

Why do we Gather? – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – Matthew 26:1-29

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

We're right around the corner from Easter. If you know people who aren't Christian and/or aren't involved in a church, please invite them to join our Easter celebration.

I want to make a quick clarification and apology! In last week's question about going to lunch with an elder. I had mentioned that happened years ago, but accidentally edited that out. Elder Paul pointed out that it sounded like the story was about one of our elders. I fixed my mistake and re-uploaded the notes, so hopefully, most of you got the corrected version!

Matthew 26:1–29

¹ When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, ² "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

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 to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵ But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

⁶ Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. ⁸ And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? ⁹ For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

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.

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."

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Let's Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. Do you, your family, or your friend group have a special meal tradition? Why is it meaningful?

Some people always eat a specific meal/cuisine or fancy dessert for their birthday. Perhaps it's something they grew up eating as a kid. Or now that they're an adult, they can finally splurge. Couples may celebrate anniversary dinners where they can dress up and finally be alone together. I've shared before how we would have a big family meal with extended family at my grandparents' house every Christmas. I loved being with my family, especially playing with my cousins.

Persians recently celebrated their new year (called Nowruz). They often set up a table with seven items, each with a special meaning(<https://youtu.be/GSijMxxBKO8>).

In this week's passage, Jesus institutes a special meal that Christians have celebrated for two thousand years.

2. What's the most awkward or surprising thing that's happened during a meal?

Perhaps a celebrity showed up at your dinner table. Was someone's first attempt at a new recipe a disaster?

At a restaurant, a server (accidentally?) spilled a cup of water all over my steak. That was one sloppy steak! It was so long ago that I don't remember if I got a new steak or not. I hope I did. At a youth graduation banquet, a server spilled water down the back of a girl's dress as he was walking by. He quickly zipped into the kitchen out of embarrassment. That was also so long ago that I don't remember how it was resolved.

In this week's passage, a woman surprises Jesus' dinner party by anointing Him with oil.

3. What big sacrifices in history, fiction, or your life inspire you?

On one hand, we see so much selfishness and greed around us. But we also see amazing selflessness. Have you seen parents who sacrificed their time, energy, and money to provide the best for their children? It's always tragic but inspiring to learn of firefighters and other first responders risking their lives to save people from disasters.

In this week's passage, a woman sacrifices a year's salary for Jesus to prepare Him for His sacrifice on the cross.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

4. What's the difference between how the world values giving and how God values giving?

The world usually judges by the objective value. The ones who give billions are better than those who give millions. Some of the richest people in the world pledged to give most of their wealth to charitable causes while they're alive or when they die (<https://givingpledge.org/about>), like Warren Buffet (\$162 billion USD) and Mark Zuckerberg (\$200 billion USD). For some reason, they didn't invite me to join. Jim Pattison pledged to give at least 50% of his \$11 billion USD wealth to charitable causes (<https://givingpledge.org/pledger?pledgerid=394>). For us to make the \$5.5 billion he's planning to give, most of us would have to work and save every penny way past the year 80,000.

If Jim Pattison or some other billionaire donates billions to churches, missions, and other kingdom-related causes, does that mean God likes their giving more than ours?

In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus sees wealthy people giving lots of money to the temple. But He focuses His disciples on a poor widow who gave two small coins. The original Greek for coin is λεπτόν (lepton), which was the equivalent of 1/128 of a denarius (a day's wage). If someone makes \$17.40/hour (current BC minimum wage), that would be \$1.09. So, the modern-day equivalent of her temple gift is a whopping \$2.18. She's so poor that someone on minimum wage could make that amount in 8 minutes. Her gift would be negligible to the temple's finances and nobody in accounting would notice if her donation was lost.

But Jesus says that her contribution was worth more to God than those who gave out of their wealth because she genuinely sacrificed. Jesus is unimpressed by all the rich people giving out of their wealth because their giving didn't affect their lives.

For God, it's not about the quantity, but the heart that willingly and cheerfully gives (2 Corinthians 9:7) and sacrifices (Matthew 19:29-30).

5. How do you feel about others sacrificing for you?

For many of us, it feels uncomfortable for others to sacrifice for us. Here are some possible reasons why it may feel uncomfortable.

Taught to sacrifice. When we were helpless kids, others gave up their time and effort for us. As we grow, we slowly start to give back and eventually sacrifice for others. It's awkward when the dynamic is reversed. We feel like we're treated as the helpless ones. Most of us would rather give up our seat on the Skytrain or bus than have someone give up their seat for us.

