

Matthew 26

by John Nelson Darby

Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, points out Judas as the one who would deliver Him up, and submits to His Father's will, leading to His betrayal and arrest.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 26:1-2, Matthew 26:6-13, Matthew 26:17-29, Matthew 26:31-32, Matthew 26:36-50, Matthew 26:57-75, Hebrews 5:7

Topics: "The New Covenant", "The Suffering of Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby reflects on Matthew 26, emphasizing the profound significance of Jesus' final moments before His crucifixion. He highlights the simplicity with which Jesus foretells His betrayal and suffering, showcasing His submission to God's will amidst human malice. The sermon also touches on the deep affection shown by the woman who anointed Jesus, contrasting it with the coldness of Judas and the disciples. Darby underscores the institution of the Lord's Supper as a new covenant, marking a pivotal shift in the relationship between God and humanity. Ultimately, he portrays Jesus as the Victim, fully aware of the impending betrayal and suffering, yet committed to fulfilling His divine purpose.

Transcript

The Lord had finished His discourses. He prepares (chap. 26) to suffer, and to make His last and touching adieus to His disciples, at the table of His last passover on earth, at which He instituted, the simple and precious memorial which recalls His sufferings and His love with such profound interest. This part of our Gospel requires little explanation-not, assuredly, that it is of less interest, but because it needs to be felt rather than explained.

With what simplicity the Lord announces that which was to happen! (v. 2). He had already arrived at Bethany, six days before the passover (John 12:1): there He abode, with the exception of the last supper, until He was taken captive in the garden of Gethsemane, although He visited Jerusalem, and partook of His last meal there.

We have already examined the discourses uttered during those six days, as well as His actions, such as the cleansing of the temple. That which precedes this chapter (26) is either the manifestation of His rights as Emmanuel, King of Israel, or that of the judgment of the great King with respect to the people-a judgment expressed in discourses to which the people could make no answer; or, finally, the condition of His disciples during His absence. We have now His submission to the sufferings appointed Him, to the judgment about to be executed upon Him; but which was, in truth, only the fulfilment of the counsels of

God His Father, and of the work of His own love.

The picture of man's dreadful sin in the crucifixion of Jesus unfolds before our eyes. But the Lord Himself (chap. 26:1) announces it beforehand with all the calmness of One who had come for this purpose. Before the consultations of the chief priests had taken place, Jesus speaks of it as a settled thing: "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."

Afterwards (v. 3) the priests, the scribes, and the elders assemble to concert their plans for obtaining possession of His Person, and ridding themselves of Him.

In a word, first, the marvellous counsels of God, and the submission of Jesus, according to His knowledge of those counsels and of the circumstances which should accomplish them; and, afterwards, the iniquitous counsels of man, which do but fulfil those of God. Their purposed arrangement of detail not to take Him on the feast day as they dreaded the people (chap. 26:5) was not God's and fails: He was to suffer at the feast.

Judas was but the instrument of their malice in the hand of Satan; who, after all, did but arrange these things according to divine intention. They wished, but in vain, to avoid taking Him at the time of the feast, on account of the multitude, who might favour Jesus, if He appealed to them. They had done so at His entrance into Jerusalem. They supposed Jesus would do so, for wickedness always reckons on finding its own principles in others. This is why it so frequently fails in circumventing the upright-they are artless. Here it was the will of God, that Jesus should suffer at the feast. But He had prepared a gracious relief to the heart of Jesus-a balm to His heart more than to His body-a circumstance which is used by the enemy to drive Judas to extremity and put him in connection with the chief priests.

Bethany (linked in memory with the last moments of peace and tranquillity in the Saviour's life, the place where dwelt Martha and Mary, and Lazarus the risen dead)-Bethany [See Footnote #75] receives Jesus for the last time: the blessed but momentary retreat of a heart which, ever ready to pour itself out in love, was ever straitened in a world of sin, that did not and could not respond to it; yet a heart which has given us, in His relations with this beloved family, the example of an affection perfect, yet human, which found sweetness in being responded to and appreciated. The nearness of the cross, where He would have to set His face as a flint, did not deprive His heart of the joy or the sweetness of this communion, while rendering it solemn and affecting. In doing the work of God He did not cease to be man. In everything He condescended to be ours. He could no longer own Jerusalem, and this sanctuary sheltered Him for a moment from the rude hand of man. Here He could display what He ever was as man. It is with reason, that the act of one who in a certain sense could appreciate what He felt [See Footnote #76] (whose affection instinctively entered into the rising enmity against the object she loved and was drawn out by it), and the act that expressed the estimate her heart had of His preciousness and grace should be told in all the world. This is a scene, a testimony, that brings the Lord sensibly near to us, that awakens a feeling in our hearts which sanctifies by binding them to His beloved Person.

