

124. The Gospel of John—13:23-30

“Last Chance”

(11/29/20)

As we have entered into chapter 13 of John’s gospel—we are roughly 15 or 16 hours from the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The evening began in the upper room where Jesus and His 12 closest men were celebrating the Feast of Passover together.

It seems that even before the Passover meal had officially begun, Jesus’ disciples began to argue among themselves (once again) who would be greatest in the Kingdom (Luke 22:24).

This caused the Lord to rise, take the pitcher of water in the room, pour some into a basin, wrap the towel around His waist like an apron and to go around the table washing His disciple’s feet (John 13:4-7).

This powerful lesson in how greatness in God’s Kingdom is measured, not in terms of how many people we are over, but in how many we put ourselves under to serve, led Jesus to begin a discourse—His final teaching to His disciples before His crucifixion.

This discourse (which only John records) occupies chapters 13 thru 17 and begins with Jesus washing the disciple’s feet (teaching humility by example) and continued with Him teaching them verbally the importance of being servants to others.

The result of living this way would be greatness in heaven—but also happiness on earth:

John 13:12-17 (NKJV)

¹² So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed ["O how happy"] are you if you do them.

At this point, Jesus begins to emphasize how that one of them will betray Him—

John 13:18-24 (NKJV)

¹⁸ I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, '*He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.*' ¹⁹ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*. ²⁰ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." ²¹ When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ²² Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. ²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke.

To get a full understanding of what's going on, you need to understand that the Jewish people, when they ate a meal together, didn't *sit* at a table lifted up on legs like we do in the West when we eat (which means Da Vinci's "Last Supper" is incorrect).

I realize that in Luke's gospel we read—"When the hour had come [for the Passover meal to begin], He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him" (Luke 22:14)—but the Greek word literally means to "*lie down*."

In Jewish culture they didn't *sit* at a table to eat—they *reclined* ('laid down') on the floor around a square or rectangular block of wood (without legs) that sat on the floor which they used for a table.

Sometimes the table was shaped with 3 sides like a "squared U" where the host (Who in this case was Jesus) reclined in the center at the bottom of the "U".

They reclined at a 45-degree angle to the table, leaning on their left side, resting on their left elbow—leaving their right hand free to eat with.

In that position the person reclining in front of you would have his head near your chest or ‘bosom’—and your head would be near the chest of the person behind you.

Now we know that the person reclining in front of Jesus that night was John (“*the disciple whom Jesus loved*”)—verse 23 tells us.

Furthermore, we know that Peter was reclining at the table, not next to Jesus—but near enough to get John’s attention.

After Jesus had announced that one the disciples in the room that evening would betray Him—it sent the disciples into a frenzy of horror and disbelief.

As the disciples were ‘buzzing’ among themselves as to who would do such a terrible thing—Peter quietly motions to John getting his attention and asks him to ask Jesus which one of the disciples it was—verse 24 records.

All John had to do was lean back putting his head on Jesus’ chest and looking over his shoulder into the eyes of Jesus to ask Him this question from Peter—which we read in verse 25 he did:

John 13:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

Now, what is not obvious at first glance but apparent as you study the text is that the person reclining directly *behind* Jesus at the table—was Judas.

This means that, as John’s head was near Jesus’ chest—Jesus’ head was near Judas’ chest.

How do we know that—several clues make this clear.

First of all, Judas had to be close enough to Jesus for Him (Jesus) to speak to him without the other disciples hearing it.

You see, Matthew tells us that when Jesus dropped this ‘bombshell’ revelation that one of them would betray Him—they all began to ask Him, “*Lord is it I?*”

As John records, that’s when Peter asked him to ask Jesus who it was—

John 13:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon.*

Apparently, the Lord said this quietly enough so that only the person directly in front of Him (John) and the person directly behind Him (Judas)—actually heard what He said.

At this point I need to bring in some more background information—this time with regard to the Passover meal itself.

The reference in verse 26 to Jesus dipping a piece of bread (unleavened bread—i.e. ‘matzah’) in something to then give to Judas exposing him as the betrayer comes right out of the order of the Passover Seder itself—and plays an important role in the events of that evening.

The Passover Meal

The Passover *Seder* (which in Hebrew means “*order*” as in “*order of events*”) is built around the drinking of 4 different cups of wine that take place at different points in the order of the Passover meal.

I. The First Cup—the Cup of Sanctification

To begin the meal the father or head of the family takes the first cup of wine called the **Cup of Sanctification**, and raises it toward heaven and recites the Kiddush (the prayer of sanctification) to set the day apart to God.

After the father or head of the family or host took the cup and prayed over it—he drank from it and then shared it with those at the table.

A. The Washing of the Hands

The second ceremony of the Seder is known as the “*washing of the hands*.”

