



Love and Betrayal

Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Matthew 26:1-16

July 28, 2013

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Introduction: We come this morning to the fifth and final section of this incredible gospel written by the Apostle Matthew. These last few chapters recount for us the closing scenes of Jesus' earthly ministry and everything in this gospel has been leading up to this – the betrayal, trial, crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have heard His incomparable teaching regarding true righteousness, the cost and calling of the gospel and of discipleship, have seen the many proofs of His person as the Son of God, the true Messiah -- the displays of His power and mercy in healing the sick, His mastery over creation, His power over death and demons, and now we come to the central reason for His incarnation, the fulfillment of the angel's words to Joseph: "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21, ESV)

In these last few chapters, we are standing on holy ground. It is here that we read how the Seed of the woman will have His heel bruised but will crush the Serpent's head. It is here that we behold the Great and Final Sacrifice of which all of the sacrifices of the OT were only shadows. Here we will see the blood shed by our great High Priest as the propitiation for our sin. Here we behold the Lamb of God slain, whose blood cleanses His people from all their sins. We see the death and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the mystery openly revealed of how it is possible that the Holy God can "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:26, ESV)

Everything else has been leading up to this zenith – the zenith of Christ's life, the zenith of the gospel, and the zenith of redemptive history – the only hope of fallen man. This is it. It is through the cross of Christ alone that God has provided the way for sinners to be saved, to be reconciled to Him, the Holy God, and to be united with Him forever. There is no salvation, no gospel, no Christianity apart from the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the emphasis that we see continually running through these chapters is composed of two complimentary truths regarding the cross. On one hand, Jesus goes obediently to a death that must happen according to the Scriptures, faithfully carrying out the will of the Father in order to redeem His people according to the fullness of time. And at the same time, we see the deliberate and responsible actions of those who are determined to do away with Him, primarily the Jewish leaders and especially the traitor, Judas. So God's eternal design and the wickedness of men is woven together into an intensely powerful drama – not just a story, but the truth -- which will conclude In Matthew's gospel with the ultimate triumph of Jesus as the Risen Lord of all.

Today the story is coming to the homestretch. We see that in verses 1-2, which serve as sort of an introduction to the last 3 chapters: "When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."" (Matthew 26:1–2, ESV) Now, don't read this as if you already know the end of the story. Try to imagine what it was like for the disciples to hear these words again from Jesus. It is not as if He had not spoken to them before concerning His coming passion. He had. From chapter 12 when He spoke about the sign of Jonah and forward, he had spoken more and more openly of what lay before Him. Jesus told them that this day was coming, but having just heard Jesus describe his coming in glory and power and majesty to judge all men, it would have been the furthest thing from their minds. They were thinking of future glory, but Christ was telling them clearly that there would be no crown without the cross, no exaltation without humiliation, no salvation without sacrifice. The time had come for Him to lay down His life for the sins of His people from every tribe, nation and tongue –for them.

But Jesus wants us to know something. He wants us to know that He knew the Father's plan and the Father's timing and He willingly embraced what was before Him. He knew the physical and spiritual agony of the cross, what salvation for His people would cost Him, and He willingly embraced it. Jesus the Christ was determined to magnify the grace of His Father, to serve the will of His Father, to accomplish the purposes of the cross for His Father's glory and to love His people to the uttermost. He was resolved. So Jesus, "... for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.."(Hebrews 12:2, ESV) For the joy of bringing many sons to glory, for the joy of perfectly fulfilling His Father's will, for the joy of fully displaying His glory as Savior, for the joy of freeing sinners trapped by the slavery of sin, for the joy of saving a people, redeeming and transforming rebels into white-hot worshippers of the Living God – He became a curse for us, He endured the wrath of God for us, He was crushed so that we might be forgiven, despising the shame.

Jesus did not let the shame and the ridicule and the derision that others would put upon Him move Him to abandon His mission at all, but stayed faithful to His calling to offer Himself as the sacrifice for sins, looking to the ultimate glorification of God in the salvation of sinners through His offering of His holy life. And He did it fully aware of what we were. “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6–8, ESV) At the right time Christ died for the ungodly and that time was here. He would die at the Passover, that special festival that marked the deliverance of the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt and from the judgment of the Death Angel, all of which only foreshadowed what would happen centuries later when Christ would deliver His people from the bondage of sin and slavery to Satan and from the eternal judgment of God.

