

**The Plot to Kill Jesus**

Matthew 26: 1-16

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We have been working our way through the Gospel of Matthew since Christmas 2014. We near its end. However, I realized about a month ago that we had a problem if we were going to get to the Easter passages during the Easter season, something needed to give. Over the last 2 weeks, we were in Matthew 22 where Jesus answers every charge of the religious leaders. Following this, there are 3 full chapters of teaching from Jesus – Matthew 23-25. He teaches about religious leaders or religious people that have plenty of religion but no heart for God. Then He teaches on the end time and how to be a disciple in anticipation of the end. These are very relevant topics for us today. Yet they would take several messages to get through. Yet Easter is about 7 weeks away. Matthew's spends a lot of time on the final hours of Jesus' life. He gives us a very long account in Matthew 26 and 27.

So we either had to rush through Matthew 23-25 or rush through the Easter passages. Neither is a good idea. So I decided we need to skip ahead to the Passion narrative so we can walk through it up to Easter. Then after Easter we will go back to Matthew 23-25 to complete those very important texts at a manageable pace.

Chapters 26-27 contain Matthew's passion narrative of the Christ. We call it the passion narrative because of the late Latin term "passionem" which means suffering or enduring. So the passion is the short final period of suffering in Jesus' life leading to his crucifixion and death. Matthew writes very long chapters about it, 72 and 66 verses respectively. In fact, all the Gospel writers devote substantial portions of their Gospels to these final hours because Jesus' suffering and death are central to the Christian faith. Commentator Craig Keener writes, *"Because the Passion story provides the historical record of our once-for-all redemption, it reveals in intimate detail both the concrete expression of God's love for His people and the awfulness of their rebellion against his will."* Journalist Malcolm Muggeridge exclaimed *"Jesus' death was manifestly the most famous one in history. No other death has aroused one-hundredth part of the interest, or been remembered with one-hundredth part of the intensity and concern."*

Today, we begin the passion narrative of Matthew. We will go through four scenes in rapid succession. Matthew has placed them together very strategically. I want to invite you to do some detective work with me. What do these four scenes tell us? What is Matthew alerting us to? When we discover the answer to that question, we will then consider some possible responses to it.

**Matthew 26:1-16 (ESV)**

**26** When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,<sup>2</sup> “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”

<sup>3</sup>Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,<sup>4</sup> and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.<sup>5</sup> But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”

<sup>6</sup>Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste?<sup>9</sup> For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor.”<sup>10</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.<sup>11</sup> For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.<sup>12</sup> In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.<sup>13</sup> 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.”

<sup>14</sup>Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests<sup>15</sup> and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.<sup>16</sup> And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew takes us through 4 scenes. First let’s get a handle on each scene. ***Scene 1 - Jesus predicts His crucifixion will happen during Passover. (26:1-2)*** Matthew uses his familiar formula to transition from a teaching section back to the story. “When Jesus had finished these sayings, such and such would happen.” But there is one small difference in his use of the formula here. Verse 1 states, “When Jesus had finished *all* these sayings. Matthew never used “all” before. He maybe points to the completion of Jesus’ teaching found in this Gospel.

Then he gets on with the story. “Jesus 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.’” So it must be sometime on Tuesday when Jesus says this because the Passover would arrive at sundown of Thursday night. For the first time, Jesus reveals to the disciples the time of his crucifixion. In his past prophecies he indicated the fact of what his crucifixion and who would be responsible. Now he gives them the when - in Jerusalem. Passover.

This feast commemorated the greatest salvation event in Israel’s history up to that point. Way back in Exodus, Israel was enslaved to Egypt. God sent 9 plagues upon the Egyptians to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But he refused. So the last plague would be the most terrible.

God would send a destroying angel to take the life of the first born in every Egyptian family. But the Israelites would be protected from such a terror if they followed God’s instruction. They were to take a lamb, slaughter it and

paint its blood on the door frame of their houses. Any house that had the blood of a lamb on its doorframe would be “passed over.” That night, the angel came. Egypt’s firstborn were struck down and Israel was free the next day.