His daily life was one continued tension of soul, in proportion to the strength of His love-a life of devotedness in the midst of sin and misery. For a moment He could, and would own (in presence of the power of evil, now to have its way, and the love that clung to Him thus bowing under it, through true knowledge of Him cultivated in sitting at His feet) that devotedness to Himself, drawn out by that which His soul was in divine perfectness bowing to. He could give an intelligent voice, its true meaning, to that which divinely wrought affection silently acted on. [See Footnote #77]

The reader will do well carefully to study this scene of touching condescension and outpouring of heart. Jesus, Emmanuel, King and Supreme Judge, had just been causing all things to pass in judgment before Him (from chap. 21 to the end of 25). He had finished that which He had to say. His task here, in this respect, was accomplished. He now takes the place of Victim; He has only to suffer, and can allow Himself freely to enjoy the touching expressions of affection that flow from a heart devoted to Him. He could but taste the honey and pass on; but He does taste it, and did not reject an affection which His heart could and did appreciate.

Again, observe the effect of deep affection for the Lord. This affection necessarily breathes the atmosphere in which, at that moment, the spirit of the Lord is found. The woman who anointed Him was not informed of the circumstances about to happen, nor was she a prophetess. But the approach of that hour of darkness was felt by one whose heart was fixed on Jesus. [See Footnote #78] The different forms of evil developed themselves before Him, and displayed themselves in their true colours; and, under the influence of one master, even Satan, grouped themselves around the only object against whom it was worthwhile to array this concentration of malice, and who brought their true character out into open daylight.

But the perfectness of Jesus, which drew out the enmity, drew out the affection in her; and she (so to speak) reflected the perfectness in the affection; and as that perfectness was put in action and drawn to light by the enmity, so was her affection. Thus Christ's heart could not but meet it. Jesus, by reason of this enmity, was still more the object that occupied a heart which, doubtless led of God, instinctively apprehended what was going on. The time of testimony, and even that of the explanation of His relationship to all around Him, was over. His heart was free to enjoy the good and true and spiritual affections of which He was the object; and which, whatever might be their human form, shewed so plainly their divine origin, in that they were attached to that object on which, at this solemn moment, all the attention of heaven was centred.

Jesus Himself was conscious of His position. His thoughts were on His departure. During the exercise of His power, He hides-He forgets-Himself. But now oppressed, rejected, and like a lamb led to the slaughter, He feels that He is the just object of the thoughts of those who belong to Him, of all who have hearts to appreciate that which God appreciates. His heart is full of the coming events, see v. 2, 10-13, 18, 21.

But yet a few words more on the woman who anointed Him. The effect of having the heart fixed in affection on Jesus is shewn in her in a striking manner. Occupied with Him, she is sensible of His situation. She feels what affects Him; and this causes her affection to act in accordance with the special devotedness which that situation inspires. As hatred against Him rose up to murderous intent, the spirit of devotedness to Him grows in answer to it in her. Consequently, with the tact of devotedness, she does precisely that which was suited to His situation. The poor woman was not intelligently aware of this; yet she did the thing that was meet. Her value for the Person of Jesus, so infinitely precious to her, made her quick-sighted with respect to that which was passing in His mind. In her eyes Christ was invested with all the interest of His circumstances; and she lavishes upon Him that which expressed her affection. Fruit of this sentiment, her action met the circumstances; and, although it was but the instinct of her heart, Jesus gives it all the value which His perfect intelligence could attribute to it, embracing at once the sentiments of her heart and the coming events.

But this testimony of affection and devotedness to Christ brings out the selfishness, the want of heart, of the others. They blame the poor woman. Sad proof (to say nothing of Judas [See Footnote #79] how little the knowledge of that which concerns Jesus necessarily awakens suitable affection in our hearts! After this Judas goes out, and agrees with the unhappy priests to betray Jesus to them for the price of a slave.

