

## Matthew 26.17-29 | Greater Promise

### Introduction | Acts 4 & the Plan for Jesus' Death

Today's sermon is the introduction to our Easter series called GOD IS GREATER. We concluded our study of the first 25 chapters of Matthew in the Fall of last year. For the month leading up to Easter, we will spend our time in Matthew 26, 27, and 28 which records the last week of Jesus life. By way of reminder, **Matthew was formerly a corrupt and successful tax collector.** Jews considered tax men THE example of a "sinner" and the Romans viewed them no better than brothel keepers. But Matthew responded to Jesus call to "follow me", left everything he knew to trust Jesus and one day be martyred for his faith in Ethiopia.

Matthew is Jewish and he wrote to Jews in order to **prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah.** The phrase "...*this was to fulfill*" appears in the gospel 16 times because the fulfillment of VERY Old Testament prophecies characterizes Matthew's portrait of Jesus as Messiah—most people don't know what that means. Most people will read Matthew and acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was a really born. Most will acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was delivered by His own people for trial. Most will even acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth was executed by Gentiles on a Roman Cross. But without a Jewish-Old Testament backdrop, most will misunderstand the suffering of Jesus (the passion) as merely the tragic and unjust murder of a good and humble teacher. Jesus death was not a terrible accident.

According to the words of one of the best friends of Jesus, a Jewish Peter preached God had planned it to take place: *truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4.27-28).* **The death of Jesus was arranged by God, and Jesus went to the cross willingly. Why? What did it all mean? .**

### Genesis 1-11 | God Promises to Save

**In today's text, Jesus tells us.** But because Matthew is writing to Jews, he doesn't often take the time (Like Luke does) to explain the Jewish context that Jesus references and customs he participates in. I wish to do that today. The death of Jesus didn't begin on a hill called Golgotha, it was planned before the world was created, and it began in a Garden called Eden. It is, therefore, timely that we just finished our study of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. In Genesis, we read that in six days, God creates everything visible and invisible. He creates a world that is beautiful and in his own words, good. He also creates men and women whom he says are very good with whom he enjoys fellowship. All is well until men believe the lie that happiness is found apart from God and His Word. They rebel and sin comes into the world. Lest they eat of the tree of life and remain in their brokenness forever, out of love, **God sends Adam and Eve out of the garden INTO CHAOS with the promise of a savior who will one day be born and bring them back into the garden again.**

From there, things go from bad to worse. Genesis 6 reveals that, if left alone, men will fill the world with sin and evil. Grieved and angry at the wickedness of men, by grace, God chooses a 600 year old man named Noah and tells him to build a big old boat, fill it with two of every animal, because he is going to wash the world clean. The wrath of God is real. The justice of God is good and the flood reveals exactly what the sins of men deserve. But God is also a God of grace. After God floods the world, he hangs up his war bow in the sky **promising to save the world and never destroy again in his wrath.**

In time, Noah's family proves just as sinful as their ancestors. His descendants, like Nimrods, attempt to build a godless city which glorifies themselves. In love, God brings a halt to their building project by confusing their languages and scattering them across the earth. **The rest of Genesis is really the story of one man named Abraham, a child of EBER—HEBREW—and his family. It is through this family that God promises to bless the world.** Abraham's grandson Jacob, whose name God changes to Israel has 12 sons. Before they can be a blessing to the world, this family finds itself in Egypt after Abraham's great

grandson Joseph saves everyone from famine. In time, the leader of Joseph helped dies and everyone forgets what he did. Threatened by his growing family, **the HEBREW people find themselves enslaved.**

### **Exodus 24 | Passover & The Old Covenant**

After 400 years in Egypt, God acts to fulfill his promise to save His people. As a demonstration of his power, and maybe his sense of humor, **God uses an 80 year-old fugitive Shepherd named Moses to lead the next chapter in the story, talking to him through a burning shrubbery.** The Exodus is the story of how the Hebrew people were supernaturally delivered from slavery in Egypt to display a picture of how God will one day save us all from slavery to sin. Like a Hollywood disaster film on a cosmic scale, God displays His power through 10 different plagues designed reveal His glory and redeem His people. 1) Nile is turned to blood. 2) Frogs cover every inch of land and home 3) Gnats/lice crawl forth and plague man and beast 4) Flies swarm over the land 5) All livestock die 6) Boils breakout on skin of Egyptians 7) Hailstones fall and kill all slaves and animals left in open 8) Locust come and eat the vegetation 9) Darkness covers the land.

**The 10<sup>th</sup> plague is the most important for context in our passage today.** Just before the final plague, God gives instructions to the Hebrew people—he institutes an annual Passover meal that the disciples are now celebrating here in Matthew. According to Exodus 12, each household was instructed to slaughter a lamb without blemish. They would take some of the blood and put it on the doorposts and the lintels of the houses in which they eat. **God then told Moses that He would pass through the land and kill all the firstborn in the land. When God saw the blood of the lamb across the door, he would accept the substitute and PASSOVER their home.** God does just that, Pharaoh frees His people, and Moses leads them to the base of a great Mountain called Sinai to worship on their way to the land He PROMISED to Abraham back in Genesis 12.

