

# The Price of Blood

Matthew 26:1-16

Jesus finished *all these sayings* (v. 1). He completed the five discourses including the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 4-6), Sermon on Mission (chapter 10), Parables of the Kingdom (chapter 13), Sermon on the Church (chapters 18-19), and the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24-25). He delivered the whole counsel of God and up to this point He has constantly confounded His enemies, speaking with authority and not as the scribes. But from here He will say very little, but instead will be “betrayed” and “handed over” repeatedly. In this passage, two groups gather at very different houses to consider the price of Christ’s blood.

## Two Houses

Jesus says to the disciples that they know Passover is two days away, and it’s then that the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified (v. 1). As soon as He concludes His faithful preaching, the chief priests, scribes, and elders gather at the high priest Caiaphas’ house to figure out how to deceitfully take and kill Him (vv. 2-4). This can’t happen during the feast because there will be an uproar, so they tiptoe around the crowd (v. 5; cf. Lk. 20:19, 22:2). They don’t want to murder Him out of pure bloodlust; they want to get Him out of the way without damaging their persons or reputations.

Matthew switches scenes to Simon the leper’s house in Bethany where a woman, who from John’s Gospel we know is Mary (12:3), takes a pound of costly oil and anoints Jesus’ head for His burial (vv. 6, 12). Right after Matthew concludes this scene, he goes back to the scene among the chief priests where Judas asks what they’re willing to pay him to deliver Jesus to them (vv. 12-16).

So we have a sandwich story with the plotting of the priests, scribes and elders on the both sides of the beautiful thing that the woman does. Both houses focus on Jesus, and both have a plan for Him. In Caiaphas’ house, they’re all about protecting their position, power, wealth, and reputation, which is why Jesus has to be dealt with. They can’t let someone walk into the temple and overthrow the tables of their moneychangers. How do they know He won’t do it again? And regardless, what will become of them if Jesus gets serious about throwing them out? So they plot as Psalm 2 says, “against the Lord and against His anointed” (Ps. 2:2-3; v. 3). Simon the leper’s house is not a palace like Caiaphas’. Presumably he’s not a (contagious) leper anymore because Jesus healed him, but he is one of “the least of these” (25:40) and his condition is public enough that Matthew includes this detail. This was a humble and fruitful house focused on serving Jesus. This story confirms it’s not a sinless house, but one where salvation is at work. Caiaphas’ palace was a den of self-indulgence and iniquity. Jesus has been teaching about how to be fruitful and generous in His kingdom, and Simon shows us how. He doesn’t sell his house and ditch his obligations, but hosts Jesus and His people there.

## Thirty Pieces of Silver

The woman’s costly oil contrasts with the thirty pieces of silver Judas takes as payment. The thirty pieces remind of Zechariah’s description unfaithful shepherds who abuse the Lord’s sheep. A faithful shepherd then serves but the sheep abhor him, and so he brakes his staff called “Grace” and asks them to pay what they think he is worth, which is a lousy thirty pieces, “that princely price they set on me” (Zech. 11:7-13).

Judas doesn’t haggle but takes the money in advance, weighed out right there (v. 15). It’s true that he wanted to make a little money, about two hundred dollars. He also led the complaint about the costly oil, “not that he

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cared for the poor,” John says, “but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it” (Jn. 12:6). But we need to be thoughtful. Judas wasn’t stupid. He had seen Jesus still the wind and waves, feed the 4000 and 5000, heal the blind, restore the sick, raise Lazarus from the dead, and recently cleanse the temple. It doesn’t appear that he actually had his heart set on that small sum or on the destruction of Jesus. It appears that He wanted Jesus to use His power to crush His enemies and of course install him as the COO of the kingdom. Wouldn’t he get credit and, as usual, a small bonus? The sum is outrageously small, but if it was huge then we would think it was outrageously huge. No price to betray God makes any sense. Sin is always insane. The thing that looks so good—the money, the girl, the guy, the praise of others—is so absurdly small and stupid when set next to the beauty and glory of God. Not to mention His infinite generosity. What does it profit to gain the whole world, and lose your soul (Mk. 8:38)? We know Judas wanted to be God because the rules don’t apply to him. He’ll “serve” Jesus just so long as He does the way Judas requires.

## A Beautiful Thing

The oil is worth 300 denarii, about a years’ wage for a day laborer, tens of thousands of dollars which Judas says could have been sold and given to the poor (v. 9; Jn. 12:4). Matthew says the disciples are *indignant*, the same words used to describe how the priests and scribes reacted when the children cried out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matt. 21:15).

Judas leads, but they gladly follow. Doesn’t Mary know how disciples ought to invest their talents and get a return for the master? Thirty thousand dollars for one day of a sweet-smelling Messiah? Can anyone get on board with that? Our assumptions betray us. *He’s not really the King. Money isn’t just a tool; it’s our security. Christians are not really the body of Christ. Jesus doesn’t really receive and reward our love for the least of His brethren.* “Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful [*kalon*] thing for Me” (v. 10).

He says they’re always going to have the poor (future Judases will always have job security), but He’s not going to be there much longer (v. 11). What’s more, she does it for His burial (v. 12). Unlike the twelve, who really are the foundation of the church next to Christ the cornerstone, she believes the gospel and prepares Him, a dead man walking, to go to the cross. Normally bodies are prepared for burial once they’re dead, but her chance to bless Him is now. And she takes it. Anointed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus will swallow up death by dying on the cross. She had already died to the sins of greed, false security, and slavish practicality, so she can break out this oil. This is such a beautiful thing for Jesus that we will be talking about until the end of the world (v. 13).

Matthew is a tax collector. He knows about balance sheets, what is owed and due, and how money is the root of all kinds of evil. Tax collectors squeeze their countrymen for a living. But Jesus opened his eyes along with the rest of the disciples so they could see like Mary does, so he could write this for us to open ours, too. Another person who will not be here always you and everyone you know and love. Jesus’ blood is priceless and so it’s nothing to give everything to Him. Very few people will need to leave the tax booth to follow Him. Most of us just need to treasure Him where we are right now. Then we see how rich we are with time, with talent, with treasure in various degrees, and take the opportunities to do beautiful things for Him.