

Matthew 26:1-16

I. Matthew 26:1 — When Jesus had finished all these sayings...

Does this sound familiar by now? Remember that Matthew has built his Gospel around five major blocks of Jesus' teaching. After the Sermon on the Mount (or the Sermon on Kingdom Righteousness) in chapters 5-7, Matthew concluded:

✓ Matthew 7:28 — *When Jesus finished these sayings...*

After the Sermon on Kingdom Missions in chapter ten, Matthew concluded:

✓ Matthew 11:1 — *When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples...*

After the Sermon on the Mysteries of the Kingdom (“Already”/“Not Yet”) in chapter thirteen, Matthew concluded:

✓ Matthew 13:53 — *When Jesus had finished these parables...*

After the Sermon on Kingdom Community in chapter eighteen, Matthew concluded:

✓ Matthew 19:1 — *When Jesus had finished these sayings...*

And now after this final Sermon on the Future Consummation of the Kingdom, Matthew concludes:

✓ Matthew 26:1 — *When Jesus had finished **all** these sayings...*

Perhaps the “all” is a sign that this time there will be no more sermons to follow. As J.C. Ryle puts it: “Hitherto we have seen him as the great Prophet: we are now about to see Him as the great High Priest.”

II. Matthew 26:1-2 — 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.”

There is no way for us to fully comprehend what Jesus is saying – even after 2000 years of reflection. Execution in two days is hard enough to wrap our minds around. But crucifixion in two days, hanging on a tree and bearing the weight of all our sins, and of all God's wrath (Gal. 3:13) – eternity will not be long enough for us to comprehend.

And so the final events of Jesus' earthly life are introduced not by the plotting of His enemies, but by His own *sovereign word*. From start to finish, Matthew wants us to see that even in His own death, Jesus is in absolute control. He is the High Priest who willingly, purposefully offers Himself up as a sacrifice for us. Jesus will be delivered up and handed over not because His enemies are running the show, but because this is what *must* happen, and therefore, this is what

will happen. Jesus will die by crucifixion not by chance, but rather because this is the way it *must* be. Jesus' death will happen at Passover not because this is the time His enemies had chosen, but because this was the time that God had ordained before the foundation of the world. At no time in Jesus' life more than in these final two days do we see that He is *truly* the sovereign Lord of all.

“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.’” ...

III. Matthew 26:3–5 — *Then* the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 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.”

So for all the secret plotting and plans for stealth, Matthew shows that the chief priests and the elders of the people are merely fulfilling the word of Jesus.

✓ Psalm 2:1–3 (LXX) — Wherefore did the heathen rage, and the nations imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers gathered themselves together, against the Lord, and against his Christ; saying, Let us break through their bonds, and cast away their yoke from us.

For all of their wicked plotting together, the chief priests and elders of the people can only accomplish the plans and purposes of God. And so the Psalmist continues:

✓ Psalm 2:4 — He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

The rulers have determined that Jesus' death must be *after* the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, but Jesus has said otherwise. So we can assume that their plans will be *overruled* by the sovereign word of the very one they are planning to kill. “After two days the Passover is coming,” Jesus said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

But in the midst of Jesus' divine sovereignty, there is still the great mystery of His *suffering* – as one made like us. On the cross, Jesus will quote the words of the righteous sufferer in Psalm chapter thirty-one: “Into your hand I commit my spirit” (31:5; cf. Luke 23:46). But even here, Matthew's words remind us of something else that this righteous sufferer said:

✓ Psalm 30:12–16 (LXX) — I have been forgotten as a dead man out of mind: I am become as a broken vessel. For I heard the slander of many that dwelt round about: ***when they were gathered together against me, they took counsel to take my life***. But I hoped in thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my God. My lots are in thy hands: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me in thy mercy.

Jesus is sovereign in death, and yet He will pray in the garden with sweat drops of blood: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will”

(26:39). Jesus will determine the time and the manner of His own death, but He will also cry out on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mat. 27:46)

IV. Matthew 26:6–9 — Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the” poor.”

John tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha (John 12:3), but for Matthew, this isn't what's important, and so he leaves her anonymous – unnamed. John tells us that this anointing actually happened six days before the Passover – just *before* Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey (John 12:1). Matthew never contradicts John. He simply says: “Now *when* Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper.” But Matthew moves the story here because it fits so wonderfully with his theme of the sovereignty of Jesus as He goes willingly and purposefully to the cross.

As Jesus is reclining for a meal in Simon's home, a woman comes up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she pours the ointment on his head. We know from John that “very expensive” here means the equivalent of an entire year's wages (John 12:5). In today's money, and remembering the much lower standard of living in Jesus' day, this might be around \$35,000. She didn't apply the ointment carefully and sparingly – she *poured* it out on Jesus' head. Once the ointment is poured out, you can't get it back. It's useless for any other purpose. In no more than a minute, it's just gone – forever. Thirty-five thousand dollars worth of ointment just “poured” out on Jesus' head.

