

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

MATTHEW 26:1-30

THE last three chapters of this Gospel admit us to the final things in the mission of the King. If ever it is fitting that we should put off our shoes because the ground is holy, it is so as we read these stories. Here the Passion of God and the passions of men come into conflict and communion.

It is apparently a strange contradiction, and yet it is a truth which stands revealed in the story that we are now to study, the last story.

Jesus had demonstrated His authority and His power in the realms material, mental, and moral, as the one and only King commanding our loyalty by His inherent royalty. And now we are to see Him moving through those scenes which so perplexed and puzzled His early disciples, moving through defeat - not to defeat; moving through darkness, through pain, through all the things that men most fear and dread and attempt to escape, yet never losing His dignity, never losing that imperial magnificence which has been so manifest in the earlier movements of the book.

In the section which we are now to study, perhaps not observed Upon the surface, but most evidently set forth when the section is carefully considered, the supreme fact is the authority and power of the King.

To briefly summarize what seems to be the content and message and portion of this passage, it is this. "**No man taketh it (My life) from Me . . . I lay it down of Myself.**"

We see here the King hemmed in, surrounded; and yet arranging for the hemming-in, manipulating by the strange and mystic might and majesty that overwhelms us as we look, all the forces that seem to be against Him, compelling them to act at His divine command, in His way, for the fulfilment of His own purpose.

May the Spirit of God, Who searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God, baptize us into solemn awe, and enlighten our minds and hearts, as we approach this last section of the Gospel.

The whole section falls into three parts.

The first chronicles for us the preliminary things, and that is the section at which we are now to look.

Let us divide it into three parts.

We have first of all the King's approach to His passion. He tells His disciples that, after two days, He will be crucified. While He is telling His disciples this, the Sanhedrim is meeting somewhere else, plotting to take Him.

Then follows that exquisite and matchless story of the Supper at Bethany. The story opens by Christ's declaration, "**After two days.**" The story in the Gospel of John begins "**Six days before the Passover,**" so that quite evidently the story recorded happened four days before Christ told His disciples definitely that in two days He would be crucified

Finally, we have the story of the Passover Feast, and the institution of the new memorial feast. Everything ends with the declaration that they went out after the singing of a hymn, to the Mount of Olives.

Before considering these separately, let us notice their inter-relation.

First we have the declared determination of Christ, the word of Jesus to His disciples. He said to them, "**Ye know that after two days in the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.**"

Then we have the record of the determination of the rulers. There is a point of oneness; and there is a point of difference. The Sanhedrim was an official religious court, and it was gathered together in its official capacity in the court of the high priest; it was a gathering together of the whole movement of opposition.

They "**consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill Him. But they said, 'Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.'**"

He said, "**After two days is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.**"

- They said, "**Not on the feast day;**"
- He said, Crucified during the feast.

The determination of the rulers, and the determination of Christ, agreed as to His death, differed as to the time. Now Matthew turns aside from the sequence of events in order to tell how it came about that He was right, and not they, as to the time. Four days before, Mary had found her way to His feet, and had anointed Him. Matthew tells us the story of that anointing, and of how Judas went out from that gathering at Bethany to the priests. Thus probably four days before Christ said He would be crucified, Judas had covenanted with them, had received from them the thirty pieces of silver, and for four days he had carried them about with him, for four days he had watched his opportunity.

The counsel of the priests had said not till after the feast be over, and Judas was charged, no doubt, by the rulers not to precipitate matters, but quietly to wait until the Passover was over and the crowds had gone.

Then Christ compelled Judas to act at once. Having said, "**One of you shall betray Me,**" and having indicated the one, John tells us that He said to him, "**What thou doest do quickly.**" Judas, acting under that compulsion, finding that he was discovered, without any repentance in his soul, hastened to the priests, hastened and obtained a company of men, and, not according to the will of the rulers, but before they intended, he had precipitated the arrest and trial of Christ in the midst of the Passover feast.

Thus we see the King deliberately moving towards the end of His set purpose, but not allowing the rulers to choose the hour, or the method; by His own quiet and deliberate act putting the right hand of His supreme authority upon all their counsels, and bringing it to effect His purpose; dragging their crafty subtlety from the lurking-places of their deceit into the clear light, as He drove Judas out to do his dastardly work, at the hour of God's appointing, rather than at the hour of the rulers' choice. Such is the relation of this part of the story to the movement of preparation.

Now let us look at things a little more carefully.

Look first at the two forces moving toward the death of Jesus.

