

January 15, 2012
Sunday Evening Service
Series: The King of kings
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2012 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Matthew 26:1-5.

1. What does the opening verses of chapter twenty-six indicate?
2. What does “deliver up” mean in verse two?
3. Is there any significance that Passover was two days away?
4. Who was responsible for delivering Jesus up to death?

FUTILE PLANS TO KILL THE ETERNAL KING

Matthew 26:1-5

This text is a major transition point, not only in Matthew’s account, but in Jesus’ earthly ministry. Here begins the great story of the King’s suffering, death, and resurrection. How could there be a greater story, a more important story to tell. This is the reason for the birth of baby Jesus. This is the culmination of the divine, eternal plan. The full glory of the triune God focuses on this point in human history.

It is interesting to me that only two of the Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, recorded the narrative of Christ’s birth. But all of the Gospel writers wrote about His glorious sacrifice. Not only did they record the event, they all gave more attention to this event in the King’s earthly ministry than any other matter. This is altogether fitting because the suffering, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is the most important story in eternity. The King’s physical death is the only key to open the door for eternal life. Christ’s death is the only means for sinners to gain eternal life. It is the most important of all stories.

Therefore, we are not surprised to read that the essence of Paul’s ministry could be summed up in this confession to the Corinthians: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1Corinthians 2:2). Or in his words, “But far be it from me

to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

Shouldn’t that be the testimony of every person who has been born again through faith in this amazing work of Christ the King? The world sees the cross of Christ as a thing of shame and attempts to explain it away as a tragic ending to a promising career. But we know that the entire scenario was played out exactly as God had planned it before He created the universe, or hung this ball of dirt among the billions of stars and planets, and even before He formed a man out of dirt, breathed life into his body, and gave him dominion over the earth. Before our parents Adam and Eve had a chance to rebel against God, God had already determined how He would redeem the fallen creation, including who would do which dastardly deeds to bring it about.

This, to me, is the irony and beauty of the King’s passion. The rulers of His day thought they had finally gotten this enigma under control and were bringing it to their desired conclusion. But in reality they were simply doing what God knew they would do, and, in the process, brought eternal judgment on themselves. Jesus told the disciples that the time had come for Him to be delivered up to be crucified. And lo and behold! The chief priests and rulers of the people gathered in council to figure out how to do what Jesus predicted they would do. So who is in charge here? The story before us reveals how the wicked rulers in Jerusalem planned to do precisely what Jesus warned His followers they would do. It is a wonderful reminder that we are redeemed and kept secure by the eternal God who works all things for His own glory.

The King Warned His Followers Of Impending Trouble (vv.1-2).

Jesus reminded the disciples that Passover was approaching (vv.1-2a). This reminder came as King Jesus was finished teaching or as Matthew recorded the situation, “When Jesus had finished all these sayings.” What sayings? We can probably find the answer to that question by looking back through the history that Matthew recorded, and which we have studied over the last several weeks. According to Matthew, Jesus had begun the day teaching in the temple (21:18). In that teaching, Jesus had illustrated by parables how the religious leaders had stolen God’s vineyard (Israel) and would kill God’s Son (21:33-43). He had answered the trick questions lobbed by Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers (22:1-46). He had lambasted the scribes and Pharisees (23:1-36),

exposing their hidden sinful nature to all the people (which the people probably already suspected). He had left the temple area with the disciples, gone to the Mt. of Olives and taught them in detail about end time events and His return as King (24:1-25:46).

Now the King brought the disciples back to the pending events. Things were about to happen in the lives of these disciples that would shock them to the core. They were about to step into the arena of rapid-fire events upon which all of eternity rests. They were about to see before their very eyes the unfolding of activity that God had planned in eternity past. How exciting is that? Actually the disciples would have used the word *discouraging* not the word *exciting* to describe the situation. We have the advantage of hindsight which reveals the wonderful outcome of Christ's suffering and death.

King Jesus reminded the disciples that the stage was set. He told His disciples, "*You know that after two days the Passover is coming*" (v.2). Jesus knew the time well. He knew that His time for suffering and glory was at hand. He understood that it was time to accomplish the event He came to earth to accomplish. It was time for God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be glorified in the great culminating events of salvation.

The exact day of the King's sacrifice for sin was pre-determined, not coincidental or accidental. That it was the time for Passover must not be overlooked. Mark pointed out specifically that, "*It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread*" (Mark 14:1). Luke affirmed the same (22:1). The celebration of Passover meant that thousands of lambs would be slain according to the requirements of God's Law. The sacrificing of innocent lambs had always been a picture of the blood of a substitute covering the individual's sins. That was God's intent for that old system of sacrifices. Furthermore, Passover demonstrated Abraham's promise to Isaac when his son asked about the lamb for the sacrifice. As the two walked up the Mount of Moriah, Isaac wondered where the lamb for the sacrifice was. Abraham knew two very important truths. First, he knew that God led him to that hill where he would be required to sacrifice his only son. Second, Abraham knew that in the future, God would provide His own Son for the lamb of sacrifice on that same hill. Maybe Abraham also sensed that even in that situation God would provide the substitute for Isaac. Therefore he said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen. 22:8).

