“Three Words of Truth” is the theme of the Northwestern Publishing House resources for the 2019 Lenten season. Special notes are given for congregations using any of these hymnals: *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (CW), *Christian Worship: Supplement* (CWS), *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (ELH), *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB), and *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH).

## Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1</th>
<th>Is It I?</th>
<th>Matthew 26:20-25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midweek 2</td>
<td>Love One Another</td>
<td>John 13:31-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midweek 3</td>
<td>Watch and Pray</td>
<td>Matthew 26:35-41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midweek 4</td>
<td>I Am He</td>
<td>John 18:3-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midweek 6</td>
<td>Take Him Away!</td>
<td>John 19:14-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Sunday</td>
<td>Save Us Now!</td>
<td>Matthew 21:1-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maundy Thursday</td>
<td>Take and Eat; Take and Drink</td>
<td>Matthew 26:26-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Friday</td>
<td>It Is Finished!</td>
<td>John 19:28-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Sunday</td>
<td>Remember Jesus Christ: He Has Risen!</td>
<td>2 Timothy 2:8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This kit includes:

- Sermon helps, including complete texts for ten sermons
- Resources for the ten services that include the following:
  - Notes and suggestions for using the orders of service
  - Sermon themes and texts
  - Hymn and psalm suggestions
  - Psalm prayers
  - Scripture reading suggestions
  - Copy master for a midweek order of service
- CD with electronic files of the resources (*including, for this year, detailed text studies for each sermon*)
- Sample bulletin available from Northwestern Publishing House
Copyright Information

The copyright to Three Words of Truth (Lenten Resources for 2019) is held by Northwestern Publishing House. © 2018 Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. All rights reserved.

Purchase of these resources gives the user permission to adapt and copy this material for use within a single congregation or organization. Permission to adapt and copy this material is not transferable to another congregation or organization. PLEASE NOTE: Pastors sharing pulpits during the season must purchase the sermon series for each congregation where the sermons are used.


The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™
Table of Contents

General introduction to Three Words of Truth................................................................. 4
Notes on the included copy master for a Midweek Order of Service ......................... 4
Notes on the use of Evening Prayer (Vespers)............................................................... 6
Notes on the use of Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline).......................................... 6
Notes on the Psalms........................................................................................................... 6
Notes on the choice of hymns ....................................................................................... 7
Notes on the use of the CD ........................................................................................... 7
Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1: Is It I?................................................................................ 8
Midweek 2: Love One Another....................................................................................... 10
Midweek 3: Watch and Pray.......................................................................................... 11
Midweek 4: I Am He....................................................................................................... 12
Midweek 5: What Is Truth?............................................................................................ 13
Midweek 6: Take Him Away!.......................................................................................... 14
Palm Sunday: Save Us Now!............................................................................................ 15
Maundy Thursday: Take and Eat; Take and Drink......................................................... 16
Good Friday: It Is Finished!............................................................................................ 18
Easter Sunday: Remember Jesus Christ: He Has Risen!............................................... 20
Notes on the Passion History Readings.......................................................................... 21
Copy master for a Midweek Order of Service .............................................................. 22
General introduction to Three Words of Truth

The overall theme for the 2019 Lenten sermons is “Three Words of Truth.” Each service focuses on a poignant three-word phrase from the record of Jesus’ passion and resurrection.

The series includes ten sermons: six midweek Lenten sermons, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

Notes on the included copy master for a Midweek Order of Service

A copy master for a midweek service is included on the last page. Unlike previous kits, this outline demonstrates the crafting of a service that draws from a number of Christian Worship resources. The following notes explain the construction of the outline, as well as its flexibility:

- The suggested Opening Hymn is “Before the Ending of the Day” (CW 595). This ancient hymn has been associated with the Office of Compline for many centuries. Another hymn appropriate for evening or for the theme of the service may be chosen.

- The confession and absolution is taken from Divine Service II in Christian Worship: Supplement. The following theme-specific confessions may be included where indicated in the service outline:
  - Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1 (Is It I?): Like the disciples, I have boldly declared loyalty to you only to fail to proclaim your name; I have foolishly listened to the devil’s lies only to be crushed with guilt and shame.
  - Midweek 2 (Love One Another): In my selfishness I have often loved myself more than others and, to my shame, more than you—you who are my life and my salvation, my joy and my peace.
  - Midweek 3 (Watch and Pray): Though you warn me about Satan, the roaring lion who rages for my eternal destruction, I all too often fail to call on you in times of temptation or to arm myself with your precious Word of Truth. I am constantly being lulled to spiritual sleep by the fallen world around me and my own sinful nature and, in my weakness, am beset with fear and doubt.
  - Midweek 4 (I Am He): All too often when my heart longs for peace and my soul yearns for joy, I turn to everything but you to find fulfillment. I have often ignored you and even despised you—my one and only Savior—by my self-centered and sinful thoughts, words, and actions.
  - Midweek 5 (What Is Truth?): The devil, the world, and my sinful nature assault me persistently with lies that compete for my attention. Though your gentle whisper calls to me, I have all too often failed to—even at times chosen not to—listen.
  - Midweek 6 (Take Him Away!): Like the fickle crowds of Jerusalem, I have praised you one day and, by my sinful attitude and choices, followed the frenzy of this wicked world the next. Have mercy on me for the times I have failed to fix my mind and heart on you and your gracious will for my life.
• The Prayer following the absolution is from Evening Prayer in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.

