

Giving Up the Giver

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[0:00] And the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God. Please keep them open and let's pray as we come to look at them together. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus and that he is supreme.

We thank you that you guarded and protected him. Even as you gave him over to the cross, you promised that he would rise again.

That his foe would not triumph. That sin and betrayal and death would not have the upper hand over him. But he rose victorious from the grave.

He even died a victor, triumphing over his enemies upon the cross. And so, Father, we pray, draw us near to Jesus. Give us eyes to see him, ears to hear him, hearts to receive him this evening.

As we come to his word, all we ask in his name. Amen. Who gave Jesus over to the cross?

[1:10] As Matthew zooms in on the days leading up to Jesus' death, that question is right at the heart of the drama. We often say that we, Jesus is the greatest gift ever given.

But who gave him to us? Our thoughts might turn to perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son.

That whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. We know then that the father gave the son. But Matthew wants tonight to give us two more answers that are equally true, but are hard for us to fit together.

I think I've mentioned before these magnetic see-through colored tiles we have at home. They're great for building things with the kids.

If you stick two together, like a yellow one and a blue one, and you look through them, they are green. Or yellow and red, and they make orange.

[2:14] You get the idea. But then stick a purple one on top. And I don't know what you call that color. It's a murky color. It's hard to see through.

A bit like that, the Gospels give us more than one lens to look through to see who gave Jesus. Each lens casts a different color on the events that lead to the cross.

Together, they cast a mysterious shadow over these events. But there is one shade that cuts through stronger than the others.

There's one answer that Matthew doesn't want us to miss. Who gave Jesus to be crucified, die, and be buried? Well, tonight, as it's as if Matthew takes three of these tiles together, he starts with a yellow, if you like, then an orange, then a yellow.

There's something off in there as you look through. There's a tinge of something else going on, but there is one color that comes through clearly. There is something Judas colored in there.

[3:24] Isn't there? There's a tinge of that. There is also something Old Testament colored as well, but it is overwhelmingly Jesus colored.

In fact, that's the lens that Matthew attaches first, isn't it? Who is in control at the start of our passage? There's a whole swirl of ideas. The disciples, Passover, preparation.

But right in the middle, what does Jesus say? Verse 18. Fix your eyes on this. The teacher says, my time is at hand.

This is his time. Everything revolves around him. He's the one directing the scene. Where do you want us to go? Go here.

Say this. Do this. And they do as they were directed. Jesus has decided where, when, and how he will keep the Passover with his disciples because this year will be a Passover like no other.

[4:30] My time is at hand. So who gave Jesus? Jesus. Well, let's see Matthew's two answers in our two points this evening.

Ben showed us last time how Matthew likes to put contrasting scenes or panels next to each other to make his point. And he does the same here tonight. Two things happen around this table. Matthew points them out to us with the words, as they were eating, at the start of verse 21 and 26. So what does he want us to see as they were eating?

Firstly, the Lord given up. The Lord given up. Picture the scene.

You're sitting down to Christmas dinner. The whole family's together. Steaming plates are coming out of the kitchen and being laid on the table. Someone gives thanks and everyone begins eating.

[5:37] Mmm, this turkey is delicious. Whose stuffing recipe is this? Can somebody pass the gravy? I'm telling you the truth. One of you is going to betray me.

Christmas can be stressful, but that would be pretty shocking even for the tensest of dinner tables, wouldn't it? Where did that come from? Passover was the festival for God's people back then. It came with a week of celebration as they remembered and turned their minds back to God's awesome rescue of them from Egypt by the blood of a lamb eaten round a family dinner table just like this.

It was the Christmas of the Jewish calendar. So when Jesus says this, hear nails screeching down a chalkboard. It's a shocking thing to say at any time.

One of us is a traitor. But as they were eating the Passover meal, no wonder they were very sorrowful or distressed.

[6:41] Now we might think that's unfair of Jesus to bring this up now. But he has picked his moment perfectly.

