

Priceless

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Folks, we're going to get straight into, we're getting straight into Matthew 26 here. If you just joined us again for the first time, we're working slowly through this gospel. So if you read these first 16 verses, if you sort of read them or just heard them quite quickly, casually, you might say something like, wow, the guys, they are really bad in this, but the lady, she seems nice, you know, be like her, right?

Now, you're all clever people, and you know that there's much more going on than this. Matthew was a very sophisticated writer, and there's so much in here, it's very dense, so we're just going to get straight into it.

So if you have your Bibles open, you'll see verse 1 there. When Jesus had finished these sayings. Okay, when Jesus had finished these sayings. This is a big signpost. Matthew was saying, the preaching part of Jesus' ministry is over.

There's no more sermons, no more parables. This is a new section, and it's the last section, and the focus of this section is the death and resurrection of Christ. So what Matthew is doing in these first 16 verses is he's introducing to us what's about to happen.

And here we learn three things about what's about to happen. Three things about the crucifixion. First, sin put Jesus on the cross.

[1 : 2 7] Second, the cross was always God's plan. And third, Jesus' death was globally priceless. Okay?

So sin put him on the cross, but the cross was always the plan, and it was a globally priceless act. Okay. So three things. We'll start with the first one.

Let's start with sin put him on the cross. So the thing you probably most want to hear about is this middle part, right?

This incredible act of devotion by this amazing woman. And we will talk about that. We want to talk about that. We will talk about that. But that's, if you kind of slide your eyes over the story here, is sandwiched between two acts of treachery.

At the start, the chief priests, and at the end, Judas. And what Matthew is doing here by sandwiching it like that is he's forcing us to confront the dark side of humanity, our part in putting Jesus on the cross.

[2 : 3 6] So we'll start with the chief priests. So we're going to talk about the first little bit, and then we're going to talk about the last little bit. Okay? So who are the chief priests anyway? Well, they were supposed to be the leaders of God's people.

It was a hereditary role passed down through generations, but it sort of got really corrupted at some point, sort of like the bishops in medieval Europe became this position you could buy, and people wanted to buy this position because it was a very powerful role in the community.

So these folks in Matthew 26, they're not pastors. They're politicians. They're aristocrats. And we read about what they're up to in verses three to five. And even just with this tiny little window into their life, you'll see there was such callousness about them.

Verse four, they plotted 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. So they're talking about killing a guy and talking about this incredibly important religious feast that's about to happen.

Let's not kill Jesus during the Passover. There'll be lots of visitors in town. Could be trouble. It's, I see Ben sitting up the front here. It's like saying, let's not kill Ben Roberts.

[3 : 52] Let's not kill the Reverend Ben Roberts during the first couple of songs of the service tonight because it'll upset the children. Right? Let's do it in the car park.

Right? Afterwards. They're just, I mean, it's bonkers. Right? It's completely, these were the leaders of God's people. And they're talking about murder so casually. It's like God has no bearing on their considerations.

And they're supposed to be the leaders of God's people. That's their job description. But their main interest was self-preservation. They just wanted to maintain their position. They had this really sweet gig.

And Jesus was rocking the boat. He was a threat. Let's get rid of him. Let's kill him. So that's the first little story of how sin led to Jesus being on the cross.

Let's jump right down to verse 14 there. So the chief priest, trying to work out how to get rid of Jesus, probably could not believe their luck when Judas turns up on their doorstep.

[4 : 52] What will you give me to deliver him to you? 30 pieces of silver. And they think that is a bargain. Now, a good question is, why would Judas do that after everything he has seen Jesus do and everything he's heard Jesus say?

Well, the simple answer, I believe, is greed. In the Gospel of John, it talks about how Judas was stealing money from the community purse. And he probably just thought, this whole Jesus thing is going nowhere.

Let's make some money out of it. Let's just cash out. So he sold his friend out for money. The big picture here is this.

If we go to like 40,000 feet, is God comes to be with us. And humanity says, let's kill him.

Let's put him on a cross. So, the start of our passage, treachery. The end of our passage, betrayal. Sin put Jesus on the cross.

[5 : 58] But, you know, the amazing thing about this, the amazing thing about this, though, is that God is big enough and wise enough to let people freely pursue these evil plans and let those plans serve his purpose.

Because out of that whole mess came salvation, which we'll talk about later. All right. Let's move on to the second big idea from the passage. So the first is sin put Jesus on the cross.

The second was the cross was always the plan. So some people think, you know, they kind of like the idea of Jesus. But Jesus' death was a horrible mistake.

So back in the days, the narrative will go like this. Back in the days, you know, the Jesus tour was going really, really well. People loved his stories. There were, the miracles created a lot of buzz.

