

Matthew 26:1–16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 March 2024

Preacher: David Helm

[0:00] Matthew 26 verses 1 through 16. 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.

When 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. Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask, a very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table.

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. But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me.

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.

[1:26] 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. 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. And from that moment, he sought an opportunity to betray him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You may be seated. Well, good morning. You know, the monetary value we place on something stems from a number of factors.

There's a graduate school of business nearby here who would indicate this very thing. The monetary value of something that we place on it stems from a number of factors.

Take supply and demand. Those who like citrus are going to pay more for their orange juice if the supply in Florida is hurt with a frost.

[2:42] Supply and demand. Take the added benefit derived. Take the added benefit.

Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Take the added benefit. Triple added benefit!!!!!!! number of factors. I wonder what monetary value do we place on Jesus? What is he worth to us? What is he worth to you? And what are the factors that would indicate your spend rate on him? From what I can summarize in the text, Matthew believes we're now ready to consider this question. For Matthew, the time for talking is over. The time to assign value has come.

I mean, just look at the opening verse. When Jesus had finished all these sayings, when he was done talking. And at this point in the gospel, this is the fifth unit of his sayings that were meant to inform the reader of who he was and what he expected and when he might return. But all that's done, he's done talking. Final time here. And if you look at verses two through five, the time for assigning value has come. He assigns value to his own death. He actually predicts here, we're just two days out. The chief priests, if you look at it in verses three to five, well, they think he has a longer life to live. They don't plan on doing him in until after the feast.

But the value has been assigned. And it's at this precise moment in the narrative that we are introduced to a woman. There she is. Verse six and following. Who is ready to assign a modicum of monetary value on Jesus? Can you see her there? Now, when Jesus was at Bethany in the house

of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask, a very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head and he reclined at table. She assigns value. In an act of incalculable generosity, an unnamed woman reveals the value that she places on the death of Jesus. It would be good for us to take a look at her together. There's a few things that I've fallen in love with as I've looked at this paragraph over this week, and I hope you have it in front of you where you can see it. Take in first the village. Now, when Jesus was at Bethany, if you were to walk, so the atlases tell me, out the golden gate beyond the eastern wall of Jerusalem, you would immediately descend into a valley, the Kidron Valley, and then you would begin walking up the other side through and to and on what is the Mount of Olives, through which you would pass through a garden by the name of Gethsemane, and you would hit the crest, and then once hitting the crest, going over now onto the eastern side of that rise, come upon a small village, archaeologists would tell us, probably of no more than 20 homes, named Bethany. A two-mile walk, less than getting to the lake here and back.

[7:32] Bethany. This place would have been a village of renown in the sense that it was on the wrong side of the hill. The sun would have set here earlier than when it had come across to the west where Jerusalem was yet rising and the temple was there and Herod's temple and the emperor's palace and Caiaphas's palace itself, all of its splendor and warmth of the late evening sun. Yes, we're in Bethany, so much for the village, but the time. Notice it says in verse 6, now when Jesus was at Bethany, how are we to take this now when? Is it a matter of chronology? Is this now

Wednesday evening after he's finished his discussions in the temple and we arrive in Bethany? There's actually good reasons to think that this is not the case that he is now inserting a story much like when you watch Netflix and suddenly on the screen it says four days earlier. Now when he was in Bethany, the last time we read about Bethany was chapter 21 verse 1 prior to his triumphal entry. Bethany was the place he was lodging over the course of the entire week and other gospel narratives will indicate that what took place here in this home and the act of this woman was on the front side of the triumphal entry. So what the writer is now saying is the time for Jesus talking is done, the time for assigning value has come. Let me show you a scene in which this value of Christ moving toward his death was actually in play. In fact, we learned from other places that this was the small town where Lazarus and Mary and Martha were from.

Lazarus was one that had died and Jesus raised from the dead after he'd been in the tomb for days. Mary and Martha were the ones that Mary was busy serving. Martha was busy serving all the time and Mary sat at his feet and the other narratives will indicate that this is indeed happening now. Martha is the one serving and it's this Mary who actually is the one one who's commemorating his death through the breaking of this alabaster flask.

The village, the time, the place. It says here in my Bible that he's in the home or the house of Simon the leper. What an ironic description or detail. Don't miss it. Leprosy, of course, was a skin condition.