One of the family members brings a pitcher of water, bowl, and towel to each person at the table to wash his hands—the ceremony is a symbolic act of *purification*.

It was probably this ceremony in the Seder that Jesus used to wash the disciple’s feet and teach them a powerful lesson about humility and servanthood.

B. The Green Vegetable

After the hands are washed, the *karpas* (green vegetable) is dipped into the salt water and eaten.

The green leafy vegetable, usually parsley, is used to symbolize the initial flourishing of the Israelites in Egypt.

But then the salt-water is a reminder of the tears of pain and suffering shed by the Jewish people during their years of slavery in Egypt.

C. The Middle Matzah

Next the leader takes the middle matzah (there are 3 sheets of matzah used in the Passover meal) breaks it in half, replaces half and hides the other half (called the ‘afikomen’) which will then be brought back later in the meal to illustrate a very important truth.

“Surprisingly, *Afikomen* is not Hebrew, but a Greek word, the precise meaning of which is difficult to determine. Some have proposed the derivation of this word from the Greek verb meaning “I have come.”

D. The Four Questions

At this point the youngest asks, “*Why is this night different from every other night?*”

1. “*On every other night we eat bread leavened and unleavened, but on this night, we eat only unleavened bread.*”
2. “*On every other night we eat different kinds of herbs, but on this night, we eat only bitter herbs.*”
3. “*On every other night we don’t dip even once in the sop, but on this night, we dip not once but twice.*”
4. “*On every other night we eat sitting and reclining, but on this night, we eat only reclining.*”

(This was probably overlooked in the Passover in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples.)

And then at this point in the Seder they would sing Psalm 113 and 114.

Psalms 113 to 118 are the Hillel psalms (the psalms of praise)—these were sung during the Passover feast but at this point they would only sing Psalm 113 and 114.

II. The Second Cup—the Cup of Deliverance

Next the second cup of wine called the **Cup of Deliverance** is poured and in response to the 4 questions—a lengthy narrative of the Passover story begins as told by the father or head of the family.

A. The Dipping of the Matzah

In preparation for the meal, everyone present washes their hands a second time for ceremonial cleansing.

Then each person must eat a piece of matzah dipped in the *horseradish* (to produce tears reminding them of their bitter years of slavery in Egypt) and then they dipped in *haroset*.

Haroset is a paste-like mixture of apples (or other fruits), nuts and sweet wine or honey and represents the mortar used by the Israelite slaves when they laid bricks for Pharaoh's monuments.

The sweetness of the haroset (also spelled charoset) is a reminder of the sweetness of God's eventual redemption out of their bitter slavery.

B. The Dinner

Next, the dinner is served—in Jesus' day, it would have consisted of roasted lamb, served with bitter herbs and matzah.

One Jewish writer tells us—

“While a roasted lamb bone is traditionally used (in the Passover Seder)...any piece of roasted meat may be used. Most Jewish families use a shank bone (some families use chicken or turkey neck), which they roast completely in the oven and then char over an open flame on their stoves. Unlike the other foods on the Seder plate, the shank bone is never eaten. Instead, it remains as a visual reminder of those monumental moments right before the Exodus.”

Now it is here that we return to John's gospel and read—

John 13:25-30 (NKJV)

²⁵ Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon. ²⁷ Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. ²⁹ For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy *those things* we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

I believe the reference in verse 26 to Jesus dipping the bread (matzah)—was a reference to Jesus dipping the bread in the *charoset*.

He then gave it to Judas who was close enough (right behind Jesus) for Jesus to hand it to him.

As Jesus handed the bread to Judas, as Matthew records, Judas responded—“*Surely not I Rabbi?!*”, to which Jesus answered, “*Yes it's you. Do what you're planning to do quickly.*”

But you see, this dialogue had to take place quietly enough for the other disciples not to hear it as they were talking among themselves who the traitor would be.

I say that because I believe that if the Lord had announced loudly enough for all of them to hear that it was Judas—I don't think he would have made it out of there alive!

If this is accurate and the order is correct then it means that—Judas left the room to carry out his betrayal of Jesus *before* the dinner part of the Seder began—which means Judas was not there when the Lord instituted Communion.

Communion is only for true believers in Christ and must not be partaken of by unbelievers or even Christians with unconfessed sin (hence Paul's warning to the Corinthians—1Cor.11)

Matthew 26:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ And as they were eating [the dinner], Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

This, I believe, corresponds to the next part of the Passover meal—the bringing back of the afikomen.

Remember that 3 sheets of matzah are used in the Passover meal—but only the middle piece is broken and hidden to be brought back later in the meal.

Of course this middle matzah represents Jesus (the Second or ‘Middle’ Person of the Trinity) and that it is broken (as He was on Calvary’s Cross), hidden only to be brought back later—speaks of His first and second coming (Explain).

