

14. Matthew 26:1 – 27:31



The final conspiracy to arrest Jesus : Matthew 26:1-5 (see Mark 14:1-2)

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified (20:19).”

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people (λαος) gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, “Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.”

Jesus is anointed at Bethany : Matthew 26:6-13 (see Mark 14:3-9)

Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment (μύρον), and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table.

But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor (see 19:21).” But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor, but you will not always have me. By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial.

Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

A disciple's devotion to Jesus

Judas arranges to betray Jesus : Matthew 26:14-16 (see Mark 14:10-11)

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him up (παράδιδωμι) to you?” They paid him *thirty pieces of silver*. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to deliver him up.

Zechariah 11:12-13 and Exodus 21:32

‘I then said to them, “If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver. Then YHWH said to me, “Throw it into the treasury” – this lordly price at which I was valued by them. So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them into the treasury in the house of YHWH’.

‘If an ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slave-owner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned’.

Preparations for the Passover meal : Matthew 26:17-19 (see Mark 14:12-16)

On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

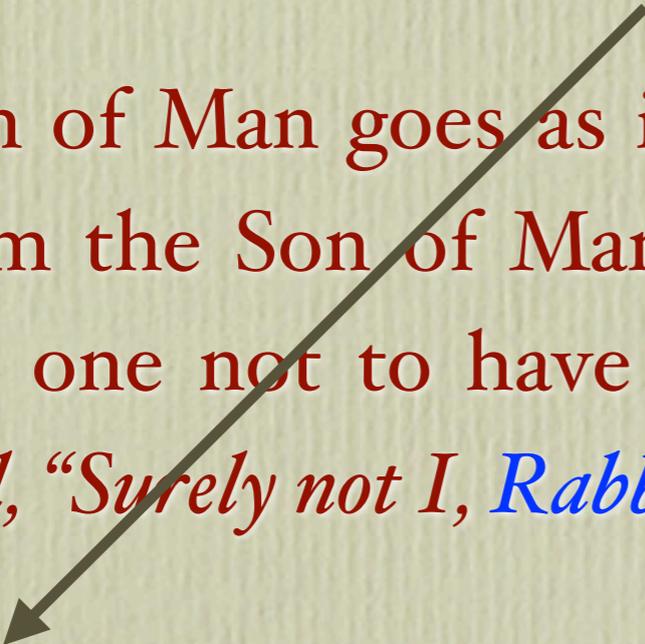
He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, *My time* (καιρός) *is near* (see 26:2). I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”

So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

At the meal Jesus speaks of betrayal : Matthew 26:20-25 (see Mark 14:17-21)

When it was evening, he reclined **with the twelve**; and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” He answered, “The one who dipped his hand into the bowl **with me** will betray me.

The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born (see 18:7).” *Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, **Rabbi?**” He replied, “You have said so.”*



At a Passover meal the bowl held the thick fruit paste consisting of figs, apples, dates, almonds, nuts, cinnamon, and wine or wine-vinegar, into which after the first Passover cup the lettuce and other green vegetables were dipped

The Supper : Matthew 26:26-29 (see Mark 14:22-25)

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after **blessing** (see 14:19) he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my **body**.”

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks (εὐχαριστέω) he gave it to them, saying, “**Drink** from it, all of you; for this is my **blood** of the covenant (Exodus 24:8), which is poured out for **many** (the multitude) (πολλῶν, hoi polloi) *for the forgiveness of sins*.”

I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new **with you** (see 1:23; 28:20) in my Father’s kingdom.”

Jesus is with his friends for a final meal. They are remembering God's redeeming action when God freed his people from slavery in Egypt and led them across the wilderness to the Promised Land. Jesus knows that his mission from God is to so love the world that everyone will be moved to leave behind whatever is enslaving their souls, and journey with him into his Father's embrace.

There is no Paschal Lamb at this meal, for it is Jesus himself whose life is about to be brutally taken from him by those who are determined to resist the freedom into which his love is calling them. It is his body that is about to be broken; his blood that is about to be poured out. He wants his disciples to know that, while he is about to become the victim of the malice of his enemies, he knows his Father's love and entrusts himself into his Father's hands as he prepares to make of his death a final gift of himself to the world in love.

As we begin our journey through Matthew's Passion Narrative let us remember that throughout his sufferings, his heart is filled with love for each of us. He is consoled to see us journeying with him to Calvary and to the Resurrection.

