

"When Jesus Gave Thanks"

Matthew 26:26-30

Introduction: A New Year's message can be a powerful way to connect the themes of gratitude and hope with the fresh start that a new year represents.

I have entitled today's message "When Jesus Gave Thanks." Because even on this most solemn occasion in the life of our Lord, Jesus found it possible to give thanks to God. This is such a powerful moment in scripture. This passage captures the Last Supper, an emotional time when Jesus shared a meal with His disciples before His crucifixion. While the mood was heavy, Jesus took a moment to give thanks. Imagine, even with the agony of the cross in His immediate future, He was able to offer thanks. Evidently our Lord had developed the habit of giving thanks in the midst of all things and at all times. And as we observe the Lord's supper ourselves today, we will see we too have every reason to be thankful. I think it's important to recognize that this example Jesus set, is not just for a moment in time, but a guiding principle for our lives, especially as we stand on the threshold of a new year.

I. Jesus gave thanks for the past:

As Jesus contemplated dying on the cross for us, He offered up thanks at a meal...

A. Jesus has arranged for He and His disciples to partake of the last Passover meal together.

1. The primary purpose of this meal was not to eat food, but to establish a memorial.
2. This meal was not primarily for the body; it was primarily for the memory.
3. At this meal two thousand years ago, we are reminded to "never forget" what God has done for us through Jesus Christ every time we observe it.

B. But was this no ordinary Passover meal - it is the last meal of a condemned man.

1. You cannot fully understand the significance of this last meal unless you understand what was known two-thousand years ago as "the Passover." The background of this event is found in (Mt. 26:17-19).
 - a. Matthew shows us Jesus was in full control of the details of His own crucifixion. (From the arrangement of the room, the meal itself, to the timing of His betrayal).
 - b. Don't miss the statement of Jesus when he said, "my time is near."
 - c. He knew this would be his last night on earth as a human being.

2. Passover was, in effect, the thanksgiving celebration of the Jewish nation. It goes back to when the Hebrew people were in Egypt, under bondage. (Ex. 12:1-13:10) This day was a graphic reminder of not only how terrible sin is, but how much God loves his people.

Here is why this is so important. It demonstrates, either God will remove your sin from you, or your sin will remove you from God. Israel had been spared because of the love of God. God had passed over their sin, their faults and their failures, not because of their goodness, but because of His grace.

If our Lord could be thankful to God for the past, it follows that each of us can find much to be thankful for in our past. He has done so much for each of us.

II. Jesus gave thanks for the present:

Next, we see Jesus giving thanks for the present moment. (picture the moment...)

A. The present moment - V. 20

1. In this moment, Jesus is with His closest friends.
2. We can be sure that in this present moment our Lord was living and laboring with an awareness of the abiding presence of the Father (the reason He can demonstrate such joy and peace).

B. The purpose of the moment -

1. Our Lord had come on a mission – Now here He is reclining with His disciples knowing He is near the completion of this mission. He certainly was thankful because of the joy of the personal accomplishments.
2. The disciples had just finished eating some bread and some lamb, which was the staple of the Passover meal. (Matt 26:27-28)
3. The bread symbolized Jesus body being given, the wine symbolized His blood that would be shed, as Jesus Himself represents the paschal lamb of Passover (He is the lamb of God) and the elements in the communion service.
4. Jesus was establishing something important here in this moment- (Matt 26:28)
5. Jesus was giving a new covenant that would replace the old covenant. (Gen 8:20; 15:9-10) *Jesus is introducing a new covenant...*
6. This "last supper" in this moment, would now become the "Lord's supper", because the Passover had now been passed-over.

If Jesus could give thanks while knowing He was about to face the cross, and shed His blood for us, we can surely muster gratitude – especially for what all this means for us today and every day!

Gratitude can shift our perspective from what we lack to what we have.

III. Jesus gave thanks for the future:

A. Finally, Jesus looked ahead with hope. In verses 29-30,

1. With the agony awaiting Him in Gethsemane and on calvary, was our Lord was anticipating the joy of returning to the Father? (Jn 17:11)
2. He was certainly thankful for what His life, teaching, ministry and sacrificial, substitutionary death and resurrection were going to mean to His followers. (Heb. 12:2)

B. He speaks of the future, promising to drink anew with His disciples in His Father's kingdom.

1. What does all of this mean for us today? Remembering the past can help us evaluate the present and anticipate the future.
2. As we partake in the bread and juice, we do so in honor of His coming to earth, living, sacrificial dying and rising again and what that means for our past, present and future! While we do it today – we do it in anticipation of the day we will do it with Him in The Father's kingdom!