

## Introduction

We have been studying the account of the institution of the Lord's Supper in order to learn many things *about* Communion. What we learn about Communion helps us come to the Table with the right heart and with proper expectations. We do not come looking for a miracle, but we do come into the presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to receive nourishment and blessing from His hands.

Now it is time that we go to the heart and core of Communion observance. It is now time to remember the Lord Jesus in a distinct way and with disciplined focus. We can do this by reflecting on the words of institution (Mat. 26.26-30) within the immediate context (26.1-25).

When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, <sup>2</sup> "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." <sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, <sup>4</sup> and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. <sup>5</sup> But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." <sup>6</sup> Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? <sup>9</sup> For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." <sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. <sup>12</sup> In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial." <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. <sup>16</sup> And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. <sup>17</sup> 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?" <sup>18</sup> 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.'" <sup>19</sup> And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. <sup>20</sup> When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. <sup>21</sup> And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup> And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" <sup>23</sup> He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> 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." <sup>30</sup> And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Mat. 26.1-30).

In the big picture, everything in verses 1-30 relates to Communion. The covenant of betrayal for thirty pieces of silver is the pivotal event in the narrative. Before citing this covenant (14-16), Matthew records our Lord's prediction of His coming crucifixion (1-2), the plotting of the chief priests to kill Him (3-5; v. 5, Let us kill Him, but "Not during the feast"), and His anointing for burial by Mary (6-13). After citing the covenant of betrayal (14-16), Matthew records the Lord's preparation for the Last Supper with the announcement that His time has come (17-19; v. 18, **My time is at hand**). Then, during the Last Supper, the narrative returns to the fact of betrayal, putting it back to back with the transformation of Passover to Communion. Note how poignant this is when we read verses 25-27 without a break: <sup>25</sup> **Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."** <sup>26</sup> **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."** <sup>27</sup> **And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you.** Thus, when they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives (26.30), they went out from the Lord's Supper to the Garden, to meet the kiss of Judas (26.49; cf. 1 Cor. 11.23, Paul locates the institution "on the night when he was betrayed").

Thus, the covenant of betrayal is a pivotal event that unites the things of this context to the Lord's Supper in the memory of the church for the time between. Therefore, we now have a way to look at this narrative (26.1-30) in order to remember Jesus in a focused way. Some questions help us get started. In general, what does Matthew call us to remember about our Lord? From the very institution account, in its context, how does Matthew direct us to remember the Lord Jesus? A short answer to these questions is like a packed suitcase: Matthew reminds us that Jesus is our singing Savior.

This text opens with the prediction of the crucifixion and it closes with singing. We see Jesus through the combined realities of crucifixion and song. When we open the suitcase of Matthew's reminding, we find two compartments; the suitcase falls open into two halves: Jesus is our *singing* Savior, and Jesus is our singing *Savior* (each point is in the emphasis).

### 1A. Jesus is our *singing* Savior

This Savior sings.

Matthew causes us to remember Jesus instituting the new Passover meal in the context of His prediction of the crucifixion, plotting of the Jews, anointing for burial by Mary, and the covenant of betrayal entered into by Judas. In other words, it is the time of hatred, betrayal, crucifixion, and burial.

In this context, they sang a hymn and went out; the hymn closed the door to the upper room behind them. **And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (26.30).**

They sang a hymn. What is the obvious point that this fact tells us about *Jesus*? It tells us that Jesus sang. Because actual examples of singing are rare in the NT (only here and in Acts 16; possibly also in Revelation), this passage is highly significant. We should pause and ponder the pleasant thought of Jesus raising His voice in some form of music to elevate speech to the level of song. It seems to me that if you absorb this obvious and pleasant fact of Jesus singing into your hearts, then you can never approach singing in a light or half-hearted way ever again. Knowing that God the Son, the incarnate Son of Man, the Lord of glory, universal sovereign, and Sabbath king is a singer puts all singing in a new light; the very notion of singing must always remind us of Him. Every singer has a sacred task to perform with his lips, lungs, and vocal cords. It is good to remember Jesus as a singer, a hymn singer, a singer of Psalms. This surely sanctifies music itself, especially vocal music.

