

The Gospel of Matthew, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 33: The Plot, the Anointing, and the Last Supper

Matthew 26:1-35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Matthew 26:1-35 carries enormous doctrinal weight, and the heaviest of it gathers around a table. What is at stake first is the meaning of the cross itself. Matthew is careful to show that Jesus is not a victim of circumstance. He predicts His death, He interprets the woman's gift as preparation for His burial, and He sits down at the Passover and deliberately recasts it around His own body and blood. The cross is not an accident that happened to Jesus; it is a sacrifice He freely offers. When He says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins," He is declaring that the new covenant promised by Jeremiah is now being cut in His blood, and that forgiveness comes through His death. Your students need to leave understanding that the Lord's Supper is rooted in this covenant, memorializes this death, and unites them with this Christ.

But the chapter aims at the heart as surely as it aims at the head. Matthew sets four hearts side by side: leaders who calculate, a woman who pours out, a friend who sells, and disciples who boast. He is holding up a mirror. The same Jesus who is worthy of the woman's extravagance is the one Judas sold for the price of a slave, and the one Peter swore he would die for and then denied. The lesson presses every student to ask which heart is theirs, and to come to the Lord's table with self-examination rather than presumption.

So teach for both. Help your class marvel at the willing Savior who gives His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, and help them grasp clearly what the New Testament church does at the Lord's table and why. Then turn the mirror gently toward them, so that they leave neither calculating like the leaders nor boasting like Peter, but pouring themselves out like the woman who simply loved Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

Twice in this chapter Jesus announces His own death before anyone moves against Him (vv. 2, 12), and the leaders plot "by stealth" (v. 4). What does Matthew want us to understand about who is really in control of these events, and what does that tell us about the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open by helping students feel how deliberately Matthew arranges the timing. Jesus has just concluded His great teaching ministry, and now He says, "after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified" (v. 2). He names not only the fact of His

death but its timing and its manner. Meanwhile the leaders are scheming “by stealth” and worrying about the crowds (vv. 4–5). The contrast is the point: they think they are running the operation, but Jesus has already announced the outcome.

Throughout this chapter Matthew keeps showing Jesus a step ahead. He interprets the woman’s perfume as preparing Him for burial before anyone has spoken of His death (v. 12). He knows Judas will betray Him and says so at the table (v. 21). He foretells that all the disciples will scatter and that Peter will deny Him three times (vv. 31, 34). Nothing takes Him by surprise. The plotters are not the authors of this story; they are players in a drama whose ending the Lamb Himself has already declared.

This is where the doctrine of God’s sovereignty over the cross becomes pastoral. The crucifixion was the worst injustice in human history, and yet it was, in the words of Acts 2:23, carried out “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” Human malice was real and guilty, and at the same time God was working His saving purpose through it. Jesus is not overtaken by evil; He walks into it with open eyes, for our salvation.

Help your students hold both truths. The leaders are genuinely guilty; their sin is their own. And God is not thwarted for a moment; He turns even their treachery into the means of redemption. The cross proves that nothing, not betrayal, not injustice, not death itself, can derail the saving plan of God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The voluntary nature of Christ’s death: He lays down His life, no one takes it from Him (John 10:17–18)
- God’s sovereignty over the cross, working salvation through human evil without excusing it (Acts 2:23)
- Jesus as the true Passover Lamb, dying at the appointed time (1 Corinthians 5:7)
- The reliability of Jesus’ predictions as evidence of His divine knowledge
- The cross as God’s plan, not a tragic accident or a defeat

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change the way you read the crucifixion to know Jesus chose it rather than being trapped by it?
- Where in your life do you need to trust that God can work His good purpose even through other people’s wrong?
- What comfort is there in knowing the cross was God’s plan all along?

Question 2

Student Question:

The woman with the alabaster jar gave Jesus something costly and was criticized for waste, yet Jesus called it “a beautiful thing” (v. 10). Where in your own walk have you let other people’s sense of what is “reasonable” shrink your devotion to Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the scene itself. A woman, unnamed here, comes with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment and pours it over Jesus’ head as He reclines at table (v. 7). In the ancient world such a flask might represent a year’s wages. She does not measure out a careful portion; she breaks it open and gives it all. The disciples are indignant and frame their objection in the language of stewardship: “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor” (vv. 8–9).