How appropriate and brilliant for God’s to plan that Jesus would die on the Passover. He would be the ultimate Passover lamb. By His blood we too are protected from God’s holy wrath for our sins. Jesus announces this to the disciples. We don’t know of any response from them because Matthew takes us to the next scene.

***Scene 2 - The religious leaders plot against Jesus. (26:3-5)***

Matthew tells us that the chief priests and elders gather in the palace of the High Priest. This gathering contained the who’s who in religious leadership. They held the highest positions of power in institutional Judaism. They ran the temple and they held power in the capital. So a meeting of this group about Jesus meant that He was being talked about at the highest levels. They gather in the palace of the High Priest, a residence that he and his family would occupy during his term of service.

Matthew names the High Priest as Caiaphas. He ruled or held that position in the years 18-36. So we know Jesus was crucified sometime before the end of Caiaphas’ High Priesthood. So here are the most powerful Jews politically and religiously at that time. What are they doing? Are they prayerfully preparing for the feast? Are they reflecting on the state of Judaism that day and how closely the people walked with God? No. They plot together to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

Yet they determine it would not be wise to do it during the Passover because the people might riot. Now remember, Jerusalem swelled to perhaps 5 times its normal population during Passover. This feast was all about celebrating their salvation or liberation from an oppressor. The Jews were currently oppressed and under occupation by the Romans. So Passover was a ripe time for rebellions and riots.

The Chief Priests and Elders were only in power because of the Romans. In fact, as soon as the Roman Governor Pilate was recalled to Rome in the year 36, the next governor immediately removed Caiaphas as the High Priest. So this group knew they had to keep the peace if they wanted to keep power. Remember, Jesus has been challenging and defeating the religious leadership through the Palm Sunday ride, the cleansing of the temple and the answers to their questions. He has the crowds on His side. So they must plot a way to get rid of him apart from the crowds.

Suddenly, there's a dilemma in this passage. Jesus said he would be crucified at Passover. The chief priests and elders plot to kill Jesus after the feast. Whose timetable will win out? Matthew will reveal how this gets resolved in a few verses. But instead of going directly there, he inserts another scene into his narrative.

***Scene 3 – A woman anoints Jesus with perfume which He interprets as preparation for His burial. (26:6-13)***

The setting changes from a plot to murder at the High Priest's house to a banquet at the home of Simon the leper. We don't know much more about him except that he is probably no longer a leper because lepers had to live on the outskirts of the city. Jesus is there with the disciples. During the meal, a woman comes up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment. Hosts would have their guests anointed with oil for a meal. It just added to the pleasantness of the evening. And personal hygiene wasn't as much of a priority then as it is today. But the usual anointing oil was not that expensive.

This one may have been a family heirloom. It is likely worth thousands and thousands of dollars in today's currency. Yet this woman opens or breaks the flask and pours it all out on Jesus' head. Now if you've read the other gospels in the New Testament, you've come across this story before. You may know that they name the woman. It is Mary the sister of Martha and of Lazarus who Jesus raised from the dead.

Matthew was there at this banquet. Why doesn't he name her? Some suggest it's because she's a woman and they held a lower place in the society. But I don't buy that. Matthew has already demonstrated his deep appreciation for and inclusion of women way back in the genealogy in Matthew 1. I think Matthew lets Mary remain nameless to show that this one female disciple of Christ proved to be more in tune and more devoted to Christ than all the males who he will identify by name – Caiaphas, Judas, Peter and all the other male disciples. But this woman displays her allegiance to Jesus. Its women who have the courage to stand with Jesus at the cross. Its women who have the courage to go to the tomb.

Matthew could be making a tremendous statement here. It doesn't matter your name or position or even gender in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus calls and receives anyone who will come to Him. He does just that as the disciples become indignant at this apparently foolish act of a woman. "We could have sold that ointment and provided for hundreds of poor people."