• The Psalm may be chosen in several different ways:
  - *Penitential Psalms*: The seven “penitential psalms” (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) may be used throughout the six weeks of Lent, a different one for each week. Psalm 51a is the appointed psalm for Ash Wednesday in all lectionaries. Settings for all of these psalms (except 102) can be found in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*. Additional settings for Psalms 51a and 130 can be found in *Christian Worship: Supplement* and *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* (CWOS), respectively.
  - *Compline Psalms*: Psalms 4; 31:1-6; 91; and 134 have been associated with the Office of Compline for centuries. They speak of night, sleep, and rest, making them appropriate for the final Office of the day. One or several of these psalms could be selected for each midweek service. Settings for all four of these psalms can be found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*. Additional settings for Psalms 31 and 91 are available in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.
  - *Suggested Psalms*: Another option is to use the psalms suggested in this guide, which were chosen to match the theme of each service. The suggestions for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week services match those in the lectionary, Year C.

• The Psalm Prayers listed in this guide match the psalms suggested in this guide. Psalm prayers for psalms chosen from *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* are found in *Christian Worship: Manual*. Psalm prayers for psalms in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* are also found in CWOS.

• Several options for the Passion Reading can be found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services* and on page 21 of this kit.

• The Seasonal Response is from Evening Prayer in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal*.

• The Hymn following the response may be chosen from those suggested in this kit, from the Lent section of the hymnal, or from other resources as appropriate to the service theme and/or the general Lenten season. Hymns followed by “(HotD)” are the Hymn of the Day appointed in *Christian Worship: Manual*.

• The Evening Prayer and the Blessing come from both Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline) outlines in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*.

A complete and more extensive order of service for Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline) is available in CWOS, as well as in other Lutheran hymnals. These settings require a commitment to learning a significant amount of music. Compline, however, may also be prayed with a minimum of sung responses.
Additional worship suggestions in this kit reference CWOS. These include special services for Ash Wednesday and Holy Week. In addition to descriptions of the special symbolism in the texts of these services, CWOS also includes special music, available in CWOS Accompaniment Edition. See the Notes for the Pastor and Musician in that edition and on its CD for more complete explanations of the services and their music.

May the Lord of the church bless your Lenten and Easter planning and worship as you and your congregation ponder Scripture’s many examples of “Three Words of Truth.”

**Notes on the use of Evening Prayer (Vespers) from Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal**

- A reminder to worship planners that the Service of Light (CW p. 54) is better suited for Advent. Evening Prayer (CW p. 52) is a more satisfying option for Lent.
- If, however, the Alternate Beginning on page 54 is used, the Opening Hymn may be omitted.
- The Psalm Prayer suggested in the service resources may be used after the psalm is sung or read as indicated on page 56.
- The Seasonal Response on page 56 can be read by the pastor or by the congregation. A choral arrangement can also be found in the settings of the Seasonal Responses available from Northwestern Publishing House, product no. 280009E.
- If the “Song of Mary” is sung, you may use the hymnal setting or alternate settings that are found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services*.

**Notes on the use of Prayer at the Close of Day (Compline) from Christian Worship: Occasional Services**

- This order of service for the end of the day is a version of the ancient order of Compline, which is also found in other Lutheran hymnals.
- Where the psalm occurs in the service, the suggested psalm for the midweek service may be used with or without Psalm 91.
- The lesson may be the Passion History for the service.
- The sermon may be given after the hymn that follows the lesson.
- The offering may be gathered after the sermon.
- The service then concludes with the prayers, the Lord’s Prayer, gospel canticles, and the blessing.

**Notes on the Psalms**

Psalms from *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* and *Christian Worship: Supplement* have been suggested that, as much as possible, coincide with the theme of each midweek service. Psalm suggestions for Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter match those of the lectionary, Year C. Psalms with refrains utilizing “Alleluia” have been purposefully avoided, in keeping with the reserved tone of Lent and the practice of “Farewell to Alleluia” observed by some congregations during Lent.
Additional suggestions of musical settings for psalms are drawn from these useful resources:

- *The People’s Psalter*, Hal Hopson, NPH product no. 274627.
- *Psalms for the Church Year: Volume 1*, David Haas/Marty Haugen, NPH product no. 278082.

*Notes on the choice of hymns*

For each service, hymns have been suggested based on the theme of the sermon. Many other Lenten hymns may also work well for each service based on local needs. Some hymns have been suggested from other sections of the hymnal for their references to the themes and applications of this series.