His timing could not have been more deliberate. Nobody was forcing the issue. Nobody even saw it coming. But he is in possession of all the facts surrounding the next few days.

And by telling them now, he's proving that nothing is going to surprise him. He is in control of the timeline. He knows every step on his path to the cross.

And knowing all of that, where is he? He's in control. He's in control. Sitting at a dinner table, eating the Passover meal with the one who, as they speak, was waiting for an opportunity to hand him over to those who would put him to death.

Nothing says, I am in control like someone who knows danger is coming, and instead of running, sits calmly across from his enemy and tells the whole room what is going to happen.

[8:01] But there's another reason Jesus brings this up now, and it's because it's Passover. See, suddenly the Passover meal has become all about Jesus.

The disciples' focus has switched from the meal to the master, from the lamb to the Lord. Am I the one who will betray you, Lord?

We've all grown, haven't we, at cousins or grandparents, relatives who have made family gatherings all about them. If what Jesus says here isn't true, then we'd be right to feel the same about him.

If his teaching is true, though, and he is in control, and his death is the fulfillment of the Passover meal, he has every right to make it all about him.

In fact, how couldn't he? He wants the disciples to understand what he's doing so that they will understand and benefit from what is going to happen to him in the next 24 hours.

[9:09] As history reaches its climax, this is the perfect moment for him, its hero, to drop this bombshell. But there is another agent in the room, a double agent.

He who's dipped his hand in the dish with me. Those words in verse 23 sound quite cryptic, don't they? It could be a sort of nod towards Judas.

But at a Passover meal with at least 13 people around the table, it's unlikely that only Judas would have taken food from the same dish as Jesus. Jesus is likely stressing here the intensity of the betrayal.

One of you who shared countless meals with me. One of whom who sat around the table with me. That's made even sharper, I think, if we remember how significant hospitality was culturally in that day.

It would be like saying, I'm going to be handed over by my own family. Now, we might well wonder, how can both those things be true at the same time?

[10:22] Jesus is totally in control, but the betrayal will be so intense, so vicious when it comes.

We might ask, who ultimately then is responsible for it? And look at Jesus' answer in verse 24. Who gives Jesus up?

The Son of Man goes as it's written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. Which is it? Jesus says both.

It is both God's plan written in the pages of the Old Testament and the one who carries it out will carry the blame. Now, how can they both be true?

Jesus does not say. He simply sticks the colored tiles together and says, look through this and you will see.

[11:26] It's worth saying that even stuck together, those tiles are still distinct. Judas is not a puppet being forced to do things against his will. Ben showed us last time just how eager he was to betray Jesus.

The chief priests don't even need to recruit him. He went to them and offered Jesus up to them for a bit of loose change. This was his idea. He wanted to give Jesus up.

But neither is Judas forcing God's hand, as if God's plan for Jesus' life is having to be quickly rewritten because one of the apostles has gone rogue.

No, Judas is fulfilling God's plan for eternity without even realizing that that's what he's doing. In a way that we cannot fully understand, God's will and Judas' will go like this.

And brothers and sisters, that is all Jesus tells us here. He doesn't say how they fit together. He just says that they do. God is sovereign over Jesus' betrayal and Judas is responsible for betraying him.

[12:38] His warning is so stark, it should leave us in no doubt that Judas has committed a terrible sin by giving Jesus up. Better never to have been born.

And yet, even the most shocking sins unfold in the outworking of God's plan for the salvation of his people. He goes as it is written of him.

I think the only helpful thing for me to say is that both of those truths should deeply comfort us. One reminds us that God is entirely sovereign and in control, even over human sin.

No wrongdoing or evil can upset or ruin his plan ever. And yet, the other reminds us that God himself never sins, nor is he the cause of human sin.

But he himself is completely pure, always, only, ever good. If you've got questions about that, I'm really happy to try and talk about it afterwards.

[13:49] But as I say, we are pressing right up against the limits of what we can say. The point, though, is that in one important sense, the Lord is truly, properly given up by Judas.

