

Where the former illustration featured women entrusted with a responsibility for which they must give account, this story introduces men similarly accountable, almost as if Jesus wished to place the relative human responsibility of both sexes on an equal footing before God. (Cf. 24:40f.; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11.)

As the sequel shows, *he delivered unto them his goods* for investing his liquid assets profitably for him during his absence. While not expressly stated here, this was clearly his expectation and his servants so understood it. Not putting all his eggs in one basket, this wise owner divided his assets among several agents whom he trusted to be responsible. Not merely logical business procedure, his plan ennobled and motivated his stewards to prove themselves worthy of such a trust. In fact, he was turning over all this wealth to men who were but slaves. This should impress them with the importance of their high responsibility and leave them determined to rise to the challenge this great honor entailed.

However, for the man in the street in first-century Palestine, such a parable as this is unquestionably wrong-headed. The Kingdom of God, for him, meant reigning, relaxing and rejoicing, not rigorous responsibility! But Jesus does not flinch from prospecting a hard, concentrated, risk-filled TOIL that requires attentiveness, creativity, determination and other requisites to turn a profit for God. Jesus thinks that our ability to work now determines our qualification to rule later. Hence, we are currently being tested. Shortly before Jesus ascended to the heavenly Throne, He acted precisely as this man by placing into the hands of His own people the Gospel and its precious promises of spiritual life, the means to obtain it and the gifts to develop it (28:18ff.; Mark 16:15ff.; Luke 24:44-51; John 20:21ff.; Acts 1:1-9). Then, upon conferring the administration of His affairs to His servants, He too left at once. Thus, the stewards of this parable represent, not merely first-century Christians, but His administrators of all ages.

25:15 And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. His goods were *talents* of silver (*tà argùria*, 25:27), quantities of money on the value of which see note on 18:24. Therefore, these talents are not primarily natural abilities, as this story is often interpreted to mean. While its principles justly apply to natural "talents," this parable's initial focus is money. In fact, that the two kinds of talents are distinct in Jesus' story is proven by three considerations:

1. Because the distribution of talents occurred on the basis of native ability, or natural talents, the monetary talents must refer to the

distribution of something each steward did not possess prior to that moment.

2. Verse 28 contemplates the taking away of the talent from one steward and giving it to another. Talents are something external to one's native abilities and of which, presumably, he cannot be deprived without violence to his nature.
3. The talents distributed are uniquely the master's goods, something the slaves did not have until their lord entrusted them to them.

And yet it would be useless hair-splitting to attempt to distinguish further the wealth of Jesus Christ from our own natural ability, since "God is at work in us both to will and to work according to His good purpose" (Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:20; Isa. 26:12). All that we are or have has been given to us by God for His purposes and glory. So, His gifts disbursed to us may be seen as distinct from our natural talents, even if these latter are empowered by the further abilities with which He endows us, whether these endowments be natural or supernatural. (Cf. Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12-14; I Peter 4:8-11.) Therefore, in the reality intended by Jesus' illustration, these *talents* represent the variety and complexity of means whereby we can be useful to the Lord.

To each according to his several ability. Lying on the surface of this parable is the startling fact that it is simply not true that all Christians are equal. This sagacious master knows the personal character and business ability of each man and dispenses his possessions accordingly (Rom. 12:3-8; I Cor. 12:11, 18). How irresponsible he would have been to have required, or even expected, a servant with less ability to produce as much as one more experienced. So, in reality, the distribution commensurate to each one's individual ability was evenly matched, even though the sums differed. Merely because God saves everyone on the same basis (Gal. 3:28) does not mean He treats us all alike. Our regeneration does not dissolve our individual differences. Our bountiful Lord knows the capacity of the vessel into which He pours His grace, the ability of the person to whom He supplies His plenteous opportunities to serve. His very discrimination is evidence of His love, because He is too kind a Master to load any of His servants beyond their strength to bear it, and too wise an Administrator to want it any other way (Rev. 2:24; John 16:12; I Cor. 10:13). Happy, then, is the steward who understands that *to each according to his several ability* means that none may

unfavorably compare the quantity of service opportunities he possesses with that of others who have more or less than he. Finally, if the master's goods were all distributed *to each according to his ability*, we see that Christ's earthly interests are entrusted to all His people. There is no Christian who is not gifted in some way with sufficient means to fulfill his own share of the Lord's work. However great or small his part, for this he is fully responsible.

Further, as the sequel shows, there is indicated here a certain liberty of action, as if the stewards could invest their lord's money more or less as they saw fit, so long as their management brought him the desired profit. Here is forepictured our magnificent Christian liberty in that Jesus has not legislated nor predetermined thousands of everyday choices whereby we may demonstrate our usefulness to Him. This is decided, rather, by our own free response to every advantage and blessing He furnishes for us to employ in His service. Our free investment of His goods is controlled only by His very general directives that govern our free enterprise by furnishing generalized indications of His will without predetermining our specific choices. (Cf. I Cor. 6-10; Rom. 14, 15; see my Vol. III, 382ff.)

And he went on his journey. Jesus' Ascension is the key element that makes our stewardship exciting, because His absence leaves us fully responsible and because His unknown return date keeps us working against time to get as much done as possible for His glory before our personal, final accounting.

At this point some manuscripts insert the word, *straightway* (*duthéōs*), which other manuscripts and editors connect with verse 16. Connected with verse 15, the sentence would be: "Then he (the master) went away at once." Although this word, when connected with either sentence, would make excellent sense, which is better?

The Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (63) rejects the connection with verse 15, not only because the limited textual evidence for connecting "immediately" with verse 16 is of good quality, but also because "this reading best explains the origin of the others. Further, Matthew generally connects *euthéōs* with what follows." However, (1) what would Matthew's general habit prove conclusively about one special case that may in fact be the exception? (2) Manuscripts that connect "immediately" with verse 15 are not only more numerous, but in some cases contemporary with the few that connect it with what

follows. (3) The sense of the parable must be determined from the words, not the words from the sense of the parable.

The Textual Commentary argues, "There is no point in the master's departing immediately; there is much point in the servant's immediately setting to work." On the contrary, if Jesus intended to hint that He would leave shortly after entrusting His earthly affairs to His disciples,—which, in fact, He did through the Great Commission,—then "immediately," interpreted in harmony with the history, belongs to the foregoing sentence. This point is crucial in order to correct the false notion of disciples who supposed He must personally supervise a long, earthly Messianic reign from a material throne in Jerusalem. Not only is His absence a doctrine they must accept, but also the suddenness of His departure.

Two Intelligent, Trustworthy Executives

25:16 Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. If, on the other hand, *straightway* belongs rightly with this verse, this servant is pictured as recognizing the preciousness of every opportunity to promote the interests of his master. Like his colleague (v. 17), he instantly grasped his responsibility to be a dependable trustee.

Why does Jesus relate that these first two administrators doubled their capital? merely to embellish the story, and not, rather, to indicate something of the time involved? How much time would ordinarily be required for a wise investor to DOUBLE his capital on the market of first-century Palestine? If this passage of time is significant, it implies once more the delay between the Lord's departure and His return. (Cf. 25:19.)

25:17 In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. *In like manner:* what is predicable of the former servant is also true of this one. The two-talent steward is no less successful than the fellowservant, even though the quantity handled and gained is less than half the other's amount. People with even less gifts than others can yet prove themselves equally faithful and diligent in multiplying the value of what Jesus entrusts to them.

This two-talent steward is not mere scenery in Jesus' story, because this man could feel the power of temptations to which, in relation to the other two, he would be susceptible:

1. Because he possessed less than the five-talent man, he could have felt deficient and incapable, and tempted to conceal his abilities.
2. Because he possessed more than the one-talent man, he could have judged himself one notch better than his inferior, falling into unjustified pride.

So, standing between the others, he represents both men's temptations to be arrogant or feel inferior to anyone with gifts more or less than their fellows. But the Lord who distributes these gifts has in mind that each simply utilize the abilities with which he personally has been gifted for his Master's glory.

A Man Too Lazy to Try

25:18 But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. This unimaginative chap differs from the evil servant of 24:48f., in that the latter was openly and actively wicked, whereas this one simply does nothing. Unlike the overconfident, foolish virgins who made at least some preparation for the wedding, this over-cautious, unenterprising administrator errs because of underconfidence. He remains stolidly insensitive to his responsibility to gain a profit for his master. Ironically, he takes a greater risk of losing everything. This fellow is not a great waster, like the prodigal son (Luke 15:13) nor a great debtor, like the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:23-35). He simply hides what belongs to his lord and refuses to put it to work.

He went away and digged in the earth. Back in the days of the uncertainties of banking and war in countries where banking was untrustworthy, the earth itself became the common safe deposit box of the uncertain, a fact evidenced by later, providential discoveries of casks of valuable coins (cf. 13:44). So, this lazy steward really risked losing his treasure to some fortunate finder who accidentally dug it up. Far more praiseworthy would have been to risk losing the talent through investment, for he would at least have attempted something positive for his lord who, not unlikely, was thoroughly versed in the uncertainties of markets and business. Nevertheless, with the last shovelful of dirt piled over the money, he considered his conscience silenced. Perhaps he even prided himself on being both honest and prudent, even quite scrupulous. He would return it to its owner, possessing the identical worth it had when he received it.

But it was *his lord's money* entrusted to him to invest, not his own to remove from circulation! This over-caution is not simply an excess

of scruple. It is equivalent to a breach of trust. He refuses to be answerable to his master beyond the barest duty of returning the money intact.

Even before the final accounting, his true attitude is exposed. M.Dods (*P.H.C.*, XXII,575) applies this:

It is not without significance that the servant who did nothing at all for his master was he who had received but one talent. No doubt those who have great ability are liable to temptations of their own; they may be more ambitious, and may find it difficult to serve their Master with means which they see would bring in to themselves profits of a kind they covet. But such men, at all events, are not tempted to bury their talent. This is the peculiar temptation of the man who has little ability, and sullenly retires from a service in which he cannot shine and play a conspicuous part.

Ultimately, as always, there are really only two types of stewards in God's judgment: the trustworthy administrators who expend their best efforts to please their Master, and the irresponsible, undependable ones who, in the end, do nothing. (Cf. John 5:41-44; 8:29.) And these latter He condemns in no uncertain terms!

The Turning Point

25:19 Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. This period of *a long time* is the indefinite interval that tries the true motives and character of each steward. During this time the lazy steward could have repented and unearthed that one talent and hurried either to invest it or place it with the bankers for interest. The two faithful stewards could have grown careless and relaxed their efforts. Instead, they considered it simply an additional grace period to labor longer! This *long time* serves to underline the fairness of the judgment finally given, because the final account does not have to be in until all the servants shall have had suitable time to make their Lord a profit. This delay is itself mercy so that we might correct false starts, cover lost ground and serve profitably. *After a long time* combines with "he went away into another country" (25:14) to imply that Jesus' Second Coming and the final judgment pictured here will be delayed longer than people expected, and is parallel to other similar clues given earlier (24:48; 25:5; cf. II Peter 3:4-13).

It is *the lord of those servants* who comes, a fact which emphasizes how completely the time, energies, talents and efforts of those slaves really belonged, not to themselves, but to their master (cf. I Cor. 6:19f.). Could such a master forget to demand an accounting for the wealth he had entrusted to his slaves? Here, then, is the final judgment, or *reckoning*, which we all must render our returning Lord. (Cf. 18:23ff.; 21:33ff.; 22:1ff.; Luke 19:15.) That we too must answer is as certain as the wealth of privileges and material riches that pass through our hands.

25:20 And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo I have gained other five talents. *You delivered to me:* without this magnanimous trust, the slave could have done nothing (John 15:5; Luke 19:16). How gracious the privilege to be allowed to do anything for Jesus Christ! Considering our real worth, that He should trust us with such priceless treasures brings us inexpressible joy over this unjustified privilege (II Cor. 4:7; Col. 2:2b, 3)! And to think that, in some minor way, we can contribute to HIS glory, mightily empowered to do so by His Spirit, and then, at last, to be certain that even the most insignificant service done for Him shall be recognized,—is not all this the very definition of grace?!

Lo, means “Look here, notice,” as if the happy steward enthusiastically welcomed his lord to see the money for himself. Though all we do and are is by the Lord’s grace (Acts 17:24-28; I Cor. 15:10), it is also correct to say, *I have gained*, because our personal commitment and efforts to express our loyalty and love to Him do count (I Cor. 15:58). No wonder there is joyous excitement and unshaken confidence in our final reckoning before our Lord! (Cf. I Thess. 2:19; Phil. 2:16; 4:1; II Cor. 1:14 all speak of Paul’s joy at Christ’s coming, due to his converts’ faith. Our confidence before the Lord: Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:19; 4:16; 9:28; I Peter 4:13; I John 2:28; 3:21; Jude 24.)

Rewards Beyond All Deserving

25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant. Here is the true spirit and character of this master, that gives the lie to the negligent servant’s attitude. M. Dods (*P.H.C.* XXII,575) scores that ingrate thus:

(His view of God) is unpardonably wrong, and the very heartiness with which these other servants were greeted refutes it.

You hear the hearty “Well done!” ringing through the whole palace—there is no hesitating scrutiny, no reminding them they had, after all, merely done what it was their duty to do. Not at all—it is the genial, generous outburst of a man who likes to praise, and hates to find people at fault.

Good and faithful servant: what a glorious title! What splendid rewards are attached to it! What joys await its wearer! He proved *good* by his dedication to the task assigned him, and *faithful* (*pistòs*) by being reliable or trustworthy. He was not entitled “good and *successful* servant,” but *good and FAITHFUL*. Praise for this highly successful manager is not based on the amount of his gain, but on the quality of dedicated service he expended, as shown by what follows.

Thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will set thee over many things. How very little capital he had actually handled for his master: a mere five talents in contrast to his lord’s incalculable wealth and even to his own future responsibilities! (See Special Study: “The Reasonableness of the Redeemer’s Rewards for Righteousness,” my Vol. I, 198ff.). He gives beyond all dreams and deserving! His lowliest servant’s final pleasure is double because duty to such a Master is already an inexpressibly gratifying favor. So, if the wealth of gifts He entrusts to us in this life is, in His estimate, but *a few things*, what immeasurably greater treasure must constitute the *many things* over which He would set us later!

I will set thee over many things. Whatever *the joy of thy lord* entailed, his reward was not an extended vacation, but nobler employment. *I will set you over* means “you shall rule over” or be responsible for. While there is more work to do, it is to be an employment that involves reigning. Rather than be discharged from investment service, these stewards are advanced to bigger things. To the men who had demonstrated themselves eager and dependable at a lower level of responsibility, their master intends to give prolonged opportunities for even greater service (cf. 24:47).

Enter thou into the joy of thy lord. What is this *joy* in which they would share?

1. A feast to celebrate the master’s return, perhaps accompanied by manumission of the slave on the basis of his outstanding fidelity and industriousness? (Trench, *Parables*, 94; cf. John 15:15; Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20). To share in such a banquet with his lord would be partial reward for his exceptional service.

2. The master's pleasure upon his newly acquired, even greater wealth?
3. The master's personal sense of joy over his servants' accomplishments?
4. Or is it "the joy of lordship . . . admission to fellowship in possession, partnership"? (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 303; cf. Heb. 3:14).

All of these could be true of Jesus. This hearty welcome says to the wise and faithful steward: "I want you to share in the happiness I enjoy!" (cf. Heb. 12:2; Isa. 53:11). Servants who have their Master's true interests at heart can participate whole-heartedly in what pleases Him. They can work for Him forever, because they share His program and are satisfied with achieving His goals. Their heart is in their (= His) work. No wonder then, that unlimited progress lies ahead for Christ's disciples who take seriously their goal to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (5:48).

Nor is it any surprise, too, that Jesus teaches us to believe that the world cannot grant us honors or praise equal to His. Only He can commend and reward. Long before judgment He established this final commendation, so we would seek to please Him and thus keep ourselves loyal to Him, longing to hear from Him, *Well done, good and faithful servant*. (Study John 5:44; 12:26, 42f.; II Cor. 10:12, 18.)

25:22 And he also that received the two talents came, . . . 23 His lord said unto him, . . . He who received less gifts, a narrower position and more limited opportunities in life is commended in the same way as the one whose gifts outnumbered his. So, it is not the quantity of talents or the disadvantages of our social position or degree of education that determines our Lord's attitude toward us, but our sense of responsibility to Him, demonstrated by our diligent use of what He has entrusted to us.

Self-righteous Dismissal of Duty

25:24 And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter. After the enthusiastic expressions of graciousness on the part of the returned master, it must have taken no little courage for his little ingrate to accuse him of a grasping, tight-fisted attitude. But this trapped, badly-motivated hypocrite must make a flimsy self-defense of some kind. So he attempts to shift all the blame onto his lord for his own failure.

I knew thee, he says? How little he knew him! *Thou art a hard man*. Nothing would have been farther from the truth, had this servant but sought to promote his master's good, a hypothesis confirmed by the lord's expansive reaction to the others who did. With poetic justice, this servant's accusation will be fulfilled in his own case, because, ironically, he pushed his lord to be harsh with him, a tactic which succeeded only in slamming the door of mercy in his own face. But it was his own indifference to duty that created in his mind this image of his lord as *a hard man* who makes unreasonable demands and expects back more than he gives. He hoped to establish his case by two parallel illustrations: *reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering* (winnowed grain) *where thou didst not scatter* (sheaves to be threshed). "Others sow and YOU reap! Others scatter unthreshed grain on the threshing floor and then thresh it, and YOU take the wheat, the fruit of their labors!" He implies that there was no real motivation to labor, because any potential return from any investment, be it market or bank investment, would have fallen to his master, hence he would have gotten nothing for his pains. What hope of personal gain was there to motivate anyone to take investment risks for such a crusty, ill-tempered old man?

This steward's reaction is probably not intentionally insolent (Prov. 26:16). Not unlikely, he supposes that, under the circumstances, his approach is just, his words sincere and appropriate. His blindness to his own misconduct stems from a totally wrong view of his lord. He did not love his master, so he willfully misunderstood him, and in this alienation of sympathy, refused to serve him. By attempting to protect his own interests, he asserted his fundamental intention to work for himself.

His grave error is that of all sinners. Men justify their sin on the basis of a firmly believed but false view of God's character. They accuse Him of demanding what they suppose belongs to them. They assume that all the time, energy, talents and cash that flow through their lives really belongs to them, and that God's expectation that He be given His portion thereof is but an unreasonable, self-calculating money policy on His part! Ironically, there is just a grain of truth in the slave's words. All our work, our lives, our talents, our very being must be utilized to the glory of God alone. Nothing we handle is really ours. It would appear that He alone is enriched by our efforts. This is but half of the truth, hence more treacherously deceptive. In His story Jesus faces this accusation head-on, shouting for all to hear that . . .

1. God's gifts are proportionately bestowed according to our ability. He is so kind and understanding that He would never overload anyone with more than he can bear.
2. Our service is only preparation for yet greater things to come FOR US.
3. Our rewards are rich and desirable beyond all we could ever hope to deserve.

So, any rebellion against such a Master as Jesus arises from our real ignorance of God. No harsh, demanding Boss, He considers the smallest favor to insignificant people as done directly to Himself (25:40)! He watches for the chance to help the weakest servants and accepts the will for the deed, loves to praise, encourage and uplift. It is only a gross and deliberate misrepresentation of His Kingdom that could ever suppose that what is given to Him or done for Him could ever be lost or forgotten or go unrewarded (I Cor. 15:58).

25:25 and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo thou hast thine own. *I was afraid*, he says. Really? He did not hesitate to insult his master to his face or return him the money without making even the smallest attempt to bring him a profit. The man feared making mistakes, so he did nothing, which was the greatest mistake of all. He implies, "Driven to it by your harsh, unreasoning character and compelled by what would happen, if I lost your money through bad investment, *I hid your talent in the earth.*"

How does God consider the one-talent man? This slave had the lightest responsibility of the three, but it was still no more than he could easily manage. Jesus rivets our attention on the man with the most limited potentiality and the least of his master's goods, because, in comparison to the highly gifted, more influential brethren in the limelight in the Church, we easily think ourselves handicapped and hampered with little means at our disposal to do anything for God. It is precisely because of this that we feel severely tempted to hide our light under a bushel, bury our talent in inactivity and then criticize God for not being more generous. We too are tempted to create the same hypothesis contrary to fact, "Had God given me more money, talents, intellect, etc., I would have produced more," when, as a matter of fact, we are not using what we have.

As this unproductive steward handed the solitary talent back to its owner, he concludes with an unconscious falsehood: *Lo thou hast thine own*. This is deceiving, because no account is given of his own time and activity, both of which were as much the possession of his

master as the talent. He was a *slave* (*doûlos*, v. 26), so he himself belonged to his lord, but did not, in reality, return to his master what was his. Although he had not squandered or absconded with his master's money, he cannot possibly escape blame, because his abilities, healthy body, time and energies were never used any more than the buried talent, but were all fruitless, as far as the master was concerned. Rather than confess any wrong, he boldly implies that his lord should praise him for his prudence and exonerate him from any blame for returning the money intact. Such is the depth of his self-deception, and the justification for his condemnation that comes next.

The Premises of His Defeat

25:26 But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; Feel the contrast that marks the "good and faithful" from the *wicked and slothful*. Whereas this steward defended himself as prudent, because he apparently took no risks, his master now attacks his inoperosity precisely because he had done nothing at all.

1. He was *wicked* (*ponerè*; Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 303 prefers "mean-spirited or grudging") toward so generous a master. Why?
 - a. Because he slandered his master first to himself, then to the lord himself.
 - b. Because he had not done his duty as slave required to invest his master's money.
 - c. Because his unwillingness to work was motivated by his disdain for his master's concerns, prosperity and clearly expressed demands before he left.
2. He was *slothful* (*oknèrè*, lazy, slow, indolent, idle). The master's proof of this accusation comes in v. 27.

Thou knewest? This is not unlikely a question to draw out what the slave could have known, hence could have produced. His master waives his own right to expect the energies of his slave to be utilized for his profit, and simply defeats the sluggard by his own arguments. *You knew?* "Then you will be judged by your own standards expressed in your own words!" This lord is not for one minute conceding the slave's judgment as true in reality, but conceding it for sake of argument. If the servant's argument means that the master enriched himself

by the labor of others, then he could have known that the lord would demand a profit from this servant's own labors. This alone should have made him more afraid NOT to invest that money in the surest kind of investment then known.

The Proper Conclusion From Such Premises

25:27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Were the slave troubled by other forms of risk through speculative investments, surely he should have been comforted by the guarantees afforded by *the bankers*. Although it was illegal to charge *interest* on money lent to fellow Hebrews (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36f.; Ps. 15:5), interest could be charged to non-Hebrews (Deut. 23:19f.). Such a low-risk investment could have commanded high interest in those days and turned a reasonably handsome profit. But how apply this option in Christian practice?

1. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 883) notes Jesus' utilization of this argument in the master's rebuttal:

In passing, a safe inference would seem to be that Jesus, who tells this parable, is not opposed to responsible capitalism. Profit prompts employment and makes possible helping those in need, etc.

2. Those who discover little direct use for their talents in Christ's service may well put what they do possess at the disposition of others to be invested profitably. Do they have enough talent to earn income? There is no shortage of missionary enterprises, charitable organizations and Christian education programs to which those with smaller gifts may dedicate their contributions. While this seems not to be a direct investment of life and talents, the efforts of the front-line Christian "bankers" brings profit to Jesus and those disciples who invest for His glory in this way shall be suitably recognized.
3. Why should our Lord, represented by the master in His illustration, be so driven by the profit motive? *I should have received back mine own with interest*, is the word of God's Son. In Himself, therefore, He furnishes the example of the spirit that must drive His disciples: get in there and make a profit, improve your opportunities, buy up the market, know how to seize the advantage.

(Cf. Eph. 5:16, esp. in Greek: "buying up the opportunity"; Luke 16:8f.) How many Christians actually believe that their one goal in life is to turn every energy and talent into a way of making positive gain for Jesus Christ? To fail to grasp this is to contribute to the sluggishness and lack of progress of His Kingdom on earth. *You should have put my money to the bankers* means "You did not." Idleness, laziness and irresponsibility for others and their goods is soundly condemned in Scripture (II Thess. 3:6-13; Heb. 6:11f.; I Thess. 5:14; 4:11; Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4f. 13:4; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4, 13; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:14-16; 27:18; 28:19). Will a Christian rob his Lord? Yet, by preventing Him from receiving what is His right to expect and what He otherwise would have obtained, he cheats Him, even though the Christian returns his talent back to God in mint condition.

The Lazy Are Dispossessed and Punished

25:28 Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it to him that hath the ten talents. This order proves that the master had not touched, much less accepted, the one talent from his indolent steward. As it lay there burning the useless servant's hand, it reminded him how many opportunities had been wasted while the money was in his hands. Whereas he expected the master to take the solitary talent back, incredibly, the lord rejected it.

As another stepped forward to relieve him of that unwanted talent, the limited stewardship of the inactive servant ended. There is now no further time nor opportunity to make good, exactly as, for the five foolish virgins, the coming of the bridegroom ended all opportunity for them.

Why give it unto him that hath the ten talents (cf. Luke 19:25)? Several reasons are suggested:

1. Indifference to one's stewardship finally makes others wealthy and impoverishes oneself (Prov. 10:4f.; 11:24f.; 12:11; 14:23; 17:16; 20:13; 21:17; 22:29; 27:18).
2. This owner may do what he will with his own possessions. God, too, is sovereign in precisely the same way. (See note on 20:15.)
3. Who was better qualified to accept additional responsibility than he who had demonstrated himself most capable by profitably handling the most money and in whose hands the master's interests were safest?

A Universal Rule of Life

25:29 For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. (Cf. Luke 19:26.) This rule of life in God's Kingdom is often illustrated in human psychology (13:12; esp. Mark 4:24f.). What is it that one *has* or *has not*? And how could anyone, who possesses nothing, be stripped of it? In our story all three slaves possessed two fundamental assets: their servanthood and their lord's talents to invest. The two slothful stewards grasped the preciousness of both, increased their lord's wealth and insured the permanency of their position. The lazy slave has now been stripped of his one talent, and thus, *has not*. He is now to be deprived of the last precious possession, his privilege to serve this generous lord. He had treated his stewardship as if he did not have it. Now what he really possessed all along *shall be taken away*.

This principle is one of life's moral laws, especially with regard to opportunities for service and abilities. To the man who had proven that he had the trustworthiness and ability to handle large sums of money, more could be entrusted. The more he was given, the more he could earn with it, the more he could be rewarded for his work, and the more *he shall have abundance*. Each trial of trust proves whether each of us is ready to move on to higher responsibilities. Those who know how to take advantage of their spiritual opportunities will be given others. But those who make no good use of theirs, however small or insignificant they may seem to them, will even lose their chance to do anything. (Consider Luke 16:10-12.)

How God Sees Uselessness

25:30 And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. *Unprofitable* not only describes the crime of this servant, but also establishes the point of Jesus' illustration.

The slave's failure lay in what he could, but would not, do. His was voluntary inertia. He lacked, but did not want to develop, creativity, initiative, foresight, alertness, aggressiveness, dependability or responsibility. So, why should anyone want to keep such a useless slave any longer?

Cast out . . . outer darkness . . . weeping . . . gnashing of teeth. These combined expressions repeat a well-known paraphrase for hell. (Cf. notes on 8:12; 13:42, 40; 22:13; 24:51; see also Luke 13:28; II Peter 2:17; Jude 13.) In what other ways in this discourse has Jesus underscored the destiny of the wicked already (24:39, 43, 51; 25:12; cf. 25:41, 46)? These expressions picture a banishment to a futile self-accusation and frustrated anger. This punishment accents the severity of the sentence Jesus pronounced upon refusal to be stewards. (Cf. 21:33-41; Luke 12:45-48.) No great sinner by most standards, this offender is rejected for unfaithfulness to his trust by simply doing nothing. There is no need to break down the broad class of unconscientious stewards to show all the various degrees of failure. After all, if our Lord so severely punishes the unprofitable use of ONE talent, what would He do to those who squander or fail to invest MORE?

This parable compares with that of the Pounds and complements it. The message of the Pounds Parable is that people given identical gifts may produce quite dissimilar results and be quite differently rewarded in strictly graduated ratio to the differing diligence. The point of the Talents Parable is that people who have unequal gifts may still utilize them equally well or badly and be rewarded in proportion to their work.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell all the differences between the Parable of the Talents and the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19). Show how the occasions on which each was told differed from each other.
2. Why are some given more talents than others? What rule did the master follow to distribute his money to each slave?
3. Of what phase of God's program is the Parable of the Talents illustrative? List the points of comparison.
4. What is a "talent" as this word was used in Jesus' story? What is its relative value? How may this value be calculated?
5. List the results obtained by the first two stewards.
6. Describe the attitude and actions of the third steward.
7. List the points in this parable that have parallels in other stories Jesus told on the same day.
8. Explain in what sense the stewards' master termed them "good and faithful servants." On what basis could he determine this?

9. Indicate the rewards of the good and faithful servants.
10. Explain what it means for the profitable servants to "enter into the joy of their lord."
11. What was the third steward's opinion of his master? Wherein was he mistaken?
12. How did the lord think his steward should have acted, given his present opinion?
13. To whom did the master give the lazy steward's talent? Why to him?
14. Explain how a person who has nothing can still lose what he has. What did the lazy steward "have" and what did he "have not"?
15. Explain the terms (a) "outer darkness," and (b) "weeping and gnashing of teeth."
16. State the central point of Jesus' story in one, well-honed statement.
17. What does this parable teach about the Second Coming of Jesus?

