

## **Introduction**

A new year is upon us and we are all hoping for something better than last year. We are not slow to close the book on 2020. The truth is we do not know what a year may bring forth. It was true as we rounded the corner last year, and it is just as true as we look ahead to the coming year. One thing I know is this. The things that matter most never change. When we look back at all of history—one year matters more than all the others. It was the year in which Jesus died and rose again. As we exit 2020 and enter 2021 and wonder what kind of year this one will be, we must remain fixated on what happened in about AD 33. What happened then defines our purpose and fuels our hope.

So starting today we are going to pave a path. We are going to chart a course for 2021 that looks back to AD 33. It is the most important year in (<https://cbs.mbts.edu/2020/04/08/april-3-ad-33-why-we-believe-we-can-know-the-exact-date-jesus-died/>).

the history of the world. Beginning today we are jumping back into the gospel according to Matthew. Only we are going to skip ahead from where we were when we were there last. We are skipping ahead to Matthew 26 so that between now (the first Sunday in January) and Resurrection Sunday, which is April 4, we will live with Jesus and his disciples the last three days of his earthly life. Once we arrive at the final verse of Matthew we will take a break, and then later in the year we will return to where we were at the Triumphal entry and go forward from there. We do not want to miss the important things Jesus had to teach in the early part of passion week. Matthew 26 takes place on Wednesday of passion week. Let's read vv.1-16.

[Read Text and Pray]

For me Christmas came and went this year like a supersonic jet. It usually is gone before I know it, but since I was sick the week before Christmas and basically lost ten days, December seemed to travel at warp speed. But it always seems to pass fast because we spend all this time and effort preparing for it. We spend day upon day setting the stage for Christmas and in one day it passes. At Thanksgiving we start putting up decorations. Then we have Christmas programs and get-togethers and we spend time shopping for just the right gifts. Then we wrap those gifts, and we can't forget the cards. There is meal-planning and baking and house cleaning. Finally the big day arrives, and it is over before it began. And as soon as it is over we start setting the stage for next Christmas.

As I said earlier there is one year and specifically one span of three days that matters more than any other since time began. They are the days involving the death and resurrection of Jesus. From the time God spoke creation into existence, preparations were underway foreshadowing and setting the stage for the day of Jesus' death. When sin entered the world, God replaced the fig-leaves Adam and Eve had sewn. He clothed them with garments of skins—produced at the price of blood. For without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. The New Testament message of the gospel is Christ crucified, buried, and raised. And that message is heralded throughout the scripture. We see it in Abel's acceptable sacrifice, in the Ark by which Noah and his family were saved from destruction. We see the necessary death of Christ in the ram that was provided to Abraham for sacrifice in Isaac's place. We see it in the Passover lamb and the redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt. Christ is the rock which being struck provides water of life. He is the host of Levitical

sacrifices by which the unclean was cleansed and by which sins were atoned. Jesus' death is portrayed in the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness when the Israelites were cursed with an invasion of poisonous serpents. Jesus is the suffering servant, about whom Isaiah speaks, who was stricken, smitten, and afflicted but pierced for our transgressions. At last, he is the sacrifice heralded by John the Baptist as the "lamb who takes away the sin of the world."

As surely as we prepare every year for Christmas, God prepared the world for the moment when Jesus would be sacrificed for sinners. Our text this morning presents 4 works of preparation for the death of Jesus. The main idea Matthew communicates to us is that "the stage is set." Final preparations are made in the fulfillment of God's plan for the death and burial of Jesus, and here they are.

### **I. Jesus Prepares His Disciples.**

"When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

As we have been studying our way through Matthew, we have observed that for some time Jesus was preparing his disciples for the eventuality that he would be killed. He told them on multiple occasions that he must go to Jerusalem and be handed over into the hands of men and suffer and be crucified. Now in this text he is adding another detail—WHEN—he would suffer. At this point it was but two days away, at Passover. For months and months Jesus had been telling the disciples he would be crucified in Jerusalem. Now he is telling them that it is only two days away.

The disciples clearly remain oblivious to the fact that Jesus would die, but Jesus himself has been pointing in this direction consistently and persistently. He knew where; he knew what; and he knew when. It was the definite and incontestible plan of God that Jesus Christ be crucified by the hands of godless men in the city of Jerusalem during Passover.

