



Sunday School Lesson for March 7, 2004.
Released on March 5, 2004:

Study Matthew 26:3-15, 20-25. Love and Betrayal
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACES: Jerusalem; Bethany; Jerusalem

Matthew 26:3-15, 20-25

3 Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas,
4 And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him.
5 But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.
6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,
7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.
8 But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?
9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.
10 When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.
11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.
12 For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.
13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.
14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests,
15 And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver.
.....
20 Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.
21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.
22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?
23 And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.
24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.
25 Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.

Introduction

Diversity-

As humans we share much in common, yet no one questions our diversity of thought patterns and behavioral styles. Some researchers conclude that people can be categorized broadly in terms of how they approach a task. One person just wants to get the job done as quickly as possible. Another wants to do the job while interacting with people. One person wants to do the job in a way that keeps the peace. Yet another wants to do the job correctly above all else. Each will take a different approach to the same job.

Similarly, with our diversities of race, religion, education, socioeconomic standing, gender, worldviews, and personal agendas, it should not surprise us to see different people react differently to the same person or situation. In today's lesson we observe people reacting in four different ways to Jesus. The Jewish leaders, a loving woman, the apostles as a group, and Judas in particular all display differing responses to the Lord.

Lesson Background

The final week of Jesus' ministry left the world changed forever. Jesus' normal base of operation when in Judea was Bethany, a village about two miles southeast of Jerusalem (see Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:1-11). His dear friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived there (John 11:1, 2), as well as Simon the leper.

Our text today picks up after Jesus has spent some intense days in Jerusalem. After a triumphal entry, Jesus had driven money changers out of the temple, had denounced their hypocrisy, had warned His disciples of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, had challenged them to be prepared for the final judgment, and had reminded them once again that He would be betrayed and crucified (Matthew 21:1-26:2). And the week was far from over!

Conspiracy

(Matthew 26:3-5)

First we consider the reaction of the Jewish leaders. They have opposed Jesus for most of His ministry, but now events take a particularly threatening turn.

1. Who were these Jewish authorities? Why were they "assembled together" (Matthew 26:3-5)?

As the time for the Passover Feast approached, the Jewish authorities were intent on disposing of Jesus. The chief priests, scribes (scholars), and elders of the people (officials) assembled at the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. Together these men made up the Sanhedrin, or Jewish court. They had been given the right to deal with religious matters among the Jews, but putting a person to death was reserved for the Romans (John 18:31).

Only one item appears on the agenda. In consultation, they plot to "take Jesus" into custody as an enemy of the state (Matthew 26:4). And their treachery is evident. Rather than arresting Jesus boldly and openly, they opt to use subtility (stealth) to do so.

Jesus' arrest, however, is only the first step toward their real objective: they want to kill him. Without His death their plan will be incomplete. An informal meeting to plot the execution of a man who has not yet been tried or convicted violates Jewish law (John 7:51). Yet the presumed spiritual leaders of Israel have fallen into such corruption that they are willing to set aside the law to have Jesus eliminated.

Many religious pilgrims flooded into the city during the Passover Feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed it. The Jewish authorities did not want to stir them up and cause a riot (Matthew 26:5).

The leaders must have cringed when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, but the fickle crowds turned against Him and played into the hands of the conspirators. It was while the multitudes of religious pilgrims were still in the city that Jesus was later arrested, tried, and sentenced to death by Pilate under pressure from the Jews. This sad narrative is recorded in John 18:28 through 19:16.

Giving Jesus Our Best (Matthew 26:6-13)

Next we contrast the hatred the religious elite have for Jesus with the extravagant love of a woman whose story has endured through the ages.

2. Why was Jesus at "the house of Simon the leper" (Matthew 26:6)?

Bethany is about two miles southeast of Jerusalem. Simon, a man apparently healed by Jesus, opens his home to friends to prepare a meal in the Lord's honor. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus are there as well as Jesus' disciples (Mark 14:3; John 12:2,3).

