

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 16 Matthew 26:1-75

Two Days until the Passover

Matthew 26: ¹ When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, ² "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is *to be* handed over for crucifixion."

Jesus does not sugarcoat His words. He clearly states that after two days He will be crucified. It is after 6:00 pm, on Tuesday night; therefore, Wednesday has already begun in Jewish life. Both Wednesday and Thursday will conclude before the officials take Him into custody.

Plot in the Court of Caiaphas

Matthew 26: ³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; ⁴ and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. ⁵ But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

In the late evening hours of Tuesday, or possibly the early hours of Wednesday, the religious leaders meet in secret to devise a plan to kill Jesus. Part of the group fears repercussions from doing anything during the seven days of Passover. The meeting ends with only two certain facts; they want to catch Him without the knowledge of the people and they want to kill Him. However, the meeting with Caiaphas ends with no clear plan as to how they will accomplish their task.

Jesus At Simon the Leper's Home

Matthew 26: ⁶ Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined *at the table*. ⁸ But the disciples were indignant when they saw *this*, and said, "Why this waste?" ⁹ "For this *perfume* might have been sold for a high price and *the money* given to the poor." ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. ¹¹ "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. ¹² ¹² "For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. ¹³ "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

Jesus does not return to Jerusalem on Wednesday, April 5th, AD 30. He stays in Bethany and visits the home of Simon the leper, a man healed sometime during His ministry, but he is probably not the leper who was healed after the Lord delivered the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 8:6. The sermon occurs in Galilee and a leper who lived in Judah would not have had the luxury of traveling that far from home.

At Simon's house, a woman anoints Jesus' head with expensive perfume. The Gospel of Mark reports the same story but John's record says she anoints His feet. Both are correct. When she pours the perfume over His head, she will rub it down His body to His feet. Jesus confirms this action in verse 12.

¹²⁵ Deuteronomy 15:11

The perfume is taken from an alabaster jar carved from either carbonate of lime or sulphate of lime stone and is either white or yellow. It comes from the alabaster mountain in Egypt, the place where the stone is primarily mined in the region. All ancient writings reveal that expensive oils and perfumes were kept in alabaster jars shaped much like an unopened rosebud.

The woman is Mary of Bethany, Lazarus' sister, according to the other gospels. John 12:4 says the perfume could be sold for 300 pence, or a year's wages. Judas, who objects to Mary's use of the perfume, is also the money handler for the 12 apostles and a thief, according to Jesus. Judas uses the excuse that the money can help the poor. Poor people remain poor because of choices that keep them poor, and there will always be poor people, according to Jesus. He says that the oil is preparing Him for His burial. Because of her action that day, wherever the gospel is preached in the world, Mary of Bethany is remembered.

Chief Priests and Judas

Matthew 26:¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests¹⁵ and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.¹²⁶ ¹⁶ From then on he *began* looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

Judas must need money and we can only speculate as to his need. Mary is willing to pour out a gift of love on the Lord worth 300 pence, yet Judas is willing to sell Him for 30 pieces of silver. Seeing all the oil wasted on the Lord stirs Judas' heart and he focuses on it as he walks about two miles into Jerusalem to betray the Lord by making a deal with the priests. But notice that he will not hand Jesus over for just any amount. "What will you give me?" he says, indicating that they will have to make his betrayal worthwhile. Thirty pieces of silver are enough to buy his betrayal. The price of a common slave purchased at the market; it is also enough to satisfy Judas.

Some believe that Mary's anointing and Judas' deal occur on Tuesday evening, but it is quite possible that both transpire on Wednesday, April 5th, AD 30.

First Day of Unleavened Bread – Passover Preparation

Matthew 26:¹⁷ Now on the first *day* of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"¹⁸ And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I *am to* keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" ¹⁹ The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.¹²⁷

Two great Jewish festivals which occur simultaneously are mentioned in this passage, both originating in the story of the Exodus. On Nisan 14th, 1445 BC, the Israelites killed a lamb and roasted it in preparation for the 10th plague that would occur after dark. At sundown, roughly 6 pm, the new day began in Jewish life in Egypt, and on Nisan 15th when the Israelites sat down to consume the Passover meal. In Jesus' day, the same schedule is followed as a memorial festival to the original event. On Thursday, Nisan 14th, the lamb is killed and roasted. The Passover meal is eaten when dark falls at 6 pm as Friday, Nisan 15th, AD 30 begins. The Feast of Unleavened Bread will continue for seven days after the sole

¹²⁶ Exodus 21:32; Zechariah 11:12

¹²⁷ Deuteronomy 16:5-8

Passover celebration. Therefore, the apostles make all the preparations on Thursday for the meal that evening.