The "when" really stands out here. The timing of Christ's crucifixion turns out to have been precisely when Passover lambs were being sacrificed. John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Apostle Paul declared to the Corinthians that, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." It was the plan of God that Jesus be crucified at Passover because Jesus is the consummate Passover lamb. He is the lamb whose blood satisfies the requirements of divine justice. Those who by faith paint the blood over the doorposts of their hearts miss out on the judgment of death. They are "passed over" and delivered. They are set free to worship and serve the Lord and to enter into his eternal land of promise.

This year it seemed that advent calendars were all the rage. I observed every sort of advent calendar with all kinds of different themes. Most had nothing to do with the birth of Jesus, just the date of Christmas. Advent calendars are supposed to count down the days not to a secular holiday but to the reason for the season—the arrival of Christ as a baby. Anyway as each day passes, you open a flap revealing an image associated with the celebration and thus you count down the days. Finally you reach the climax when Christmas day arrives. It is almost as though Jesus was employing an advent calendar to declare to his disciples the nearness of the dramatic day of his death. Over and over he has been alerting them. Now he tells them it is only two days away! As surely as we count the days to Christmas, Jesus was counting down the days to his death. And rightly so. The death of Christ stands out as the climactic point in history. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of the atoning death of Christ. Christ's own countdown to the event underscores what the rest of the Bible makes clear. Christ's death for our sins is what J. C. Ryle calls "the master truth

of Scripture.” The atoning death of Christ is central and foundational to what the Bible is all about. Ryle says that “without it the gospel is an arch without a keystone, a fair building without a foundation, a solar system without a sun.” Just as Jesus pointed again and again to his death, so should we.

The world may shake its collective heads and call the cross foolishness, but for Christ’s followers the death of Jesus on the cross is the wisdom of God and the power of God and the saving grace of God. And “far be it from us to boast about anything except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). By his cross Christ’s followers have been crucified to the world and the world to us. So Jesus set the stage for his death by preparing his disciples for the fact that the time had now arrived.

## **II. The Jews Prepare Their Plot.**

While Jesus was preparing his disciples for his death, the Jewish rulers were preparing to bring his death about. “The chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest . . . and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “NOT during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

The Jewish rulers were filled with envy and jealousy and hate. Jesus did not tow the line. His ministry of truth and righteousness exposed the swamp in Jerusalem and in the hearts of the Jews. The deep state of the Jews was rankled at him; they were scheming against him determined to bring him down and take his life.

And the thing that jumps out at us is the determination the rulers made NOT to carry out their plan during the feast. They were afraid their efforts would be thwarted by the masses of people who arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. So their scheming involved waiting until after Passover. And this aspect of their planning stands out because we have just seen that Jesus told his disciples his crucifixion would definitely take place DURING Passover. And we know that it did. In the midst of the seriousness of Christ’s looming death and the ugliness of the hatred of the Jewish rulers there is a comedic effect. We grin internally as we read the words, “not during the feast.” These people are full of rage and empty of sense. They are the pink panthers of the middle east. What they connive to do, they cannot do the way they scheme to do it, but it basically falls into their lap.

And the reason is that God is displaying that they lack the power or the sense to accomplish their ill-will toward Jesus. At the end of the day, he will not be crucified because of their cunning. He will not be hanging on the cross because they have power over Jesus. No, he could have summoned angels to rescue him. He willingly delivered himself to be crucified. They are completely incapable of thwarting Jesus. They can only be used in the divinely designed project to bring salvation to sinners both Jew and Gentile. On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared this very point to the multitudes: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:22-23). Days later the disciples were gathered for prayer and they were calling to mind the fact that Gods’ enemies plot against the Lord in vain. And they prayed these words, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever YOUR hand and YOUR plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28). Listen, Jesus is Lord over his crucifixion. No one took the life of Jesus from him. He willingly yielded himself up. The cross of Jesus is not evidence of human power but divine power weaving together even the

vile and dark hearts of man into his own plan and determination to save lost sinners and bring them to life and into fellowship with him!

Jesus prepares his disciples. The Jews prepare their plan.

### **III. A Woman Prepares Jesus' Body.**

The disciples called her act a waste. But Jesus rebuked them saying that it was a beautiful thing she had done. She had taken a ridiculously expensive alabaster box of ointment, broken it open, and poured it on Jesus' head. Pure excess. Pure luxury. "The money would have been better spent on the poor." That is what the disciples were thinking. But Jesus corrected them. Is he not with them for only a short while longer? And is he not worthy of such a lavish display of love and care? And in God's providence what this woman did was to prepare him for burial. There would not be time after his crucifixion; the embalming had already been done. The woman whether she knew it or not, had prepared the body of Jesus for his burial which was about 48 hours away.