*Notes on the use of the CD*

The CD included with this kit has electronic files of the sermons and worship resources. Permission is given to modify and print out these files as desired. Please include the NPH copyright notice in worship bulletins. See the README file on the CD for a complete listing of the contents.
Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1

Is It I?

Service Resources

Psalm: Psalm 51a (CW & CWS)

Additional musical setting options:
*The People’s Psalter*, pages 100,101
*Psalms for the Church Year: Volume 1*, pages 20ff.

Psalm Prayer: Almighty and merciful Father, you freely forgive those who, as David of old, acknowledge and confess their sins. Create in us pure hearts, and wash away all our sins in the blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lessons:
- Isaiah 59:12-20 or 2 Samuel 24:10-25*
- 2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:2 or Revelation 3:14-22*
- Luke 18:9-14
  *or The Passion History

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:20-25 (ESV suggested as it contains “Is it I?” verbatim)

Sermon Theme: Is It I?

Hymn Suggestions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>CW(S)</th>
<th>ELH</th>
<th>LSB</th>
<th>TLH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lord, to You I Make Confession</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Sinners Does Receive</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>609</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Depths of Woe I Cry to You</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Adam We Have All Been One (HotD)</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Hopelessness and Near Despair</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptismal Waters Cover Me</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes on the Service

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of Lent, the church’s 40-day journey of repentance and renewal in preparation for Holy Week and Easter. Because of its unique character and place in the church calendar, Ash Wednesday deserves celebration as a separate festival rather than being assimilated into the cycle of congregational midweek Lenten services. The readings for Ash Wednesday (*Christian Worship: Manual*, page 403) issue a strong call for Lenten preparation that is lost if they are replaced by the beginning of the serial reading of the Passion History. Ash Wednesday’s special call to repentance and renewal is not repeated during the Sundays in Lent because they are not properly part of the season (hence the nomenclature Sundays in Lent, rather than Sundays of Lent). Rather, these Sundays serve as “islands of refreshment” during the course of the season, in keeping with the emphasis that all Sundays are “little Easters.” Because Ash
Wednesday is a major festival of the church year, either The Common Service (CW, page 15) or the Service of Word and Sacrament (CW, page 26) serve as appropriate liturgy options. Celebrating the Lord’s Supper is also most appropriate, though done with austerity, in keeping with the character of the Lenten season. The music of the liturgy should be restrained: the Song of Praise (“Glory Be to God” or “O Lord, Our Lord”), “Alleluia,” and other festive portions of the Ordinary should be omitted. An alternate version of the “Lord, Have Mercy” (“Kyrie”) such as “Kyrie, God Father in Heaven Above” (CW 266) may also be used. Black paraments are preferred over purple, in recognition of the solemnity of the day.

**Imposition of Ashes**

The ancient custom of placing ashes on each worshiper’s forehead is incorporated into the rite called **Imposition of Ashes.** A form for this beginning of the Ash Wednesday service is found in *Christian Worship: Occasional Services,* page 147, and other Lutheran worship resources. We encourage congregations to consider using this symbolic worship form after careful instruction on the meaning of the rite.

*Readings in italics are from the “Supplemental Lectionary” included in *Planning Christian Worship Revision* (available from the WELS Resource Center website).
Three Words of TRUTH
Lenten Sermons for 2019

Keith C. Wessel
Contents

Introduction and Series Overview

Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1
Is It I?
Matthew 26:20-25 (ESV)

Midweek 2
Love One Another
John 13:31-35

Midweek 3
Watch and Pray
Matthew 26:35-41

Midweek 4
I Am He
John 18:3-9

Midweek 5
What Is Truth?
John 18:33-40

Midweek 6
Take Him Away!
John 19:14-18

Palm Sunday
Save Us Now!
Matthew 21:1-11

Maundy Thursday
Take and Eat; Take and Drink
Matthew 26:26-28

Good Friday
It Is Finished!
John 19:28-30

Easter Sunday
Remember Jesus Christ: He Has Risen!
2 Timothy 2:8
Three Words of Truth

Introduction

As I sat in Lenten worship one year and listened to the gospel accounts of Jesus’ passion, the thought struck me how many little three-word phrases pop out of the texts, often with pointed impact. The themes for this Lenten sermon series make use of several of these well-known three-word phrases. The texts for this series are more than three words. However, it is especially the three words that the preacher will want to focus on.

I have provided the following chart that gives a general overview of my line of thought as I developed these sermons, that is, the various nuances that I think give each three-word phrase its uniqueness.

The texts are taken from the NIV 2011 with a single exception: the Ash Wednesday text is from the ESV, since that translation employs the familiar words “Is it I?” (Incidentally, when one young pastor collegially questioned this entire approach—the three words—by pointing out that none of these themes are comprised of three words in the original Greek, I simply smiled and told him that I wasn’t planning on preaching in Greek; it is still God’s truth, even in translation.) And—yes—I admit that I took a bit of liberty by getting three words “Save us now!” (words not in any text) out of the one Hebrew word “Hosanna!” If you deem this an egregious homiletical foul, forgive me.