Judas knows it. Verse 25, Judas, who would betray him, answered, Is it I, Rabbi? And Jesus knows it. You have said so.

He fairly gives the game away by answering Jesus' words after the other disciples and after Jesus has spelled out the betrayal and its consequences. Notice he even calls Jesus Rabbi.

But what had the rest of the twelve called him in verse 22? Lord. Even now, in front of the apostles, to Jesus' face, Judas cannot disguise his low opinion of Jesus.

Rabbi was a respectful term, but it only means teacher. And by this point in the gospel, these guys know very well that Jesus is far more than a teacher.

[15:02] He is Lord. He won't say it out loud, but Judas makes his intention so obvious that Judas doesn't even dignify his question with an answer.

You have said so. Now, there's loads going on there, but I just want to tug out two implications for us that I think that Matthew highlights.

One is the wickedness of betraying Jesus. Judas has been with the Lord Jesus for three years. He'd seen it all.

He wasn't a straggler. We know from elsewhere that he was the one tasked with keeping hold of the money bag for the twelve. Outwardly, he was no less an apostle than Matthew himself.

How many dishes had he dipped his hand in with Jesus? How many miles had he walked with him? How many sermons had he heard him preach? And yet, now he has the chance. He sells Jesus out and doesn't even have the guts to say it to his face.

[16:12] In one sense, no one can ever betray Jesus like Judas did. It's unique. It's a one-off in history. But it is a warning to us nonetheless that to the extent that we do know the Lord Jesus and have walked with him, heard his word, tasted his goodness, accepted or approved the truth about him, it is a wicked thing for us to turn our back on him and give him up as if he were only another teacher and not our one true Lord.

Hebrews puts it like this in chapter 6, it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who've tasted the heavenly gift and shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

We're not Judas, we didn't crucify Jesus, but in effect, says Hebrews, we are crying out in our hearts, crucify him if we give him up.

It is possible, brothers and sisters, for us to betray him to our own harm, says Hebrews, to our own death, not his.

Again, Hebrews 10, how much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by one who has spanned the Son of God? So friends, if you are here tonight and you are tempted tempted to give Jesus up and walk away, be warned, what a wicked thing that would be to do for all the good that he has done you, for all that he is, the Son of God, the Christ, our Lord, our Savior, to throw him aside in exchange for the few copper coins of pleasure this world can give compared with the feast of the Father's kingdom that he came to get you access into, Jesus leaves us in no doubt that that would be by far, by far, the biggest mistake of your life.

[18:42] And for what? That's the second thread I want to tug, the futility of giving him up. How can you outsmart someone who is always an infinite number of steps ahead of you?

Judas is so far down the rabbit hole of his own conspiracy that he doesn't seem to notice that Jesus is the one in the driving seat. It's like a child doing something that they know is naughty and not realizing that the parent is standing quietly watching from a distance seeing how far they'll take it. At that point, every cookie stolen from the jar isn't gain, it's loss. because when the parent steps in, it will all be taken away and more.

There will be consequences. If the child knew that the parent was watching, would they have tried to get away with it? Surely not, we think. Yet Judas knows his cover is blown.

Jesus sees straight through him. Yet he carries on as if he could ever get away with his cookies. his betrayal is absolutely futile.

[19:53] He stands to gain nothing and lose everything because Jesus has seen him doing it. It's absolutely tragic. Friends, not only is it a terrible thing to give Jesus up, it is also tragically pointless.

Whatever you think you stand to gain by walking away, you will not get to keep. you will lose everything. There will be consequences because you are betraying an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-seeing Lord.

Why bother? Friends, don't get sucked so far down into those dark thoughts that you convince yourself it's worth it. If you find yourself thinking that you might like to walk away, that this Christianity thing is overblown and there is more for me out there, please, please, bring those thoughts out of darkness and into the light.

Find someone to talk to you, someone to pray with you, someone to walk with you through it. Get help to get out of that hole because giving up on Jesus is not worth it, and it never will be.