John 12:1,12 specifically place this event before the triumphal entry, and thus earlier than what we have just read in Matthew 26:3-5. This means that Matthew places this event where he does in his text in order to achieve a certain dramatic effect. When we compare the reason the Jewish leaders are assembled in Matthew 26:3-5 with the reason for the assembly at Simon's house, the contrast is startling indeed!

3. What did Mary do to express her devotion to Jesus (v. 7)?

John informs us that it is Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who is the woman who anoints Jesus' head with precious ointment or perfume (John 12:3). It is customary to anoint the heads of important guests, but this act is extraordinary in more than one respect. The alabaster box, or jar, probably is a cherished family heirloom. The precious ointment is worth "three hundred pence" or the amount of wages a person would receive for three hundred day's work (John 12:5).

Mary not only pours the perfume on Jesus' head while He is having supper, she also anoints his feet, wiping them with her hair (John 12:3). Generally it is considered immodest for a woman to loosen her hair in mixed company, but Mary defies a prevailing cultural norm in expressing her devotion. She is willing to give up a family treasure and her own reputation among those who value tradition over truth in order to show her love to the Lord.

4. Mary defied prevailing cultural norms to demonstrate her devotion to the Lord. What are some cultural norms we must defy today? How do we do this properly?

Today's postmodern culture is one of "diversity." As that term is generally understood, it demands we accept any point of view as equal with any other. To insist that one religious system is better than another violates this expectation. Thus, trying to win people to Christ defies "prevailing cultural norms." To call any behavior a sin is equally "intolerant" in the world's view. Any discussion of immorality, whether criticizing illicit relations between a man and woman or criticizing homosexual behavior, is labeled as bigoted and inappropriate.

The world says Christians are free to believe what they want, but they are to keep it to themselves. But Jesus says we are to share it! We do this recognizing our obligation to obey God above all (Acts 5:29). Our witness for Christ is to be undergirded with gentleness, respect, and good behavior (1 Peter 3:15, 16).

Gift Criticized (vs. 8,9)

5. Why did the disciples consider Mary's act wasteful (vs. 8,9)?

The disciples did not view this in a favorable light. They perhaps followed the lead of Judas Iscariot in this matter (see John 12:4-6). He was the treasurer of the group and would have preferred to have had the ointment sold and the money deposited in his pouch. He did not really care for the poor, although the other disciples did.

Judas was a thief, and he must have desired to get his hands on at least some of the money that ointment might have brought if it had been sold. As we shall see later in this lesson, it was money he was after when he agreed to betray Jesus to His enemies (Matt. 26:14,15).

Gift Honored (vs. 10-13)

6. How did Jesus explain His understanding of the significance of Mary's act (vs. 10-12)?

Perhaps Jesus could see that Mary was upset by the criticism leveled against her by the disciples. Nevertheless, He quickly sprang to her defense. He rebuked them for troubling her. He said that she had performed a good work upon Him. He reminded the disciples, they would always have the poor with them to help, but they would not have Him to help much longer.

Many of Jesus' teachings contain a "startle factor" that grabs attention. This is one of them. On the surface it would appear that Jesus is minimizing the concern we are to have for the poor. But actually He is reaffirming Deuteronomy 15:11. Jesus' recognition that the poor will always be among us indirectly acknowledges our need to minister to them. That will not change until the Lord returns.

We should also recognize that some service opportunities are timeless, while others are narrowly time bound. When the window of opportunity to serve in the time bound cases is shut, it is permanently lost. When Jesus says that they will not always have Him with them, He reveals that the opportunity for His followers to honor Him in the final tragic hours of His earthly ministry is severely limited. On the stage of history, Mary seizes the opportunity of a lifetime.

As Mary anoints Jesus with the ointment, does she realize that she is doing it for His burial (v. 12)? Jesus had told His disciples several times about His coming death

and burial, but it had made little impression on them (Matthew 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19). We cannot be certain that Mary does indeed realize this, but Jesus Himself certainly sees the deeper meaning. This incident provides the Master with yet another opportunity to teach.

