

# Preparatory Acts

Matthew 26:1-5

Morning reading: Psalm 51

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**Main point:** The events around the atoning work of Christ display His power, polarization, and penetrating glory.

## Introduction:

Every day we do things, no matter how large or small, that are preparatory to good or greater things. Or they might prepare us to do evil or destructive things. Every act is a preparatory act. What sort of preparatory acts are you doing today and what are they preparing you for? What have your *thoughts, attitudes, desires, or actions* prepared you for this morning?

In the first 30 verses of Matthew 26, we are told of four *preparatory acts*. Two done in *opposition* to Jesus. Two done in *service* to Jesus. Once these four acts are completed, the stage is set for the last night and day of Jesus' earthly life. We are days away from the crucifixion of Christ. This portion of Scripture ought to be read and studied with what Bishop J.C. Ryle calls, "peculiar reverence and attention."<sup>1</sup> My friends, our approach as we come ought to be to "take off our shoes," as it were, for the place on which we are standing is "holy ground."

Following the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25, Matthew devotes two chapters to the *passion and suffering* of Jesus. The focus of chapters 26 and 27 will be on the atonement for sin that Jesus will accomplish. The major time for teaching is done. There will be a brief lesson in the Upper Room about the Lord's Supper (*Matt.26:26-29*), but now Matthew will show us how Christ accomplished the work of redemption. His *prophetic* ministry is done; His *priestly* ministry now begins. Jesus is now going to fulfill that which He came to accomplish. Matthew introduces this section to us with four electric scenes.

- First, we see Jesus **PREDICTING** His death (*vv.1-2*)—Highlighting unfathomable *grace*.
- Second, we see the leaders **PLOTTING** His death (*vv.3-5*)—Revealing inexcusable *hate*.
- Third, we see a woman **PREPARING** Him for His death (*vv.6-13*)—Expressing undeniable *love*.
- Finally, we see an evil insider **BETRAYING** Him unto death (*vv.14-16*)—Exposing deplorable *hypocrisy*. Judas is a picture of *how close religious people can be to Christ and yet not be saved*. We will cover this final scene in one single message next time.

The common thread which weaves this all together is the fact that this *prepares* the stage for our Lord's work of atonement. The stark contrast is striking as we walk through these scenes. In one chapter, there is *darkness*, then *light*, *hatred* then *love*, *evil* then *good*—*premeditated murder of the Master* and *sacrificial love to the Master*—and the net effect which Matthew deliberately seeks to set before us is this: No one can be exposed to Jesus and remain the same. There is no middle ground with Jesus. There is no fence sitting. There is no neutrality. Jesus is the fork in the road for every man, woman, boy, and girl listening today.

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburg, 2001, pp.346

It is said that “the same sun which melts the snow, hardens the clay.” Do you understand the saying? The sun is so powerful that it causes completely opposite effects. Snow melts, clay hardens—but an even greater reaction is caused by another Son: The Lord Jesus Christ.

Every heart is either being *melted* down or *hardened* by Christ. By exposure to Jesus, every heart either becomes more *submissive* to Jesus or *hardened* toward Him. The Lord Jesus Christ is so powerful and penetrating that exposure to Him causes the human heart to move in one of two directions. Which direction will you be moved in as we behold the brightness of His glory?

### **Context:**

Let’s step onto the first scene. It is Wednesday evening of Holy Week. In two days, Jesus will be handed over for crucifixion. We have moved from Palm Sunday to Wednesday on the last week of his earthly life before the cross.

### **Transition:**

What do the events leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion teach us about our Lord? And ourselves?

### **Exposition:**

#### **A. PREDICTING (vv.1-2)—Jesus predicts His death.**

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had finished all these words, He said to His disciples, <sup>2</sup>“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is *to be* handed over for crucifixion.

**The connection** to the previous chapter must not be forgotten. Our Lord has just been teaching about His Second coming as the Bridegroom, the Master, and the Judge. In the analogy of the sheep and goats, Jesus plainly stated that the Son of Man is going to return in *all His glory*, with *all His angels* to sit on His glorious throne as He gathers *all the nations* and exercises judicial authority as Judge of *all mankind*.

Now without pause or hesitation, He speaks of His *crucifixion*. See the juxtaposition from exercising divine separation to offering Himself as a penal substitution. Can we meditate for a moment on this: the Bridegroom slain? The Judge crucified? The King executed? Oh, dear friends, we are meant to see the singular fitness of Jesus as our Savior and our God. As the Almighty God, He is mighty to *save*. As the Perfect Man, He is fit to *suffer* and *die* in our place. He is the *Judge* and the One *condemned*. He is the *Priest* and the *Sacrifice*. He is the *King* and the One who *dies* in the place of the criminals. He rules, but He must submit. He owns the crown, but He must bear the cross.

