

WEDNESDAY

Day of Intrigue & Contrasts

INTRODUCTION:

Wednesday is now the 4th Day of Passion Week. This was a day of intrigue and contrasts. It is called “Spy Wednesday” because it was at the close of this day that the religious leaders met secretly to plan to have Jesus arrested and killed:

- Mat 26:3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, Mat 26:4 and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.

It was a day of contrasts as we see Mary’s lavish display of love for Jesus as she anointed him with very costly perfume contrasted with Judas’ betrayal of Jesus in exchange for a comparatively small amount of money.

JESUS’ DAILY ACTIVITIES – TEACHING & PRAYING

Luke gives us a general overview of Jesus activities for the week. During the day Jesus taught at the temple, and each evening he would spend time alone praying:

- Luke 21:37 Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, Luke 21:38 and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

Jesus rose early and went to the temple to teach. It appears that having cleared the temple, He was now using it for its intended purpose. The people also arrived early, no doubt discerning the special opportunity they had to be with the famed teacher. The example both the crowd and Jesus set for us is to rise early to worship God and spend time in his word. The crowds had now perhaps been whittled down to the responsive people – those who wanted to learn more.

PROBLEMS MAKE PRAYER A PRIORITY

At night Jesus went out to pray on the Mount of Olives. There was no doubt a special favourite place that Jesus and his disciples gathered there. The day before he had retired to the same place and shared with his own disciples the prophecies concerning the end times.

- Luke 21:37 ... and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives,

The phrase “to spend the night” means to “abide; lodge”. Jesus spent considerable time in prayer alone each evening. The intensity of the week made prayer a necessity. Jesus was no doubt a man of prayer. It is doubtful if he would have succeeded in his mission apart from the Father’s help. All that he needed, he sought from His Father by means of prayer. His life shows us that when encountering any type of problem, our first recourse should be to move to prayer. Problems make prayer a priority.

THE HIGH PRIEST, CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS PLOT TO KILL JESUS (MATT 26:1-5; MARK 14:1-2; LUKE 22:1-2; JOHN 11:47-53)

While Jesus teaches the crowds, the religious leaders had their own secret meetings. They spent the day plotting how to capture him and how they might have him killed. We do not know all that they planned, but as the next hours unfolded, their schemes are revealed.

- Mat 26:3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, Mat 26:4 and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. Mat 26:5 "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."
- Joh 11:47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. Joh 11:48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Joh 11:49 Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! Joh 11:50 You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." Joh 11:51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, Joh 11:52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. Joh 11:53 So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

Little did they know that their fiendish plans were parts of the fulfilment of prophecy. The high priest himself did not realise that he was prophesying when he said that it was best that one man die for the whole nation. Jesus, however, was fully aware of what was going to take place. He remained fully in control of all the events of Passion Week, even ensuring that he would be crucified at the very time that the Passover sacrifice was going to be made.

- Mat 26:1 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, Mat 26:2 "As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

A DAY OF CONTRASTS

Wednesday is a day of contrasts. We see Mary expressing her sacrificial devotion publicly as she pours out her precious perfume on Jesus. Contrasted with that is Judas' private betrayal of Jesus for an amount so small that it was considered to be an insult.

MARY ANOINTS JESUS - PREPARATION FOR HIS BURIAL

Matthew's gospel says that an unnamed woman anoints Jesus with very expensive perfume. The woman is generally thought to be Mary Magdalene, or Mary the sister of Lazarus. The Jews usually embalmed the dead and also placed aromatic spices on the body as a sign of continued respect. In Jesus' case though the woman went on Resurrection Sunday morning to prepare the body, they found that Jesus had already risen. Jesus therefore interprets this act of Mary as that process of putting aromatic perfume on his body, though it does out the normal sequence:

- Mat 26:6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, Mat 26:7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume [made of pure nard. She broke the jar and –
- Mark 14:3], which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.
- Joh 12:3 Then Mary poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. Joh 12:4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, Joh 12:5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." Joh 12:6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.
- Mat 26:10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. Mat 26:11 The poor you will always have with you [and you can

help them any time you Mark 14:7], but you will not always have me. Mat 26:12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Mat 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

In John 12:5 this valuable ointment was worth 300 pence or denarii, which would be the average wage for 300 days of labour (almost what an average worker would earn in one year). One denarius = \$20, therefore 300 denarii = about \$6000. At approximately R180/day x 365 in our terms, it would be in the region of R65,000-00.

Mary would not have been able to simply purchase the perfume on a whim. It must have been her own personal prized possession. Yet when the occasion arose to express her devotion to Jesus, she did not hesitate to offer it to him, ahead of his burial. There's a great song about this event by Cece Winans with the title, "Alabaster Box".

JUDAS AGREES TO BETRAY JESUS – ZECHARIAH'S "HANDSOME PRICE" – THE PRICE OF A SLAVE

Judas, indignant at Mary's "waste" of money left Jesus' company and went to negotiate with the religious leaders how he might betray Jesus – for a price (Matt 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6; John 13:2;13:27;6:70-71). Note that they did not approach him, but he on his own volition (voluntarily) offered to betray him. His motivation was to "make a quick buck" from the transaction. He accepted a relatively small payment from them. They in turn took the money to pay Judas from the temple treasury – money that had been given for the maintenance of the temple. They were using the church's coffers as it were to pay the traitor for the opportunity to murder Jesus. Jesus' condemnation of them as hypocrites is reinforced every time we get a glimpse into their true characters. Instead of focussing on helping the pilgrims in their quest to honour God during the season of the Passover festival, they spent their time focussed on ways to kill Jesus.