He was super popular with people on the margins. He was super popular with the regular folks. Kind of like a Bernie Sanders type guy. But it all goes sideways.

[7 : 00] It all goes sideways because the establishment don't want him. And so they take him out. So that's what some people think. Now, this is not what the Bible teaches, though.

I want you to think about the order of events in the first few verses, right? Verse two here. Jesus announces his crucifixion. After he announces it, what's the next thing that happens?

The chief priests are like, yeah, we've got to kill Jesus. So the order is obviously important there. Jesus says, I'm going to die. Then the chief priests, yeah, we should totally kill Jesus. Obviously, the elite think they're in control.

And they're not. Jesus is in control. So all that to say, Jesus was not caught off guard by his arrest and crucifixion. And death on the cross was the plan going all the way back to the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is just pointing to this, pointing, pointing, pointing to this. I want you to think for a moment about the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. So lots and lots of chapters about animal sacrifice, which to our modern sensitivities, you know, we find quite distasteful, perhaps.

[8 : 14] But think about what those sacrifices were trying to communicate. So what would happen is when an animal was sacrificed, people would lay their hands on the animal.

And it was a way of saying, a way of them sort of acknowledging, yep, this animal is dying instead of me. That it was pretty clear to everyone in the Old Testament that the animal was being slain in their place as an atonement, as a way of paying the price for the sin of the person.

Now, the Old Testament people could have been wondering, so how does this work exactly? Like, we've got this dead lamb and I've put the blood in the places, but how is that actually a substitute for us?

How is that a substitute for me? And the New Testament answer is, these were pictures of the real substitute coming, which was going to be Jesus Christ.

He was the substitute. And why is this important? Why is this really important that we understand this? Because you will not understand the depths of God's love unless you see what he did was to be a substitutionary sacrifice.

[9 : 26] Now, suppose you don't like this idea. If you don't like the idea that Jesus came to take the anger of God on himself for you, if you don't like that idea, then what happens?

The death of Jesus on the cross becomes a terrible mistake. Folks, understanding that you are sinful and that Jesus died for you and he loves you that much, this moves us to live sacrificially, right?

That is the engine room in our hearts for walking in sacrificial love for the rest of our lives. And the woman in this passage, I think she understood something of this.

So let's get to her. But first, big picture again for the moment. Sin put Jesus on the cross. The crucifixion was planned by God. And lastly, crucifixion was this globally priceless thing.

And that's what the middle section is about. We have treachery. We have betrayal. And this incredible act of this woman.

[10 : 36] So let's talk about her. Verses 6 to 13. So, Jesus was at Bethany. That's a town at the house of Simon the leper.

Presumably, Simon was no longer a leper. We don't know what that was about. But they're having a good time. And they're relaxing at the house, having like a dinner party or something like that. Woman comes up, breaks open a jar of very expensive oil and anoints Jesus.

Now, all four stories of Jesus in the Bible talk about this story. So what's so important about it? The better question is, what does Jesus say about it?

And Jesus says a number of things about what happens. He says what she did was beautiful. He says what she did was unique. And what she did was prophetic.

So he says it was beautiful, it was unique, and it was prophetic. Let's just take one minute on each of these things here. Start with beautiful. So after the anointing, the disciples are angry, but Jesus defends her, which I just love that, that Jesus defends her.

[11 : 44] Folks, when you have shame in your life, when you feel like you're overwhelmed by sin, or you're not good enough, or you've done something terrible, or whatever it is you're thinking, Jesus defends you.

Jesus defends you. When you think you're being persecuted for your faith, Jesus defends you. So Jesus says in verse 10, leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing to me.

Okay. So the oil thing. This is a cultural thing. Let's talk about it for a moment. So back in the days, so people would come over for dinner, and they might put a little bit of oil.

It wouldn't be unusual to put a little bit of oil on the guests. Made the place smell nice. It was a way of honoring them. But this is not what Mary did. She broke open a whole jar.

It was like this clay thing with a narrow neck. She snapped the neck off, poured the entire thing on Jesus. And it wasn't just any old jar of perfumed oil. It was very, very expensive perfume.

[12 : 43] It was perfume made from this thing, this root, only found in India. And John's Gospel says it was worth about 300 denarii, and a day's wage back in the days was one denarii a day.

So you're not far off. You know, a bottle of perfume worth about \$50,000. What was she doing with a bottle of perfume worth \$50,000? No idea.

But as a guess, it was probably the most expensive thing she owned. We don't have no indication she was fabulously wealthy outside of this. But remember, they didn't have banks or stocks or things like that in the ancient Near East.

But they'd have perhaps these heirlooms. And it was something that a family might keep in case there's a famine or, you know, they lose the farm or something like that happens. They can sell this one thing that they have and it'll be okay for a little while.