Finally, a word about the length of these sermons. I find myself, now in my early 50s, preaching at a more leisureed pace than I did as a young preacher. Every preacher has his own method of estimating the length of any given sermon, of course. I can only claim that I have attempted to write these sermons to be in the 15-17 minute range. The Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Easter sermons are a bit longer. Experienced preachers—as they have always done with Lenten sermon series from NPH—will know where best to expand a thought, subtract one, or substitute one, tailoring it to best fit the congregation’s needs.

With that, I pray for the Lord’s richest blessings upon your Lenten worship. I also pray that God’s people may, through your preaching, have the eyes of their hearts enlightened in order to “know the hope to which he has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph 1:18,19).

Keith C. Wessel
Ash Wednesday/Midweek 1

Is It I?

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:20-25 (ESV)

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.” (Mt 26:20-25 ESV)

In Old Testament times, God summoned his people to Jerusalem three times a year, in pilgrimage. They were to appear before the Lord at the three high festivals—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. You know from the gospels that Jesus himself made that trip a few times, as well as one last time.

Today we begin our annual pilgrimage of sorts. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of our 40-day trek through the Passion History of our Lord, visiting familiar places along the way and culminating with us gathered, in spirit, in the upper room, at the foot of the cross, and at the entrance of the empty tomb. Forty days—for the 40 days in the wilderness, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, when he battled temptation to remain sinless for us.

Our Lenten series this year takes us to all those familiar places, and does so by using little phrases—three words of truth each week—that focus our spiritual attention on what is important.

Today, Ash Wednesday, we begin our Lenten journey by staring in a mirror at ourselves—reflecting on our sinfulness in the light of God’s Word, but then looking past our own reflection to see that Jesus is standing right there behind us—our Hope, our Cure, our dear Savior.

We begin by making the three-word question of the disciples our own: Is it I? What’s the answer?

1. Yes—it is I whom God calls to repentance. But then, more important: Is it I?
2. Yes—it is I for whom the Savior willingly goes.

God bless our Lenten journey through his Word!

1. Yes—it is I whom God calls to repentance.

In that upper room on Maundy Thursday, Jesus spoke many, many comforting things to his disciples as he prepared them for the fierce trial of faith that they would undergo the next day—watching him, their teacher and Lord, hang in agony on the cross. But Jesus also dropped a couple of bombshells on his disciples that night as well.

One of them was this: While they were half-joking around about which one of them was the best of the disciples, Jesus, the Son of God, quietly got up and began to wash their feet, doing the work of a common household servant. I imagine it was pretty quiet all of a sudden; perhaps all they heard was the gentle splash of water in the bowl as each awaited his turn in ashamed silence. Actions sometimes speak louder than words, don’t they?
But then, a second—even bigger—bombshell. As they began their last meal together, Jesus became visibly agitated and then just said it: “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” Boom! . . . And more silence. Then troubled voices filled with concern and shock: “Is it I? Is it I? Is it I? Is it I? Is it I? Is it I? . . .” And Judas too had to ask, otherwise his silence would have been too revealing; he knew how to cover his tracks: “Is it I, Rabbi?”

What’s interesting about the way each disciple asked that question is that each was expecting Jesus to answer, “No, not you.” Yet Matthew says they were all filled with grief over Jesus’ revelation, and so the questions didn’t come from pride or self-confidence (”It couldn’t possibly be me!”). By this point, all the disciples knew that Jesus could read the hearts and minds of people, including theirs. No, these were questions prompted by doubt and fear, and each was looking for reassurance.

But even asking the question “Is it I?” is revealing. What does it reveal? It reveals what sin has done to us and what sin has the potential to do to us. Although none of us here today is the one who actually betrayed the Lord Jesus to his enemies, each of us has sinned—daily sins—and has felt the same fear and doubt the disciples felt. Along with the disciples, each of us cannot brag about how strong we are in our faith. Instead, we simply must realize how powerful a force sin is in our own lives and what awful potential for self-destruction sin brings with it. How could Judas do it? He had seen Jesus heal the sick. He had seen Jesus walk on water. He had seen Jesus feed thousands . . . and had even helped pick up the leftovers. He had been sent out as a missionary by Jesus and had preached the gospel. He had been given authority to do miracles himself—and probably did many. “It would have been better for that man if he had not been born,” Jesus simply said. How—how could Judas do it?