Tell me this wouldn't have shocked the sensibilities of every single one of us here! Would any one of us have been any less disapproving than the disciples? Would any one of us have really expected *Jesus* to be any less disapproving than the disciples? We can't know exactly all that this woman was thinking, but it does seem certain that she wasn't thinking rationally and sensibly. Her emotions seem to have clouded her thinking – and for many pious Christians today, this is one of the worst of all sins. Didn't Jesus tell the rich young ruler to sell what he possessed and give the money to the poor (Mat. 19:21)? Didn't Jesus just say that to feed and clothe His poor disciples is to feed and clothe Jesus Himself (Mat. 25:33-40)? Wouldn't it make far more sense for this woman to sell the ointment and use the thirty-five thousand dollars to *feed and clothe* Jesus? Isn't food and clothing far more practical and beneficial than being anointed with sweet smelling perfume? Who can argue with this?

“When the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, ‘Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.’” Never did the disciples seem more right. Never did a woman's senses seem to be more clouded by emotion. Never would many Christians today have felt more justified in their criticism – and even their indignation.

V. **Matthew 26:10–11** — But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a [lit. “*good deed*”; NASB] to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”

So what is Jesus really saying? Is He diminishing the importance of giving to the poor as if they really don’t matter that much? “For you always have the poor with you.” Well actually, this seems to be an allusion to a verse from Deuteronomy:

✓ Deuteronomy 15:11 — *For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, “You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.”*

In other words, Jesus is saying: You are right to be concerned for the poor, and you are right to think of whatever ways you can to meet their needs. But there’s something else that you need to consider: “You always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.” So now what does that mean? Is Jesus saying that as long as He is on earth, good deeds done to Him should replace all good deeds that would have otherwise been done to the poor? But Jesus Himself has just said that doing good deeds to His poor disciples is the *same thing* as doing those good deeds to Jesus Himself! So then what is Jesus really saying?

Well, first of all, Jesus never corrects the disciples for their logic, or even for their theology. Who could argue with them here? The problem was not their logic or their theology, but their self-righteous and *judgmental* hearts. They were “indignant.” Look at this emotionally unstable woman wasting thirty-five thousand dollars when it could have fed and clothed so many poor people! But when Jesus rebukes the disciples, He rebukes them for “troubling” and “bothering” the woman. *More important* than how practical, and wise, and efficient we are with the money that we give to God is our heart. And Jesus knew this woman’s *heart*. Did His disciples love and adore him like this? Did His disciples honor and reverence Him like this? The disciples were measuring “moral quality by [emotional stability and sensibility]... But Jesus estimated moral quality according to the principle of believing and active love from which the act sprang” (Lange). So what excuse do they have for being indignant, and for troubling this woman? Sometimes we need to get off our doctrinal and/or practical “high horses” in the interests of paying more attention to people’s *hearts*. I would tend to agree with Bruner when he writes:

“This is probably not a deed (at least in its excess) of which Jesus would [generally] have approved if he had been asked beforehand. But everything changes when one has to respond after the fact. Jesus defends the woman’s perhaps poor economic sense by a charitable interpretation of her intention (‘he reads the disciples a lesson in the interpretation of motives...’) ... Some attacking of subjective, very emotional Christian faith today, though objectively correct, may be the bashing of the anointing woman. Jesus must be hurt every time disciples hurt a person devoted to him, perhaps particularly when disciples feel superior theologically, intellectually, [or practically].” (Bruner)

The primary point is not the perfect application of our theology (which in this case the disciples had down pat), but rather the true depth of our *love* and our reverence for Jesus. And on this most important point, the woman has far *outdone* the disciples.

It's *because* Jesus knows this woman's heart that now he can say something that will surprise not only His disciples, but also the woman herself. "She has done a good deed to me. For... you will not always have me [with you]." What is this good deed that Jesus has in mind? He seems to be hinting at some special meaning behind this woman's anointing. And somehow it seems related to the fact that He will not always be with His disciples. At this point, I can just imagine the woman being just as surprised and confused as the disciples. She had poured her ointment on Jesus' head out of a good heart overflowing with love and devotion, but we can probably assume she had not thought through the realities of Jesus' limited time on earth. And if she had not thought this through, then how much less would she have been thinking of what Jesus will say next. "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good deed to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me." What is this "good deed" that this woman has done to Jesus? And what does this good deed have to do with Jesus' limited time on earth?

Jesus answers:

VI. Matthew 26:12-13 — "In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial. 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."