More importantly, Jesus sang *with His disciples* (they sang a hymn). He did so with them in the first communion observance of the new Israel, the coming church. Thus, if singing in general reminds us of Him, then how much more ought congregational singing, in particular, function to remind us of Him.

A couple of NT texts tell us about His singing.

In Romans 15:9, Christ fulfills the words of the Psalmist regarding the Messiah's singing among the Gentiles (and thus in the church), **"I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name."** We are not told much about His singing but the fact that our Lord Jesus, our Savior sang hymns has to stir us up to sing hymns like He did. So we ask, what are we told about His hymn singing? It is praise that involves singing hymns **"to God's name"** (Rom. 15:9). His hymn singing is an expression of music from the vocal cords that glorifies and praises God.

The writer of Hebrews, tells us that Jesus sings God's praises "in the presence of the congregation" (He is present) and He makes declaration to us His brothers and sisters (in the gospel sign, seal, and word from God) **I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.**<sup>13</sup> **And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me" (2:12-13).** How are we to understand this? It is not to be restricted to heaven and final glory because the context here concerns the family facing temptation and needing help (Heb. 2:18). This must refer to the fact that *Jesus sings along with us in our singing*. He does this as our risen Lord; He is present with us by the Spirit.

This is a lofty thought. Here we are singing as part of worship and we think of singing as a word to ourselves ("awake my soul and sing"), a word to one another ("Listen, hark, do you hear the voice of love and mercy? Come, turn your harps, all on earth with all in heaven, join to praise"), and a word to God ("Forbid it Lord [I pray] that I should boast save in the death of Christ"). But it is also a word from God ("To Him that on Jesus that has leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes; I will never, no never, no never forsake"). Now, the fact that our Savior sings makes it a word from the Lord Jesus *calling us to rejoice and to sing along with Him*. He is present with us as risen Lord by the Holy Spirit. He sings along with us. And in our singing He calls us to rejoice and to express that joy in songs of praise to God.

If we remember the Lord Jesus in this way as a singer who *calls us to sing* then that has to put some spark in our hearts to sing amidst the congregation. But if we remember Him as a singer who *sings along with us* then that has to put some fire in our hearts to sing praises to God amidst the congregation.

When we look at Matthew 26.30 (in the context of 26.1-30) with remembrance glasses on, we remember Jesus instituting the new covenant meal. We see Him patient under trial and patiently loving His disciples with their self-doubt at the Table. We see Him obedient, conquering, determined, and resolved in the roles of prophet, priest, and king. Still, sparkling like a diamond, we see Him in joyful fellowship with His disciples... singing.

Here at the Table, it is heart-warming to remember Jesus as our *singing* Savior, but there is more for us to consider, which brings us to the second main point (the other half of the suitcase to unpack), namely, that Jesus is our singing *Savior*.

## 2A. Jesus is our singing *Savior*

In other words, this singer saves. To unpack this point, we need to answer this question: “How could He sing in the time that has come, the time of extreme hatred, pious betrayal, painful crucifixion, and humiliating burial?”

Singing is at the least an expression of praise and at the most the expression of heightened joy. The singing of our Lord is joyful praise. How can joyful praise surface in this time of hatred, betrayal, crucifixion, and burial? To answer that question, we have to listen to how the Lord connects the Passover meal with the time that has come (26.18, **My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.**). This observance of the Passover in all its details including the very location is due to the fact that the time of fulfillment has arrived. Thus, the coming of this time, which is the time of hatred, betrayal, crucifixion, and burial, made it necessary that Jesus eat this Passover with His disciples. Moreover, this context made it necessary that Jesus transform the Passover meal. He says, “my time has come so I must celebrate Passover with my disciples; I must do so in order to institute a new meal of celebration for the church, the new Israel.”

Why does He sing in this context of a rising storm of suffering? He sings because it is His joy to give His church the new covenant meal. He sings because He has laid down the bricks of the pathway on which His church will walk and find refreshment for the journey that leads home to heaven. In other words, it is His joy and delight to give us the nourishing sign and seal of Communion. Thus, it is His joy to provide His people with nourishing benefits that come to us from His painful crucifixion and humiliating burial. He offered His body and blood to the cross in order to give us the benefits of the forgiveness of sins, the certainty of heavenly glory, and the anchoring of our faith as we come to His Table in faith for the strengthening of faith.