7. How have Jesus' words in Matthew 26:13 been fulfilled?

Jesus makes a guarantee that history confirms. Though she wants nothing more than the privilege of honoring her Lord, Jesus guarantees that Mary herself would receive a memorial. The very fact that we study this story today establishes the truthfulness of Jesus' prediction. Like Mary, we also can seize those unique moments in which we demonstrate that we "would rather have Jesus than silver or gold."

8. Jesus said that Mary's act of devotion would be remembered throughout time. For what will you be remembered? Why do you think so?

Your learners might list many specific things. It will be important, however, to stress a bigger picture: we will be remembered for those things that characterize our lives. Therefore, if we want people to remember us as followers of the Lord, then we need to be sure we demonstrate that. We cannot rewrite the scripts of our lives after we have lived them. We must give ourselves now to that kind of service.

Stress to your learners the importance of having right motives in their answers. We must be careful not to do our good deeds "before men, to be seen of them" (Matthew 6:1). We certainly don't want to be remembered as phonies!

Ultimately, we must give ourselves to the Lord wholeheartedly, and not worry about how others will remember us. Mary was completely unselfconscious when she anointed the Lord. But her story is told even twenty centuries later.

The Betrayal
(Matthew 26:14, 15, 20-25)

How much the disciples "get the idea" at this point we don't really know. The one definite exception is Judas. The lure of cold hard cash leads him down the path of ultimate infamy.

Betrayer's Contract (vs. 14, 15)

9. What motive propelled Judas to go to Jesus' enemies with an offer to betray Him to them (vs. 14,15)?

In stark contrast to Mary's loyal and loving act toward Jesus, we now move to the disloyal and hateful act of Judas Iscariot toward Him. As a member of the band of twelve men who ministered with the Master, Judas had shared in all of the teachings and experiences of being with the divine Son of God. However, there obviously was a lack of commitment and devotion in him. He allowed Satan to enter and direct his thoughts, feelings, and actions. He reminds us of men whom Paul characterized as "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (II Tim. 3:5).

This might be a good time to caution your students against the wiles of Satan. They are not immune to his acts of oppression, obsession, and possession.

Judas went to the chief priests and wanted to know what they would give him to deliver Jesus to them. If they could satisfy his greed, he would help them take Jesus captive when no crowd was present (Luke 22:6).

When we think of a covenant, we usually think in terms of an honest agreement. For example, people make a covenant with God to follow and obey Him. It is possible, however, to make covenants with those who are evil as well. This is what Judas Iscariot did when he agreed to accept thirty pieces of silver from the chief priests for betraying his Master to them.

There are Satan worshipers today, and they make covenants directly with him. What they fail to realize is that he is no kinder to his subjects than he is to his enemies. Whatever they hope to gain from this association is destined to lead to disappointment in this life and then to eternal doom.

Betrayer's Charade (vs. 20-22)

10. Why did Jesus reveal that one of His disciples would betray Him (vs. 20,21)?

The scene now shifts to the evening of Jesus' final Passover observance with His disciples. Judas already has agreed to the contract on Jesus' life, but none of the disciples know that. Therefore, when the even was come for them to share the Passover, it is easy for Judas to sit down as one of the twelve with his plan undetected (v. 20).

As they were eating, Jesus made the statement that one of them was going to betray Him (v. 21). Since this was the first time it was announced that Jesus would be betrayed to the Jewish authorities by one of His own disciples, it must have made Judas Iscariot nervous. He must have wondered whether he would be exposed and have the other disciples turn against him and perhaps threaten to harm him.

We can only wonder at the motivation Jesus had for making the statement about a betrayer, but it was one way of causing His disciples to look inward at their own individual allegiances to Him. It is good spiritual discipline for us to do this ourselves periodically.

11. How did the disciples react when they were told of the betrayal (v. 22)?

We are told that the disciples were exceedingly sorrowful when they were told of the betrayal. Every one of them asked, "Is it I?" The questioning at first may have been directed at themselves, for apparently it was John, leaning on Jesus, whom Peter signaled to ask Him about the betrayer's identity (John 13:22-25).

