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Sermon Notes

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The Preparations for Christ's Death

Matthew 26:1-16

I. The Centrality of the Cross of Christ

A. As We Come to Matthew 26-28...

1. We come to the climax of the drama of Matthew's magnificent Gospel
2. AND we come to the final steps that led to the cross of Jesus Christ, and His glorious resurrection from the dead

B. The Cross is the Center of Human History

1. History is a unified story unfolding from the wisdom of God
2. It is not, as Shakespeare would have said,

“A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

3. History has a PURPOSE, a DIRECTION... it has a beginning and it will have an end
4. And the center of all history is the cross of Jesus Christ

As John Bowring put it in his hymn,

**In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.**

5. In the Western World, the life of Christ divides all of history into two sections... B.C. and A.D.
6. And the cross stands over the timeline of history as the centerpiece of why the Son of God came to earth

Matthew 20:28 the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

C. The Cross Prefigured in Scripture

1. The saving work of Christ is the focal point of all Scripture
2. It is prefigured again and again in the pages of the Old Testament
 - a. The animal that died and gave its skin to cover Adam's nakedness is a picture of Christ
 - b. Abel's sacrifice from the firstborn of his flock, acceptable to God, was a picture of Christ's saving work
 - c. Noah's Ark, floating safe above the flood, by which a whole family was rescued, is a picture of Christ
 - d. So also the ram in the thicket on Mt. Moriah, which died in the place of Abraham's son, Isaac
 - e. The Exodus from Egypt, was a picture of Christ's saving work
 - f. As was the Passover Lamb, whose blood was painted on the doors and averted death by the avenging angel
 - g. Every animal sacrifice offered by a Levitical priest prefigured Christ's death on the cross
 - h. So, as we embark on Matthew 26-28, we are ascending step by step to the greatest act in human history... the saving work of Jesus Christ for sinners on the cross and at the empty tomb

D. Paul's Commitment to Preach the Cross

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

E. Matthew 26-28: Step by Step Preparation for the Cross

1. Today: The preparations in predictions, worship, and betrayal
2. In subsequent weeks: the Last Supper, Gethsemane, the arrest and trial of Jesus, Peter's denial, the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, His glorious resurrection, and the Great Commission

II. Preparation Through Predestination, Prediction, and Plotting (vs 1-5)

Matthew 26:1-5 *When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ² "As you know, the Passover is two days away-- and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." ³ ¶ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴ and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. ⁵ "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."*

A. The Cross Predestined by God

1. Before the foundation of the world, God had worked out this plan, that Christ would die for the sins of God's people all over the world
2. As John saw on the Island of Patmos,

Revelation 13:8 *[Jesus is the] Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.*

3. As Peter put it in his first epistle:

1 Peter 1:19-20 *[You were redeemed by] the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.*

4. By this plan, all human actors... all of Jesus' enemies, including Judas, Caiaphas, and Pilate, are operating on a divine plan and a divine timetable:

Acts 2:23 *[Jesus] was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.*

Acts 4:27-28 *Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*

5. So, the events of this story are not some TRAGIC ACCIDENT in which a good and compassion man was trapped by political forces he didn't understand and was swept away like some passive twig floating on a whitewater river!!
NO!!!

John 10:18 *No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

In other words, it would have been ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE for Jesus to have died if He didn't will it... He was not passive in these events, but actively orchestrating them for His glory and our salvation

SO... Matthew (unlike Mark and Luke) puts a lot of the unfolding of this in Jesus' mouth... He SPEAKS what is going to happen before it does:

B. The Cross Predicted by Christ

Matthew 26:1-2 *When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ² "As you know, the Passover is two days away-- and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."*

1. Jesus' power to predict the future proves His deity
2. Also, He has been predicting this very thing again and again to His disciples so that they would not be shocked and stop believing in Him
3. This is the fourth and final time Jesus makes this prediction... the first was in Matthew 16