Passover

Matthew 26: ²⁰ Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples.

Shortly after 6 pm on Nisan 15th, AD 30, Jesus and the apostles gather in the upper room for their final private meeting.

Matthew leaves a great deal of material out of the Passover story. The other gospels give a fuller description because their audiences are not very familiar with Jewish practices. Matthew does not need to explain the Passover supper to his readers because they have celebrated it for over 1475 years. However, Matthew does describe the actions of the betrayer at the table. The other gospels indicate that the eleven apostles miss the meaning of Judas' dipping his bread in Jesus' bowl.

One Will Betray

Matthew 26: ²¹ As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." ²² Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" ²³ And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. ²⁴ "The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."¹²⁸ ²⁵ And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus said to him, "You have said *it* yourself."

In that day, sharing one's bread and dipping it in another's bowl tie the two in a bond of friendship; however, it is not the case with Judas and Jesus. To them it is the sign of the Lord's betrayer. Judas himself denies that he is the betrayer indicating his full awareness of the purpose of the moment.

Lord's Supper

Matthew 26: ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."¹²⁹ ²⁹ "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." ³⁰ After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Judas is still with the apostles even though Jesus has announced the method by which his evil plans will be detected. He will take part in the Lord's Supper with the others. Neither the foot washing nor the lengthy narratives of the arguments between the apostles about who will be the greatest, telling Peter He will pray for Him in his denial, Jesus' comforting words about Him going to prepare a place for them and the promise of His return is mentioned here. All are absent in Matthew's Gospel in favor of the simple breaking of the bread and the giving a piece to each man as a symbol of His body.

When Jesus handed each man a piece of bread He changed the order of the ceremony that had been in place for over 1475 years. It is a new custom that they are to remember and

¹²⁸ Psalm 41:9

¹²⁹ Exodus 24:6-8

repeat as often as they can. The wine is also used as a symbol of His blood that is about to be shed to allow Him to receive the forgiveness of sins of the people of the world.

Bread is a staple in Jesus' day but it is not easy to eat, especially if it is unleavened bread as is the case in this supper. Liquid of some type is always used to soften it so it can be chewed. In this case, it is quite possible that they used wine to soften the bread. But the Lord does not allow that to be the sole use of the wine. He purposefully has each one of them take a drink as part of the new ceremony. The Lord's Supper is a picture of the complete fulfillment of all that the Passover symbolized and foretold. The Gospel of John says that at the end of the supper Jesus approaches Judas with His cup and bread. Judas takes a portion and dips it in the Lord's cup. Jesus says to Judas, "Do what you must do quickly." Judas leaves the upper room and the other apostles have failed to see the fulfillment of the sign that points to Judas as the betrayer.

The Lord continues to teach the apostles late into the evening and they finally leave the room together. They sing a song, most likely a Hebrew Psalm from the Old Testament. We can only speculate, but it was probably one sung in past years during the Passover season. Psalms 113 through 118 are possibilities as well as Psalm 136.

On the Way to the Mount of Olives

Matthew 26: ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'¹³⁰ ³² "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Matthew fails to record the lengthy conversation between the Lord and His 11 apostles as they journey through the city, across the Kidron Valley, and up to the Mount of Olives. Rather, he focuses on the Lord's single mention of a prophecy that is about to be fulfilled. In that garden that evening, when the Lord is arrested in fewer than two hours, all of His followers will scatter like birds. Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled.

Jesus also foretells His plans for after His resurrection. The gospels reveal that He will see most of them on the day of His resurrection and that He will go ahead of them to meet them in Galilee when they arrive.

