

STUDY 1 - MATTHEW 26:1-16

I have put possible questions in italics throughout the notes.

In these studies we are going to be looking at the last three chapters in Matthew – the events of the last supper, arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is important though to recognise that these events do not happen in isolation – we are jumping into a gospel 25 chapters in. This first study will help us set the context for what follows.

Due to the nature of these passages, the studies may seem a bit limited on application “what should we do.....” questions. Partly this is because the aim of these chapters is to point to what Jesus has done, and the right application is to worship him. Equally, I wanted to avoid the “be like the woman in Bethany, don’t be like Peter or Judas” moralistic type applications that are common when we study these passages sometimes as I’m not sure they are always helpful. However there will be important implications that flow from what we study.

Vs 1-5

As we begin Matthew 26, immediately we are faced with the fact that this chapter continues from chapter 25. “When Jesus had finished all these sayings”. Looking back at chapters 24 and 25 we see that Jesus has just been teaching his disciples about the coming of the Son of Man in glory. The Son of Man was Jesus’ favourite description of himself – it points to his incarnation (it can simply mean “human being”), but it also alerts those who know their Bible’s well to the figure in Daniel 7 who is given an everlasting dominion. Jesus has told a number of parables about his return and the judgement.

The shock of these opening verses in Matthew 26 is that Jesus now tells his disciples that “the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified”. Although this is not new information for the disciples Jesus is deliberately emphasising this “you know” (which can be a reminder “I have already told you”, or an emphasis “know this”). Jesus is also deliberately underlining the fact that this will happen at the Passover – he is beginning to show that he fulfils the Passover for his people (a theme we will see in the next study at the last supper).

There is a sudden scene change in verse 3 as Matthews attention turns to the Jewish leaders gathering and plotting against Jesus. They are clearly taking great care about how they want to get rid of Jesus, “by stealth” and they want to avoid antagonising the people. However by including these verses here Matthew is underlining that they are not in control of events. Jesus is! His death is not a case of the Jewish leaders securing a victory. They don’t want to do it during the feast, but Jesus says it will be done during the Passover. For all their stealth, God’s timing and purposes will be achieved.

“When Jesus had finished all these sayings”.....What has Jesus just been saying about himself as the Son of Man (see 24:44, 25:31). What is surprising about what Jesus is now saying will happen to the Son of Man?

What happens at the Passover? (to remind yourself, look up Exodus 12) What does Jesus say will happen at this coming Passover? Is this just a coincidence of timing?

What evidence is there that the chief priests are taking great care about how they arrest Jesus? What evidence is there in these verses that they are not in control of the situation at all?

Vs 6-13

The scene shifts for a third time in verse 6. It is important to notice that this little scene is out of chronological sequence in the gospel. John 12:1 tells us this happened “six days before the Passover”. Matthew is not being dishonest here – he is deliberately making a contrast between this woman’s actions and the actions of Judas and the chief priests by sandwiching her story between two short scenes with them in. As we’ll see, this incident also serves to explain a little about Judas’ actions.

Jesus and his disciples are at the house of Simon the leper (presumably cured, but his nickname has stuck). A woman (not named, but in John 12 we are told it is Mary) took some very expensive oil and poured it on Jesus head. The picture is one of extravagance – the fact the oil is “expensive” is underlined, in John’s gospel we are told it was from the highly esteemed Indian Nard plant.

The reactions of Jesus’ disciples show quite how extravagant this action was. The oil cost a lot – surely (they think) the money could have been put to better

use helping others? To them this action appears wasteful. They see a foolish action.

However Jesus does not see things that way. He sees that she has done a beautiful thing, because she has done it to him. Her extravagance was a reflection of the depth of her love for him. She recognised who he was and the value of who he was. Verse 11 is an important and serious statement about who Jesus is – if he were not God it would be deeply offensive! He is worth this extravagant love, and he has a claim on people far greater than any human being. It reminds us of other similar statement he has made in the gospel where he has emphasised the need to turn from family etc and follow him.

The other point Jesus makes is that he will not always be physically with his disciples. There will not be the opportunity to do what this woman has done very soon, as he will leave them. While he is present, no expression of love can be excessive. This woman was prepared Jesus for burial (verse 12). She, and not the disciples, has truly grasped what Jesus is about to do. Her action was an expression of faith as well as love.

Jesus begins verse 13 by saying “Truly, I say to you”, which in Matthew’s gospel emphasises that what is about to be said is important (see 25:45, 26:34). Note what is important – this gospel is going to be proclaimed, a gospel which centres on Jesus’ death, and the action of the woman (her love, extravagance and faith). Notice it is what this woman has done which is important, and not the woman herself. It is noticeable that in this section she is not named.

What words would you use to describe the actions of this woman in Simon’s house?

How do Jesus and his disciples differ in their response to it?

Verse 11 can sound jarring to our ears. Why should serving Jesus take precedence over serving human beings? (see also 8:18-22, 10:34-39, 16:24-26)?

What else has the woman been doing by her actions? (verse 12) How has this expressed her faith?

When Jesus says “truly I say to you” he is saying something very important (see 25:40, 45, 26:21, 34). What is Jesus saying here about:

- *The gospel*
- *What has just happened*

This incident does not seem to be in the right place in the gospel chronologically. Why do you think it has been put here by Matthew? How does it contrast with what’s going on around it? How does it fit in?

Vs 14-16

Matthew moves back to the plotters and betrayers in verse 14. However this is not unconnected to the scene in verses 6-13. It may be that the scene in Simon’s house was the catalyst for Judas decision to go to the chief priests – certainly he is very vocal in that scene when John records it. Was that the moment when his disillusionment prompted a decision to act? Certainly his primary motivation here is greed (a stark contrast to the woman). “What will you give me?.....

Although the chief priests must have been pleased to now have someone on the inside of the disciples to act as a betrayer, the price they gave was paltry for a human life. “30 pieces of silver” (about 120 days wage for manual labour). Even here there are hints of divine providence (see Zechariah 11:12-13).

What do Judas’ motives for betraying Jesus appear to be? How much do the priests value Jesus? How does this contrast with the woman in Simon’s house?