

## 1. Matthew's Passion:

- Matthew's account of the passion narrative - that is the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem through to his death on the cross and burial takes place in chapters 26 and 27 of the gospel.
- It has of course been represented in one of the greatest pieces of classical music, *St Matthew's Passion* by J.S. Bach:
  - See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1lpv1kKwgo>
  - Including such great hymns as 'O sacred head, sore wounded'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M4uUJibpvw>

- Before you begin this study: why not see how much of the passion narrative (in general) you can remember without consulting a Bible.

What happens when?

- The first passion narratives circulated as oral traditions; they were not yet set inside the gospel 'stories' we are familiar with; the gospel which began that process is reckoned to be Mark.

## 2. Telling the whole story!

- Our common habit is to lift biblical texts out of their literary context. We have texts we like and others we don't. In services of worship we only read a few verses. Imagine what it might like to read only the last couple of chapters of a book and you have not read the first 10 chapters.

**For those who like technical points**

Sometimes we read a message into the text; sometimes that reading into the text says more about us, our context than it does about the text. That kind of interpretation is called **eisegesis**. (It happens a lot).

The opposite task is to let meaning be drawn out of the text. That is called **exegesis**.

What we are seeking to do below is *exegesis*.

- It is a good idea to pay attention to how these two chapters fit inside the whole gospel. We can come at this task in two ways.

- **The first is to place this narrative inside the themes of the whole gospel.**

- And so we note:

The gospel moves from the name of Jesus being Emmanuel ('God with us') to 'I am with you to the close of the age";

The first reference is made by the angel of the Lord in a dream to Joseph. Jesus is not yet born: his birth, teaching, public ministry, passion and resurrection all lie in the future.

The final reference is made by the risen Christ.

We can also become familiar with the structure of the gospel. For Matthew the following pattern has been discerned.

Birth narrative  
5 narratives and 5 teaching  
discourses  
Passion narrative / resurrection /  
great  
commission

- **The second is to look at what happens in the text just before we begin the passion narrative.**

Read Chapter 25: This chapter is part of the 5<sup>th</sup> and final teaching discourse in Matthew.

What is the focus of this teaching? How does it end?

### 3. Matthew 26:

#### a). The end of teaching:

Read: Matthew 26:1;

This chapter follows on from the completion of Jesus' teaching. In the previous 4 teaching sections the text has read 'When Jesus had finished saying these things'; the difference now is that it reads 'When Jesus had finished saying **all** these things' (Mt 26:1). The word 'all' has been added which suggests that the narrative is now about to take a different turn. The public ministry of healing and teaching has concluded: we might keep in mind the end of the sermon on the mount now: 'each of those who hears my words and does them ...'.

#### For those who like technical points

Throughout this gospel Matthew has followed a pattern of linking the Jesus story to episodes in the Hebrew Bible to do with characters like Joseph and Moses.

The transition from the completion of all this teaching to what happens next is not unlike Deuteronomy 31:24

<sup>24</sup> When Moses had finished writing down in a book the words of this law to the very end,

Moses then sings a hymn, praising God for the care of Israel despite the people's infidelity; and then concludes with the words at 32:44-47. The people are will cross over the Jordan into the promised land.

#### b). The plot to kill Jesus, the anointing at Bethany, Judas agrees to betray Jesus:

Read: Matthew 26:1-5; 6-13; 14-16.

**God's timing:**

Jesus signifies the timing: the Passover will happen in 2 days' time; it is not a case of others determining his fate. The reference is placed inside God's history with the people of Israel.

The timing of the Passover is a reminder of how the people of Israel were able to save their own first born from death by having the blood of a slaughtered lamb put on the lintels and doorposts of their dwellings in Egypt (Exodus 12). Jesus is becoming the Passover lamb.

Jesus does not refer to 'I' will be handed over; he places himself inside the tradition of the 'son of man'.

Remember the first time we met the chief priests. When was that?

The first time we met the chief priests was in the course of the magi's visit to Herod. There was a threat then and now again there is threat. Caiaphas (14BC to 46 CE) is the high priest.

- Remember how the teaching of Jesus finished: Matthew 25:31-46. How might that flow into the episode below?

Jesus and the disciples are in the house of Simon the leper. Jesus is again in the presence of the unclean and the outsiders. The disciples take exception to a woman anointing him with expensive oil: the money could have been used for the poor .

What might be the significance of Jesus being anointed by a woman whose name we do not know? Imagine what it was like to be that woman?

The woman who anoints him with expensive oil is anonymous. Jesus declares that she will be remembered for this deed.