The Lord pursues His career of love; and as He had accepted the poor woman's testimony of affection, so He now bestows on His disciples one of infinite value to our souls. Verse 16 concludes the subject of which we have been speaking: Christ's knowledge, according to God, of that which awaited Him; the conspiracy of the priests; the affection of the poor woman, accepted by the Lord; the selfish cold-heartedness of the disciples; the treachery of Judas.

The Lord now institutes the memorial of the true passover. He sends the disciples to make arrangements for the celebration of the feast at Jerusalem. He points out Judas as the one who would deliver Him up to the Jews. It will be noticed, that it was not merely His knowledge of the one who should betray Him which the Lord here expresses-He knew that when He called him; but He says, "One of you shall betray me." It was that which touched His heart: He wished it to touch theirs likewise.

He then points out that it is a Saviour slain who is to be remembered. It is no longer a question of the living Messiah: all that was over. It was no longer the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. Christ, and Christ slain, began an entirely new order of things. Of Him they were now to think-of Him slain on earth. He then draws their attention to the blood of the new covenant, adding that which extends it to others besides the Jews, without naming them-"It is shed for many." Moreover, this blood is not, as at Sinai, only to confirm the covenant, for fidelity to which they were responsible; it was shed for the remission of sins. So that the Lord's supper presents the remembrance of Jesus slain, who, by dying, has broken with the past; has laid the foundation of the new covenant; obtained the remission of sins; and opened the door to the Gentiles. It is only in His death that the supper presents Him to us. His blood is apart from His body: He is dead. It is neither Christ living on the earth, nor Christ glorified in heaven. He is separate from His people, as to their joys on earth; but they are to expect Him as the companion of the happiness He has secured for them-for He condescends to be so-in better days:-"I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new [See Footnote #80] with you in my Father's kingdom." But, these links broken, who, save Jesus, could sustain the conflict? All would forsake Him. The testimonies of the word should be accomplished. It was written, "I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad."

Nevertheless He would go, to renew His relationship, as a risen Saviour, with these poor of the flock, to the same place where He had already identified Himself with them during His life. He would go before them into Galilee. This promise is very remarkable, because the Lord resumes, under a new form, His Jewish relationship with them and with the kingdom. We may here remark that, as He had judged all classes (to the end of chap. 25), He now exhibits the character of His relationship with all those among whom He maintained any. Whether it is the woman, or Judas, or the disciples, each one takes his place in connection with the Lord. This is all we find here. If Peter had natural energy enough to go a little farther, it would only be for a deeper fall in the place where the Lord alone could stand.

And now He isolates Himself to present, in supplication to His Father, the sufferings that awaited Him.

But while isolating Himself for prayer, He takes three of His disciples with Him, that in this solemn moment they may watch with Him. They were the same three who were with Him during the transfiguration. They

were to see His glory in the kingdom, and His sufferings. He goes a little way beyond them. As for them, they fall asleep, as they did on the mount of transfiguration. The scene here is described in Hebrews 5:7. Jesus was not yet drinking the cup, but it was before His eyes. On the cross He drank it, made sin for us, His soul feeling itself forsaken of Him. Here it is the power of Satan, using death as a terror with which to overwhelm Him. But the consideration of this subject will be more in place when we come to Luke's Gospel.

We here see His soul under the load of death-by anticipation -as He alone could know it, nor had it as yet lost its sting. We know who has the power of death, and death as yet had the full character of the wages of sin, and the curse, of God's judgment. But He watches and He prays. As man, subjected by His love to this assault, in the presence of the most powerful temptation to which He could be exposed, on the one hand He watches; on the other, He presents His anguish to His Father. His communion was not interrupted here, however great His distress. This distress only cast Him the more, in all submission and in all reliance, upon His Father. But if we were to be saved, if God was to be glorified in Him who had undertaken our cause, the cup must not pass away from Him. And His submission is complete.

He tenderly reminds Peter of his false confidence, [See Footnote #81] making him sensible of his weakness; but Peter was too full of himself to profit by it; he awakes from his sleep, but his self-confidence is not shaken. A sadder experience was needed for its cure.

The Lord therefore takes the cup, but He takes it from His Father's hand. It was His will that He should drink it. Committing Himself thus entirely to His Father, it is neither from the hand of His enemies, nor from that of Satan (though they were the instruments), that He takes it. According to the perfection with which He had subjected Himself to the will of God in this matter, committing all to Him, it is from His hand alone that He receives it. It is the Father's will. It is thus that we escape from second causes, and from the temptations of the enemy, by seeking only the will of God who directs all things. It is from Him we receive affliction and trial, if they come.