And this text that we are looking at today is specifically written by Matthew as a story of contrasts – the contrast between the chief priests and elders, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and Judas the betrayer in light of Jesus’ coming crucifixion. He presents it in a sandwich format. He sandwiches the story of Mary’s love and adoration between the hatred of the chief priests and the treachery of the false disciple, Judas. He tells us of the wicked plans of the religious leaders, flashes back to the beginning of the week in Bethany, and then details the scheming of Judas. We start with

The Conspiracy of the Religious Leaders (v. 3-5) Matthew writes: “Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.”” (Matthew 26:3–5, ESV) The name, Caiaphas, is synonymous with intrigue, duplicity, scheming, treachery, self-preservation and deceit. At a time, under Roman occupation, when the high priesthood was sold or bestowed as a political favor and when the job security of that position generally lasted no longer than a few years, Caiaphas managed to hold on to his title and position for 22 years. So it is no surprise that at his behest, the chief priests and elders gathered in his palace to scheme and plot how to arrest and kill Jesus in the most efficient manner possible. From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus had been a thorn in Caiaphas’ side, a threat to his power, popularity and position. Caiaphas was concerned not with what was righteous, honorable or proper, but only with what was expedient,. It was he that said of Jesus, according to John: “It is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.”” (John 11:50, ESV) What he really meant, of course, was that it was better for him and for his position and

prominence that Christ should die. He was determined, along with the other religious leaders, to put an end to Jesus and the way that His undeniable righteousness exposed their hypocrisy and ungodliness and the way His ministry was a threat to their power and wealth.

The secrecy of their plans was made necessary because of Christ's fame with the people. He is held, at this point, in higher esteem than any of the priests or the elders in Israel. To avoid the confrontation and unrest that would accompany the open arrest of Jesus, these men plot to accomplish the arrest and murder of Jesus in the quietest way possible. So they concoct a plan to eliminate Jesus after the Passover, at least nine days later, and yet God's will cannot be opposed. They schemed and planned, to lay hold of Christ in 9 days, but the death of Jesus Christ would not be according to their schemes or timetable but according to the divine plan established before the foundation of the world. Christ would die at the Passover, the true Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world. In all of his scheming we see that truth – the truth about Christ, the truth of the gospel, the truth of his sinfulness and his desperate need for a savior – they were never a consideration for Caiaphas, only what would allow him to retain his imagined power, his imagined worth, his imagined control and his imagined glory.

In that, Caiaphas is not unlike the multitudes in our own day who refuse to consider the claims of the gospel, who refuse to consider the truth of Christ, those who prefer a pleasant fiction regarding themselves and their worth and power and glory, and ignore their desperate need for the Savior in order to hold on to the shabby, dilapidated, so-called life they have made for themselves. Like Caiaphas, they would rather Christ just quietly go away, the truth silenced so that they can continue in their self-deception that ends in eternal death. To them, Christ is worthless, someone to eliminate quietly and secretly. They simply do not know Christ's worth. And in contrast to them, and to Judas later in the text, Matthew shows us the

Extravagant Worship of Mary, the Christ-Lover (v.6-13) In a flashback to the beginning of the week, before the triumphal entry, Matthew tells us what took place in the house of Simon, a man who had been a leper but who had been healed by the miraculous power and grace of Christ and who had determined to hold a dinner in His honor. "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." (Matthew 26:6-7, ESV)

Combining the accounts of Matthew, Mark and John, we get a fuller picture of what was taking place. Simon held a dinner for Christ and the disciples in Jesus' honor. Lazarus was there, as was Martha who as usual was busying herself in the kitchen preparing the meal as the men reclined around the table. Mary was there too. Mary, who was always at Jesus' feet, who was always ready to hear her Master speak, who delighted in His presence, who loved being with Him was also at this dinner and her presence would soon be quite conspicuous. In the middle of the proceedings, quite to everyone's shock, she took an alabaster flask filled with spikenard, an exceedingly expensive fragrant oil, and, Mark says, she broke open the flask and anointed Christ's head and His feet with this oil – all of it. Without regard for anyone else in the room, John says: "Mary... took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:3, ESV)

Now listen, it was not uncommon, it was expected really, that you would anoint a guest with oil at a meal. It was a common and proper practice, especially in the days before deodorant, but what Mary did goes far beyond duty and obligation. This was an expression of lavish love, of deep devotion, of worship and honor extravagantly poured upon Christ. She was honoring and adoring the One who was going to die and rise again for her salvation, the One who was going to bear her sin, the One who loved her to the uttermost. Nothing was too extravagant, nothing was too costly, and nothing was too effusive to give to her King.