*Come behold the wondrous mystery  
Christ the Lord upon the tree  
In the stead of ruined sinners  
Hangs the Lamb in victory.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Boswell, Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery

We observed the connection. Now notice how Matthew turns the page, as it were, with **the transition statement**.

***“When Jesus had finished all these words...”*** This is Matthew’s way of placing a traffic sign of transition before us. He shifts us from *the teaching* to *the narrative*, from *the sermon* to *the events*. We have just come through a large block of teaching (chapters 24-25), and whenever Jesus finishes one of these teaching chunks, Matthew records this phrase as a sign to signal movement in the story of Jesus. He also does this in chapter 7:28 after the Sermon on the Mount.

Notice, Jesus says to them, ***“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion.”***

What did they know? And why was it significant? Is Jesus simply giving His disciples a “heads up” on the *conflict* they are about to face? Or, is there something **more significant** He wants them to *comprehend*? What did they know?

- *They knew* that *the Passover* was a week-long celebration to remember what God had done in delivering Israel from Egyptian bondage.
- *They knew* that a sacrificial offering would be made in the temple—a blood offering, a lamb.
- *They knew* that the blood of that lamb would be sprinkled on the altar and then the carcass would be taken home and roasted.
- *They knew* that the lamb would be the central item in the Passover meal on that Thursday evening.

The Passover meal was a celebration of the central Old Testament redemptive event. You remember the brushing of the blood of the lamb of the doorpost at the entryway of their homes (*Ex.12:7*). You remember the passing over of the death angel (*Ex.12:12*). You remember that by this act they were delivered from their enemies, and the blood of the lamb was a sign for God to pass over them so that no plague would befall them when God struck the land of Egypt (*Ex.12:12-13*). The Passover was a celebration of the main Old Testament salvation picture or event.

What Jesus is doing is deliberately drawing a direct parallel between Passover and His own death. He wants them and us to understand something about the Great Passover which was about to be observed. This is the significance. This is why He is pointing it out to them—***“You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion.”***

In other words, this is no *coincidence*. There is a parallel here men, pay attention! The Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion. My death is to be a blood sacrifice for sin. Like the blood sacrifice of the lamb which satisfied the requirement of God for sin, My death will lead to the salvation of those who believe. It will spare all who believe in the judgment of God and will result in deliverance from their enemies.

This is clearly the understanding that the Apostles had of what Jesus came to do. Listen to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

- **1 Corinthians 5:7**—Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

In this same village of Bethany where Jesus is now, but three years prior, John the Baptist was baptizing people, and when he saw Jesus coming, he said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29).

John knew that a Perfect Lamb had come; later the disciples understood what His death meant. What is the death of Jesus? It is a Passover sacrifice. The altar would be the cross. Peter understood it this way as well when he wrote,

- **1 Peter 1:18-19**—knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

The author of Hebrews underlines this significance again when he writes,

- **Hebrews 10:12**—but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

Again, Paul, the great preacher of Christ and Him crucified, challenged the Ephesian believers to,

- **Ephesians 5:2**—...walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Let me bottom line it for you. *Jesus is interpreting His death for us.* Was His death an ordinary death? Was it simply the unfortunate circumstances of a good man? Perhaps a martyr or a helpless victim like Cicero, Martin Luther King, or Gandhi? Absolutely not! His death was necessary for the forgiveness of our sins!

Bishop J. C. Ryle eloquently expresses the importance of His death with these searching words.

"We can never attach too much importance to the atoning death of Christ; it is the leading fact in the Word of God, on which the eyes of the soul ought to be ever fixed. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. It is the cardinal truth on which the whole system of Christianity hinges. Without it the Gospel is an arch without a keystone, a fair building without a foundation, a solar system without a sun. Let us make much of our Lord's incarnation, and example, His miracles and His parables, His works and His words, but above all let us make much of His death. Let us delight in the hope of His second coming and millennial reign, but let us not think more even of these blessed truths, than of the atonement on the cross. This after all is the master-truth of Scripture, —that *"Christ died for our sins."*<sup>3</sup>

**Applied:** How do you see the cross? But more importantly, how will you respond to the cross of Jesus Christ?

## **B. PLOTTING (vv.3-5)—The leaders plot His death.**

<sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas; <sup>4</sup> and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. <sup>5</sup> But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

While Jesus was *prophesying*, his enemies were *plotting*. What is taking place here is a fulfillment of Psalm 2:2, where we read, *"the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Messiah."*

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<sup>3</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Matthew*, The Banner of Truth Trust, p.347

Notice how the Jewish leaders—with their diabolical schemes—are plotting against the Lord. However, their plan to manage crowd control was overruled by God because the Lord's hour had come.