Betrayer's Exposure (vs. 23-25)

12. How did Jesus respond to the disciples' question "Lord, is it I" (v. 23)?

Jesus replied that one who dipped his sop, or bread, into the dish (bowl of sauce) with Him would betray Him (Matthew 26:23). This was not definitive, however, because each of them was likely to do this as the meal progressed. The only one who could be sure that Jesus referred to him was Judas Iscariot, but it put the others on guard too.

Each one had to consider the possibility that he had the capacity to some degree for betraying Jesus. We should never get so self-confident and smug that we think we are incapable of betraying our Saviour and Lord in various ways.

13. Why would it have been better for Judas not to have been born (v. 24)?

Jesus acknowledges His willing intent to fulfill God's plan as it has been written of Him in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53). He never dodges the work of giving His life to pay sin's price for our eternal salvation.

But Jesus sternly warns that His betrayer will not be allowed to dodge the consequences of his rebellion either. In the terrible judgment he will face, Judas will not be able to argue, "Well, I wasn't warned." (See also Acts 1:15-20).

Jesus solemnly declared that it would have been good if he had never been born. Peter was later to say, "Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place" (Acts 1:25). Perhaps Peter simply meant that the betrayer was destined to go to the same place of perdition (hell, the lake of fire) to which all sinners will go. However, the implication seems to be that it was some place of special eternal horror all its own.

It would appear that Judas Iscariot pretended to be as confused as the other disciples when he asked Jesus whether he was the betrayer (Matthew 26:25). Jesus replied that he, Judas, had said it, meaning yes, Judas was the betrayer. The other disciples, however, did not understand that Judas was actually the guilty one.

John 13:26-30 tells us that Jesus intentionally dipped His sop in the dish and gave it to Judas. At that point, Satan himself entered into Judas. Jesus sensed this and told him to go and do what he was going to do quickly. No one else at the table was aware of the significance of this. The other disciples thought that Judas, the holder and keeper of the money bag for the group, was going out to either buy more provisions for the feast or give something to the poor. Judas went out and "it was night," a phrase that certainly foreshadowed his wicked business of betrayal.

14. In spite of hostility, what did Jesus keep doing?

Our texts have featured various levels of hostility. The Jewish authorities were hostile to Jesus. The disciples, and particularly Judas Iscariot, were hostile to Mary for honoring Jesus with precious ointment instead of selling it for profit. Judas was also hostile in scheming to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. His hostility was identified by Jesus. Through it all, however, Jesus moved deliberately toward the cross.

CONCLUSION

Love and betrayal step to center stage in today's lesson text. But they do not stand there alone. Hatred and lack of discernment make their appearances as well.

Varied Responses-

The hatred of the Jewish leaders for Jesus demonstrates the depths of corruption to which people in power can sink. The very people who should have accepted the message were the ones who resisted it by all means possible. The same is true today.

The extravagant love of Mary for Jesus challenges us to love Him just as completely. If she had to break a conventional norm to anoint Jesus' feet, or if she needed to let go of a family treasure to satisfy her longing to serve Christ, she just did it. May we do the same.

The disciples allowed themselves to get caught up in what seemed like a pious position, only to discover their own lack of discernment. How important it is that we evaluate all sides of an issue and then reach a conclusion with spiritual insight! To do otherwise causes us unintentionally to devalue our Lord.

And then there is Judas. How tragic that a man who had been invited into such close fellowship with the Son of God could turn so completely! While we take great pleasure in our relationship with Christ, we should never take it for granted. What will we do when we find ourselves in situations where we ask, "Will it be I who betrays the Lord?" Instead of running toward Christ's enemies, let us decide right now that in every circumstance, regardless of the cost, we will run full speed to the Lord of glory!

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we marvel at how the Lord Jesus still loved in the face of hatred, His disciples' lack of discernment, and the betrayal of one so close. Give us grace to be extravagant in loving You, for You are worth everything we have to give. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Let the extravagance of our love for Him reflect the extravagance of His love for us.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Luke 22:7-30 sets the stage for a lesson on the Lord's Last Supper.

Let's discuss this in the Forum .
www.JesusIsAll.com/forum