However questionable her *actions* might have been in any other circumstances, in these circumstances, God has taken this woman's well intentioned heart and used her to prepare His own beloved Son for burial. How dare the disciples be indignant! How dare they trouble this woman! Her sensibilities may have been clouded somewhat by emotion, but in the end it was she, and *not* the disciples, whom God was able to use to prepare His own beloved Son for burial.

So important is the good deed that she has done that wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. Can you imagine how she must have felt as she listened to Jesus' words? The woman thought of her action as only the overflowing expression of her love and devotion to Jesus. The disciples thought of the woman's action as an unfortunate waste of what could have been used to feed many of the poor. But Jesus saw in this woman's action what *only He* could see – the preparation of His own body for burial. And so in this memorable scene in the house of Simon the leper, we have a most beautiful anticipation of the *Gospel* – the good news that Jesus will *willingly and purposefully* lay down His life for us.

"Truly, I say to you," Jesus said, "wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

"Wherever the Gospel of St. Matthew is read, the deed that she did is known. The deeds and titles of many a king, and emperor, and general, are as completely forgotten, as if written in the sand. But the grateful act of one humble Christian woman is recorded in hundreds of different languages, and is known all over the globe." (Ryle)

May we love, honor, and cherish Jesus like this woman did! May we be filled with wonder and awe to know that Jesus willingly and purposefully received this woman's anointing... as a preparation for His own burial – while He still lived. Once again, we see that the final events of Jesus' life will not be controlled by His enemies, but by His own *sovereign word*. At no time in Jesus' life more than in these final two days do we see that He is truly the sovereign Lord of all – who chooses to lay down His life for us.

VII. Matthew 26:14–16 — 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.

After Jesus had told of his death by crucifixion in only two days, *then* the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered together to plot His arrest and murder. And after Jesus told of His own anointing for burial, *then* Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests offering to deliver Him up to them at a secret and opportune time. Men plot and scheme against Jesus, but all the while, it is Jesus who *willingly and purposefully* goes to the cross for us.

“We behold, as in a bright mirror, the voluntary sacrifice, by which all the transgressions of the world were blotted out, and, contemplating the Son of God advancing with [calmness] and courage to death, we already behold him victorious over death.” (Calvin)

We don't know why Judas did what he did. And even if we did know why, how could it ever make sense? Was he disillusioned with Jesus' failure to be a military and political Messiah? But this doesn't explain why he should want Jesus to *die*. Was he just a cold-hearted mercenary who would do anything for money? But then why not go on robbing the money bag (John 12:6)? Surely, there would be more profit in the money bag than in the one-time offer of thirty pieces of silver (about one month's wages). Of all the Gospel writers, only Matthew tells us the exact amount for which Jesus was betrayed. This is because he wants us to see a fulfillment of Zechariah chapter eleven (cf. Mat. 27:3-10):

✓ Zechariah 11:12–13 (NIV) — I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they valued me!

Conclusion

As Jesus begins this final journey to the cross to die for sinners like you and like me, let's purpose to always be asking ourselves, “What is the price at which we have valued Him?” Judas betrayed Him to His death for only thirty pieces of silver. But the woman who came to Jesus at Simon's house freely offered an entire year's wages just to anoint His body for burial.

Are we a Judas? Before we respond without thinking, remember that Judas was “one of the *twelve*.” No doubt, Judas had deceived *everyone* around him – everyone but Jesus. Bruner asks: “Is there something to be said for the thesis that in a deep sense *all* of us are Judas? Might it be that Judas is *not* unique? Must he always be ‘someone else’? Paul's theology of universal

depravity (Rom 1-3) could encourage such a self-critical reading... We too often make Bad Judas *other people* rather than hearing it as a warning to *ourselves*.” When we intentionally and knowingly sin, are we not betraying the one who bore God’s curse for our sin upon the cross? And when we make worldly possessions and secular entertainment a priority over the things of Jesus and His kingdom, is this not also a terrible betrayal? At what price have we valued Jesus? Are we a Judas?

Or are we the woman who came to Jesus in Simon’s house? Do we have *hearts* that would easily, with reckless abandon, spend a years’ worth of wages just to anoint the body of Jesus for His burial – because we know that His death and burial is all *for us*, and for our transgressions? As one commentator would ask: Have our souls been raised to “a sublime, solemn, and joyous feeling of self-sacrificing love”? (Lange)

“We now approach the closing scene of our Lord Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry. Hitherto we have read of His sayings and doings: we are now about to read of His sufferings and death.” (Ryle) Over the coming weeks as we walk with Jesus through the final days and hours of His life – as He willingly and purposefully chooses to lay down His life for sinners like us – may we always be asking ourselves: “At what price have we *valued Jesus*,” and how are we showing it today?