

Week 30: Matthew 26:1–46

Hook



Main Point: The Upside-Down King prepared for His mission of self-sacrifice.

What's most valuable? Break your LifeGroup into small groups and welcome them to the live auction. Each group will be given an imaginary \$100 bill. The teacher or director will act as the auctioneer, and groups will bid on items on the auction list. The groups should bid on items that reflect their values, interests and tastes. Provide the groups with the auction list (feel free to adjust the list to suit your group) and a few minutes to review it before the auction begins.

Auction List

- Cold Brew Coffee Maker - \$25
- Coffee Grinder - \$60
- Water Filter Pitcher - \$30
- Cast Iron Frying Pan - \$30
- Waffle Maker - \$30
- Air Fryer - \$60
- Blender - \$50
- Instant Printing Camera - \$50
- Noise-Canceling Headphones (wired) - \$30
- Wireless Earbuds - \$45
- Streaming Media Device - \$40
- Electronic Tablet - \$50
- Wireless Charger - \$35
- Wooden Cady Tray for Baths - \$50
- Cordless Drill - \$40
- 34 Piece Socket Set - \$40

5 Amp Corded Jig Saw - \$35

Transition: Today we will examine folks making choices as to what they value more. One will choose Jesus over finances; others will choose sleep over Jesus.

Week 30: Matthew 26:1–46

Book

Main Point: The Upside-Down King prepared for His mission of self-sacrifice.

Matthew 26:1–13 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus is worthy of extravagant worship. (Mary of Bethany)

Q: Why is it significant that Jesus told His disciples that He would be crucified soon?

Q: Why was it OK to use this perfume this way instead of helping the poor with it?

This chapter begins the final section of Matthew, the passion narrative. Matthew opens by telling us that Jesus knew He was going to be crucified and told His disciples so. Even though He had told them He would be killed by the religious leaders and rise again on the third day way back in chapter 16:21 they still seemed surprised when it all came to pass. Matthew wanted to remind his audience again that Jesus knew this would happen. It was His mission and He remained committed to it, walking in obedience all the way to the Cross. No matter the schemes of the human power and authority of the religious leadership, Jesus followed God's plan and His timing, not theirs.ⁱ

Matthew also noted that Jesus' death and Resurrection would align with Passover. This was significant for Matthew's Jewish audience. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew referenced the Old Testament, showing how Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy. Here Matthew referred briefly to Passover, reminding his audience that Jesus is the new covenant Passover Lamb, the spotless sacrifice whose blood would redeem all of us from the slavery of sin (1 Peter 1:18–19).

Matthew also noted that the religious leaders schemed to arrest Jesus *secretly* out of fear of the crowd. The high priest, Caiaphas, remained in office much longer than any other first-century high priest (19 years), which suggests that he knew how to keep the Romans content and keep political uprisings at bay. He handled any threat to the political stability of Jerusalem swiftly and efficiently. The fact that it later became a trial in front of a screaming crowd was not their original intent, but with so many people from all over the Roman world there for the festival who may not have been familiar with Jesus, it worked in their favor.ⁱⁱ

The contrast in this story is between the woman and the disciples. It's not a hypocritical Pharisee being called out for his thoughts and attitudes (as in Luke), but Jesus' closest followers. This is only the beginning of the passion narrative in which the faithfulness of Jesus' female followers stands in contrast to the fear of the Twelve. Noted Bible scholar Craig S. Keener wrote, "The devotion of the women in the passion narrative puts the male disciples to shame for their cowardice. Although disciples are supposed to let their 'good works' shine (5:16), Jesus commends only this woman for a 'good work' (26:10)."ⁱⁱⁱ

The woman is unnamed here, but in John's book, she is Mary, the sister of Lazarus (John 12:1–8).^{iv} Guests at a meal were typically anointed with oil by the host as a sign of hospitality, but this outpouring of an entire jar of perfume was extravagant and very unusual.^v These perfume bottles had a very long neck with a slow drip so that only a little of the expensive perfume came out at a time. For the whole jar to be poured out over His head, it would have to have been broken.^{vi} Broken and poured out as an offering, just as Jesus' body would be.

It was not wrong for the disciples to be concerned about the poor, especially around Passover. Part of celebrating the festival – and not an optional part – was giving to the poor.^{vii} Jesus did not downplay the importance of helping the poor. He simply said the poor would always be there; there will always be opportunity to help the poor. This was their only opportunity to anoint Him for His burial. Jesus had just told them He was about to be crucified, but they didn't understand. They were not just surprised at her anointing Him, they were *indignant*. How dare she! They thought anointing Him was a *waste*. If they were thinking in only human terms, they were right. That was a lot of money to just pour over Jesus' head.

