

# Preparation for the Cross

Matthew 26:1-16

What would you do if you knew what was going to happen to you tomorrow? If, somehow, some way it was possible for you to look into the future—what would you do? Would seeing into the future change your behavior today? What if you knew the date of your death; would it change the way you live today? Would it make you live with more urgency?

A hearse in Norwich, CT, was spotted with this gentle reminder as a license plate: "U-2." We all face the certainty of death. Have we made the necessary preparations? The fact is, none of us knows what tomorrow holds.

But Jesus did. In Matthew 26, Jesus knows what is in store for Him. He knows that within just a few short hours, He would be arrested, beaten and bruised, and hung on an old rugged cross. He knows the tremendous pain and suffering that lies ahead. So He knows He must urgently prepare. In the few short hours of calm, Jesus is prepared for the cross. (*Jim Drake – Urgent Preparation*)

Let's note four types of preparation for Jesus' death on the cross.

## I. Jesus' Death was Predetermined by God (vv.1-2).

26:1 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings,  
that He said to His disciples,  
2 "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man  
will be delivered up to be crucified."

### A. Jesus Knew How He would Die.

"When Jesus had finished all these sayings," that is, when He completed His teachings concerning His return, He snapped his disciples back into the reality of the present by saying specifically that "**after two days**" He would be "**delivered up to be crucified.**"

This is the fifth time Matthew records Jesus telling His disciples about His upcoming death. In **16:21**, just after Peter makes his great confession, Jesus explicitly told them that He would soon "**suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised the third day.**"

In **17:12**, as Jesus descends from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John, He speaks of the martyrdom of John the Baptist who came as "**Elijah.**" Then He pointedly adds, "**Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.**"

Just a short time later, in **17:22-23**, Jesus says, "**The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men and they will kill Him and the third day He will be raised up.**"

Next we move to **20:17-19**, where Jesus again gives this dire prophecy, "**Behold we are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.**"

Now for the fifth time, Jesus tells His disciples that He is about to "**be delivered up to be crucified.**" Jesus knew He must die. He knew exactly how He would die. He knew He was born for this purpose.

From time to time unbelieving intellectuals will pontificate, "**Jesus was such a good teacher but he was a man before his times. His life was unfortunately snuffed out by fate before he had a chance to fully develop his social agenda.**" These are lies from the pits of hell. Jesus was born to die for our sins and He knew it.

After the last supper, Jesus said to the disciples, "**And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined...**" (Lk.22:22). The evening before he was to die, He prayed, "**Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour**" (Jn.12:27).

Peter would later cry out on the day of Pentecost that he was "**delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God**" (Acts 2:23). Rev.13:8 describes Jesus as "**the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world**." Isaiah prophesied, "**For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken**" (53:8). Dan.9:26 says "**Messiah shall be cut off.**" Zech.13:7 says, "**Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion, Says the LORD of hosts. Strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered...**"

Jesus was no reluctant victim but the willing sacrifice for our sins. He said, "**The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**" At His arrest He told the disciple if He wanted He could call down "**twelve legions of angels**" (Mt.26:53). In Jn.10:17-18, He said, "**Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.** This command I have received from My Father."

#### **B. Jesus Knew When He would Die.**

Jesus said He would die "**after two days**" and at "**the Passover.**"

That Jesus would die at "**Passover**" was no coincidence. As in the deliverance from Egypt, Passover was when the sacrificial lambs were slain for the sins of the people. They were merely symbols of Jesus' sacrifice as "**the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (Jn.1:29). As Isa.53:7 prophesied, "**He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.**" Thus Paul could say in 1 Cor.5:7, "**For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.**"

The Bible mentions several other occasions when people tried to kill Jesus. Herod tried to have him killed as an infant in Bethlehem. Lk.4 records an early visit to the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. His sermon so incited the people that they tried to throw Him off a cliff. He supernaturally passed through them and escaped (vv.16-30). Early on in His ministry, Jn.5:18 says, "**Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.**" To some Jesus was known as "**He whom they seek to kill**" (Jn.7:25). Jesus was born to

die, but He would die at the time, the place and the way sovereignly determined by God.

The time was not right for Jesus to die on any of these previous occasions. Now, however God's divine timetable was right and Jesus knew both HOW and WHEN He would die for our sins.

## II. Jesus' Death was Plotted by Jewish Leaders (vv.3-5).

3 Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people  
assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,  
4 and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.  
5 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among  
the people."

Wherever "Caiaphas" the "high priest" is mentioned in the Gospels it is always in connection with his murderous desires against Jesus. With his father-in-law Annas, the former high priest, he formed a partnership with Rome that kept their family in power. He saw Jesus as a threat to that power structure.

In an ever-escalating pattern for over three years Jesus had publicly exposed their hypocrisy and ungodliness. They had enough. They wanted to find some way to "kill" Jesus without upsetting the masses of pilgrims.

They wanted to seize Him as soon as possible but they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." Though they planned to put off the arrest for a few days, God had sovereignly chosen Passover as the time for the sacrifice.

Next we have the beautiful sacrifice of Mary contrasted with the treachery of Judas:

## III. Jesus' Death was Perfumed by Mary (vv.6-13).

6 And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper,  
7 a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly  
fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table.  
8 But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why  
this waste?  
9 "For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to  
the poor."  
10 But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you  
trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me.  
11 "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have  
always.  
12 "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My  
burial.  
13 "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the  
whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a  
memorial to her."