After the Crucifixion, and after the Resurrection, and after Pentecost, Peter stood up and began to preach in the power of the outpouring of the Spirit, and as he looked out upon those masses of people before him, and saw amongst them rulers, He said, "**Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.**"

Mark the two things that Peter recognized.

- "**Delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.**" That is one side of the story.

- And the other, "**by wicked hands . . . Crucified and slain.**"

Here is the historic fact in Christ's approach to the Cross. Here in a mystery which almost overwhelms us, we see God and sin combining towards one goal.

Look at the King.

He was moving towards His Cross. One might almost say leisurely, for notice, "**When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said.**"

His was the leisure that had in it no unrest, no haste, no friction. "**When Jesus had finished all these sayings.**"

How often they had tried to arrest Him. How constantly He had said, "**My hour is not yet come.**" "**Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold. I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected;**" when I am ready I shall be perfected. "**When Jesus had finished all these sayings.**"

His teaching was not complete until He had said the last word, until He had not merely enunciated the ethic given at the commencement of His ministry, until He had not merely uttered the glorious and prophetic instructions to His own, but until He had also uttered the mysterious and marvellous prophecy on Olivet.

"When Jesus had finished . . . He said" - and no hand could arrest Him until He was ready. That man has never read these stories thoroughly who says that Jesus Christ was a victim of circumstances and men. He was the Master of circumstances and of men.

Thus we see this Galilean, this Man, lacking in all the things that men count great, moving in the midst of circumstances that seem to hem Him in, and master Him, and beat Him; and yet as we look at Him, His hand is upon them all, and with quiet leisure and definite intention, and intelligent purpose, unafraid, and unsurprised, He moved towards His Cross.

There in the court of the high-priests was the Sanhedrim. They were also moving towards the Cross. It was the final gathering, and they were attempting to encompass His death officially. It was a crafty gathering.

They saw He must die, but they were not quite sure of time and place. The only thing to avoid is the feast. "**Not on the feast day.**"

Thus grace and sin were moving toward the same sad end; grace in the person of God's King planning for the Cross; sin in the person of the rulers plotting for the Cross. As we look back upon those two scenes, of Christ in the midst of His disciples, of the rulers at the palace, they were as far apart as heaven and hell, as love and malice, as right and wrong, as clear open action, and crafty devilish deceit. Yet both were moving toward the one end. As we read the story again, and the two pictures become impressed upon our mental vision, we see the Lord high and lifted up, His train filling the Temple, and we learn anew the meaning of the old Psalmist's declaration,

**"Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee:
The remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain."**

This was no human Teacher to be bruised and beaten at man's choice. It was the King, with His hand upon circumstances, governing the Sanhedrim, letting them work out their own nefarious designs, and yet so high seated over all, that presently He took the spear of their uttermost malice, and bathed it in the blood of God's uttermost grace. So He approached His Cross.

Then let us look at this picture of the Supper at Bethany - the action of Mary and the action of Judas.

We will not now go into the details of these stories, all the touches of exquisite beauty in the action of Mary; and all the lines of red and flaming fire that frighten us when we come to Judas. But with the general impression of these two things upon our minds, let us notice carefully how the instruments were the instruments of grace and of sin. Mary was the instrument of grace. Judas was the instrument of sin. In the story we see shining about the Master a great light, and deepening over Him a great darkness. There is the light of Mary's love.

There is the darkness of Judas' treachery.

These two people were also moving toward His Cross, she with a love that went beyond death, anointing Him for burial; he with a hate that merged all things in death, arranging for His death.

The contrast is vivid. This woman got nearer to the inner heart of Jesus than any human being prior to Pentecost. When she brought that alabaster cruse and poured some ointment on His head and some on His feet, the whole company of the disciples, and not Judas only, murmured, they all said, Why this waste? What a revelation of apostolic incompetence was that question.

Quite kindly one may say, and yet with tremendous conviction, one would rather be in succession to Mary than the whole crowd of apostles. Mary saw into His soul; not that she perfectly knew all the meaning; but she saw in His eyes the shadow of the coming suffering and the Cross. A mutual sympathy was there, hers for Him and His for her. Maybe Mary looked at Him sitting there in Simon's house, and she thought in her soul, there is a shadow in His soul, the end is near; I wonder if I can do anything to let Him know that at least I have touched the fringe of His garment of sackcloth. Love is always prodigal. Love overlaps all the bounds of prudence, and gets the most precious thing in the house and pours it out.

