

## Matthew 26A

- The four Gospel accounts could have no purpose nor significance without the passion of Christ...in fact, they couldn't rightly be called "Gospels" without it
  - The "good news" of these four accounts is ultimately found in the death of the Lamb of God in our place and His resurrection to bring us to glory
    - Everything we've been studying for the better part of 2.5 years has been leading to this final section of Matthew's book
    - This final section begins in Chapter 26 and takes us to the end of the book in Chapter 28
    - We'll cover the Last Supper, Jesus' betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, His trials, crucifixion, and resurrection
  - We're going to take a fresh look at these events because our understanding is heavily colored by church tradition and even folklore
    - You probably know Jesus' birth story has been overshadowed by Christmas traditions and the lyrics of Christmas carols
    - Likewise, the passion of Christ has been colored by Easter traditions of various churches and by popular culture
    - Even the day of the week on which churches typically claim Jesus died is wrong
    - So we need to take a fresh look at Scripture as we move into the next chapter and set aside all our assumptions
  - And since we are moving into a new section, let's revisit our circumstances and the timeline of events
    - In His final week of life, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday and went directly to the temple courts
    - He taught that day and again on Monday and Tuesday, being inspected by the religious authorities
    - Jesus passed their inspections, proving Himself to be a worthy sacrifice, the Lamb of God
  - Each night Jesus walked east over the Mt of Olives to a little town called Bethany and probably slept in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus

- At the start of Chapter 24, Jesus was exiting the temple on Tuesday afternoon when His disciples posed those questions
- Jesus answered them seated on the Mt. of Olives and then after the discourse was over, He continued to Bethany Tuesday night
- That's where we are now as we return to the text

[Matt. 26:1](#) When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples,  
[Matt. 26:2](#) "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion."

- Jesus says that in two days He will be handed over for crucifixion on the Passover
  - The phrase "handed over" implies a transfer of custody from one authority to another
  - In its simplest sense, Jesus was referring to Judas handing Jesus over to the Jewish authorities
  - Equally likely, Jesus was referring to the Jewish authorities handing Jesus over to the Romans to be executed
- But in a spiritual sense, Jesus was also referring to the Father's plan to hand His Son over to the enemy
  - And that's the story Matthew is now setting out to tell in these final chapters
  - It's the story of how the Lord of all Creation, a man popular in His day, could end up crucified with criminals
- But before we get into that story, Jesus' comments on the Passover give us an opportunity to introduce another important detail
  - There is still a good deal of mystery surrounding the timeline of the events of Jesus' death and resurrection
  - Most have been taught that Jesus died on a Friday, but as we will see in future weeks, that doesn't fit with Scripture
  - And the timing of other important events like the Last Supper are also confused

- So as we study the events, I need to review a couple of important rules that will guide our time-keeping observations in this study
  - First, the start and end of a Jewish “day” is reckoned according to the pattern God established during the Creation in Genesis 1
    - In Genesis, each day of Creation began with a 12-hour period of darkness followed by a 12-hour period of light
    - God called the arrival of darkness “evening” and the arrival of light “morning” and the two periods together form a single day

**26A-1**

- Because God described each day of Creation as an evening and a morning, Jews adopted the same convention for counting days
  - A Jewish day begins as darkness arrives which is typically 6 PM and then continues for 24 hours until the next evening
  - For example, a Monday begins at 6:00 PM on Sunday night
- We count the beginning of our days at midnight, which means our day starts six hours later in the middle of the dark period
  - Comparing the two side by side systems, we can see that the Jewish “day” begins six hours earlier than a modern day
  - So when marking time, we need to remember that an evening event takes place on the next “day” in Jewish reckoning

**26A-2**

- The second difference in Jewish reckoning is that when counting days, Jews consider any part of a day as equally a whole day
  - So if it was 5:00 PM on a Sunday afternoon, then the start of Monday is barely one hour away starting at 6:00 PM Sunday night
    - Nevertheless, a Jew in Jesus’ time would still consider that one remaining hour on Sunday as equally the whole “day” of Sunday
    - Therefore, if you asked how many days remain until Tuesday, the answer you would get is two days (i.e., Sunday & Monday)
    - In summary, in Scripture new days start at sundown and we count any hours remaining in the current day as a day
  - Looking at Matthew 26, Jesus says that the Passover would come after two days (or we could say it was two days away)

