

# Matthew 26:1-30: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Matthew chapter 26 verses 1 to 30. 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. But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.
- For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. 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.
- 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.
- Now on the first day of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover? He said, Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, The teacher says, My time is at hand.
- [ 1 : 4 5 ]     I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve.
- And as they were eating, he said, Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me. And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, Is it I, Lord?
- He answered, He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it had written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.
- It would have been better for that man if he had not been born. Judas, who would betray him, answered, Is it I, Rabbi? He said to him, You have said so.
- Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread. And after blessing, it broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
- [ 2 : 5 1 ]     I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day, when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
- At the beginning of Matthew chapter 26, we read that Jesus finished all of these sayings. There's a sense of completeness and conclusion. These aren't just a random assortment of statements and stories, but a clearly defined and rounded body of teaching.
- We have similar expressions in chapter 7 verse 28, chapter 11 verse 1, chapter 13 verse 53, and chapter 19 verse 1. And this is the last of the great teaching discourses that make up the bulk of Matthew's gospel.

I've argued that Jesus' teaching in Matthew is a complete body of teaching. It's not just a drab bag of different sayings that are ordered in random order. Rather, it follows a pattern all the way through, and it concludes with a condemnation in chapter 23, followed by the casting of a sentence in chapters 24 and 25.

Jesus once again foretells his death. The Passover is coming. After two days, the third day after that, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.

[ 4 : 06 ] Now he connects his death with the event of the Passover, inviting association with the Passover lamb, with the death of the firstborn, with the passing through the Red Sea, and all these other elements.

Jesus has spoken about his forthcoming death before, but hasn't connected it with the Passover in the way that he does here. The chief priests, after this, plan the plot to arrest and kill Jesus, and do so in the palace of the high priest himself.

This is a plot at the very heart of the authority structure of that day. Jesus is a genuine threat to their power and their influence, and they don't want to capture and kill Jesus during the feast, but they end up doing just that later on.

After this, Jesus is in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, and a woman anoints his head with perfumed oil. This is an extravagant and a costly action, and Jesus declares that he's preparing him for his burial.

It's an action that values Jesus himself, Jesus in his person, in his presence, in his body. And the disciples are indignant over the cost of the ointment, but they fail to appreciate the value of the one to whom it is given.

[ 5 : 16 ] The value of that one more than deserving the extravagant gift that is given to him. Jesus answers by saying that the poor will always be with them, but that he will not be.

They're thinking purely in terms of cost and money and the value, but they don't see the value of the one they have with them. Now, perhaps we should think of this in relationship to the previous chapter.

Might there be a connection between Jesus' statement about his body and the fact that the poor will always be with us? Jesus in the previous chapter has spoken about the way that acts of devotion and care and concern for the poor, for the outcast, for the needy, for the homeless, for people in prison, etc.

can be expressions of love for him. And the hospitality and love shown to such persons are ways of showing our devotion to him. And this, I think, is part of what we're supposed to see.

True devotion to Jesus' body will be seen in our treatment of the poor. Judas goes to the chief priests after this and betrays Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

[ 6 : 22 ] There are a number of things in the Old Testament that seem to lie behind this. Exodus chapter 21 verse 32, with the law of the goading ox, for instance. Israel is like a goading ox, and Christ is the one who's valued like the servant who's goaded by that ox.

In Psalm 22 verse 12, Jesus is described, or the Messiah, or the one who's persecuted is described as being surrounded by bulls of Bashan, wild bulls. Jesus is also the rejected shepherd of Zechariah.

Zechariah 11 verses 12 to 13, valued at only 30 shekels of silver. This is a significant number. We've seen this number before in the Old Testament. Perhaps we should also connect it with the story of Judah in the sale of Joseph in Genesis chapter 37 verses 26 to 28.

In that passage we read, There would seem to be connections between Judah and Judas, even beyond the name that they share in common.

We should also observe the very sharp contrast here. Jesus has been valued for so little, 30 shekels of silver, in direct and sharp contrast to the action of the woman at Bethany that values his presence at the most extravagant cost.

[ 8 : 01 ] The immense expense of the ointment, but the cheapness of the sale of Christ. It reveals that what was really being valued was money. It was the ointment's monetary value that really mattered.

Not the poor, not Christ, but money. And here the way that Christ is sold for such a pittance is again a revelation of where value truly lies.

Throughout the book of Matthew there's a deep challenge to value systems. And perhaps we should remember at such points that Matthew was a tax collector, someone for whom the radical nature of Jesus' teaching about money might have particularly resonated.

