus and the disciples are going to eat just after sundown when 14 Nisan turns to 15 Nisan Thursday night, where did that lamb come from? When did that lamb have to be selected? Sunday. So this individual who is expecting the teacher and recognizes this message from the teacher, he doesn't know for sure, but he is ready that arrangement had to have been made on Sunday.

That there would be a lamb specifically for Jesus and his disciples, right? Jesus would not violate the law of Moses on this most important of feasts. So the arrangement had to have been made at some point on Sunday. Remember when it tells us that after the parade, Jesus went to the temple and he looked around and then left? At some point, Sunday afternoon into Sunday evening, Jesus spoke with this individual who knows him as teacher and he is known to us as a certain man, as so-and-so.

The Greek is literally translatable as a certain so-and-so, a certain somebody. Purposely left vague, why? Once again, it's highly likely that this man and or his family are still residents of Jerusalem at the time that the Gospels are written. And his identity is not revealed, lest the authorities track him down.

And most assuredly, his identity and the location of his room are not known to Judas. Judas cannot give away the location of this meal until after he goes there and attends the meal. They are going to walk in and they can't leave until the meal is complete.

Jesus ensures that this upper room meal, this meal on the day of preparation, this is the evening of 14 Nisan, not the beginning of 15 Nisan. This is when 14 Nisan has just started after dark, the upper room meal on the day of preparation as John so clearly states. And it is completely reconcilable with the synoptics.

But this is Wednesday evening, which in the Jewish calendar at sundown, Thursday began and they're eating this meal. Judas could not leave and tell anybody where they are. This gives Jesus time to deliver all of the wonderful content, to establish his words about the bread and the cup, the new covenant in his blood.

This is my body, which is broken for you. None of this is going to be interrupted. Jesus will present all of the content of John 14 and John 15 and into John 16 at this time without interruption.

Jesus knows exactly what he is doing. And that's why you have this elaborate arrangement made, which Jesus engineered the preceding Sunday so that the host could obtain the lamb. The lawful, acceptable lamb that the disciples will then partake of

without the Lord Jesus on Thursday night.

After the crucifixion, the Lord's body is in the tomb. The sun goes down, the disciples will be back at this room and hardly able to function or think, observe Passover. During Passover, nobody leaves.

You stay there all night long. It can't be Passover in the upper room meal because they leave and go out to the Mount of Olives. Nobody leaves the room.

You stay there all night for Passover. So it can't be the Passover meal, but it is amazing the amount of confusion on this score. So the disciples did as Jesus directed them and they prepared the Passover.

There's going to be several meals. There are going to be several necessities that have to be laid in store, arrangements that need to be made. And so it's sort of like the rehearsal dinner the night before a wedding.

You can say, well, prepare the wedding. Well, part of the wedding preparations include the rehearsal itself and then the rehearsal dinner. And it's like that.

So when evening had come, he sat down with the 12. And as they were eating, he said, assuredly, I say to you, one of you will paradidami me. One of you will hand me over.

They were exceedingly sorrowful. And each of them began to say to him, Lord, is it I? He answered and said, he who has dipped his hand. This is an heiress.

And this doesn't necessarily make the identity clear because several of them at various points in this meal have dipped their hand in the dish. And his point is not to say, see the guy with his hand in the dish, right the minute that I'm speaking, this is him. And everybody looks and says, Judas, how could you? What Jesus says is one who has dipped his hand in the dish with me.

This isn't so much he as one. And that only limits it to the group. One who has dipped his hand in the dish.

Well, they all have. And so they all have to continue to question. One who has dipped his hand with me in the dish will hand me over.

They still don't know. Can you imagine that Peter or James or John would have tackled Judas and started pummeling him or how could you? The Lord says, you're the one. This doesn't tell them who it is.

It tells them more intimately that it's not even in the outer circle of disciples because none of the outer circle are there. It is only the 12. And one of the 12, one of the intimates who has dipped his hand in the dish will betray him.

The son of man indeed goes just as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the son of man is delivered over, is handed a cross. It would have been good for that man if he had not been born. Once again, if it had been good for that man, if he had not been born, why did God let him be born? Why did Jesus choose him to be among the 12? It's all about choice.

And the question becomes, what do I choose? Choose, am I going to hand over that which is most important for that which is ephemeral and fleeting, momentarily gratifying, seems right at the time. This is why it is so important to spend quality time in reflection, going over what we're doing, who we are, why we're here. Is this really what I should be saying? Is this what I should be doing? Is this how I should be spending my time? Or am I handing over the things that are a part of the son of God, the son of man, my opportunity to be his body on this earth, but I am handing that over to the world.

I'm handing it over in the interest of some short-term gratification. When we ask ourselves this question, Judas becomes a much more personal possibility for each one of us. We say, I would never turn in a fellow believer to the authorities.

We can be turning over the Lord Jesus every day by not observing the priority where we should be keeping him close and keeping him near, his words, his example, the will of his father, and not handing it over in some way, shape or form and compromising and ultimately betraying our responsibility. Something to think about. We'll pick up at this point next week.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the powerful words of scripture. Thank you for the privilege we have of such wonderful access to it, insight from it.

We pray that as your Holy Spirit impresses it on our hearts and ministers it to our souls, that we will be able to see clearly where the best choices we can make lie, that we can choose properly, that we can prioritize correctly, that wisdom we've been seeing in Proverbs 2 that enables us to discern what is good, what is better, and what is best, and then live in that light. It is our privilege to have your Holy Spirit with us at all times to enable and empower us to do so. We thank you for that privilege.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, everything that he said and did, what he continues to say and do on our behalf at your right hand. Bless each one as we go forward into the coming week. May we find these words resonating in our souls in the days ahead.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.