6. Illustration of the sheep and the goats

(25:31-46)

31 But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: 32 and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; 33 and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? 38 And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto these my brethren, *even* these least, ye did it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 for I was hungry and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger,

and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. 46 And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. On what basis of judgment will Jesus separate the sheep from the goats?
- b. How do you harmonize this Scripture's basic message with the teaching of salvation by grace through obedient faith in such verses as John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Acts 2:38, etc.?
- c. List scriptural statements, parables, etc., that teach that following Jesus and being a Christian requires a work, service and fruit-bearing, or that reveal the condemnation of every worthless, fruitless life that simply does nothing. What are you doing about it.
- d. Must we limit "the least of these my brethren" to the categories named: the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the unclothed, the sick or imprisoned? Who else should be treated with the same loving concern? Or do you think Jesus wanted the list restricted to those named?
- e. What does Jesus' emphasis on "all nations" gathered before His judgment throne have to say to the anti-missionary notion that each people has its own god and is happy in its own religion and should, therefore, be left alone as they are?
- f. When we view a needy person, whatever his need may be, how, according to Jesus, are we to react to him?
- g. Jesus implies that "all nations" will be separated into two groups on the basis of their usefulness in helping others. Does this mean that the Gospel is not really the final standard of judgment, especially for those who had not heard it? Or, does Jesus imply that all the world will have already heard His message, and now is to be judged according to its standards?
- h. Christians must do everything for Christ's sake and motivated by Him. If the sheep represent Christians, how can any real disciple be so completely unaware that he had served Christ by helping the needy, as to ask, "When saw we you hungry or thirsty, etc.?"

- i. Some believe that the sheep and goats who are judged here are distinguished from Christ's brethren, but nothing is affirmed about a judgment of the brethren themselves. Thus, the judgment in question is only of unbelievers, not of believers. How would you react to this?
- j. Is this picture of final judgment, initiated by the picture of a shepherd dividing sheep and goats, a parable, an allegory, simply an illustration, or what?

PARAPHRASE

“When the Messiah returns in His splendor, escorted by all the angels, He will take His seat on His glorious throne. All the people of the whole world will be assembled in His presence. He will then separate people into two groups, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those at His right, ‘You who have my Father’s blessing, come take possession of your inheritance, the Kingdom destined for you ever since the world’s founding. This is because when I was famished, you gave me some food to eat. When I was thirsty, you offered me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you shared hospitality with me. When I was poorly clad, you furnished me clothes. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

“At this point the righteous will respond, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? or thirsty and give you a drink? Or when did we see you a stranger and welcome you into our homes? or ill-clad and clothe you? Or when did we ever see you sick or in prison and take care of your needs?’

“The King will give them this answer: ‘I can assure you that every time you showed these kindnesses to one of my brothers here, however unimportant he might be, you did it to me.’

“Then the King will turn to those at His left hand, saying, ‘Get out of my presence: there is a curse on you! Leave for the eternal fire destined for the devil and his messengers. You see, when I am hungry, you gave me no food to eat. When I was thirsty, you gave me nothing to drink. When I was a stranger, you did not invite me home. When I was ill-clad, you did not clothe me. When I was sick or in prison, you did not take care of me.’

“At this point they too will ask, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you starving or thirsty or a stranger or ill-clad or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’

“The King will then answer, ‘I can tell you for sure that the extent to which you neglected to do it for one of these most insignificant people, you did not do it for me.’

“Then the damned will leave for their eternal punishment, while the righteous enter into life that is eternal.”

SUMMARY

Christ’s second coming and judgment will be contemporaneous. His judgment will be universal, involving every human being that has ever lived. He will judge people, not on their Jewishness or any other superficial basis, but on their everyday usefulness and service to others.

NOTES

- a. Christ’s second coming and judgment
are contemporaneous

25:31 But when the Son of man shall come in his glory; and all the angels with him; then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. This illustration is not a proper parable like those preceding it, but a prophecy rich in parabolic comparisons. We shall better appreciate this concluding section of Jesus’ discourse, if we remember that He said it just a few days before His death. In the face of the worst that Satan could hurl at Him, He calmly sets it down as indisputable fact that He would return in glory to judge!

Son of man come in his glory instantly identifies Jesus as the great subject of Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7:9-14). No longer would His glory be dimmed by the real humiliation and weakness of His incarnation (II Cor. 13:4). By these simple words He proclaims several stupendous certainties:

1. Jesus Christ shall triumph at last! His total Lordship over all the world is now ultimately certain. To term Himself “the King” in v. 34 harmonizes completely with the Danielian prophecy of His triumph and His own self-designations here.
 - a. *He shall come in his glory*, returning to earth in that splendor

that rightly pertains to this regal state and is His because He is God's Anointed.

- b. *And all his angels with him*, not merely to heighten the effect of His glory by their splendor and multitude, but to execute His will (13:41f., 49f.; II Thess. 1:7f.; Rev. 14:17ff.).
2. For Jesus Christ, all history is rolling onward inexorably toward one destiny. It will not plunge farther and farther out of control in a crescendo of moral chaos with no hope of relief. Nor is it grimly whirling in cyclic idiocy, going nowhere, eternally destined to drone on, wearily grinding out the same human follies. Rather, every man and event rolls on toward judgment before our Lord Jesus Christ! There is a time and a place when earth's time-line stops abruptly in front of His throne,

When the Son of man shall come . . . then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. Jesus' Second Coming in triumphant glory will bring all earth history to a close and set in motion the Final Judgment of all of earth's people. Every feature depicted here by Jesus underscores the finality of this moment. (Cf. 16:27; Rom. 2:16; I Cor. 4:5; II Tim. 4:1; II Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11ff.; 20:11ff.) Note the relative closeness of sequence: His Return and the Judgment occur relatively close together. The Gospels never intimate the presence of a great interval of time between Jesus' personal return and the world's end, as if 1000 years must separate the two events. The Millennium of Revelation 20, during which Christ reigns with His saints, must precede His return. (See notes on 24:30.) Because He calmly sits in judgment *on the throne of his glory*, the completion and completeness of His victory is expressed. Thus, the battle against sin and the devil are finally over. *The throne of his glory* may be so described for various reasons:

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 220) thinks it is "because by the decisions of that day his glory will be exhibited more brightly than ever before. All the obscure things in the past administration of his government will then be made clear."
2. It is because of the radiant brilliance of Him who sits thereon, a reflection of the true, heavenly splendor of Jesus, that glory of which the Apostles caught a foreglimpse at His Transfiguration (17:1-8 and parallels).
3. This throne is evidently His heavenly throne, identical with His brilliant "white throne" depicted in Revelation 20. There, as here,

the basis of universal judgment is the same (25:35-40, 42f.; Rev. 20:12f.).

4. It cannot be an earthly, temporal throne reconstructed in a material Jerusalem to be "the throne of David." In fact, David himself (Ps. 110) grasped the exalted spiritual character of Christ's reign and located the true "throne of David" at God's right hand, not in earthly Palestine. Peter (Acts 2:33ff.) revealed on Pentecost Jesus' exaltation to the throne of David at God's right hand, forever establishing the true site and significance of His present reign. There is no New Testament text that definitively promises a "personal reign of Christ on a temporal throne in a material city of Jerusalem" (Kik, *Matthew XXIV*, 113).

If this language is reminiscent of 19:28; 24:30f. or 26:64 which, in my view, refer not to the Second Coming exclusively or even primarily, but to Jesus' full vindication during the lifetime of His contemporaries, this similarity of language may be explained as a historical preview of even greater events. That is, this Jesus, who was so preeminently distinguished by earthly events in His own day (i.e. the fall of Jerusalem by the fulfillment of His prophecies, by the liberation of His Church from Judaism's thralldom; etc.), shall be supremely exalted to glory by His personal return at the Last Day. This is the final, glorious completion of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 7:13f.).

b. The judgment shall be universal

25:32 Before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats. Before him! Before the humble Carpenter from Galilee shall be arrayed all of the world's religious pundits, political leaders, world philosophers, controllers of communications, sellers of armaments, heads of nations, taxi-drivers, housewives, priests, prostitutes, school children—saints or sinners all—standing heads bared, dumbstruck, all eyes fixed on the one Figure there on the throne at the center of the universe, our dear Lord Jesus Christ! Racial differences now have no meaning; historic national distinctions are wiped out. All forms of government that ever held sway shall now bow to the King on that throne.

All nations include all those who have ever lived. Even those long dead are now resurrected from physical death to stand before Him (John 5:28f.; Rev. 20:12f.). Otherwise, Jesus would merely sit in judgment over those nations that happen to dwell on earth at His return.

But *all nations* (*pànta tà éthnē*) must not be confused for a similar Hebrew idiom that refers to Gentiles, as distinguished from God's chosen people, as if no Jews or Christians are meant here. In this intensely Hebrew Gospel, Jesus' attitude toward *the nations* (*tà éthnē*) cannot be anything but highly interesting, because, in contrast to Israel, God's people, the Gentiles were so commonly distinguished by this term, that *the nations* is ordinary Jewish parlance for "the pagans." However, that Jesus is not using these words in this sense is evident from the following considerations:

1. He says not "the nations," but *all the nations*. Thus, the common idiom is altered by *all*.
2. His Hebrew interpreters would not have accepted His words exclusively in the sense of "the pagan Gentiles."
 - a. No Hebrew could conceive of "the righteous" (vv. 34, 37) as somehow excluding the outstanding representatives of the Hebrew *nation*, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and scores, if not thousands of others.
 - b. Nor would it be likely that many Hebrews would admit that Gentiles should be admitted to the Kingdom on so rudimentary a test as their good works without Mosaic Law. Remember the struggle in the early Church over this issue (Acts 15:5; 21:20ff.; *Galatians; Hebrews*)!
 - c. So, from the nationalistic Jewish standpoint, Jesus is talking nonsense, because His Jewish listeners would demand, as an irreducible minimum, that Israel be included as one of *the nations* to be admitted on the basis of its good works. But to admit Israel destroys the supposed idiom for "pagan Gentiles" here.

Therefore, our Lord means literally *all the nations*. In contrast to the foregoing Jewish prejudice, His point is precisely that the godly people whom God welcomes are not merely Hebrews, to the exclusion of the Gentiles, nor even vice versa, but, rather, anyone of any nation who proves himself useful to God on the basis indicated (25:35-40). As will be shown, only those who submit to Jesus' Kingship and who trust Him to know final issues, are finally accepted.

So, speaking originally to purely Jewish Apostles, who might have thus misunderstood Him, Jesus did not predicate final judgment on the basis of national Jewishness at all, but upon any man's real usefulness to his fellowmen; a standard of justice which all men can recognize (cf. Rom. 1:18-32; 2:9-16).

He shall separate them. Whereas other parables picture His angels as employed to distinguish the righteous from the wicked (cf. 13:41ff., 49f.), here He claims this as His prerogative. This is no contradiction, just a question of emphasis. What He orders His agents to do, He may be said to do for Himself. No angel moves, but at His word. *He shall separate them: all the nations* are not even to be judged as nations, but broken down into individuals. In Greek, *them (autoùs)* is masculine gender, whereas its antecedent, *nations (éthnē)* is neuter. (Cf. 28:19 in Greek for an analogous construction and concept.) For this last, definitive separation He shall need no last-minute, detailed scrutiny of the relative merits of each one of millions upon millions of human beings all resurrected or transformed live to stand trial before Him. He shall distinguish them into two groups as expertly as an experienced *shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*, i.e. according to their true character so perfectly well-known to Him who has pastured them for centuries (John 10:14f., 3f., 27f.). Though *sheep and goats* are commonly pastured together, they do not share a common destiny, because of their different natures. This nicely illustrates how completely human lives are merged here on earth, yet how decisively and permanently they will be parted at judgment. Jesus must remove many from His flock, because He does not recognize them or their claims to belong to Him. Ezekiel developed this sheep-goat allegory further than Jesus does (Ezek. 34:17ff.). However, in strong, clear strokes the Lord more simply draws the basic distinction which permanently collects people into two fundamental categories.

Mingled together as one great flock prior to this judgment, the great family of man is difficult to distinguish into the two classes. (Cf. 13:24-30, 37-43.) But each man will have written his own book (cf. II Cor. 3:2f.) the contents of which are already well-known to the Judge (John 2:25; Rev. 2:23; cf. 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1c, 8, 15). For Jesus to separate *sheep and goats* is a matter of no difficulty or delay. In fact, these books are not to be opened to inform the Lord of each man's deeds, but to document for the world the righteousness of His judgments based on what every person had done (16:27; I Cor. 4:5; Rom. 2:16; Rev. 20:12f.). Our text (25:34-36, 40) will establish an essential criterion whereby anyone may cause his name to be inscribed in the Lamb's book of life even from the foundation of the earth (Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12ff.; 21:27; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23). The Lord already knows who are His (II Tim. 2:19). His practiced

eye can distinguish a *sheep* from a *goat* everytime, even if everyone looks like a cross between a sheep and a goat to us! Even if on earth the race had been thoroughly organized into complicated categories by racial types, styles of government, economic statuses, technological development, cultural advancement, etc., with one simple gesture Jesus shall obliterate these unmeaning distinctions that had seemed so significant before. At the final Day, there will be just *sheep* or *goats*, only a twofold division of humanity: the saved and the lost (3:12; 7:23ff.; 13:24ff., 48; 21:28ff.; 22:1ff.; 24:40f., 45, 48; 25:2, 33). Such a twofold categorization of the race is striking, because great rabbis prior to Jesus had confidently decided that mankind's destiny must be distributed into three sectors: the perfectly just, the completely wicked, and those to be consigned to a Jewish purgatory (Edersheim, *Life*, II,440; esp. Append. XIX).

25:33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. *Sheep*, in Scripture, is a common designation for God's people or Christ's disciples (7:15; 10:16; 26:31; John 10:2-16, 26f.; 21:16f.; Rom. 8:36; Heb. 13:20; I Peter 2:25). These sheep are further described:

1. They are called "the righteous" (25:37, 46).
2. They are invited as "blessed of my Father" (25:34).
3. "The kingdom is prepared for (them) from the foundation of the world" (25:34).

Among Semitic peoples, *goats* are highly prized along with sheep. Their hair or wool may be of various colors (Gen. 30:32—31:13), although sheep's wool is spoken of as white or snow-colored (Ps. 147:16; Isa. 1:18; Ezek. 27:18 "white wool"), while goats were generally dark colored (Song 4:1? cf. "tents" of goat-hair, 1:5?). Since in a nomadic society a person's wealth could be calculated by the size of his flocks of goats and sheep, there would be no natural prejudice against goats as animals. Perhaps Jesus chose goats as the contrary of sheep, simply because they are so commonly associated together in the flocks and are separated by shepherds. They naturally lent themselves to the purpose of Jesus' graphic presentation of judgment. Helplessness and total dependence on the shepherd characterize sheep, whereas goats are more headstrong and daring. It may be these latter characteristics that suggest the figurative use to describe people.

Set . . . on his right hand . . . on the left. This arrangement follows well-established tradition: *the right hand* signified acceptance and

honor; *the left*, rejection. (Cf. I Kings 2:19; Ps. 45:9; 110:1; Eph. 1:20; Matt. 26:64, etc.) This simple act by Jesus instantly indicates the King's final judgment on everyone. Judgment is actually all over at this point. What follows is not the deciding of anyone's fate, but the rewarding or sentencing and His justification in either case.

That Christians shall be brought before Christ in judgment should not be questioned by reference to texts like John 3:18 or 5:24, when texts like Romans 14:10 and II Corinthians 5:10 reveal that we must appear before His tribunal. The former texts correctly affirm that a Christian will not be *condemned* in court because of his sins, because these shall have been forgiven him for his faith in the grace of Christ. The latter passages picture our appearance before the Judge, without stating our sentence of acquittal. Not one of our sins will be discussed, only our acts of practical helpfulness.

c. The basis of judgment:
everyday usefulness and service to others
(25:34-45)

25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, **Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.** Ezekiel had depicted God as Shepherd who would care for His sheep and judge them until the time He would establish His "Servant David" over them to tend them and be their true shepherd (Ezek. 34:23f.). This great Davidic Shepherd was also to be Israel's true King (Zech. 9:9; Ps. 2). So, while it may appear unusual in the Gospels that the Shepherd should also be Judge and King, it is neither illogical nor unforeseen, but most appropriate, because only those who have a true shepherd's heart are fit to be kings or judges over God's people (Ezek. 34; Zech. 10:3; 11:3, 5-17). Although Jesus has already appeared in Matthew as "king of the Jews" (2:2) and "king of Zion" (21:5), this is the first and only occurrence of His using this regal title for Himself. To entitle Himself *King* in this context is tantamount to affirming His own deity. (Cf. I Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:13-16.)

Come, ye blessed of my Father. Whether this expression (*toû patròs mou*) be seen as genitive or ablative, the concept is magnificent: they are blessed because they belong to God or their blessedness originates

with Him. (Cf. Eph. 1:3-14; II Cor. 1:3f.) When their compassionate mercy toward the needy, the unworthy and those who could not pay them back, is so characteristic of God Himself (Deut. 10:17ff.), hence shows their true spiritual kinship to Him (cf. 5:44-48; Luke 6:27-36), should not they *inherit* who are most kin to Him?! (Cf. Rom. 8:16f.; I Peter 1:4; I John 3:1-3.)

To inherit the kingdom, from the viewpoint of the Hebrew listener, means to take possession as rightful heir of all that Hebrew history had prepared Jewish people to long for, i.e. the perfect, total, eternal government of God in all realms of His world. (Cf. II Peter 1:11.) But to *the righteous*, what is *the kingdom* to be inherited?

1. While there is a beautiful sense in which to *inherit* anything of God's is to be recognized as His child, this does not mean He intends to abdicate in favor of His renewed humanity. It is not His sovereign universal rule of all realms of the universe that they inherit, for He shall continue to be King in this sense (I Cor. 15:28; Rev. 11:15; I Tim. 1:17; 6:15f.).
2. As Plummer (*Matthew*, 350f.) expressed it, "This King not only comes in His Kingdom, but has kingdoms to bestow, which have been waiting throughout all time for their proper sovereigns." (Cf. Luke 12:32; 19:17, 19; Dan. 7:27; Rev. 2:26f.; 3:21; 5:10; see my note on Matt. 5:10.) In this higher, nobler sense, then, WE shall be the kings and lords over whom Jesus shall reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords!" (Lenski, *Matthew*, 990). Before this judgment, we are but heirs of hope (Rom. 8:15-25; Gal. 4:6-7; Heb. 6:12; I Peter 1:4). However, because of this judgment, we really inherit all that the Lord promised. (Cf. II Peter 1:10f.) This does not mean we were never "in the Kingdom" before (Col. 1:13). Rather, we come into full possession of that for which we have spent our life (Acts 14:22), the "new heaven and new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (II Peter 3:13), where God is sole Ruler, sin is forever banished and all things are subject to Him (I Cor. 15:24-28).
3. Because it is to be a *kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*,
 - a. It is not of recent date. Jesus affirmed, "In my Father's house ARE many mansions" already destined since the world's founding for God's children (John 14:2). But, if He Himself subsequently affirmed, "I go to prepare a place for you," how, then, is everything fully ready since before man's creation? Before

- creating man, God purposely designed such a *Kingdom* as would be suitable for man. But its pure character demanded that the conditions be established whereby sinful man could enter into it. Thus, without Christ's part there could be no place for unredeemed sinners. So, His atonement, forgiveness and intercession prepare a place for us with God. By establishing the real, spiritual basis of this Kingdom, Jesus simply carried out all God had projected since before the world's foundation.
- b. It fits our needs. This kingdom was designed specifically for God's people, in contrast to the fate of the wicked which was really reserved for someone else, the devil and his crowd.
 - c. What begins on this world's Last Day, therefore, is but the successful completion of the personal eternal purpose of our sovereign God. The Kingdom we are to enjoy is no makeshift, contingency plan. Our future rule is but the realization of the unalterable, ultimate goal of the sovereign Lord of the universe (20:23; John 17:24; Eph. 1:3ff.; I Peter 1:19f.; I Cor. 2:9f.).

Is it just possible, therefore, that *the kingdom we inherit* is that original sovereignty for which God created us (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 8:3-9)? Will He place us once more in His Paradise where there shall be no more curse, crying or death, where He shall live with man forever and man with Him in perfect communion? (Cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 26; 3:5, 21; 21:3, 4, 6f.; 22:1-5.) Is it thinkable that *the original kingdom* we were designed and created to *inherit* shall finally be ours? If so, adore Him who can turn Eden episode with its aftermath of sin and death, into a proving ground for His saints and a battleground on which to defeat Satan! Worship Him whose program could not be defeated, despite a seemingly interminable interlude of several millennia!

Love, the True Test of Discipleship to Jesus

25:35 For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; 36 naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me. This is the standard of values that justifies the sentence just pronounced upon the righteous. This norm is so strikingly simple that some commentators incline to apply it also to men totally ignorant of Christ. They assume that the unconsciousness, with which the righteous did their deeds of love, proves that their motivation was natural, as opposed to revealed, religion, and that Jesus here welcomes

their love which prompted their deeds *in lieu of* intelligent faith in Him. But may it be correctly supposed that ANYONE, who does not know Jesus' grace or the power of His Spirit, could do consistently what is described here for any prolonged time without eventually faltering and failing? Where is the moral power in paganism to meet even this standard of justice which apparently all nations could recognize? Where, apart from God's Spirit, are men stimulated and empowered to love so consistently as Jesus pictures here?

Jesus' point is not that, in the case of anyone ignorant of Christ, sentence will be given on the basis of good deeds, but, rather, that judgment is based on usefulness to God and man, rather than on national Jewishness or any other sectarian superficiality. Although He addressed a Jewish context, saying what well-versed Hebrews could have expected Him to say, the surprise is that racial Jewishness is so far from being a prime requisite that it is not even a peripheral consideration!

Such a standard is easily justified. This kind of thoughtful usefulness to others and open-handed generosity proves our likeness to God. (Cf. God's argument in Deut. 15:1ff. and Jesus' restatement in Luke 6:30-36; Matt. 5:42-48.) Such steady, unstinting concern for the unfortunate, the little people and for those unable to pay, is proof of our similarity to Jesus Himself who so magnanimously mingled with and lifted the fallen (Luke 15! Matt. 9:9-13; II Cor. 8:9; 5:21; Rom. 5:6-8). Bearing one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2) links us with the great Burden-bearer (Isa. 53:4-6). Such open-hearted liberality proves also how much we really trust our heavenly Father to provide our own needs and how much we actually believe He can always make us rich enough to be generous (6:19-34; II Cor. 9:8-11). This generous spirit toward our fellow servants illustrates just how clearly we have understood the grace we have received from our own gracious Lord and King (18:21-35). Even though those who were *hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and in prison* put themselves in debt to us by accepting from us food, drink and spiritual refreshment, we have really learned to "forgive our debtors" (6:12, 14f.). Only thus can anyone obtain mercy (5:7). Grace is for the grateful and the gracious, not for the hard-hearted and tight-fisted. So, why should not a salvation by grace through faith be measured by the reality of the very deeds that prove this faith real (Rom. 2:6; Matt. 16:27; I Cor. 3:8; II Cor. 5:10; James 1:27; 2:14-26; I John 3:14-18; 4:20f.; Rev. 22:12). Only by the acid test of DEEDS of humble

usefulness and daily mercy are our faith, love and appreciation of grace proven real (John 13:35; I Cor. 13). The contrary is also demonstrated by their absence.. (See on 25:42.)

Jesus could not have added, "I was ignorant and erring, and you instructed me and led me to repent, and I was forgiven," lest we misunderstand His purity, true identity and consequent authority. However, had He done so, it would have been marvelously appropriate with respect to every one of His brethren here. Our own brotherly intercession for them, pleading with them to repent and our sacrificing self for them, proves how much we grasp and appreciate His perfect High-priesthood (Heb. 4:14—5:10; 7:26f.).

Noteworthy is the peculiar character of these deeds. Rather than highlight some great, newsworthy accomplishments like prophecy, casting out demons or miracles (7:22), Jesus underscores simple, common deeds of kind helpfulness that even the most insignificant, least known disciple could do for someone else.

For many whose prime religious life-emphasis is attention to the smooth functioning of ecclesiastical machinery and the construction of imposing institutional structures, the great surprise is Jesus' stunning lack of interest in most of our statistics thought so significant: how many miracles wrought, how many demons cast out, how many pages of prophecy penned, how many bodies present in our religious meetings, how much money given, how much our buildings are worth, how many prayers said, sermons preached or Bible verses memorized. The only finally important question is: how can I successfully serve a Lord who longs to help the lonely and the needy, unless I show Him that I love Him by seeking to serve those very unfortunates that He loves and died to save and serve? (Cf. Gal. 4:19; 2:20; Eph. 3:16f.) So, the final aim of all growth in piety is to make us more like God, to put the mind of Christ in us and to cause us to act as He did (I Peter 2:21ff.; I John 4:17-21; Rom. 8:29).

How very easy, then, it is for ANYONE however great or small, to please Jesus! All one must do is love perfectly, doing the things that anyone could do to provide the needs of common people we meet everyday. If this seems simplistic, recall what Jesus thinks is required to love perfectly. (See notes on 5:44-48; 7:12.) Such unpretentious, unstinting altruism does not spring from non-Christian philosophy, but is the natural expression of a new creature, empowered by a new

Spirit and possessed with a new love. So, mere humanistic charity without faith in Jesus has no hope of final justification on the basis of our text.

That there should be striking verbal parallels between Jesus' words here and the pre-Christian *Testament of Joseph* 1:5f., should occasion no surprise. Rather, more surprising would have been Jesus' ignorance of the literature of His own people. But the Lord turned that language upside down, since "Joseph" credits God with helping in each case, whereas Jesus the Lord Himself credits common, generous people with assisting Him in His need.

Ye took me in, though a stranger. (Cf. Judg. 19:18; Heb. 13:1f.) This warm hospitality welcomes the stranger into our own family circle, sharing whatever is needed (III John 5-8, 10; Titus 3:13f.). *In prison and ye came unto me*, in context with predictions of Christian persecutions, calls believers to identify with the imprisoned (Heb. 10:32ff.; 13:3). But with respect to non-Christians incarcerated for crimes, His people may labor within existing prison systems to bring them Christ's love and message.

Self-forgetful, Utterly Humble Service

25:37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? 38 And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? How could any informed Christian, whose every deed and attitude should be expressed out of his love for Christ and in conformity to His will, ever be so surprised as to ask this? Some assert that no one who has ever known a personal relationship to Jesus could ever say what is recorded here. Consequently, they decide that *the righteous* here are not Christians, adducing the following reasons:

1. Their award is based on works, not expressly on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.
 - a. However, Christians too will be judged *as believers* on the basis of what their deeds reveal about the reality of their faith (James 2:14-26; Rom. 2:6-11; Matt. 16:27; II Cor. 5:10).
 - b. To consider pagan unbelievers who have never heard of Christ as saved specifically because all their deeds of love had been done to and for Christ, even though they did not so intend them and

only discovered it at this tribunal, is to show extraordinary laxity quite out of harmony with the general trend of New Testament doctrine. (Cf. Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 6:23; 11:32.) No interpretation of this text can be true that undermines the three mainsprings of Christian evangelism: the conviction that (1) all men indiscriminately are really sinners and damned; (2) that Jesus Christ is their only God-appointed Savior; and (3) that Christian evangelism is the divinely appointed means for bringing the really lost to the only Savior (Rom. 10:9-17).

- c. Further, are pagans so really well-known for the kind of continuous, unselfish hospitality and generosity Jesus pictures as having been done for Him? (Cf. notes on 11:5.) Or, is it, rather, the pagans themselves who comment on the remarkable Christian open-handedness unknown among the unconverted?
2. These words (vv. 37-39) cannot be "the language of humility because Christian humility cannot be thought of as devoid of consciousness" (Biederwolf, 357, citing Olshausen).
 - a. But are Christians really as conscious of their every act as, ideally, they should be or would desire it? Are we really un-faillingly aware that every needy person we confront represents Jesus Christ to us? Is it impossible that on that Last Great Day we could (in Alford's words) be "overwhelmed at the sight of the grace which has been working in and for" us? Is there no room for true surprise at just how much eternal good we actually shall have done as the fruit of Christ's Spirit in us or how far-reaching our influence for good shall have been?
 - b. Is there no room for genuine, child-like amazement that our common, lowly deeds of human sympathy, which in the course of our earth-life seemed only the right thing to do, should be exalted by the King of heaven and treated as having been done to Him personally? Can there be no happy astonishment that the many tiny favors, now long-forgotten, which were but the natural fruit of the maturation of Christ's life in us, should suddenly reappear as Jesus' reason for welcoming us home?

So, the supposition, that *the righteous* here could not be Christians, is less well-grounded than originally thought, and it becomes unnecessary, with McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 221) to obviate the problem by considering this conversation in Jesus' story as something that could not occur at judgment, or to think that most Christians "will have already learned the lesson here taught." The genuine astonishment of the Christians is completely comprehensible under the following conditions:

1. **THE TRUE ABSENCE OF CHRIST FROM THE WORLD AND THE OMNIPRESENCE OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.** In the pressure of everyday life it is easy to forget that we really serve Christ. So, when the plight of another human being comes to our attention, perhaps we may not perceive the image of Jesus in them. Our decision to help them may come simply from our loving awareness of their need and our desire to minister to them. The figure of Christ is often quite obscured by the nitty-gritty realism of their need, so our kindness in meeting it really reflects the natural, spontaneous reaction of a godly, loving heart. Rather than calculate how much eternal reward we pile up by serving Jesus directly, we simply act out the true instincts of our Christ-like graciousness by serving the other human being simply for the sake of helping him. This sets the stage, however, to be surprised that such long-forgotten, spontaneous service should be considered as rendered to the King Himself.
2. **OUR IMPOSSIBILITY TO DO SERVICE DIRECTLY TO JESUS AND HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH HIS PEOPLE.** The Christ reigns from a heavenly throne. No mortal can approach Him with gifts of food, raiment or gems. None can serve Him, unless He should consider every service of our lives, however apparently insignificant they seem to us, as done to Himself. Only thus can we find service and recognition where, before, we dared not dream it possible. So, because of His kindly identification with every one of His creatures, our King graciously attributes this service to us. (Cf. Acts 9:1-4, 13; John 15:18—16:4.)
3. **THE GREAT DISPROPORTION BETWEEN THE SERVICE RENDERED AND THE REWARD GIVEN.** When Christians depend on God's grace all their lives and merely respond to it in gratitude by serving others, suddenly find themselves endowed with abundance exceeding all they could ask or imagine, such magnificance seems a disproportionate reward for so very little done for God during their lifetime. So they stand frankly embarrassed to realize that Jesus is serious in granting them infinite, eternal glory on the basis of what they supposed was insignificant to Him.

