

Jesus' Blood of the Covenant
Matthew 26:1-30
Key Verse: 26:28

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

This passage of Matthew's gospel contains dramatic encounters. In the background, like music in a minor key, the Jewish leaders are plotting to destroy Jesus. In the foreground, a mysterious woman spontaneously pours expensive perfume on Jesus' head. Then Jesus foretells his betrayal by one of the Twelve. For the disciples, it was a time of sharp mood swings and escalating tension. In the midst of it all, Jesus taught his disciples the meaning of his death as they celebrated the Passover. Jesus gave his disciples an eternal treasure that bound them securely to him in covenant.

Like the disciples, we too experience rapid changes and surprises. We see both beautiful things, and also acts of betrayal. It is hard to keep our emotional balance. We need an anchor for our souls which is everlasting and unchanging, and gives us hope. Jesus provides this by giving his body and blood to us. Jesus is all that we need. We will study this passage in two parts, focusing first on a woman's beautiful act of love for Jesus (1-16), and then on the meaning of Jesus' body and blood given for us (17-30).

First, she has done a beautiful thing to me (1-16). Jesus told his disciples plainly, "As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (2). The Israelites celebrated the Passover from the time of Moses so they might remember God's grace of deliverance from bondage in Egypt. God wanted the Israelites to recognize his grace, thank him, and continue to live by his grace. By Jesus' time, they had celebrated the Passover for over a thousand years. It not only looked back into history, but also forward to its fulfillment by Christ. On this Passover, Jesus would be handed over to be crucified. The chief priests and elders were already gathered in the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest. They were scheming to arrest Jesus and kill him (3-4). They had to do it secretly (5). Though they intended it for harm, God would use it for the greatest good. Jesus' sacrifice as the Paschal Lamb would bring salvation to the world.

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came and poured a jar of very expensive perfume on his head (6-7). This jar of perfume must have been very precious to this woman. It was very expensive. Why did she do this? In Luke 7, a woman pours perfume on Jesus out of gratitude that he forgave her sins. In John 12, Mary pours perfume on Jesus after he had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead. They expressed their love for Jesus because he had saved them out of his love. Thanksgiving toward Jesus overflowed in their hearts. Voluntary, spontaneous, lavish giving is the fruit of Jesus' great love in a person's heart.

However, when the disciples saw the woman, they were indignant (8). They called her act "a waste," and clamored that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor (9). They did not understand the woman's heart of love. They did not stop to consider that Jesus, the Son of God, was worthy of such an offering. Their minds were fixed on money.

Jesus had perfume dripping from his head, and its scent emanated from his clothing. He was surrounded by disciples who were chastising the woman who had doused him. Anyone else might have felt embarrassed or burdened. But Jesus defended the woman's action, saying to his disciples, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me" (10). We should accept Jesus' definition of "a beautiful thing." Lavish love for Jesus is a beautiful thing, not a waste.

After defending the woman, Jesus dealt with his disciples' objection. Look at verses 11-12. "The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial." In truth, Jesus cares for the poor and his disciples should also. However, at that moment, philanthropic work was secondary. It was the time for Jesus to prepare for his death on the cross. For this reason, the woman's act had unique beauty and significance. No one understood Jesus. No one seemed to know what was happening to him. While people were indifferent and self-absorbed, Jesus was going to the cross to die for them. Jesus might have felt lonely and misunderstood as a human being. Then this woman expressed selfless love and gratitude to him. Jesus accepted it as the preparation for his burial; it became part of gospel history. Jesus honored

the woman: "...wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her" (13).

In contrast to the beautiful woman, Judas Iscariot--one of the Twelve--decided to betray Jesus. So he went to the chief priests and made a deal with them to hand Jesus over in exchange for thirty pieces of silver (14-15). Judas thought he could outsmart Jesus. He watched for his opportunity (16). But it was Jesus who prevailed for his own good purpose. Various explanations have been given for Judas' betrayal. Yet Matthew indicates that love of money was Judas' reason. It should be a warning to us.