It was the most expressive, most passionate, most loving and significant thing that she could do at that moment to express her love for Jesus. She took this valuable oil, this treasure that she had, and poured it all upon Christ. She was not satisfied to give Him only a few drops, to give Him a token expression of her love. No, she broke the flask open and poured it all upon her Lord. She was intentional in her expression of love. She was real. This was not a show, not a sham. She was unconcerned with appearances or what other people might say about the extravagance of her devotion. The fact that there were those present that disdained her, that mocked and scorned what she did, did not matter for she only cared about blessing Jesus and expressing her love to Him. She was emotional in her gratitude. This was not a dry, dead, perfunctory sort of "thank you." This is no half-hearted overture; she holds nothing back as she expresses her feelings for the Lord. She was not tentative in her approach, but whole hearted. It is not that she was doing this to draw attention to herself. That is not her motive. Jesus would have rejected her had that been the case. She expressed her love in the best way that she could to the Lover of her soul, and she did it with abandon. Her act was intensely personal and that is probably what bothered the disciples the most. She expressed her love for Jesus

from the depth of her soul. It unnerved the disciples, shocked them, convicted them, offended them even. She understood the worth of Jesus in a way that even the disciples themselves had yet failed to grasp. You can see this in their response.

“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.” (Matthew 26:8-9) They were indignant. That is, they snorted like horses at what she had done. Really, it is Judas that says something first. John says: “But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.” (John 12:4–6, ESV) Judas is the first to ridicule her act of devotion, because he was a thief, but the whole of the disciples fall right into line with his thinking. This is a waste. The proper use of that perfume was not to waste it on anointing Jesus but to sell it and give it to the poor. Mark says they “scolded her.” Did they really believe this was a waste or was it a cover for their embarrassment and shame? I don’t know, but one thing is certain, Jesus wastes no time in defending her.

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.” (Matthew 26:10, ESV) “Why are you abusing her? Why are you giving her grief? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” A beautiful thing – a good, excellent, worthy, pleasing thing. Lavish, extravagant, costly, personal, thoughtful expressions of love are a beautiful thing to the Lord. He goes onto say even more.

“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.” (Matthew 26:11–12, ESV) He corrects them. The poor will always be with you and there is a time and a place for caring for the poor, but I will not always be with you. This is the time to love Me, to honor Me, to worship Me. She understood better than they did the reality of the times, the reality of what was coming. She anointed Christ for His burial, she acted out of faith and out of a heart that understood the significance and soon coming of His death and she loved Him for His loving her even unto death. Displaying an understanding of what Jesus had been teaching all along, that He would die for His people, she reckoned herself as one of His people and taking His words as divine truth, in love, she anointed Him for His death and burial.

What a scene. Judas and the other disciples ridiculed Mary, but Jesus vindicated her. She has anointed me for my burial. At best, no-one else in the house perceived the reality of Christ's soon death. At worst, nobody cared enough to do what she did. Mary, who loved Christ and had sat at His feet and not just heard but listened to His words – she above everyone else in Simon's home at that time, understood the worth of Jesus, really grasped His worth and personal, gracious, loving nature of His mission.

Mary anointed Jesus for His burial. How did Mary know what was coming when no one else did? Jesus had revealed it to her. None of the others really knew or understood, but she knew. She knew because Mary had chosen to listen. She knew what it was to have intimate fellowship with her Lord; the incomparable honor of sharing the deep things of Jesus' heart, sitting at Christ's feet, communing with Him, seeing Him for who He is.