Peter's Promise

Matthew 26: ³³ But Peter said to Him, "*Even* though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this *very* night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

Peter's reply to Jesus' statement that they will all scatter is met with another prophecy; Peter will deny the Lord three times before the crowing of the rooster that night. Even though Peter claims his faithfulness to the death, he will not keep his word and neither will the remaining ten apostles.

Gethsemane is a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives about three-quarters of a mile from Jerusalem's eastern wall. It is there that Jesus tells all of His apostles to sit while he goes just a bit further to pray. Although we do not know the place where Jesus will pray, the apostles do because He tells them where He is going when He says, "While I go over there and pray." The Lord does not ask these men to pray.

¹³⁰ Zechariah 13:7

With Peter, James and John

Matthew 26: ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

Eight of the apostles are left behind as the Lord takes Peter, James and John with Him a few steps further. He shows His human grief and distress even to the point of death to these three men. Jesus seems to be asking them for a measure of human sympathy in His distress. Jesus asks only these three men to keep watch with Him. He then walks a little further to have a necessary and private conversation with the Father.

With the Father

Matthew 26: ³⁹ And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

Probably just a short distance past the three but still in eyesight of the eight, Jesus falls on His knees, His face on the ground, and pleads with His Father. The cup is a metaphor for His approaching death. Back in Matthew 20:22, Jesus warns James and John that they do not understand the cup from which He is about to drink. The time has finally arrived for Him to drink from the cup. He has spoken of His death for more than three years and His humanity is instinctively distressed as His death approaches rapidly. However, His divinity instinctively defers to the will of the Father. The trip to Calvary is the culmination of His reason for coming to earth as a baby to ultimately provide forgiveness of sin. ¹³¹

Found Them Sleeping Three Times

Matthew 26: ⁴⁰ And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you *men* could not keep watch with Me for one hour? ⁴¹ "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." ⁴³ Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. ⁴⁵ Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

After an hour, the Lord returns to Peter, James and John only to find that they are sleeping. His words show His disappointment and He repeats His original charge to them, but this time He requests that they pray at the same time so that they will not fall into temptation. We do not know the specifics of the temptations these men are about to face except for Peter who will deny knowing Him three times. Whatever might tempt them will come about because of the weakness of their flesh, not an unwilling spirit or desire.

The Lord's second conversation with the Father is fairly short. His words, "Your will be done," are a confirmation of His willingness to fulfill His purpose.

Returning to the three men, the Lord finds them sleeping again. He repeats His second charge and returns to speak with the Father. For the third time He returns to them and

¹³¹ Matthew 26:27-28

again they have failed to stay awake. He wakes them and charges them to ready themselves for the events to come in the next few moments. Judas is on his way to betray Him. Surely the other eight have seen the Lord's coming and going and they will now join Him as the crowd approaches with Judas.

Large Crowd and Judas

Matthew 26: ⁴⁷ While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, *who came* from the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him." ⁴⁹ Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. ⁵⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Friend, *do* what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

The Sanhedrin and the council of priests have sent a cohort of men that make up the crowd, the band of soldiers from Antonia¹³² and the temple guard. ¹³³ The crowd of soldiers and police are armed with knives, clubs and lanterns to light the way even though it is a full moon that night.

The kiss is given. It is the sign, but it is not an unusual sign on the surface. It is the common greeting of the day, but Judas kisses only the One he is betraying so the soldiers will not be mistaken. How sad is it that the Lord is betrayed by one of His own, a man chosen to be with Him through the previous two years, experiencing the power invested in the apostles by Him and knowing everything that the other eleven know. The Lord is betrayed from within His own circle.

Sword and the Ear

Matthew 26: ⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. ⁵³ "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ "How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, *which say* that it must happen this way?"

Surely the apostles want to split the man's head. Who is the apostle? Neither Matthew, Mark, nor Luke reveals his name most likely because he was still alive when their gospels were written. But John is not in such a situation because he is the sole surviving apostle when he writes his gospel. According to John, Peter is the man who found the two swords in the upper room when Jesus asked for one. It would be needed for this very moment and Peter uses it. ¹³⁴ Whose ear is cut off and healed by the Lord? John also reveals that it is Malchus, the leader of the council's guard.