- So to determine what day of the week Passover took place, we need to determine the day of the week Jesus spoke these words
- We get the answer by carefully consulting the time references that we find in Matthew and the other Gospels
- First, the Gospels report Jesus came to Bethany and stayed in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus the day before He entered Jerusalem
  - Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, Palm Sunday as we call it now, so that means He entered Bethany on a Saturday
  - John's Gospel reports that the day Jesus entered Bethany was six days before Passover
  - So we count Saturday as one day and then five more days puts Passover on a Thursday that year
- After Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey on Sunday, He went to the temple to teach late that afternoon.
  - Mark tells us that Jesus spent Sunday afternoon and the next two days in the temple
  - Each night Jesus went back to Bethany to spend the night and the next day He returned to the temple
  - And all the Synoptic Gospels report that Jesus delivered the Olivet Discourse on Tuesday afternoon
- That brings us to the start of Chapter 26...it's Tuesday afternoon shortly before sundown, so Wednesday is just an hour or so away
  - And at that moment, Jesus says two days remain until Passover
    - Using our rules, we count the hour remaining on that Tuesday afternoon as a whole day plus the next day, Wednesday
    - So if Passover started two days later, then it must be on Thursday, which begins on Wednesday night...confused yet?
  - The point is, Matthew's time references in Chapter 26 agree with John's time references in John 14...the Passover happened on a Thursday
    - Which means that Jesus died on a Thursday, not on a Friday as tradition tells us

- And we will see additional evidence later in Matthew that confirms Jesus did, in fact, die on a Thursday
- Now you may be thinking this is interesting, Steve, but do we really need this level of detail? Is it really *that* important?
  - Let me answer that question with a question: is it important to you that your accountant can do math correctly?
  - What if your CPA's math was correct most of the time, but once in a while he was a little off...maybe he missed a zero here or there
  - Would that be important to you?
- Obviously, we want our accountant's math to always be precise because it's our money he's dealing with, and we don't want it mismanaged
  - But there's actually a more important reason why we want a CPA who does math properly...
  - Knowing how to add and subtract properly is a basic test of competence and trustworthiness for an accountant
  - If your CPA can't do math, he isn't competent to manage your finances
- That's why we should care about getting details like timelines correct when studying Scripture...it's a basic test of competence
  - Making sense of Scripture is ultimately the job of the Holy Spirit working inside us
    - But the Bible says He brings understanding to those teachers who handle the word with care and precision

**2Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.**

- Those who work diligently to handle the word of God accurately are approved by God, and His approval is evidenced by insight
- He reveals answers to those who seek the truth in a diligent manner because this brings Him glory
- Conversely, when teachers approach study in a lazy manner or if we're content with "rounding errors," we will not be approved

- But as with our accountant example, the biggest problem with being a poor workman is the damage it does to our reputation
  - When any Christian upholds traditions that are not supported by Scripture, we set up ourselves and others for a crisis of faith
  - I've encountered believers who came across a Bible verse that contradicted what they had been told, and it rocked their world
  - They encounter a crisis of faith, because they suddenly wonder if the Bible can be trusted or if their faith was in something false
  - Some feel cheated or deceived to the point that they walk away from following Jesus
- So we may think understanding exactly which day Jesus died on to be a minor thing, and you may question why we spend time on it
  - But for a believer wrestling with the trustworthiness of Scripture, these details are the make-or-break differences
  - And if our Bible teachers and pastors can't find biblical support for traditions, we need to abandon our traditions
- And in their place, we need to teach what the Bible says, and more than that, we need to be able to defend it in detail
  - We need to take care with God's word so that we get everything right, as best we can, not overlooking even the smallest detail
  - Because the Bible validates itself, and there are no contradictions...just our own misunderstandings
- So let's return to Chapter 26, and from this point Matthew's narrative will jump around from scene to scene to highlight certain events
  - It reads a little like a movie script, where a writer weaves together action from different scenes so he can tell a single story
    - In this case, the events of this week involve three primary scenes
    - There is Jesus in and around the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mt. of Olives
    - The Jewish officials in their exclusive homes of the upper city of Jerusalem
    - And the Romans officials in the Praetorian