Jesus’ response is striking. He does not scold her for poor financial planning. He says, “She has done a beautiful thing to me” (v. 10), and He receives her extravagance as preparation for His burial (v. 12). Then He gives her the highest honor: wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, her deed will be told (v. 13). The very act the disciples called waste, Jesus called worship that would outlast empires.

Press this gently into your students’ lives. The world, and sometimes the church, is quick to apply a calculator to devotion. There is a kind of reasonableness that slowly shrinks our worship until we give Jesus only what is convenient and leftover. The woman is a rebuke to all calculated love. She shows that there is a place for sheer, lavish, seemingly impractical devotion to Christ.

Help students name where their devotion has grown careful. It may be money, but it may be time, energy, hospitality, or willingness to be thought foolish for Christ. The aim is not to manufacture guilt but to recover wonder. When you see who Jesus is, holding back begins to feel absurd, and pouring out begins to feel like the only sane response.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship as the pouring out of what is costly, not merely what is convenient
- The difference between worldly stewardship-talk and genuine devotion to Christ
- Jesus as worthy of extravagant love because of who He is
- The danger of letting other people’s opinions define the limits of our devotion
- Acts of love for Christ that He remembers and honors

Discussion Prompts

- What is one thing you have been treating as too costly to give to Jesus?
- Whose disapproval most tempts you to shrink your devotion, and why?
- What would extravagant, ‘unreasonable’ love for Christ look like for you this month?

Question 3

Student Question:

Judas asks, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" and settles on thirty pieces of silver (vv. 15–16). What does this scene reveal about how sin grows in a heart that is near to Jesus but not surrendered to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn now to Judas. Matthew places his betrayal immediately after the woman's worship, and the contrast is deliberate. She gives away a fortune; he sells his Lord for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a gored slave (Exodus 21:32). His question is chilling in its coldness: "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" (v. 15). Love asks what it can give; sin asks what it can get.

Notice that Judas was no outsider. He was one of the Twelve, trusted with the moneybag, present for every miracle and every private teaching. His proximity to Jesus did not protect him. In fact, John tells us he had been quietly helping himself to the common purse (John 12:6). Sin had been growing in him for a long time, hidden under the surface of discipleship, until at last it broke out into open betrayal.

This is how sin works in a heart that is near to Jesus but not surrendered to Him. It rarely announces itself with a dramatic decision. It starts as a small compromise tolerated, a love of money excused, a private area kept back from the Lord. Left unchecked, it grows roots, and one day it bears fruit no one expected. Judas did not become a traitor in a single moment; he became one gradually, then suddenly.

Use this with sober tenderness. The point is not to make students suspicious of one another but to make each one examine his own heart. Every disciple has some Judas-question lurking: a place where we are quietly asking what we can get rather than what we can give. Name the danger of unsundered corners, and call the class to bring them into the light before they grow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin's pattern of growing secretly before it acts openly (James 1:14–15)
- The peril of nearness to Christ without surrender to Him
- The love of money as a root from which many evils grow (1 Timothy 6:10)
- Betrayal as the fruit of long-tolerated compromise
- The need for ongoing self-examination, not presumed security

Discussion Prompts

- What small compromise have you been tolerating that could grow into something larger?
- Where are you tempted to ask what you can get from God rather than what you can give Him?
- How can honest confession to God keep hidden sin from taking root?

Question 4

Student Question:

Judas had walked with Jesus for years, heard every sermon, and watched every miracle, and still betrayed Him. What false security might you be resting in, assuming that closeness to the church or the Bible is the same as a heart surrendered to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question builds directly on Judas. The most unsettling thing about him is how close he was. He had every advantage a person could have, three years of daily life with Jesus, the teaching, the miracles, the trust of the others, and none of it saved him, because his heart was never truly given over. Familiarity with Jesus is not the same as surrender to Jesus.

Help your students see the modern versions of false security. We can rest in regular church attendance, in knowing our Bibles, in growing up in a Christian home, in being respected among believers, while quietly keeping some corner of life from the Lord. These are good things, but they are not substitutes for a surrendered heart. A person can be very near the things of God and still not belong wholly to God.

The aim here is honest self-knowledge, not despair. Scripture calls us to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5), not so we will live in fear, but so we will live in reality. It is far better to discover an unsundered area now, while there is time to repent, than to assume all is well and be wrong.