Jesus Questions the Crowd and Disciples Flee

Matthew 26: ⁵⁵ At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as *you would* against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. ⁵⁶ "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

¹³² John 18:3

¹³³ Luke 22:52

¹³⁴ John 18:10 and Luke 22:38

If the military crowd had come to arrest Jesus as a thief, they would have had a warrant for His arrest stating the crime He had committed. However, they do not seek Him as a thief but rather as a robber, one who is hiding from justice after being convicted. Warrants are not needed to bring in those who are already convicted, so they have come to arrest Him as such.

Why did they not seize Him on Sunday, Monday or Tuesday when He was in their temple in clear sight of everyone? Why are they seizing Him in the dark of night instead of the light of day? Neither question matters. Jesus has all the power to subdue the entire cohort of people in the garden that night but He does not act because He has resigned Himself to the cup that He has come to earth to drink. To fulfill Scripture, He gives Himself over to the crowd and, as He had prophesied less than two hours before, all the apostles scatter like a covey of quail.

To Caiaphas

Matthew 26: ⁵⁷ Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. ⁵⁸ But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.

The leaders of the Jewish people which include the entire Sanhedrin and priestly order are waiting for the arrival of Jesus in Caiaphas' council room. Not one of them accompanies the soldiers sent to arrest Jesus. They trust the deal arranged with Judas and gather around Caiaphas expecting to accomplish what they have purposed to do.

Matthew's narrative leaves Peter in the courtyard among the officers and John is in the council room where Jesus is standing before all the elders. In John's account, John goes to the doorkeeper to arrange for Peter to come into the council room.

False Witnesses

Matthew 26: ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. ⁶⁰ They did not find *any*, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, ⁶¹ and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?" ⁶³ But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN."¹³⁵ ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; ⁶⁶ what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!" ⁶⁷ Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him, ⁶⁸ and said, "Prophecy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

As judges, the Sanhedrin and priest cannot act as witnesses, so they must find some. That night no credible witnesses can be found. Furthermore, none of the testimonies of the false witnesses agree, posing a huge problem for the leaders.

¹³⁵ Isaiah 27:13; Zechariah 9:14

Finally, two witnesses come forward repeating the Lord's words out of context. Matthew's quotation is not found in his gospel but it is in John's.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Jesus did say the words but He was speaking about the destruction of His body, not the physical temple. However, the testimonies of the two witnesses do not agree so the elders cannot honestly use them against Him even though they try. Because the witnesses do not agree, Jesus does not respond to the accusations.

When provoked by the high priest to state whether He is the Christ or not, Jesus responds by saying, "You have said it yourself." With these words ringing in the ears of the elders, He has admitted and claimed that He is the Messiah and the Son of God. They are words of blasphemy. What Caiaphas has done is illegal in the Jewish system; the accused cannot be compelled to testify. Not only does Caiaphas compel Him to testify; he also adjures Jesus by a vow to the living God, a phrase reserved for placing a witness or culprit under oath.

Jesus' answer is not simply that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, but that He will one day return as judge and Caiaphas will be the culprit if his heart does not change.¹³⁷

To Caiaphas, the words of Jesus are blasphemies and in the hearts of the majority of the Sanhedrin, He is worthy of the death penalty, but the Jewish council does not have the power to put Him to death. They are the religious judges and they need the help of the civil judges. Unable to kill Him, they beat and poke fun at Him.

Peter's Denials

Matthew 26:⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."⁷⁰ But he denied *it* before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."⁷¹ When he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."⁷² And again he denied *it* with an oath, "I do not know the man."⁷³ A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are *one* of them; for even the way you talk gives you away."⁷⁴ Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed.⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Peter returns to the courtyard when they begin to beat Jesus. He is approached by a girl who asks a question and he denies his association with the Lord. Twice more he denies the Lord and then the rooster crows just as Jesus had foretold. His voice and his Galilean dialect give him away. He cannot answer them with the Judean guttural speech patterns. Peter's heart is broken as soon as he hears the rooster. He is guilty of denying Jesus before the Father but his heart is dreadfully repentant to the point of bitter tears. The Lord will have pity for Peter's bleeding heart but we can only wonder about what the Lord is thinking about Judas at this moment in time.

¹³⁶ John 2:19

¹³⁷ Isaiah 27:13; Zechariah 9:14