No wonder, then, that Judgment must occur, in order to reveal to everyone what is now utterly unperceived by the majority and only dimly grasped by a few, i.e. the actual character and influence of men's lives and the extent to which each truly harmonized or contrasted with God's will for each one. No wonder, too, that only Jesus

Christ Himself is qualified to decide on the relative significance of our small kindnesses, because only He can know how truly our conduct toward others really served His great purpose, how far-reaching our Christ-likeness influenced others to further godliness and how much the world was made a better place because of some apparently insignificant deed we did years ago. No wonder, too, that His evaluation of men's conduct is so radically different from the estimate that both the good and the evil place on their own deeds.

Is not this paragraph motive to love, praise and serve Jesus forever? Our generous Lord considers as headline news the many little kindnesses we have done for years and totally forgotten as not worth mentioning! He erects an eternal monument to commemorate a glass of cold water, a flat tire changed for a handicapped person, a tear dried on the face of a child, additional time to pay offered a family strapped by unemployment, and countless other deeds! This simple declaration of Jesus tests our discipleship to the core: do we believe His world real? Dare we admit the hidden Christ in the ragged need of our neighbor? Can we confess the riches of the invisible Christ to be greater wealth than all the pleasures of indifference to our neighbor's needs? Can we live as if we could see Him who is invisible? (Cf. Heb. 11:25-27.)

25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Our concept of this wide-sweeping criterion is influenced by two factors: (1) how do we identify *these my brethren*? and (2) why utilize this principle of judgment? *These my brethren* must be someone present in the great judgment scene, indicated perhaps by a sweep of the King's hand. But who are they?

1. Some commentators assume that three groups are contemplated by the Lord: the sheep, the goats, and *these my brethren*. This trichotomy then forces them to identify each group somewhat as follows:
 - a. The sheep are fleshly Israel ("the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), the goats are unbelievers, and *these my brethren* are the harrassed Church of Christ.
 - b. *These my brethren* are Israel according to the flesh (Rom. 9:5), the sheep are the Church who had been kind to Jews in distress, while the goats are unbelievers who had not.
 - c. *These my brethren* are the elect of God, the Church of both

Testaments, while the sheep and goats become two different classes of people outside the pale of either covenant.

However, Jesus was not necessarily coining terminology for a tight eschatological system. He was speaking popularly to Hebrew listeners expected to understand Him. This tri-partite division leads to confusing and contradictory conclusions, hence the simpler solution is that of Jesus, the twofold division of humanity, the sheep and the goats (25:32f.).

2. The King's sweeping gesture toward *these my brethren even these least*, then, must include ANYONE of the entire human family who had need, whether Christian or not.
 - a. It can be validly argued that Jesus' true *brethren* are only those who do the will of His heavenly Father (12:46-50). Jesus said so, and that settles it.
 - b. On the other hand, our section began with Jesus' great Messianic title: "the Son of man" (25:31), which focuses attention on His authority to judge as well as on His true identity (Dan. 7:13f.; John 5:27). Even though He is THE Son of man par excellence, yet, by virtue of His human birth, HE IS BROTHER OF EVERY MAN WHO EVER LIVED. (See notes on 8:20.) From this point of view, then, there is no exclusiveness or pride in Jesus, because He is not ashamed to call even the worst sinner of the race "brother."

So, Plummer (*Matthew*, 351) was right to affirm that "Christ's claiming the poor and needy as His brethren is quite in keeping with His character as the Son of Man and the Son of God." His calling any man "brother" expresses His love for every human being to whom He willingly claims kinship. What psychologically powerful motivation He provides us in that act: by claiming kinship to everyone, whatever their need, He endears them to us! Anyone who is a brother of Jesus is a brother of mine to love and help just as He would! He urges, "*The least of these my brethren* are your brothers too."

How apply Jesus' words? By "doing good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). Would our generous Master withhold His praise, should we show kindness to some unbeliever? Can the Savior of every man, who gave Himself without limit to win the heart of each, somehow not be sympathetic to the cry of the overlooked and despised who hurt, or fail to notice when any of His own people stops and stoops to lift the fallen and relieve their affliction, when the Heavenly Father does this every

day (5:45; Luke 6:27-36)?! So, when any believer helps anyone in the great family of man, God's promise to Abraham, "In you and in your children shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," finds surprisingly wider fulfillment (Gen. 22:18).

Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Why adopt this standard that sounds as if deeds alone are the determining factor in the salvation or loss of each man? Standing before a people for whom orthodox faith is paramount, why does Jesus emphasize deeds? Is it that faith in the correct doctrine is somehow less important than deeds? No, belief in the right teaching or hearty acceptance of the true revelations of God, is evident only in the life that acts in harmony with those revelations to express confidence in Him who told us what to believe. These deeds, then, reflect a person's attitude toward God, and are the acid test of his belief or unbelief (7:21; James 2:14ff.; I John 2:9ff.). Hence, the Lord will "render to everyone according to his deeds" (16:27; 10:32f.; Rom. 2:6ff.). Here is why:

1. There is absolutely no way anyone can serve God directly. He does not dwell in temples made by men nor is He served by men's hands (Acts 17:24f.). He does not use or need our gifts (Ps. 50:9-13). Our very materiality defeats our best efforts to do service to Him who is spirit (John 4:23f.). Therefore, some other way must be found, if man is to serve Him at all.
2. Therefore, God has chosen to send us His representatives to substitute for His royal Person: the needy, the ill, the alienated, *the least of these His brethren*. This is the finest test of our true character, because, were Jesus to appear on earth in His kingly glory, too many would hastily mask their true personality, show Him smiling deference, spare no pains to do Him honor and deny Him nothing. Were He to send the great, we would suppose that their importance gives value to our service or that we could later benefit from their position. Contrarily, *the least* are indicated, because they cannot repay. Serving them does not advance our position socially. (Cf. Luke 14:12-14.) The inclination to show them generosity would be practically nil in self-pleasing societies, but it would demonstrate our true character.
3. Hence, to serve people is to serve Jesus Christ. To abuse or persecute them, or simply to turn a deaf ear to their pleas, is to treat God in the same way. (An ancient concept: Deut. 15:7-11; Ps. 22:24; Prov. 19:17; 14:31; Eccl. 11:1f.; Isa. 63:9; Zech. 2:8; II Cor. 9:6-8;

- Heb. 6:10.) The richness of our generosity with people is the measure we give to God—even if it is service we render our earthly superiors (Col. 3:18—4:1; Eph. 5:21—6:9; Matt. 7:2; Luke 6:37f.).
4. Therefore, in Jesus' name we identify with others in their need (Heb. 13:3; Rom. 12:13, 15, 16, 20f.; II Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:28; 5:1, 2; Phil. 2:1-5; I Thess. 5:11-15).

In the final analysis, then, everyone will be rewarded on the basis of his similarity to the Judges (5:44-48; Luke 6:32-38). While our text intimates that our Lord will surprise the world by the startling basis on which the judgment of each turns, this verdict will harmonize perfectly with the moral sense, experience and judgments of the world as it estimates others, i.e. not merely on the basis of the opinions held, but especially on the basis of deeds and character. So, God utilizes our commonest standard of judgment to deal with everyone on that Last Day.

ARE ALL GOOD PAGANS SAVED?

Alford (I,256) describes those, who are judged *righteous* here, as decent pagans:

(They) *know not* that all their deeds of love have been done *to and for Christ*—they are overwhelmed with the sight of the grace which has been working in and for them, and the glory which is now their blessed portion. . . . It is not the *works, as such*, but the *love* which prompted them—that love which *was their faith*,—which felt its way, though in darkness, to Him who is love, which is commended.

In a similar vein, Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Test*, 306) taught

The doctrine of this passage is that love is the essence of true religion and the ultimate test of character for all men Christian or non-Christian. *All* who truly love are implicit Christians. For such everywhere the kingdom is prepared. They are its true citizens and God is their Father.

Others might urge that, if God wants to save a person who never heard of Christ, but whose treatment of his fellows reveals that practical love to which God aimed in all His decrees, will not that pagan's unbaptism be considered baptism, his unconversion become conversion? After all, is not the very purpose of the Judeo-Christian

tradition to make men over in the likeness of God? Could not this purpose be achieved by someone who never heard about Jesus?

This thesis, however well expressed, is only hypothetically possible but not juridically probable nor sustained by the mainstream of Scripture. None has ever been good enough to be redeemed by his own mere goodness, even though it be goodness to his fellows (Rom. 3:10ff., 23). To affirm the contrary denies that God has consigned all men alike to the category of sin with its consequences (Rom. 3:9; 11:32; Gal. 3:22).

Now if God wishes to save pagans who never heard of Christ but simply on the basis of their "practical love which stands in the place of faith"—since they could never have any faith in a Jesus of whom they never heard (Rom. 10:14-17)—that is His business. He is Lord. Nevertheless, the only information He has revealed about His plans indelibly underlines the deadness, darkness and doom of those living outside the pale of the Judeo-Christian faith. The principle purpose of *Romans*, for instance, is to convince Jews that lost Gentiles can be saved on the same ground of faith as any Hebrew. Ephesians 2:2ff. describes the destiny of death programmed for the "disobedient . . . objects of wrath like the rest of mankind." Ephesians 2:11ff. sweepingly indicts the entire Gentile population of earth as "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel . . . *having no hope and without God* in the world." Ephesians 4:17-19 categorically declares that Gentiles live "in the futility of their minds . . . darkened in their understanding, *alienated from the life of God* because of the ignorance that is in them, due to the hardening of their heart." Peter too condemns as "former ignorance" and "futile" the traditions of one's tribe or race as something from which men must be redeemed (I Peter 1:14, 18; 4:3f.; cf. Col. 1:21). John announced that it is uniquely the Son of God who has come to give us understanding and the opportunity to know Him who is true, the true God and eternal life, while all the rest are idols (I John 5:20f.). Can anyone, Jew or Gentile, be saved in his idolatry? "He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life" (I John 5:12). Will our covenant-keeping God act inconsistently with these revelations of His own intentions?

The Opposite Verdict

25:41 **Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the**

devil and his angels. Jesus unflinchingly reveals the following characteristics of this punishment:

1. The punishment of the wicked is no blessing, but a curse, suited to those *cursed* by God. This filthy place of horror, desolation and death all over again is a place where God's patient love and forgiveness is not. (Rev. 20:14f.; II Thess. 1:9 "exclusion from the presence of the Lord.")
2. Their chastisement separates them from Jesus: *Depart!* (cf. 7:23; 25:46; Luke 13:27f.; cf. "outside": 8:11f.; 22:13; 25:10ff., 30; Rev. 22:15). This deprives them of all the joy of His presence.
3. Their penalty involves being cast *into the eternal fire*. Some question the eternality of hell on the assumption that the wicked shall be tormented so many years and then extinguished by annihilation. But since *the devil and his angels*, the beast and the false prophet will be tormented "day and night for ever and ever," (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14f.) it is no surprise that those demons and men who follow Satan should share his fate (8:29; Mark 1:24; Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:14f.; 14:9-11). Such a prospect offers little hope for a merciful reprieve through later annihilation.

Further, this unquenchable fire is *eternal fire*, because it is *prepared*, hence, not necessarily like any other fire known to man. Consequently, it is not subject to the logical deductions that some base on scientific knowledge of elements in our present universe. If the Lord Himself provides the fire, who can debate its reality or character, if He terms it "unquenchable" or *eternal*? (Cf. Isa. 33:14; 66:24; Matt. 3:10-12; Mark 9:43-48; Jude 7; Rev. 20:10, 14f.; cf. 19:20; 21:8.) Such fire, then, must be worse than all our present experiences of literal, earthly fire. (Cf. Deut. 32:22; Ps. 11:6; 18:8; 21:9; 97:3; 140:10; Jer. 4:4; Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2; 4:1.) On *eternal*, see 25:46. Sodom's fate is but a grim preview (Jude 7, NIV).

4. Their punishment is *prepared for the devil and his angels*, a fact with two ramifications:
 - a. Hell is no afterthought for God. Satan's revolt did not catch God unprepared to deal with his rebellion. God is prepared either way. For those who share His holiness, He prepared a realm of eternal happiness. For those who share Satan's proud, rebellious spirit, He has ready a place of unending punishment (13:41f., 49f.; 18:8f.; Luke 16:19-31; Jude 7).

- b. Hell was not originally planned for man whose high destiny was established at his creation "to rule over all the works of (God's) hands" (Ps. 8). But when man determined not to realize the glorious purpose for which God created him, he damned himself to spend eternity with those who likewise rebelled against the benign purpose of God.

The Justice of the Sentence

25:42 For I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink; 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not (Heb. 13:16). Why should it be true that, regardless of all other considerations, the sin of neglecting to bless the needy with required refreshment is sufficient to justify an eternity of punishment? Because one's indifference to people proves how he understands grace and shows that, in his view, when anyone is in need of mercy, it should not be granted (James 1:22; 4:17; Luke 12:47). So, none is granted to him (5:7; 18:32f.). Lack of positive, out-going love that actively ministers to people is the denial of all that is fundamental in religion (22:34-40). God's love simply does not dwell in the selfish (I John 3:17). God feels responsible for the unfortunate, and acts accordingly. There can be no praise for an inactive orthodoxy (James 2:14-26).

But why did Jesus not mention those other sins that men consider far more heinous, as the basis of His unquestionably right verdict? Surely murder, adultery and idolatry are still sins, still culpable . . . ? His piercing analysis here intends to reveal the terrible criminality of what are only apparently the least of sins. He does this for two reasons. By condemning the "unimportant" sins, He simultaneously pronounces His judgment convincingly against all others thought far more serious. (See note on 25:30.) Further, by condemning this indifference to our fellows which is expressed in these petty omissions, He attacks the selfishness behind all the "more important" sins. Again, He condemns what men's attitude toward Him would have been, had He personally approached them in the guise of their needy fellowman. It is as if they had said "no" to Jesus Christ in every single situation. Should they not be rejected for this? Can the Lord welcome the uncompassionate?

The Self-righteous Rebuttal

25:44 **Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?** Their ignorance of any contact with Jesus is precisely like that of the godly, since neither group actually saw the Son of God Himself. Nevertheless, although the form of their surprised question is identical to that of the righteous, it is motivated by self-deception. They suppose that they would have been hospitable, had they actually met Him. So, in their self-justification, the ungodly haughtily challenge the King to name the time and place where they were faced with the opportunity to serve Him and failed to do so. Their self-deceived argument is, "Had we been granted the privilege to serve you, we would have been more than glad to do so. But we never met anyone that even closely resembled you—just miserable wretches whom it was useless to befriend, a shabby old woman, a waif too skinny to adopt,—all situations too trifling to take seriously, you understand."

The King's Defense

25:45 **Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me.** Just how closely Jesus identified with His suffering people is illustrated by His charge that Saul of Tarsus, by persecuting the Church, had attacked Him personally (Acts 9:4f.). Further, how closely Jesus identifies with the entire human race, despite its sinful unbelief, culpable ignorance and moral hardening, is indicated by His concern that men who never heard one Gospel sermon, be fully human and humane. But they fail even this rudimentary test. Their wisdom is futile, their understanding darkened. Separated from the life of God because of their ignorance which is due to spiritual self-hardening and having lost all sensitivity, they plunge into every other form of indulgence, ever greedy for more (Eph. 4:17ff.). Thus, they become less than human, like unreasoning animals (Jude 10). To be fully human means to glorify God as God and treat His creatures accordingly. (Contrast Rom. 1:18-32.)

- d. The results of the judgment
will be permanent (25:46)

25:46 **And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life.** Some insist that Bible texts are rare that

assert the eternity of God's punishment of the damned. Granted, but HOW MANY TIMES DOES JESUS HAVE TO SAY A THING FOR IT TO BE TRUE? When correctly interpreted, just once is sufficient. Linguistically, the punishment of the rejected will endure as long as the joyous happiness of the saved, for the word, *eternal*, is the same used to define both (*kòlasin aiònion . . . zòèn aiònion*). Nothing could be less defensible that to affirm that *eternal punishment* must be of shorter duration than *eternal life*. The larger Biblical context describes the wicked's sentence of punishment as endless. (See notes on 10:28; 18:8; 3:12; 25:41; cf. Isa. 33:14; 66:24; Jude 7, 13; Rev. 14:11; 20:10.)

Contrary to the supposition that truly *eternal* punishment must imply some kind of everlasting life for the wicked, it is more exact to say that the Scriptures "eternalize all human spirits," whether good or bad, saved or damned.

1. At death the spirit returns to God (Eccl. 3:21; 12:7). If man's breath alone were intended, what is there to commit to God (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59)?
2. Therefore, the wicked dead as spirits are now alive and undergoing punishment (Luke 20:38; 16:19-31; I Peter 3:19; II Peter 2:9). Christians, too, survive death and are alive with the Lord before the resurrection. (See notes on 22:32, 33; cf. II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23.) The death of the body is not equal to the death of the spirit, because all men, apart from the resurrection, survive their separation from the body (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4f.; 23:43; I Cor. 15:18; Rev. 6:9ff.; 7:9?).
3. That the "second death" (Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) does not imply annihilation is proven by its Biblical definition as "the lake of fire." So, whatever is affirmed of the fire is true also of "the second death." Further, as its name implies, it is death all over again for the wicked dead who were resurrected to face judgment. But, since the first death, which is the basis of the comparison, was not the end of man, since he survives the separation from the body in physical death, "the second death" clearly cannot imply annihilation. It implies but the separation, not from the continuation of God's goodness during earth-life, but from the eternal blessedness of His goodness during the next life.

Jesus considered *eternal life* and *eternal punishment* as proper antitheses. However, the quality of *life* He means cannot be bare existence, for

which non-existence would be the true opposite. Rather, His *life* connotes an existence enriched by abundant joy, peace and reigning (John 10:10; Rom. 5:17). *Punishment*, its true opposite, connotes an existence marred by unending misery. While eternal existence marks each destiny, how completely different is their quality!

Further, how could *punishment* be *eternal*, as Jesus says, if the punished were somehow annihilated before the termination of that suffering which He Himself declares shall be as *eternal* as the life of the blessed? In such a case, *eternal punishment* would be a contradiction in terms. But, because it is not, may it not be concluded that the punished are as *eternal* as the *punishment* for which they are destined?

That *eternal punishment* is neither unjust nor unworthy of God, is evidenced by the unexpected appropriateness of God's permitting the righteous and the wicked to realize their last dream, that goal to which their whole moral life tended. Is it not evidence of God's final mercy to all that each is granted the unchangeable privilege of loving or hating Him forever, of living with Him or apart from Him forever? The impenitent continue to insist until, at last, because they will not accept what God offers, the Judgment grants them what they desired. But to their endless chagrin, they discover too late that their desires were self-destructive and horribly mistaken. So, because they shall have eternally what they desired, it shall be *eternal punishment*. Consequently, God would be giving sinners what they had always wanted, they would be endlessly punished, and He would be perfectly just.

Therefore, is not the self-chosen misery of the wicked also appropriate? *Punishment* here implies that the pain caused is not spiteful brutality or purposeless cruelty on God's part, but rather a discipline imposed by the wise plan of a good God in harmony with the nature and needs of the impenitent themselves. Either they learn in this life to live *with* God and enjoy it, or they shall be granted the fearful privilege and awful responsibility of living *without* Him and of suffering all the eternal consequences their free choice entails.

But that God already considers their love so cold, their conscience so dead, their intellect so darkened and their will so hardened that none could ever desire to return to the hated Judge who sentenced them to eternal torment, is evidenced by the fact that the wicked dead are even now being punished (II Peter 2:9). The permanence of their isolation from the righteous is beyond dispute (Luke 16:26;

Matt. 13:41f., 49f.). Not one statement of Scripture suggests any possible future reversal of the judgments announced on the Last Day. "Today is the day of salvation! After this life there remains only judgment (Heb. 9:27; 10:26, 27).

Plummer (*Matthew*, 346) saw the incalculable risk and folly involved in wistfully hoping that *eternal punishment* does not mean just what it implies:

Although in the story of the five foolish virgins . . . we are told nothing as to the duration of the punishment for careless misconduct, we are told that it was inflicted, and that it was severe . . . meant banishment and untold gloom. And, even if, when it had done its work, the punishment ceased, yet the loss which it had involved was irreparable. Is it not the depth of folly to incur certain punishment, because it is not certain that the punishment shall last for ever?

But that it shall last forever is foreshadowed when Jesus called the wicked, *Cursed*. So saying, He signalled the termination of His, indeed all, intercession. Now, alone without any defender, they must stand before Him who longed to be their Intercessor, but who is now Lord and King, and He must put these enemies under His feet for ever. They have no hope, none to plead for them. They can only *go away into eternal punishment*.

The righteous enter into eternal life. (See on 25:21, 34.) Here is permanent success in what really counts. What perspective this final vision gives to our present, seemingly humdrum lives! Whatever the ordinariness or excitement of our present service, whatever the comparative greatness or insignificance of our achievements, the only true distinction of worth in the long-run is whether or not, in the esteemed judgment of Jesus Christ, we served Him through kind helpfulness to the least of His brethren. For with that judgment rests a joyous future with God that alone is worthy of the title, *eternal life*. What more appropriate, eternal dwelling could be imagined for those who are willing to associate with people of low position to lift, encourage and lead them (Rom. 12:13-16), than *eternal life* with God whose dwelling place is ever with him who is contrite and lowly in heart (Isa. 57:15; Matt. 5:3-12; Rev. 21:3; 22:1-5) and loves to bless too?!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List all the main features surrounding the Second Coming of Christ taught in this great prophetic discourse, whether in direct declaration,

indirect statement or illustration.

2. List all the features of the sheep and goats illustration that are parallel with details given in other parables.
3. What is the one main point of this illustration about the sheep and goats? Show what is really new in this story that was not taught in others.
4. According to Jesus, what is to be the criterion of judgment? What makes this standard so vital?
5. On what previous occasion(s) had Jesus clearly taught about His glorious coming with His angels to judge men according to their deeds? (Occasion and text.)
6. In what sense will "all nations be gathered before him"? Will they be judged as nations or as individuals?
7. Who are the "sheep" and who are the "goats" in Jesus' illustration?
8. What is meant by "inherit the kingdom"?
9. In what sense was "the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"?
10. Who are the "brethren" of Christ to whom practical help was to be given? Defend your answer.
11. What is meant by "eternal fire"? In what sense was it "prepared for the devil and his angels"?
12. Who or what is "the devil"? Who or what are "his angels"?
13. Define the following terms, using everything the Bible teaches on these subjects:
 - a. "eternal punishment" Does this imply unending existence, or a quality of existence?
 - b. "eternal life" Does this imply merely unending existence, or a quality thereof?
14. To what coming does our Lord allude in this parable? Prove your answer.
15. Explain what is meant by "the throne of His glory."
16. What does this section teach or imply about the character, nature and authority of Jesus?
17. What does this parable reveal about the purpose of a final judgment?

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SECTION 61

JESUS PREDICTS HIS OWN DEATH A FIFTH TIME

TEXT: 26:1, 2

1 and it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words, he said unto his disciples, 2 Ye know that after two days the passover cometh, and the Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you suppose Jesus thought it essential for the disciples' growth and even their sanity to repeat His death prediction one more time?
- b. Why do you think Jesus thought it essential that they hear it at this particular time in His ministry?
- c. Do you see any particular connection between Jesus' usual way of expressing His death prediction and the noteworthy addition made on this occasion: "You know that after two days the passover is coming"?
- d. If you see the connection suggested in the previous question, how does this connection reveal the greater plan of God behind the two events?
- e. Who do you suppose is going to "deliver up (the Son of man) to be crucified"? (1) Judas? (2) the Jewish authorities? (3) Pilate and the Romans? (4) God? On what basis do you choose or reject any of the above?
- f. Since this death announcement comes on the heels of "all these words" which Matthew records contextually in chapters 23-25 as almost one continuous discourse, how does this death announcement fit into all that Jesus has been saying?
- g. If Judas heard this announcement, what effect do you think this sinister warning had on him?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

When Jesus had finished His prophetic discourse, He commented to His disciples, "As you know, the Passover is the day after tomorrow, and I the Son of man, will be handed over to be executed on a cross."

SUMMARY

Once again Jesus hammered home the unwelcome truth that He would be crucified, this time, however, specifying that this would occur during the Passover festival.

NOTES

1. AFTER THE DISCOURSE

26:1 **And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words he said unto his disciples.** Matthew deliberately indicates that the foregoing speech of Jesus is to be considered one continuous discourse, not a collage of bits and pieces taken from heterogenous sources and now compiled into one fabricated homily. While it is remarkable that Matthew repeatedly used the same formula (*καὶ ἐγένετο ἡὲν ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοὺς λόγους τοῦτους*), on what reasonable basis can any critic deny this excellent writer the right to make use of whatever connectives HE considers appropriate?

Because *all these words* refers contextually to the great Eschatological Discourse (chaps. 24, 25) and possibly also to the anti-Pharisean sermon (chap. 23), two important ends are achieved:

1. Because, in Matthew's outline, no more landmark sermons follow this remark, some deduce that our author speaks of the conclusion of Jesus' great public or semi-public discourses. However, the great valedictory speeches at the last Passover supper occur after this. (Cf. John 14-17.) So, Matthew does not add *all* to imply that Jesus' teaching is absolutely completed with no more to say to anyone, but simply that the foregoing lessons on chapters 23-25 are the background in which to understand what follows next.
2. Fully aware of the emotional impact His presentation of His own future glory must make on His yet immature disciples, Jesus must bring them back down to earth. With future glories ringing in their ears, resurrecting old wrong-headed Messianic concepts, they needed to be especially warned once again of His impending suffering, in order to be emotionally ready for what was coming.

2. APPROACH TO DEATH

26:2 **Ye know that after two days the passover cometh, and the Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.** The disciples are reminded of two great facts:

1. *After two days the passover cometh.* As Jesus often spoke of time this means "in a couple of days" or even "day after tomorrow," which counts the day on which the predicted event is to occur. (See on 12:40; 16:21; 17:23; 20:19 where Mark and Luke's parallel consistently say "on the third day" for Matthew's "after three days." Despite what seems to us an imprecision on Jesus' part, He is not inaccurate. In fact, Matthew gives circumstantial evidence agreeing with the other Evangelists. John dated the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem as "six days before the passover" (John 12:1) i.e. the day before the Messianic Entry (John 12:12). Beginning with the day after their arrival at Bethany, Mark incidentally lists the following five days as they occur:

1. Day 1, the triumphal entry (John 12:12; Mark 11:11)
2. Day 2, the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12)
3. Day 3, the fig tree was noticed as withered (Mark 11:20)
4. Day 4, at the conclusion of the great day of debates, discussions and discourses, "it was not two days before the Passover" (Mark 14:1; cf. Matt. 26:2)
5. Adding these two days, the count tallies with that of John at five; or six including the arrival at Bethany.

Thus, Matthew's citation harmonizes with that of Mark and John too.

The passover comes on the 14th day of the month Abib or Nisan corresponding to our March-April. (Cf. Exod. 12; Lev. 23:4ff.; Deut. 16:1ff.; see notes on Matt. 26:17ff.) Since Jesus ate the Passover on Thursday night and was crucified on Friday (27:62; cf. John 19:31; Mark 15:42), this prophecy was pronounced late on Tuesday evening, 12 Nisan (Wednesday already begun). So, the *two days* are from Tuesday evening to Thursday evening.

2. *The Son of man is delivered up to be crucified.* His purpose was not simply to glance at the calendar, but to draw some internal connection between the Passover and His own death.
 - a. The connection is not that the crucifixion and the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb must strictly coincide at the same hour, since Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. (See on 26:17ff.; cf. Luke 22:15.) That He died on the day following the lamb's sacrifice changes nothing, since His death occurred on the same day the Passover was eaten, i.e. on 15 Nisan which began at sunset on the 14th with the Passover meal. Rather, this solemn declaration draws a parallel between the two sacrifices as to their meaning and purpose.

- b. The present tense, *the Son of man is delivered up (paradidotai)*, need not refer to Judas' plot as already boiling in his heart. Rather, Jesus speaks with such confidence regarding the future fact, that He uses this vivid, realistic present in the place of the future tense. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, § 323.) His prophetic confidence is not unexpected, because it arises out of God's set purpose and foreknowledge which handed Jesus over (*paradidotai*) to wicked men for crucifixion (Acts 2:23). Even here, sinful men must unwittingly cooperate with the eternal purpose of God! Even so, unless God hand Him over to be sacrificed, sinners could not touch Him (26:53).

The *you know* which governs the first clause, introduces also the second: "*You know* not only that the Passover is coming, but also that I have warned you for months that I must die. Now you must connect the two." He had gradually led them to this knowledge by hints (John 2:19ff.; 3:14; 6:51; 10:11, 15; Matt. 9:15; 10:38; 12:40; 21:38), but also openly and unmistakably (16:21; 17:12, 22f.; 20:17ff.). In this fifth, final prediction recorded in Matthew, there is the repeated certainty that the Romans would be the executioners, since crucifixion was not the usual Jewish method of capital punishment. The new element is the determination that He would die at this Passover.

Whereas His death will be decided by the Sanhedrin and executed by the Romans, Jesus is perfectly aware of what His foes are plotting. Dignified and majestic, He approaches His death with intelligent purpose and mastery, even defining the final hour Himself. The leaders would decide it must occur "not during the feast." But it is Jesus who definitely fixed the precise day as during the feast. This point is made clearer in the following section (26:3ff.). What took place on Golgotha that Passover was no freak accident in the vicissitudes of irrelevant history. But the realization of the eternal, predetermined plan of God! (Cf. Ps. 33:10f.; cf. 2:4; Prov. 19:21; Eph. 1:3-14; I Peter 1:19ff.)

Bruce (*Training*, 289) grasped the high appropriateness of Matthew's introduction to the Passion history, composed of four elements:

1. Jesus' prediction of His imminent crucifixion (26:1f.).
2. His enemies' consultation on how His elimination must be achieved (26:3ff.).
3. Mary's anointing His body for burial and further motivation of Judas' betrayal (26:6-13).

4. Judas' offer to betray Jesus to the authorities (26:14ff.).

In these four segments, Matthew puts together divine certainty, human audacity, deep love and unutterable duplicity. The program of God is pitted against human plotting. Baseness and hatred are contrasted with honest, deeply-felt love. Discipleship, for all its weakness and failure, is supremely treasured by God above all unbelieving scholarship and disenchanting cunning.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what context did Jesus predict His death this time?
2. What specific teaching had Jesus just completed before making this announcement of His impending death?
3. On what day of the Hebrew calendar does the Passover occur? Therefore, on what day did Jesus pronounce this prophecy of His suffering?
4. How often had Jesus predicted His death to His followers before this? On what occasions?
5. Does the expression, "after two days," mean "on the third," "on the second day" or what? Give Bible evidence to support your answer.
6. What facts indicate that Judas had not already agreed with the authorities to betray Jesus?

