

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY TWELVE

Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

Matthew's account from here on rivets on the cross. The mysterious plan of God dovetails with the hatred of humankind, and we see God at work to bring His Son to the purpose of His coming.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

AFTER finishing His *Olivet Discourse* with its lofty visions of the future, Jesus drew His disciples' attention down to Earth and back to the present: "As you know, Passover begins in two days" (Matthew 26:2).

Jesus had come to Jerusalem with His disciples to celebrate Passover, an annual festival these men had celebrated many times before. But this Passover would be different. In a few days, Jesus would lay down His life as the paschal lamb slain for the sins of the world. He reminded His disciples the real reason for His coming to Jerusalem: "and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified" (26:2).

The time for Christ's death was growing closer. The eleventh hour had struck. Every tick of the clock now carried the cadence of His slow and agonizing march to the cross. As we'll see in this *Searching the Scriptures* study, the countdown begins with a group of powerful religious leaders plotting to murder Jesus and a friend planning to betray Him.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Remarkably, Jesus had *just* announced His coming in glory. "For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 24:27). The contrasting images of His coming and His crucifixion jolt our senses. How can the all-powerful King of the universe hang on a cross to die? The answer: He chose this death because He loves us.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

What emotions does Jesus' loving sacrifice stir in your heart? Take a moment to express your devotion to Him as you walk with Jesus through these events of Holy Week known as the Passion of Christ.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read *Matthew 26:1–16* as if you were witnessing the events firsthand. Notice how Matthew switches locations as a director of a film might cut from scene to scene. The gospel writer ushers his readers from the Mount of Olives into the residence of Caiaphas. Then he invites us to a dinner party in Bethany and takes us back to Jerusalem for a clandestine meeting.

What feelings does the quick pace of this passage and its dramatic contrasts create in you?



Observation: Preparing, Planning, Pouring, and Plotting

Observing a passage of Scripture shouldn't be done in a hurry. Take time to notice how Matthew purposefully selected each word and constructed each sentence. Pick out the action words and note the tense of the verbs. Watch for the transitions that mark the sequence of events, such as "When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (Matthew 26:1), "At that same time" (26:3), and "Meanwhile" (26:6). Keep developing your skills of observation, and watch Scripture come alive!¹



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

Preparing the Disciples—Matthew 26:1–2

What subtle details do you observe in the timing and content of Jesus' words to His disciples in *Matthew 26:1–2*?²

How does His statement compare with previous foretelling of His suffering and death in *16:21*; *17:12*, *22–23*; *20:18–19*, *22–23*; and *21:38–39* (the murdered “son” represents Jesus)?

Planning a Murder—Matthew 26:3–5

What do you observe in *Matthew 26:3–5*? Who are the characters? When, where, and why did they meet? What concerned them?



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Matthew 26:1–16

What contrasts do you see Matthew drawing between Jesus (the perfect High Priest) and Caiaphas (the political high priest)?

Pouring the Perfume—Matthew 26:6–13

From the sinister scene at Caiaphas' luxurious residence, Matthew cuts to the humble home of Simon, a former leper whom Jesus had likely cleansed. What did the woman do that no one expected, according to *Matthew 26:6–7*? What do her actions communicate about her heart for Jesus?

What shortsighted, even sinful, perspectives may have prompted the disciples' reaction in *26:8–9*? How did they rationalize their criticism?



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Matthew 26:1–16

What lessons did Jesus teach about priorities and worship through His words to the woman, according to *Matthew 26:10–13*?

Plotting the Betrayal—Matthew 26:14–16

What do you observe in Judas Iscariot's actions in *26:14–16*? What does his question tell you about his character?

What contrasts do you see Matthew drawing between the woman and Judas Iscariot? The woman worshiped Jesus at the cost of her perfume, but what did Judas' actions cost him in the end? How have these two individuals been remembered through time?

The woman came to Jesus overwhelmed with adoration. Knowing she may never see Him again, she brought her most expensive possession and poured it over Him. For days, others around Him could smell the fragrance of her worship. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16



Interpretation: Examining the Hearts of Caiaphas and Judas

Let's use our interpretive "stethoscope" to examine the hearts of Caiaphas and Judas Iscariot.

First, what background information about Caiaphas can you discover in your resources that might reveal his motives? Read page 233 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on Matthew 16–28*, to gain insight into this man's character. For an online resource, consult [Constable's Notes](http://net.bible.org) at net.bible.org. Write down your insights into what may have motivated the most powerful religious and political Jewish leader in Jerusalem to want to murder Jesus.

Second, what insights can you learn about Judas Iscariot from John's parallel account of this scene in [John 12:1–8](#)? What was the real reason behind Judas Iscariot's reaction to the woman's anointing of Jesus? How do you think Satan may have used this incident as the final push to drive Judas to betray Jesus?

What common characteristics link Caiaphas' and Judas' treacherous hearts?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

*There's an old English couplet I've quoted for years:
"Still, as of old, man by himself is priced.
For thirty pieces, Judas sold himself, not Christ."
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



Correlation: Examining the Heart of Mary

According to John's parallel account, Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, was the woman who anointed Jesus. What does her previous encounter with Jesus in her home tell you about her heart, according to *Luke 10:38–42*?

What further insight into her character can you gather from her encounter with Jesus when He arrived in Bethany after Lazarus died, according to *John 11:31–44*? What do you think her tears communicated to Jesus? How did Jesus' actions link her heart to His and strengthen her faith in Him?



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Matthew 26:1–16

Perhaps Mary heard Jesus say to the disciples that He would be “handed over to be crucified” (Matthew 26:2). If so, how might knowing Jesus would soon die a terrible death on a cross have motivated her to anoint Jesus as she did?

What do Mary's actions teach about the nature of true worship?

You may worship in your car or alone on a walk or while gazing at a marvelous scene that only God could have created. Let out your worship! While lost in praise, Mary cared little about what others thought and even less what they said. Her model is marvelous to witness.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Application: Worship Amidst Murder and Betrayal

It's no accident that Matthew inserted the scene of Mary worshiping Jesus between the scenes of Caiaphas plotting to murder Jesus and Judas selling Him out. Such pure devotion amidst such insidious treachery!

Jesus received these extremes with calm assurance in the Father's providential plan. He was resolved to sacrifice Himself for all people, even those who hated Him. Truly, He is worthy of our praise!



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16

How does Mary's devotion to Jesus inspire you in your walk with Christ?

What qualities of Jesus revealed in Matthew 26:1–16 increase your love for Him and strengthen your faith in Him?



Countdown to Betrayal

Matthew 26:1–16



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by prayerfully reciting the lyrics of an 18th century hymn of devotion penned by Samuel Stennett. As Mary poured out her most precious perfume, offer the fragrance of your worship to the Lord.

Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned³

Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
upon the Savior's brow;
His head with radiant glories crowned,
His lips with grace o'erflow,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

No mortal can with Him compare,
among the sons of men;
fairer is He than all the fair
who fill the heav'nly train,
who fill the heav'nly train.

He saw me plunged in deep distress,
and flew to my relief;
for me He bore the shameful cross,
and carried all my grief,
and carried all my grief.

To Him I owe my life and breath,
and all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
and saves me from the grave,
and saves me from the grave.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. Matthew used the phrase, "When Jesus had finished," to indicate major turning points in His account (*Matthew 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1*). The phrase in Matthew 26:1 signals the turning point of Matthew's gospel to its climactic theme, the passion and triumph of Christ (26:1–28:20).
3. Samuel Stennett, "Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned," Hymnary.org.