It was a sacrament of sympathy, but it will not be a perfect picture unless He knows. Sympathy must be answered by sympathy. Love like this must have the answer of love. He said, "**In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. 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.**"

That is the only time Christ ever suggested the raising of a memorial to any one, and the memorial He suggested was not a memorial of marble or of gold, not of a temple upon which old Time will act until it crumbles its magnificence to the dust.

It was a memorial of a fragrance; and earth is sweeter, and heaven richer, for Mary's love and Christ's acceptance of it.

There was no tremor in His voice, "**She did it for My burial.**" He was arranging, manipulating, mastering evil; and He gathered up the sweet and precious fragrance of a devoted love. It was dear to Him and precious, and He said, It shall be her memorial.

Thank God for that light in the darkness. Thank God there was one heart came somewhere near to Him, one frail woman, despised as sentimental by the apostles, who poured upon Him an ointment that makes heaven finer for its rich and rare aroma.

And then the darkness is revealed in Judas' lack of sympathy. He had no sympathy for Mary, because he had no sympathy for Jesus. Observe his selfishness and his act of baseness.. No comment is necessary; in such brief words we leave it.

Finally we come to the Passover.

Here we see the perfecting and passing of the old economy, and the beginning of the new. The Passover was observed, the feast of deliverance from slavery, the feast of the exodus, the feast of hope. Men had kept it fitfully through the long centuries, regularly at first, and then occasionally through the age of decadence. The King sat down to keep it as one of that nation and people. That was its last keeping in the economy of God, because all that it had foreshadowed was fulfilled as He sat at the board, and all that to which it had pointed found the ultimate fulfillment in Him.

He completed that of which the exodus had been but the preparation. The final exodus came by the way of that Cross to which He was going.

Then, still sitting there in the midst of the feast of a past and failing dispensation, at a board where there was still the unfermented wine of the Passover feast, and where there was still the unleavened cake fragments remaining, He instituted a new feast. He took bread, some of that which was there, and broke it, and said, "**Take, eat; this is My body.**" He took the cup and said, "**Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.**"

Jesus was at the Passover board, and He took the Passover bread, and the cup of the old economy of anticipation; but as His hands touched that Passover bread, He made all things new; as His hand took hold upon the Passover cup, He made it flush with the new glory of a new dawn, and a new age, and a new dispensation. In the simplicity of this picture we see the establishment of the Christian feast.

There are three things we need to remember concerning it.

- It is a commemoration. Christ said, "**This do in remembrance of Me.**"
- It is more than a commemoration, it is a communion, in which, through all the coming age, bands of His disciples shall sit down and take bread and fruit of the vine, and in the sacred material act enter into an actual and spiritual communion with Him.
- It is more, it is a covenant, declaring that those who sit at the board are made one with Him in all the enterprises of His heart.

The old Passover feast was the feast of the exodus, and was a feast of hope. The new is the feast of the exodus, but the exodus that He has accomplished, which no longer fills the heart with hope, but with the certainty of an already achieved victory.

When men and women gather through the ages around that board, it is to remember Him, it is to commune with Him, it is to pledge themselves in loyalty to Him.

Never let us forget that. Away behind ecclesiastical Rome is pagan Rome, and there among the ruins of pagan Rome we still see upon the fresco the Roman soldier taking his sacramentum. This is our Sacramentum, our oath of allegiance to live and fight and die for this King.

Thus symbolically He led His disciples through the shadows of darkness into the sunlight of a new morning. How simple it was; at the end of the Passover feast. He touched the old bread and it broke into infinite sustenance for the world; He put His hand upon the old cup, and out of it came the red wine of the Kingdom of God. When we sit in simple symbolism around the table let us never forget that He is there, the King Himself.

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.” There is no doubt whatever that they sang the great Hallel. And if we turn back to Psalms 113-118 we find exactly what they sang. They sang the first two of those hymns, Psalms 113 and 114, at the commencement of Passover; the Psalms which tell of the Lord the high and the humbled One, a song of the exodus, how He led them out of Egypt into Canaan.

Think of Jesus sitting at that last Passover Supper, singing those two Psalms before the Passover, and see how exquisitely they fit and perfectly fall in with all those thoughts that are in our mind. Then Psalm 115 begins,

**“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But unto Thy name give glory.”**

That speaks of Passion for the glory of God.

- Psalm 116 is the story of a passing through death to life and service.
- Psalm 117 is the psalm of universal praise following upon that passing through death to life and service.
- Psalm 118 has as refrain,

“His mercy endureth for ever,”

That was the last note of the song.

And when they had sung that hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives. Thus the King came to the darkness of the Cross singing of the enduring lovingkindness of God.

~ end of chapter 67 ~

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