As they were eating, the Lord was given up to die. It is a wicked thing, but it was ultimately pointless because the Lord himself is in full control, which is, again, the overriding color of these verses.

[21:32] The most important answer that Matthew gives to that question, who gave Jesus, is not Jesus. It is this, who gave the Lord Jesus?

Our second point, he did. Jesus gave Jesus. Our second point tonight, the lamb gives himself, the lamb gives himself.

Verse 26, as they were eating, what else happened? We've heard lots about Jesus being given up, given over, but now what happens? just try to take in the majesty and the poignancy of these words.

The whole world is clamoring over Jesus. There are hands grasping at him, trying to grab onto him. Soon, they will take his body and break it, flog him, drive nails into him, and make him bleed.

But now, in the calm and quiet of the night before that all happens, around the table, 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.

[22:53] and he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Friends, can you see it? Who breaks the bread and pours the wine? Jesus. Who gives the bread and wine to the disciples?

Jesus. Who will ultimately break Jesus' body and pour out his blood? Jesus. And who will give his broken body and shed blood to his disciples?

Jesus. Jesus. He's planned for all these other hands to push him towards the cross so that he can give himself there for them. And there's so much we could say about this meal.

Of course, it's something that we do regularly in communion, eating bread, drinking wine together. But if the Last Supper is the context for the Lord's Supper that we share, there is another meal behind the Last Supper, which Matthew is more interested in.

[24:18] Because, of course, what meal is this? It's the Passover meal that Jesus arranged at the start of the passage. Where would you have us prepare the Passover?

But all is not what it seems. See, when we read from Exodus earlier about the origin of the Passover meal, what was the centerpiece, if you like, of the meal? What was at the middle of the table?

What is the focus of the Passover? Take a lamb. A lamb. Instructions, detailed instructions about what to do with its body, instructions about what to do with its blood.

Now, we're not told whether there was a roasted lamb on the table that night, but Matthew's done that on purpose. Because, again, Jesus lifts his people's eyes from the meal on the table to himself, his own hands, what he is holding.

And what is it? Not the roasted flesh of a lamb, rather, this is my body. Not the blood of a lamb, but drink this, my blood of the covenant.

[25:33] If, as many of us will be, we're familiar with hearing those words, we might not get quite how bizarre this would have been for the disciples. In the setting of this meal, it's as if the lamb has sat up on the table and said, here, take my body, here is my blood for you.

Imagine the shock when they heard the familiar liturgy, as familiar to them as the words of communion are to us, turned on their heads. What would they have said in their hearts?

This isn't about you, Jesus, it's the Passover meal. It's about the lamb. But what if that is exactly the point? What if Jesus is giving his body and his blood, pictured in the bread and wine, because he is giving himself to be their Passover lamb?

As we heard, the first Passover was on the same night as the tenth plague, the knockout blow, as the Lord landed his judgment on Egypt, coming to the rescue of his people.

The Lord passed through the land to judge every household, and the penalty for disobeying his voice was death. The first nine plagues, he hadn't required his people to do anything, but this time was different.

[26:59] He had told his people to sacrifice a lamb without blemish or defect, to roast it and eat its body and paint its blood on the doorpost of their houses.

Without the blood of the Passover lamb painted on the doorposts, they would suffer the same fate as Pharaoh's son, death. But the Lord said, when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

what was the blood to do? The blood was to shield them from wrath, blood to protect them from death, blood to cover their sins.

And every year from then on, God's rescued people celebrated the Passover as a covenant meal. It had this focal place in their relationship with the Lord.

They ate the lamb together to relive and experience that rescue all over again. So what's any of that got to do with Jesus' body and Jesus' blood?

[28:09] Jesus says it has everything to do with him. Put your eyes on these words. What does he say his blood is and will do, verse 28?

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. What an incredible thing to say.

My blood is Passover lamb blood, covenant blood, sin-covering blood. Can you see what he's saying?

