

Notes abridged from "Saint Matthew" by J.C.Fenton - Pelican Gospel Commentaries

Chapter 26 .17 - 46 (The events of Thursday)

Chapter 26 .17 - 19 (= Mark 14 .12 - 16)

Matthew shortens Mark and changes a couple of things. In Mark two disciples are sent ahead, in Matthew it's all. Matthew and Mark (and Luke) are clear that the Last Supper is the Passover Meal. In John the timescale is different, the Passover is on the evening after Jesus dies (John 18.28). John changes the day for theological reasons - he depicts Jesus as the Lamb sacrificed at Passover.

- verse 17 - *"the first day of the Unleavened Bread"* - The day before, or after Passover. Clearly the former is meant. It was eaten only in Jerusalem..
- verse 18 - *"My time is at hand"* - Matthew has added this to Mark, Jesus is aware of the plans of Caiaphas etc.
"I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples" - a direct statement, unlike the question in Mark *"Where is my guest room where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?"*.

Chapter 26 .20 - 25 (= Mark 14 .17 - 21)

Matthew changes Mark slightly, omitting *"one who is eating with me"* (Mark 14.18) which is from Ps.41.9 (cf John 13.18) and Matthew usually quotes Jewish Scripture where he can. But the phrase may be a later addition to the Mark text anyway.

- verse 20f - For the regulations concerning the Passover Meal see Exodus 12.1ff. Originally eaten standing it was, by Jesus time, eaten reclining in traditional manner. Again *"he sat at table"* is literally *"he reclined at table"*.
- verse 22 - *"one after another"* literally *"each one"*. *"Is it I?"* is *"surely not I?"*. Matthew adds *"Lord"*, which contrasts with *"Rabbi"* when Judas asks.
- verse 23 - *"he who has dipped his hand into the dish with me"*. At Passover hands dipped into the dish, at other meals bread was dipped.
- verse 24 - *"The Son of man goes as it has been written of him"* i.e. As it has been written in scripture. See also v31 which quotes Zechariah 13.7.
"But woe for that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed". Judas will be judged for what he has done. *"It would be better for that man if he had not been born"* is from 1 Enoch 38.2 (a Jewish scripture in the Apocrypha) and is possibly a proverb.
- verse 25 - This whole verse is added by Matthew to show that Jesus goes to his Passion knowing what will happen in every detail. Matthew uses phrases from elsewhere in his Gospel; *"Judas who betrayed him"* (10.4), *"Is it I?"* (26.22), Judas using *"Rabbi"* (26.49), *"You have said so"* (26.64).

Chapter 26 .26 - 29 (= Mark 14 .22 - 25)

Jesus explains his death as being in the purposes of God, by a two fold "parable in action". He compares bread to his body, and wine to his blood. In Jewish sacrifices mentioned in scripture blood was separated from the body. In *"blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* Jesus' death is depicted as a sacrifice to God in which a new covenant is established between God and people. By telling them to eat and drink he indicates they, and those who follow, will be beneficiaries of the sacrifice. He then looks

forward to the fulfilment of what he will inaugurate by his death, namely his father's kingdom, the messianic banquet, where he and they will again feast together.

- verse 26 - *"Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples"*. This is the normal way of saying grace (cf 14.19, 15.36). *"Blessed"* means blessed God, i.e. gave thanks to God - not blessed the bread. The word *"eat"* is added by Matthew to Mark.
"this is my body" Bread is compared to his body which is soon to be put to death. Asking the disciples to *"eat it"* is offering them a place in the situation it will bring about - the kingdom.
- verse 27ff - The same actions are now performed with the cup. *"Blood of the covenant"* is a scriptural term (Exod 24.8, Jeremiah 31.31, Zechariah 9.11) referring to both past and the new *covenant* of the last days foretold by the prophets. *"poured out"* is a present tense *"about to be poured out"*. *"for many"* is a semitic way of saying *"for everybody"*. It does not mean that the act is for some and not for others. (cf 20.28 *"to give his life as a ransom for many"*). *"for the forgiveness of sins"* is an addition by Matthew, see Jeremiah 31.34 *"I will remember their sins no more"*.
- verse 29 - Possibly a vow of abstinence until the kingdom comes. Such vows accompanied and strengthened prayer. Jesus sees his death as a way in which God's kingly rule comes into the world, then, as at a banquet, says I shall drink *"new wine with you, in the new world"* (19.28).

Chapter 26 .30 - 35 (= Mark 14 .26 - 31)

Those who "kept Passover" had to stay in Jerusalem all night, but due to immense numbers of people the area of Jerusalem was extended for the feast to include the west side of the Mount of Olives. Jesus and the disciples go there and Jesus tells them that Zechariah's prophecy *"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered"* will be fulfilled. He assures them that, after the resurrection, he will lead them to Galilee - the land of the Gentiles, where the Gospel will be preached and disciples made. Peter pledges to remain faithful, but Jesus predicts denial.