"Bethany" was just east of Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives. Perhaps Jesus and the disciples were sleeping there during the feast. While there, they were invited to a meal at the home of "Simon the leper." This was probably someone who had been healed by Jesus (cf. Mk.1:40-44).

As they recline at the table after dinner, "a woman," John tells us she was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, this woman "came to Him." She had in her hands "an

**alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil."** Mk.14:5 suggests the oil's value at "**over three hundred denarii**," nearly a year's wages.

Mary approached Jesus "**as He sat at the table.**" Mark says she "**broke the flask**" and Matthew says she "**poured it on His head**" as He sat there. She didn't pour out just a little. She emptied it. She held back nothing but gave it all up for Jesus. John says, "**the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.**" The others sat there for a few moments in stunned silence.

Suddenly, the extravagance of the gift overwhelmed them. They did the math and became "**indignant.**" They called Mary's gift a "**waste**" saying it could have been "**sold for much and given to the poor.**"

Then the rebuke came from the Master. Jesus asked, "**Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always , but Me you do not have always.**" Helping the "**poor**" and ministering to physical needs is always important as Jesus taught. However, this was an act of worship.

Jesus says, "**For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial.**"

Philip Keller writes, "The delicious fragrance ran down over His shining hair and thick beard. It enfolded His body with its delightful aroma. Even His tunic and flowing undergarments were drenched with its enduring pungency. Wherever he moved during the ensuing 48 hours, the perfume would go with Him: into the Passover, into the Garden of Gethsemane, into the high priest's home, into Herod's hall, into Pilate's praetorium, into the crude hands of those who cast lots for His clothing at the foot of the cross. This special right of perfuming the head and body was a rare ritual reserved only for royalty. Jesus recognized this and so did those around Him. It was a significant moment of momentous meaning."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus further said "**Wherever this gospel is preached... what this woman has done will be told as a memorial to her.**"

### ***Love's Response to Christ***

Love shows extravagance and lavishness. Love does not look for cheap bargains. Love gives the best. Mary loved this Savior who would pour out his life for her, and so she poured out on him that which cost her most.

Many Christians worship in a way that costs them nothing. Why? Their view of their salvation is cheap. Their knowledge of their sin is shallow. True worship is loving God with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul, and all our strength.

In response to the love of Christ for her, and in preparation of His death, Mary boldly came, broke the neck of the perfume bottle, and poured the entire contents upon the head and upon the feet of Jesus. Then, in great humility, she unbound her hair, which was a terrible thing to do in the Jewish culture. Instead of using a towel, she used her own hair, which Paul says is her glory, to wipe the feet of her Savior. This was bold worship! It was courageous, costly, humble worship!

But contrast the beauty of her worship with the ugliness of Judas' treachery: Mary was an instrument of grace, Judas an instrument of sin. Mary had the light of love, Judas the darkness of treachery. Mary openly worshipped; Judas secretly betrayed. She will always be remembered for her love. He will always be remembered for his betrayal.

## **IV. Jesus' Death was Prearranged by Judas (vv.14-16).**

**14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests**

**15 and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.**

**16 So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.**

What happened to Judas? That's a question Bible scholars have asked for centuries. He shared the same experiences as the other 11. He saw the miracles. He heard the teaching. He traveled with, ate with and lived with Jesus for 3 and ½ years. He had looked deeply into Jesus' eyes. He knew the Shepherd's voice. He had felt the Lord's embrace. How could he betray Him?

Judas betrayed Jesus because Judas never really knew Jesus. Like so many cultural Christians today, he honored Jesus with his lips but his heart was far, far away (15:8). Because of his unbelief and his greed he rejected the Christ of the cross. But without the Christ of the cross, we have no hope, no life, no forgiveness, and no Savior. Judas' actions eventually left him lost and alone, and he took his own life. He went out of this life lost and condemned because he would not accept the Christ of the cross.

In the late 1950's, Reinhold Niebuhr, Professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, was asked what he thought about the work of crusade evangelist Billy Graham. He declared, "Graham's preaching has set back Christianity 200 years."

Someone asked Billy Graham for his response to Niebuhr's statement, and he replied "If we have set back Christianity 200 years, we have failed, for our intent was to take it back 1900 years and to the cross." (Source: Jim McCullen)

We must lift up the cross because it is the only message we have: Jesus Christ crucified, raised from the dead. When Jesus said **"Take, eat. This is My body"** and **"Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins,"** he was speaking of the cross. You cannot be forgiven unless you go the way of the cross. You cannot have eternal life apart from the cross. You cannot be prepared to go to heaven unless you enter by way of the cross.

Jesus was prepared for the death He would face, are you? Come to the cross today. Find God's love poured out to you. Find forgiveness. Find eternal life. Find Jesus, the Savior of the world; the Savior of your soul.

And for those of us who have already come to the cross, let's not come alone. How can we be content to bask in the warmth of God's love and forgiveness when others are still lost? All around us are people who carry a heavy weight of sin. They are sick in their hearts from the burden they carry. You can see it in their eyes, read it in their faces, and hear it in their voices. They long for something better; they long to love and to be loved. Where can they go? We have the answer — and the answer is found in the cross of Christ.

The three weeks, as we get ready to celebrate the resurrection on Easter Sunday, God is calling us as a church to get the good news out so people can FIND IT HERE; so they can find Jesus and the life giving power of the message of His cross. Won't you join me in getting the word out?

<sup>1</sup> Philip Keller, *Rabboni*, pp.222-223.

I am thankful to Coy Wiley for the outline for today's sermon.