SECTION 62

JESUS IS PLOTTED AGAINST BY THE RULERS

TEXT: 26:3-5

3 Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas; 4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. 5 But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. The Gospels recount numerous clashes between Jesus and the authorities before this Last Week. What are the immediate causes

of this present plotting, those elements which had not been so much factor prior to this Last Week?

- b. Why do you think they assembled in the high priest's court, rather than in the regular meeting place of the Sanhedrin?
- c. Why do you think they concluded that they must take Jesus by subtlety? Was guile or deceit the stated purpose of this august body of religious leaders?
- d. Why did these, the highest authorities in the nation, fear the people so? Were their fears justified?
- e. Their final conclusion to postpone Jesus' assassination until after the feast clashes with Jesus' private pronouncement concerning that event. What does this fact reveal about them? about Jesus?
- f. Why do you think Matthew put these two conflicting decisions together here in one context?
- g. If you were the highest religious authority among your people and thought you must deal with a blaspheming, rebellious teacher and false prophet worthy of death, what would you do? Would you brave the wrath of the nation in the name of righteousness in your pursuit of God's honor, or would you cower and plot, as do these? Are you sure? What does this problem tell you about the leaders? and about yourself?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The Passover celebration was not only two days away, the feast when the Jews eat bread without any yeast in it. The clergy, the theologians and the judicial rulers of the nation assembled at the residence of the high priest, Caiaphas. There they plotted together, looking for some cunning plan whereby they could ensnare Jesus and dispose of Him. Because they were afraid of the people, they kept saying, "Not during the Passover Feast, or the people may riot!"

SUMMARY

The same day that Jesus predicted His own death at the Passover, the nation's rulers assembled to discuss the plan which would make His words reality. Contrary to His prediction, they determined it must not happen during the feast or even publicly.

NOTES

1. THE ALLIANCE OF THE DESPERATE

26:3 **Then were gathered together the chief priests, and the elders of the people, unto the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas.** *Then*, i.e. two days before the Passover (Mark 14:1). That Matthew does not mean "next in order, after the foregoing prediction," but "at the time just alluded to," is easily inferred also from Jesus' notice of the time (26:2). If so, at about the same time He prophesied that the supreme authorities of Israel would crucify Him during the Passover, they themselves were debating to put off their attempts until after the festivities. This timing is the more psychologically probable, if their fruitless sallies against Jesus and His exposures of their ignorance and hypocrisy occurred this same day, driving this resentful, embittered leadership to regroup to plot strategy.

How many previous consultations had been held to plot the demolition of the Nazarene's popularity? The opposition that now exploded as an obsession to kill Jesus had begun very early (John 5:16ff.; Matt. 12:14; John 7:1, 19, 25, 30ff.; 8:37, 40, 59; 10:31f., 39). But these sporadic, flailing attempts had aborted. The spectacular resurrection of Lazarus right under the nose of the leaders had gained new followers for Jesus (John 11:45). This daring miracle spurred the shaken authorities to instant action to combine forces in a concentrated, cooperative drive to stop the Galilean Prophet (John 11:47-54). Out of that plenary session of the Sanhedrin (*sunégagon . . . sunédrión*) came the determination to make Jesus a political scapegoat by death. From then on Jesus became a hunted man (John 11:57). But even so, no one came forward with interesting intelligence data, because Jesus was adroitly avoiding population centers by moving in out-of-the-way places like Ephraim (John 11:54) or travelling in the company of His admirers. This rendered secret capture impossible (Matt. 19:1f.; 20:29; John 12:19). So, because the prior conciliar decision had not procured the Galilean's elimination, and because He continued to wound the collective pride of the nation's leaders (see on 26:4), a fresh consultation must be held to establish which strategy would lead infallibly to decisive success.

This private conclave is composed of *the chief priests*, of official clergy, "the scribes" (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) or theologians, *and the elders of the people*, or national senate of Israel. *The chief priests* are not only the high priest actually in office as well as those who had

been dismissed from office by the political rulers, but also those priests in charge of the Temple administration in its various services. Together, these formed a priestly aristocracy quite distinct from their brethren, the common priests. Despite their political dismissal, these former high priests continued to exercise considerable influence, even if informally. (Consider the implications of Acts 4:6; 23:5 in the light of John 11:49, 51.) Modern attempts to free the orthodox Pharisees and *elders of the people* from guilt fail to prove these plotters were only Sadducean priests and their lackeys. (Cf. Flusser, *Jesus*, 85, 159ff.) The silence of the Gospel Passion narratives *in itself* proves nothing about Pharisean participation in the Passover plot, because they omit all mention of the Sadducees too. Each group is presented not under its party label, but in the person of those men whose official function as priests or scribes gave them this platform from which to attack Jesus officially. From this consultation on, then, party loyalties no longer count; just the final goal. Hence, the Gospel writers accurately picture Jesus' opposition as one united front composed of every section of their national religious and political leadership. (Cf. the apostolic preaching, Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 23; 5:21; 13:27.)

The theory that the godly Pharisees in the Jewish Senate disapproved of the Sadducean priesthood's political betrayal of Jesus to the Romans cannot be sustained by appeal to the silence of the Synoptics. It is said that the Evangelists could not credibly report the Pharisean protest against the Sadducees without appearing self-contradictory, since they desired to give an anti-Pharisean flavor to their pre-Passion stories (Flusser, *Jesus*, 85). The better hypothesis is that no concerted protest of the Pharisees ever rose to defend Jesus. What were the Pharisees doing in the arresting party in Gethsemane: protecting Jesus by reading Him His rights to a fair trial and warning him against self-incrimination (John 18:3)?! And, if they were alerted for the arrest, did they abandon their duty during the trials, if in fact they were pro-Jesus? And how explain the strange reappearance of the Pharisees to insure the tomb against imposture, if they had supposedly abandoned the Sanhedrin which brought about a victory for them (27:62)?

Granted, not all scribes are Pharisees nor are all Pharisees scribes. (Cf. Mark 2:16.) However, since the Pharisees had been ousted from

political power by John Hyrcanus (*Ant.* XIII,10,5-7) and Alexander Jannaeus (*ibid.*, 13,5), they utilized the scribe's role as interpreters of the Law to qualify themselves for positions of influence because of their accurate knowledge of tradition and its importance in legal interpretation. As opposed to the priesthood which was virtually, but not totally, closed to Pharisees (cf. Josephus, *Life*, §39), the Sanhedrin offered opportunities to implement their viewpoints at the highest level, whereinsofar their influence could command a majority of the elders that composed it. (See Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, Introduction. Cf. note at 8:19.) Thus, the combination, *chief priests and the elders of the people* along with the scribes (Mark 14:1; Luke 22:2) combines the units that comprised the Sanhedrin.

Their gathering *together into the court of the high priest*, rather than in the Sanhedrin's usually assembly hall ("of hewn stone") may have several explanations:

1. Was this a night meeting at the close of their long day of disastrous debate with Jesus? Perhaps no night meeting of this sort could be held in the Temple.
2. This closed session emphasizes the selective nature of this assembly, as if the question of the Galilean Prophet could not be suitably handled in an open forum. Would such councilors as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea have been welcome or even informed of this scheming, if suspected of bias toward Jesus? (Cf. John 3:1; 7:50ff.; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50f.)
3. Perhaps even non-members of the Sanhedrin, whose astuteness could be pressed into service to promote the success of the conspiracy, could more easily be brought into the plot, if held outside the Sanhedrin's hall.

The court of the high priest (tèn aulèn toû archieréos) is the identical place where Peter denied Jesus, being the courtyard within which the men awaiting the outcome of Jesus trials had built a fire (John 18:15). The courtyard itself is surrounded by the buildings of the palace proper. It would appear from the denial accounts that both Annas, the old patriarch among the chief priests, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law and high priest then in office, lived in different apartments in this same palace complex. (Cf. John 18:13, 24 and notes on Matt. 26:57.)

Because *aulè*, by extension, seems to refer to the entire palace in some contexts (cf. Mark 15:16 - pretorium; perhaps also Luke

11:21; 1 Macc. 11:46), some argue that this insidious plot occurred, not where servants could overhear in an open courtyard, but in some large room of the high priest's apartment, as if he were a king in his "court." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 120f.; Rocci, 302.) Besides the lack of evidence that *aulè* refers to the house itself (cf. Moulton-Milligan, 92), may it not be assumed that the chief priests, Annas and Caiaphas, would have servants like their masters, or if not, could order them to leave during the deliberations, thus actually insuring their privacy?

So it was to Joseph *Caiaphas* they came. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII, 2,2; 4:3.) This past master of Roman-Jewish diplomacy succeeded in retaining his office from 18-36 A.D. in an epoch when the high-priesthood was almost a yearly turnover, having become the unfortunate victim of Herodian politics continued by Rome. (Josephus [*Ant.* XX,10,1] counts 28 high-priests in 107 years, an average of 3.8 years for a function that should have been for life!)

2. THE ATROCITY DETERMINED

26:4 and they took counsel together that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him. All their sectarian differences and private animosities are sublimated by their shared, intense bitterness that goads them to recognize and destroy their common enemy. What recent events demanded this urgent plotting? Had not Jesus encountered opposition from these same leaders before? Why so brutal and why *now*?

1. They were genuinely alarmed at their losses sustained after Jesus raised Lazarus (John 12:10f., 19).
2. They were envious of His wide popular acceptance witnessed in His Messianic Entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11; esp. Luke 19:39f.; John 12:19).
3. The priesthood was especially stung by His furious denunciations of their Temple monopoly (21:12-17).
4. They launched futile attacks against Him only to find themselves publicly humiliated, exposed as incompetents and unable to defend themselves against His incisive brilliance and devastating accusations (21:23—22:46).
5. They stood defenseless before His scathing exposè of their hypocrisy (23:1-39).

6. Perhaps their greatest, most fundamental motivation is their unwillingness to repent. Rather than turn to Him, they turn on Him. Resentment, not repentance, is their reaction.

This assembly is not gathered to decide *what* should be done about Jesus, because this is already a foregone conclusion. Rather, their unscrupulous pondering is to determine *how* (*tò pòs*, Luke 22:2) He could be eliminated most certainly and quietly. Jesus' judicial murder is premeditated.

They determine to act *by subtlety* (*en dòlo*). This contrasts with the public police arrest they had attempted earlier without success (John 7:32, 45ff.). Because *subtlety* has the flavor of deceit, cunning and treachery, it suggests that the leaders of the nation deliberately abandoned all conscience to seek out unashamedly deceitful means to trap Jesus. But this expression may not at all represent what those rulers thought they were doing. Rather, they were seeking some stratagem, some cunning plan, to arrest Jesus which would not compromise their public image or cripple their authority. From their point of view, they were working on strategy. They probably argued, "This must be done *discretely*." Jesus later exposed their underhandedness to their face (Luke 22:52f.; John 18:20ff.).

3. THE ATTACK DELAYED

26:5 **But they said, Not during the feast, lest a tumult arise among the people. But they said** (*èlegon dè*, better: "they kept saying") graphically pictures a nervousness that firmly insisted on postponement. This verb stands out in elegant contrast to Jesus' prophecy (26:2). All urgency implied in their dedication and determination to destroy the Nazarene, must be subordinated to this prime consideration.

Not during the feast means not during the seven-day festival of Unleavened Bread that began with the Passover proper but continued another week. Originally two separate feasts, these naturally came to be treated as one, since anyone who came for the one must remain for the other. The celebration of national liberation from bondage naturally lent itself to stirring the patriotic spirit and potentially set the stage for nationalistic uprisings. That Jesus was Galilean, believed to be the long-awaited Messiah by those who came from Galilee, the hot-bed of liberationist terrorism, was reason enough for the authorities to conclude to wait another ten days before acting. That the feast

involved three days of solemn rest would not have stopped them, only calculating prudence.

Lest a tumult arise among the people. Their determination to postpone all action is based on several considerations:

1. Their chief danger does not lie with Jesus Himself. Apparently, something in His demeanor convinces them that He would not utilize His miraculous power in self-defense. Otherwise, would they have dared strike out at the unpredictable, awesome supernatural might He could bring to bear?
2. "His unjustified popularity with the crowds" constituted their principle preoccupation, because, during a feast attended by thousands of Jews from all over the world (cf. Acts 2:5-11), He would be surrounded by sympathetic Galilean supporters who hailed Him as their Messiah (Luke 21:37f.). Should the rulers make their move publicly, they risked open insurrection, if not civil war.
3. Consequently, the Jewish rulers had no doubt that an untimely insurrection would try the patience of the Roman authorities whose decisive reaction would reduce still further the already painfully minimal authority of the Sanhedrin (cf. John 11:48). In this tension we hear the cunning voice of Caiaphas repeatedly cautioning, lest his own careful diplomacy, that walked a long political tight-rope between Jewish loyalties and cooperation with Rome which gave him his high-priesthood, be wrecked by avoidable civil disorder and rioting.
4. The only factor that was not a consideration for their postponement was the high holiness of the feast. Had they thought that they could murder an innocent Man during the feast, nothing would have hindered them from so desecrating it, if they could but achieve their unholy purpose. They only fear that an insurgent, enraged populace would impede the plot. These rulers knew their people and had good reason for caution, because of all the tumults and seditious precedents they could have cited. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,5,3 = *Wars* II,12,1.4; the Passover tragedy under Archelaus, *Ant.* XVIII, 9,3; 10, 2.9.)

But this careful deliberation was to come to nothing because of the unsuspected presence of a traitor in Jesus' own following. Rather than follow their own carefully chosen counsel of caution, their burning desire for vengeance overpowered their reason. The stupidity of Satan defeated him: too quickly he moved his pawn, Judas, into

conjunction with the religious and political hierarchy, forcing him to sacrifice caution for temporary advantage and risk long-term failure. Notwithstanding Caiaphas' worries and the council's precautions, they were all forced to deal with Jesus *publicly at the feast*. These high councilors are an integral part of a higher plan of which they have no knowledge. Earlier, when they wanted to capture Jesus, He could not be touched. Now when they are unwilling to do it, because of personal considerations, He decided it against their will—and won. Further, despite the fact that they were forced to kill Jesus during the Passover, no one rioted. Literally everyone miscalculated Jesus' voluntary submission to death. This gauged just how seriously so many misunderstood the will of God, and how truly Jesus comprehended and obeyed it.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. On what day did the authorities assemble to plot Jesus' judicial murder?
2. Explain the various names used for the Jewish national feast: why do Mark and Luke call it "the Passover" and "the feast of Unleavened Bread"?
3. Is this plotting by the authorities the first of its kind, or had they done this before? If so, when?
4. List the Jewish national leaders that formed this consultation against Jesus. Explain the historic political or religious position of each group, showing their party's interest in silencing Jesus.
5. Where did this meeting occur? Who presided over the meeting?
6. Explain the authorities' fear of an uproar if Jesus were to be arrested during the feast.

SECTION 63

JESUS IS ANOINTED BY MARY OF BETHANY

(Parallels: Mark 14:3-9; John 11:55—12:8)

TEXT: 26:6-13

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, 7 there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at

meat. 8 But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? 9 For this *ointment* might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. 10 But Jesus perceiving it said unto them. Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. 11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. 12 For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Simon is really a leper, a ceremonially unclean outcast from Jewish society, how could it also be true that he possessed this house in Bethany, in which these guests are free to visit? If he were no longer a leper, why call him that?
- b. If the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany occurred several days earlier, before the Messianic Entry (John 12:1, 12) why then does Matthew delay recounting the event until now? Did he not know when it took place? Or does he have some other reason for registering these facts now out of their normal chronological order?
- c. If you assume that Matthew correctly placed this section here for good and appropriate reasons, what is the relationship between it and this new context in which he inserts it?
- d. How did Mary manage to anoint Jesus' head and feet, if He was eating at a table?
- e. How would you feel, if a good friend of yours came up to you at a dinner party and poured an 11:5 ounce bottle of strong perfume on your head and feet? What would others say? How should you treat this person? What of your dignity? How do you think Jesus answered these questions?
- f. Why do you think Mary chose such expensive ointment for this use?
- g. Why do you think the disciples were so indignant as to considering the anointing of Jesus a *waste*? What does this reveal about them? Even though John pictures Judas as instigating these complaints because he was greedy (John 12:6), how do you account for the other disciples' joining in to reproach Mary? Do you think their principle could ever be justified?

- h. Jesus said, "You always have the poor with you." Is He saying, "There shall always be the haves and the have-nots? Does He resign Himself to this reality? Then, should we do nothing about the poor?"
- i. Do you think Judas would really have used the money from the sale of the perfume in the way he indicated it should? What makes you think so?
- j. If, as Jesus affirmed, Mary anointed His body beforehand for burying, would not the perfume get a bit old, before the crucifixion actually took place? If six days were to pass before the burial, then how could her anointing Him "for burial" have anything to do with it?
- k. What is there about Mary's act that makes it so significant that one can hardly preach the Gospel without mentioning her memorial/memorable deed? Why did Jesus approve of her act so heartily.
- l. Do you think Mary anointed Jesus for the motive He attributed to her, i.e. specifically "to prepare [Him] for burial"? How could she have known about His approaching death and decide to anoint His body? And how could He know her real reason, without her announcing it publicly?
- m. How is the example of Mary supposed to teach us practically? Are we to go around anointing others? Is her noble deed merely a source of joy to us or are we to be strangely warmed by her love for Jesus, and love Him because she did, or what?
- n. How has Jesus' prophecy about Mary's memorial been fulfilled? Are you personally helping to fulfill His prediction? If so, how? If not, why not?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Earlier, six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, the town where Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, lived. While there, they gave a dinner in His honor in the house of a man known as Simon "the leper." Martha waited at the table and Lazarus was one of those at the table with Jesus. As He was reclining at the table, Mary approached Him with a third-liter (about 12 oz.) alabaster flask of very expensive fragrant oil made of genuine nard. She broke open the jar and began pouring it over Jesus' head and anointing His feet. Then she wiped His feet with her hair. The fragrance of the

perfume filled the house. But there were some disciples, among whom Judas Iscariot (the one who was to betray Him), who, when they saw it, were indignant and grumbled to one another, "Why was this perfume wasted this way? Why, this ointment could have been sold for a fortune—more than a year's wages,—and donated to the poor!" and they sternly rebuked her. (Judas said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. Since he had charge of the common purse, he had the habit of pilfering the money put into it.)

But Jesus, noticing this, said to them, "You all let her alone! Why are you embarrassing the lady? For she has done a 'good work' to me. Judas, you let her observe it, anticipating the day of my burial. In fact, you will always have the poor people among you, and you can help them any time you want to. But I will not always be around for you to help. She has done what was in her power to do. By pouring this ointment on my body, she has anointed my body ahead of time for its burial. I can assure that what she has done will also be recounted in memory of her wherever in the whole world this Good News is preached!"

SUMMARY

In a historical flashback the Gospel traces elements that not unlikely helped to crystallize Judas' decision to betray Jesus: Jesus did not permit anyone to criticize Mary's anointing as something less than perfectly appropriate under the circumstances. Further, Jesus continued what Judas must have considered to be negative talk about His own death in the not-too-distant future. Not only did Jesus praise Mary and her manifest faith in His testimony to His death and rebuke Judas in the process, but He promised her deed eternal fame as widespread as the Gospel proclamation.

NOTES

THE SETTING

26:6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper. Neither Matthew nor Mark affirm exactly when the Lord was in Bethany. Rather, each introduces this episode with a circumstantial principle that derives its temporal value from its connection with the main verb of the sentence, "a woman came up." Only John furnishes the precise chronological data: "Six days before the Passover, Jesus

came to Bethany" (John 12:1). Therefore, whereas Matthew and Mark had been discussing events "two days before the Passover" (26:3; Mark 14:1), we conclude that they inserted the anointing in Bethany out of its normal chronological order so as to achieve an extraordinary, logical—or should we say, psychological?—connection between the anointing and its consequences. This procedure cannot be charged with contradiction, because neither writer asserts that this event occurred in any time sequence other than that indicated by John. (In fact, even John utilized this same technique in reverse with reference to the same events. [See John 11:2 and 12:1ff.]) If the Passover came on Thursday night that year (see on 26:17; cf. John 19:14, 31; Mark 15:42), then "six days before the Passover," dates the anointing in Bethany one evening before the Triumphal Entry. (See Hendriksen, *John*, II, 171ff. for fuller discussion of the date.)

So, what could have motivated Matthew and Mark to edit their material by inserting this event out of strict chronological order? In the loving anointing by Mary what is the connection they saw which qualifies this section's place appropriately between Jesus' prediction of His death (26:2) and the Sanhedrin's plotting (26:3ff.) on the one hand, and Judas' pact with the rulers (26:14ff.) on the other?

1. Their reason cannot be solely the venom rankling in the breast of Judas that drove him to betray Jesus, if the rebuke he received during the anointing be thought to be the only cause. In fact, neither Matthew nor Mark make this connection. They do not even mention the traitor by name. Only by reading John do we learn that it was Judas who led the complaining and something about his motives. But not even John draws the conclusion that Judas left the supper more decided than ever to betray the Lord. This is simply a conclusion based on a comparison of the three Gospels, none of which verifies our suspicion, even if they do not contradict it.

What took place at Bethany that night may have triggered the betrayal scheme already maturing in Judas' mind. Perhaps Jesus' rebuke is less a factor than His frank talk of His burial. This defeatism finally convinced the greedy Judas that his dreams of political power and personal wealth were finished, unless some urgent solution were found. In harmony with their own understanding of Jesus' betrayal and its causes, Matthew and Mark rightly connect Judas' determination with what occurred at this supper, for, say they, Iscariot walked away from this event determined to go to the priests (26:14).

2. Matthew sketches a magnificent contrast between what two of Jesus' disciples did about the predictions of His coming death (26:2; Mark omits this detail.).
 - a. Mary believed Him and anointed Him while she could (26:6-13).
 - b. Judas believed Him serious about His dark future, and so decided to make his own position as disciple bring him money one way or another by betrayal (26:14-16).
 - (1) If Jesus defended Himself by miraculous power against the crisis that forced Him to declare His Kingdom, honor His loyal supporters, in the end He would enrich Judas.
 - (2) Or, if Jesus chose to die, in which case the hoped-for declaration of the Kingdom must forever die with Him, Judas would have at least the betrayal payment for his trouble.
 - c. This contrast is between real belief among quite opposite types of disciple, and how their distinctive moral differences caused each to react. Matthew's reader is gently led to reflect on the question: what do I personally think about Jesus of Nazareth?
3. Matthew and Mark create, thus, a stark contrast between Mary's open-hearted love and the burning hatred and base plotting of the priests and Judas.

Simon the leper: nothing more is known of him beyond this supper given Jesus in his house. Because of so many Simons in Israel—there were even two more Simons at this table: Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot!—he was distinguished by his former disease, rather than by occupation (“Simon the tanner” Acts 10:6), by his skin complexion (Acts 13:1, Symeon Niger is “Simon Black”), by his father's name (“Simon Bar-jonah” Matt. 16:17) or by his politics (“Simon the Zealot” Acts 1:13). To call him *Simon the leper* reveals an insider's view of small-town life in first-century Palestine that a more formal identification of the man could not have achieved. Had Simon the leper been healed by Jesus? If so, his name is the unembarrassing living memorial to God's grace to him. Of course, he may have been deceased, his spacious house being now borrowed for this meal.

It is striking that John omits all mention of Simon the leper, directing all attention to Mary, Martha and Lazarus, whereas Matthew and Mark do not consider their names essential to the story. One tentative hypothesis is that, because of the more commodious size of Simon's house, the banquet was set there, rather than in that of Lazarus. Naming Lazarus was important for John, since he intended to indicate

Jesus' greater interest for the festal crowds as well as document how Lazarus' resurrection fired Jesus' enemies' animosity (John 12:9-11).

This incident must not be confused with the anointing of Jesus by a sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). While both episodes are comprised of three identical elements, (1) the anointing by a woman at a meal in the house of a Simon, (2) the criticism of the woman by someone present, and (3) Jesus' defense of the woman, based on reading someone's thoughts, these incidents are not identical. (Cf. Foster, *The Final Week*, 25ff.) These motives conclusively distinguish them:

1. Luke's anointing occurred much earlier in Galilee during Jesus' ministry there; this anointing took place in Judea a few days before His death.
2. The Galilean Pharisee is a rude, ill-bred host, lacking the refinement to offer the usual amenities for his Guest's comfort, whereas everything at this supper sings of love for Jesus.
3. In Galilee the host launched no verbal attack, but merely judged the woman mentally, whereas Judas led other disciples in a verbalized criticism.
4. The bases of criticism varied: there, the propriety of Jesus' permitting a woman to touch Him; here, the propriety of a questionable use of needed funds.
5. In Galilee Jesus admonished the host; here, His disciples.
6. While the basic motive of both anointings is love, the Galilean woman did it in gratitude for forgiveness, but here Jesus underlines Mary's faith in His revelations: "for my burial."
7. In the Galilean anointing, the sins of the woman are made prominent and forgiven, but here Mary's character is only praised for its loving thoughtfulness and her grasp of Jesus' teaching, and made a universal example.

1. THE GENEROUS GIVING TO THE GODLY GUEST SPLENDID SELF-FORGETFULNESS

26:7 There came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at meat. Jesus revealed the Father to us as much by His table conversation as by His monumental mountain-top sermons. Many of the most profound things He ever taught were said while He was

eating with others. (Cf. John 2:1-11; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; 14:1-24; Matt. 26:20-29; John 13-17; 21:12-23; Acts 1:4-8: "while He was eating with them.")

There came unto him a woman. But that this woman remained unidentified throughout the narrative of Matthew and Mark may indicate that the main point of this episode is not her friendship to Jesus which would express itself in a lavish love appropriate to this person, but the high importance of her purpose and the faith that prompted it. (See on 26:12.) That our author suppresses her name may also point to the early date of his writing:

1. To publish her name while she was still alive would expose this inhabitant of Bethany of Judah to the vindictiveness of those Jerusalem Jews who sought to repress the wildly spreading defections from Judaism to the movement of the Crucified One. John, writing after 70 A.D. could reveal her identity, because her enemies were defeated or dead.
2. Perhaps Matthew omits her name so as not to embarrass her, protecting her own modesty. Perhaps she was dead when John wrote, so naming her would cause no trouble to her.

The elegantly shaped *alabaster cruse* Mary brought was carved out of a translucent, usually whitish, fine-grained variety of gypsum stone. The use of such a vessel also points to its value, being the usual type of container for expensive aromatic oils (Pliny, *Natural History*, 13.3; 36.12; Herodotus 3.20.1). John (12:3) noted that this precious vase held one *litra* or 327.5 grams (about 11:5 oz.) of the costly essence. That Matthew called it *exceeding precious ointment* points to princely oriental luxury, a view externalized by the disciples' complaint.

Having an alabaster cruse does not mean she originally purchased this as one of several flasks of ointment to prepare her brother, Lazarus, for burial (John 11:17, 39). This supposition arises out of the disciples' complaint that, while the bottle retained its commercial value, she should have sold her possession. But its being merely a left-over contrasts with the spirit of initiative and creative preparation evident in her deed, and raises the question why it was not used on Lazarus originally. Did the sisters buy too much? It is simpler to admit that she simply spent the money for Jesus. Godet (*John*, II, 206f.) argues that Jesus' observations to the Pharisee in Galilee (Luke 7:44ff.) imply that the anointing of one's guest's head and washing his feet

were common services before a meal, and the omission of these amenities constituted a rude oversight. (Cf. Gen. 18:4; Judg. 19:21; I Sam. 25:41; Ps. 23:5; 92:10; 45:7? 141:5; John 13:5; I Tim. 5:10.) Hence, no one present would look askance as she began her task.

She poured it upon his head as he sat at meat. How harmonize this with John's affirmation that she anointed His feet (John 12:3)? Her doing both would not be difficult, if the guests were lying Roman-style on couches that radiate out from the central table. She simply approached Him, walking between the couches. Next she broke off the top (seal?) of the new long-necked vase to pour out its contents rapidly (Mark 14:3). Her original purpose was undoubtedly to anoint Jesus' head in the ordinary way. But observing that His feet were rough and travel-worn, she gladly poured the same perfume on them too as if her priceless essence were common water. To remove the excess, she used the only towel she had brought, her own hair. Since she came only to anoint His head, presumably she would have needed no towel. That it was against good breeding for a woman to present herself among men with her hair dishevelled does not testify against Mary's morals or argue for identification with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36ff.

1. Mary's hair may have been neatly bound up when she came in. Then, her need to dry Jesus' feet may have caused her to waive a minor scruple and undo her hair to meet the unforeseen need. It is perfectly in character with her carefully planned love offering to be only too glad to do this.
2. Her humility and irrepressible self-giving know no limit as she renders homage even to the least favored part of His body, drying *His feet with her hair*, her crown and glory. (Cf. I Cor. 11:15.) The generosity with which she poured so much perfume on His feet testified that no sacrifice was too costly. That she wiped them with her hair proved that no service was too demeaning for her. Any disciple worthy of the name must see that true adoration demands that we lay our honor at Jesus' feet in precisely the same way. Lenski (*John*, 840) preached: "The proper place for a disciple's head is at the Savior's feet." If John the Baptist considered himself unworthy to unloosen the sandals from Jesus' feet, why should not Mary react in a similar way?

2. THE GRACELESS GRUMBLING AT THE GOODNESS OF HER GIFT

26:8 **But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?** They not only saw it; they also smelled the concentrated perfume, for "the house was filled with fragrance" (John 12:3)! Among Mary's critics, the voice of Judas is raised against the useless *waste* (*apòleia*, "destruction, loss"). But were it Matthew's exclusive purpose to insert this episode in this place to indicate one of Judas' motives for betraying Jesus, then *why did not Matthew at least name Judas* in his account? Why does he inculcate his fellow *disciples*, when, according to John, Judas was the main agitator?

Here is important evidence of independent eye-witness. John, from his own vantage point at the table, noticed that Judas instigated these remarks, whereas Matthew and Peter (Mark) remembered that others added their assent. While both versions are correct, complementing each other, their own independent testimony is confirmed even by this problem.