Matthew 16:21 *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

4. Jesus warned His disciples ahead of time for their benefit:

John 14:29 *I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.*

5. The timing is NO ACCIDENT: It was during the Passover
 - a. As I mentioned a moment ago, one of the greatest moments in Jewish history is a clear picture of the salvation from sin that God worked through Jesus
 - b. The Passover was a powerful picture of the substitutionary death of Jesus; a lamb without blemish was slaughtered and its blood painted on the doorposts... thus the blood delivered the Jews from death by the avenging angel
 - c. Perhaps as many as 2 million pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover
 - d. The death of Jesus at the time when the Passover Lamb would be sacrificed is a perfect conclusion/fulfillment to the centuries-old symbolism

John 1:29 *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

6. Also, note the TIMING!!! Jesus had it right, the Jewish leaders had it wrong... the Jewish leaders wanted to hold Jesus quietly during the Feast, and then kill Him eight days later after the Feast was over, so that there would be no uprising among the HUGE THrong that was in Jerusalem... but Jesus said it would be after TWO DAYS

Luke 22:22 The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed,

- a. Amazing about the timing... all the other times, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Him right there and then, but Jesus did not die, because it was not yet His time
- b. But now, the Jewish leaders would like to kill him AFTER THE FEAST so there would be no riot among the people, and they can't do that either!! Jesus decided with His heavenly Father when He would die... it was predetermined that Jesus would die in two days

C. The Cross Plotted by the Jewish Leaders

Matthew 26:3-5 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴ and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. ⁵ "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."

1. These were the plotting, scheming enemies of Jesus... they had been dreaming of the day to kill Jesus for several years, now the time had come
2. Their motives: jealousy, because of His purity and miracles and popularity with the people; but also, He was a threat to their religious machinery and position with the Romans... they were getting rich on the sacrificial system, and were in a dominant position among their own people... but Jesus threatened all that
3. Caiaphas: the High Priest, a wicked schemer, the head of the corrupt religious machine that was making them tons of money; certainly a puppet of Rome, son in law of Annas... the Romans sought to keep control of the High Priesthood, and over a period of about a hundred years, some 28 men held th office; BUT CAIAPHAS held it for 27 years (A.D. 15 to 37... an unparalleled length in that office)
4. The Plot: to ARREST JESUS SLYLY... (literally, as it by "bait"); the goal is to keep it from the masses of Jews, many of whom might have rioted
5. But, as I said, their timing was not to be... God rules, not man

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

John MacArthur: “From the standpoint of the Jewish leaders, the Passover was the worst possible time for them to take direct action against Jesus, especially to put him to death.... But Passover was the time God had chosen.... When by God’s sovereign allowance, Jesus’ enemies finally succeeded in putting Him to death, it was at the very time they most wanted to avoid.”

III. Preparation Through A Woman’s Faith and Love (vs. 6-13)

A. The Act Described

Matthew 26:6-7 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

1. All four Gospels have an account of a woman anointing Jesus
2. However, in Luke’s Gospel, the woman is a sinful woman who anoints Jesus with her tears, washing His feet and drying them with her hair
3. All the other three Gospels seem to be talking about another time, and all seem to be talking about the SAME INCIDENT
 - a. John tells us it was eight days before the Passover, so Matthew has relocated the account here
4. The Location: the home of Simon the Leper
 - a. Bethany... east of Jerusalem, a couple of miles away
 - b. We know nothing else about this man, Simon, although since he was called a leper, it is most likely that Jesus had healed him, such that they could all meet in his house
5. Who:
 - a. Interestingly Matthew does not tell us her name, but John tells us it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha
 - b. Martha and Mary were serving tables at this man’s house, either as a kindness to him, or some think it possible that Simon was Lazarus, Martha and Mary’s father...
6. The Act: a lavish outpouring of costly love
 - a. Alabaster jar: itself very costly; probably a long, slender-necked vial, sealed, so that the neck of the vial would have to be broken to get to the perfume