In this part we learn how to please Jesus and participate in his work. It is to remember the grace of Jesus who died for our sins, and to serve him joyfully and gratefully, pouring out our treasures with a heart of love. Loving and sacrificial service should mark our family life, Christian ministry, vocation, school study, community service, and all we do. We can see many who are doing this in our fellowship. One young woman was about to begin study for an M.D. Ph.D. at a prestigious university. But when she realized through deep Bible study that Jesus loved her dearly, affection for him sprouted in her heart. Then she gave up her dream of an M.D. Ph.D. and devoted herself to study the word of God, pray, teach the Bible, and serve others. It is a beautiful thing to Jesus. Her godly parents recognized her beautiful act and supported her decision. Since then, the Lord blessed her with three Bible students at UIC. There is another beautiful woman at UIC. While working at the campus and studying for her master's degree in a promising field, she met Jesus personally through Bible study with a shepherd. She was so moved by the love of Jesus that she wanted to give her life to Jesus. After finishing her degree, she was offered a very good job. But taking that job meant leaving UIC. So she refused it. She devoted herself to serve Jesus by teaching the Bible, visiting the needy, cooking, and many other things. Later she was called to join children's ministry. She has been pouring her life into the spiritual development of young children. Someone said she was wasting her life and time. But to Jesus it is a beautiful thing.

Second, "this is my body...this is my blood" (17-30). The time to celebrate the Passover came. The disciples wanted to know where to prepare it. Jesus did not give an address. Jesus explained mysteriously in order to hide the location from Judas. As Jesus instructed his disciples, he said, "My appointed time is near" (18). Here we see Jesus' faith. Outwardly, it seemed that Jesus was vulnerable to the plots of evil men. But Jesus did not think so. Jesus was sure that he was obeying God's will to give his life as a ransom for many. When we see the evil in the world, we can easily succumb to fear, thinking that dark forces rule. But God is at work in the midst of the darkest evil to bring about his glorious good. We have heard about the terrible shootings in Colorado. Yet in the midst of it, God has been working. One shooting victim had been praying for over a year to share God's love with others. He was wounded by three bullets, but none were fatal. After release from the hospital, he was interviewed on a major television network. He used that opportunity to share his faith in God Almighty, and to publicly forgive the murderer. He believes it was God's answer to prayer. God is always good, and he uses all things for a glorious purpose. We can learn from Jesus to trust in God and his goodness and power in any adverse situation.

As evening came, Jesus reclined at the table eating with the Twelve. He said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me" (20-21). Jesus' words must have shocked the disciples. They became very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" (22) Each one questioned his own heart. They did not want to betray Jesus, but they were not sure about themselves. If Jesus had indicated Judas at that moment, it would have been the end of his plot. But Jesus concealed the betrayer's identity, saying, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him" (23-24a). Jesus went on to warn Judas seriously: "But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (23-24). In spite of Jesus' effort, Judas did not repent. Judas ignored Jesus' warning, hardened his heart, and lied (25). He would go through with his betrayal. Jesus must have felt great pain in his heart, for he loved Judas. Yet at this very moment Jesus entered into a new covenant with his disciples. Jesus formed with them an unbreakable relationship, rooted in his love, which brought everlasting life and peace.

Look at verse 26. "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.'" Jesus associated the bread with his body. Jesus' body would be broken on the cross. It was to sacrifice himself for the life of his people. Jesus said in John 6:35, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." As we were made for God, our souls cry out for God's life in us. People try to fill this need with other things: human love, material things, pleasures of the world, and so on. But nothing satisfies. Only Jesus can give us the bread of life that satisfies our souls and gives us true peace. All we need to do is accept Jesus' body with faith.

Look at verses 27-28. "Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" Jesus associated the cup with his blood shed on the cross. Jesus shed his blood to forgive our sins. Sin is the real problem of every human being. Past sins condemn us, making us slaves of guilt and shame. Present sins bind us in slavery to powers that we hate. Future plans to sin cause us to forfeit blessings God wants to pour out on us. Sin makes us utterly miserable. Yet we are helpless to solve our sin problem. Money, education, willpower, psychology, and any other human means are futile against the power of sin. But Jesus' blood has the power to forgive us and cleanse us and to save us from the power of sin completely. Hebrews 9:14 says, "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" Through Jesus' blood we can stand before God as his children in a deep love relationship. God's love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor 13:7). The love of God through the blood of Christ is the anchor for our souls. God takes hold of us and never lets go until he draws us to his heavenly kingdom. This was the hope Jesus held out for his disciples (29). This is our assurance in any kind of trouble or hardship in this world. When we have a blood covenant with Jesus we can also have true and lasting relationships with each other. After making a blood covenant with Jesus, the disciples sang and marched out to the Mount of Olives (30). Let's accept Jesus' blood of the covenant.