Lead the conversation toward surrender rather than mere self-criticism. The cure for Judas's tragedy is not more religious activity but a heart laid fully open to Christ. Invite students to name, even privately, the one area they have been keeping back, and to give it to the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between proximity to Christ and surrender to Christ
- The danger of resting in religious habits rather than a living relationship
- Self-examination as a healthy and biblical practice (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Surrender of every area of life as the mark of genuine discipleship (Luke 9:23)

Discussion Prompts

- What good religious thing are you tempted to treat as proof that all is well in your heart?
- Is there an area of your life you have quietly kept back from the Lord?
- What would it look like to surrender that area to Him this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

At the table Jesus takes the Passover bread and cup and gives them a new meaning, pointing them to His own body and blood (vv. 26–28). Why does it matter that the Lord's Supper grows directly out of the Passover, and what is Jesus claiming about His death by doing this?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now we come to the upper room. Jesus and the Twelve are keeping the Passover, the meal that for centuries had memorialized God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the blood of a lamb on the doorposts caused death to pass over (Exodus 12). Every element on that table carried the memory of redemption by blood. Help students see that Jesus does not abandon this story; He fulfills it. He takes the very bread and cup of Passover and gives them a new and deeper meaning.

He takes the bread, blesses and breaks it, and says, "Take, eat; this is my body" (v. 26). He takes the cup and says, "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" (vv. 27–28). The Passover lamb pointed forward to this; Jesus is the true Lamb whose blood delivers His people not from Egypt but from sin and death. Paul will later say it plainly: "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

By rooting the Supper in the Passover, Jesus is making a staggering claim about His death. It is not a tragedy to be mourned but a sacrifice that saves. His blood is "the blood of the covenant," language that reaches back to Exodus 24, where Moses sealed the old covenant with blood, and forward to Jeremiah 31, where God promised a new covenant. Jesus is announcing that the new covenant is being cut in His own blood, and that through His death sins are forgiven.

Take time to let students feel the weight of this. Around an ordinary table, with bread and a cup, Jesus is interpreting His own approaching death as the once-for-all sacrifice that opens the new covenant. Everything the church does at the Lord's table flows from this moment. Set the foundation here; you will build on it at the heaviest question.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the true Passover Lamb whose blood delivers from sin (Exodus 12; 1 Corinthians 5:7)
- The Lord's Supper rooted in and fulfilling the Passover
- 'The blood of the covenant' connecting Exodus 24 and Jeremiah 31 to the cross
- Jesus interpreting His own death as a saving sacrifice, not a defeat
- The continuity of God's plan: the same redeeming God across both Testaments

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing the Supper grow out of the Passover deepen its meaning for you?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Lamb whose blood delivers you from sin?
- Why is it important that Jesus called His death a sacrifice rather than a mere tragedy?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus says the bread and cup are shared “for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 28). When you come to the Lord’s table, how does remembering that His blood was poured out for your forgiveness change the way you examine your own heart beforehand?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the Supper toward the heart and the way we come to the table. Jesus says His blood is poured out “for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 28). Forgiveness is not a vague feeling; it is the costly gift purchased by His blood. When we hold the bread and the cup, we are handling the memorial of the very thing that washes us clean.

Paul connects this directly to self-examination: “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:28). To come to the table thoughtlessly, with unconfessed sin and a hard heart, is to miss the meaning of what we are doing. To come having searched our hearts, having confessed and turned from sin, is to meet the grace the cup proclaims.

Help students see that self-examination at the table is not about manufacturing guilt or proving ourselves worthy. None of us is worthy; that is the whole point of the cross. It is about coming honestly, owning our sin, and receiving with gratitude the forgiveness His blood secures. The table is for sinners who repent, not for the self-righteous who pretend.

Encourage a practical habit. Before the Supper each Lord’s Day, students can take a quiet moment to bring their sins to God, to thank Christ for His blood, and to renew their commitment to follow Him. The meal then becomes what it was meant to be: a weekly reorientation of the heart around the cross.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness of sins purchased by the blood of Christ (Matthew 26:28; Ephesians 1:7)
- Self-examination as the proper preparation for the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28)
- Confession and repentance as ongoing in the Christian life (1 John 1:8–9)
- Coming to the table as a forgiven sinner, not as one who has earned a place
- The Supper as a regular renewal of the heart around the cross

Discussion Prompts

- How do you usually prepare your heart before taking the Lord’s Supper?
- What sin do you most need to confess and lay down before coming to the table?
- How does remembering Christ’s blood was poured out for you change the way you partake?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus tells the Twelve, "You will all fall away because of me this night" (v. 31), quoting the prophecy that the sheep would be scattered when the shepherd is struck. What does it mean that even the failure of the disciples was foreseen and woven into God's redemptive plan?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the meal, on the way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus tells the Twelve, "You will all fall away because of me this night" (v. 31). He quotes Zechariah 13:7: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Even the scattering of His closest friends was foretold by the prophets. Their failure does not catch God off guard.