How can I do it? How can I do it—after I have heard God speak so clearly in his Word about right and wrong, about being holy in thought, actions, and speech? How can I do it—when I read many examples of people in the Bible and see examples today (perhaps, sadly, in my own family) of those who once believed but chose to turn away from Jesus? Do I really stop to think about what sin can do in my life? I mean, besides the problems and irritations it causes or the frictions in personal relationships, do I really realize that it can drive faith from my heart and leave me to stand before God’s holy throne when I die with no excuse and an eternity of hell before me? As one of my professors emphatically said, “Sin isn’t like having a cold; it’s a terminal disease.” And every funeral we attend, every cemetery we drive past ought to remind us of that. This day too—Ash Wednesday—is a reminder of our own mortality and the judgment that will follow.

“Is it I?”—Yes! It is I whom God calls to repentance, for it is I who am sinful from birth, I who daily sin against my Lord. The letter of Hebrews says that God’s Word is sharp, like a sword, and reveals the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb 4:12). Jesus’ announcement in the upper room did just that and forced the disciples to examine themselves. When they did—when we do—what do we find? Grief, doubt, and fear when we honestly look at ourselves.

2. **Yes—it is I for whom the Savior willingly goes.**

But in that upper room there is also Jesus. There, in the person of that God-man Jesus, is love we can’t understand. In love, he does confront us with our sin. But like a doctor diagnosing a disease, Jesus confronts us so that we stop living in denial or entertaining wild dreams about entering heaven because of our own goodness. He does it so that we turn to him and are saved, for apart from him there is no Savior. Although his words reveal who we really are behind the
façade that we so often put on, more important, his words also reveal who he is and why he came.

“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him.” Almost a passing comment by Jesus in this text, but a statement loaded with love and comfort for us! He is “the Son of Man”—true man, yet true God. But by taking on our human nature, Jesus became our brother. He shares our humanity. He’s been here on planet Earth. He knows what temptations we face; he faced them all. He knows how we struggle in weakness; he chose to live in weakness too. He knows what grief and sorrow we carry around in our hearts; he knows how frightened by the future we become at times. And he knows all these things not simply because he is true God but because he is true man who experienced life in the sinful world just as we do.

And this Son of Man “goes as it is written of him.” No, Matthew here in our text really isn’t highlighting the tragedy of Judas (although it certainly is that). Rather, this is Jesus’ story; it’s all about him—this story that began before the creation of the world. It’s the history of how he, the Son of God, created all things good in the beginning and how his enemy Satan declared war against him by corrupting the crown of his creation, mankind. In that garden, he stood there with Adam and Eve. He cursed the serpent and then promised to come and make all things right again. Here he is—in the flesh and in the upper room. All the prophecies pointed to him and this night, this weekend. The final, hellish battle was about to commence. He “goes.”

He will go for you, for me, for all. Although later that night he wrestled in prayer and in fear with his Father about this battle, perfect love drove out fear. He “goes” to the mock court, to Pilate’s hall, to the flogging post, through the streets of jeering Jerusalem, up gory Golgotha, onto the cross. He “goes” into the tomb, a place utterly foreign to the living God.

But he will go out of the tomb too. And he will tell his frightened followers: “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:10). Then he will go to the right hand of God and rule all things for them—but also for you, for his people. He will go as it was written and make all things right again.

Is this really for me? Is it—this work of Jesus that washes away my sins? Is it really for me—forgiveness and peace? It is really for me—a glorious future in heaven that he (who cannot lie) promises to me and to all who believe in him? Yes, it is for you, it is for me. Put your faith in him! Whoever trusts in him will never be put to shame.

And walk with him—not just during these 40 days of Lent but every day. Fight the good fight of faith by the power of the Spirit—struggling against sin and clinging to your Savior. This is the truly Christian life, and this is the blessed life. Amen.
Text Study: Matthew 26:20-25 (Ash Wednesday)

Context of the Text

Matthew 26 takes place in the Upper Room of Maundy Thursday. The events of that evening are familiar to preachers.

The issues surrounding the entire chronology of Holy Week are complex. Biblical scholars of all stripes have for many, many years attempted to harmonize the seemingly contradictory testimony of the synoptic gospels vis-à-vis the Gospel of John as to exactly when Jesus died and, working backward, as to exactly when Jesus celebrated the Last Supper. Much ink has been spilled on this topic, and this text study won’t flesh out all the arguments. However, it is possible to agree on certain key items:

