

February 28, 2016 - 11:00 a.m.

Pastor Jonathan Falwell

One Week to Live: Faithfulness in Serving

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-35

Summary: In part two in a series on the final week of Christ's life, Pastor Jonathan looks at the Last Supper, where Jesus points out how His disciples will fail Him, reminding us all that there is hope, even when we blow it, but also reminding us how important it is to serve Him and others using Christ as our example.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 26, and what we are going to do is spend a little bit of time in looking at a very important moment in that last week of the life of Jesus. You know we started last week with a series that will lead us right up to Resurrection Sunday entitled *One Week to Live*. And last week we talked about when Jesus arrived in the city. And the first thing He did when He arrived in Jerusalem that week was He went up to His house, cleansed the temple and threw out the thieves. He threw out the robbers. He threw out all of those that were dishonoring the name of Christ; they were dishonoring God in what they were doing in that place.

And we talked about how it is important for us to recognize that we, too, need to clean house; that we need to clean our own houses, our own temples, before God; to make sure that we are pursuing holiness if we are going to experience all that it is that God wants us to experience through His Son Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to continue the journey during that last week. We're going to go not from a public setting like the Triumphal Entry or even up to the cleansing of the temple, but we're going to go into a private room. We're going to sit down with the disciples, sit down with Jesus as He talks to them about some pretty important things leading up to the moments ahead of what was going to take place when He, indeed, walked to the cross to lay down His life for you and me.

And in Matthew 26 we're going to read a story. We're going to get a glimpse of what that meal was like. But before we read this passage, I want to fast-forward a little to verse 28, where we read this verse together, which is our memory verse for today. And I want to put it up on the screen right now and I want us to read this out loud together, because this, in a nutshell, is everything that we're going to talk about here today.

Let's read it out loud together, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Let's read that together one more time out loud, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The blood of Jesus Christ that was shed so that we might have life.

Today that's what we want to spend some time focusing on, of what Jesus used in this setting, in this time, to talk with His disciples. I'm going to read from Matthew 26, beginning with verse 17 for our reading for today. It says this:

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you?" "As you go into the city," he told them, "you will see a certain man. Tell him, 'The Teacher says: My time has come, and I will eat the Passover meal with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus told them and prepared the Passover meal there. When it was evening, Jesus sat down at the table¹ with the Twelve. While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?" He replied, "One of you who has just eaten from this bowl with me will betray me. For the Son of Man must die, as the Scriptures declared long ago. But how terrible it will be for the one who betrays him. It would be far better for that man if he had never been born!" Judas, the one who would betray him, also asked, "Rabbi, am I the one?" And Jesus told him, "You have said it."

As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it, for this is my body." And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, "Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many. Mark my words—I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

On the way, Jesus told them, "Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, 'God will strike¹ the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee and meet you there." Peter declared, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I will never desert you." Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me." "No!" Peter insisted. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" And all the other disciples vowed the same.

I want to take a moment this morning to paint a picture of what was taking place during this night. Jesus had gathered His disciples all together into a private place, a private room. It was not under the watching eyes of the public of the city of Jerusalem. There were no the crowds that were gathered around; there were no the crowds there that just a few days prior had cried out, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" The crowd that was there in the temple when Jesus cleansed the temple no longer was present.

This was just a private meal with a family that had gathered together—much like you and I often do with our families. And they gathered together at a table that probably looked a little bit like this. It probably was a little bit lower, because back in those days they didn't have seats around the table; they actually reclined on the floor as they ate. The only time I usually do that is with a pizza box and a plate of Oreos. But still, they got together and they gathered in that room and they were lying down around that table—probably expecting a really fun meal. They were probably expecting a time of hearing from Jesus and hearing some encouraging words, some statements that Jesus might give them that would help them in their walk and help them along the way as they continued to serve Jesus.

And rather than those moments and words of encouragement, rather than Jesus gathering the disciples together there and really lifting them up and giving them a great pep talk and encouraging speech to send them out, excited about what was to come, what He did was talk about some things that had to break some hearts in the room that night.

You see, Jesus began talking about some things that were very difficult to talk about. Today we look at this passage because I think a lot of what Jesus experienced and what Jesus shared with the disciples that day are probably a lot of things that you and I experience, too. He gave some words and some comments that had to leave those disciples first stunned and second ashamed because of what He shared in that place.

I want to give you some words that He gave to His disciples. And as we share these words, as we look at what it is that Jesus talked about on that first Lord's Supper, in the first Lord's Table moment, that we allow ourselves to get a glimpse of what took place then and what Jesus said then and was trying to teach them and to teach us as we experience many of the same things.