Jesus' disciples will desert him : Matthew 26:30-35 (see Mark 14:26-31)

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, “You will all be scandalised (σκανδαλιζω) because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’ (Zechariah 13:7). But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”

Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you (see 16:23).” Jesus said to him, “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

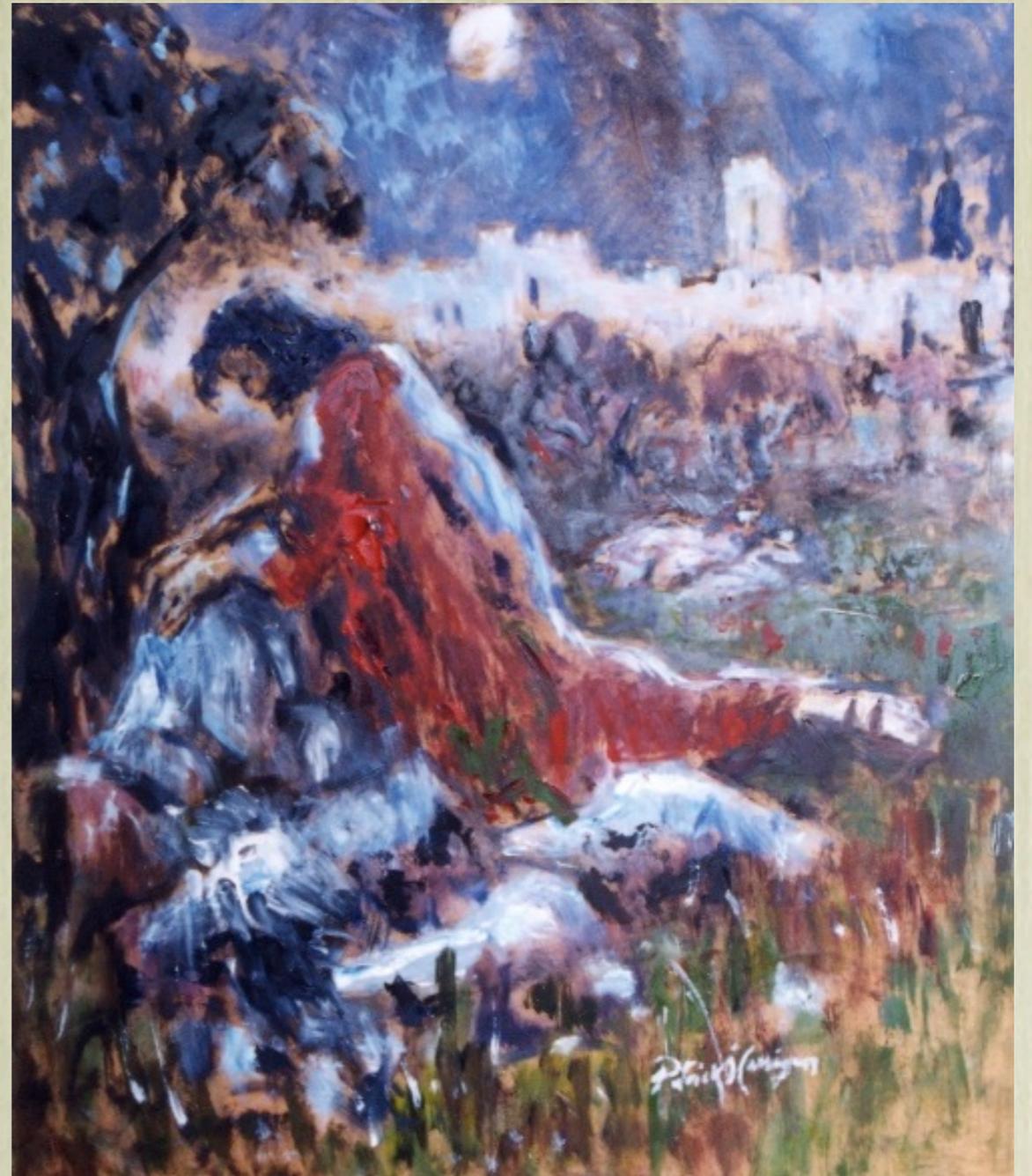
Jesus faces his bitter agony alone : Matthew 26:36-41 (see Mark 14:32-38)

Then Jesus went **with them** to a place called Gethsemane (oil press); and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake **with me**.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father (Mark: ‘Abba’), if it is possible, let this cup (see 20:20-23) pass from me; yet **not what I want but what you want**.” Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake **with me** one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial (6:13).