I believe it was the afikomen that Jesus broke and gave to His disciples when He said, **“Take, eat; this is my body.”** (Mention how the matzah is *unleavened*, *striped* and *pierced* as Jesus body was)

Matthew 26:27-28 (NKJV)

²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.

²⁸ For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

This brings us to the third cup of wine used in the Passover meal—

III. The Third Cup—the Cup of Redemption

The third cup of wine called the **Cup of Redemption**, is at this point in the meal poured and sipped.

It was here in the order of the Passover meal and with this third cup that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (Communion).

It was with this third cup—the Cup of Redemption, that Jesus chose to remind us of His blood shed for us on the cross—the blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, redeeming us to God and causing His judgment to ‘pass-over’ us.

IV. The Fourth Cup—the Cup of Praise

Finally, they would pour and drink from the fourth cup—the **Cup of Praise**.

Jesus apparently didn’t drink this cup that night—

Matthew 26:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

That means that the Passover meal that Jesus observed with His disciples that night—was not finished!

Jesus said He wouldn’t drink of that forth cup—the cup of praise (sometimes called the ‘*cup of restoration*’; or ‘*the cup of the kingdom*’) until He drank it with all of us in the Kingdom—which means that we are all going to finish that Passover meal with Jesus someday!

Closing Hymn

They would then sing from Psalm 118 to officially end the Passover Seder.

One of the songs from Ps.118 would be from verse 24, “*This is the day which the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.*”

(Explain how Jesus sung this the night before the cross)

Matthew 26:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

John 14:31 (NKJV)

³¹ ...**Arise, let us go from here.**

As we bring this to a close—something you might not have known, but really needs to be stated.

The place where Judas was reclining that night, right behind Jesus (the Host) where Jesus' head was near Judas' chest—was the place of highest honor in that culture, reserved for the most intimate friend.

The question is—*“How did Judas wind up reclining there?”*

Well in Jewish culture no person could just choose to recline there of their own accord—they had to be invited to recline there by the host.

In other words—Jesus had invited Judas to recline there next to Him in the place of honor.

Also, to offer a person the bread after it had been dipped as Jesus did for Judas, was in that culture a sign of the deepest friendship—equivalent to toasting someone in our culture.

You say—*“I don't get it? Why would Jesus do all of that knowing Judas was about to betray Him?”*

He did it to communicate to Judas that He loved him and was, even at this late hour, giving him a chance to change his mind and not go thru with his betrayal (and rejection) of Jesus.

I believe Jesus was treating Judas this way to show him how much the Lord loved him so that he would be convicted and brought to the point of repentance.

It's as if Jesus was saying to Judas, "*I still want to be your friend and your Savior—it's not too late, but this is your last chance.*"

And I believe the statement in verse 21 that Jesus was "*troubled in spirit*" was because He knew where Judas would spend eternity—and that deeply troubled the Lord, Who did not want to see Judas wind up in hell.

Verse 30 is especially sobering—

John 13:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

Of course, it was night *literally*—the Passover was not celebrated until sundown—but that's not the "night" the Holy Spirit meant.

It was "**night**" for Judas in that the day of God's grace or opportunity to be saved had ended.

He loved darkness rather than light and now, as Jude said, "*there is reserved for him the blackness of darkness forever.*" (Jude 1:13)

God's Spirit will not always strive with man—there comes a point in every unbeliever's life when they have rejected Jesus and the light of the gospel so much—that God withdraws His offer of salvation and they are sentenced to eternal darkness.

The statement "**it was night**" means that Judas had now passed the spiritual point of 'no return'.

This was evidenced by the statement in verse 27 where we are told that "*Satan entered into Judas*"—in other words the devil now had complete and eternal control over him.

There was no longer any hope for Judas to repent and be saved—the opportunity was over; the day of God’s grace had come to an end—the night of eternal darkness had begun and would culminate in the outer darkness of hell forever.

How about you?

The fact that you’re here this morning probably indicates the day of grace has not ended in your life and you still have the opportunity to receive Jesus and be saved.

And like He did with Judas, the Lord is trying to show you in a variety of ways thru His goodness and love that it’s not too late, that He still wants to be your friend and Savior.

But like Judas this could be your last chance—don’t wind up like him.

Don’t betray Jesus for the sake of your ‘*friends*’—don’t sell Him for a ‘*few pieces of silver*’ (some material possessions).

Remember Jesus’ warning—“*What would it profit if a person gained the whole world but lost their soul—what on earth would be worth losing your eternal soul for?*”

Today is the day of salvation—but the night is coming when it will be too late to receive Jesus as your Savior.

The choice is yours—make the right one—your eternity hangs in the balance!