

What Did They Sing?

A study of Matthew 26:26-30

By Mark Hatfield

During the time that this local church has existed, we have made it a point to spend an extensive amount of time on the Lord's Supper. I believe this extra time has been very uplifting and helpful as we desire to keep this memorial as the Lord commanded. In this time frame we prepare a set of hymns that will help us to focus on the most important aspects of this Supper relating to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Often during these times of remembrance, similar texts are read that merely talk about the institution of and the keeping of the Lord's Supper. I have often found it to be helpful to look at the context surrounding these verses of Scripture.

One such passage is Matthew 26:26-29, where it says, "While they were eating, Jesus took {some} bread, and after a blessing, He broke {it} and gave {it} to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave {it} to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

What I want to do today is read the very next verse and ask some interesting questions. In verse 30, this passage says, "After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Singing a hymn? Jesus just ate His last meal with the disciples before going to the cross to die...and they sang a hymn? What could they possibly have been singing about? Why would they sing at a time like this? Why would we sing at a time when we are remembering the death of Jesus?

First, let us point out that a hymn by definition is, "a song or ode in praise or honor of God". The original word in this text even reveals a deeper implication when we learn that this word (hymnesantes) means "to celebrate God in song".

Now, back to our questions: what were they singing about and why were they singing at a time like this? After some research I

learned that it is recorded in history by Jewish records that Psalm 113 and the 5 psalms that follow it were traditionally sung after the Passover. Jesus is making a profound statement with singing a hymn, not after the Passover, but after the institution of the Lord's Supper where He becomes the sacrificial Lamb of God. Psalms 113 - 118 deal with God's deliverance of physical Israel from physical bondage. In them God is praised, so these psalms are called the Hallel, which means, "The Praise of God". But one part of these psalms is intriguing in light of this study, when we read near the end of this sequence of psalms in Psalm 118: 22-24, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner {stone.} This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Let us rejoice and be glad in a day that the stone which the builders rejected becomes the chief cornerstone. It makes sense to those who have received salvation. Celebrate God!!!

Matthew Henry in his commentary made the following observations about singing a hymn after the Lord's Supper:

It is very proper after the Lord's supper, as an expression of our joy in God through Jesus Christ, and a thankful acknowledgment of that great love wherewith God has loved us in him.

It is not unseasonable, no, not in times of sorrow and suffering; the disciples were in sorrow, and Christ was entering upon his sufferings, and yet they could sing a hymn together. Our spiritual joy should not be interrupted by outward afflictions.

While I realize that the actual hymns that we have are not identical to what they had sung, what hymns do we have today that celebrate God in light of what we remember in the Lord's Supper? Would they have sung:

434 - Not to us, O' Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory because of your love and your faithfulness (This hymns words are actually in the compilation of psalms [Psalm 115:1] sung during the Passover).

83 -God is so good, God is so good, God is so good, He's so good to me.

38 - Our God is an awesome God, He reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and love our God is an awesome God.

4 - To God be the glory, great things He has done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son, who yielded His life an atonement for sin and opened the life-gate that all may go in. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice. O' come to the Father through Jesus the Son, and give Him the glory, great things He has done.

After we partake of these emblems we too will sing some hymns. We will sing these hymns that I have mentioned in this lesson. Please give your full attention now to what this Supper should mean to you. Prepare your heart to celebrate God, following this time of remembrance.