- b. The perfume itself was almost certainly a liquid, not an ointment
- c. John said it was “pistic” nard; coming from the head or spike of a fragrant East Indian plant belonging to the genus Valerianna, which yields a juice of delicious odor
- d. It was extremely aromatic, and the whole house was filled with the fragrance
- e. Judas, who cared only about the money, said it was worth 300 denarii, approximately one year’s wages for a working man
- f. It was an overwhelmingly extravagant offering, and everyone of Jesus’ disciples was STUNNED by it

B. The Disciples Indignant

Matthew 26:8-9 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. ⁹ "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

- 1. Matthew tells us the disciples were indignant at Mary for what she had done
- 2. It wasn’t just Judas... it was ALL of them!
- 3. Judas vocalized their shock, painting it hypocritically with a concern for the poor:

John 12:5-6 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

- 4. BUT the disciples as a whole were thinking similar thoughts...
- 5. It is truly sad to trace out the shameful attitudes and actions of the Twelve the night Jesus was arrested
 - a. Here, they are completely out of step with Jesus on this beautiful act of worship and they are indignant with the woman and give her a very hard time

Elsewhere:

- b. They spend time arguing about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24)
- c. Judas is about to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver

- d. Peter arrogantly boasted that, even if all of them fell away, he never would; all the other disciples said the same thing
- e. They failed to watch and pray in Gethsemane, falling asleep rather than comforting Jesus and staying with him
- f. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss
- g. All the rest of them deserted Jesus and fled when He was arrested
- h. Peter denied Him three times, even calling down curses on Himself
- i. All in all, it was a very shameful display of why everyone of them AND US need a Savior

C. The Woman Defended by Jesus

Matthew 26:10-12 *Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me." ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.*

1. Jesus is the most unpredictable and surprising man in history
2. After teaching them the parable of the sheep and the goats and the need to care for the poor and needy, He defends Mary's actions despite the statement that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor
3. He rebukes the disciples: WHY ARE YOU BOTHERING THIS WOMAN
4. He defends her actions: SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING TO ME
 - a. The Greek word implies that it was morally pure... a truly GOOD action
 - b. The word beautiful is a good one
5. Then He quotes Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy 15:11 *There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.*

- a. Mark adds a phrase

Mark 14:7 *The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.*

- b. For the rest of your lives, you can give to the poor and needy!!

- c. For the rest of history, there will be poor people
 - d. You can help them ANY TIME YOU WANT!!!
 - e. BUT... you will not always have me
6. The real significance: she was preparing Jesus' body for burial
- a. This was a shocking reminder to them of what they all keep forgetting... Jesus is about to die
 - b. Mary seemed to be the only one who took Jesus fully at His word and believed what He was saying... "I am about to die."

D. The Act's Timeless Memorial

Matthew 26:13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

- 1. Amazing statement... with tremendous foresight that "this gospel" would someday be preached all over the world
- 2. Jesus' death was not the end of this movement, but the beginning
- 3. And Mary would be held in honor wherever the gospel would be preached
- 4. The Scriptures would be written, and the Holy Spirit would see to it that we understood what Mary did
- 5. This prophecy is being fulfilled RIGHT NOW AS I PREACH!!!

E. The Act Properly Understood: Both Unique and a Pattern

- 1. Unique: "You will not always have me"
 - a. The reason Mary's actions were so beautiful is that she understood the utter uniqueness of the moment and acted accordingly
 - b. Jesus would never be with them in this way again
 - c. Therefore, Mary's actions are a stand-alone in all of Redemptive History... never again to be repeated, because Jesus highlighted that uniqueness in His statement
 - d. We cannot love Jesus now as Mary did... it is not possible, because He has ascended and we cannot touch Him; AND He will never die again, so there is no need, and it would be inappropriate for us to try to prepare Him for another burial

- e. So, Mary's act was utterly unique in all time
- 2. YET, it is also a pattern for the kind of LAVISH WORSHIP God wants each of us to give
 - a. It was based on FAITH:
 - i) Mary was a contemplative listener and student of Jesus' words, for in Luke 10, she sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him