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Agony continued : Matthew 26:42-46 (see Mark 14:39-42)

Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, **your will be done.**” Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed **for the third time**, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”





All his life Jesus had wanted only to do the will of his Father. Now, because of the refusal of those in power to listen to God's revelation of love, the obedience is bringing Jesus up against their sinful determination to have him killed. Jesus knows God's own revulsion at human cruelty and sin. His heart reaches out to those he has not yet been able to reach during his all too short ministry.

His whole being trembles at the meaninglessness of what he is about to endure, and God seems silent in this lonely garden, where the cold light of the full moon is filtered by the leaves of the ancient olive trees. God has asked Jesus to love, to give his life in love, so that is what Jesus is resolved to do, whatever the outcome for himself. His soul finds peace in this trust and he rises to face the kiss of betrayal from the one he still calls 'friend'. They are drawing near, the dark lit by the menacing torches of the temple guard.

Jesus is seized : Matthew 26:47-50 (see Mark 14:43-46)

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people (26:3). Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.”

At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. *Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.”* Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.



Jesus is seized (continued) : Matthew 26:51 (see Mark 14:47)

Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Matthew 26:52-54

Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword (see Revelation 13:10). Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions (70,000) of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?”

Jesus is seized (continued) : Matthew 26:55-56 (see Mark 14:48-50)

At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Jesus' testimony before the Jewish Authorities : Matthew 26:57-63

(see Mark 14:53-61)

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to *Caiaphas* the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered.

Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards *in order to see how this would end*.

Now the chief priests and the **whole council** [συνέδριον] were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days (see John 2:19).'" The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" But Jesus was silent.

Jesus' testimony before the Jewish Authorities : Matthew 26:63-66

(see Mark 14:61-64)

Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the **Messiah**, the Son of God (see 5:33-37).” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the **Son of Man** seated at the right hand of **Power** (Psalm 110:1) and coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13).”



Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “*He has blasphemed!* Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16; Numbers 15:30). What is your verdict?” They answered, “He deserves death.”

Jesus is the Son of God, but in a way beyond the comprehension of the Jewish leaders. He calls himself the 'Son of Man', because he stands there in solidarity with all the ordinary people who, down through the ages, have been unjustly condemned by the powerful. God hears the cry of the poor, and Jesus has embraced their cause. There is a terrible irony in this scene, as in the scene before Pilate. The high priest and the other members of the Jewish court think that they are judging Jesus. In reality they stand condemned by the way they are abusing their power.

Jesus is abused and mocked : Matthew 26:67-68 (see Mark 14:65)

Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, “*Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?*” (see Isaiah 50:6)

Three times Peter denies knowing Jesus : Matthew 26:69-75

(see Mark 14:66-72)

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before all of them (see 10:33), saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!”

At that moment the cock crew. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times (see 26:34).” And he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus is handed over to Pilate : Matthew 27:1-2 (see Mark 15:1)

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate *the governor* ('prefect' from 26 to 37).

The death of Judas : Matthew 27:3-5

When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver (see 26:15) to the chief priests and the elders. He said, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself.

“Cursed is he who takes gifts to kill the life of innocent blood!”

(Deuteronomy 27:25).

The death of Judas (continued) : Matthew 27:6-10

But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money.” After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah (in fact Zechariah 11:13) “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.”

‘(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)’(Acts 1:18-19)

Jesus' testimony before Pilate : Matthew 27:11-14 (see Mark 15:2-5)

Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." (see 26:64) But when he was accused by the chief priests *and elders*, he did not answer (see 26:62; see Psalms 38:14-15; 39:9; Isaiah 53:7). Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, *not even to a single charge*, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Jesus' testimony before Pilate : Matthew 27:15-18 (see Mark 15:6-10)

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called **Jesus Barabbas**. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

Pilate's wife : Matthew 27:19

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.



Jesus before Pilate : Matthew 27:20-23 (see Mark 15:11-14)

Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the **crowds** (ὄχλος) to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” **All of them** said, “Let him be crucified!” Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

Jesus before Pilate : Matthew 27:24-26 (see Mark 15:15)

So when Pilate saw *that he could do nothing, but rather* that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; *see to it yourselves.*”

Then all the people (λαὸς) answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:28).

Gentile soldiers mock the 'king of the Jews' : Matthew 27:27-31

(see Mark 15:16-20)



Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They *put a reed in his right hand and* knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.



One does not take the cross upon oneself. It strikes from behind, catching you off balance, grasping for support that isn't there. So it was with Jesus. He, however, embraced it, and in so doing he embraced those who thrust it upon him. He embraces us, too, in our folly, for his broken heart cannot stop loving us with all the love of the God who wants us to know that suffering need not destroy us. Accepted in love it can purify our heart and open it more fully to grace.