

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series - Matthew (Lesson SB_MT26B)

Matthew 26:1-30

The Plot to Murder Jesus (26:1-5)

After the Lord had pronounced His judgment on the Pharisees (23:1-36) the Pharisees were enraged against Jesus. While Jesus was teaching His disciples about His Second Coming and events surrounding it as recorded in chapters 24-25, the chief priests and elders withdrew into a secret session in the house of the high priest.

A side note: Note that the groups of religious leaders that gathered to plot Jesus' death included the "elders of the people." Many theologians and local church leaders believe in a type of church government that involves a plurality of elders or an elder board. Almost everyone acknowledges that the concept of the elder originated with Moses and was perpetuated throughout the Age of Israel.¹ I find it interesting that we see in these verses how even the most spiritual man to have ever lived (i.e. Jesus) was opposed by the "elders of the people." Question: does not the same possibility exist today where a pastor is just one member of a "council of equals?"² In other words, if the pastor is to be the spiritual leader, it is very possible that the spiritual pastor could find himself shackled (and opposed) by the non-spiritual elders who do not share the same God-given vision.³

Caiaphas was the high priest from A.D. 18 to 37. However, Luke 3:2 indicates that both Annas (the father-in-law of Caiaphas) and Caiaphas were high priests. Acts 4:6 calls Annas the high priest. Although Caiaphas was officially the high priest, Annas still had influence over that office. Annas was so despicable that the Roman government deposed him from office. However, he continued to work behind the scenes through his wicked son-in-law, Caiaphas. Caiaphas is the one who had counseled the Jews that "it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (Jn 11:50) because the religious leaders of Israel did not want to lose their positions of influence and power should the Roman Empire have to quash a Jewish

¹ For instance, consider the following quote taken from Ed Glascock, "The Biblical Concept of Elder," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 144, Number 573, (January 1987), 69 – "Besides the lexical meaning there is a further connection between Paul's word 'elder' and the Old Testament word. The office of elder in Israel was established before the Exodus. After the Exodus, God had Moses select 70 from among all the elders and He gave them His Spirit, even as He had to Moses, so that they might share the burden of leadership with him (Num. 11:16-25). Thus elder in Israel became a spiritual office as well as being the traditional position of honor that it was among most ancient Near Eastern cultures. (Scripture refers to elders in Egypt, Moab, and Edom, as well as in Israel.)"

² Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Leadership* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995), page 39.

³ There are other problems associated with the concept of elder rule in the local church given the fact that the limited information regarding church administration and leadership contained in the New Testament is set in a period where apostolic authority is present in the form of the Apostles and the early church represented a transition from one age to another. We are no longer in a transition period, nor are there Apostles present with authority over more than one local church. However, a complete examination of this subject is outside the scope of our current study.

“insurrection” that recognized Jesus as its king. These religious leaders were comfortable with the status quo.

Principle: to yield to God and His will takes a person out of their comfort zone. Religion is a comfort zone for most people. The religious leaders in Jesus’ day did not want to do anything that might disturb the comfortable situation they enjoyed in Israel and with the Roman authorities.

Corollary: A comfortable position in life doesn’t imply that one is a spiritual man or woman. This principle has always been true of the spiritual life of the believer regardless of whether the believer is of the Age of Israel or of the Church Age. The religious leaders of Israel mistook their comfortable and secure status and the approbation they received from Israel with favor from God.

In the days of Jesus, the High Priest was, by virtue of his office, President of the Sanhedrin Council (the body of seventy high priests, elders, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees who were effectively the rulers over Israel under the oversight of the Roman procurators).⁴ Notice in these verses the hypocrisy of religion. These religious leaders had no problem murdering Jesus; however, they just didn’t want to do it during the “feast” so as to not cause an uproar among the people. They recognized the wide interest in and acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. They did not want to cause a riot and God forbid they be defiled and not be able to participate in the feast of unleavened bread.