- The year was 30 A.D.\(^1\)
- The seeming discrepancy as to whether Passover fell on Friday (Synoptic) or Saturday (John) can be harmonized in a reasonable manner, taking into account the fact that there was a local calendar in Judea established by the traditional method of priests observing the moon phase, as well as a "fixed" calendar used by Diaspora Jews for planning pilgrimages to Jerusalem.
  - In the end, for us these minor discrepancies matter very little. The issue involves the entire approach of the ancient writers (secular historians too) toward chronology. Our scientific age is fixated on precision, but readers of the New Testament simply have to understand (1) that measuring time was imprecise back then compared to our present day; (2) what took place was far more important to ancient historians than when things took place.
  - "Where did you celebrate Christmas this year?" we might ask a friend. He could answer, "Well, on Christmas Eve we were at my Mom's house, and Christmas Day we spent with my husband's family." So here are two different times in two different places . . . but it all is the celebration of Christmas—and we don't get bent out of shape with our friend, accusing him of false statements, inaccuracies, etc.
    - This isn't to imply that chronology is irrelevant. But it is to say that it is enough to know that Christ sacrificed himself for the sins of the world on Passover weekend, and that Scripture consistently identifies Jesus with the Passover Lamb (Jn 1:29; 1 Co 5, etc.)
    - Scholars, however, press the issue because they want to establish whether or not the "Last Supper" was, in fact, a Passover seder; whether the statement that Jesus was in the tomb for "3 days" is accurate or not.\(^2\)
- A good summary and sane proposition of Holy Week chronology can be found in Massey Shepherd's article from 1961.\(^3\) If you have a particular interest in chronology, I'd encourage you to read it. It does approach the gospel texts from an historical-critical

---

\(^1\) John F. Brug, “Recent Debate Concerning the Chronology of the New Testament,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Brug's conclusion is not original; other scholars have substantiated the year at 30 as well. But Brug's article provides a good framework of the entire NT era, summarizing the findings of scholars. He does not go into the specific chronology of Holy Week at all.

\(^2\) "The Two Sabbaths of Passover," accessed June 30, 2017, http://thewayofthemessiah.org/tsp.html. This is one Messianic Jewish take on the events of Holy Week, proposing a timeline radically different from what is traditional. As for other Messianic Jewish thoughts (more restrained), Stern, David *Jewish New Testament Commentary* at Mt. 26:1. Also in the same (p. 79-80) is a nice chart depicting the prophecies and fulfillments of Holy Week.

\(^3\) Massey H. Shepherd, “Are Both the Synoptics and John Correct about the Date of Jesus’ Death?,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80, no. 2 (1961): 123-32.
methodology, but the chronological information and the reasoning behind the thesis are sound, and the brief history of chronological approaches to the problem are excellent.

The major events of Matthew 26 are:

- The prediction of his own suffering and death (26:1-5)
- The anointing of Jesus by a "sinful" woman at the house of Simon the Leper (26:6-13)
- Arrangement for the betrayal by Judas (26:14-16)
- The Lord's Supper (26:17-30)
- Jesus in Gethsemane (26:31-46)
- Jesus' arrest (26:47-56)
- Jesus' trial before Caiaphas (26:57-68)
- Peter's denial (26:69-75)

The Text

There are no significant variants in the Greek text.

20 Ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης ἀνέκειτο μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα.

- ἀνέκειτο – 3rd sg. Imperfect < ἀνάκειμαι (depon.) – to lie, recline. However, one needs to be careful of making too much of the opinion (and it is just that) that the Upper Room was set in the traditional Roman style, making use of the triclinium arrangement of tables. That is a possibility, of course. Oriental custom, however, was also to recline at meal, without the formal arrangement of guests such as that involved in a Roman banquet.
  o Stern relates: "The last of the 'Four Questions' recited in the modern Seder service by the youngest person present is, "on all other nights we eat our meals either sitting or reclining: why on this night do we all recline?" The answer is that at the time the questions were fixed in the Seder liturgy, slaves ate sitting or standing, while only free Roman citizens reclined. Thus in Roman cultural language reclining represents freedom from Egyptian slavery."

- Ὀψίας – "evening" Thayer notes that this is either from 3 to 6 pm, or from 6 pm till the onset of night. This imprecision naturally has implications for when exactly Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper. Was it before 6 pm and thus on Thursday? Was it after 6 pm and thus, on the Jewish calendar, actually early Friday (Passover?). Liddell-Scott (classical Greek dictionary) indicates that this was originally an adjective meaning "late," that later became a substantive noun (such as here).

21 καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν εἶπεν· ἁμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἕνας ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με.
καὶ ἐσθίόντων αὐτῶν – Gen. absolute clause here, and the "attendant circumstance" shading of the participle fits in nicely: "as they were eating" Present active ptc. indicates synchronous action with that of the main verb.

ἀμὴν – You can tell from the chart at right that this word is a favorite of Matthew. However, John uses it frequently, and John is the only NT author to employ the double ἀμὴν. (Thayer notes that the "double amen" has the force of a superlative: "most assuredly.") This is a Hebrew word to substantiate the certainty of a statement. The derivative ἀμέν "verily" is carried over into the New Testament in the word ἀμὴν which is our English word "amen." Jesus used the word frequently (Mt 5:18,26, etc.) to stress the certainty of a matter. The Hebrew and Greek forms come at the end of prayers and hymns of praise (Psa 41:13 [H 14]; Psa 106:48; 2Ti 4:18; Rev 22:20 etc.). This indicates that the term so used in our prayers ought to express certainty and assurance in the Lord to whom we pray." (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, entry 0116).