This is a sobering and yet strangely comforting truth. Sobering, because it shows how fragile even devoted disciples are; these men had left everything to follow Jesus, and within hours they would abandon Him. Comforting, because their failure did not undo God's plan. Jesus knew it would happen, named it, and still went to the cross for them. He was not saving people who would never let Him down; He was saving people exactly like us.

Notice the grace tucked into the prediction. In the very next breath Jesus says, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (v. 32). Before they have failed, He has already planned their restoration. He looks past the scattering to the reunion. The Shepherd who is struck will gather His sheep again. This is the heart of God toward failing disciples.

Help students hold the tension. We should never make peace with our sin or treat our weakness lightly. And yet our failures, real and grievous as they are, do not exhaust the grace of God or thwart His purposes. He weaves even our stumbling into a story that ends in restoration for the repentant. That is good news for everyone in the room who has ever let the Lord down.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's foreknowledge of human weakness and failure (Zechariah 13:7)
- The frailty of even devoted disciples apart from God's sustaining grace
- Christ's plan of restoration prepared before His followers ever fail (v. 32)
- God weaving human failure into His redemptive purpose without excusing it
- The faithfulness of the Shepherd toward scattered, repentant sheep

Discussion Prompts

- How does it comfort you that Jesus planned to restore the disciples before they ever fell?
- Where have you assumed your failure was the end of your usefulness to God?
- How can you take sin seriously and still rest in God's grace?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter insists, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (v. 33). Where are you most tempted to overestimate your own faithfulness, and what would it look like to depend on the Lord's strength there instead of your own resolve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter's response is one of the most human moments in the Gospels. When Jesus says all will fall away, Peter objects: "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (v. 33). When Jesus tells him plainly that he will deny Him three times before the rooster crows, Peter doubles down: "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" (v. 35). He means every word. And in a few hours he will fail completely.

Peter's mistake is not lack of love; it is misplaced confidence. He trusts in his own resolve, his own courage, his own loyalty. He believes he is stronger than he is. This is one of the most common and dangerous spiritual conditions: the assumption that I, at least, would never do that. The moment we are sure of our own standing is often the moment we are most exposed.

Help students locate their own areas of overconfidence. It may be a sin they look down on in others, certain they would never commit it. It may be a relationship, a temptation, a pressure they assume they can handle on their own. Scripture warns, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Self-assurance is not the same as strength.

Point the way forward. The answer is not to despair of ourselves but to depend on Another. Real strength comes not from boasting in our resolve but from clinging to the Lord, watching and praying, and staying close to Him in the very places we feel strongest. Peter learned this the hard way; we can learn it sooner.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of self-confidence in the spiritual life (1 Corinthians 10:12)
- The difference between sincere intention and actual strength
- Dependence on the Lord rather than personal resolve as the source of standing
- Watchfulness and prayer as guards against temptation (Matthew 26:41)

Discussion Prompts

- In what area are you most tempted to say, 'I would never do that'?
- Where have you been relying on your own resolve rather than the Lord's strength?
- What would it look like to depend on God in your strongest area, not just your weakest?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus said over the cup, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (v. 28). What is the new covenant Jesus inaugurates here, what does the

Lord's Supper actually mean and accomplish for the church, and how does the New Testament teach us to observe it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, so give it room. At the table Jesus lifts the cup and says, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (v. 28). Three great truths are packed into that sentence: a new covenant, a sacrificial death, and forgiveness of sins. Long before, God had promised through Jeremiah a new covenant under which He would write His law on the heart and remember sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jesus now announces that this new covenant is being cut in His own blood. The old covenant was sealed at Sinai with the blood of animals; the new is sealed at the cross with the blood of the Son of God (Hebrews 9:11-15).