The first word that Jesus gave to His disciples that day as He talked through some of the moments, some of those elements as they gathered around this table, the first word that He talked about was the word "betrayal." Not a word that you would expect to hear at a dinner table among friends, is it? Now we all have this image of the Lord's Supper. It's an image that is so often used because it's the image that DaVinci thought it looked like, where all of the disciples gathered around one side of the table and Jesus was right here in the middle and they were all gathered around and nobody on the other side.

Have any of you ever gone to a place where you sat down with your family at a restaurant at a table and you've all decided to sit on one side and leave the other side empty? I don't think we do that. We sit around the table. Why? Because we want to talk with each other and we want to hear from one another and we want to share life with each other. And Jesus chose that setting to share the first word, "betrayal."

Look what it says in verse 21, "While they were eating, He said, 'I tell you the truth. One of you will betray me.' Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, 'Am I the one, Lord?'" Now during the meal Judas had already agreed to betray Jesus. It had already been set in stone. Judas had already signed on the dotted line; he already had a plan in place. He'd already made an agreement with those who wanted to kill Jesus, and Jesus knew that. Judas thought he was hiding and thought that no one would know, that this was secret, that I'm going to go and act like

everything is normal. I'm going to act like there's nothing wrong and there's nothing going on here. And he showed up and the first words out of Jesus' mouth were, "One of you is going to betray me."

Let me give you a word of advice. If you ever gather your friends and family together for a special meal and you're sitting around the table, I wouldn't start out with that line, because immediately the place was hushed. Immediately there was fear. Fear because none of them knew who it was. It tells us that all of them were greatly distressed, and each one of them, every single one of them, began asking, "Lord, is it me? Am I going to do that? Am I the one who's going to betray you? Am I the one?" And it went around, person by person, asking that question.

Jesus knew exactly who it was. Jesus knew that Judas was the one who had done it, and what took place after that story, what happened immediately after Jesus shared that and they began asking the question, "Is it me? Is it me?" and they got to Judas and he said, "Is it me? Am I the one who did it?" And Jesus said, "Yeah, it's you. Now go and do what you have to do, and do it quickly."

John 13 tells the story that immediately Judas hops up and he leaves the place and everything is set in stone here. The wheels began turning for what was to take place in just a few hours. But can you imagine at a Passover meal with the people that He loved the most, the people who were closest to Him, it started with the idea of betrayal, but it didn't stop there.

It continued, because then Jesus also used another statement, another idea that He shared with His disciples what was to take place, and this word was the word "desertion." Look what it says in verse 31, "On the way, Jesus told them, "Tonight all of you will desert me. For the Scriptures say, 'God will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"

Think about this. You've got to realize that all of the disciples, after it was revealed that Judas was the one who had betrayed Jesus, and after Judas had hopped up and run from the room, let me just tell you something: all eleven of the disciples were feeling pretty good. They were pretty excited. Okay, we got that out of the way. Judas is gone. He's a bad dude. We'll take care of him later. He messed up; he betrayed Jesus; but all of us, we're good. We've made it. We're in good shape. We're honored Jesus. Jesus, we're the best. And the conversations, you can look in Scripture where they are actually sitting around asking, "Am I better than you?" and asking in a holier-than-thou, "I'm better than this person," and all that stuff that took place. They thought they were great.

Yet here, as they walked out Jesus said, "By the way, let me tell you something else." I can see Jesus maybe doing this. I think if I had done it I probably would have phrased it a little bit differently. I probably would have kind of thrown it back in their face a little bit and said, "You're all feeling good about yourselves, right? Let me just tell you something: Every single one of you guys are going to desert me tonight."

Again, a hush falls. Again, shock. Again, distress. "There is no way that's going to happen. There is no way we are going to desert you, Christ." And Jesus knew that pretty soon He was going to be arrested, He would be beaten, He would die on the cross. He knew pretty soon that

all of the disciples would be taken away from the presence of Jesus, and Jesus understood. And when He told the disciples that “every one of you will desert me,” Jesus knew that the further away that we get from the presence of Christ, the easier it is to deny the power of Christ. And He knew that every single one of them would end up deserting Him.

So He talked about betrayal; He talked about desertion; but He didn’t stop there. He then went on to talk about disobedience. Look what it says in verse 34, “Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, Peter—this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.’” This was after Peter said, “There’s no way I’ll ever deny you, Jesus. I promise you, there’s no way. I will not deny you.”