ὅτι εἷς ἐξ ὑμῶν παραδώσει με – Simple indirect statement here, followed by a partitive genitive and future indicative: ". . . that one of you will betray me." The compound verb παρα-δίδωμι has a wide range of meanings, from "hand down" (stories, traditions) to "surrender" to "transmit." Here we know from the context that Jesus implies insidious intent. The news is shocking to the disciples and sad for Jesus to relate. Later in the chapter, the Savior rises from prayer in the garden by saying, "Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer:" Not, "Here comes some soldiers . . ." or "Here come my enemies . . ." but ". . . my betrayer." So are fulfilled the words of prophecy in Psalm 41 of the Savior being betrayed by a close friend with whom he had shared struggles and sorrows; a close friend whom he had given authority to preach the gospel and power to drive out demons; a close friend who once had returned from a mission trip with joy along with the others that demons had submitted to them in Christ's name. Judas had seen it all—the miracles, the healings, the compassion, etc. But unbelief, in the end, is an illogical response to God's grace and goodness.

καὶ λυπούμενοι σφόδρα ἤρξαντο λέγειν αὐτῷ εἷς ἑκάστος· μήτι ἐγώ εἰμι, κύριε;

καὶ λυπούμενοι σφόδρα – The masc. pl. ptc refers back to "the twelve" of 26:20. The present tense indicates that the situation of the Twelve "being saddened" or "feeling bad" was happening simultaneously with the beginning of their individual questioning. λυπέω in the Mid/Pass means "to be sorrowful" or "be distressed"—virtually a stative verb. (The aorist has a more ingressive idea: "become distress/ sorry", according to Friberg's lexicon.)

εἷς ἑκάστος – Gingrich's Greek NT Lexicon renders this "each and every one." This is more the idea of completeness than of a sequence (i.e. "each one took a turn asking, one after the other"—as if they progressed around the table in some orderly fashion. Thus, the ESV, NIV, and EHV are a bit misleading here in rendering "one after another.") Danker also sees it as intensive: "each one, every single one." So the emphasis is really on the inclusivity, not the process. The NASB and KJV are closer, and perhaps the NASB captures the scene best: ". . . they each one began to say . . ." One can imagine the "bombshell" that Jesus dropped caused all the disciples to begin asking at the same time—a mild cacophony instead of a politely ordered inquiry.
• **σφόδρα** – This is a strong adverb: "exceedingly, extremely" etc. "Very sorrowful is a rather weak translation for a phrase which contains Matthew's favorite word for violent emotion, even shock (used in 17:6,23; 18:31; 19:25; 27:54). They are so shaken that they cannot even trust their own self-knowledge—though the form of their question might be better translated, 'You can't possibly mean me, can you?'" 7

• **μήτι ἐγώ εἰμι, κύριε** – The classical Greek use of the negative μή in a question expects a "no" answer, and that usage continues in Koine Greek. NIV: "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" GWN: "You don't mean me, do you, Lord?" Yet these all ought not to be taken as expressions of confidence in self, along the lines of Peter's bold statements later. They had been with the Savior long enough to know that he "knew what was in a man." So the questions aren't really, "It couldn't possibly be me, Lord, right?" Rather, it was more along the lines: "Lord, I don't think I would do something like that... but I know that you know what's in my heart better than I do. So I'm not really sure if I could do that or not. I don't think so, but I'm looking to you, Lord, for reassurance that I won't." 7

23 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· ὁ ἐμβάψας μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ τὴν χεῖρα ἐν τῷ τρυβλίῳ οὗτός με παραδώσει.

• **ὁ ἐμβάψας μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ τὴν χεῖρα** – Louw-Nida indicates that this verb (aorist ptc. here, substantive use: "the one who dipped") means to "dip in a liquid." We see the close connection to the standard verb for "to baptize." Luke's version of this verse is less specific: "However, the hand of the one betraying me is with me on the table" (22:21). John's account is most detailed. There Jesus speaks of dipping a piece of bread and handing it to the betrayer. But as we read the account, the only logical conclusion that we can draw is that this information was relayed only to John, who had leaned against Jesus' chest and privately asked him to which of them he was referring. If this had been a loud announcement and a grand gesture, all the disciples would have realized that Judas was the betrayer. It is plan from John 13:28,29 that the other disciples had no clue what was actually happening in respect to Judas, Jesus' directive, and Judas' subsequent departure. This distribution of the "dipped bread" must have even been so subtle that John himself didn't realize what was going on. John does make it clear that "no one" was in the know (Τοῦτο δὲ οὐδείς έγνω (Jn 13:28).

• **ἐν τῷ τρυβλίῳ** – "in the bowl" This is the common, standard Greek word for "bowl." However, it does bring up the entire issue of what may have been the menu at the Passover of Jesus' day, and how exactly the meal / courses were eaten. Please refer to Edersheim's study of the subject in The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, Ch. 11-12. 8 Although interesting, this is a minor detail of the text.