- verse 30 - *"when they had sung a hymn"* Psalms 114-118 were sung at Passover. *"the Mount of Olives"* is mentioned in Zech 14.4, and again Jesus quotes from that prophet.
- verse 31 - *"You will all fall away because of me this night"*. Earlier (24.10) he spoke of the falling away of many disciples before the end. Here he predicts the falling away of all of them. It is from Zech 13.7. For Jesus as *shepherd* and Israel as *sheep* see 9.36 and 25.32.
- verse 32 - The first prediction of resurrection in the Passion narrative. For Galilee and the mission to the Gentiles see 4.12ff, 28.7, 16ff, *"I will go before you"* means *"I will lead you forth, like a shepherd"* (cf John 10.4).
- verse 33 - Matthew adds *"because of you"* and the second *"fall away"*. Cf 16.22f for Peter's failure to follow Jesus, and 16.22ff for his refusal to believe Jesus must be killed.
- verse 34 - The prediction here is fulfilled in 26.69-75
- verse 35 - Peter's *"even if I must die with you"* indicates he still hasn't accepted Jesus death is inevitable, as is that of anyone who will not deny him. Cf 10.38 *"Those who do not take up their cross and follow me are not worthy of me"*. *"and so said all the disciples"* In failing to believe and understand, Peter is speaking for others too.

Chapter 26 .36 - 46 (= Mark 14 .32 - 42)

The final passage in which Jesus is with his disciples (until after the resurrection 28.16ff) although they are 'in the background' until 26.56 when "*all the disciples forsook him and fled*". First three are commanded to watch with him, the don't obey his command and are separated from him. In this, the account of Gethsemane, we see the obedience of Jesus to God "thy will be done" 26.42, contrasted with the failings of the disciples. This is represented in "*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*" 26.41. In Jesus *spirit* wins over *flesh*, in the disciples *flesh* is victorious over *spirit*. They sleep then face a temptation (trial) which they cannot stand up too and therefore fall away.

- verse 36 - "*Gethsemane*" Jesus has prayed here before - 14.23. It means "oil press"
- verse 37 - "*Peter and the two sons of Zebbedee*" Mark has Peter and James and John. See also Matt 4.21, 10.2, 20.20, 27.56. These three are also alone with Jesus at the Transfiguration 17.1. There they see glory, here they see the obedience that will be crowned in glory.
 "*He began to be sorrowful and troubled*" The conflict between *spirit* and *flesh* is depicted. For sorrow and conflict see also 19.22, the young man's love of possessions and Jesus challenging command.
- verse 38 - "*My soul is very sorrowful*" Quotation from Psalm 42.5.
 "*even unto death*" Quotation from Jonah 4.9 meaning "enough to die". Sorrow seems to be engulfing him.
 "*watch with me*" Matthew has added "*with me*" to Mark's text to emphasise the disciples are commanded to share in what he faces. The Greek word translated as "*watch*" means literally "*keep awake*". It is used both for not sleeping but also being watchful for the Day of the Lord. See especially 1 Peter 5.8.
- verse 39 - "*My father*". Mark has "*Abba, Father*", Matthew omits the Aramaic "*Abba*".
 "*if it be possible*" Mark has "*all things are possible to you*". Matthew may change because the prayer is not answered.
 "*let this cup pass from me*" Matthew changes Mark's order slightly but retains "*pass from*" which is used in relation to the Passover (Exod 12.23). For "*cup*" see 20.22 and 26.27. In the Jewish scriptures the word is an expression for destiny in good and bad senses. For *cup of suffering* see Isa 51.17,22, Lamentations 4.21 and Psalm 11.6
 "*nevertheless, not as I will, but as your will*" Echo the Lord's Prayer and may have suggested to Matthew the words at v46.
- verse 40 - "*Sleeping*". Contrasts with *watch* (see 1 Thess 5.6). *Sleep* is used often to describe failing to heed the commands of God.
- verse 41 - "*may not enter into temptation*" or *trials*. *Watching* and *praying* can protect from the wiles of the "tempter" or Satan.
- verse 42 - Matthew has added this, a second prayer of Jesus, to the Mark text. It is composed from v39 and the Lord's Prayer (6.10) together with the idea of drinking the cup (20.22)
- verse 44 - This, third prayer, is Mark's second (Mark 14.39).
- verse 45ff - The "*hour*" for Jesus to be handed over to the power of sinners has come. Jesus wakes the disciples "Rise" (from sleep) "let us be going" to do the will of God.

Week Three:

Matthew 26.47 - 27.10:

Arrest - Before Caiaphas - Peter's denial - Judas dies

SYMBOLS OF THE PASSION (by Mike Claridge)

1. The Meal

Just an ordinary meal. In an ordinary room. With ordinary friends.

You did what every Jew was called to do that night – and that night in every year.

With family or with friends.

With actions and words as old as faith itself.

With lamb and herbs, with bread and wine, you celebrated the Passover feast.

It's meaning clear despite the mists of time.

It's message always new despite the passing years.

In bread and wine the freedom of your people, though still oppressed, is brought alive again.

From slavery to freedom, in ancient times, you people journeyed over water and desert.

Once slaves, then free, now oppressed again.

You needed the meal. The meal of freedom, thanksgiving and hope.

But this time your words were different, your actions changed.

Taking bread and wine you said,

“This is my body, and this is my blood.

This night I give you myself to set you free from all that is wrong”.

An extraordinary claim.

An extraordinary promise.

Plain bread and cheap wine given such meaning and shared with your friends.

Your eyes met theirs, and in them they saw such love, deep love, an all giving love.

To set them free, somehow, someday?

How you must grieve.

Your simple act with bread and wine has become so complicated.

A meal of freedom, an act of giving,

now bound in rules by the people who claim your name.

You made us free, but we restrict who can come to your table.

You called us to be one, but we have made bread and wine a source of division.

You accepted the outcast, but we only accept those who play by our rules.

When will we see that you, in bread and wine can set us free.