The Anointing at Bethany (26:6-13)

We know from John 12:1-8 that the woman who anointed Jesus here was Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Apparently, Jesus spent His nights in the village of Bethany, just a few miles outside of Jerusalem. From John’s account, we know that it was Judas who asked the question of why this fragrant perfume was not sold and given to the poor. It was customary to anoint the heads of Rabbis and special guests at marriage feasts, but Mary anointed with the most expensive perfume both the head and the feet of Jesus.⁵ This was a very expensive and fragrant oil that was sold at a price that put it beyond any but the wealthy. As such, its use reflected Mary’s deep love for her Lord and the anointing served as an outward symbol of her understanding just Who He was (the Messiah of Israel) and the spiritual reality of the death He would suffer. As such, her service to Jesus would be memorialized throughout history. In the same manner, our actions that are derived from our personal love for the Lord will be memorialized throughout eternity in the form of eternal rewards.

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus (26:14-16)

After Jesus’ stinging rebuke of the disciples (for whom Judas had evidently been the spokesman), the eleven accepted His rebuke quietly while Judas was moved to action. Luke records that it was at this time that “Satan entered Judas” in Luke 22:3. This statement by Luke could very well be an indication that Judas was an unbeliever since only the unbeliever can be indwelt by a demon or Satan. However, we know that it is also possible for the believer to come under the influence of demonic or Satanic thinking and not be personally indwelt by Satan or a demon.

⁴ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, R. K. Harrison, editor, Revised and Updated Edition – 1988 (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 1126-1128. Unger notes on page 1126 that “the rise of this great council of the Hebrews took place in the time of Greek supremacy, though the rabbis endeavor to trace its origin to the college of *seventy elders* named by Moses.” [Emphasis in italics mine]

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ: A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 414-415.

Judas sought an opportunity to betray Christ secretly so as not to start a riot. His unexpected offer to the Sanhedrin changed the timetable that the Sanhedrin was considering, i.e. to execute the plan for the death of Christ after the Passover. If it had not been for Judas' offer, the arrest of Jesus might have been postponed.⁶ God in His omniscience knew how the decisions of each person would weave together from eternity past and accomplish His intended result. Jesus' only source of comfort amidst all of this opposition to the point of His death was His intimate knowledge that it was the Father's plan for Him.

Principle: Nothing else comforts the believer in the midst of persecution and suffering except an intimate and abiding personal love for the Father and His plan. This principle is just as true for us as it was for Jesus. We will only be able to relax amidst personal and national crises to the extent we have an intimate and abiding personal love for the Lord.

Jesus' Last Meal With His Disciples (26:17-30)

In the last lesson, we studied some of the difficulties associated with trying to pin down the exact sequence of days leading up to our Lord's crucifixion, so I will not address that issue again here. Suffice it to say however that it is quite probable that the meal that Jesus ate with His disciples as recorded here in Matthew as the Lord's Supper was not the Passover meal. Jesus' instructions are in preparation for the Passover; however, the meal was not necessarily the Passover.⁷ If the meal was the Passover which was eaten right after sundown on the 15th of Nisan (per Jewish reckoning) after the slaying of the Lamb as the sun began to go down on the 14th of Nisan (i.e. the beginning of the 15th of Nisan), then Jesus would have been killed on the special Sabbath.

In verse 28, Jesus states "this is the blood of the new covenant." He was most likely referring to the fact that His death on the Cross was the basis for the fulfillment of such prophecies related to the Messianic Kingdom as found in Jeremiah 31:31-34; 32:37-44; Ezekiel 34:25-31; and 37:26-28. Once again, the church is not in view in this passage even though Paul later establishes the Lord's Supper as an ordinance for the Church to keep in 1 Corinthians 11:25-26.

Jesus' statement in verse 29 supports this view. His Father's kingdom is a reference to the Messianic kingdom and His statements in regard to drinking the fruit of the vine in the Father's kingdom alludes to the wedding supper of the Messianic kingdom (Millennium) in which He is the groom, the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (resurrected believers of all ages) are the bride, and believers entering the Millennium in their physical bodies on earth are the friends of the bridegroom.

⁶ Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus*, 415.

⁷ It is interesting that the entire Passover season was referred to as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Unleavened bread referred to the Passover as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed for seven days (Lev 23:4-8). Pentecost notes that "since the days of the Dispersion, the Jews had added an extra day at the beginning of the eight days of this festival season and called it the Day of Preparation." See Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus*, 415-416. Pentecost also provides a good summary of the arguments for and against viewing the Last Supper as the Passover on pages 416-421.