Debt. We don't like the feeling of being in debt to someone. If someone does something for us, we have to pay it back so we're even. If your co-worker pays for your meal, you make it even by paying for the next meal. If your friend gives you a ride, you make it even by paying for their meal. If your Life Group helps you move to your new place, you show your gratitude by paying for their next meal. Ok, there are other ways to pay back than with a meal, but you get the idea.

In this week's passage, Jesus celebrates the Passover and predicts the sacrifice He's soon to make. As Christians, we observe the Lord's Supper to remember the sacrifice He paid for us that we can never pay back. Asda

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.

6. What stands out about the woman anointing Jesus?

Busy Week. Jesus had a very special welcome as the crowds cheered for Him (21:1-11). He cleaned out the temple (21:12-17), confronted powerful religious leaders (e.g., chapter 23), predicted His death and destruction of the temple (24:1-2), told His disciples to prepare for His return (24:36-25:13), taught about the final judgment (25:31-46), predicted His death (e.g., 26:1-2), and more. It's been a busy few days as things are escalating.



Simon the Leper. The term leper (or leprosy) didn't only refer to what we medically/scientifically call leprosy. It was a catch-all for skin diseases, including leprosy. Because many skin diseases were contagious and could cause severe disfigurement and disability, those with diseases had to stay away from everyone (Leviticus 13:45). Since Jesus and the disciples were there, Simon must have been cured, likely by Jesus. He must have been so grateful for Jesus essentially saving his life.

Expensive Ointment. The Gospel of Mark identifies the ointment/perfume as nard, worth 300 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage, so 300 denarii would be a year's wages (Jews didn't work on the Sabbath or certain festival days). The median yearly salary for Vancouverites was \$41,500 in 2020 (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220317/t004c-eng.htm>). Imagine buying a \$41,500 bottle of perfume! The most expensive one I could find at London Drugs was *only* \$250.

Nard is from the Himalayas in Nepal, China, and India. That's over 4,000 kilometers away! No wonder it's so expensive.

Mark also states that she broke the flask open. She can't reseal it and save it for later. She's pouring all of it out.

Prepare for Burial. Spikenard was used for special occasions like showing devotion to a deity or burials. Mary's probably just trying to show Jesus how much He means to her, but Jesus knows He's going to be killed and buried soon. He's already told His disciples four times about His death (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2).

Wherever this Gospel is Proclaimed. Jesus gives her some high praise. He said it's "a beautiful thing to me". Not only that, her actions will be told everywhere the Gospel is preached. What do you think the woman must have felt to hear Jesus' words?

7. What do the woman's actions indicate about her feelings toward Jesus?

As mentioned in the previous question's notes, she spent a year's salary on this ointment for Jesus. The degree of our affection toward Jesus reflects our appreciation of what He's done. Those who are forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47, cf. Matthew 18:23-35). Her abundant sacrifice is the result of Jesus' abundant love towards her. Jesus did so much for her, she wants to do so much for Him.

Imagine if you spontaneously gave God a year of your income through giving to the church (<https://willingdon.org/give>), supporting missions (<https://willingdon.org/global/short-term-missions>), donating to the benevolence fund

(<https://willingdon.org/benevolent-fund>), or sponsoring a refugee family through Journey Home Community (<https://journeyhomecommunity.ca/communities-of-welcome>) or a child through Compassion (<https://www.compassion.ca/sponsor-a-child/>).

What would that say about your love of Jesus? What would other people think?

8. Pastor Ray said, “Are we susceptible to missing what is most important? God gives us windows of opportunity to know Him – to worship Him – to glorify Him by serving others, giving generously, sharing the gospel, caring for the “least of these.””

What causes us to miss out?

Here are some possible reasons.

Wrong idea of knowing. For some, knowing God is purely an academic pursuit. Just learn a ton of theology or go through the motions of daily devotionals and Sunday worship. We miss out on abiding and spending time with Jesus. We also forget to love our neighbors. Knowing is relational.

Focus on the cost. The disciples missed out on worshipping (and encouraging the woman’s worship of) God by focusing on the monetary value. It’s easy for us to also focus on the cost of knowing and glorifying God. By attending weekly Sunday worship, Life Groups, and other gatherings, we have to give up participating in sporting events, going to farmers’ markets, and sleeping in. By giving our money to the church or taking newcomers out to lunch, we give up the ability to buy new clothes, take a trip, or enjoy a succulent Chinese meal.