It just emphasized again how much the disciples misunderstood the kingdom and Christ's purpose in coming. They didn't understand *why* He needed to die or what His death would mean for them. They were still thinking in physical terms, not spiritual. Because they didn't understand the nature of the kingdom and Christ's mission, they did not understand the extravagance of her worship. But she was offering all she had to Jesus in honor and worship. She anointed His head like a king, set apart for God's purposes.^{viii} Even she may not have understood all the ramifications of what she was doing, but she understood that Jesus was worth giving her *all*. He was the treasure hidden in a field, the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:44–46). Makoto Fujimura said of her offering, "What she has done is beautiful and enduring *because* it is ephemeral, *because* it is useless, *because* it's a waste. God somehow demands of us so much more than this transactional nature. It is really about the gift that we've been given, and the only response we can give back is with extravagance, with gratuitous beauty."^{ix}

We can't really blame the disciples for not understanding. They hadn't seen the whole picture yet. They were living in the middle of the story. After Pentecost, they would give all that they had and even risk their lives for the mission and consider it an honor to do so (Acts 5:41). But we do know the whole story, so the question for us is, are we giving our all to Jesus in extravagant worship? Are we offering all we are all and all we have as a living sacrifice to Him, for His kingdom and His glory (Romans 12:1–2)? Do we pour it all out to Him, lay it all at His feet?

Q: What things in your life are you still holding back from Jesus? Why?

Q: How can you love and serve God and love and serve your neighbors *extravagantly*?

Q: How would your life be different if you offered all your time, talent and treasure to Jesus?

Matthew 26:14–30 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Not everyone who claims to love and follow Jesus really does. (Judas)

Q: Why do you think Judas became a disciple? Why do you think he betrayed Jesus?

Q: Why did Jesus celebrate the Lord's Supper with someone He knew would betray Him?

We're not really sure why Judas initially decided to follow Jesus. It wasn't a casual choice for any of them, considering they gave up their whole lives and livelihoods to follow Him. Like the other disciples, he had given three years of his life to the mission, so it's unlikely he set out to get Jesus from the beginning. Whatever his initial reasons, shortly after Jesus told them He was about to be crucified by the religious leaders, Judas went to those same religious leaders and asked what they would pay him to betray Jesus. It's no coincidence that he went to the chief priests; they were the exact people Jesus had just said would kill Him.

Judas is both a contrast with the woman who offered extravagant worship, whose story is just before, and with Peter, whose story is just after. Peter denied Jesus, but he didn't go so far as to sell Him out. Peter operated out of doubt and fear for his own life, which is somewhat understandable given the circumstances. But Judas acted out of callousness and greed. You could say that Peter slipped up in the moment, but Judas made a calculated, premeditated decision to betray Jesus. Loyalty was one of the highest values in ancient culture. The ancient world despised someone who betrayed a tie of loyalty for the sake of a bribe.^x

Judas was the complete opposite of the woman who "wasted" all of her most expensive possession on Jesus. She gave everything for Jesus while Judas sold out Jesus for money. Thirty pieces of silver was the amount of reparation the Old Testament law required for a slave who was accidentally killed (Exodus 21:32). This was a tiny amount of money compared to the value of Samson in the book of Judges. The rulers of the Philistines *each* paid Delilah 1,100 shekels of silver to betray him (Judges 16:5)! While the nameless woman believed Jesus was worth pouring out perfume valued at more than a year's wages, the chief priests set Jesus' *life* value at only thirty pieces of silver. And Judas agreed to it.^{xi}

Not everyone who claims to follow Jesus really loves Him; some are more interested in what they think they can get out of Him. The Bible tells us some preachers and teachers are really in it for the money or fame or other selfish motives (Philippians 1:15–17). Some people attend church just because their parents did, because it seems like the right thing to do, or because it's beneficial for business or social networking purposes. These people may not explicitly betray Jesus, but if they are following Him for the wrong reasons, He will one day say to them, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus knew Judas was going to betray Him, yet He ate the entire Passover meal with Him, as a brother, as one of His closest disciples. In John's account, we even see He washed Judas's feet along with all of the other disciples. What does that say about Jesus, that He even washed the feet of His greatest enemy? That He loved him to the very end? The backdrop of Judas's

betrayal is the Last Supper, where Jesus claimed His own blood as the blood of the new covenant. Instead of the Passover lamb, which saved the Israelites from death one time, His blood would save all people from their sins for all time. Jesus came to die for us while we were yet His enemies (Romans 5:8). Even those who deny or betray Jesus can find redemption in the new covenant through His blood if they repent and turn to follow Him.^{xii}

Q: What are some of the ways people who claim to follow Jesus betray Him or use Him to get something for themselves?

Q: In what ways have you treated Jesus as a means of getting what you want instead of loving Him and following where He leads?

Q: How can we love people who seem to only think of themselves in the same the way Jesus loved Judas? What kind of a difference might that make in their lives?