The disciples need no longer watch: the hour is come. [See Footnote #82] He was to be betrayed into the hands of men. This was saying enough. Judas designates Him by a kiss. Jesus goes to meet the multitude, rebuking Peter for seeking to resist with carnal weapons. Had Christ wished to escape, He could have asked for twelve legions of angels and had them; but all things must be fulfilled. [See Footnote #83] It was the hour of His submission to the effect of the malice of man and the power of darkness, and God's judgment against sin. He is the Lamb for the slaughter. Then all the disciples forsake Him. He surrenders Himself, setting before the crowd that came what they were doing. If no one can prove Him guilty, He will not deny the truth. He confesses the glory of His Person as Son of God, and declares that henceforth they should see the Son of man no longer in the meekness of One who would not break the bruised reed, but coming in the clouds of heaven, and sitting on the right hand of power. Having borne this testimony He is condemned on account of that which He said of Himself-for the confession of the truth. The false witnesses did not succeed. The priests and the heads of Israel were guilty of His death, by virtue of their own rejection of the testimony He rendered to the truth. He was the Truth; they were under the power of the father of lies. They rejected the Messiah, the Saviour of His people. He would come to them no more, except as Judge.

They insult and outrage Him. Each one alas! takes, as we have seen, his own place-Jesus, that of Victim; the others, the place of betrayal, rejection, abandonment, denial of the Lord. What a picture! What a solemn moment! Who could stand in it? Christ alone could steadily pass through it. And He passed

through it as a victim. As such, He must be stripped of all, and that in the presence of God. Everything else disappeared, except the sin which led to it; and, according to grace, that also before the powerful efficacy of this act. Peter, self-confident, hesitating, detected, answering with untruth, swearing, denies his Master; and, painfully convinced of man's powerlessness against the enemy of his soul and against sin, he goes out and weeps bitterly: tears, which cannot efface his guilt, but which, while proving the existence, through grace, of uprightness of heart, bear witness to that powerlessness which uprightness of heart cannot remedy. [See Footnote #84]

Footnotes for Matthew 26

75: It was not in Martha's house that this scene took place, but that of Simon the leper: Martha served and Lazarus sat at meat. This makes the intelligent act of Mary more entirely personal.

76: No instance is found of the disciples ever understanding what Jesus said to them.

77: Christ meets the heart of the poor woman in the city which was a sinner, and told God's mind out there, and told it to her. He meets Mary's heart here, and justifies and satisfies her affection, and gave the divine estimate of what she did. He met Mary Magdalene's heart at the sepulchre, to whom the world was emptiness if He was not there, and tells God's mind in its highest forms of blessing. Such is the effect of attachment to Christ.

78: The enmity of the chiefs of Israel was known to the disciples-"Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" And afterwards by Thomas-a gracious testimony to the love of one who afterwards shewed his unbelief as to Jesus' resurrection-"let us go that we may die with him." Mary's heart doubtless felt this enmity, and as it grew, her attachment to the Lord grew with it.

79: Judas's heart was the spring of this evil, but the other disciples, not occupied with Christ, fall into the snare.

80: "New" is not anew, but in an entirely new way.

81: It is wonderful to see the Lord in the full agony of the anticipated cup, only as yet presenting it to His Father, not drinking the cup; yet turning to the disciples and speaking to them in calm grace as if in Galilee, and turning back to the dreadful conflict of spirit Himself exactly for what was before His soul. In Matthew He is victim, I add, and every aggravation, with no alleviating circumstance, is here what His soul meets.

82: I purpose speaking on the Lord's sufferings when studying the Gospel of Luke, where they are described more in detail; because it is as Son of man that He is there especially presented.}

83: Remark here in so solemn and crucial a moment, the place that the Lord gives to the scriptures: that thus it must be, for it was there (v. 54). They are the word of God.}

84: I think it will be found, on comparing the Gospels, that the Lord was examined at Caiaphas's over night, when Peter denies Him, and that they met formally again in the morning, and, asking the blessed Lord, received from Himself the confession on which they led Him to Pilate. Over night it was only the active leaders. In the morning there was a formal assembling of the Sanhedrim.

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