Simon, we don't know any more about him. Perhaps he was Mary and Martha's father or friend, whatever. They were now lodging in Simon's home. He had been one who was unclean, presumably healed by Jesus, and he's still known as Simon the leper, the one with the skin. Let's put it this way, the unclean one.

[11:13] He's staying in the home of the one who had been unclean on the distant side of the hill. Meanwhile, the chief priests are gathering in the city to begin their ritualistic washings in preparation for the Passover. Jesus is here residing outside the city with one he had made clean.

And for Matthew, the healing of a leper back in chapter 8 was the first fully narrated miracle that Jesus performed. And this is now the final act that we see on his way to the cross. The leper himself bookends the ministry of Jesus who takes the unclean and makes them clean.

The village, the time, the place, but the act. Look again at verse 7. A woman came up to him with an alabaster flask, a very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. Let's just call it what it is. It's an act of incalculable generosity. It was hard. Ironically, this ointment was meant to help skin conditions.

It would have come from India. And now here she is, and she begins to pour out upon the head of Jesus.

I've tried to envision it. She comes perhaps from behind him or on the side in the home of one whose skin no longer needs treatment and takes the most expensive of objects and breaks it. And it begins, can you see it, it's not a bottle of perfume that's tss, tss, tss. No, this is walking into a potpourri store and being overwhelmed with the aromas. All flooding down upon him and running down to his feet. In fact, we know that she begins to wipe his feet with the excess of the ointment which is now puddling on the floor.

[13:57] There's no indication in the text that she questioned or second-guessed the fullness of the possession she had.

There's no sense of, well, is this enough? Well, certainly this is enough. This is more than enough. This is incalculable generosity. This is extravagant gift. She's never wondering, can I stop now? Can I quit giving now? When will it be known now? When can I get on with other things now? No, it's the fullness.

It's the fullness of the fullness of the year's salary. You know, the median salary in Woodlawn is a little over \$30,000. It's as if a resident of Woodlawn gifts a fullness of \$30,000 upon the head of Jesus as an extravagant act of love.

You know, the text doesn't reveal whether this woman had a high net income or not. Maybe she did. She certainly possessed a possession that was helpful to skin conditions that she felt she needed. But there's no indication that she was a person otherwise of great means. Don't forget, she lives on the wrong side of the hill in a place that lepers called home with her sister and her brother and extended family.

[15:49] What an act. She poured it out. The village, the time, the place, the act, the reaction. Look at verses 8 and 9.

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. Let's at least give these objectors their due. Should we not?

It's understandable. Not only is it understandable, on the surface of things, it seems appropriate. It seems like this is just too much. Wasteful.

It appears overdone. It appears too much because almsgiving, the giving to the poor, was one of the three chief acts of worship.

So they have set aside, this woman has set aside, the chief act of worship. Paul will be told when he begins to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, we only want you to remember the poor, the thing which Paul says, I was eager to do.

[17:09] You see, giving to the poor is essential to your worship. Neglect the poor, you do so at your own spiritual peril, even to this day.

To neglect the poor is to neglect the weightier matters of the law. All these things are true and therefore understandable, this indignant sense.

Why this waste? So much more could have been done with it. But to this reaction, look at Jesus' response, 10 to 13.

Four simple observations in regard to Jesus' response.

Notice he calls this, not a wasteful thing, but a beautiful thing. Secondly, he says, the poor will always be with you.

[18:27] Now he's not undermining our perpetual obligation for the poor. Day by day, week by week, obligation. But he's saying, that is always before you.

Three, he's saying, she did it in preparation for my burial. How we are to understand this is somewhat beyond us. But what we do know is that from her act, it almost looks like a prophetic act. It almost looks like an awareness that he has said over and over that he has come to die for the sins of the world. And she seems to know that this is the week.

This is the moment. Two days from now, or four days from now, if you put it on the front side of the triumphal entry. So all these spices are there.

Fourthly, Jesus says, wherever the gospel is proclaimed, they're going to talk about her. You know, it's not very often you come to church and say to yourself, the scriptures were fulfilled today in my hearing.

[19:37] But they just were. Again. Again. As we speak about her, Jesus' very words are fulfilled again.

Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, we will speak about the unnamed woman who bestowed on Jesus a gift of incalculable generosity, of extravagant sense, so that others would be pointed to the value of his death.

I guess you'd have to just call that a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend resources in a way that expressed the value she placed on his death.

And the gift that she gave, we are promised, would extend beyond her life. The gift that she gave was intended to draw others to consider the value that she places on his death.

His death was intended as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

[21:03] His death and burial were indications of his willingness to take on the judgment and wrath of God that was due upon all the citizenry of humanity for all time.

The value of his death in a moment on the cross was to speak of the eternal significance of being restored in relationship to God.

Tell me, how do you put a price on that? What a gift. What an unusual once-in-a-lifetime moment. I've only had one such occasion in my life that I would even approximate to an internal desire, need almost, compulsion.

Now let me put it differently. Privileged burden of an extravagant gift meant to point people to the death of Jesus in ways that would far extend beyond my own life.

[22:39] And we're sitting in it. You know, when God went ahead of us on this building, and believe me, He went ahead.

He presented me, my family, our church, the opportunity of a lifetime to put something down, to pour something on, whose sole object was that for decades and decades after we're gone, after your voices of praise no longer were down from the walls and others are in your seats, hearing messages on the death of Christ, actually continue to play out in time.

And let me just tell you, I've always sensed it as a privilege. I've never asked, when can I stop pouring? I'm just gonna pour.

My flask is not yet empty. I remember when we got underway, a person who had lived in the community for a long time rebuked me severely.

Well, at least it was face-to-face. If you have all the power, you and that congregation, to acquire funds to do that work on that corner in some limited way, then you should have spent it on job training for every man in this neighborhood.

[25:03] I didn't really know what to say. I mean, the job training is needed. And we are under a continual obligation.

I remember another, at the time, even in our midst, a member who called our breaking of the alabaster flask on this place as an ungodly act.

And then they left altogether. Those things keep me up at night because I'm questioning my motives. You know, what are we?

What am I doing? And I keep coming back to this love offering of once-in-a-lifetime, extravagance, puddled on the floor, so that 50 years from now, somebody sits in your seat and says, what is this we're hearing about the death of Jesus?

And tell me about these people who thought his death was so significant that they took on a privileged burden of ensuring that it would go on long after they lived.

[26:24] I wonder, in one sense, this unnamed woman, how, for me, she's a beautiful woman.

You could probably tell, experientially meaningful to me. She's an unnamed woman here. Jesus says she's a model for all that will follow him down through the ages.

She's certainly an example for us. And I wonder how the woman in the text might reveal your thoughts on the question, what value do you place on the death of Jesus?

Jesus, what is having the world here of his death worth to you? That's the opposite of the prosperity gospel, by the way.

We're not talking about what you get by coming. We're talking about what you give. And we're not talking about what you give to me or someone else. We're talking about an act of worship to the Lord. Those who value the death of Christ for themselves are those who demonstrate on occasion

a willingness to desire and give generously to the work of pointing others to consider the gospel of his death.

[27:57] That is the good news of his death. That's just what Christians do. Perhaps the generosity of that kind actually might have led you to even be here this morning.

Perhaps you don't know Jesus. You've never met Jesus. You have no understanding yet of the value and the significance of his death. Or perhaps you're bringing someone this evening who doesn't know that value or significance.

But do you know in Isaiah 55 it's very clear that with the costly gift of God's own son he's able then to say to a world come those of you who don't have money buy without it's all free for you.

But all the freeness of the gospel is done on the back of the generosity of God's gift as a giver. If you don't know Jesus today I would encourage you to consider with me afresh the value of his death.

there's nothing more treasured by the people of this church than his death. And we will do everything in our capacity that that message gets out in perpetuity until he comes.

[29:26] well Matthew is kind of aware that not everyone will value his death in that way. By way of contrast just take a look he presents us with another scene I won't take as long but 14 through 16 fewer verses less time you should be happy.

You move from this unnamed woman to a man there's this contrast it's another scene they're side by side probably intended by Matthew so that we can see our decision on Jesus in the clearest light possible.