In the past Samuel had anointed David to be the king (1 Samuel 16:12-13); Zadok had anointed Solomon to be the king (1 Kings 1:39). These anointings had been through the hands of a prophet and priest, not an anonymous woman.

Jesus is anointed to be a king and anointed in advance of his death / funeral - thus reminding us again of the three gifts the magi brought to the infant Jesus.

- **Solve the puzzle! Why do the chief priests need Judas' help to arrest Jesus?**

The answer is not known. Judas is thus caught up in a power play in which he might be seen as a relatively minor player but somehow necessary.

He is paid 30 shekels of silver - the same amount that is given to the shepherd in Zechariah (11:7-17) in the hope that the sheep of Israel and Judah might be one. There is much uncertainty as to what the name 'Iscariot' means.

- What were Judas' motives?

**c). The Passover with the disciples,  
The institution of the last supper,  
Peter's denial foretold:**

**Read: Matthew 26:17-25; 26-30; 31-34.**

- It is time to make ready for the Passover meal; the disciples are away from home. Where will it be observed? It is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is this feast that Jesus will reconfigure.

The disciples are told to go into the city and a 'certain man' - an anonymous man - will be informed that the Teacher (rabbi) will hold the Passover meal in his house; this account is similar to the one of going into the village to bring a colt and a donkey for the Passover entrance.

**Notice the difference in the response of Judas to the other disciples.**

The meal takes place: it remembers how the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites but Jesus now says that one of the disciples (one who dips his hand into the bowl 'with me' - 'I am with you', 'God with us') will betray him. The disciples respond, 'Surely not I, Lord?', but Judas replies, 'Surely not I Rabbi?'

Jesus now 'converts' the feast of unleavened bread into the institution of the Lord's Supper.

**For those who like a technical point**

The reference to 'the blood of the new covenant' (26:27) can be read in the light of Exodus 24: 3-8. Moses has received all the ordinances from the God, the people have agreed to obey, Moses has thrown blood on them and then declares:

*<sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." <sup>8</sup> Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."*

How important is 'the forgiveness of sins'? How often do we hear the language of forgiveness and sins? Is this 'the gospel'?

The covenant is one of the 'forgiveness of sins'. From the very beginning we have been told that Jesus goes about preaching the forgiveness of sins. His very name (Yeshua) means 'he will forgive the sins of his people' : that is his messianic status rather than the deliverance of the people of Israel from a foreign occupying power.

Jesus insists that 'all of you' are to drink from the cup: it is thus implied strongly that Judas drinks from this cup as well.

Imagine what it must have been like in the ancient world (if you were not Christian) and heard that these people 'eat' the body' and 'drink the blood of Christ'!

The command to eat his body and drink his blood will sit with baptism as the means of creating a new community that is 'earthed' in Christ.

**For those who like a technical point**

Jesus declares that he will drink of the fruit of the vine until he does so new in the Father's kingdom: hence the liturgical response of 'Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again' in our Communion service!

Like Moses Jesus and the disciples now sing a hymn. We do not know what hymn it was - most likely a psalm.

**d). Jesus prays in Gethsemane,  
The betrayal and arrest of Jesus.**

**Read: Matthew 26:35-46; 47-56.**

- Jesus now returns to the Mount of Olives; he informs them that they will desert him that night. In Ezekiel 34 God had declared that he will seek out the scattered sheep of Israel, but now Jesus cites Zechariah 13:7: the shepherd will be struck down and the sheep scattered. Jesus will be left alone but he advises them, in advance, that he will go ahead of them to meet them in Galilee.

Peter refutes the charge that he will deny Jesus: later, in the lead up to his three-fold denial, Peter will 'follow' Jesus 'from a distance'. Note that already Peter has declared that Jesus is the Messiah (16:13-20). And Jesus has said that he will build his house on this rock, reminding us also at the same time of the ending of the sermon on the mount: 'each of those who hears my words and does them is like the wise man who built his house on rock ...'.

Jesus is now in the garden of Gethsemane; the disciples are at a remove for Jesus goes 'over there' to pray. He takes with him Peter, James and John - that is, the same three disciples he had taken with him up the mountain at the time of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13: 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him').

The garden is the setting of Jesus' anguish. We have heard him predict that he will be handed over to others, that he will be put to death, and that the disciples will fall away despite protestations

to the contrary. What now confronts Jesus - and lies at the heart of his anguish - is his impending separation from the Father which later become evident in his cry from the cross.

How does the anguish Jesus undergoes differ from the anguish of other human beings?