What this woman did was not merely accepted by Jesus; it was applauded by him. "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her." Christ Jesus lauds the woman's selfless act of lavish worship. She honored him without regard to the expense. And that is anything but waste.

John MacArthur comments: "The true worshiper does not ask, 'How much does it cost?' or 'Do I have time?' Like the woman, the true worshiper gives Jesus whatever he has, knowing it is trifling compared to what has been received from him. This woman is a perpetual example to all Christians of unselfish, sacrificial adoration. (136)"

How much are you willing to sacrifice of yourself and what might be gain for you in order to honor Christ, to worship Christ, to spend time with Jesus Christ? Are your hobbies more important? Your comforts? Your pursuits? Even your service? It is an honor to Christ when we sacrifice self to honor his name!

### **IV. Judas Prepares His Betrayal.**

Jesus prepares the disciples. The Jewish Rulers prepare their plan. The woman prepares Jesus' body. And now we see Judas preparing to betray the Lord.

These words are shocking. Here is a guy who has been with Jesus for three years now. He heard all the sermons and saw him walk on water, feed thousands, and even call Lazarus out of the tomb after four days. BUT "then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him."

Apparently, Judas was disillusioned about Jesus. This talk of death and dying and burial perhaps made him question why he started following him in the first place. This was not the talk of a victorious messiah but capitulation to his enemies. It was over. For Judas his hope that Jesus was Messiah was lost. But something good could come out of it for Judas, if he could just get some money for his trouble. Judas was precisely the tool the rulers needed to go ahead and arrest Jesus and get rid of him once and for all. Judas was driven by the love of the world and the love of money. He stole from the treasury. And now he seeks pay for turning Jesus over to the chief priests. Thirty pieces of silver is what they offered. It may sound like a lot, but 30 pieces of silver was the price prescribed by the scripture to be paid to a slave-owner if one's ox gored that slave.

Jesus' life was worth no more than a run-of-the-mill slave in terms of the payment given by the chief priests to Judas. Jesus' life was of little value in the eyes of the rulers or even Judas.

When the world sets its eyes on the things of the world, it is blinded to the infinite value of the Son of God. Here is the God/man who is worthy of being anointed with the costly nard but for worldly gain is sold for a paltry 30 pieces of silver. The woman was selfless in a way that magnifies the worth of Jesus, but the disciple was so consumed with himself that he was willing to take even a token amount to give him up.

Judas shows us how low one will go because of the love of money—even the love of a little money. He shows us the truth that “if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” He gives up he who will never pass away for what is constantly passing away. Paul reminds Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

Jesus had warned, “You cannot serve God and wealth for you can only love one of the two.” Your ultimate allegiance can only be with one. Judas' ultimate allegiance was with money and we know the outcome. He pierced himself with great pangs. Learn from Judas to see what or who is truly valuable and to sacrifice the world to worship and serve the ruler of the world.

## **Conclusion**

So we see that in four different instances the stage is being set for the death of Christ. And overall we learn that the evil intents of human beings can never thwart God's ultimate plan. God weaves together His Son's preparation of his disciples, the plotting of the Jews, the anointing of the woman, and even Judas' deal to betray to bring about his good plan.

God's good purposes involve hard realities—affliction, suffering, hurt, pain, trial, hostility, betrayal, and even crucifixion. It was true for his own son.

Looking back through the Bible it was also true of Joseph. His brothers disowned him, sought to kill him, and finally sold him into slavery. There he suffered while being faithful. He was falsely accused and then forgotten. But his testimony was that while his brothers did what they did with evil intent, it was God who was at work bringing about good.

Each of us will face the same realities in our lives individually and even corporately as a whole. People will do evil to us. They will use us and even betray us. Life circumstances will involve that we suffer affliction and trial. But none of these things will be able to thwart God's plan for good in the lives of his people. He causes all things to work together for good for those who love God. That includes viruses, cancer, and infection. It includes a world that rages against godliness and the godly. They cannot thwart God's good purposes; but can only be used in his great and marvelous plan to redeem and sanctify and bless his people.