Take a look at 14 through 15a in the place of the woman we have a man then one of the twelve whose name was Judas Iscariot went to the chief priest and said what will you give me if I deliver him over to you?

this man comes with a name where she does not and this is a man among men the chief priest Caiaphas his siblings which were all elevated to mediate through sacrifices people's relationship with God the 70 the Sanhedrin put them all there this is a man among men and notice the time then it just makes it easy somewhere between the triumphal entry and Wednesday evening before Maundy Thursday comes Judas would have had plenty of opportunity as Jesus is coming and going from the temple we know that he did this after her act of generosity in fact that's probably spurred his anxiety that Jesus was not the one he really wanted what Judas wanted was simply a revolutionary gospel that was the good news of nothing other than social and he's rejected this substitution for sin he's moved on and so now he comes and says what will you give me if I deliver him to you?

the place is extraordinary he comes to them most likely this is the house of Caiaphas the high priest unlike Bethany this impoverished little village Caiaphas' palace is in what's called the upper city elevated sight lines of extraordinary value wealth power privilege means he's there now bartering on the life of Jesus the question Judas asks though isn't what value he would place on them it's what value would they place on him what will you give me how much is he worth to you Jesus says I'm the man of access I can give him over to you and their negotiated answer is telling evidently it says they paid him thirty pieces of silver

[32:45] I think they probably turned to case law I mean these guys were attorneys as well as religion teachers and they probably thought gosh what's the what's the value of the life of a man well Exodus 21 tells us that if an ox gores the slave of a man then reparations are in order and the reparations are simply thirty pieces of silver so they're calculating the monetary value of his life and they arrive at a price that is not more than that of a slave in the first century world and in one sense then they're paying Judas as though

Judas was Jesus' master who had something of value but I'll give you the money and we'll take the life and interestingly they're willing then to play the part of the ox that's what the chief priests and these men have become I'm more than willing to gore the life of Jesus and in exchange provide reparations for you that indicate I value him as nothing greater than the life of a common slave they see Jesus in this way the chief priests were just simply too parsimonious to grant a value greater than that let me put it in contrast the lady pours out over a year's resources 30 pieces of silver we're

talking 200 to 300 bucks put a couple of

Ben Franklins in your wallet and you've got their monetary value on the life of Christ how about us what is the life of Christ worth to you I'm going to talk to men especially can I do that I will and the reason I'm going to is because this contrast here is between an unnamed woman and a named man among men there's no secret that women are more spiritually sensitive than men in most churches women are the ones that are leaning in while men are the ones who are leaving out and the single women in this country who attend church are longing to see a career professional single man who actually values the life of Jesus and the married women in churches are longing often to see their own husbands come to value the life of Jesus in a way that far exceeds what they're getting in their homes women

I'm just going to say I'm not going to say they're spiritually advantaged but it certainly seems like it women optimistically give themselves to the growth of the gospel more readily than men men what is the life of Jesus worth to you men often equate the worth of Jesus to the smallest amount necessary to make him go away we pay to have the one you ever get those phone calls asking for money and you don't know how to get off the phone sometimes and occasionally and they're waiting for this kind of person well I'll give you 20 bucks just to get you off the phone now leave me alone may it not be so in this church may this church somehow find the capacity to raise up men men who value the life of Jesus more than a couple of Ben

Franklin's in their back pocket the implication is I think simply learn from the unnamed woman the implication for Judas here is clear and from that moment he saw all opportunity to betray him if you don't value the life of Jesus you're just going to do whatever is necessary to get him to get out of your life as soon as possible so you can get on with your business you can get on with your thoughts you can get on with your life you can get on with your commitments you can do the things that you want to do I'll give him a little bit but as little as I can in a word that's just called betrayal and with that the contrast is complete the time for talking is done the time for assigning value has come and my word to us today as a church family is simply determine the value that you place on the death of Christ determine it for the woman incalculable generosity decide decide today what you think life is worth for

[39:19] Judas! Judas a handful of coins that a couple days from now I'll throw at your feet our heavenly father we we come needing to in some way understand the factors that would make us value his death or devalue his life and I pray for each one of us that we would take to heart the example and the model of the unnamed woman in our text so that the death of Christ would be elevated in our midst for the purpose that when we are in the ground others yet will learn of him in Jesus name we pray amen