They were right to be concerned for the poor. But they were wrong to miss the massive display of devotion and love by this woman. Jesus defends her. “Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing. You will always have the poor but not me. In pouring this ointment she has prepared me for burial.” It is unlikely that the woman had burial in mind when she poured the ointment over Jesus’ head. She seemed to be offering an extravagant act of love perhaps declaring her belief that Jesus was the Messiah. But Jesus applies her offering to his burial. Then he declares that wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, this woman and her act will be remembered.

So folks, I don’t know if you noticed it but you’ve just been part of the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy. We have heard the story of this woman. Her extravagant display of love has been proclaimed to all of you. There have been a thousand kings and emperors in the time since this act. Yet few of us know much about them. Yet her simple act continues to be proclaimed as part of the Gospel story today. God can use anyone regardless of position for His glorious purposes. What a beautiful moment. But the story cannot end here.

Matthew moves us to the fourth scene in our passage today. ***Scene 4 - One of the 12 joins the plot against Him.*** **(26:14-16)** Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus’ 12 chosen disciples, goes to the chief priests. They were part of the group meeting back in scene 1. Judas asks what they will pay him if he delivers Jesus over to them. This would require Judas to bring them to Jesus at a private place away from the crowds. They pay 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave back in Exodus. So from that moment on, Judas seeks an opportunity to betray Jesus. Remember earlier the dilemma created by the first two scenes? Jesus declares that He will be crucified during the Passover. The chief priests and elders want him killed after the Passover because of the crowds. Judas steps in and solves the chief priest’s problem. If they can arrest Jesus in secret, then he may very well die during the Passover.

So there are the four scenes for today. What do these four scenes tell us? What do we now know that we wouldn’t know if they weren’t in the Bible? **Jesus would certainly be killed.** Things are coming together for this dreadful event to occur. Jesus predicted it. The chief priests and elders plotted it. Mary’s anointing prepared for it. One of Jesus’ inner circle turns against Him & joins the plot against Him. In spite of Jesus’ popularity, there is now a reasonable pathway to His execution.

Yet Jesus willingly goes ahead with this plan. God ordained and designed this. Even though human participants think they are accomplishing their own plans, they will ultimately serve the Sovereign Lord. Jesus' death would be no accident. Nor would it be a just punishment for a crime he committed. It was a plot undertaken to get rid of him.

Now you might say, well that's an interesting or uninteresting history lesson. But what does this have to do with us this week? Well what if we add two little words to the revelation of this passage. **Jesus would certainly be killed FOR ME.** How have we responded to Jesus who certainly and willingly was killed for us?

Some of us may respond like the religious leaders – deceitful about our spiritual lives and opposed to Jesus. Oh we may not act like this is the case outwardly. But inwardly we are opposed to any rule of Jesus over our lives. I do this when I want to go my own way; or justify something I am doing. Or this can happen when we come to God and want Him to do something for us. We make promises. We may even change our lives for a while in our attempt to get something out of God. But if He doesn't deliver what we want, then we get angry or defiant and turn away from Him.

I remember a time in my life when I was very angry with God for a while with what I was going through. I could see no good purpose in it. I could see no good reason for it. So I just raged against God. He silently bore with my accusations. Through the Scriptures and other people, slowly but surely, I began to come through that time. Only in the last years have I begun to see the good that could come out of that difficult time. But while I was going through it, I was God's opponent.

You might be going through a time when life hasn't turned out like you thought it would or it isn't going well right now. Several things have come together that leave you at the end of your resources or your energy or your hope. God may be doing something that needs to happen. God may be doing something in you that you don't want to face but need to face. Instead of turning away from Him, I plead with you to turn to Him and let Him lead you through whatever is happening right now.

Another way we may have responded lately to Jesus who was willingly killed for us is like the disciples where our priorities are out of order. They failed to see that this extravagant display of love by this woman was the greatest priority at that moment. They get angry. This does not fit their paradigm of ministry. To stop and celebrate or stop and show extravagant love or stop and worship is not very productive. Or so it seems.