Matthew 26:31–46 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Even those who truly love Jesus have moments of fear and doubt. (Peter)

In this section we hear Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial and see Peter, James and John fall asleep on Him when He needed them the most. His three closest friends, His inner circle. Even those closest to Jesus have moments of fear, doubt and weakness. Peter promised he would never betray Jesus, and he probably really meant it. He couldn't imagine the amount of pressure and fear for his life he would soon feel when Jesus was on trial. When Peter and the other disciples saw Jesus arrested, their world was shattered. As Jesus quoted from Zechariah 13:7, they were like sheep who scattered when the shepherd was killed. But Peter didn't believe it. Even if everyone else fell away, even if he had to die with Jesus, he would never betray Him! He would realize how wrong he was about his own strength and faithfulness in only a few short hours. These statements combined with the story of Peter, James and John falling asleep in the garden teach us that even the best of intentions cannot protect us in times of great temptation unless we have learned how to seek God in prayer (v. 41).^{xiii}

The disciples left the Upper Room and went to the Mount of Olives and then to Gethsemane because faithful Jews were supposed to spend the night in the city limits of Jerusalem on Passover night.^{xiv} Gethsemane, a grove of olive trees, is still there today. The name means "oil press," symbolic of the way Jesus' heart was so deeply "pressed" as He prayed.^{xv} Jesus told His disciples that His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death" (v. 38). This was not a normal kind of pain or worry or fear. Jesus was at the breaking point. His grief was so intense it felt like it could have killed Him.^{xvi}

It is important to understand how real Jesus' pain that night was. It is perhaps one of the most striking moments of His humanity in the Gospels. Instead of showing weakness or insufficiency on Jesus' part, it shows His authenticity as a high priest who experienced every emotion we have and yet did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). This made Him the perfect spotless sacrifice who could

die on behalf of all our sins. It also shows Jesus' obedience and submission to the Father and His love for the Father. Despite the intensity of His grief and His desire not to have to die, He *chose* obedience to the Father's will over His own desires or comforts. Jesus' obedience is a model for us. Sometimes the road God calls us to walk will be difficult, even intensely difficult. Christ's example is that God's true servants follow the path God has given them no matter what their own personal suffering (1 Peter 2:21).^{xvii}

Jesus had already taught the disciples to regularly pray "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (6:13). But this night in particular, Jesus warned them to "watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation" (v. 41). Had they stayed awake and prayed with Jesus, would they have had the same kind of strength and obedience He had to go to the Cross? If we prayed as Jesus did – pouring out our hearts, our grief, our frustrations, our worries, our desires to God, but then ending every prayer with "nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" – we would be more equipped to fight temptation. We would be more in touch with the Spirit than the flesh (v. 41). If we spent less time worrying and more time praying, we would have peace (Philippians 4:6–7). If instead of stewing in anger or fighting with someone, we prayed for them, our relationships with them would be revolutionized (Matthew 5:43–48). If we came to God in prayer *first* instead of using prayer as a last resort, we would have more peace, patience, love and all the other Fruit of the Spirit. If we truly submitted to God's will instead of always pushing for our own, our paths would be straight – not easy, but straight (Proverbs 3:5–6).

Q: How does it feel to know that even Jesus' closest friends had moments of doubt and fear?

Q: Why is it hard for us to submit to God's will, even if we trust that He loves us?

Q: How have you seen prayer change your heart, your attitude and your life?

Q: How can we remind ourselves to always turn to prayer in all circumstances?

Week 30: *Matthew 26:1–46*

Took

Main Point: The Upside-Down King prepared for His mission of self-sacrifice.

Teacher, find a clip of George Beverly Shea singing the song “I’d Rather Have Jesus” and play it for your class. Shea was a staple of Billy Graham crusades, first partnering with Graham in 1947. Shea was known for the simplicity of his testimony, his heart to listen to the hurts of others and his selflessness.^{xviii} At age 23, he composed the melody to a poem by Rhea H. Miller. Below are the lyrics to “I’d Rather Have Jesus.”^{xix}

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold;
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.
I'd rather be led by His nail pierced hand

Chorus:

Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway.
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.

I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than worldwide fame.
I'd rather be true to His holy name [Chorus]

He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom;
He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs.
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead [Chorus]

CHALLENGES

THINK: Really examine your life. What things have you been holding back from Jesus? What have you not offered to Him, to be used for His glory and His kingdom? In what ways have you not submitted to His will?

PRAY: For God's will in whatever circumstances you are dealing with, even if it's hard. Pray for God to reveal His will to you and give you the strength and wisdom to follow it. Spend time each day this week seeking His will for your life.

ACT: Offer yourself. Choose one area in which you have not been offering your whole self as a living sacrifice to Jesus. Pray for wisdom to know how to offer yourself to Him. How can you use that talent, gift or area of your life to bring glory to God and grow His kingdom? Put it into action. Choose one way to use that part of your life to glorify God, and then do it!

ⁱ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

ⁱⁱ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 1993).

ⁱⁱⁱ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

^{iv} Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

^v Kenneth Ewing Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).

^{vi} John P. Meier, *Matthew, New Testament Message 3* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980).

^{vii} Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

^{viii} Morna D. Hooker, *The Message of Mark* (London, UK: Epworth Press, 1983).

^{ix} "The Economy of Wonder" (video) *For the Life of the World, Vol 6* - <https://www.letterstotheexiles.com/>

^x Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

^{xi} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

^{xii} Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

^{xiii} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

^{xiv} Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

^{xv} A. W. Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

^{xvi} John P. Meier, *Matthew, New Testament Message 3* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980).

^{xvii} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

^{xviii} <https://billygraham.org/about/biographies/george-beverly-shea/>

^{xix} https://hymnary.org/text/id_rather_have_jesus_than_silver_or_gold