The Passover, a one-day celebration, and the feast of unleavened bread, a seven-day celebration, were connected. It was a celebration commemorating God's miraculous deliverance of His people from Egypt. It pictured God's deliverance of His people from bondage. The actual event was bondage in Egypt. The picture was deliverance from the bondage of sin. It also pictured deliverance through a substitute's blood. The symbol was the blood of an innocent lamb shed for the benefit of the family. The fulfillment of the symbol is the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, that takes away the sin of the world. How significant that God would choose this particular day, this particular celebration as the time to offer the only acceptable sacrifice to cover the sins of all who trust Him and cry out to Him for salvation.

The King reminded the disciples that during Passover He would be delivered up to death (v.2b). King Jesus would be delivered over? How could that be? The word for *delivered* is the Greek word *para-di'domi*. It is a combination of the word *para* which means with, beside, alongside with the Greek word *didomi* which means to hand over, to deliver up, to give what is due, to fulfill obligation. That gives us the meaning to deliver someone or something into custody, and to do so by treachery.

Who would do that to the King? How? Actually, the Scripture records that there were frequent examples of this "delivering" in the next hours after Jesus promised it. Judas was the betrayer who *delivered* the King into the hands of the guards. The guards *delivered* the King to Caiaphas and his goons. The religious leaders *delivered* Jesus to Pilate. Pilate "*handed over*" Jesus to the Roman soldiers who crucified Him. Each person involved in this "delivering up" of King Jesus to be killed was to be blamed and will pay for their sin for eternity. Already they have suffered for nearly 2,000 years for their dastardly deeds.

And yet those wicked people are not the only ones who are guilty of delivering up Jesus. In fact, it was each person's sin that treacherously delivered up the King of kings to be killed. This means that I delivered Jesus up to be killed. Because of my sin, I betrayed Him and delivered Him. And so did every sinner born in the history of humanity . . . which is everyone.

Even more amazing is the fact that it was ultimately God who delivered King Jesus to be killed. The delivery of God's beloved Son into hands of wicked men to be killed was the eternal plan of God the Father. Peter preached that reality to many of the people who had been

in Jerusalem a month or so earlier for Passover. He preached, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Yes, *they* killed Him through the hands of lawless men. But He was delivered to them according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. God the Son reminded Pilate that the matter was really taken out of his hands. “Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin’” (John 19:11).

But most amazing of all is that the King *DELIVERED HIMSELF UP*. On an earlier occasion He had taught the disciples, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:17-18).

Now the King informed the disciples that the delivery was about to take place and that He would be delivered up to face a particular kind of death. He was going to be delivered up “*to be crucified*.” Crucifixion was practiced as a form of capital punishment and as a deterrent to future crime. Some evidence shows that it was practiced in various middle eastern cultures from about the 6th century BC through the 4th century AD. The Romans did not invent the cruel, inhumane form of punishment, but it appears they took it to an art form. It is quite significant that this horrible form of punishment would be so common at the time of Jesus when in times previous to Him and after Him it was not quite as common.

Maybe God’s plan included crucifixion because He Himself had required that such a person would be cursed. In His Law, God required, “If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance” (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). How would that apply to Jesus, the Lamb slain for sinners’ sins? He was crucified, and isn’t this statement from the Law a reference to hanging, as in a rope tied around a branch of a tree and then around the victim’s neck? Not necessarily. Consider the Holy Spirit’s commentary on this aspect of God’s Law and its application to Christ. Paul wrote under inspiration: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for

us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13).

On one hand, crucifixion was the most hideous, de-humanizing form of punishment man could devise. On the other hand, according to God’s Law, it was the ultimate expression of His curse against sin. Jesus had to hang on a tree to fulfill the pictures God had already established.

So how would you have responded if you would have been Peter, or John, or Andrew? Do we tend to forget that the King was not only fully God but also fully human? What would it be like to tell your best friends that within the next couple of days you will certainly die and not in an acceptable fashion? What would it be like to have your hero, the leader in whom you placed your hopes, tell you he was certainly going to die before the weekend? I think we would feel like life had suddenly become hopeless. Where would we turn for help; where would we look for encouragement? My hope is in the Lord because He is the Lord and King. He is in control of all things!

The Religious Leaders Planned to Destroy Their King (vv.3-5).