**Side note:** It is an amazing study to trace the way that our Lord operated with this divine timetable in view, which undergirded His courage and safeguarded His peace in the face of relentless opposition. (Cf. *John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20*)

But then we fast forward to this final week, and within 48 hours we will hear Him say, "*While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are your*" (Luke 22:53).

**Applied:** Just as God orchestrated the events leading up to Christ's death and resurrection, God orchestrates every event in life according to His divine will. What is happening in your life at this time is not a coincidence! What are you hearing at this time, according to the providential plan of God? What you do with it will be a preparatory act. Will it be for greater good? Or for greater judgment? You decide.

Now, why did the Holy Spirit inspire Matthew to record this plot? There are two reasons.

*First, to show us the complete rejection of the Jewish leaders. The chief priests, the elders, and the high priest Caiaphas all represent the Sanhedrin—the ruling Jewish leadership of Israel. They represent the nation (Cf. John 1:11-12). Their minds are made up. They are hostile and full of bad blood. They have been opposing Jesus all along. They have tried to catch Him in some misstatement. At the end of chapter 21 in verse 46, we are told that "they looked for a way to arrest him." Now they are getting specific. Now they have gone to a new low of evil. They are no longer considering His claims; they are conspiring His death. This is evil in high places! But why? Why would someone want to kill the only perfect Man who ever lived? Why would someone desire to murder an innocent Man, a holy Man, a righteous Man, a Man who, according to the testimony of some disciples, "was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people" (Luke 24:19).*

The answer might seem petty, but it is no smaller than the excuses that some of you use for refusing to surrender your hearts to Him now. They wanted to kill Him in part *because they were losing their control over the people.*

This is what we read in John's gospel, (11:47-53)

- **John 11:47-53**—Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." <sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, <sup>50</sup> nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish." <sup>51</sup> Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, <sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. <sup>53</sup> So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

The first reason for this account is to show us *the complete rejection of the leaders.*

The second reason is to show us the complete pollution that also taints our hearts. What are we meant to learn from this about ourselves?

These men are but a reflection of *every man's heart apart from Christ*. David said from the womb, we are polluted (*Ps.51:5*). We come forth from the womb speaking lies (*Ps.58:3*). The more your heart is exposed to the light, the more the darkness will appear. John wrote, "*This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than Light, for their deeds were evil*" (*John 3:19*). Why does a man or woman, or a boy or girl refuse to come to the Lord Jesus Christ? It is the same reason any man resists coming. John says, "*For everyone who does evil hates the Light and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed*" (*John 3:20*).

We do not want the evil in our hearts to be exposed. The more His Gospel truth is offered and resisted, the more your heart will seek to banish Christ from *conversation*, from *consideration*, from public *discussion* and *proclamation*, and in every place. This spirit of unbelief that sought to put to death the Lord Jesus Christ, coils within every unsaved heart.

This is why the great puritan preacher Thomas Watson said,

"The devil would paint sin with a vermilion color of pleasure and profit, that he may make it look fair; but I will pull off the paint that you might see its ugly face. Sin is of the devil. It fetches its pedigree from hell (*1 John 3:8*). Satan was the first actor of sin, and the first tempter to sin. Sin is the devil's first-born. It is a defiling thing. Sin is not only a defection, but a pollution. It is to the soul as rust is to gold, as a stain to beauty. It makes the soul red with guilt, and black with filth."<sup>4</sup>

Sin is so *blinding* that it rationalizes the obvious. The record is here to show us how even the most religious people need the change and cleansing that only the atonement of Christ brings!

*There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains!*<sup>5</sup>

You cannot stay neutral when it comes to Jesus! You will either *love* Him or *hate* Him, *follow* Him or *reject* Him, *own* Him or *disown* Him, *conspire* against Him or *aspire* to live for Him; but there is no middle ground when it comes to Christ!

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburg, 2000 p.133

<sup>5</sup> William Cowper, *There Is a Fountain Filled With Blood*

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