Two important considerations justify Matthew's procedure:

1. *The disciples* meekly followed Judas' lead. Perhaps because he had shown the courage to speak frankly despite the festive occasion, he did it directly in Jesus' presence, apparently arguing from right-minded principles. Our author does not name Judas, because his point may be that even other disciples are blindly led into this mistaken criticism. So their shamefully unthinking reaction is at least as noteworthy as naming the perpetrator.
2. *The disciples* did not follow Jesus' lead! This rash, uncharitable criticism was expressed in the presence of Jesus who could have pronounced far more competent judgment in the case and corrected any misdeed in Mary's conduct with the infallible certainty of divine judgment. His acquiescence in itself should have been justification enough for them not to join Judas' attack.

Judas' grumbling had enough truth and logic in it to convince and enflame deep emotion in the other disciples, moving them to indignation at this apparently inexcusable waste. Their attitude was a groan (*embrimàomai*), arising out of their displeasure (Mark 14:5). Is it not worthy of note when the godly are shaken from their steadfastness by a rogue disciple masquerading as a defender of the weak?

But *the disciples* who lamented the extravagance must be distinguished as two groups whose motives differed as to sincerity, even if both could make use of the same argument:

1. Judas' anger, says John (12:6), was driven by his greed. His rage is not faked, because he was really mad about losing money. Only his public reason is hypocritical. He felt personally cheated by her senseless throwing away good money that could have passed into his own grasp.
2. The *indignation* of the others, however, was motivated by their sense of stewardship, perhaps also by their own forced frugality over the last years of traveling with Jesus. (Cf. 8:19; John 6:12.) Those who have learned to control their own spending, often cannot tolerate to see others practice what the former consider "extravagance," even for the most justifiable reasons.

To what purpose is this waste? In Mary's deed they could discern only a lavish expenditure typical of conscienceless prodigality, quite uncharacteristic of godly people responsible for every penny God entrusts to them. But is *whatever* anyone spends for JESUS really squandered or lost? Great faith, judged by the external manifestations it motivates, may seem a waste, something extra or calculable only in terms of loss. But in terms of true stewardship, the objecting of Judas, and others like him, is exposed for the diabolical hypocrisy it was: he considered 300 denarii too much to spend for Jesus' luxury, but was willing to accept just under half that amount for Jesus' life (30 pieces of silver equals 120 denarii!)

Charity: the plausible argument of a short-sighted utilitarianism

26:9 For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. The disciples could quickly estimate the commercial value of the perfume on the following bases: The size of the container was a Roman pound (26:7). The container was alabaster, not ceramic. The aroma was identified to be that of an exquisite, oil-base perfume, "nard perhaps?" Its aroma filled the house, indicating its strength (John 12:3). The rapid mental calculation of the group's business-minded treasurer, Judas, settled the price at 300 denarii (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). Figured at a denarius

a day, a common day-laborer would have to work almost a year to earn wages enough just to pay for this perfume! So, is not her expensive perfume unquestionably an unjustifiable luxury in contrast to the crying needs of the poor who have no daily bread?!

The value of this perfume may not indicate anything about the affluence or prominence of Lazarus' family, because it could be Mary's personal sacrifice of her personal funds or life-time savings. By whatever method she earned it, she would have had to save 20 denarii a year for 15 working years to amass this sum by herself. Even if she were independently wealthy, this was still a large sum for her to pour out in one gift.

This ointment . . . sold . . . given to the poor. Judas marshalled the other disciples to criticize what they could not stop. By implication these disciples treat Mary as if she never felt any compassion for the poor. Were not the entire apostolic group and Jesus dependent on others' generosity sufficiently to qualify as *poor* (8:20; 27:55f.; Luke 8:2f.)? Had her family never hosted these very men, meeting their needs? While they were accustomed to *practical* hospitality, they were shocked by her *impractical* extravagance. Nevertheless, as they took up Judas' insincere position, the disciples' understanding of the problem involves alternatives that are not mutually exclusive: either love the poor or anoint Jesus. As Jesus will imply in His answer, one can legitimately dedicate himself to His worship as well as labor sacrificially for the liberation of the needy.

John, however, redimensioned Judas' slashing remark: "He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief" (John 12:6). As treasurer of the Lord's group, he received all contributions and was responsible for disbursing cash for purchases and gifts to the poor. (Cf. John 13:28ff.) But he pilfered funds held in trust. Is Farrar (*Life*, 496) correct to conclude that Judas formed this argument to blind himself to the baseness of his ruling passion? While certainly a hypocritical pretext, did he present himself as a champion of the poor to conceal even from himself the glaring wrongness of his greed? Lenski (*Matthew*, 1008) eloquently sketched the treacherousness of Judas' insinuations:

He condemns not only Mary but Jesus himself. Judas implies that Jesus is robbing the poor; that he is lavishing upon himself what rightfully belongs to charity; that for his own glorification he allows a waste that is utterly wrong; that his example is harmful to others; and that Judas is the man who knows what is right, proper, charitable, and is not afraid to mention it!

This was the sort of leadership the unthinking disciples were following! Even if they were moved by sincere concern for the poor and intended to pass judgment only on Mary, they unwittingly swung behind an attack on the Lord Himself!

3. HIS GALLANT GRATITUDE FOR HER GLADDENING GRACIOUSNESS

26:10 **But Jesus perceiving it said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.** Because Judas' sweeping innuendo implicates Jesus too, the Lord cannot defend Himself without appearing to condone wastefulness by accepting it. But to the surprise of everybody, He brilliantly defended Mary, while fairly weighing the truth of the disciples' position and in full awareness of the poor people all about Him.

Why trouble ye the woman, as if what she has done could somehow be defined "sinful"? Embarrassed and stunned, Mary alone could not convincingly turn back the accusation of wastefulness. Jesus proceeds to show that *she has wrought a good work upon me*. Several reasons may have prompted this approach:

1. IT WAS USEFUL SERVICE TO THE POOR. The Lord gently reveals the disciples' gross misconception by explaining that she was using what was in her power to do *a good work upon me*. Jesus, the poor ex-carpenter from Nazareth, was now without permanent housing and living on the very contributions of which Judas was the common treasurer. (Cf. Luke 8:12.) Edersheim (*Life*, II,360) remarked compellingly:

That He, Who was ever of the poor and with them, Who for our sakes became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich, should have to plead for a last service of love to Himself, and for Mary, and as against a Judas, seems, indeed, the depth of self-abasement.

Hence He himself was one of the very poor to whom those of greater means should do good. This, says Jesus, *she has done*, fulfilling the very principle defended by the disciples. Because her purpose was to prepare His body for burial (26:12), then her goal and purpose must be judged useful, because specifically related to the exigencies of burial and its relative costs. For the actual

burial Nicodemus brought 100 times the weight of Mary's perfume (John 19:39). The women procured and brought even more spices (Luke 23:55f.; Mark 16:1). Thus, her supposed extravagance did not literally transcend the boundaries of strict economy or thrift, because burial costs were really that great. Could the disciples consistently criticize as bad stewardship what someone paid for a loved one's embalming, when they themselves would have expressed their love and loyalty to Him in a similar way? So, why should they condemn as useless waste her anticipation of Jesus' approaching burial? Because they simply did not believe it would ever happen. This single critical element of unbelief distinguishes the depth of her discipleship from theirs.

2. IT WAS UNSELFISH. In order to honor this poor Man, she had chosen to do without many luxuries which the money for this perfume would have purchased. Her deed was not merely a "good work" (*érgon agathòn*) in the classical Pharisean ethic, but a higher, "noble deed" (*érgon kaiòn*).

Lavishness is the proper expression of devotion and gratitude. No loving expenditure, however seemingly costly, is censured by our Lord, when it is motivated by unadulterated love for Him. True love does not calculate how little it can get by with, but wants to pour out its resources to the limit. How can we consider ourselves lovers of God and Christ, so long as we consider it perfectly respectable to donate to His cause the minimum amount possible before appearing miserly?

The true worth of a gift must be evaluated by its motivation hidden in the soul of the giver. As in Mary's case, only Jesus can discern this with unflinching precision. Ironically, Judas' avarice passed for prudent concern for the needy, while Mary's generous devotion was judged wasteful. We cannot now anoint His physical body, but we can pour out generous love on His Body, the Church, and care for His poor brethren (25:35ff.; Gal. 6:10).

3. IT WAS DEVOTION TO CHRIST. She knew that Jesus was no mere poor, itinerate rabbi, but the Christ of God! Can what is done for such a Person out of devotion to God ever be *anything but good work*?
4. IT WAS THE INTELLIGENT EXPRESSION OF A FAITH THAT PLANNED. (See on 26:12.) Prudence and common sense are also God's gifts to us, lest we neglect other duties to Him and His people by an extravagance at one point that impoverishes others

whom we are called to serve. While Mary's tender lavishness strikes a responsive chord in our hearts, it must not justify thoughtless excesses on our part that do not show the same intelligent foresight and planning she did. In fact, Jesus praised her intelligent faith in His predictions of His death and her determination to do what was in her power to act on them. It is a serious misreading of His words to see her gift as prompted by an unseeing emotion that reacted unthinkingly on this impulse alone.

5. **THE DECISION WAS RIGHTLY HERS ALONE.** Mary's was the privilege to dispose of her own property as she deemed right and proper under God, without answering to men. The disciples' criticism implied their right of judgment, as if the property were theirs to use in ways they deemed more practical and prudent. But Jesus does not back down, require Mary to undo her deed, or apologize. Rather, He defended her freedom to dispose of her own property in a manner consonant with her discipleship. By pointing to an appropriateness they had not seen heretofore, He informed their ignorance and defended her liberty.

Jesus' treatment of the disciples' scruple becomes a masterful demonstration of how to deal with opinions today. (Cf. Rom. 14:1—15:7; I Cor. 6-10.) Although they cited an unexceptionable Scriptural principle, neighborly love for the poor, they applied it in such a way as to contravene another principle, the right of private property (Acts 5:4; implied in Deut. 23:23). Further, the disciples had argued against her apparent violation of the rule of utility or expedience. (Cf. I Cor. 6:12; 10:23f.)

Therefore, the dichotomy between the useful and the beautiful can be a false dilemma, because a deed of loving adoration like Mary's can be both. How should we apply His dictum? Is extravagance ever right? The lavishness of Christian love is sanctioned not only by Jesus' express approval of Mary's generosity, but also by His own marvelous example, the fact to which her act pointed, "for my burial." Consider His own deliberate "waste of love" which He was about to pour out on Calvary:

1. He considered His death absolutely useful, directed to a practical end, but, at the same time, it was the expression of a love that must act lest its heart burst.
2. Similarly, there is extravagance in lavishing His love on us through His death, because not everyone for whom He died would even

appreciate it. He gave a sacrifice sufficient to save the race, fully knowing that few would accept it. His gift is extravagant because none of us could ever deserve it. What others might term "wasteful," in our gratitude we call "magnificence."

3. We may confidently transcend the considerations of our usual "produce":
 - a. By spending lavishly, even emotionally, on Jesus, completely overwhelmed by the lordly generosity of His love.
 - b. This means unstinting, unselfish liberality to others. By freely "squandering" our love on the unthankful, the undeserving and the unlovable, we imitate Jesus Himself.
 - c. The kind of self-sacrificing liberality here promoted is that unsparing big-heartedness that gives, even sometimes going beyond what could be considered strictly "necessary," and a prodigality that almost demands that it be restrained by those responsible to organize it. (Cf. Exod. 35:4f., 36:3-7; Acts 4:32-37; II Cor. 8:1-4; Phil. 4:10.)

TO EVERY DUTY ITS TIME AND PLACE

26:11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. Granted, this is addressed to the objecting disciples, but is there an allusion to the specific duty of the thieving Judas, who, as treasurer of the common fund, must disburse funds to the poor, but robbed them himself? Jesus' statement implies, "You can help them any time you want" (Mark 14:7). That Mary has given so generously to me now does not mean she cannot be kind also to the poor on other occasions. Particularly lavish generosity to special friends once in awhile and a consistent, thoughtful meeting of the needs of the poor are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

You have the poor always with you. How carefully and deliberately He avoids rejecting the disciples' principle. Rather, He supports them in believing it! His own deeply felt concern for both the spiritual and physical needs of the poor was above question. He had expressed it in formal lessons and in His own practice (5:7, 42; 6:2ff.; 19:21; Luke 6:20f., 30, 38; 21:1-4; John 13:29). It was a fundamental theme of His whole ministry (Luke 4:18; Matt. 11:5). His doctrine embodied all that God had said about His own love for the poor (Deut. 15:11 in context! Ps. 41:1; Prov. 14:20f., 31; 19:17; 29:7; Isa. 58:1-7; Jer. 22:16; Dan. 4:27; Amos 2:6f.; 4:1; 5:11; 8:4, 6). Jesus' attitude

encouraged people to believe that God is keenly interested in those who watch over the poor (25:34-40). His later New Testament doctrine is no less explicit (Acts 2:44f.; 4:32f.; 11:27-30; Rom. 12:8, 13, 16, 20; II Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:10; 6:2, 10; Eph. 4:28; I Tim. 6:18; Heb. 6:10; 13:1ff.; James 1:27; 2:5, 15f.; 5:1ff.; I John 3:17f.; III John 5-8). His identification with the poor and concern for them should forever dispel any suspicion of neglect on His part.

Nonetheless, Jesus is an intensely practical realist, fully aware of all human differences that contribute to one's ability to obtain and retain wealth. He is no visionary that dreams of the day when every trace of poverty should be wiped from the earth. He is not guilty of that oversimplification that preaches a communistic economic equality. He knows that all men are not equal. He is perfectly aware of the inequalities of position and opportunity, the fluctuations of health, the many variables in intelligence, ability and personal aggressiveness. So, because He comprehended that these inequalities are often immutable ingredients of the human condition, with these words He committed the care of the poor to His own people. He knew by experience the happiness poor people feel from receiving needed help (Luke 8:1-3), and the even more special joy of Christians who share it in His name (Acts 20:35).

It has always been the spiritual descendants, not of Judas, but of Mary, who have truly cared for the poor. Where Jesus Christ is lovingly adored, truly believed and obeyed, the poor are best cared for. Really, nothing poured out in honor of Jesus can ever be called a waste. In fact, in a general sense, everything that truly promotes the progress of His Kingdom according to His criteria brings with it a deeper concern for the poor, a more practical interest in the Third-World peoples, a broader grasp of our common, interrelated human brotherhood.

It is against this background that one can understand Jesus' tenderly sad observation. *But me ye have not always* (cf. 9:15). While normally appropriate to avoid luxury for self so as to be able to assist the poor, Jesus pleads the extraordinariness of the present circumstances as justification for Mary's seeming wastefulness. Death makes extraordinary demands that set aside common everyday rules. The moment of His own death was fast approaching. If *anyone* were to prepare His body for burial while He was still able to appreciate the beauty and nobleness of such love, the time was now or never. *Me you have not always*: how completely understated! These disciples had only

a few days left to show their devotion to Jesus before this privilege would be gone forever. But they were blinded, precisely because they sincerely, however, wrongly believed they would have Him always. Unique opportunities to do good pass away, and must be taken when the situation presents itself, when the impulse, the time, the people and the circumstances are ours. The moment must be seized, lest that chance of a lifetime be mistaken for something that could be done anytime, and be forever and tragically lost. In fact, Mary's was the only anointing Jesus received. The other women brought their anointing spices to an empty tomb. The time to do this while Jesus could appreciate it came and went.

4. THE GLORY OF A GENUINE GRASP OF THE GIST OF THE GOSPEL

26:12 **For in that she poured this ointment upon my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.** Normally, *for burial* a great quantity of spices and ointments would be needed (II Chron. 16:14; John 19:39; Luke 23:56; Mark 16:1). Nicodemus alone brought 100 Roman pounds worth (= 32.74 kg or 71.9 lb.). Although Mary had literally anointed only Jesus' head and feet, He accepted her intention as if she had anointed His entire body.

The fact that Mary did not announce the motive behind her act has been interpreted by some as if she could not have intended such a solemn purpose. Consequently, skeptics assert either that Jesus gratuitously attributed this (false) motive to her, or else the Evangelists simply invented this pious, but false, attribution. How strangely inconsistent or wilfully blind are those critics who are so ready to confuse the anointing in Luke 7:36-50 with Mary's act as two contradictory accounts of the same event, but do not see that Jesus could discern Mary's true purpose just as clearly as He read the heart of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:39f.)!

Others, to avoid this irreverence, suggest alternate explanations:

1. Jesus spoke only of the "effect of the woman's act, not her conscious purpose. . . . She meant nothing but to show her love" (Bruce, *Expositor's Greek Testament*, 309). This explanation is plausible, since the Semitic idiom often ignores Greek nuances and substitutes purpose for result. (Cf. Blass-Debrunner, §391, 402(5); also Arndt-Gingrich, 378.)

2. Is it possible that Jesus magnanimously attributed to her a motive she did not dream, but would have embraced, had she thought of it? Is it not true that a goodly amount of our service given out of pure devotion to Christ possesses a value that goes beyond our comprehension?

Only clear testimony of Scripture can prove that Mary did not understand nor consciously intend her deed as Jesus declares it. Argument alone is incapable of establishing the contrary. Only her embarrassed demurring could do this. But the Gospel is silent, leaving only Jesus' unequivocal testimony standing. Apparently, Jesus simply read her thoughts, stated them and that settles it.

MARY BELIEVES ME!

In Mary the Lord has found at least one disciple who really understood Him. She had willingly let Him be the Teacher to say whatever He wanted to, even if it contradicted popular philosophy and traditions and even defied her own logic, desires and emotions. In short, her discipleship is real and profound. She believes unquestioningly that Jesus really means what He has been saying all along about His impending death. She could grasp the unmistakable conclusion that Jesus' predictions must mean that He would not defend Himself by supernatural means. So she perceived that He is going straight to the cross and that, when His bitter archenemies had Him under their power, she might never be able to approach to prepare His body properly for entombment. Therefore, she planned ahead ("she took beforehand," Mark 14:8 *proélabon murisai* means that she used foresight. Prematureness has nothing to do with it.) She bought the perfume and "kept it for the day of my burial" (John 12:7). Now, therefore, seeing the opportunity she ardently desired would come, she made her move decisively. No wonder Jesus thinks her noble act worthy of a Gospel memorial!

Mary, the model of faith that
comes by hearing the word of Christ

26:13 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her. This is the only occasion

Jesus ever raised a monument to any specific human being. But it is not an eternal memorial to a bottle of perfume, but to a genuine faith that acts intelligently while the opportunity to serve God is ours. It would never occur to a Judas that, were Jesus to remain a dead Messiah nicely embalmed with Mary's ointments, *this gospel never would be preached in the whole world!* Jesus' prediction must be dismissed as the illogical vagaries of a dreamer, unless, despite His death and burial, He could rise again and infuse into His followers that courage to preach which only His triumph over death can give. It simply escaped Judas that, in the midst of all this morbid talk about suffering and death, Jesus uttered this stupendous prediction: *This gospel shall be preached in the whole world!* (Cf. 24:14; Mark 13:10.) Even if the betrayer actually heard it, in his unbelief, he discounted Jesus' certainty of victory. And yet, Jesus' declaration is not simply the prophet's foresight. It rings more like the proclamation of a Monarch. Unlike any earthly potentate, this King decrees her glory, while He Himself is under the death sentence. There is a bold irony that gives character to His words:

1. Christ's promise of immortal renown to Mary boldly reveals His own self-awareness, as He consciously stood in the shadow of His own cross. His bold prediction could never be automatically self-fulfilling without resurrection. But *this Man* was not just another human. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 224) taught:

His divine foreknowledge is demonstrated by the literal fulfillment of his prediction, and as the knowledge of this incident reaches forward into coming ages and spreads abroad still farther in the earth, the demonstration becomes continually more surprising.

2. He who presents Himself to Israel for consideration as Messiah is no local Christ, interested exclusively in the narrow concerns of one people. Despite His own self-limited mission "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24; 10:6, 23), He always looked beyond these horizons to the regions beyond. (See Special Study, "Gentiles," at the conclusion of this volume.)
3. What is to be preached in the whole world shall include her anointing Him for *burial*, and He dares call this *good news* (this gospel)? But "burial" includes the atoning death of matchless life, hence summarizes His sacrificial suffering for humanity.

4. If Mary realistically faced the fact of the cross, even more so does Jesus! He has freely walked to Jerusalem to face those who hate Him bitterly. His exhortation to the Apostles on their early mission, "Do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot destroy the soul" (10:28), is not to be tested in the crucible of Jesus' own personal experience.
5. Whereas Judas and the others, so far from heralding this deed, would have strangled it aborning, Jesus considers this "absurdly wasteful act" so characteristic of the spirit of the true Christian that to proclaim His message demands its exemplification by reference to what Mary of Bethany did!

But in what sense(s) must Mary's noble act serve as a memorial of her, inciting to its imitation everyone who reflects on it? Perhaps the fact that Jesus did not specify how this is to work was intended to push us to ponder, lest we brush aside its less obvious, but essential significance. In every part of this story what is as obvious as the aroma of her perfume, is her love. But this is not expressly indicated as a model for us. We do not love Jesus just because Mary did. We love Him, alone because of what He means to us personally. Some of the same reasons that drew her to Him draw us too. So, what should her example mean to us?

1. **HER FAITH UNDERSTOOD.** By faith she was enabled to share in "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). By believing what He predicted, she actually grasped understandingly and shared sympathetically what He was going through. Hence, she points to that sympathy of mind whereby we "follow in His steps" (I Peter 2:20-25).
2. **HER FAITH IS A MODEL OF GREAT INITIATIVE DESPITE WEAKNESS.** Weak, feeble, really unavailing to avert the imminent tragedy of Jesus' death, this disciple did what she could. She showed great initiative by taking creative steps that were unthinkable even to Jesus' closest disciples who had deliberately blindfolded themselves to the reality of His impending death. Faith freed her from this prejudice, empowered her to take decisive steps to express her love while there was time, even if what she believed about Jesus' future was emotionally crushing. She simply dared to believe Him and took the initiative in harmony with what He said. Faith is *envisioning what the Lord says He intends to do in a given situation* and doing, in harmony with His Word, what lies in our feeble

- power, even if our weak efforts seem unavailing. (Remember Luke 21:1-4!)
3. **HER FAITH WAS BOLD.** Her courage braved the potential criticism of others and risked rejection, even by Jesus Himself. After all, she probably did not discuss this move with Him to get His approval beforehand. Sometimes, as in her case, it is utterly impossible for us to defend the rightness of our actions to the satisfaction of everyone's doubts. Sometimes our good actions do *not* speak for themselves, because our true motive remains impossible to prove. Our only consolation lies in our confidence in His love and in believing that our Lord approved our endeavor to do His will. This bold discipleship is what it means to express our real commitments "before men" (10:32).
 4. **HER FAITH WAS UNCALCULATING.** When she first began, her act was rejected as senseless waste and esteemed by no one present but Jesus. Who could have imagined the undying glory that would surround her uncomplicated, adoring act? Yet, without planning it, she did something simple that was destined to guarantee her immortal fame. This is but a live case that concretely illustrates the high estimate our Lord places on loving service, however humble. (See note on 25:35-40.)
 5. **HER FAITH WAS CREATIVE.** Her detractors' rebuke revealed their own slavery to traditionally recognized forms and mechanisms of social redemption. Her grasp of Jesus' message and spirit permitted her to appreciate her own broad freedom of action. No express command or approved precedent guided her decision. She simply believed His death-predictions and invented an unheard-of, scandalizing way to externalize her loving devotion for Him and her faith in His revelations. *And He approved it.* Dare we act this way in relation to our worship offered the same Lord who promotes her example? Do we have this same freedom in our faith? (Cf. "How to Avoid Becoming a Pharisee," my Vol. III, 375ff.)

These considerations invite us to believe Him implicitly, love Him devotedly and do whatever we can while the opportunity is ours. May our faith drive us to passionate, generous self-giving, not caring how many know what we think about Jesus! In our feeble, fumbling efforts, we too shall not be able to do much for Jesus, but let it be said of our discipleship, "They did what they could!"

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Who was Simon the leper? Where was his house? According to John, who else was present at his house?
2. When, exactly, was Jesus in Bethany for the event described here? Which Gospel writer positively dates this event chronologically? Where? On the basis of what facts can this date be known?
3. Name the woman who anointed Jesus' head and feet.
4. List the differences between this anointing and the one that is recorded by Luke 7:36-50.
5. Of what was the perfume container made? How does this detail add to the cost of the ointment? How much ointment did it hold, according to John?
6. What kind of ointment was used? On what basis could its value be estimated? According to John, how much was it worth? How much would it be worth today?
7. Describe the disciples' reaction to the anointing: what was their judgment and on what principle was it based?
8. According to John, who led in the criticism? Reconcile this with the other Gospel statements about who complained.
9. Show how Jesus used the disciples' own argument against them and, at the same time, defended the woman.
10. In what two ways was this anointing a "good work"?
11. What did Jesus mean by "You will not always have me"?
12. What motive did Jesus say was in the woman's mind when she anointed Him? In what sense was this anointing for that specific purpose?
13. Where else had Jesus spoken before of the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel? (book and chapter)

SECTION 64

JUDAS AGREES WITH JESUS' ENEMIES
TO BETRAY HIM

(Parallels: Mark 14:10, 11; Luke 22:3-6)

TEXT: 26:14-16

14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, 15 and said, What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver^s him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him *unto them*.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. "What do you think of Judas? Whose son is he?" are two important questions in this section. Collect all of the facts revealed in the New Testament about this man. Trace the development of sin in his life as it leads up to the sins of betrayal and suicide.
- b. If Matthew already mentioned him before (10:4), why does he now present him here as "one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot"? Is he copying from a document that has this fixed, traditional expression, or does he have some better reason for expressing himself this way? If so, what is it?
- c. Why do you think Matthew inserted Judas' secret agreement with Jesus' enemies right in this place after the anointing in Bethany? Why not include it before it, even omitting the anointing? What connection is there between the two facts, if any?
- d. Do you think the authorities welcomed Judas' offer or treated him with diffidence? Would they be two-faced with him, their own confederate?
- e. Judas was greedy (John 12:6). Do you think that he dickered with the authorities over the price for betraying Jesus? Or did he even question the price? On what basis could he accept it as is?
- f. Do you see any significance in the final price settled upon of thirty pieces of silver? If so, what is the significance? If not, why not?
- g. Why should the priests be so glad to pay Judas in advance? What is the psychological advantage for them to do it this way?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Apostles, conceived a diabolic plan. He went away and, with the Jewish clergy and officers of the Temple police, discussed a scheme for handing Jesus over to them. His offer was: "What are you willing to give me, if I hand him over to you?"

Upon hearing his proposal, they were delighted and promised to give him money. So he agreed. At this they counted out to him thirty silver coins. So, from that moment on he began watching for a good chance to betray Jesus when no crowd was present.

SUMMARY

His decision fixed by Jesus' undimmed "defeatism," Judas went right to the authorities to work out a mutually agreeable plan for

Jesus' capture. His incredibly timely offer was immediately welcomed by the rulers who awarded Judas the purchase price of a slave for his efforts. Thereupon he began plotting a course which would lead to his plan's realization.

NOTES

1. THE TRAITOR'S TRADE-OFF

26:14 Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests. When did he go? Matthew, having concluded the historical flashback, now returns to his narration of events that occurred "two days before the Passover" (26:2-5; cf. Mark 14:1f.; Luke 22:1-6). However, *then*, points to the anointing in Bethany as the psychological, if not the immediately chronological, background in which Judas' determination to betray Jesus finally crystallized. The element common to Matthew's two paragraphs (26:1, 2 and 26:6-13) is Jesus' repeated allusion to His death. His "disgusting negativism" apparently proved too much for his ambitious disciple. But the betrayer did not arise from the Bethany supper to hurry over to Jerusalem in hopes of concluding a midnight deal with the powers-that-be. The likelihood is very slim that he would have found them assembled on that Sabbath evening. That he did not see the priests for several days is clearly implied in the council's desperation as late as "two days before the Passover" (26:3-5). Further, the Triumphal Entry on the day after the Bethany anointing, as also the furious purification of the Temple on the following day, would have seemed to Judas to cancel all of Jesus' negativism, pointing to the immediate realization of his own nationalistic hopes. But, when ensuing events did not confirm this prognosis and Jesus continued to arouse the bitter enmity of every segment of Jewish political life into a white-hot rage, Judas grew more frustrated with Jesus' political inaction. Then, Jesus' latest prediction of His own death tipped Judas over the brink (26:2, 14). Two days before Passover, inspired by a diabolical plan, he sought out the priests and found them ready to talk. (See below on *priests*.)

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot. That Matthew should resort to this rather elaborate introduction of someone already introduced and described (10:4) has been thought to verify the theory that he merely follows stereotyped tradition. But, as we have seen, to establish his own credibility, Matthew needs no copy-book similarity

to the other Evangelists. To assume categorically that he unimaginatively copied other work is to fail to take him seriously. Rather, Matthew remained shocked that the ultimate betrayer of the Messiah of Israel should turn out to be *one of the twelve*! Nevertheless, he does not draw back from recording this sordid picture of one of his brother-apostles, because, as has been his approach throughout this Gospel, he must show the disciples' slow growth in faith through their many falls. Thus, even in this horrible contradiction of discipleship, he objectively displays the options that confront every potential disciple. In the life of *Judas Iscariot*, Matthew warns, are to be found the same alternatives and components of betrayal which tempt *every disciple*. Not merely *one of the twelve*, but all of them faced the scandal of the cross. Matthew's message is that *one of the twelve* cracked, because of the flaws in his own personal faith. By examining this negative example, we may learn what flaws of our own would, in the end, make us turn against Jesus.

WHAT MADE JUDAS DO THIS?

Many tend to judge Judas in the light of the grandeur and divinity of the One whom he betrayed, but not according to his own motives. Hence, in the highly-colored, negative language used to describe the heinousness of his crime, they obscure Judas the real man. He becomes the model of all hatred and infamy with not one scruple left to cause him to shudder at the baseness of his treachery. He is pictured as wilfully forgetting everything he knew about Jesus: His compassionate love, His matchlessly holy life, His unequalled teaching and His supernatural deeds.