So Mary broke open the family treasure. And she didn't pour a bit on Jesus. She emptied it on him. This outrageous display of devotion and affection.

[13 : 47] Unconditional devotion. She was a follower of Jesus. And she had been so moved by what Jesus had done.

She had been so astounded at the things that he'd said that she was all in, right? She was all in. As a side note here, sometimes as Christians, particularly probably like Anglican types, we can feel a bit uncomfortable with these sort of public displays of emotion or devotion when it comes to Jesus.

You might be tempted to say things like, oh, she's a bit needy. Maybe a bit unstable. This is not the case.

One thing that's really interesting to note about this woman, her name's Mary, Mary Bethany. She's mentioned three times in the New Testament. But every time she's mentioned, where do you find her?

You find her at the feet of Jesus. So in Luke 10, Jesus visits his family and it says, Mary sat at the Lord's feet, listening to a teaching. John 11, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet.

[15 : 01] And in John 12, she anointed his feet. So she was at Jesus' feet. She had filled her mind with the things of God. And she knows she had been given so, so, so much from Jesus.

She'd been given billions of jars. And she's simply returning one back to him. She had stared at the beauty of what Jesus had said and done and was changed and transformed so she could pour herself out for him.

She did a beautiful thing for Jesus. What was the other thing Jesus said about what she did? Jesus said it was unique. So where do we get that from?

Verse 8, when the disciples saw it, they were indignant. It's a strong word, they're indignant. Why this waste could have been sold for a huge sum and given to the poor.

Jesus says, don't trouble her, she's done a beautiful thing. You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. I imagine in that situation, most of us would have been with the disciples.

[16:12] Have you guys ever heard of the Teddy Awards? I just learned about it this week. They're awards given to the most ridiculous examples of government waste. It's like a, no, it's a Canadian thing apparently.

And in Canada they give out lots of awards. The municipal award this year was given to the Vancouver Parks Board. For a project inviting residents to send emails to 25 trees in two parks, the city paid...

I'm not passing judgment here, people. I am just saying some words. The city paid \$50,000 to five people to answer emails on the tree's behalf.

So all I'm saying... Is that... Is that there could have been a better use for that money.

This is the kind of thing that riles people up, right? We hate waste. And maybe there was an environmental spin to this, which is wonderful, but I didn't see it when I read more about it. We hate waste.

[17:26] I just think we would have been with the disciples going, this is a ridiculous waste of money. I mean, that much money, that could have helped hundreds and hundreds of people in a village like that. Could have been a game changer. However, Jesus says in verse 11, the poor are always with you.

In other words, there is an ongoing obligation to help the poor. But right now, this thing that this woman has done, this is a unique moment. Mary, with this anointing, this very unique thing, is signposting for us the momentous significance of something about to take place.

So it could look like waste, but it's the right thing to do because what it points to is so unique and so important. In fact, it's so important that Jesus says in verse 13, whenever the gospel is proclaimed, anywhere in the world, we're going to be talking about what this woman did.

And here we are, talking about it 2,000 years later. But the disciples don't get it. All they focus on is the value of the oil, not the value of Jesus, or what's about to happen.

They miss the beauty of it. They miss the weightiness of it. Okay, I'm almost finished here. Big picture, one last time. So we're looking at this middle section here, the story of this amazing woman.

[18:50] And Jesus says what she did was beautiful and unique. But not only that, it was prophetic. Verse 12, And pouring this ointment out on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.

So, you know, back in the days when somebody died, they'd prepare the body and they'd wrap it in linen and sort of pack it with this sweet-smelling ointment. Now, I don't know if she knew what she was doing.

It was prophetic. We don't know. But Jesus knew and made it clear. So by doing this, she is forever remembered in history, is continually directing our attention to a king who would die on a cross, who would be killed.

And this crucifixion is not a miscalculation. Jesus didn't get in over his head. It was planned. And in fact, God did this amazing thing.

He took the worst thing a human could do to somebody and used it to save them. Isn't that incredible? Let's finish up.

[20 : 01] To be a Christian means to believe what Matthew has taught us today. And if you are here and you are not a Christian, you can believe this today.

You can make a commitment to this. And I want to create some space to do that in a moment. Emma's going to come and play for us just in a second. And in that space, you can pray, God, forgive me.

I believe you died on a cross for me. And when you believe that, you become a follower of Jesus and you'll be with him for eternity. You can do that in the quietness of your heart.

Or perhaps you're here and you're a Christian, but you feel like your heart has gone a bit cold. Well, the place to warm it up is at the cross to consider again the immense and beautiful thing Christ has done.

So let's spend a couple of minutes considering these things in our hearts. Let's perception. Let's see.