Jesus is obedient not to political ideas or the advice of friends; he is obedient to the will of God. The desire is for this cup to pass him by but not his will, God's will. There is a depth here which is beyond us in this anguish. The purpose of the son of man's coming - this cup, God's plan - is now in place. It will involve the separation of the beloved son from the Father.

Compare the request of the disciples with the parable of the foolish bridesmaid n Matthew 25.

Throughout Jesus' teaching there have been many calls for disciples to stay awake, to be alert, and be vigilant. The contrast that is made is with falling asleep. The disciples have heard Jesus' parables and teaching to do with staying away but they have fallen asleep. While they have been asleep, Jesus has been praying.

- The act of handing over comes via a kiss. Judas still calls Jesus 'Rabbi', not your traitor or zealot or whatever; Jesus calls him 'friend'.
- Judas has arrived with a large crowd from the chief priests and elders. The crowds have clubs and swords which can be set against Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the mount of peacemaking and turning the other cheek (5:38-48). Jesus could have been easily arrested during the day in public - in the Temple, but the arrest comes by way of the night. Jesus declares that he could have an army of angels to protect him following one of his supporters drawing a sword and cutting off the ear of one of the high priest's slaves. In Luke Jesus heals the ear, but there is no reference of such in Matthew.



**For those who like to play detective**

**Who is Judas?**

due to his act of betrayal of Jesus. Judas is notorious in the Christian tradition of conspiring with the chief priests and a kiss.

There is some uncertainty as to what his name means. Some argue that it means he is Judas from the village of Kerioth; others suggest that his name is related to the word for dagger, and that he was a zealot.

In terms of Christian history Judas is usually portrayed very negatively. His act of betrayal leads to the death of Jesus and yet there is an irony here: this death leads to the Christian understanding of salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Was Judas used' by God?

The way in which the gospels tell the story of Judas is not always consistent. The main act of conspiring in a plot and betrayal through a kiss are consistent.

**For Matthew's account of Judas, read:  
Matthew 10:4; 26:14-15; 26:20-25; 26:47-50;  
27:3-10;**

So using the evidence from Matthew, what kind of person do you think Judas is?

**How does John's version differ?**

John 6:67-71; 12:1-6; 13:18-30; 18:1-8

- e). **How many court appearances did Jesus undergo?  
Why was he put to death? (continued in part 2)**

**Jesus before the High Priest,  
Peter's denial of Jesus.**

**Read: Matthew 26: 57-68; 26:69-75**

- Jesus is taken to the house (the *oikos*) of the High Priest, Caiaphas. The scribes and elders have been

gathered in order to discover some evidence that can be lodged against Jesus. In order for someone to be put to death at least two witnesses must agree in their testimony (Deuteronomy 17:6).

It seems as if many witnesses came forward but there is no agreement. At last two come forward saying that Jesus had said:

"This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" (Matthew 27:61).

Note: Jesus had said that Temple would be destroyed (24:1-2); he had not said in Matthew that he would destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in 3 days. (cf. John 2:19).

- The high priest has heard what he wanted to hear. Nathan had told David that only one appointed by God could build the Temple (2 Samuel 7:12-13). To claim the right to destroy the Temple is to claim the equivalent of being God. Such a claim would seem to be blasphemy. Jesus remains silent and made no response to these witnesses: he is silent.
- The high priest now charges Jesus under oath - the irony being that Jesus has said his followers should not take oaths (Matthew 5:33-37). The high priest challenges / tempts Jesus; his response is now the same as it was to Judas' question, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?': 'You have said so'.
- Jesus adds: you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. It is a quotation taken from Daniel 7:13. The son of man is the son of God.

#### What is blasphemy?

- The high priest now tears his garments; he accuses Jesus of blasphemy - at Matthew 12:31-32 Jesus had said that every sin but blasphemy can be forgiven. For Matthew Jesus is the one person alone is incapable of blasphemy is accused and charged with blasphemy. There is no need for further witnesses. They have all heard Jesus and so they are now all witnesses.

The chief priest asks for a verdict, knowing the answer: 'He will deserve death'. Jesus is then abused: 'they spit in his face' (Isaiah 50:6), strike him, slap him, and taunt him saying 'Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is that struck you?'

- Meanwhile Peter is identified by a servant girl. He denies knowing Jesus; he even swears an oath on such denial. Bystanders then recognize him on account of his accent. Now he adds in a curse. The cock crows. Peter leaves the courtyard and weeps bitter tears. There is no look from Jesus at the moment of denial, as there is in Luke. This is the last time we hear of Peter in Matthew's gospel.

**What are your five takeaway points from this study?**

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**Which 3 verses from this chapter would you like to remember?**

Part 2 will deal with chapter 27