While the view is credible, it fails to take into account another route that alienation from Christ can take, a route which, ironically, still permits the disciple to believe himself a loyal follower of the Lord. It is the road more commonly taken by those who believe themselves wiser than He, more practical, more versed in worldly know-how, who simply know how God's Kingdom should be run better than the King Himself. They retain their own right to rule, their own worldly ambitions, their private, "unimportant" sins. But this too is no less a betrayal of Jesus Christ. In fact, it is essentially more diabolical, because perpetrated by those who, in the name of loyalty; to Him, actually prove false to (= betray) everything He stands for. The result is the same and he who does it is no less a "betrayer" or "traitor"

(10:4; 27:3; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16; John 6:71) or a "devil" (John 6:70). It is from this standpoint, therefore, that Judas Iscariot is the more valuable case study in discipleship destroyed. So, what made Judas betray the Lord? We must see him as . . .

JUDAS ISCARIOT, THE COMMON SINNER

GOD did not predetermine his choices, because, aside from His determinate counsel and foreknowledge which decided *that* the Christ would be betrayed, by *whom* or *how* were items neither foreordained nor the subject of prophecy. (See on 26:24.) Here we see most clearly the interplay between divine sovereignty and human freedom. The Sanhedrin, following its own political fears, defined Jesus a wanted man (John 11:57). Here was opportunity for *anyone* to betray Him. Judas, moved by his own ambitious desires, took the bait.

SATAN? Luke (22:3) attributes this diabolical plan directly to the devil who entered into Judas. And why not? Judas had left too many doors open in his life. (See below.) This, however, was no literal possession, hence presents no problem fatal to the moral freedom of Judas who remained fully free in his conscious choices. As will be seen, Satan already owned much territory in Judas' thinking. (Contrast John 14:30b.) Judas did not offer Satan any resistance. (Contrast James 4:7.) Why should he? Judas thought Satan's ideas sound, because they were already so identical with his own concepts! There is no overwhelming demoniacal power in Judas' case any more than in our own (I Cor. 10:13). Rather, Judas found the temptation to betray Jesus irresistible, because he found his own concepts irresistible.

AVARICE? His stealing from Jesus' common fund revealed His love of money (John 12:6). His proposal to Jesus' enemies, "What are you willing to give me?" (26:15) seems to confirm his greed. That covetousness is not an altogether insufficient motive was ably defended by Farrar (*Life*, 551f.).

How little insight can they have into the fatal bondage and diffusiveness of a besetting sin, in the dense spiritual blindness and awful infatuation with which it confounds the guilty, who cannot believe in so apparently inadequate a motive! Yet the commonest observance of daily facts which come before our notice in the moral world, might serve to show that the commission of crime results as frequently from a motive that seems miserably small and inadequate, as from some vast and abnormal temptation.

And covetousness is simply "civilized" idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5).

However, while avarice can drive a man to be cold and unscrupulous, crushing conscience to gain more, this does not explain how such a man could have ever become the disciple of that poor Man who had no place to lay His head (8:20). Surely, in first-century Palestine there were faster routes to sheer financial success!

VINDICTIVENESS? Was the rage of hatred now boiling in Judas because of the gentle rebuke he received at the anointing in Bethany? Had he not taken a public stand for righteousness ("given to the poor"), but was rejected? No matter how kind were Jesus' words, did he feel humiliated publicly? Did Jesus' defense of Mary's "sentimentalism and lavish waste" wound and provoke the betrayer to the limit? This hypothesis does not explain the time Judas had to cool down, his apparent inactivity for four days from the anointing until his going to the priests. Further, raging hatred, burning to get even, does not explain Judas' surprise, as great as anyone's, that his bargain actually resulted in Jesus' death sentence (27:3ff.). Contrary to his own expectations, his ill-conceived plan had produced precisely the opposite result from what he intended. Then, as he had never accepted Jesus' own self-understanding of Messiahship, he was left no alternative but to imagine Jesus' total failure. Shattered and hopeless, Judas took revenge on himself.

Again, vindictiveness finds satisfaction, not in silver, but in blood. Were Judas merely vengeful, he would have despised pay offered for his deed, since revenge itself would have been pay enough.

THWARTED POLITICAL AMBITION. Much of Judas' motivation is bound up in his reason for being Jesus' disciple in the first place. Contrary to popular belief, *Judas Iscariot* may well have been a Galilean. (See note on 10:4 my Vol. II, 272f.) He would have been exposed to the nationalistic fervor for which the Galileans were noted. Further, *Iscariot*, family name of both Judas and his father, has been interpreted by some as an Aramaic transcription of the Greek *sicàrios*, meaning "assassin" from the Latin *sica*, a "dagger." This label covered "the most fanatical group among the Jewish nationalists quite hostile to Rome; they did not hesitate to assassinate their political opponents" (Arndt-Gingrich, 381,757). If so, Judas stood farther to the political right than Simon the Zealot. So, if Judas followed Jesus in the hope of fulfilling the extremist political ambitions of this misguided nationalistic spirit, the fierce radicalism of Judas would be decidedly frustrated by many elements:

1. Jesus inexplicably refused to preach the standard Messianic doctrine generally held by "right-minded" patriots. He steadfastly declined to inaugurate a materialistic Kingdom of God (John 6:14f., 66-71). Because the Lord so emphatically opted for a spiritual messiahship and refused Israel's crown (John 6:15), perhaps Judas discerned the beginning of the end of his own materialistic dreams of personal wealth and power. His political disenchantment may have become a bitter, vindictive drive that impelled him to formulate—even if ever so slowly—which move to make.
2. Then Jesus constantly warned of heartaches, set-backs, even martyrdom ahead for His most intimate followers (24:9ff.). Utopian dreams of wealth and glory for anyone were conspicuous for their absence.
3. Jesus' apparent failure to meet the public challenges of the Pharisees (12:38ff.; 16:1ff.) in smashing ways that would command belief, shook all the Apostles, not merely Judas (15:12; 16:6). And the enemy kept attacking.
4. Jesus' doctrine of the cross (16:21-28; 17:22f.), for the disciple that neither understood nor believed it, would be deeply discouraging and liable to be labelled "morbid defeatism." Exasperatingly, Jesus continued to use this language (26:2, 12).
5. Perhaps most disgusting for Judas was Jesus' obvious inability to seize the political advantage. After feeding the 5000, He turned down Israel's crown during a moment of high revolutionary spirit among His most ardent followers! Now He did not follow up the Triumphal Entry by declaring the Kingdom. Rather, He continued inciting the authorities to implacably bitter antagonism (Matt. 21-23).

In short, Jesus' gradualism, His emphasis on spiritual power and intangible riches and His repudiation of power politics all add up to the disenchantment of ANYONE thoroughly enamored with instant political solutions and tangible spoils. Even John the Baptist seemed staggered by the direction and slowness of Jesus' program (11:2ff.). Sadly, evaluation of Judas' motivation is not difficult, because there are so many political activists like him! The kind of person that would betray Jesus in light of these elements is fundamentally selfish, impatient, ambitious and demanding. This volatile mixture adds up to one clear controlling passion in Judas: INSTANT UTOPIA. Judas' thievery is of a piece with his disappointment at Jesus' political impotence. Avarice and desire for security from the pain, grief and sufferings of the world will lead a person not only to steal, but impatiently

demand the immediate, permanent solution that instantaneously eliminates intolerable people and problems. Immediate solutions is Judas' operating procedure. The long, hard road of patient teaching, self-giving service and suffering to transform man's present ills he considers absolutely intolerable. Such a man is fundamentally a person without faith. He cannot allow God time to transform into things of beauty and eternal worth all that he finds disgusting and imperfect.

Therefore, in his disgust with Jesus' astounding lack of progress, he may have resolved to force the issue by precipitating a supreme crisis that would force Jesus to declare the formation of the Kingdom, accept the Crown so long refused, and issue a call to liberate Israel from the oppressor, and initiate a program that would elevate and enrich His loyal supporters.

It is even conceivable that Iscariot, honestly felt that this betrayal could promote the success of God's plan for Israel. He was enough of a believer in Jesus to foresee that his Master could prove Himself invincible in the ensuing clash, consequently would never even risk death. Perhaps Judas imagined that the end of the affair would find Israel's enemies outwitted, frustrated and finally beaten, as on so many other occasions when Jesus had shown Himself the master of every situation. Not incidentally, Judas richer by far more than thirty pieces of silver, could chuckle smugly at their discomfiture.

Thus, Judas could expect himself to be forgiven this momentary "sin," because, by personally masterminding what he may have considered Jesus too impractical and other-worldly to put together, he would actually become Christ's benefactor. Not incidentally, too, Christ's consequent political indebtedness to Judas the king-maker promised enormous financial benefits for his daring foresight and brilliant execution. Thus, even in this betrayal Judas could consider himself quite loyal to Jesus. He could not only keep up the appearance of friendliness, but actually feel it. Was he not acting in the best interest of Jesus and of the other disciples, indeed of all Israel? From this point of view, the intention to have Jesus killed is the furthest from Judas' mind.

So, in reality, Judas is not a man apart, the archetype of monstrous wickedness. This traditional image is as unrealistic as it is popular. It is but a caricature that blurs our own spiritual kinship with so much of Judas' own failures as a disciple. So, what was his fatal flaw? Barclay (*Matthew*, II,367) well concluded:

However we look at it, the tragedy of Judas is that he refused to accept Jesus as He was, and tried to make Jesus what he wanted Him to be. It is not Jesus who can be changed by us, but we who must be changed by Jesus. We can never use Jesus for our purposes; we must submit to Him to be used for His. The tragedy of Judas is the tragedy of the man who thought that he knew better than God.

To see Judas as a misguided, worldly-wise king-maker is neither to excuse his crime nor detract anything from the real awfulness of his sin (26:24) or from the certainty of his condemnation (Acts 1:25). Rather, to picture him as a common disciple who followed ordinary temptations that lie before any of us has the intensity practical value of showing how desperately real is our own vulnerability to the temptation to be false to the Lord, while contemporaneously believing ourselves upright citizens of the Kingdom of God in good standing.

Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests. Even though the Pharisees also shared the determination to put Jesus to death, that Judas approached *the chief priests* and "captains" (Luke 22:4) points to an encounter different from the Sanhedrin's earlier informal meeting (26:3ff.). Perhaps he went first to the Temple police requesting permission to make an interesting offer *to the chief priests*. These "captains" (*strategoís*) are probably not Roman soldiers, since this military term could also apply to the Levitical Temple guards who maintained order at all times in the Temple. (Cf. Num. 8:5-26; II Chron. 23:1-19; Acts 4:1; 5:24; see also Josephus, *Wars* VI, 5,3; Edersheim, *Temple*, 147ff.; cf. 2 Macc. 3:4.) Eventually, these Levitical officers would need to be brought into the picture, because, being under the authority of the chief priests, they could be counted on to participate in Jesus' arrest (Luke 22:52). Approaching one of these who could take him directly to Caiaphas, Judas could present himself as ready to obey the official order to turn Jesus in to the authorities.

There is no evidence that Judas appeared before the entire Sanhedrin to bargain with its members, unless it be assumed that the aforementioned council were still in session (26:3ff.). That all three Synoptics mention only priests and Levites, points not to the Sanhedrin, but to the clergy alone. Judas' approach, therefore, was not the cause of a convocation of the Sanhedrin, but an unexpected element that radically catalyzed the ecclesiastical authorities' decision to act.

2. THE TAWDRY TRANSACTION

26:15 and said, **What are ye willing to give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver.** Jesus had not formed a clandestine movement, but operated openly. But the chief priests' dilemma lay in their fear to arrest Jesus publicly and in their ignorance about His whereabouts in private during the constant movement of people during the feast. So, Judas' entire usefulness and offer hinged on his valuable particular knowledge of Jesus' habits. (Cf. John 18:2.) Being a member of the most intimate group of disciples, he could conduct the Lord's foes directly to Him during the private, evening hours in the absence of cheering crowds to protect Him from arrest. Further, to avoid capturing the wrong person, Judas could correctly identify Jesus during a night raid.

And they weighed unto him thirty pieces of silver. Mark and Luke state that "they promised (engaged) to give him money," to which Luke adds, "He agreed." Was this merely the early stage of the negotiation between Judas and the leaders, and they later actually gave him the full amount after consigning Jesus to them? Both Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 902) and Lenski (*Matthew*, 1012) argue that the priests paid right away. The testimony of Mark and Luke only means to record the priests' instant reaction to Judas' offer, to which he declared agreement, then, according to Matthew, they paid him outright. The psychology of the situation would demand that the priests seize this unparalleled chance by morally binding Judas to go through with the betrayal.

That Matthew reports, *They weighed unto him*, rather than "They paid him," alludes to the use of a scale to determine monetary value by weight (*éstesán*, "they placed [on the scales] - "they weighed"). Because coins were then in common use (cf. 5:26; 10:9, 29; 17:24, 27; 22:19; 25:15ff.; Luke 10:35; 15:8), three things may have been true:

1. *Weighed* might just be a linguistic holdover among Palestinian Jews, meaning simply "paid."
2. Either they actually weighed out the silver in the ancient manner, sanctimoniously showing religious precision in doing their wickedness.
3. Or they simply handed him the coins, but Matthew utilized the ancient expression to point to the prophecy of Zech. 11:12 (*éstesán tòn mishthòn mou triàkonta arguroùs*, LXX; Matthew has *argùria*).

Taken in shekels, *thirty pieces of silver* equals 120 denarii, the equivalent of four month's wages of a common day-laborer. Nonetheless,

that so little should be awarded him by the Jewish authorities for the life of a MAN seems unrealistic and out of proportion to the value of their Prey.

1. Some see this low evaluation as the priests' contempt for Jesus. Perhaps the priests belittled the assistance Judas offered, and finally conceded a small compensation for his offer which would be but a minimal convenience to them. The brevity of our account, however, neither affirms nor denies such haggling. In fact, if Judas sought merely to push Jesus to act, *any* price that appeared to cover his true motive would be right.
2. Did this sum represent only the down-payment of more? This is highly doubtful because,
 - a. The non-coincidental allusion to Zech. 11:12 suggests that this amount was the total price. (See on 27:9, 10.)
 - b. When Judas had been paid in full for betraying Christ and he discovered that his plan had backfired, he returned only *the thirty pieces of silver* (27:3ff.). There is no indication of more.

So, the priests haughtily judged that the value of a slave (Exod. 21:32; cf. Gen. 37:28) was quite adequate for the Nazarene! Edersheim (*Life*, II,477) sensed the high symbolic significance, unappreciated, of course, by the Temple bosses:

The Lord was, so to speak, paid for out of the Temple—money which was destined for the purchase of sacrifices; and that He, Who took upon Him the form of a servant, was sold and bought at the legal price of a slave (Phil. 2:7; Exod. 21:32).

Ironically, *thirty pieces of silver* is the "handsome" price paid the Lord for His service in caring for Israel. (Zech. 11:12; see only on Matt. 27:9.)

If Judas' petty bargain for the going price of a male slave seems paltry, this petty cash embezzler's love of money would not stick at turning his private plans to profit. On the other hand, if he dreamed that by pushing Jesus into a crisis which He could escape only by inaugurating the long-awaited Davidic Kingdom, then Judas stood to gain far more materially in the ensuing glory and inflowing wealth that must come. So, *thirty pieces of silver* would not be the last income realized at the expense of the Galilean Prophet. This small bargain would thus have been but a minor incident on the way to bigger things.

The task targeted

26:16 And from that time he sought opportunity to deliver him unto them. *From that time* means from two days before the Passover (26:1; Mark 14:1). Thus, on Tuesday night (the beginning of Wednesday) he made his contact and on Thursday night (the beginning of Friday) he fulfilled it. But this interval is also his last moment to repent and revoke his evil agreement and return the blood money, confessing his sin. (Cf. 27:3ff.) But, from his point of view, why should he want to fail to help Christ do what He apparently cannot bring Himself to begin? Such is the blindness of error!

The *opportunity he sought* must be one in which the crowds favorable to Jesus could not impede His arrest. In harmony with the Sanhedrin's fear that people would riot, should the police attempt a public arrest, Judas agreed to the priest's strongly recommended directive "to betray him to them in the absence of the multitude" (Luke 22:6; cf. Matt. 26:5). Despite the leaders' enthusiasm prompted by Judas' unexpected offer, their basic solution arrived at earlier has not fundamentally changed. Postponement until after the feast is still a fundamental part of their strategy, because, although they sense their ability to move more freely than they could have without the guidance of an insider like Judas, a risky collision with the people still spelled political suicide for them.

But something imperceptible has changed. Unbeknownst to them, by their accepting Judas' proposal, they surrendered absolute control of the situation back to Jesus, because he could now control the events by guiding Judas to their disadvantage. (See on 26:21-25; cf. John 13:27.)

Undoubtedly, the priests and Judas imagined themselves in control of the situation, unconscious of the overruling providence of a God who can make even the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps. 76:10). Those who would not willingly serve Him as instruments of righteousness, can, without violation of their human will, be made to serve the purposes of God. Even while they are bent on gratifying their selfish desires, God's program moves irresistibly forward. While they will not consciously cooperate with Him, He shall still be glorified in their reactions to His providence through the elements He brings into their lives and in the choices He places before them. Because He has the right to decide their options, He rules, while leaving completely unshackled their human freedom to decide.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. When did this consultation between Judas and the authorities occur?
2. Explain Matthew's elaborate introduction of Judas as "one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot."
3. List facts in Judas' life with Jesus that conspired to tempt him to betray Him.
4. What circumstances in Jerusalem facilitated Judas' going to the chief priests to offer to turn Jesus over to them?
5. State the probable terms of the agreement.
6. What is today's value of thirty pieces of silver?
7. List other Biblical allusions to thirty pieces of silver.
8. In what way did Judas' offer create the mechanism whereby the Sanhedrin's decision not to capture Jesus during the feast was completely reversed so as to make Jesus' earlier prediction come true?
9. Describe the type of opportunity the authorities wanted Judas to find that would be ideal for capturing Jesus. Why did not Judas betray Jesus immediately?
10. How much time did Judas think He had to deliver Jesus into their hands? How much did he actually have, according to the actual history of the events?

SECTION 65

JESUS CELEBRATES HIS LAST PASSOVER AND
INSTITUTES THE LORD'S SUPPER

(Parallels: Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-39a; John 13:1—18:1)

TEXT: 26:17-30

17 Now on the first *day* of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the passover? 18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. 19 And the disciples did as Jesus appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

20 Now when even was come, he was sitting at meat with the twelve disciples; 21 and as they were eating, he said, Verily I say unto you,

that one of you shall betray me. 22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord? 23 And he answered and said, He that dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. 24 The Son of man goeth, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born. 25 And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi, He saith unto him, Thou hast said.

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. 27 And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. 29 But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

30 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why did the disciples ask Jesus where preparations for the Passover should be made?
- b. Why do you think Jesus had not previously announced the location?
- c. Does it not appear that His instructions, as to where this feast is to be celebrated, are deliberately devious? What possible purpose could there be for such ambiguousness, if His disciples needed to know? Or did they?
- d. Since Jesus was a wanted Man, do you think His disciples would have encountered difficulties with the authorities as they presented the lamb for slaughter by the priests?
- e. What is the householder, where the Passover is to be eaten, to understand by Jesus' mysterious phrase, "My time is at hand"? Do you think His most intimate disciples understood it? If so, what would it mean to them? If not, how could Jesus expect a less intimate disciple to grasp it? If so, why say it?
- f. On what basis could Jesus count on the host's consent?
- g. Why do you think Jesus waited until evening to go to the appointed house for the Passover meal?
- h. If Judas already knew he would betray Christ and Jesus Himself had clearly predicted that someone would do this, what possible

purpose could be served by repeating this prediction at the Passover supper?

- i. If Jesus' intention were to predict Judas' betrayal, why did He continue to use such ambiguous language right up to the very departure of Judas? Should not prophecies be expressed in clear, literal language without all this beating around the bush?
- j. How do you think Judas reacted to Jesus' blunt, even if somewhat ambiguous, prediction that one of the Twelve would betray Him? How would you have reacted, if you were Judas and knew what he knew?
- k. Jesus said, "The Son of man goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man, if he had not been born." How does this affirmation relieve God of all responsibility for Judas' actions and lay the blame squarely on the betrayer himself?
- l. How does the above-cited affirmation prove that Judas' betrayal did not catch God unawares, but, rather, was actually foreseen and planned for by God, to carry forward His own program?
- m. How does this statement of Jesus demonstrate categorically that the widely-believed hope, that everyone shall finally be welcomed by God, is simply without any foundation in truth?
- n. Do you think that Jesus waited until the Passover supper was completed before instituting the Lord's Supper, or that He simply transformed its various elements as they moved from one part of the Passover ritual to the next, thus giving new meaning to them? Why do you decide as you do?
- o. Is there any special symbolism involved in Jesus' taking the Passover bread, blessing it and breaking it for distribution among the disciples? If so, what symbolism?
- p. How could Jesus say, "This is my body," with reference to the bread, when, as a matter of fact, He was present bodily there before them?
- q. Now deal with the cup: how could its contents be called "my blood," if His blood were yet in His veins?
- r. If Jesus is our Passover Lamb, why did He make no use of the literal lamb to say what He uses loaf and cup to teach?
- s. Why did He term it "the blood of the covenant"?
- t. Why would not Jesus drink that cup again until the day it could be drunk "new with you in my Father's Kingdom"? In what sense would He do this? In this particular context, why is this promise such glorious news?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The first day of Unleavened Bread arrived, on which it was necessary to sacrifice the Passover lambs. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and get the Passover meal ready for us to eat."

"Where do you wish us to go and do this?" they asked.

"Go into the city," He told them. "Just after you enter the city, a certain man carrying an earthenware water-jug will be coming toward you. You follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher sends word: My appointed time is near. At your house I shall celebrate the Passover. Where is my guest room where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will then show you a large upstairs room all furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

The two disciples did as Jesus had directed: they left and went into the city. They found things just as He had told them they would. So they prepared the Passover.

When the evening hour came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve and took His place at the table with them. They were reclining around Him at the table.

[At this point Luke records Jesus' earnest desire to eat the Passover with the Apostles and the first cup. John records the washing of the disciples' feet and the first intimations of the unclean betrayer. Perhaps Luke's narrative of the ambitious contention among the disciples about their relative personal importance should also be included here.]

As they were at table eating, when Jesus had spoken about the betrayer and His own direct connection with God, He became deeply agitated in spirit and exclaimed, "I tell you the truth, one of you who is eating with me will betray me."

The disciples were deeply pained to hear this. One by one they began to ask Him, "It is not I, is it, Lord?"

"The one who will betray me is right here at the table, eating supper out of the same dish with me!" He answered. "The Son of man is going to His destiny, as the counsel of God has determined for Him and as the Scriptures have written of Him. But what misery awaits His betrayer! It would have been better, if that man had never been born!"

The disciples looked at one another, puzzled and uncertain as to whom He referred. They began to question each other about which of them was going to do this.

One of Jesus' disciples, an especially close friend, was reclining at the table on Jesus' right. So Simon Peter signalled to him: "Ask Him whom He is talking about."

So that disciple leaned back close to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus responded, "It is the man to whom I give this bit of food after dipping it in the sauce."

So when he had dipped the morsel, He handed it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then, after the morsel, Satan took possession of him, and he spoke, "Surely, it is not I, is it, Rabbi?"

Jesus said to him, "It is you, not I, who said what is the case. What you are going to do, make quick work of it!"

Now, no one at the table guessed what He meant by this. Some surmised that, because Judas was in charge of the common fund, He was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast." Others thought He meant that Judas should donate something to the poor. So, after Judas accepted the morsel from Jesus, he left immediately. And it was night. . . .

After Judas' departure, Jesus commented, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in Him God is glorified. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and do it at once."

[Here John records the new commandment.]

As the meal proceeded, Jesus picked up some unleavened bread. When He had blessed it by giving thanks, He broke it and shared it among the disciples, saying, "Take this and eat it: it represents my body which is sacrificed for you. Do this to remember me." Similarly, after the meal was concluded, He lifted a cup of wine. When He had given thanks, He offered it to them, stating, "Drink from it, all of you."

So they all drank from it. Then He went on.

"This cup represents my blood which seals the new covenant with God, the blood which is to be shed on behalf of multitudes of people for the forgiveness of their sins, I can tell you for sure that I shall never drink this wine again, until the day comes when with new meaning I drink it with you in my Father's Kingdom, the long-awaited Kingdom of God!"

[Here John reports Jesus' prediction that the disciples cannot follow Him where He must go. Peter promises total loyalty, but Jesus predicts his threefold denial. Luke also reports the predicted denials and the unexplained sword purchase (Luke 22:31-38).

Jesus presents His last discourse (John 14-17). John 14:30 may mean that Jesus and the Twelve arose to leave, but lingered further in the Upper Room until Jesus completed His instruction and His intercessory prayer. Otherwise, what are the probabilities that Jesus did all the teaching of John 15-17 while walking through the streets of Jerusalem that night?]

When Jesus had spoken these words, they sang the Passover Psalms. Then they went out of the city across the Kedron Valley, as He was in the habit of doing, to the Mount of Olives.

SUMMARY

Jesus organized the Passover supper preparations in such a way as to leave Judas ignorant of the location until the last minute, and, in doing so, demonstrated His divine foresight. During the supper itself He clearly pointed out His betrayer, while contemporaneously giving him clear warning to back out. When, however, Judas left, Jesus gave new meaning to the bread and wine. It would now represent His own suffering and the ratification of the new covenant. After a long series of far-reaching instructions, He led His men out to His appointment with destiny.

NOTES

I. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER (26:17-19)

26:17 Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the passover? According to Luke, Jesus called Peter and John to begin these preparations. This question, then, reflects their obedient response to His order (Luke 22:8).

Technically, *the Passover* and the feast of *unleavened bread* are two distinct festivals, the former being a one-night celebration on 14 Nisan and the latter a feast lasting one week from 15-21 Nisan. (For their history and character, see Exod. 12:1-51; 13:3-10; 23:15; Lev. 23:4-8; Num. 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8; Ezek. 45:21.) Two circumstances led people to call both feasts by the same name.

1. Because the feast of *unleavened bread* immediately follows the Passover, at which only unleavened bread is also eaten, the day of the Passover itself could be considered *the first day of unleavened*

bread, although technically, the longer feast began on the evening of 14 Nisan (= 15 Nisan).

2. If Jews purified their houses of all leaven during the evening of 13 Nisan, or at the very latest, during the morning hours of 14 Nisan (Cf. Edersheim, *Temple*, 221), the 14th becomes virtually *the first day of unleavened bread*, even though, technically, it is Passover.

Even Josephus (*Ant.*, XIV,2,1; XVII,9,3; cf. XI,4,8) calls the feast of unleavened bread "Passover," which would make *the first day of unleavened bread* coincide with the Passover (cf. *Wars*, V,3,1), precisely as does Matthew. Josephus does this fully aware that the official *first day of unleavened bread* occurs on the day following (*Ant.* III,10,5). He even speaks of the feast of unleavened bread thus: "We keep a feast for EIGHT days, which is called . . . of unleavened bread" (*Ant.* II,15,1). This makes Passover virtually part of the feast of unleavened bread.

This popular, untechnical language explains why *the first day of unleavened bread* is clearly defined by Mark and Luke as "the day . . . on which the passover lamb had to be sacrificed." Both authors use imperfect tense to point to Jewish customary practice. Further, all the Synoptics describe it as the day on which Jesus intended to eat the Passover. Again, since no one—neither the disciples nor the host—questions Jesus' order to prepare the Passover meal at this particular time, one is led to the natural conclusion that this moment is the regular time. No one asks, "Why at this unusual time?" but, simply, "Where do you wish us to prepare?" Therefore, *the first day of unleavened bread*, according to Matthew, is Thursday, Nisan 14. This is because the events narrated from the Passover supper until Jesus' burial all occurred by normal Jewish reckoning, on Friday, Nisan 15, which began at sunset on the preceding day. (See Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:42; Luke 23:56; Matt. 27:62; 28:1.)

IS MATTHEW'S DATING WRONG?

Even a superficial reading of Matthew's chronological notices concerning events in Jesus' Last Week must lead to the conclusion that he reports a consistent, straightforward story: Jesus actually participated in the Passover supper at its normal time on the evening of

Nisan 14, was captured and tried that night by Jewish authorities, and, next day (Nisan 15) was tried and crucified by the Romans. He was in the grave by Friday evening (= beginning of Nisan 16), all day Saturday (= Nisan 16) and arose Sunday morning, Nisan 17. With this accounting the other two Evangelists are in total agreement.

Some scholars attempt to prove that John contradicts (or silently corrects) this view. Then they seek alternative solutions that would leave the Synoptics a semblance of historical respectability, notwithstanding this apparently undeniable error. Accordingly, say the scholars, Jesus ordered a supper on Nisan 13 that in many respects resembled the Passover, but, of course, without the lamb. At this meal He instituted the Lord's Supper. Consequently, then, being arrested that night, He died on the cross at the very hour the rest of the Jews were sacrificing their paschal lambs on Nisan 14. Thus, He fulfilled the Passover symbolism. But does this reconstruction fit the facts?

Several unprovable presuppositions are necessarily involved:

1. The Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, gradually, but erroneously, came to identify what occurred in the Upper Room with the Passover itself, whereas John supposedly corrects this erroneous connection. Their motive, it is supposed, was to give emphasis to Jesus' fulfillment of the Passover typology, by picturing Him as dying at the very hour the paschal lambs were slain.
 - a. However, why did the Synoptics so obviously place Jesus' death on the day AFTER what they mistakenly took for a Passover meal, instead of linking it with the Passover itself? They set Jesus' death too late for synchronizing the supposed typological symbolism with His death. Either they inexplicably failed to see this contradiction or such symbolism was not part of their belief or purpose.
 - b. Further, if the symbolic synchronization of Jesus' death with the Passover slaying were truly God's great design, surely the Gospel writers would have been alert and sympathetic to this nuance and as much as anyone else. Granted that they linked Christ's death with the slaying of the Passover, how explain how these intelligent writers could blunder so obviously as to connect Jesus' Last Supper with the actual Passover (i.e. 14 Nisan) in their histories, rather than with the night preceding His death, i.e. Nisan 13, as according to the theory, they should have done?