If we focus on the cost, we’ll be less willing to do it. And even if we go through with it, we probably won’t enjoy it because we’re too focused on what we’re missing out on.

Busy. Life is busy! Work, commutes, chores, and obligations. Taking care of ourselves. There are so many demands on our lives every day. It can be draining. After a long day, we may be too exhausted to do anything.

We can also be busy serving Jesus to the point where we can’t appreciate Him. Often, the people who serve and give and do serve and give and do a lot. We’re scrambling to prep and teach this class, then lead devotionals with our friends, then serve in this or that ministry, and then participate in a Life Group. We become like Martha (Luke 10:38-42). We need a moment to breathe.

Ignorance. Some of us simply may not know because we’re new to Christianity or Willingdon. We’d love to know God more and serve Him, but we have no idea where to start. If that’s you, ask others in your Life Group about what they’re doing. Take a Discovery (<https://willingdon.org/discovery>) or WSBM (<https://willingdon.org/wsbm>) course to learn more about God. Check out opportunities to volunteer at church (<https://willingdon.org/volunteer>).

9. What do you think was going through the disciples’ minds when they heard about the betrayal?

This group of guys had been together for three years. They traveled together, ate together, and experienced Jesus’ miracles and teachings together. They stuck around when other followers of Jesus left (John 6:66-68). This time there’s big excitement around Jesus, not just from the disciples, but also the city. Perhaps their faithfulness to Jesus

was about to pay off because Jesus' kingdom was about to manifest! But now they hear that one of them is going to betray Jesus.

How does Jesus know one of them will betray Him? And if Jesus knows this, why doesn't Jesus do something about it? Kick him out of the group! Discipline the betrayer. Do something! **Why** would any of Jesus' disciples do this? They were brothers who saw Jesus walk on water and feed thousands and heal every disease. It must have felt like they were so close to the kingdom coming. Why is one of them thinking of betraying Jesus now? **What** would the plan be? How would it go down? **When** will it happen? Are they safe? Should they get out of here? **Who** is going to do it? The disciples are wondering if they may betray Jesus. Perhaps not now, but in the future? Peter will betray Jesus, so maybe every disciple has the potential of turning their backs on him?

10. Pastor Ray said, "To remember is to remember what Jesus has done, but it is not *just* to bring to memory. To take in his body, to identify with him fully, and to identify with his body, the church family. It is to say, "Thank you, Jesus. I am all yours.""

How can we move from only acknowledging facts to identifying with Jesus and His church?

If you've been in the church for a while, the Lord's Supper can be another ritual we do. Eat the bread. Drink the cup. Get out of service a little later than usual. Wait until next month when we do it all over again. On the other hand, perhaps you're new to all of this, so you have no idea what's going on. Here are some ways you can identify with Jesus and His church family.

Consider how we've been relating to other Christians. We celebrate the Lord's Supper once a month. How have you been spending time with Jesus during the rest of the month? Are you only connecting during the 15 minutes or so we have the Lord's Supper? Or the 65ish minutes a week we have Sunday service? Or the 120ish minutes a week in Life Group meetings? How about the rest of the time?

Are we spending time in God's Word and prayer? Are we seeking His will in our decisions throughout the day? Are we only meeting with Jesus when you're with the group, but not alone?

Consider how we've been relating to other Christians. Around 20 years later, the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." (1 Corinthians 11:20). What went wrong?

People only cared about their own experiences and neglected others. By doing so, they "despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing" (1 Corinthians 11:22). Ouch! That's a theme throughout Paul's letter. They consistently behaved selfishly, forming factions (3:1-9), suing each other (6:1-11), using their freedoms to harm weaker Christians (8:4-13), and more. They only cared about themselves. In last week's passage, Jesus says that the way people treat the "least of" His family indicates whether or not they belong to Him.

So, what can you do? You can start with your Life Group. Are there quiet or "invisible" members? Often, a few people take up most of the time in discussions, talking about their week, and sharing prayer requests. They're not trying to monopolize the time. They're just eager to share. But the quiet ones may feel that their sharing isn't as important or struggle to find an opening to express their thoughts.