24 ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει καθὼς γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ, οὐάι δὲ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκείνῳ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοται· καλὸν ἦν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἐγεννήθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκείνος.

• **ὁ μὲν υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὑπάγει** – Rogers/Rogers states that "to go away" here is a euphemism for "to die." What is the force of the present tense here? Wallace describes the progressive 5


present, an identification that fits well here: "The present tense may be used to describe a scene in progress, especially in narrative literature. It represents a somewhat broader time frame than the instantaneous present, though it is still narrow when compared to a customary or gnomic present. The difference between this and the iterative (and customary) present is that the latter involves a repeated action, while the progressive present normally involves continuous action. The progressive present is common, both in the indicative and oblique moods."  

- καλὸν ἣν αὐτῷ εἰ οὐκ ἔγεννηθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος – Robertson, in his grammar (p. 920) sees this as a Contrary to Fact (i.e. 2nd Class) condition without the ἄν in the apodosis. "If that man had not been born, it would have been a good thing"—a hypothetical, unreal situation. The condition is somewhat at variance from classical Greek in that Matthew uses both an imperfect and an aorist, but this is hardly uncommon in Koine Greek. Further, Robertson also notes that "sometimes ἦν is aorist" (p. 1015). Irons notes that both BAGD and BDF’s grammar cite καλὸν as an example of a positive degree adverb functioning, in actuality, as a comparative: "better . . ." The inverted word order of both the condition the sentence in general call for added emphasis on καλὸν.

- ὁ γιος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου – Here, Jesus' true humanity is underscored.

- Did Judas have to betray Jesus? In commenting on Acts 2:23, Gerhard speaks about both the Jewish people and Judas himself: "A careful distinction must be made between the actual deed of betraying, condemning, and crucifying Christ and the most salutary goal of that crucifixion. The deed itself was wicked and unjust, and for this reason Peter says clearly that Christ was crucified 'through the hands of lawless people (Acts 2:23); and John says that Satan 'put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ (Jn. 13:2).’ Therefore God did not force the Jews to act, nor did he approve it, but he truly avenged himself with the destruction of the entire city. . . . The salutary fruit of the Passion is deservedly credited to the plan and the decree of the wisdom of God, but the unjust execution of Christ must be attributed to the snares of the ancient serpent and to the cruelty of the Jews. This is why blessed Peter connects the plan and foreknowledge of God, because that plan of God regarding the redemption of the human race through the Passion of Christ had as its companion—or, rather, its antecedent (not with respect to time but with respect to order and to our thought)—the foreknowledge of God, by which from eternity God saw the wicked wills of Satan and the Jews with most present sight. 

  "I offer the following proof. If with his eternal decree God, by hidden force, had compelled or incited Judas and the Jews to crucify Christ, then surely Judas and the Jews would have intended no other purpose in betraying and crucifying Christ than what God himself intended. But now, God intended a purpose far different from that of Judas and the Jews in this work, which no one can deny under any appearance of the truth. Therefore God did not compel Judas and the Jews with his decree, nor drive them with his impulse, to crucify Christ. The logical connection in the major premise is obvious, because one must consider actions on the basis of their purpose and intent, and difference of which causes the acts to differ."  

---


25 ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Ἰούδας ὁ παραδιδοὺς αὐτὸν εἶπεν· μήτι ἐγὼ εἰμί, ῥαββί; λέγει αὐτῷ· σὺ εἶπας.

- ὁ παραδιδοὺς – Pres. act. ptc, substantive use. Burton, Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek: "The General Present Participle. The Present Participle is also used without reference to time or progress, simply defining its subject as belonging to a certain class, i.e. the class of those who do the action denoted by the verb. The participle in this case becomes a simple adjective or noun and is, like any other adjective or noun, timeless and indefinite." A legitimate rendering, then, could also here be "Judas the Betrayer."

- λέγει αὐτῷ· σὺ εἶπας – "[Jesus] said to him, 'You said.'" - Robertson: "The difference between ouv and μή, in questions is well shown in Jo. 4:33, 35. In the use of μή, the answer in mind is the one expected, not always the one actually received as is illustrated in the question of the apostles at the last passover. They all asked μήτι ἐγὼ εἰμί, ῥαββί; The very thought was abhorrent to them, 'It surely is not I.' But Judas, who did not dare use ouv, received the affirmative answer, σὺ εἶπας (Mt. 26:25).

Text Analysis

Malady: Not heeding the call to repentance.

Telic Note: (Main point in a nutshell): The Lord knows and examines the heart.

Propositional Statement: In this text the Holy Spirit would have us realize the tremendous power sin has in the human heart so that we repent and cling in faith to the Son of Man who came for us.

Theme and Parts: (suggestions)

Is it I?
1. Yes—the one with a sinful heart
2. Yes—the one for whom the Savior goes

Is it I?
1. Yes—the one whom the Son of God calls to repentance
2. Yes—the one for whom the Son of Man willingly goes