2. It is also assumed that the Evangelists did not intend to describe a regular Passover meal. Contrarily, their every phrase clearly affirms the traditional preparation for and participation in a common Passover supper. Absent is any inkling of deviation from the standard celebration, either on the part of Jesus, His disciples or their host. Simply underline the word "Passover" in the following texts for complete conviction of this fact: 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-10, 13, 15.
3. If Jesus were crucified at the very hour the Passover lambs were slain, how could we explain the multitude of Hebrews milling around the cross, when they should have been in the Temple most deeply involved in preparing their own lambs by sacrifice and in purchasing whatever was needed for their own celebration of the Passover that very evening? (Luke 23:48ff.; Matt. 27:55f.; Mark 15:40f.).
4. Affirmations in John are thought to militate against the version presented by the Synoptics:
 - a. *John 13:1* supposedly dates the Last Supper as before the regular Passover time. John simply affirms, however, that "Before the feast of Passover . . . Jesus loved" His disciples. It does not date the supper, because John next documents how Jesus acted at the feast "when the supper [finally] came" (John 13:2).
 - b. *John 13:29* When Judas left the Last Supper, the others supposed he went to purchase items essential to the feast. Some usually assume that no shops would have been open at that late hour, were it the regular Passover night. Again, they assume "for the feast" means "for the Passover" proper next day.
 - (1) However, "for the feast" means only for the total seven-day celebration, not strictly for the Passover. (See above.)
 - (2) How would the high holiness of the Passover stop merchants from desecrating it more than the solemn sacredness of the Temple would stop the priests from desecrating it by their operating their animal market with its precincts?
 - (3) Edersheim (*Temple*, 394; cf. his *Life*, II,508 and Append. XVII,786) citing the last two chapters of the Mishnah, notes that, even on the assumption that the Sabbath followed the Passover—a belief essential to some interpretations of John 19:31—

Though servile work was forbidden on the first Paschal day, the preparation of all needful provision for the feast

was allowed, and must have been the more necessary, as, on our supposition, it was followed by a Sabbath. Indeed, Talmudical law distinctly allowed the continuance of such preparation of provisions as had been commenced on the 'preparation day.' . . . Even now Rabbinical ingenuity can find many a way of evading the rigour of the Sabbath-law.

Therefore, anyone who assumes that absolutely no stores would be open hence nothing could be purchased on Passover evening must be able to prove it, against the conclusion of the disciples who were well acquainted with what could or could not be done in Jerusalem on Passover night. (See Keil- Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, II,439.) This greater freedom explains the disciples' reasoning. Edersheim (*Life*, II,508) argues even further:

The mention of these two suggestions by the disciples seems almost necessarily to involve, that the writer of the Fourth Gospel had placed this meal in the Paschal Night. Had it been the evening before, no one could have imagined that Judas had gone out during the night to buy provisions, when there was the whole next day for it, nor would it have been likely that a man should on any ordinary day go at such an hour to seek out the poor. But in the Paschal Night, when the great Temple-gates were opened at midnight to begin early preparations for the offering of . . . the festive sacrifice, which was not voluntary but of due, and the remainder of which was afterwards eaten at a festive meal, such preparations would be quite natural. And equally so, that the poor who gathered around the Temple, might then seek to obtain the help of the charitable.

c. *John 18:28* Because the Jews feared defilement that would prohibit them to "eat the Passover," many assume John means the regular Passover meal had not yet been eaten. This assumption is fallacious because:

- (1) "Passover" does not necessarily nor exclusively refer to the Passover meal proper, since *tò pàscha* has the following well-documented meanings: (See also Josephus' usages above.)

- (a) The Passover lamb itself (26:17, 19 = Mark 14:12, 14, 16; Luke 22:7f., 11, 13, 15)
- (b) All that concerns the meal itself (26:19; John 13:1f.)
- (c) Passover day itself (Exod. 12:14, 17; 13:3; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; John 12:1)
- (d) The entire Feast of Unleavened Bread is loosely called the Passover (cf. Ezek. 45:21; Luke 2:41 = Mark 14:12) and Passover is termed "first day of unleavened bread." The use of the expression "the feast" refers, not merely to the Passover Supper, but to all the festivities of the seven-day festival (John 13:29; 19:14; Matt. 27:15 = Mark 15:6). This use of "the feast" harmonizes with other examples. (Cf. John 4:45 = 2:23; Tabernacles was a seven-day feast yet termed "the feast." Cf. John 7:2, 10f., 14, 37; Passover, John 11:56; 12:12.)
- (e) The offerings of the Passover week. (See Edersheim cited below.)

So, the Pharisees were concerned about their ceremonial purity to eat other sacrificial meals of the Passover week. (Cf. Deut. 16:2f.; II Chron. 30:22.) So, John is in perfect harmony with prophetic precedent, since Ezekiel calls "the Passover, a feast lasting seven days" (Ezek. 45:21, NIV, esp. in Heb. and LXX). Thus, John refers to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, treating it as virtually part of the Passover.

- (2) Edersheim (*Temple*, 218) reminds that Hebrews must bring TWO sacrifices for the Passover: the regular Passover lamb and a peace- or fellowship-offering. (Cf. Exod. 23:14ff.; 34:18f.; Deut. 16:16f.; Lev. 23:37f.) Because this second offering was in addition to the Passover lamb, it could be offered anytime during the Passover week, but *must be eaten only by persons who were ceremonially clean* (Lev. 7:19-21). This explains the hypocritical preoccupation to remain outside Pilate's defiling quarters. *They could not have eaten their Passover peace-offerings, not the Passover lamb itself, in a state of defilement.*

To this it might be objected, "Was this fellowship offering ever called 'eating the Passover,' as John terms it?" Edersheim (*op. cit.*, 251f.; also 395) proves that this Chagigah ("festival offering") was specifically Paschal, citing a learned Jewish writer, Dr. Saalschutz, "The

whole feast and *all its festive meals* were designated as the Passover. See Deut. 16:2; comp. 2 Chron. 30:24 and 35:8, 9; *Sbach. 99b, Rosh ha Sh. 5a*, where it is expressly said, 'What is the meaning of the term Passover?' (Answer) 'The peace-offerings of the Passover.' Thus, "it is this second Chagigah which the Jews were afraid they might be unable to eat, if they contracted defilement in the judgment hall of Pilate" (Edersheim, *op. cit.*, 218).

- (3) Further, because defilement from whatever cause always ceased at sundown with washing (Lev. 11:24f., 28, 31; 15:1-27; 17:15, etc.), these Jews could never have feared defilement for the regular Passover Supper which is *always eaten after sundown*. Rather, they feared defilement that interfered with their sacrificing and eating the festive sacrifice (Chagigah) that very day, Nisan 15.
- d. *John 19:14* is rendered by some (cf. RSV), "Preparation FOR the Passover" which describes the day Jesus was tried, therefore, He partook of an early pseudo-Passover supper or did not respect the proper, normal date. But this unnecessarily forces John to contradict the Synoptics. However, this verse should be rendered (as NIV): "It was the day of Preparation OF Passover week" (*paraskeuè tou pàscha*). That *pàscha* here does not refer to the Passover meal, but to the entire week, is evident in that John already recorded that meal which the Synoptics unquestionably connected with "eating the Passover (lamb)."
- e. *John 19:31* is interpreted to mean that Jesus was crucified on the day used for preparation for the Passover which that year fell on the Sabbath making it "a high day."
- (1) But *Paraskeuè* actually says "Friday" as clearly as words can communicate. Not only does this term mean "preparation" in general, but, as a technical term for a day of the week, it means "Friday" (Rocci, 1422; Arndt-Gingrich, 627). Josephus (*Ant.*, XVI,6,2) clearly documented the day before the Sabbath as the day of preparation in the time of Augustus, i.e. a custom in use long before Jesus' death. John further defines the day meant, by his registering the Jews' urgency to remove the bodies from the crosses, lest they remain there "on the sabbath." Therefore, it was Friday. Their concern arose because "that sabbath was a high day," but

this does not prohibit its being Saturday. Again, John himself agrees that Jesus was in the tomb before sunset on Friday (John 19:42). Further, this Saturday was called a "high day," not because it was the first day of Passover, but the second, when the firstfruits offering was made. ("Sabbath" in Lev. 23:11 refers to the Passover rest, not Saturday. Cf. Josh. 5:11; see Keil-Delitzsch, *Pentateuch* II, 439-441.) No evidence exists to show that, in the year Jesus died, there were any coincidence between (a) *the first day of unleavened bread*, and (b) the weekly Sabbath, which would make that Saturday a special Sabbath, or "high day." Rather, that Saturday, Nisan 16 that year, was a special Sabbath, because the weekly Sabbath coincided with the firstfruits offering. (See Edersheim, *Temple*, 256ff.)

- (2) That Joseph of Arimathea could buy a linen shroud or that the women could prepare spices on Nisan 15 is not contrary to the hypothesis that the day was a festival involving Sabbath rest. (That Nisan 15 was Friday is proven by the women's resting next day, "on the sabbath according to the commandment.") So they were able to function on the Passover without any consciousness of having violated its sanctity (Luke 23:56). Obviously, the festival rest was not observed with the same rigor as normal Sabbath rest. Edersheim (*Temple*, 396) cites the Jerusalem Talmud that "expressly declares it lawful on Sabbaths and feast-days to bring a coffin, graveclothes and even mourning flutes—in short to attend to the offices for the dead—just as on ordinary days."

Therefore, is it not of utmost importance to seek out those facts that render possible a satisfying, yet uncontrived harmony between the Synoptics and John? Any supposed contradiction between them is the creature of intolerable ignorance and uncritical acceptance of pseudo-scholarly hypotheses that show a philosophical and moral bias toward driving a wedge between the Lord's witness.

5. The various movements of Jewish leaders and other people involved in Jesus' arrest, trials and crucifixion all on the night of gravest importance and high solemnity is no argument against believing the Last Supper identical with the Passover. Their mad zeal to crush the Galilean Prophet would completely explain the actions of men who, in trying Him, did not hesitate to violate their own criminal code and tread on the principles of truth and righteousness.

6. The silence of the Synoptics as to whether a lamb were present on the table can be no positive argument that there was none. Since they declaredly intend to describe a Passover meal, they may safely assume that an intelligent reader, who knows anything about a Passover, must also know that, *by definition*, such a supper must include the lamb that was sacrificed. (Cf. Mark 14:12 = Luke 22:7.)
- f. That Jesus observed the Passover regularly is further evidenced by the impossibility of His obtaining a lamb at any other time. Unless He made some exceptional omission of the lamb, of which deviation Scripture silence is complete, the presence of the Paschal lamb on the table meant that the meal was eaten on Nisan 14 at evening. In fact, the lamb, by definition, had to be sacrificed in the Temple and its blood applied to the altar by the priests. But as no Sadducean priest could be induced to comply with exceptional requests of "that renegade Nazarene," no Paschal lamb would be sacrificed at any time other than the traditionally appropriate time. Hence, no Passover supper could be observed complete with lamb, until the correct day for slaying it.
7. John's Gospel shows incidental agreement with the Synoptics with reference to the release of Barabbas. They say that customarily a prisoner was to be released "at the feast" (27:15 = Mark 15:6) and John specifies "at the Passover" (John 18:39). But this conversation between Pilate and the Jews occurred in the morning (27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66; 23:1; John 18:28; 19:14; cf. Mark 15:25). Therefore, Jesus' crucifixion and Barabbas' release could never have occurred on 14 Nisan, since the forenoon hours of that day could not be termed "the feast" nor "the Passover," except by a very loose use of language, because the feast does not begin until evening. Otherwise, Barabbas was officially released *before* the feast.

Consequently, Matthew's dating is neither wrong nor contradictory to that of John. (See Seth Wilson's "Was Jesus Crucified on Friday?" in Butler's *John II*, 405ff.)

The passover

26:18 And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. Evidently Jesus intended to remain

outside of Jerusalem (perhaps at Bethany?) while Passover preparations were going on. This accomplished several practical purposes: He risked no untimely clashes with the authorities and by His absence He did not distract worshipers from their own preparations. *Go . . . to such a man (pròs tòn deina)* is Matthew's summary of how the disciples were to find the proper house. (See PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for Mark and Luke's information.) It is extremely doubtful that Jesus mentioned the man's name, because Judas, by inquiry, could have learned his address and directed the police there before Jesus could finish teaching His men (John 13:31—17:26). For security reasons, therefore, Jesus did not name the man and thus effectually hid the address from Judas. Consequently, He could enjoy that last, earnestly desired Passover meal in an undisturbed privacy with His disciples.

And say unto him. The identity of this completely unknown householder cannot be even partially discovered from what Jesus told His men to say. *The Teacher saith. My time is at hand.* For Jesus, this was to be a bitter-sweet hour with its positive side (cf. John 2:4; 12:23; 13:1) and its painful crisis (John 17:1). In His mind, this phrase meant, "the schedule set by my Father for bringing to a successful conclusion my mission to redeem the world." Thus, Jesus proves how thoroughly conscious He was of the impending suffering (John 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20). However, *my time is at hand* is not so precise an expression of time that one must assume He thought His suffering were so near that the Paschal meal must be observed ahead of its proper time.

I keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. No irregular schedule is implied here; rather the contrary, because, were this some aberration from the norm, a great deal more explanation would be required to convince an unsympathetic householder to cooperate with the exceptional nature of the request. Therefore, it is quite likely that Jesus had already established some previous understanding with this person. That Jesus could describe the needed space as "my guest room" (Mark 14:14), and that it would be "furnished and ready" (Mark 14:15), points even more certainly to a previous agreement. In fact, because thousands of families would be seeking just such a room in Jerusalem for observing the Passover, it is more in keeping with Jesus' foresight to suppose that, to insure absolute tranquility for this Last Supper.

Speculation surrounding the man's identity ranges from people of means and potentially spacious houses like Nicodemus (John 3:1ff.; 19:39) and Joseph of Arimathea (27:57, 60; Luke 23:50), to the capacious residence of Mary, John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). Was this the same Upper Room utilized by the Twelve and others for prayer and temporary lodging later (Acts 1:13f.)? Nevertheless, the man's identity is as unknown to us as it was to Judas.

The hypothesis of a previous contact does not compromise Jesus' supernatural discernment that guided His two messengers to meet the man bearing the water-pot at precisely the right moment (Mark 14:13ff. = Luke 22:10f.).

26:19 And the disciples did as Jesus appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Peter and John entered Jerusalem, saw and followed the man indicated by Jesus. The gracious householder showed them spacious, second-floor room (Mark 14:15 = Luke 22:12). Did Jesus mean that it would be furnished with cushions to sit on and a low table, or that it had already been inspected for leaven? Perhaps the Apostles were to do this latter task before bringing the other elements for the feast such as water, basin and towel (John 13:4f.).

Merely because nothing in this entire account is ever said about a paschal lamb does not prove that there were none, or that Peter and John could not have procured it, or that Jesus deliberately celebrated the Passover one day earlier than the official date. That they could have procured the lamb is obvious for several reasons:

1. The Law required that the lamb be selected on 10 Nisan (Exod. 12:3, 6). This means that the lambs all be set aside on Sunday, the day Jesus made His Messianic entry into Jerusalem. Would the necessity to select the lamb four days early be obviated in Jesus' time by purchasing directly from Temple stock preselected and approved and kept among Temple sacrificial animals until purchased by Passover buyers? (Cf. John 2:15.) However, it is morally unlikely that Jesus, who severely condemned the market in the Temple proper, would send His men there to take advantage of its convenience, unless, of course, that markets were by now re-located somewhere outside.
2. That the two Apostles could have slain the lamb at the regular time is completely reasonable, because of the vast assembly of Hebrews who must crowd the slaying of their lambs into the afternoon hours of Nisan 14. Thousands of lambs were normally slain

between three and five o'clock (*Wars*, VI,9,3) by hundreds of priests with the assistance of Levites who skinned them (II Chron. 35:1-19). It is only remotely possible that one of the apostles would be recognized by any unfriendly priest assisting with the slaying. Contrarily, were there no friendly priest or Levite to whom they might turn?

Unless the owner of the Upper Room furnished everything, the two disciples would need to procure unleavened bread, wine, the bitter herbs and the fruit sauce and roast the lamb.

II. CELEBRATION OF THE LAST SUPPER (26:20-25)

26:20 **Now when even was come, he was sitting at meat with the twelve disciples.** The time is not Thursday evening, 14 Nisan, the beginning of Nisan 15. Presumably, Peter and John's preparations occupied the better part of the day, so they did not rejoin the others until finished. Mark (14:17) notes that Jesus did not even come near the Upper Room until after sunset, perhaps choosing to remain outside of Jerusalem all day for the above-mentioned practical considerations. At the Passover hour everyone else in and around Jerusalem would be deeply absorbed in his own participation in the Passover meal.

Matthew begins his narration where *He was sitting at meat* already. Before this, however, the disciples had bickered among themselves about their relative importance, perhaps as they took their places at the table (Luke 22:24f.; however, Luke's account may not be in strictly chronological order). Then, Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them the meaning of true greatness of humility and service (John 13:1-20).

He was sitting, rather, reclining (*anékrito*) Roman-style on a couch, or in the Oriental custom, on cushions arranged on the floor spoke-like around a low (U-shaped?) table in the center of which the food was placed. The original Passover institution required Israelites to eat the meal standing (Exod. 12:11). By custom, however, this detail had been abandoned to bring the feast's observance into line with Israel's Egypt, their enjoyment of security in the Promised Land seemed to dictate that they partake of the meal comfortably sitting or reclining.

With the twelve disciples means in the absence of many others. The women who came with Him from Galilee (27:55) and the other men were apparently scattered out over Jerusalem as guests in private homes or camped out on the hills surrounding the City.

The betrayer betrayed

26:21 **And as they were eating, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.** Into the phrase, *as they were eating*, Matthew compressed several incidents that occurred before this. (See PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY; cf. John 13:1-20; Luke 22:14-18, 24-30.)

Verily I say unto you gives this statement a deep solemnity that arises out of Jesus' own deep, spiritual agitation (John 13:21). In effect, then, Jesus faced a multifaceted crisis:

1. He must warn the disciples that the impending shock was no surprise to Him, so that they would be the better braced for it when it came (John 13:11, 19). Yet He must not tell them too much, lest they block Judas' freedom to act and thus hinder God's plan.
2. Foreknowledge of Judas' betrayal did not diminish the pain for Jesus. He is fully aware that one of His own men is under contract to betray Him. But He loves that man. Now He must put words to His mounting concern for him, revealing enough to be effective yet without saying too much.
3. He must warn Judas that He knows all, giving him the opportunity to back out while there is time. Yet He knows that Scripture portrays the betrayer as His own intimate friend. So, He cannot force Judas to repent without violating his freedom of choice.
4. Yet, in some way, He must create a spiritually receptive environment in which He could proceed with the last, vital instruction. Until Judas left, perhaps Jesus felt the oppressive spirit that evilly moved the man to act.

So, even if in His humility He washed Judas' feet along with the others'. He must now distinguish him from the rest. But this revelation is not easy for Jesus because of these pressures (John 13:21).

One of you shall betray me. Study how Jesus treated Judas, and stand in awe of God's respect for human freedom. The Lord did not expose him by name, violently attack Him or wither him with supernatural power. His arsenal of appeals was multiple and varied: He began by shocking him with the heinousness of what he was contemplating, a move that was calculated to catch Judas completely off-guard. Then He appealed to Judas' sense of fellowship and love. Last, He appealed to Judas' self-defensive instinct by a stern warning well calculated to stir his fear of God. Granted, none of these appeals turned the man around, but it was because Jesus completely respected

his freedom of choice. In no case did Jesus coerce Judas even to save him.

What does this revelation say about Jesus? Even this prediction of the betrayal documents Jesus' confidence in the resurrection. Of what value would it be for a permanently dead Christ to vindicate His true identity by revealing that He knew all along which course events would take? To what purpose assert that He was able to elude the cross, but consciously chose to die thereon, only to remain buried forever? Merely to glorify a one-way martyrdom? If He knew how to avoid death by eluding His betrayer, but was trapped in full knowledge, would He not be judged a fool, if there were no resurrection to free Him from death's clutches? Thus, even though the announcement of the betrayal shook these men, it was nothing compared to the supreme horror of His crucifixion. But when these events had all become history and Jesus stood triumphant on life's side of the grave, what faith-grounding energy they could derive from the knowledge that Jesus saw it all ahead of time and, despite, the temptations to avoid it, and at great risks to Himself, chose to go through it anyway!

What does this revelation mean to the Church? Just as Judas was at the table of Jesus Christ, so rogue disciples, in the role of believer, continue to appear at the Lord's Table, so we must not be scandalized whenever and in whomever it appears.

Doubt mixed with hope

26:22 **And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord?** Unable to believe their ears, these men are stunned, grieved. Their distressed reaction cries out the pain of their soul. They are *sorrowful*, not only because Jesus would be betrayed, but because one of them would do this unthinkable, cowardly deed. Regaining their voices, they formulate their hesitant, incredulous question in Greek form that expects a negative answer, "It is not I, is it, Lord?" They hope against hope for a negative answer. Since the Lord did not indicate when the betrayal would occur, they may not even have connected His words with that very night. (Contrast 26:31, 34: "this night.") Perhaps they believed that He referred to some distant future when they might possibly be tempted to betray Him. This explains why their reaction reflects a distressed self-doubt. Otherwise, they could have categorically denied any intention to be

traitor to Him that very night. Instead, *they began to say unto him every one, "one after another"* (Mark 14:19; *heis katà heis*).

1. By this keen sensitivity and genuine self-doubt, they really proved their innocence and deep loyalty to Jesus. Pricked by memories of their lack of graciousness, their weakness of love, the extent of their selfishness and the reality of their doubts, their own conscience accused them. Painfully aware of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, they distrust themselves. But they prove their discipleship real as they bare their soul for His scrutiny and trust His testimony both to the fact just announced and to the identity of the guilty one. Better question one's own maturity and loyalty than doubt the Lord's word!
2. It is a mark of the beauty of their humility that each lays himself open to accusation. Not one of them questioned the loyalty of his fellow apostle, even by insinuation. Peter will break this rule later (26:33). But for now the group is compact, each disciple searching his own heart.

Out of their self-examination arises two observations:

1. It illustrates how thoroughly Judas had succeeded in hiding his plans and even his mentality from his brother-apostles. They saw nothing unusual in Judas' character or talk that would arouse their suspicions. But Jesus read the secrets of Judas' heart.
2. But that the other disciples had discerned nothing unusual in Judas may actually depict to what extent they too shared his false, carnal Messianism. (See notes on 26:14; cf. Acts 1:6; Matt. 20:20ff.; Luke 22:24ff.) This may simply indicate how close to disaster they too walked, were it not their greater confidence in Jesus!

Each dismayed, *Is it I, Lord?*, should have shaken Judas with powerful force, because the betrayer knew the innocence of each man. Finding himself in the moral minority could have persuaded him to repudiate his plan. But the innocence that drove the others to question Jesus does not motivate Judas, so he does not speak up at this point. He may be taken aback that Jesus has somehow uncovered his plot, but for reasons of his own, he cannot be greatly distressed that such a betrayal is really also a denial of his discipleship. (See on 26:14.)

Dare we ask ourselves with the same painful objectivity what kind of situation or temptations would ever undermine our resolve to serve

Jesus, sufficiently to compromise our loyalty to Him? This humility is the only appropriate spirit with which to approach the Lord's Supper. Hope as we might that we be equal to the severe testing of any future situation, no one can predict with certainty that he shall stand up under fire.

The outrageousness of treason

26:23 And he answered and said, He that dipped his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. Rather than use knives and forks to eat, they followed Oriental manners by dipping their food from the common dish with their hands. Some believe *the dish* He refers to was the *charoseth*, a dish of thick spicy sweet-sour fruit sauce composed of figs, dates, raisins, vinegar and other ingredients.

It is evident, however, that Jesus has not yet directly answered anyone's heart-wrenching question. Although *he that dipped* (*ho embapsas*) appears to point to one past act, as if Judas had just done so, the Lord refers, not to an act just completed, but to the fact without reference to time. (Time, per se, is not a necessary part of the sense of the aorist participle, the emphasis being primarily on the act itself, as opposed to a continuing process.) Because many were dipping in the bowl with Jesus during that meal, the dipping would not in itself unmask the traitor. However, probably not all of the Twelve would *dip his hand with [Jesus] in the dish*, as there might be several such dishes on the table for that many people. So, this revelation decidedly limits the list of potential betrayers to those dipping directly with Him, a fact that even more decisively highlights the closeness of this fellowship. Further, if, as Edersheim (*Life*, II,493f.) pictures it, Judas is seated on Jesus' left and John on His right, it would be an easy matter for Judas to *dip his hand with [Jesus] in the dish*. It also explains how Jesus could easily be talking directly with Judas without others hearing (26:25) and then hand him the sop (John 13:25ff.).

Jesus' purpose is not merely to point to the mechanics of eating nor specifically to the seating order at the table. Nor is this a whispered aside to John, as is His later remark (John 13:26), because nothing is said here that would distinguish Judas from the others. Rather Jesus' semi-enigmatic response intends to rouse the moral indignation and stir the conscience of everyone present. This response underscores the moral inconceivableness of the betrayer's act. "He is my table

companion, sharing the deepest bonds of fellowship." The very instrument of betrayal, "the hand of him who betrays me," was not only ready to grasp the opportunity to be false to Jesus, but even at that moment was "on the table with" Him (Luke 22:21).

1. He pushes every disciple to distrust his own heart and loyalty against the presumption that would cause the failure of nearly everyone that very night. Everyone of them, in a sense, *dipped his hand . . . in the dish* then "deserted Him and fled" (26:56).
2. He focuses on the underhandedness with which He, the Lord of glory, would be betrayed to suffer. To the Oriental, to eat together is to form a bond of fellowship for which those who thus participate should be willing to give their lives to protect that of the other covenanters. The ultimate treachery, as Jesus hammers it out, is that one would arise from *this* meal, in which he had shared from the identical dish, and go out to repudiate this covenant of friendship and be traitor to Him.
3. Jesus also demonstrates how thoroughly He Himself is master of this crisis. He is not merely tightening the accusing circle around Judas. His purpose is didactic apologetics: "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (John 13:18ff.).
4. By appealing to the bond of fellowship to which Judas was theoretically committed by eating with Jesus, He intends to rouse Judas' conscience to grasp the enormity of what he planned. Not only does He warn Iscariot that he is found out, He also longs to save him, if possible. For Judas to resist the pressure of his conscience will demonstrate how far he was beyond recall. In fact, his rationalizations (see on 26:14) probably justified his eating with his Victim, because, if we have rightly understood him, he did not admit that Jesus would be hurt in the final life-and-death crisis. Consequently, Judas could see no violation of hospitality, table fellowship or implied friendship. *For Judas, therefore, Jesus was not Lord, nor His appeals or arguments final. Judas still reigned over his heart, not Jesus.*

26:24 The Son of man goeth, even as it is written of him: but woe unto that man through whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born. All the disciples needed to come to terms with the true purpose behind Jesus' suffering. Their mistaken sorrow and shock were caused by a wrong view of God's program in which there was no place for a butchered Christ. So He must assure them of two things:

1. *The Son of man goeth* to His death. This is a conscious decision to which no human being is forcing Him. They cannot snatch His life from Him. Rather, He actually intends to lay down His life (John 10:17f.; 15:13; Rom. 5:7). By establishing these priorities, higher even than self-preservation itself, He explains both to Judas and the Eleven why He was making no move to stop this terrible deed.
2. *Even as it is written of him.* His death would not spell the unaccountable victory of evil, but, rather, the marvelous success of God's set purpose. Luke (22:22) has: "as it has been determined." This sovereign decree was well-documented ahead of time by the prophets. (Cf. Isa. 53; Ps. 22; Dan. 9:26f.; Zech. 12:10ff.; 13:1.) These the disciples were far too reluctant to believe. (Cf. Luke 24:25ff., 44ff.; John 20:9.) What is *written of him must take place!* (Cf. Luke 22:37; Matt. 26:54, 56.) Our Savior, God's Son, plants His feet firmly on the Old Testament as upon a firm foundation that can never be shaken. For Him, its message, which centers in His own Messiahship, is the revelation of God's determination to carry out His program to head up everything in Christ. Jesus is unafraid to say this, even if those Old Testament prophecies predict His shame and suffering.

Woe unto that man . . . good were it for that man if he had not been born. This sentence sounds so drastic a pronouncement that Judas' sin is often blown out of proportions, as if we common mortals could never match his consummate wickedness. But, elsewhere, Jesus endeavors, with the same vigorous language to impress upon every disciple that all arrogance, self-satisfaction and indifference toward others deserves the severest measures, even death (18:5-9)! Non-existence is to be preferred to sin! (Did this concept lurk in Judas' mind to become the twisted autosuggestion that led to his suicide?) Further, if Judas be thought "a common sinner," (see notes on 26:14), what does this ominous sentence of awful judgment awaiting him mean? Why was Judas' sin so wrong? These questions find their solution in Jesus' warning: *Woe to that man.* In this *woe* are two sentiments:

1. FOREBODING JUDGMENT. While there is not even a breath of personal animosity in Jesus' heart, His sorrowful outcry is founded on the curse that God must pronounce upon such a sinner.
 - a. Judas sinned, because it is a crime to turn an innocent man over to the violence of his fiercest enemies from whom he could never receive just treatment and who are unquestionably determined

to kill him. This is objectively wrong, whatever Judas' subjective reasons might be (cf. 26:14).

- b. Further, it is objectively wrong because of the unspeakable wickedness of any disciple who dares believe himself wiser than the King Himself to organize and manipulate the program and progress of the Kingdom of God to achieve his own ends, whatever they be or whatever his supposed motive.
- c. Judas sinned, because Jesus here exposed and condemned Judas' masterplan to betray Him. This final warning pushes Judas to realize that, if the betrayal now goes through, he must now sin with full awareness. Now there can be no extenuation of guilt nor excuse. That Judas bull-headedly plunged on to this diabolical appointment must mean, then, that he considered his own rationale far more convincing than Christ's attempted deterrent. This is the moral failure typical of most of us. Whether meant as open rebellion or not, Judas hereby defied the wisdom of Jesus Christ!
- d. Judas' sin is objectively wrong, because he did it deliberately, regardless of the use God planned to make of his treachery. The man acted freely. If interviewed about his scheme before Jesus' arrest, Judas would probably openly claim personal credit for the genius of his plot. Nowhere could he have discerned any compulsion from God. Thus, not even Judas would have blamed God for this severe condemnation, because he fully expected something quite different to develop from his plotting. (See on 27:3ff.) Nor is his sin transformed by the fact that God knew he would do it and permitted him to go ahead. God's secret purpose to utilize the man's falseness for His own glory does not change the objective nature of the crime freely chosen by Judas. That Jesus is destined by Divine sovereignty to be betrayed does not in any way minimize the responsibility of His betrayer nor justify him in any sense, merely, because he made God's plan function—any more than Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar or Caiaphas could be excused for their hardness of heart. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 226) rightly argued:

This shows that a man who, by a wicked act, brings about the purpose of God, bears the same guilt as though God had no purpose in it. It is his own act and motive for which he is judged, and not the results which God may have intended to bring out of his act.