There God meets his people, gives them the law, and like a bridegroom to his bride, makes a covenant promise with His people. Beginning with the 10 commandments, God gives over 600 commands and instructions. This is a conditional covenant; God promises blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. And when Israel falls short, God **establishes priesthood and a sacrificial system through which sins can be atoned for and the covenant relationship can be preserved.** This is a way that God can maintain relationship with his chosen people through substitutes and temporary righteousness. The covenant is God read, agreed to, and “signed”. *Exodus 24.3-8 Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answers with one voice and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do. “ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD...And Moses took half of the blood (from offerings) and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Before there was a New Covenant signed in blood, there was an old one.*

### **Jeremiah 31 | Rebellion & the Promised New Covenant**

From Exodus to Malachi, the Old Testament proves that God’s people cannot keep God’s covenant. The people are not simply unable to obey, time and time again, they give themselves to idolatry. But time and time again, God called them back to himself—*If my people who are called by name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2Chron. 7.14).* But the law which promised life proved to bring death—it only revealed how sinful they were. Again, just as we saw in Genesis, things went from bad to worse. Kings rose and kings fell, and God punished the sins of his people , but at the same time, **promising that the ONE true King would come and save them.** God raised up nations to punish His own chosen

nation. Israel was conquered and exiled several times. And it was during these dark times, that God raised up prophets to both condemn and give hope:

One of these prophets, Jeremiah, said: **Behold, the days are coming declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, *NOT LIKE THE COVENANT that I made with their fathers* on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days declares the LORD; *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'KNOW THE LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jer. 31.31-34)**

### **Matthew 26 | Jesus and the New Covenant**

Which brings us to the passage here in Matthew where Jesus is instituting a New Covenant. **This is Jesus' opportunity to interpret everything that is about to happen before it happens.**

Jesus is a man whom John the Baptist called "**The Lamb** who takes away the sins of the world", a man who will die on a cross with a sign above him that says "**THE KING OF THE JEWS**" gathers with His Hebrew disciples, **for the PASSOVER celebration**, he establishes a **New Covenant**—a GREATER PROMISE—that God is making with His people. The focus on of Matthew 26 is not on what the disciples are doing, but what Jesus is doing. Notice the words...Jesus took...Jesus blessed...Jesus broke...Jesus gave. The New Covenant is not about something men must do, or not do, it is about what God has done. .

Earlier in Matthew, when Jesus was speaking with the Pharisees who thought he came to abolish God's rules and law, Jesus said—I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill them, so that he could give us **..a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36.26.** Even if the Pharisees kept all the rules with their bodies, Jesus revealed that they still had sin I their hearts. The Old Covenant was incapable of producing righteousness.

**Salvation is not God's work WITH US; it is God's work FOR US.** Like the Lamb used in the Passover, Jesus is the substitute for our atonement. Jesus stood before God as our representative. **He assumed responsibility for our obedience to the Law of God AND he assumed the responsibility to render to God satisfaction/penalty for our disobedience.** The GOSPEL IN FOUR WORDS IS: **JESUS IN MY PLACE.**

The promise of the New Covenant is not that we develop a righteousness apart from God so that we're deemed "good" and then He owes and accepts us, rather, **that He develops a righteousness through Jesus Christ and gives it to us (II Cor. 5:21).** **As Keller so aptly says, the Gospel is not that "it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you've been good," but that "it doesn't matter if you've been good, as long as you believe in Christ as your Savior."** That is why Paul can write: **Romans 8.1-4** **There is, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. **By sending his own SON (HE IS GOD), in the likeness of sinful flesh (HE IS MAN), he condemned sin in the flesh,** in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. **This is why the writer of Hebrews can say that JESUS IS A GUARANTOR OF A BETTER COVENANT (Hebrews 7.22)—A Greater Promise. How this is greater...in every way?**

- Jesus makes a new covenant **as HOLY GOD** (Judge) – Only God can make a covenant to save the world from sin. The world has sinned against Him—he is the one who has been wrong. As the Son of God, God himself makes the promise.

- Jesus makes a new covenant **as SINLESS MAN** (2<sup>nd</sup> Adam) – Not only does God make the covenant, he represents both parties. Jesus is the Son of Man...he is fully man. God represents man in the covenant. And he is not a sinful man representing a sinful man; he is the only sinless man representing all sinless men.
- Jesus makes a new covenant **as PERPETUAL PRIEST** (High Priest)– In Christ, God mediates the covenant forever. Unlike the priests of the Old Testament, who died and could not continue their office, Jesus is alive. As such, he mediates the covenant of God permanently and perpetually. We are always able to draw near to God in Christ because Jesus is always making intercession.
- Jesus makes a new covenant **as INFINITE SACRIFICE** (Passover lamb)– The blood of Christ empowers the covenant. In Christ, God promises to forgive my sin, past, present, and future, and therefore, remove my guilt. The blood that forgives my sin is not merely a man's blood, it is God's blood. And has God's blood it has infinite weight and value to cover any and all sin for anyone who will believe.

### **CONCLUSION | Communion**

The **Lord's Table is our response to Jesus Words**. *If you do not believe Jesus, the bread and the cup is not something you should receive until you have surrendered your life to Jesus. We encourage you to use this as a time to consider the offer of forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus holds out to all who are willing to receive him. Place your hope in him. You might not come forward for communion today, but you can come to Jesus today and find eternal life, which is what all of this is about.*

**For those who do believe Jesus**, the Lord's Table is for all who desire to live under the New Covenant—God's Greater Promise—where your acceptance is based not on what you achieve, but what you believe.

The EUCHARIST is a combination of two words which, together, mean thanksgiving. Separately, they are GOOD (EU-logy – good word) and CHARISA which means beautiful or grace, where we get our English word caress. **Together the Eucharist is “the good caress” which means; the risen Lord embraces his people and assures them again and again of His love and forgiveness.**