Now teach clearly what the Lord's Supper actually is, and just as clearly what it is not. It is a memorial: Jesus said, as Paul records, "Do this in remembrance of me," and Paul explains that as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:24-26). It is a communion, a sharing in the body and blood of Christ, by which believers are joined to Him and to one another (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). It looks back to the cross with gratitude, looks up to the risen Lord in fellowship, looks around at the one body, and looks forward to His coming. What it is not is a re-sacrifice of Christ. Scripture is emphatic that He offered Himself "once for all" and need never be offered again (Hebrews 9:25-28; 10:10-14). Nor does the bread and cup change into literal flesh and blood. Jesus, sitting bodily at the table holding the bread, spoke as He often did using a thing to represent a deeper reality, just as He said, "I am the door" and "I am the vine." The Supper is a memorial and communion, not a magical transformation or a repeated offering.

Then teach how the New Testament church observes it. The pattern in Scripture is clear and beautiful in its simplicity. The disciples in Troas "on the first day of the week, gathered together to break bread" (Acts 20:7); Luke records it as the very purpose for which they assembled. Paul gives the assembled church at Corinth careful instruction for how they eat the Supper "when you come together" (1 Corinthians 11:18-26). The apostolic pattern is the Lord's Supper observed by the gathered church on the first day of every week, the Lord's Day, the day of His resurrection. This is not a rare or annual event but the regular center of the church's worship, as ordinary and as precious as the weekly gathering itself.

Finally, hold up the wonder of it. Every Lord's Day, ordinary people take ordinary bread and an ordinary cup, and in that simple act they remember the most extravagant gift ever given: the body broken and the blood poured out for the forgiveness of their sins. The table is where the new covenant is rehearsed in the heart again and again. Lead your students not merely to understand the Supper but to love it, to come hungry and grateful, and to let it shape them week by week into people who live by the cross.

Be tender with any in your class who have grown careless about the Supper or who carry confusion about it from another background. The aim is not to win an argument but to recover wonder and to anchor the practice in Scripture. When people see what the table truly is, the weekly meal stops being a routine and becomes a feast.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The new covenant in Christ's blood, fulfilling Jeremiah 31:31–34 (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 8:6–13)
- The Lord's Supper as a memorial that proclaims the Lord's death (1 Corinthians 11:24–26)
- The Lord's Supper as a communion in the body and blood of Christ, uniting the one body (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)
- Christ offered once for all: the Supper is not a re-sacrifice (Hebrews 9:25–28; 10:10–14)
- The bread and cup represent His body and blood; they are not literally transformed (figurative language, as in 'I am the vine')
- The apostolic pattern of observing the Supper on the first day of every week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:18–26)
- The Supper as the regular center of the church's worship, shaping the heart around the cross

Discussion Prompts

- In your own words, what is the new covenant Jesus inaugurated in His blood, and what does it secure for you?
- How would you explain to a friend that the Lord's Supper is a memorial and communion rather than a re-sacrifice?
- Why does observing the Supper every first day of the week, rather than rarely, matter for the life of the church?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage, from the plot to the table to Peter's boast. Name one specific way the Jesus you have met here, the willing sacrifice who gives His body and blood for you, is reshaping how you worship, give, or watch over your own heart this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this capstone to gather the whole passage and press it into the week ahead. The class has stood before four hearts: the calculating leaders, the worshiping woman, the betraying friend, and the boasting disciples. And at the center of them all is the willing Savior, who walks toward the cross, gives His body and blood, and looks past His followers' failures to their restoration. The aim now is not more information but a changed life.

Invite students to be specific. A vague intention to 'love Jesus more' will evaporate by Tuesday. A concrete answer might sound like: "I will come to the Lord's table this Sunday having truly examined my heart," or "I will give Jesus something costly I have been holding back," or "I will stop trusting my own resolve in this one temptation and start praying daily about it."

Draw out which of the chapter's figures each student most needs to learn from. Some need the woman's extravagance; some need to flee Judas's slow compromise; some need Peter's humbling lesson about overconfidence; some need to receive the comfort that Christ plans restoration for those who fail. Let each person name the one truth that has gripped them.

Close in worship, not merely resolve. The deepest response to this chapter is gratitude that Jesus poured Himself out for us. Lead your class to marvel that the One worth the woman's whole alabaster jar gave His own body and blood for their forgiveness, and to leave the room ready to pour themselves out in return.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of doctrine about the cross and the Supper with daily devotion
- Specific, concrete obedience as the fruit of meeting the crucified Christ
- Worship and gratitude as the proper motive for the Christian life
- The Lord's table as a weekly means of being formed around the cross

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the four hearts in this chapter do you most need to learn from right now?
- What is one specific step you will take this week in response to what you have seen?
- How can this class pray for you as you take that step?