Luke 10:42 Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

- ii) Mary heard Jesus' words about His own death and BELIEVED THEM... unlike the disciples, who were avoiding these words, Mary heard and believed; she accepted Jesus' need to die, although I don't know if she fully understood the atonement at that point
 - iii) Mary's actions were based on FAITH IN JESUS' WORDS
 - b. It was LOVING... she cherished Jesus and sought to honor Him, and poured out this costly perfume out of a heart full of love for Him; the BEAUTY of the action was in the love that was in her heart
 - c. It was LAVISHLY SACRIFICIAL... true love is reflected in SACRIFICE... Mary gave the absolute best thing she had; in this way, she reflected the generosity of God the Father, who poured out Jesus on our behalf
 - d. It recognized the SUPREMACY of Christ above all... yes, it is right to serve and love the poor, to share the gospel, to do many horizontal acts of kindness to others... but we were CREATED FOR WORSHIP... and this worship is Christ-centered; the duty to love Christ is greater than the duty to care for the poor

IV. Preparation Through a Disciple's Treacherous Betrayal (vs. 14-16)

Matthew 26:14-16 Then one of the Twelve-- the one called Judas Iscariot-- went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

- A. A Shocking Contrast: Money Poured Out vs. Money Received
 - 1. Whereas Mary poured out a costly give TO Jesus, Judas sought to trade Jesus IN for money
 - 2. In three Gospels, the account of Judas arranging Jesus' betrayal immediately follows the account of the lavish anointing...

3. John tells us Judas's greed, as we've already noted

John 12:6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

4. So, perhaps he realized that the game was up soon, and if Jesus is going to agree to waste so much money, he might as well trade Jesus in for whatever he can get
5. Mary's sweet, faith-filled, sacrificial love is starkly contrasted with Judas's Satanic hatred and selfishness:

Luke 22:3-6 Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. ⁴ And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. ⁵ They were delighted and agreed to give him money. ⁶ He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

B. The Disgusting Price: Thirty Silver Coins

1. The same price set on a slave in the Old Testament
2. A pathetically small price for which to sell your soul
3. What could you buy with those coins?

C. The Significance of the Betrayal

1. The pain of the betrayal cannot be overemphasized
2. Jesus showed Judas intimacy and love, kindness and honor
3. Judas traded him in for 30 silver coins
4. The pain of this betrayal we will delve into later in this Gospel...
5. Psalms makes it plain

Psalm 41:9 Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

D. Judas's Agreement

1. To watch for the best possible time to hand Jesus over
2. That was what the Jewish leaders were buying with their money

V. Applications

A. Come to Christ

1. The core of our faith is the Cross of Jesus Christ
2. This chapter has discussed the preparations God made to lead to the cross
 - a. We have seen the eternal plan of the Father before the foundation of the world
 - b. We have seen that the death of Christ on the cross was the point of all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament
 - c. We have heard Paul say he resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

3. BELIEVE the Good News:

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Colossians 1:20 making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

B. Marvel at the Sovereignty of God in Orchestrating the Details of Christ's Death

1. Understand the eternal roots of the plan of God:

Revelation 13:8 [Jesus is the] Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

1 Peter 1:19-20 [You were redeemed by] the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

2. God moves His enemies around like pieces on a chess board:

Acts 4:28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

3. The timing of it... the High Priest Caiaphas cannot control the death of Jesus; it would happen at the set time God had ordained

C. Imitate Mary's Level of Devotion

1. Faith-filled: study scripture to understand what Christ said He would do
2. Loving: let your love for Christ overflow in acts of worship to Him

3. Sacrificial: let it be costly... decide to spend time worshiping Him, rather than some of your hobbies or pleasures or business

4. Christ-exalting: saturate your mind in the greatness of Christ

D. Beware of Judas's Idol: Money

1. Judas sold his soul for 30 pieces of silver

2. Money really was his god... he had no true devotion to Jesus

3. Beware that the same idol doesn't grip you

Colossians 3:5-6 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

E. Minister to the Poor "as often as you want"

Mark 14:7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want.

1. Ironically now that Christ has ascended, one of the ways we can love Jesus the best is by caring for the poor and needy as He said

Matthew 25:35-40 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' ³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'