He sings in the time of the storm because of the life-giving benefits that this time of fulfillment provides for His brothers and sisters in the church He came to build.

He sings because by submitting Himself to the will of the Father, and thus to hatred, betrayal, crucifixion, and burial, He presents Himself as a fragrant sacrifice well pleasing to God. He sings because He triumphs over hatred, betrayal, sin, and death. He sings because He triumphs over sin and death on behalf of His covenant brothers and sisters that the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world.

The brief statement that His time has come indicates that He is about to fulfill His part in the eternal covenant of redemption. He does so to give His covenant people the forgiveness of sins, heaven’s glory, and life-sustaining nourishment from here to eternity. It causes the Lord Jesus great joy to give His people the oath of the Communion sacrament on top of His promises of the gospel. It is His great desire to give us assurance and to strengthen our faith. He delights to enable us to hold fast to our hope with strong encouragement, anticipation, and expectation. Therefore, He laid down this brick for the road of our walking that we may share in His joy and have the comfort of the Scriptures. His goal is that all contradiction may be countered so that we may firmly believe that we belong His covenant that stands as a rock. He bursts forth into song

even in the midst of a flood of troubles because these troubles enable Him to save and sanctify the Father's elect people.

In summary, we see Jesus the singing Savior. That is one of the memories that Matthew gives us in His account by the Holy Spirit's reminding.

What then shall we say to these things?

Well, we must say some things first by elevating speech to song. First, we must sing!

"We taste thee O thou living bread, and long to feast upon thee still. We drink of thee, the fountainhead, and thirst our souls from thee to fill."

Again, what then shall we say to these things?

God adds oath to promise by giving us this festive meal, and we respond with confession of faith and covenant renewal.

1) First, I need this singing Savior

Because of my sin that I acknowledge forthrightly, I need the work He did that caused Him to sing. I need the sacrifice He made of His very body and blood. I am a sinner and I am not worthy of the least of His favors. I need Him. I need the body and blood pictured in these elements of bread and wine. I need Him as I need bread; He is the bread of life. As a prayer, "O Lord Jesus I need you."

2) Second, I own this singing Savior as my very own

He has put the highest and greatest hope out in front of me that I may have a sure anchor for my faith. He makes me want to sing along with Him. I appropriate His work to my life. I own Him as my king to live under His authority and by His law. This is my baptismal pledge: I commit myself to live under His absolute authority over my life in its entirety (that is the core commitment of baptism). In all my learning it is from His hand that I learn. In all my living it is His will that I desire to do. "Like Him, to be like Him, O to be like Him," that is my desire. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found in Him. He is my portion. He is my song as my singing Savior.

This becomes the prayer: "O Lord Jesus I own you as my very own. Your death is my death and your life is my life. You are my Lord and my God. What you command that I will do. You say be baptized then I will be baptized. You say take communion then I will take communion. You say sing praises to God then I will sing praises to God."

3) Third, I own the children of this Savior who sings as my family

There is only one loaf so we being many are one body. He is our king, savior, sovereign God, and our dear elder brother. He sings in the midst of the congregation. So I want to sing in the midst of the congregation. I want to sing, pray, and fellowship with the people of God in communion, that is, in co-union. What a privilege this is to gather together to ask the Lord's blessing, to remember the Lord Jesus, and to sing along with Him.

So even though it is not always easy to do, though it may be easier said than done, we are to sing together with family love, one anothering mutually preferring love, and brotherly love (Rom. 13:10). In other words, we are to pile up love along the pathway of our journey. We are to compound love, heap it up as we make our way on the sure path of the good road as fellow soldiers protected by the armor of light. This begins right here with one another. And it should spill over in our relationships with all Christians and to all other contexts of life. Thus, we say in symbol what we ought to say in our hearts and live in our lives: "O Lord Jesus I own your people here and everywhere as my family."

Let us so take and eat in remembrance of Him, our singing Savior who praises God in joyful song at the thought that His death as a sacrifice provides us with nourishing bread and wine.