- Chapter 26 started with the scene of Jesus in the Garden, and now Matthew moves to the home of the high priest, Caiaphas

**Matt. 26:3** Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas;

**Matt. 26:4** and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him.

**Matt. 26:5** But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

- Caiaphas, the official high priest of Israel, convenes a secret meeting of the chief priests and the elders of Israel, referring to the Sanhedrin
  - The chief priests were leaders in the temple, and the Sanhedrin were Pharisees and Sadducees who collectively ruled the nation
    - Of course, all these authorities operated under Roman occupation and control, so their power was limited
    - They acted as a quasi-government that enforced Jewish law but still required Rome's approval to carry out most punishment
  - They meet in a courtyard on Tuesday evening, probably at Caiaphas' home in the wealthy, upper side of Jerusalem
    - Under the Law of Moses, the high priest was to be a descendant of Aaron, who inherited the position from his father
    - But by Jesus' time, Israel was under Roman control, so Romans selected the high priest, and they chose men loyal to Rome
  - Decades earlier, a man named Annas had been high priest, but he resisted Roman rule, so the Romans removed him from the office
    - In his place, Rome eventually installed his son-in-law, Caiaphas, in AD 18 as high priest
    - But Annas was still living in Jerusalem at the time of these events, so Jews remained loyal to Annas
    - So at this particular time in history, there were said to be two high priests in Jerusalem
- In this meeting, Caiaphas initiates a conspiracy to seize Jesus at some point during the week of Passover and kill Him

- Jesus' popularity had become too much of a threat, and His public rebukes of the Jewish religious leaders were too damaging
  - There were rumors floating around that Jesus' disciples might try to install Jesus as king of Israel by force
  - And the religious leaders knew that if this happened, they would lose power as the Roman army retaliated against Israel
- So they conspire to kill Jesus as a patriotic effort to save their nation and a cynical ploy to maintain their positions of authority
  - But they are caught between a rock and hard place...any attempt to kill Jesus during Passover would also be dangerous
  - The city of Jerusalem was not a large place, geographically speaking, and at Passover it swelled to over a million pilgrims
  - If these leaders moved against Jesus in a public way, the crowds might riot, they say in v.5
- So their fear of reprisal leads them to seek a way to move against Jesus outside the view of the crowds, under cover of darkness
  - But that raised a new problem: how to find Jesus at night
  - There were no cameras or cell phones, so finding a single man among millions at night over such a broad region required help
  - They needed insider information to know where to find Jesus at a particular time of night so they could move against Him
- This conspiracy sets the stage for Judas' betrayal later in this chapter, meanwhile Matthew switches the scene again

**[Matt. 26:6](#)** Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, **[Matt. 26:7](#)** a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

**[Matt. 26:8](#)** But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste?"

**[Matt. 26:9](#)** "For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."

**[Matt. 26:10](#)** But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me.

**[Matt. 26:11](#)** "For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me.

[Matt. 26:12](#) "For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial.

[Matt. 26:13](#) "Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."

- Matthew goes back in time to Saturday afternoon to retell a story that connects the leaders' conspiracy to the man who eventually betrays Jesus
  - This scene took place in Bethany on the day before Jesus entered Jerusalem on a Sunday
    - Matthew says Jesus visited the home of a leper named Simon, and John reports Martha, Mary and Lazarus were there also
    - And during the course of the meal, a woman approaches Jesus with a valuable vial of perfume to anoint Jesus
  - John tells us that this woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and both women were serving Jesus at the table
    - In Jesus' day, people reclined on the ground toward the table leaning on their left elbow while eating with the right hand
    - So while Jesus is reclining, Mary approaches with this vial and begins pouring perfumed oil on Jesus' head and feet
  - The perfume was pure nard, a costly scent imported from India, and it was a large amount of perfume
    - John describes it as a *litre* of perfume, which was a Greek measure of 11 ounces, about the size of a soda can
    - This is a ridiculously large amount of perfume, and an extravagant gesture on Mary's part
    - Matthew confirms this vial was very costly, and John reports it was worth three hundred *dinarii*
    - A *denarii* was about one day's wages for a working man, so we're talking about nearly a year's wages
- Mary had probably saved most of her adult life to purchase this vial of perfume in preparation for a future wedding day
  - In an age when bathing was not common, perfume was greatly valued for its ability to cover odor and "purify"