And Jesus said, “Oh Peter, before this night is over, before the sun rises again, you will deny three times that you even know who I am.” You ask how is that disobedient? Well, go all the way back to Matthew 4:19, when Jesus was walking along the seashore one day. You remember what happened there? He’s walking along the seashore and all of a sudden He ran into Peter and Andrew. And you remember what He said: “Follow me, for I will make you fishers of men.” And Andrew and Peter, who had spent their lives and careers being fishermen immediately threw down their nets and followed after Jesus. And for the next three years they did so faithfully, and they obeyed Jesus and they did what Jesus told them to do. They did everything that Jesus instructed them, and they were honoring Christ and letting people know about who Jesus is. These were incredible members of the team, and yet here Jesus says, “Before this night is even over, you will disobey that original call to follow me, and you’ll deny you even know who I am.”

You see, Jesus talked about betrayal and he talked about desertion and He talked about disobedience, and He didn’t stop there. He went on to talk about broken promises. Look what it says in verse 35, “‘No!’ Peter insisted. ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you!’ And all the other disciples vowed the same.”

Jesus talked about broken promises during this night. In a night which could have been an amazing gathering of friends, a time where they celebrated and rejoiced in all that God had done in their midst, a time when they could have had an incredible moment of encouragement, but yet here Jesus was sharing with them the idea of desertion and betrayal and disobedience and broken promises.

And I can’t help but think that for all of us who are gathered in this room together today, the idea of betrayal and disobedience and desertion and broken promises probably rings pretty loud in our ears today, because I think probably a lot of people in this room, at some point, maybe at this point, you’ve had broken promises. The people who were closest to you, the people you cared about the most, the people that you knew would never let you down, yet they betrayed you. They deserted you. Made promises to you that they did not keep. And your heart is broken.

Why did Jesus spend this last meal with His disciples talking about such depressing topics? Why did He spend this last meal talking about these things that had to just put a pale over the whole room, a cloud, a dark cloud over this entire event? Here’s why: Because of what He was about to say in the midst. Because in the midst of all the betrayal, of all the disobedience, of all the desertions, in the midst of all the moments of talking about broken promises, Jesus said some

words in verse 26, As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'Take this and eat it, for this is my body.' And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, 'Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.'"

Let me tell you why Jesus used this gathering, this meal to talk about such depressing things. Because in the midst of all of those things that they had been through; in the midst of the distress and the broken promises and the cloud that had to be over the room, Jesus said this. "And despite it all, my blood will cover everything."

Isn't that encouraging? Isn't it great to know, as Jesus said here, "The reason that I'm going to die on this cross, the reason that my body will be broken, the reason that my blood will be poured out is to pay for every single one of those sins." Jesus chose that table as a time to let them know, "I still love you."

So for us today, how does that come back and apply to each of us? How is that a moment that we can take and we can grab hold of that truth and be encouraged by what took place at that meal? It's because every single one of us—and I don't care who you are; where you've come from; what your background looks like; how young you are or how old you are; I don't care if you've been in this church for a thousand years or this is your first Sunday here—every single one of us have betrayed Jesus at some point in our lives. All of us have deserted Him. All of us have disobeyed Him. All of us have broken our promises to Him. And yet Jesus said, "It's okay, because I will still love you. And not only will I still love you; not only will I die on the cross and pay that price for you," but look what it says here in verse 32. It also says this, "But after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to Galilee," and you know what it says there? It's a really incredible statement, "and I will meet you there." Kind of a glimpse, if you will, a picture of what it is that Jesus not only did for the disciples but what Jesus did for us.

He poured out His blood so that we could be forgiven. He poured out His life so that we could be saved. And He has gone ahead of us and one day, because of Christ, we can meet Him there for eternity.

So why is this table so important? A lot of people had the idea that the Lord's Table, communion, the Lord's supper, whatever language that you use, that's it's just something that we do out of ritual; it's something we do because somebody long ago wrote it down in our church's constitution that this is what we will do. No. We do it because Jesus very clearly said, "This do in remembrance of me." To help us recognize who Jesus is, that without Jesus there is no hope. Judas experienced that.

To recognize who Jesus is, and to also to remember what Jesus did is so that we can always remember that Jesus poured out His life for us. But not only to recognize and to remember, but also to reflect; to look back and recognize, man, I've blown it over and over and over again. But as Romans 8 very clearly tells us, nothing can separate us from the amazing love of God.

So this morning we come to this place and recognize, yes, this is a pretty important table, and even those depressing, discouraging words that Jesus offered in the midst of that meal with the disciples, those are important words; important words to help us recognize that in the midst of a life that is flawed and a sinful nature that will always keep us from experiencing the love of Christ in every situation, that Jesus still says, “I love them, and I’ve opened my arms wide for them, and don’t you ever forget it.”

Keywords: Matthew 26:17-35, the last supper, upper room, failure, betrayal, disobedience, salvation, forgiveness, redemption, recognize who Jesus is