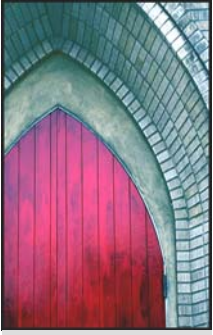


# REMEMBER UNTIL HE COMES AGAIN

*The Proximity of Hope*

SCRIPTURE TEXT: MATTHEW 26:20-30 (ESV)



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## *Thinking about Proximity:*

Last winter a tsunami swept across a dozen islands in Asia, killing thousands. It felt so far away. A week ago Hurricane Katrina landed on New Orleans and southern Mississippi shore lines, causing the waters to swell and surge into that area—most of which is below sea level. The news is saturated with photos of a major city underwater. Red Cross workers expect the death toll to possibly rise into the thousands. This one is close—just a day's drive. My heart aches.

It's got me thinking about proximity—and how our proximity to something usually affects how real it is to us. Images of people waiting to be air-lifted off of their 100<sup>o</sup> roofs while the flood waters swirl about in their living rooms beneath them bring something of the reality of the devastation closer to us, but they also widen the gap between those of us who only hear of such things and those who have lost everything. For some of us, it is a fitting description of how we feel about our own lives—stranded above the ruin, waiting for rescue, devastated.

We live in a world that hosts tsunamis, hurricanes and floods. What are we to hope in? No doubt the wreckage of the gulf coast has many questioning the providence and even existence of God. And while this is happening, today we come to the Lord's Table—as we do on the first Sunday of every month. It is right that we come. We come with the question of the proximity of hope on our minds. But beloved, we do not come with our heads hung in despair. Our text, though itself laced with tragedy, is the testimony of the proximity of hope for our world—assuring us that God is here and He is not silent.

## *Matthew 26:20-30*

<sup>20</sup>When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.

<sup>21</sup>And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." <sup>22</sup>And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" <sup>23</sup>He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. <sup>24</sup>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."

<sup>25</sup>Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

<sup>26</sup>Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." <sup>27</sup>And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup>for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup>I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

## *Our Proximity to Judas:*

This is a bit of a tight-wire act because I want to ask us to relate to Judas, as I believe the other 11 disciples seemed to, without sympathizing with him. The author of Hebrews tells us clearly Judas' sin was horrible, saying, "How much worse punishment do you think will be reserved for the one who has spurned the Son of God and profaned the blood of the covenant?" <sup>Heb 10:29</sup> He profaned the Covenant and is undeserving of our pity. But as a man who grew up in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine and spent the previous three years following Jesus after a life of growing up in his Jewish culture, we can begin to relate to some of his pragmatism and the widening chasm between his religion and his life.

By now he had sat down to around 30 Passover meals—the occasion for this last supper. Passover was to them what Christmas is to us. It told the story of God passing over the houses of the Israelites as He struck dead all the other firstborn sons in Egypt—and of their deliverance to the Promised Land. God told the people to commemorate this every year in the feast called Passover. They ate unleavened bread to remember the haste with which they left. They ate bitter herbs to remember their own bitter lives as slaves. They ate lamb to remember the blood they spread on the doorposts of their homes so the Lord would pass over them and let them live.

And there were four cups of wine which symbolized the four covenant promises of God—promises upon which the entire nation of Israel had been built—1) God would bring them out of the land of slavery, 2) God would set them free, 3) God would redeem them from their sins and 4) God would take these people as His own and be their God. Everything about the meal was designed to bring the participant into close proximity with their heritage, their story, their redemption and their God—standing to tell them that they lived between two ages—the age of the Exodus and the coming of the Messiah.

But we know how these things go, don't we? We celebrate enough times and all we really think about is how expensive the preparations are, how long the lines get at the mall, how frustrating family members can be and how very far removed we feel from the story the holiday recounts. We are so far removed from the previous age that we are beginning to suspect that the age to come isn't really coming at all. And we have to ask, Are we just kidding ourselves here?

If you can relate to this, you can relate to Judas. He had resigned himself to the fact that the Covenant promises of God were foolishness, and that if he had to choose between his religion and 30 pieces of silver, he'd take the silver. And I think about proximity again. He had picked the **worst possible moment** in history to cash in his chips—the very weekend the world would awaken to the presence of God's Messiah and the redemption He'd accomplish by His death and resurrection. All of redemptive history had been building up to this point. At that very table with the One who would become the final Passover Lamb—Jesus—on this eve of the age they had looked forward to with this very celebration—never closer in proximity to the coming age, Judas abandoned hope.