- Young women saved for years to purchase the perfume they would use on the special night they met their groom
- So for Mary, this vial probably represented her life savings and it was her most important preparation for marriage
- But now she's given all of it to Jesus instead in one, extravagant gesture of love
- Matthew says her perfume was kept in an alabaster vial which means it could only be opened once by breaking the cruse
  - Once opened, it would dissipate in time, so Mary pours the entire contents on Jesus lavishly
  - And both report that the scent filled the house, and I'm sure that's an understatement
- John tells us she not only poured it on Jesus' feet but then she also wiped His feet with her hair
  - This was a tender act, a sacrificial act of love, that both honored Jesus and humbled Mary
  - In those days, a Jewish woman never let down her hair in public before men, since to do so was considered shameful
- So in choosing to use her hair to dry Jesus, Mary was making a gesture of humility, accepting shame so she could bless Jesus
  - Anyone observing this moment would have been struck by a remarkable contrast
  - On the one hand, we see a humble woman assuming a position of great shame before her guests
  - Yet at the same time, her humble gesture and extraordinary sacrifice bestowed great honor upon Jesus
- In Jesus' time anointing with perfumed oil was a practice reserved for a handful of situations
  - First, it was used in consecration rituals in the temple
    - Secondly, it signified a man chosen to serve God either in a spiritual role like prophet or priest or as a king

- Thirdly, oil was applied to a sick person as an appeal to God for healing
- Finally, it was applied to a dead body to prepare the body for burial
- Jesus tells us in v.12 that Mary was applying the oil to His body as a preparation for His coming death and burial
  - Jesus wasn't going to die for a few more days, but Mary heard Jesus say He would be crucified in Jerusalem
  - She knew what that meant, so before He was taken from her, Mary honors Jesus with a burial anointing reserved for kings
- Can you imagine the conversation that Mary had with the Holy Spirit when she felt Him prompting her to give up her life savings?
  - Do you supposed Mary felt a little conflicted at first?
  - What would *you* say if you felt the Lord asking you to take a prized \$60,000 bottle of wine and pour it out as an offering?
  - Or to burn \$60,000 in cash in your fireplace to warm your house on the occasion of a neighbor's visit?
- Wouldn't you question whether this is the best use of those resources? Wouldn't you look for an excuse to avoid the sacrifice?
  - I think Mary probably had a moment of reflection, because that would have been normal and expected
  - But then just as quickly, she grabbed the vial, opened it and poured it out on Jesus, giving Him the anointing God intended
- The Lord asks all of us to humble ourselves and make our lives a living sacrifice so that He may receive glory – are you prepared to do it?
  - Jesus makes this request because He gave Himself up for us, to the point of dying in our place to give us eternal life
    - So it's a reasonable request on His part...he made a dying sacrifice for us, so He asks us to make a living sacrifice for Him
    - But we tend to set limits on what we give God...He can have everything except that ONE thing we say we can't give up