They need encouragement and opportunities to share. You can say, "Hey, Firstname Middlename Lastname, I'd like to know what you're thinking." When they do talk, acknowledge what they say ("That's a good point. Thanks for

sharing.”) and interact with it (“I hadn’t thought of that before. What do you think about ...?”). When they ask questions, let them know it’s a valid question to ask (“That’s a good question. I used to wonder the same thing ...”). Every member of the group is equally important (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

If you know me well enough, you’ll know I could *easily* talk through the whole two hours. I have *so many* good insights to teach and stories that would entertain and encourage the group! But I’m not the only one with important wisdom, questions, and encouragement. God’s Spirit dwells in all believers. That means others have equally important things to share, too.

11. What does Jesus accomplish by sacrificing Himself?

Many people believe in the Moral Influence Theory (<https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1992/03/the-moral-influence-theory>), that Jesus’ death on the cross was just an example of God’s love towards us, a demonstration of the results of sin, or a standard of what it means to live right. They believe that Jesus’ death didn’t accomplish anything more than that. But the Gospel message of the Bible paints a different picture.

The Bible begins with God creating the universe (Genesis 1) and making it good. Instead of enjoying God’s love, people want to be god and determine their own paths (Genesis 3). Since God is good, disobedience separates people from Him, and He must punish evil.

God establishes a system of sacrifices, where innocent animals die in the place of people. The Passover is an example of this. God’s people had been enslaved in Egypt, but He was going to save them by sending Moses. The Egyptians refused to let God’s people go, so He punished them with plagues. The tenth one was the death of all the firstborn sons across Egypt. The only way to avoid this fate was to kill a lamb and put some of the blood on the door frame (Exodus 12:11-13). When God saw the blood, He passed over the house and spared everyone inside.

Over a thousand years later, Jesus would be the ultimate sacrifice and Passover lamb. He lived a perfect life, fully obeying God, making Him an innocent sacrifice and not deserving of punishment. By dying on the cross, He not only suffered physically but also suffered the punishment for our sins (Isaiah 53:5-6). If we believe in Jesus, God sees that Jesus paid the price for our sins and passes over us.

Because Jesus shed His blood to pay for our sins, His blood also enables us to have a restored relationship with God. A covenant is a type of relationship that God establishes. As Pastor Ray said, “Through Jesus, God invites people like us into an eternal, bonded relationship where God is our Father, Jesus is our Savior, and the Holy Spirit abides in us.” Since Jesus paid for this and we didn’t earn it, it is all by grace.

12. What sins have been forgiven because of Jesus’ death on the cross?

There are so many healthcare products with vague claims like “increasing wellness” or “flushing toxins”. But they don’t clearly define what wellness means or what toxins are getting flushed, so there isn’t any real way to measure or appreciate whether the product is working. At best, we benefit from the placebo effect.

In a way, our faith can be like that. Jesus said His blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins. We treat sin as a theoretical concept that Jesus dealt with, so we don’t appreciate it. He died for each and every sin we have

committed (or will commit). When we believe in Jesus and ask for forgiveness, He forgives the concrete, real sins we've committed.

Jesus forgives people who committed sexual sins and adultery (e.g., Luke 7:36-50), fraud (Luke 19:1-10), anti-Christian murderers (1 Timothy 1:15), and much more (Colossians 1:5-7). By acknowledging how much Jesus has forgiven us, we can appreciate what He has done. We can also tell others, too.

What are some examples of sins Jesus has forgiven you? Of course, share what you're comfortable with.

13. What part of our future feasting with Jesus are you excited about?

Jesus tells His disciples that He won't feast with them until they join Him in God's kingdom.

Are you excited about *finally* meeting the real, flesh and blood Jesus? We've all seen tons of depictions of Jesus, from paintings, icons, movies, and AI bots (<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-14104559/Switzerland-Church-AI-Jesus-confession.html>). But those are only limited human attempts to capture Jesus' glory. And we can't interact with them. But we will see Jesus in His full glory. We'll finally be able to embrace Him and be with Him. Listen to "I Can Only Imagine" by MercyMe (https://youtu.be/N_lrrq_opng) and spend a moment imagining.

Are you excited about being with all of God's followers at the feast? You'll be with Melchizedek, Moses, Mordecai, Malachi, Mary, Martha, Martin Luther, Marin Lloyd-Jones, and more. You'll see your spiritual predecessors and your spiritual descendants. It will be the most amazing get-together in history.