And because she understood, Mary loved Jesus. That's the secret of her life. Many heard Jesus but never loved Him. Many were healed by Jesus, but never loved Him. Many watched Jesus with fascination, but never loved Him. Many speak of Jesus today, many read of Him, many hear of Him preached, many even quote Him, but never love Him. Mary did. We need to realize that we are called to be lovers of God before we are servants of God. We are called to be lovers of Jesus before we are servants of Jesus. Mary shows us that devotion to God must be the basis of the whole of our lives. Heartfelt devotion and the worship that comes from a heart of love must precede all else. Devotion to Jesus' Himself must exceed all our other agendas, all our other important and godly agendas have to be pursued in light of the priority of our love for Christ. And devotion to Christ is never wasted. In fact, Mary's action lives forever as a lesson for us.

Jesus said: "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." (Matthew 26:13, ESV) What she did, her love for Christ, her deep devotion to her Lord, would be remembered and spoken of as long and as far as the gospel was preached. She would stand as a shining priority of expressive love and devotion to Jesus born from faith and an understanding of His worth. But she was not the only one who made a mark in redemptive history. Someone else in that room would be forever remembered, not for lavish, personal love, but for

The Treachery of Selling Out the Christ (v. 14-16) “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.” (Matthew 26:14–15, ESV) In stark contrast to lavish love, the costly love of Mary, that declared the Christ was priceless to her, Judas asks: “What will you give me for Him. How much can I get for selling out Jesus?”

Judas goes and seeks to make a deal for the life of Christ. He seeks out the chief priests to betray Jesus. How they must have thought that Providence was smiling upon them – one of Christ’s own followers was willing to betray Him. What would make Judas do it? That is the big question. From an eternal perspective, we know that he was eternally chosen for this, chosen to be the betrayer of the Christ. Jesus knew his identity all along. In the eternal counsel of God, Judas would betray Christ, but why? God did not violate his will and force him to do this. He did it willingly. What made him do it, from a human perspective?

First, we know that Judas was never a true believer. He never really trusted Christ or believed the gospel, never truly honored Him as the Messiah. We know that he was a greedy opportunist, stealing from the bag, serving as the catalyst of the disciples’ indignation toward Mary. He was self seeking, looking to profit off of Christ and cut his losses. He was clearly disillusioned with the message of Jesus and the fact that He was not willing to use His might and power to overthrow the Roman government and elevate His disciples. But, in all of the reasons that Judas would choose to betray Christ, perhaps Matthew gives us one hint through this use of a flashback to Mary’s act of devotion. Perhaps Judas was bitter over the rebuke He received from the Lord for His opposition to her honoring and loving Christ, convicted by her realness and his fakery. He had had enough. He could not stand to see this woman elevated above himself, honored for her love while he was rebuked. Whatever the contributing factors, Judas grossly underestimated the worth of Christ, being willing to sell Him for the OT price of a slave gored by an ox. He was willing to sell Christ cheaply. He didn’t even strike a hard bargain with the priests, but simply took what they offered because, to him, Christ was worthless. The rest of Judas’ sorry life is summed up in verse 16.

“And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.” (Matthew 26:16, ESV) He spent the rest of his life looking for the opportunity to hand Jesus over to death. All that consumed him was his own foolish longing to trade the inestimable worth of Christ for a paltry sum. How sad and terrifying that he would do so.

A couple of lessons explode from this account of Judas' treachery. First we see that a man may enjoy great privileges, and make a profession of faithfulness, and yet all the time have a heart truly untouched by the grace of God. Judas had the highest possible privileges. He was an apostle, a companion of Christ. He heard Him preach, saw Him heal, watched all of His miracles, saw the perfection of His holiness, enjoyed the fellowship of the saints and he still betrayed Jesus because he never really loved him, was never really touched by the grace of God. The same can be true of us. You can read all the right books, listen to faithful preaching, do religious things, sing songs to Christ, be part of a great church, but never truly know Christ. Judas serves as a cautionary tale for the whole church. His life is motivation for us to pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23–24, ESV)

Second, we cannot help but see the utter foolishness of trading Christ for something that is utterly worthless, for what can ever satisfy our souls. He stands as a warning never to set our hearts to sin against Christ, to set our hearts to what we know is wrong. To plan to sin, to seek the opportunity to sin, is a soul-killing thing. And yet how many professing believers have done just that? You know some and I do too, who deliberately and knowingly planned to sin grievous sins and who never returned to Christ. Judas never came back from this sin. He never found repentance. We can never glibly plan for and pursue sin and say "I can repent later." Repentance is a grace from God and who is to say that we will have the grace of repentance when that later time comes? Let us be on guard, beloved, for when we sell Christ out for worthless, fleshly gratification, when we deliberately and knowingly and determinedly sin, we walk in the footsteps of Judas, who never loved Christ, and that should terrify our souls.