He is the Passover lamb. He will give himself to be sacrificed, his body broken, his blood poured out, so that God's amazing redemption and deliverance of his people foreshadowed in the first Passover will be fulfilled for his disciples in the last Passover the next day upon the cross.

But unlike every other lamb ever taken and killed at Passover, Jesus gives himself to be killed, so that we, his people, might receive his body and blood as the sacrifice which will take away our sins.

[29:30] Of course, that's what we remember and, in a sense, relive, re-experience every time we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord's Supper in faith. But I think Jesus is saying more than that here.

He is saying to us, receive my death in the same way that you eat bread and drink wine. Imagine going to a friend's house for dinner, they're cooked up a feast and they lay it out on the table spectacularly.

They pour the drinks, have a seat they say, and let's admire the food. What lovely presentation, isn't that nice? The colour of the wine, the sparkle of the light upon it, look at the crust on that bread, that turned out just like I had hoped.

And after an hour sort of looking and commenting on the meal, the host says, well that was a lovely evening, we'll have to do that again sometime, get home safely. You went to a meal, but can you really say that you had the meal?

The meal was laid out for you and you were there, but can you say that you received it or benefited from it? When you got home, you could look up the recipe again and try to recreate it, perfect the timings, get the best ingredients, work on getting it just right.

[30:53] You could take the whole lot to a lab and analyse its chemical content and explain at a molecular level why it had the texture and the taste that it does. You could do everything possible with this meal and know everything there is to know about it.

But until you've put it in your mouth and tasted it and swallowed it and digested it, until it's nourished and fed you, you have not had the meal.

You've been given it, but you haven't received it. That's how you need to receive my death, says Jesus, like you're eating the Passover lamb.

Friends, we can look at Jesus' death from every angle. We can read every book that there is on its theological significance. We can talk about it every week, every day, but it will do you no good.

To benefit from his death in any way, shape, or form, you need to feed on his sacrifice by faith. You need to spiritually eat and drink and digest his broken body and poured out blood.

[32:12] take hold of his death, he says. Take it in for your forgiveness. Pull his death over you like a shield to cover you from your own death for your sins.

Put your trust in what he did on the cross to rescue us from God. Friends, Jesus willingly holds out his death to us and gives himself to us.

because he wants us to receive him and take hold of him by faith. So tonight, if you have never taken hold of that gift or received it yourself, you can do that tonight and know that your sins are forgiven.

Feed on him by faith for yourself and you will never go hungry again. you will never thirst or die but have eternal life.

That is why he gave himself to us. That we might receive him by faith. And brothers and sisters, that is our day-to-day faith that finds its fullest expression in the Lord's Supper.

[33:27] The bread and wine don't do anything for us unless our spiritual diet in between communion is Christ's death on the cross. What sustains us in communion is not the bread and wine itself but what we receive spiritually who feeds us inwardly as we eat and drink in faith.

So while our passage tonight might well leave us hungry and thirsty for the Lord's Supper again as it should, let's continue until then to make Christ's sacrifice our food and drink that we depend on to live each and every day.

In the sure hope that if we feed on him now by faith, we will eat and we will drink with him forever in God's kingdom in the age to come.

Let's come to him now as we pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are in awe again of the majesty of your death for us.

How we thank you for your willing sacrifice that you gave yourself for us and loved us. Lord, we pray that we would not rely on these outward forms to receive you, but that by faith, Lord, each of us tonight would receive you.

[35:15] Lord, help us, we pray not to have you only in an intellectual sense, but truly to rely upon you, to depend upon you as food and drink, to depend upon you as your people depended upon the Passover lamb and its blood, to avert death and wrath and judgment.

Lord, we pray, help us to depend upon Christ's death on the cross like that. Help us never to have a light grasp of him, but to hold on to him daily.

lead us, we pray, turn our hearts towards him. Lord, help us never to stray from him or desert him and give him up, but each day to feed on him by faith and so be nourished and benefit from his death.

Lord, we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.