But sometimes, stopping to love, worship and celebrate Christ are exactly what's needed. That's what we try to do each Sunday we come together. Stop the regular routine of life to worship Him. In a couple of weeks we are going to be stopping the regular routine of our Sunday's to celebrate something He's done with the mortgage retirement celebration. These pauses help us remember the beauty of the Lord and the reality of beauty in our world which sometimes looks pretty gray. So if our priorities are misaligned, we need to return to worship and closeness with Christ as our number 1 priority.

Maybe we've been a little like Judas lately. What was it that set Judas off? Was it a realization that Jesus was not going to be the kind of Messiah that Judas wanted? Was it greed? Was it his attempt to position himself most favorably because it didn't seem like this Jesus experiment was working out?

We can all have a little Judas in us when God doesn't act like we want Him to. Or when God doesn't conform to our expectations or when God doesn't answer our prayers like we want them answered. How do we respond when that happens? I think Judas' biggest problem was that Jesus didn't turn out to be what Judas expected. Judas saw some great things about Jesus. But he didn't see Jesus capitalize on them to bring about what Judas wanted – a powerful, revolutionary Messiah, who reestablished Israel to greatness.

I can't be sure about this because we're not told what motivated Judas. But we are in danger of following His footsteps if we do not submit our expectations of God to the revelation of God which includes times when we don't understand what's going on. God has revealed much about Himself through His Word, through Christ and through creation. Yet His ways are higher than our ways. It is certain that some things will happen in our lives that we don't understand or see purpose in now. But God is at His work accomplishing His greater purposes.

When things don't turn out like we thought or when He doesn't answer like we expect, we have to go back and check our expectations against His revelation. Does God promise us an easy life? Does God promise us a trouble free life? Does God promise that everything will be okay? Does God guarantee unending prosperity, health and wealth? No.

But He does promise to never leave or forsake us. He does promise to work all things together for good. He is the God who can bring good out of difficulties. He is the God who can transform tragedies into a sort of triumph. He is the God who heals, helps and perseveres. He is the God who sent His Son to die so we can look forward to an eternity with Him where we will experience unending life, joy, health and wholeness. But not during this life.

When we get that straight, we can begin to live life with a God centered perspective. I don't think Judas ever got there. I think he thought that Jesus was going to usher in an era where life would be glorious, powerful and easy. When it became apparent that Jesus would not be the revolutionary Messiah but the suffering Messiah, Judas said, "I'm done."

We need to guard against thinking we can mold God into our image. He's God. We're not. Instead, we need to walk in and with Him through our days.

All of us need to respond more often like Mary did towards Jesus. When I think about this scene, I marvel at it yet I'm uncomfortable with it. It's weird to me to think about someone pouring oil or perfume over my head at a dinner. But maybe if I thought of an appreciation banquet in Jesus' honor, I could get my head around this a little more. Say that I was charged with holding an appreciation banquet for Jesus – I had to pay for it. It was \$50 a plate for 500 people. So this would cost me \$25000. Would I do that for Jesus?

Would, I spend \$25000 for an event that could last a few hours? Think about how many kids I could sponsor in the third world with that money. I could help support some missionaries. I could stock up the food bank of St. Albert. I could help out people who are out of work.

\$25000 for one appreciation night? On top of that, this man is going to die in a couple of days. Is it really worth spending that much money on someone whose days are numbered? Yet, He's going to give up His life so that I can have life. What he's about to accomplish will bring real kingdom life to people around the world through centuries of time. Yes, it's \$25,000 now. But I can always support the poor.

I can get my head around this a little more when I think of Mary's gift this way. Yet, we do not live in this exact circumstance. Jesus will never have to die again. The sacrifice has already been made. Yet, I am still compelled to offer an extravagant display of love to Christ. I may not have \$25000 to spend at a banquet. But I have each day to offer to Him as a gift. I have one life to offer as a gift. I have the opportunities before me to use to proclaim His greatness to all I encounter. So do you. When I remember that He was going to be killed for me it heightens my love and my response.

Jesus was certainly killed for you & me. How will we respond to His tremendous act of love?