

February 28, 2010/ Matthew 26:1-16 (ESV¹)

Matthew 26:1 When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples,

Jesus has been talking about His second coming and His judging and glory and power at the end of time ... He now reminds the disciples once again of His suffering to come ... He tells them that before He reigns as king, He must die as the eternal sacrifice ... this is the central fact of all history ... as the apostle Paul put it **Galatians 6:14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**

2" You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

Jesus, as usual, refers to Himself as the "Son of Man" ... the disciples, and all good Jews, would have heard that as a clear claim to divinity and Messiahship ... the phrase is used in Daniel 7 that we've read repeatedly in the past weeks ... **Daniel 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.**

3Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,

this appears to be an executive subcommittee of the Sanhedrin ... these are the official representatives of the Jewish people ... and they come to the rejection of their Messiah ... they gather at the palace of Caiaphas, who was high priest from AD 18 to AD 36 ... he was a shrewd politician ... he lasted for 18 years in the job of high priest ... from 37 AD to 67 AD and the destruction of the temple, the Romans appointed and deposed 28 different high priests! ...

4and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

5But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

these guys have a real problem here ... they recognize Jesus' popular following ... after all, He's come into Jerusalem on palm Sunday to the shouts and cheers of a huge throng ... He's drawn big crowds teaching in the city ... people are flocking to Him, hoping He's going to be Messiah, their great liberator ... and if they arrest Him in sight of the people, there's going to be a riot ... they've got to get it done somehow "by stealth" ... chronologically, they must catch Him "during the feast" lest He get away ... but the plan of man seems to be to put off the execution until the crowds are gone ... there is that plan and there is the plan of God, revealed by Jesus in verse 2 ...

before saying how this all comes together, Matthew cuts to an incident that stands in stark contrast to the intrigue and hostility of the gathering of the leaders of the people and the complicity of Judas shown after this incident ... we go to Bethany and an anointing of the Messiah/the Christ/ the anointed One ...

6Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,

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Simon is otherwise unknown to us ... we know that Jesus has raised His friend Lazarus at Bethany, where Lazarus lived with Mary and Martha ... presumably Simon is one Jesus healed (otherwise he wouldn't be giving a dinner party) ... some have speculated that perhaps he was father of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha ...

7a 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.

here is what gets called an impractical, extravagant act ... but it is one done selflessly and from a sincere heart ... it is an expression of deep gratitude and love ... almost surely it is a matter of real financial sacrifice on her behalf ... the spikenard was worth perhaps a whole year's wages for a common person, as much as it would take to feed a crowd of 5,000 people ... and she pours it on the head of Jesus, an anointing for the anointed One ... it may very well be that it's her way of saying that "this is Messiah" ...

8And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste?"

note that it's not Jesus' enemies that object, but rather the disciples ...

9For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."

we know this impulse ... it says that we're more righteous than "they" are, because instead of having a fancy building "we" have used the money for "ministry" ... but there are all sorts of things wrong with this impulse ... at its heart, it is covetous ... we really wish "their" resources were under "our" control ... it's not really our business at all what someone else does with what God has entrusted them with ... we're responsible for what we do with what He's given *us* to manage ... and we're wrong if we think that a genuinely selfless display of devotion to Christ and expression of high esteem for Him is ever inappropriate ...

the disciples' word "waste" is an interesting indictment ... it is a waste to devote to only the Creator some part of what He has given us to use? ... if it doesn't "benefit" humans in some immediate and tangible way, it's a waste? ... really? ...

10But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.

a "beautiful" thing ... a "noble" thing, an "admirable" thing ...

11For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.

our obligation to care for the poor is always present ... that's just taken as given ... this doesn't in any way cancel that obligation ... **Deut. 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.'** ... but this is not ordinary day-to-day stuff here ... this is the anointing of Jesus before the crucifixion ...

12In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.

this seems to assume that Jesus was saying that a criminal's body is not given a proper burial, and that He fully expects to be executed like a criminal ...

13Truly, 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."

the fragrance of the lovely, beautiful, noble, admirable thing this woman did lasts on to you and me ... everywhere the teaching, and far more importantly, the sacrificial death and resurrection of our Lord are told, so also is this act of devotion ...

14Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests

then ... immediately after the event in Bethany ... we pick up again from the dilemma in verse 5 ... the one called Judas "Iscariot" ... the name may have designated his home town ... some have speculated that instead it indicated he belonged to a radical anti-Roman group ...

he "went" ... why did he go? ... the truth is that we aren't told and don't really know ... people have speculated about that for 2000 years ... maybe he was disenchanted, having decided that Jesus was acting more like a defeatist than a liberator, and that it was time to get out while the getting was good ... maybe he's regretting 3 years spent on what looks now like a failing enterprise ... there has been speculation that he was jealous of the places of trust held by other disciples ... maybe he was revolted by the scene of Mary anointing Jesus and appalled that Jesus had permitted it ... and some have speculated that perhaps he was trying to force Jesus' hand, thinking that somebody needed to do something to get Jesus to use His power to get on with the revolution ... maybe it was a mix of some or all of these, but for some reason he went ...

15and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.

"What will you give me?" ... those are words that should make our blood run cold ... the man has access to all that one really needs, the presence of the Savior ... and his question is "What else can I have?" ...

thirty pieces of silver ... not zero, but not very much either ... it's the price that the OT prescribed for compensation if one's ox gored and killed another person's slave ... some commentators speculate that inflation by this time probably made it worth a 10th of that much ... Barclay in the 1950's made the calculation that the price was on the order of 5 British pounds ... Hendriksen in 1973 made it about \$20 ... in any case, it's surely not much of a price for betraying the Author of the universe ... not even the kind of price one would expect to receive as a ransom for a minor public figure ... its smallness indicates the low regard of the chief priests for Jesus and how little Judas thinks of the implications of what he's doing ... it surely also echoes the Messianic reference in

Zec 11:12 Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.

where God's chosen shepherd is rejected and paid little ... whatever the motivation for this betrayal, the low price of thirty pieces of silver stands in stark contrast to the great extravagance of the anointing ...

16And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

the matter is effectively settled at this point ... the die is cast ... Judas is going to betray Him ... the leaders have their means of a "stealthy" arrest ...