- Luke 22:1 Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, Luke 22:2 and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Luke 22:3 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. Luke 22:4 And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. Luke 22:5 They were delighted Mat 26:15 [Judas] asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. and agreed to give him money. Luke 22:6 He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.
- Mat 26:14 Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests Mat 26:15 and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. Mat 26:16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

These events were the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy in Zechariah 11:12-13:

- Zec 11:12 I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. Zec 11:13 And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.

Zechariah 11:13 calls it a 'handsome' price. That usually means a lot of money but in this case it was so little that it was an insult. The specific amount of 30 pieces of silver is an interesting amount when we look at its other applications in Scripture:

30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave that was killed by accident:

- Exo 21:32 If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.

The first way that the amount that the priest paid, and that Judas accepted was an insult was that it was the equivalent value paid to recompense the owner of a slave if a slave was killed by accident. In this way they showed that they considered Jesus to have no more worth than a slave. They regarded Jesus as sharing the lowest rung of human social hierarchy. He had little more value than a common slave.

30 pieces of silver was the price for redeeming a female (woman)

- Lev 27:1 The LORD said to Moses, Lev 27:2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the LORD by giving equivalent values, Lev 27:3 set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; Lev 27:4 and if it is a female, set her value at thirty shekels.

To understand this, we need to understand that under the Old covenant, if a person wanted to dedicate their life to the Lord, that voluntary act could be done – in theory only. They could 'dedicate' their life but were not allowed to actually serve at the temple. Only people from the tribe of Levi could do that. However, in place of actually serving there, people could give a sum of money once-off and that money would be used to fund the ongoing expenses of the temple. It also became a symbolic reflection of the worth of a member of society. The value for males was set at 50 pieces of silver, and the value of a female was set at, guess what – 30 pieces of silver. Now not only was the price they were willing to pay for Jesus' little more than that of a slave, but it also somehow reflected that they would not even consider his value to be that of an Israelite man.

Here is the irony. Judas complains that when Mary poured out the jar of perfume worth around R65000 she was being wasteful. Yet he was willing to betray Jesus for as little as R5000. Little did he know that it was his own soul whose value he had set at R5000. That day he "sold his soul to the devil".

HE WAS DESPISED THAT WE MIGHT BE HONOURED

In betraying Him, the chief priests were showing how much they despised Jesus. This was again a fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. He was despised that we might be "honoured". Ephesians 2:6 says that believers occupy a privileged position with Christ in the heavenly realms – a place we do not deserve. However, it came by means of Jesus' dishonouring on Spy Wednesday.

- "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" – Isaiah 53:3
- Ephesians 2:6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

HE WAS REJECTED THAT WE MIGHT BE ACCEPTED

Isaiah 53:3 above says that Jesus was not only despised but that he was also rejected. Judas rejected him as Lord that day. The religious elite had already done so. Many in the crowds who celebrated his entrance into Jerusalem and shouted his praises would change their opinion of him and reject him during his trial and execution. This “rejection” too was part of Jesus’ “passion” (“suffering” – Acts 1:3)

- “He was despised **and rejected** by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not” – Isaiah 53:3

Throughout the Bible we see the different ways in which Jesus was repeatedly rejected:

- “He went to his own people, and his own people didn’t accept him”. John 1:11
- “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” – Luke 17:25
- About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” - Mat 27:46
- Psalm 41:9 Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.
- Psalm 55:12 If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. Psa 55:13 But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, Psa 55:14 with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.

Derek Prince said, “My observation is, and this is simply out of my personal dealings with many people, that the commonest, single emotional problem in our contemporary culture today is rejection. I’m also inclined to believe it is the deepest wound that the human heart can ever bear”. Jesus endured our rejection that we might have his acceptance with the Father.

Jesus’ rejection, and ultimately his crucifixion was not wasted on the world that did not appreciate him. It won for us acceptance by the Father:

- “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” – Ephesians 2:13

JUDAS’ REMORSE AND THE HYPOCRISY OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

When Judas saw that the verdict passed on Jesus was death by crucifixion, he was filled with remorse. This was not repentance. It was remorse. Repentance sees sin and moves us to penitence – a deeper level of sorrow. Remorse is a focus on how we feel when we sin. We may feel guilty and shameful in ourselves. It is a form of self-pity. It does not see our actions in the light of the wickedness that they are. In any event, Judas had made a calculated, deliberate decision to betray Jesus, and it was he and not the religious leaders who initiated the act of his betrayal.

- Mat 27:3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. Mat 27:4 “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” Mat 27:5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. Mat 27:6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put

this into the treasury, since it is blood money." Mat 27:7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. Mat 27:8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Mat 27:9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, Mat 27:10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

When Judas returned the money he was again fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy:

- Zec 11:13 And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter.

True to their nature, the religious leaders considered it wrong to put the unholy money back into the temple treasury. So, they used it to buy a field from which clay which was used for pottery had been excavated – a potter's field. The field would be used as a cemetery for foreigners. The irony here is that the money had been taken from the temple treasury in the first place. It was they and Judas who had taken the money dedicated for godly purposes and used it to accomplish their evil scheme.

THE TRAGIC END OF JUDAS' LIFE

It appears that Judas did not witness Jesus crucifixion. Perhaps he did, perhaps he did not. We *are* told how his life ended. Judas committed suicide:

- Mat 27:5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Acts 1:18-19 shows us the grim details of his suicide:

- Act 1:18 (With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Act 1:19 Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

The account in Acts does not differ from the account in Matthew. In all probability Judas hung himself, and his body rotted until it burst open and then his entrails fell to the ground. The day ended tragically for Judas. In this way Jesus' words were fulfilled:

- Joh 17:12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS PLAN HOW TO GO ABOUT ARRESTING JESUS

The account of the day ends with the religious leaders planning how they would go about arresting Jesus:

- Mat 26:3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, Mat 26:4 and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.