Reflecting and Meditating on this Text

There is really only one question, one question that can be asked in many ways, but one question that fills my mind after reading this text – Do I really love Jesus Christ? What is He worth to me? What is He worth to you? The whole of this account by Matthew, in essence, comes down to this – What is Jesus worth to you? The chief priests and elders thought Him worthless, someone to eliminate quietly and secretly. Judas did not value Him at all and was willing to trade Him for the measly price of a slave. Mary loved Him like she had never loved anyone else and gladly lavished upon Him what was most precious if it would bring pleasure to Him.

So I ask you and I ask myself, what does your faith, your praise, your delight in Him, your personal sacrifice, your obedience to His commands, your devotions to His worship, your faithfulness in giving, your faithfulness to His church – what does it say about your love? Are you deeply and passionately in love with Him? Do you show it? Are you a worshipper who loves Christ and is unafraid to show it? Do you recognize the depth of your need, your absolute helplessness to help yourself and do you love Jesus unashamedly and lavishly because of what He has done for you and for who and what He is to you? Do you long to promote His glory and His fame? Do you long to love Him with your heart and soul and mind and strength? Are you hungry for His voice in His Word and for the joy of expressing your love in worship and obedience? Do you desire to know Him better and to know Him more deeply? Do you fight against temptation even unto the shedding of your blood so that you will not dishonor Him who died for you? Are you willing to suffer for His sake and for the sake of His gospel? How is your love to Christ this morning?

Beloved, I know that, for me, I do not love Christ as much as I want to. I know my love for Him needs to deepen and grow and here is the truth: If we are truly to love our Lord with real and true, it will only come through looking at ourselves and gazing upon our Savior.

Look at yourself and then behold your Savior. Look at what you were, at what your sinful flesh still desires to be, at how you still stumble and fall sometimes. You have not kept God's law. You have given yourself to idols. You have not loved God with all your hearts, soul, mind, and strength. You have not loved your neighbor as yourself. You have lied. You have stolen. You have murdered in your heart. You have gossiped. You have torn down the reputation of another. You have coveted. You have been proud. You have been unrighteously angry. You would have been far worse had it not been for the restraining grace of God. When we examine ourselves in the mirror of God's Word...this is what we know we are by nature – sinful men and sinful women. By nature, this is who we are. And what do we deserve? Hell, wrath, death.

Look at yourself and then behold Jesus, behold your Savior. Take a good long look at your beautiful Savior, Jesus Christ. He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. He came to seek and save the lost. He is the only Savior, the One who set His love upon you in eternity past and who determined to do all that was necessary to deliver you from the penalty that your sins deserved. He has shown to us the depth of God's love by laying down His life for sinners. It was

His love despite our sin that caused Jesus to humble Himself and lay aside His rights as God, shroud His glory in flesh and make Himself of no reputation. It was His love despite our sin that made Him suffer the opposition and hatred of sinners against Himself. It was His love despite our sin that drove Christ to sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane, love despite our sin that offered His back to be flayed in scourging, love despite our sin that offered His brow for the crown of thorns driven deep, love despite our sin that took the nails deep into His wrists and feet, love despite our sin that endured His Father's face to be turned from Him and which drove Him to suffer the wrath of the Father and the agony that you sin deserved in your place, that caused His agony, suffering and humiliation. Gaze in awe at Jesus dying on the cross, His body broken, His blood shed for you--the sinless one in the sinners' stead--to pay off the debt you could never pay. His death satisfies your debt. His suffering pays the cost of your rebellion. You are forgiven because of Christ! And the curse of death for sin is destroyed as a result. Behold your Savior who makes you new. Beloved, that is why we must love our Savior so much. It's because of his great, immeasurable, astonishing love for us.

How is your love to Christ? May our Lord have the same preeminent place in our lives that he possessed in the heart and life of Mary of Bethany because we have a Savior who loved us and has loosed us from our sins in his own precious blood. How is your love to Christ?

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2013

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.