They plotted secretly to kill the King secretly (vv.3-4). The important people gathered at the “leader’s” house (v.3). These men occupied the highest office, the most important office of religious affairs in Israel. These men should have been the most likely, the first, to embrace Messiah as their king. Instead they gathered to discuss how to arrest and kill this son of the carpenter from Nazareth. The priests among these men were supposed to be descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother. They even claimed to be the protectors of God’s Law.

So how could people who were so privileged in God’s things and who were so important be so blind to the truth about Jesus? Jesus had not hesitated to point out this blindness during the debates of that day. He had called these very men things like, *you blind guides* (Mt. 23:16); *you blind fools* (Mt. 23:17); *you blind men* (Mt. 23:19); *you blind guides* (Mt. 23:24); *you blind Pharisees* (Mt. 23:26). One time Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees cut deeply. “Then the disciples came and said to him, ‘Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’ He answered, ‘Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit’” (Matthew 15:12-14) How did they come to such a condition?

The rulers' spiritual blindness illustrates the important principle of divine tension we find throughout the Bible. In the first place, they were fully responsible for their sin against Christ. They were stubborn against God and, therefore, rejected Messiah. They refused to listen to the truth. They lied and caused division against God's anointed. Even Judas who lived with the King for nearly three years took it upon himself to betray Him. They were so blind they willingly accepted responsibility for the murder. They were so blind that they said to Pilate, "*His blood be on us and on our children!*" (Matthew 27:25).

How did they become so blind? They did what they did because they were destined to this end. Consider Judas for example. The disciples understood why he delivered Jesus up to death. Peter said to the group, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus." "For it is written in the Book of Psalms, 'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and " 'Let another take his office.'" (Acts 1:16, 20). Jesus certainly was not surprised that Judas handed Him over. Not too many days previous to this time Jesus told the disciples, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil" (John 6:70).

So, too, these very rulers were destined to commit this crime. Peter wrote near the end of his life, "So the honor is for you who believe, but for those *who do not believe*, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble *because they disobey the word*, as they were destined to do" (1 Peter 2:7-8). Because they refused to believe God, they were confused about King Jesus. Because they refused to believe God's Word, they disobeyed it and killed Jesus.

Within a few days after the resurrection, Peter had come to such a clear understanding of God's will and the rulers' responsibility in the crime that he preached, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23).

The important rulers were directed by, or under the influence of, Caiaphas. He was a conniving, treacherous, and deceitful man according to Josephus. Every mention of him in Scripture has him trying to embarrass or destroy Jesus. Because he was part of (head of) the Sadducee party, his was a political concern. If Jesus was not put out of the way, the Romans would come and take away his position. He was

the one who said of Jesus, "If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation" (John 11:48).

This wicked man could not imagine fairness. He was too self-centered and greedy to consider justice. To him the sole reason for doing anything was based on how it would effect him and his powerful family. Caiaphas was not necessarily born in the line of Levi, a Law requirement for any who would occupy the office of High Priest. However, under Roman rule, the office was bought through lobbying and bribery. However, because the Jews would demand some kind of relative of Levi, Caiaphas married the daughter of Annas, the High Priest who served before him. In fact, they served in a joint leader capacity for a few years. He was the classic illustration of a person who rejects Christ because to embrace Him by faith would "mess up the plans I have for my life."

Under his leadership, the important people discussed how to kill the King without attracting too much attention (v.4). They "took counsel together" to determine how they could secretly seize Jesus. Once they had Him, they could determine how and when to kill Him. All the time the rulers thought they were in control when in reality they were simply doing what their stubborn, selfish sin led them to do . . . which God knew and predicted about them.

Nevertheless, these apparently powerful, important leaders actually feared the people (v.5). They did not want to arrest and kill the King during the festival. This was the biggest feast of the year. Josephus estimated that over 200,000 lambs were typically killed during the Passover feast. The law required one lamb per 10 people. That would mean that the population in Jerusalem during the feast was around 2 million. Two million people could cause quite a riot. Passover might be a good time to arrest Jesus, but it would be an awful time for a public execution. That would have to be done later in a secret way. Obviously, these leaders were not remotely aware of God's plan!

They didn't want to do the wrong thing because they feared the people would riot. Matthew wrote, *lest there be an uproar among the people* (Mt 26:5). Luke wrote, *for they feared the people* (Lu 22:2). Like Herod who was afraid because the people revered John as a prophet – but he killed him anyway. There are a couple of important principles that come to bear here. "The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). "The fear of man lays a

snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe” (Proverbs 29:25). A guilty conscience is a heavy thing to bear.

Far better for us to trust God, to love God, to flee to God and, humbling ourselves before Him, to fall into His tender embrace. How silly for us to make plans without God. How foolish to be like the wicked rulers and assume that we know what is best and then be driven by the fear of unacceptability and have to live with a guilty conscience. Worst of all is to rely on human wisdom to drive us to a decision that brings God’s judgment on us and our children.