- It might be our money or our time or a relationship or a bad habit or an attitude or a grievance we can't forget, etc.
- When you set a limit like that with God, guess what thing He will demand from you?
  - God knows the things we cling to in our hearts, and He will ask for that ONE thing standing between us and obedience
  - If you hold on to that thing, you miss the opportunity to see the Lord work miracles in your life and in your walk with Him
- In Mary's case, the Lord promoted her to sacrifice her lifetimes for Jesus, and obediently she gave Jesus literally everything she had
  - But by her obedience, she glorified the Lord in at least two ways
  - First, she gave Jesus the burial honor He could not receive at His death, which honored Jesus in the eyes of His disciples
  - No man who died in Jerusalem was more richly honored in death than was Jesus by this woman's gift of anointing
- Secondly, Mary created a beautiful picture of the purpose of His death
  - Mary humbled herself and endured shame to bestow great honor upon Jesus in death
  - So too Jesus humbled Himself, enduring great shame in death so that He might bring Mary and all God's children to glory
- Finally, the Lord also had a reward for Mary for making this sacrifice
  - Notice in v.13 Jesus declares that as a result of her obedience, her story will be known by everyone in the church, everywhere the Gospel goes
    - Can there be any higher reward than to be honored in God's word in this way?
    - This woman made a great sacrifice, yes, but that great sacrifice brought a great reward
    - And that reward could only be obtained through her sacrifice
  - Moreover, I wonder how the Lord plans to reward her in the Kingdom for her obedience to Him in this life?

- Whatever the value that vial of perfume was, it will pale in comparison to the value of her eternal inheritance
- You will be more willing to make great sacrifices for God when you understand two things
  - The magnitude of Christ's sacrifice
  - And His willingness to reward us in eternity when we please Him
- Mary apparently understood both, but some of the men don't understand her motivation, so they object to her actions
  - Matthew doesn't name those who objected, but John tells us that the main objections came from Judas Iscariot
  - Judas criticizes Mary's actions as wasteful, saying they could have sold the perfume and given the money to the poor
- At first, Judas appears to have a sincere concern for the plight of the poor, but John gives us the real reason for Judas' objections
  - Judas managed the money box for Jesus' disciples, like the treasurer for a small civic organization
  - He collected donations as they came to Jesus and used the money to pay for the disciples' meals, accommodations, etc.
  - But Judas frequently pilfered from the funds, so Judas was upset that he missed out on access to all that wealth
- That detail is a window into the heart of Judas, revealing him to be a man who didn't love Jesus or his fellow disciples and couldn't understand Mary's gesture
  - John's Gospel confirms that Judas was an unbeliever at the end of John 6
    - Jesus says He selected His twelve apostles knowing full well that one of them, Judas, was a devil, meaning an unbeliever
    - So Jesus intentionally picked an unbeliever to be included among His inner circle so that this man could betray Him
  - The conspirators imagine themselves driving events, but in reality God had hand-selected the man who would help them three years earlier

- Perhaps nowhere in the Bible is the sovereignty of God more evident than in the fact that God selected His own enemy
- And by this selection, the Lord ensured that His own death would take place on His terms according to His timing
- Finally, Judas' comments offers us a glimpse into the heart and motives of unbelievers, who use godliness as a cover for sinful desires
  - Judas spent three years with this group of disciples, hearing the teaching and experiencing the miracles of Jesus
  - Yet in the end, the best his unbelieving heart could do was adopt stereotypical religious thinking and ritual
- For example, when he saw Mary dumping out her perfume, he couldn't understand the value of her gesture
  - He considered giving money to the poor to be a greater way to honor God than worshipping God directly
  - Why? Because unbelievers are, by their nature, limited to seeing and understanding earthly, temporal matters
  - True spiritual understanding about eternal matters lies outside the grasp of an unbeliever
  - Because such understanding requires the Holy Spirit working in their heart

**1Cor. 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.**

- If unbelievers can't understand God in spiritual ways, they have to fall back on earthly expressions of religion
  - So for unbelievers, helping the poor is their highest form of religious expression because this world is all they understand or value
    - Unbelievers who are drawn to religion are seeking to make this world a better place, to make this world into heaven
    - But it's all a game, and in the end it's a hypocritical pursuit hidden behind a veneer of self-serving piety

- And Christians need to be aware of this game too so that we don't become too distracted by trying to make this world into heaven
  - Those who have the Spirit of God know that this world is passing and so what truly matters is waiting in the world to come
  - Like Mary who willingly gave away her life savings, we need to be ready to make sacrifices
- But we need to make sure we are making the right sacrifices according to the leading of the Spirit and not the spirit of this world
  - The Church is called to show charity to others, primarily to those in the church, and always for eternal purposes