We can think about Jesus' teaching concerning serving mammon, or maybe his teaching in regard to the temple tax, or maybe his teaching in paying taxes to Caesar, or maybe, again, his teaching to the rich young ruler that is asked to sell what he possesses and give it to the poor.

In all of these cases we're seeing something about the way that Jesus regards money, and how much it differs from the way that we usually regard money. It is literally the first of unleavened, and Jesus sends his disciples into the city to ready the celebration of the Passover together.

[ 9 : 16 ] Maybe in thinking about the leaven, and the reason for which it's brought up at this point, we should reflect upon the theme that's been in the book already of purging out the old leaven. The old leaven is going to be removed, and later new leaven will be added.

Perhaps at Pentecost we're supposed to see that as an adding of a new leaven. The old leaven is the sourdough that is transferred from bread to bread in succession, and it's an old principle that's perpetuated.

And Jesus has spoken about the leaven of the Pharisees and the scribes, their teaching, their teaching that is passed on from one generation to another, something that represents something unhealthy at the very heart that's passed on in succession.

And Jesus is going to remove that. That old leaven is going to be purged out, and a new one is going to be added. While eating the meal, Jesus declares to his disciples that one of them will betray him, and all of them wonder whether they will be the ones that will do it.

In Matthew's Gospel, that association of the disciples with the actions of Judas is interesting. In the other Gospels, we hear that Judas is the one that particularly protests the cost of the ointment.

[ 10 : 26 ] And we also know that he is the one that's going to betray Christ. But in this Gospel, the other disciples are indignant with him concerning the cost of the ointment, and they're also wondering whether they will be the ones that will betray him.

That line between Judas and the other disciples is really not so sharp here. It's not very clear. Through this, Jesus' knowledge of Judas' treachery is revealed. There's also a sense of destiny.

The Son of Man goes as is written of him in the Scriptures. And I would imagine that this is primarily referring to various anticipating stories. Stories of Ahithophel, stories of Judah and his relationship with Joseph, and other stories like that, along with certain prophecies, but primarily the stories that point forward, anticipate and call for some greater fulfillment.

Jesus and his disciples here are eating a Passover meal, or at least a Passover-associated meal. And it is absolutely crucial to grasp this if we're going to understand what Jesus does.

Jesus isn't just taking up physical food and drink. He's taking up elements that already bear great meaning within a meal that has considerable meaning and import.

[ 11 : 40 ] In Exodus chapter 12, the whole thrilling story of the plagues is interrupted to institute something. The celebration of the Passover that shall continue and institute the events of that particular celebration.

This is an event that looked forward to future realities, and also drew the people back to that past event, and enabled them to participate in that reality.

This meal, then, is freighted with meaning and symbolism already, and Jesus takes up that pre-existing symbolism and relates it to himself. In this case, that symbolism is that of the unleavened bread associated with the Messiah.

It's a broken and a distributed and participated body. It's a self-communication and symbol. But it's something that already has that meaning. It's not something that Jesus conjures up as a symbol out of thin air, nor is it best to understand this in terms of more metaphysical categories, if we're detaching it from the importance of the story.

It has a typological, a symbolic, a figural meaning, first and foremost, and that's how we'll understand how it is a self-communication of Christ. Jesus, in connection with the cup, speaks of the blood of a new covenant.

[ 12 : 54 ] The Sinai covenant had the blood of its covenant. We see that in Exodus chapter 24. And in Zechariah chapter 9 verse 11, there's blood of a covenant there that will deliver people from the watery depths.

There's blood poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12 speaks of such blood. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

This is for the forgiveness of sins. And the forgiveness of sins is not just individual forgiveness, having access to God. It's the forgiveness of the nation. It's the forgiveness of a nation that's been alienated from God.

God is going to restore his people, not just individual persons, but a people, and bring them in the Messiah into a new relationship with himself. Wine also anticipates the kingdom.

Christ will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until he does so in the kingdom. And so this celebration anticipates that celebration, the wedding supper of the Lamb. As we look in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we see that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is poised between two great moments in history.

[ 14 : 14 ] It looks back. It memorialises the Lord's death. And it does so until he comes. We're caught between those two events, the event that we memorialise in the past, and the event that we anticipate in the future.

And the fact that we're memorialising his death also highlights that the meaning of the Last Supper was pointing forward to and related to and grounded upon the actual sacrifice of Christ's death.

His self-communication in the elements of the supper was the self-communication of his death. A question to consider. In what ways might the contrast between the actions of the woman of Bethany and those of Judas help us to reconsider our relationship with money?

A question to consider.