2. SADNESS MINGLED WITH LOVING MERCY. Jesus' awareness that with His disciple, Judas, He shall fail, notwithstanding His last impassioned appeals to turn him, wrings from Him this wail of sorrow. If there is any anger in Jesus, it is not so much against Judas the man, as against the superstition, ignorance, selfishness and resultant evil in him that makes him impervious to the last heart-broken pleas to reconsider. Jesus' sadness may also be wrung out of Him, because He foresees the unbearable self-reproach that would engulf Judas when he finally grasped the horrible impact of his deed.

The Lord's dire warning actually treats Judas with merciful indulgence by effectually furnishing the traitor a motive, *hence also a chance*, to back out of the conspiracy. Let the Bible texts affirm that the Messiah must suffer and even suggest that a close friend betray Him (Ps. 41:9; John 13:18), but let not dear Judas decide to be that man!

Good were it for that man if he had not been born. But Judas had been born, and his only escape now is by repentance. Nothing in sovereign predestination demanded that *he* be the apostate apostle. God's program would have been fully carried out, even if Judas backed out! Prophecy only said, "Someone." Let that turncoat be someone else! Jesus' solemn sentence must silence everyone who would defend Judas. For, from this point on, to become Judas' defense lawyer is to commit the same sin of which Iscariot himself was guilty: presumption to argue against the Lord's judgment.

Jesus' warning should have shaken the man to core, because He has just affirmed, "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). Although the Lord had not consciously selected Iscariot to groom him for treachery, at the same time He made no miscalculation in choosing him, as if He could somehow be taken unawares by Judas' scheming.

On what basis could Jesus reasonably admonish the man, if He knew all along that this disciple would not submit to His will? Should not Jesus have simply given up without trying? This quandary faces every disciple who must feel the attraction of doubting whether a given reprobate can be brought to repentance. But that Jesus *did* admonish Judas urges us to go ahead and try. Further, He acted in harmony with God and His prophets who also mercifully attempted the impossible. (Study Gen. 4:6f.; Prov. 29:1; Isa. 5:1-7; 6:9f.; Ezek. 3:18ff.; 18:30ff.; 33:1ff. esp. vv. 30-33; Luke 13:6-9, 34f.; Acts 20:25-31.) So, ironically, even from Jesus' full consciousness of His

own failure to persuade Judas, we may draw strength to labor incessantly to win others, despite the ever-increasing odds against their conversion. Even while using every appropriate persuasion to lead them to repent, we may not force their will. And, in the end, their loss will grieve us, but never so greatly as did the loss of Judas to our Lord. But He thoroughly understands what we undergo when we fail, because He has been there too on the night when Judas walked out eternally unpersuaded.

The betrayer's bold bluff

26:25 And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said, Is it I, Rabbi? He saith unto him, Thou hast said. While others questioned themselves, for Judas to remain silent would have been damning evidence of his complicity. Steeling himself, therefore, he risks exposure. However, if, as we believe (cf. notes on 26:14), Judas felt no malevolence toward Jesus personally, but, rather, a certain superiority, his question here is, from his point of view, neither shameful nor defiant mockery. Rather, as he reflects on Jesus' revelation that a turncoat is in their midst, he may be thinking, "You may call me a traitor today, but tomorrow you will thank me for what I am doing for you!" Further, Judas' curiosity may have been pricked by Jesus' startling announcement, so he now tests the quantity and quality of His intelligence source to discover how much the Rabbi really knows. Or is He merely guessing? So, Judas' question is not wholly false, even if it is a feint.

Is it I, Rabbi? While the others called Jesus, "Lord," Judas, alone terms Him, *Rabbi*. Could he not bring himself to confess Jesus as "Lord"? Although to call Him their "Teacher" was a mark of high respect and true discipleship (John 13:13f.), how very far *Teacher* is from confessing Him Lord (Rom. 10:9; 14:9; I Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11)! This title for Judas is really hypocritical, because in this very moment he was unwilling to let Jesus teach him! For him, Jesus was neither really Teacher nor Lord.

Not asked together with the pained questions of the others (v. 22), but after Jesus' stern warnings (v. 23f.), Judas' bold question appears too isolated to have escaped the notice of everyone. But in the confusion of the general debate that arose, while others continued asking, Jesus continued to talk. (Cf. John 13:22; Luke 22:23.) Then, Judas, sensing that continued silence would be damning, speaks.

He saith unto him, Thou hast said. Did Jesus really say this, or is this merely Matthew's summary of the incident related by John 13:23-27, in the sense that Jesus answered Judas positively only by handing him the sop? (So, Godet, *John*, 255.) While this signal gesture was intelligible to John, unless Judas (and potentially others) heard the signal, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel, when I have dipped it" (John 13:26), it would not have been understood by Judas to whom the answer here in Matthew was supposedly given. Therefore, Jesus actually spoke to Judas to reveal His supernatural insight into Judas' perfidy. Then later, when Peter gestured to John, He told John the signal, but to no one else.

Although some believe that *Thou hast said* means "Yes" in the same way the American expression, "You said it!" affirms so definitely, several factors must be taken into consideration:

1. Jesus' answer was not heard in the confusion. Everyone was talking, because they began to question one another which of them it was that would do this" (Luke 23:23). Otherwise, had these words been distinctly heard in that electric atmosphere, the other disciples could have pounced on the traitor instantly. Perhaps Jesus whispered His positive answer.
2. Further, if they heard Him, they may not have believed the betrayal imminent, supposing that this revelation referred to some distant future, not to the impending crisis that very night. Because they could not believe that Jesus would die soon, despite His many warnings, they would even postpone the eventual betrayal to some hopefully distant day.
3. However, it may be doubted whether this expression is so precise and definite as would appear from its use elsewhere (cf. 26:64). While not intentionally evasive, this response mildly demurs at the formulation of a statement made by the other party in the conversation. Hence, there is no need to suppose that, had anyone heard Jesus say this, he would instantly recognize Judas for the traitor. Rather, Jesus' less-than-definite expression, "The words are yours," might have even appeared to deny Judas' treachery. "Not I, but *you*, Judas, said it." Thus, whoever overheard it may have judged Jesus' answer too vague for certainty. But a meaningful look of Jesus may convince Judas that He really does know about Judas' plot, but will not tell, leaving Judas really free to decide his own course.

That this response of Jesus is not a precise answer exposing Judas is proven by the fact that no one correctly guessed why Jesus sent him out from the Passover (John 13:28f.). Because *thou hast said* is all that Matthew records, since he omitted the dipping of the sop, we must conclude that Jesus did, in a sense, commit Himself to a positive answer. Nonetheless, because of the foregoing considerations, it may be that this commitment is much clearer in light of subsequent events than it was when originally uttered by Jesus there at the table.

However, one disciple, John, did learn the traitor's identity, not directly nor verbally, but by a gesture (John 13:23ff.). Jesus dipped a bit of bread into the sauce and handed it directly to Judas. Some see this gesture as treating Judas as an honored guest on the part of a careful host, a last, loving attempt of Jesus to break through Judas' reserve of determination to carry out his plan. Jesus thus directed this last appeal to all that was possibly yet loyal in the man. Contemporaneously, by this exquisite gesture of oriental hospitality. He hid Judas even more effectively from all others. But Iscariot's brazenness remained impenetrable, leading Jesus to hurry him out into the night to get on with his demoniacal business. Still, John could not react swiftly enough to block him, because the Lord deliberately hurried the man out before anyone really grasped what was happening. Perhaps John did not react in harmony with that explosive revelation, because he saw that it had been Jesus Himself who sent Judas beyond their reach.

The fact that John alone records the dipping of the sop specifically points to a Passover meal. "In the Passover Haggadah the Passover supper is distinguished from all other meals in several ways including 'on all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice'" (Barrett, *John*, 373; cf. Mishnah, *Pesach*, 10,4). Further, that John alone records that when Judas left "it was night" (John 13:30), points to the Passover meal, not some other, because, while any other supper meal could be eaten at any time from the later afternoon to early evening, "the Passover-offering could be eaten only during that night and only until midnight" (*Zebahim* 5.8 cited by Barrett, *John*, 374).

Judas, strongly urged by the authorities not to precipitate the crisis but to wait until "after the feast in the absence of the multitude" (cf. Luke 22:6), now finds himself discovered. Compelled by his fear of retaliation from the others, if they learn he is to act this very night,

and hurried out by Jesus, he dashed to his fellow plotters to obtain the necessary men to arrest Jesus. Thus, before they really wanted it, he hastened the crisis, making Jesus' arrest and sufferings to occur during the Passover feast contrary to their earlier prudential judgment to wait. But this precipitation of the events began with Jesus' quiet, skillful move that sent Judas forth to his ungodly, morally mad mission. This resulted in the fulfillment, right on schedule, not of the rulers' careful plotting, but of God's eternal plan. Even in this detail Jesus showed Himself Master of men and circumstances, and, bless God, fully Master of Himself!

III. INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (26:26-30)

THE BROKEN BREAD

26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed and brake it; and he gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. The expression, *as they were eating*, by its very ambiguity does not permit us to know at what stage in the Paschal Supper Jesus established His memorial. Edersheim (*Life*, II,510) is undoubtedly right to affirm that "it almost seems as if the Evangelists had intended, by their studied silence in regard to the Jewish Feast, to indicate that with this celebration and the new Institution the Jewish Passover had for ever ceased." Further, Matthew does not indicate when Judas went out. John, who alone reports his departure, does not document the Lord's Supper. So, the final proof is lacking whether Judas partook of it.

However, it is more probable that Jesus did not confuse matters unnecessarily by mixing the exposure and expelling the betrayer with the vital instruction on the Lord's Supper, since the disciples' minds would have wavered back and forth from their consternation about betrayal to their concentration on Jesus' death. But even this is not conclusive, since our own self-examination easily accomplishes this every Sunday as, at the Lord's table, we contemplate our own betrayals of discipleship.

Again, because of the divided manuscript evidence in Luke, scholars are divided concerning the order of the Lord's Supper institution: did the cup or bread come first, or were there two of the traditionally four Passover cups involved in Luke's account, one mentioned before the Lord's Supper and one

during its institution? Two answers are possible to deny the unwarranted assumption that Matthew and Mark are at insoluble variance with Luke:

1. While the available manuscript evidence of Luke is definitely debatable, there are valid reasons for considering it virtually certain. (See the controversy even among textual editors in *Textual Commentary*, 173.) The longer form of Luke's text containing the cup-bread-cup order appears to enjoy the best manuscript documentation and best reasons for its inclusion.
2. There are affinities between Luke's account and that of Paul (cf. Luke 22:19f. with I Cor. 11:23ff.), which, according to some, argue that Paul and Luke share the same oral tradition. Nevertheless, Paul, when reporting the essential facts of the Supper's institution, *always* follows the order: "eat/drink," "bread/cup," and "body/blood," never inverting either of these elements. (I Cor. 10:16f., 21 does not relate the Passover event.) Therefore, if Luke intended to transcribe the tradition as he received it originally from Paul, the original autograph of Luke likely had the rendering given by the majority of textual witnesses: "cup-bread-cup," the first of these cups being related to the Passover, not the Lord's Supper.

Jesus took bread, not loaves of raised dough, but the flat, unleavened bread of the Passover meal. *And blessed*: to give God thanks for any food is virtually to bless it, since thanksgiving consecrates it (I Tim. 4:4f.). In this sense, *blessed* (*eulogésas*) and "gave thanks" (*eucharistésas* 26:27; cf. 14:19 with John 6:11; see Mark 8:6, 7) amount to the same thing, hence are practically synonymous. While undoubtedly Jesus always gave thanks for food, His doing so at the Passover was also traditional, not specifically commanded by God as an essential part of this ordinance. Why is it that He *brake it*? Although breaking for others after giving thanks was Jesus' habit (cf. Luke 24:30, 35), Edersheim (*Temple*, 241f.) considers the act a normal traditional part of the Paschal ceremony.

Take, eat; this is my body. Because it was *bread* that He broke and gave to them, calling it His *body*, He pointed to Himself as the Bread of life that would nourish them with eternal life. (See John 6:53ff.) *Take, eat*: this symbolic enactment teaches them that His life and its power over death must be appropriated by each disciple in a way so intimate and personal that it may be compared to the assimilation of

food whereby its nutritional power becomes part of the disciple, giving him the power of Christ's life. When taken literally, His language sounds like mystical nonsense. Nevertheless, the implication is that Jesus' life, as this is expressed in His concrete historical incarnation is literally our only life. He really is the only source and sustainer of our physical and spiritual life (Col. 1:17; 3:1ff.; Phil. 1:21; John 1:4; 15:1-11). But this life is not merely our juridical acceptability with the Father, but our personal, conscious feeding our souls on Christ Himself.

The shared cup

26:27 And he took a cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. Both Paul (I Cor. 11:25; and Luke 22:20) agree that the institution of the cup took place at the conclusion of the Passover meal. *He gave thanks!* Aside from the traditional blessing of the cup (cf. I Cor. 10:16), how could He sincerely feel like giving thanks to God for the somber meaning of *that cup*? He gave thanks, because He thoroughly believed in the final victory of the program of God whereby the Father would bring joy out of shame and death. He could be grateful, because He believed!

In English, *Drink ye all of it* sounds like "Drain the cup," whereas Jesus said, *All of you drink of it (piete ex autoû pântes)*. This *all of you* stands in evident contrast to the general Roman Catholic practice of forbidding the cup of anyone but the priest, but Jesus emphasized the common sharing. *All of you* does not prove that Judas was present, as if "the Twelve" were addressed as a yet unbroken group, for Jesus could reasonably address this to those yet present and faithful to Him, though Judas be now gone.

Rather, His point is another: unity in the fellowship. As each disciple drinks from the cup he shares not only with every other who does so, but he thereby commits himself to that fellowship. He drinks together with others in the memory of Jesus' redemptive death, thus committing himself to share in the meaning of that sacrifice. This also involves our moral obligation to the rest of the family. More than any other, this must be thought of as "the cup of brotherhood." Western Christians must recapture what it means for people to "drink together," notwithstanding the ungodly abuses of this concept among drunkards. Drinking together constitutes a pledge of mutual loyalty. This simple act practically expresses an oath of

allegiance to live in fellowship with, to defend and die for those with whom one drinks. In the Lord's Supper it is with Jesus Christ and His Church that we drink! There can be no higher allegiance, no more precious fellowship, no more sacred commitment than this. As we eat and drink, honoring the memory of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, we commit ourselves to hate sin and abandon it to express our loyalty to Him. We solemnly consecrate ourselves to the promotion and progress of all that is precious to Him.

In this light, then, there could be little doubt that He also drank from this same cup. Luke's citation, "I shall never eat . . . drink . . . until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:15, 18) is to be interpreted in harmony with Matthew 26:29, i.e. after this sad celebration of the Last Passover, He would no longer participate in the Passover itself until its full significance were realized in the Kingdom. (See on 26:29.)

26:28 **For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins.** After the disciples all drank from the cup (Mark 14:23f.), Jesus furnished this threefold explanation of the cup's symbolism:

1. *This is . . . blood of the covenant.* This entire sentence is a highly compressed reference to the long-awaited arrival of the "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31ff.) which God, through the Messiah (Isa. 42:6; 53:12 death) would make with His people and whereby He would completely forgive their sins, absorbing its penalty Himself. But even such a *covenant* could not be ratified without the shedding of *blood*, as was the ancient Mosaic pact (Exod. 24:8). Because ancient covenants were considered a life-and-death matter, they were sealed with blood, because the life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). Failure to keep them spelled the forfeiture of the transgressor's life. So, a covenant with a holy God that offers forgiveness of sins and fellowship could not be established without the judicially appropriate substitutionary shedding of blood for the sinner (Heb. 9:22). So, by saying, *the blood of the covenant* (*tò haîma . . . tês diathêkes*). Jesus associated this new symbolism with the ancient words of Exodus 24:8 pronounced at Sinai. By using this Mosaic terminology, Jesus deliberately interprets the Mosaic institution as having no meaning except as it finds its perfect final fulfillment in Him. God has never had but one grand scheme of redemption,

even though this was expressed in various covenantal relationships. The initial phases only prepared for the final, perfect *covenant* established by Jesus Christ.

Further, because the Sinaitic pact united the many tribes of Israel into a holy nation, a people for God's own possession with a mission to accomplish in world history (Exod. 18:4f.), it would appear that Jesus intends that the new covenant create the new Israel of God from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues to have the same privilege and purpose. (Cf. I Peter 2:9f.; Gal. 6:16). In this light, then, the Lord's Supper becomes a celebration of this new brotherhood, for it points not merely to a personal covenant with God, but also to the covenantal creation of the new people of God. (See Paul's use of this concept: I Cor. 10:17 and perhaps 11:29.)

2. *This is my blood . . . which is poured out.* His expression excludes natural death and points to the blood-shedding of a sacrificial victim. So saying, Jesus depicts Himself as God's Lamb. (Cf. John 1:29; Heb. 7:27.) His self-giving institutes a new relationship which makes the Mosaic covenant obsolete.
3. *For many unto remission of sins.* His death as a substitutionary sacrifice was the purpose of His coming (20:28). This phrase gives the clearest sense to the suffering of Jesus. His mission is neither simply to teach pious moral doctrine or eschatological visions, nor suffer martyrdom as a supreme model of fidelity to duty. His purpose was to establish a covenant between man and God in the only way it could be: by *blood* which achieves *remission of sins*. By beginning with elements of the Passover, He drew attention to the exodus, no more from the slavery of Egypt, but from slavery to sin. Consequently, participation in the Supper must involve our renewal of our own individual total self-commitment to God's program to eliminate all sin in ourselves and in others, for in Jesus' death God's passionate hatred for sin and His passionate love for sinners meet.

For many may be an intentional echo of Isaiah 53:11f. that pictures the Messiah's vicarious death in the place of sinners. He did not give His one innocent life for the forgiveness of but one person—one life for one life—, but for all humanity (John 12:32; cf. Paul's argument, Rom. 5:12-20).

Unto remission of sins does not connect forgiveness with participation in the Lord's Supper, as if He said, "Drink . . . for the

remission of sins," so that whoever missed the Supper for whatever reason could not be forgiven until the next occasion for partaking. Rather, the participation is a celebration of a past fact and renews our confidence that we have been forgiven by His blood. All the disciples who partook that night were already "clean" before Jesus instituted this Supper (John 13:10f.; 15:3).

Whereas Luke (22:20) and Paul (I Cor. 11:25) both say, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," the difference is slight, because the real basis of *the covenant* whereby remission of sins is to be enjoyed, is still Jesus' blood. He simply makes the cup stand for this fundamental principle. When one partakes of the cup, he thereby recognizes and respects *the covenant* and its provisions.

The translation of the RSV, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20) wrongly applies the pouring to the cup, rather than the blood. Even though both "cup" and "blood" are neuter gender in Greek, the appositional phrase, "which is poured out," is located after "my blood," and should be considered to modify it. A much better rendering would be: "this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Take, eat. This is my body . . . Drink ye all of it. This is my blood. Literal identification of Jesus' body and blood with the bread and cup is excluded by the fact that Jesus stood there before them, holding these symbols in His hands. Instead, although this eating and drinking are physical acts, they are nonetheless truly spiritual, because they are based on a belief and a participation in something that cannot be seen or felt. While not literally a partaking of flesh and blood, the acts are nonetheless real, precisely because spiritual. What is eaten and drunk is still bread and wine to the sense, but to the soul, it is undoubted spiritual participation in all the reality of Jesus Christ.

This bread is my body . . . this cup is my blood. By beginning with elements common to the Passover meal, Jesus pointed to Himself as the true fulfillment of the Paschal symbolism. It is remarkable that He made no direct allusion to the lamb. This is because the lamb is to serve no purpose in the new Supper He instituted, for He Himself is "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (I Cor. 5:7). By His choice, therefore, we partake only of bread and wine that symbolize

to us what the Paschal lamb represented to the Israelites, God's Lamb. Thus, because our Lord Himself fulfilled this symbolic feast in all of the rich meaning God intended Israel to grasp as they observed it, our participation in the Lord's Supper fulfills all the symbolic significance of the ancient Passover. So, if Israel's eating of the Paschal lamb signified their identification with all that the lamb represented and accomplished spiritually for them, our eating of the bread and drinking the wine signifies our loyal fellowship in all that Jesus accomplished through His flesh and blood too.

What bread and wine mean to the body, participation in the body and blood of the Lord must mean to our inner life. By sharing in the broken bread and the cup of blessing, we really, even if symbolically, participate in the vibrant life that was His (I Cor. 10:16f.). Therefore, if not to partake of bread and wine, common staples of the Middle-East diet, is to starve, not to absorb Jesus' soul-sustaining love, message and attitudes cannot keep us alive spiritually either. We must have Him to live! For the disciples, the net result of this revelation should be high encouragement to believe that Jesus' approaching suffering was no freak disaster inflicted by brutal men or unforeseen by God. So far from frustrating His purpose, His death would actually accomplish His true mission. While His suffering would seem to be the entirely unjustified sin of resentful, ungodly men, it would be Jesus' freely chosen way of ratifying a covenant which would redeem men from sin and initiate a new age. Rather than shiver in horror of His shameful death, He glorified His suffering by elevating it to a central place in the institutional life of His people. In this covenantal ritual of eating and drinking, they thereby bind themselves once again to keep the covenant, by their own self-giving life like that of Jesus. Thus, the Supper is more than a supremely appropriate commemoration of the great redemptive act He would accomplish on the cross. It is also a continuing reminder of His love and of our dependence upon Him. Thus, the appropriate attitude for partaking of the Supper must be aroused, not so much by an intellectual acceptance of a past fact alone, as by hearty gratitude toward the generosity of Him who did it: "Christ's love compels us . . ." (II Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20).

SPECIAL STUDY

GOD IN THE BOX:

ROMAN CATHOLIC TRANSUBSTANTIATION

The "miracle" of transubstantiation whereby the bread and wine undergo a change into the literal body and blood of Christ is a tradition

that entered ecclesiastical life around 380 A.D. and became dogma of the faith in 1215. (Cf. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, chaps. VIII-X for the history of its development.) In 1226 Catholics began to kneel in the presence of the host, the consecrated wafer of the Eucharist kept in a special box called "the Tabernacle," because it was thought to become the presence of Christ in their midst. "Continuing idolatry" must be the judgment on this worship of the consecrated Host, whereby, according to Pope Paul VI (Encyclica "Mysterium fidei," No. 35),

Not only during the offering of the sacrifice and the carrying out of the Sacrament, but also afterwards, while the Eucharist is kept in the churches and chapels, Christ is truly the Emmanuel, that is "God with us." Since he is with us day and night, he dwells with us full of grace and truth. . . . The Catholic Church professes this service of worship of the Eucharistic Sacrament not only during the Mass, but also beyond its celebration, by saving the consecrated bread with the maximum diligence, presenting it to the solemn veneration of the faithful Christians, carrying it in procession for the rejoicing of the Christian multitude.

In theory, these views of traditional Romanism (as opposed to modern controversial Catholic theology) are based on Jesus' words, *This is my body . . . this is my blood*. By these words Catholics officially believe that Jesus Himself worked, hence, sanctioned the miraculous transformation. That such a position cannot be sustained from the words of Christ, is proven by the following considerations:

1. After having said, *This is my body . . . this is my blood*, He referred to the *bread* as simply *bread* (I Cor. 11:26) and to the cup as "the fruit of the vine," (26:29; Mark 14:25), although both, according to the theory, should have already changed into flesh and blood. Paul, too, speaks of the supposedly transformed *bread* as simply *bread* two more times and calls the wine simply "the cup" three times, after citing the supposedly miraculously transforming words of Jesus (I Cor. 11:27ff.). Now, if neither Jesus nor Paul could discern any change in these elements, there must have not been any.
2. In the Catholic mass there is no transformation that can be discerned by the impartial observer, not even by the Pope himself (*Osservatore Romano* for 1-2 July 1968, p. 2). The wafer remains

what it is and the wine drunk by the priest is still wine. But calling it a "spiritual miracle" is inexcusable, because, when Jesus worked real miracles, tangibly verifiable changes occurred. When He turned water into wine, for example, everyone could tell that it was no longer water, but the finest wine (John 2:9f.). There was no need for ecclesiastical hocus-pocus nor mental gymnastics nor auto-suggestion to cause people to think a material change had taken place when it had not.

3. Such a miraculous transformation, in the nature of the case, is not to be expected from Christ. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass, established by the Council of Trent (canons 1 and 2 of the Decretal on the Eucharist, and sanctioned by Vatican II), affirms that the Eucharist is a propitiatory sacrifice that is offered to take away the sins of the living and dead in Christ. (Cf. *Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, "The Liturgy," §§ 9,354, 1288.) Thus, every mass becomes a repeated renewal of Christ's sacrifice, which shifts the believer's attention from the proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection to the pretended "mystery" of the mutation of the Eucharist's elements (*ibid.*, §§ 286, 1252-1254). But Christ's sacrifice was a unique event: once for ever (Rom. 6:9f.; Heb. 7:25-27; 9:22, 25-28; 10:12-14)! Thus, the supposed necessity of other, repeated, complementary sacrifices of Christ's body and blood to remove sins, is diametrically opposed to the Bible doctrine of the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's original sacrifice (Heb. 10:17f).
4. Such an interpretation turns into wooden, prosaic literalism the figurative language of a Teacher whose lessons abound in vivid pictures. *This is my body . . . my blood* are simply metaphors, that vivid figure of speech which creates a relationship between two objects by calling one of them by a term that denotes the characteristic of the other, thus, rhetorically transferring the characteristic of the one to the other so as to suggest some analogy between them. While many illustrations could be cited (like John 10:7, 9; 14:6; 15:1; I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; Matt. 5:13-16; Jer. 2:13; Gen. 49:9, 14, 21, 22, 27), the one which shows most convincingly that Jesus' language is to be understood figuratively is Luke's version: "This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20; cf. I Cor. 11:25). By affirming that "this cup" is a "new covenant," He brings together two otherwise unconnected ideas to make His point. This combination is simply another metaphor of

the same type utilized by Matthew and Mark's version: *This is my body . . . my blood*. At any rate, Jesus warned against turning metaphor into literalism with precise reference to His body and His blood, when He cautioned so emphatically, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

5. The disciples themselves understood Jesus to speak symbolically, because no serious objection arose from these Hebrews against the cannibalism implicitly involved in eating real human flesh and drinking real human blood, for to them this could not be less than totally abhorrent. (Contrast the unbelievers, who, like the traditional, Catholic position, thought Jesus spoke literally, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" John 6:52!)
6. Possibly utilizing the ancient formula of Exodus 12:11, at the Passover Hebrews spoke of the Passover lamb thus: "This *is* the body of the lamb which our fathers ate in Egypt." (Cf. Edersheim, *Temple*, 232, who documents a similar statement in Mishnah, *Pes.* 10.3.) Although it was decidedly not the same lamb, each Passover lamb stood for and memorialized it.
7. We present a photograph to our acquaintances, saying, "This is my mother," knowing that they cannot misunderstand us to affirm that the picture itself is our parent. Similarly, while alive in their presence, Jesus could even more easily hand them bread and wine and affirm, *This is my body . . . my blood*, without their misunderstanding Him to mean that some metaphysical change had come over those common elements which even their own senses could not discern, but which Jesus continued to speak of as bread and wine.

Therefore, certain knowledge not only of this text but also of Jesus' general use of metaphors and of His style of Kingdom, as well as genuine spiritual discernment are all needed to restrain us from repeating the sacramental substitution of the Church's Dark Ages. Those men, unwilling to believe that the spiritual influence of the Supper lay in mere symbols, attributed to the figure all the powerful virtue of the things symbolized, transferring the power of salvation from Jesus the Savior to the sacrifice of the mass. But salvation cannot be acquired through the magical properties of earthly elements, but by a new standing before God, a position determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ and attained by His self-sacrifice once for all forever. The certainty that we truly and

properly partake of Christ is not made possible as the result of an ecclesiastical magic trick accomplished only by authorized personnel (which also shifts attention to a special priestly hierarchy). Rather, this certainly is obtained by the willing confession that all who eat His flesh and drink His blood in the sense that HE expressed, that is, by absorbing His words, His Spirit and His life, have His life abiding in them (John 6:53-63).

This supposed miraculous change only occurs because of the sacerdotal authority of the priest, hence the attention of the participant is directed toward celebrating the glories of the sacerdotal hierarchy while he concentrates on that imaginary miracle performed thereby. Thus, the conscience of the worshipper is gradually drawn away from the Gospel emphasis to an obsession with human mediation and a god in the box, the consecrated wafer in the Tabernacle. The most negative effect of this belief is its emphasis on a daily miracle created by priestly power, while the power of a Christ risen to die no more is relegated to an event in the dusty past, remembered once a year at Easter.

That not even all Catholicism is agreed on the transubstantiation dogma is evidenced in all the Catholic theologians' struggles to oppose it especially before Vatican II. The Pope's stern rebukes of Catholics who oppose the doctrine, measure the magnitude of lower-level dissent among progressive Catholics (Encyclica "Mysterium fidei," No. 4). Let us hope that the new Catholic theology be able to free itself from the official dogmatics of the past which had nothing to do with the Bible and were useless to strengthen the faith, and that they might proceed more swiftly and freely on the road toward a return to God's Word.

Undaunted confidence in the future

26:29 But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. This declaration stands in astonishing contrast (*légo dè humîn*) with what, to His disciples, must have seemed inexplicable pessimism. But Jesus intends to infuse into them His own unshakable confidence in His final victory. After picturing His death in the symbols of bread and wine, He now lays before them a stunning challenge: "I have just talked about my death, but now I promise

you that the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom of God will have come on earth before another Passover rolls around! Dare you believe *that*? This year I drink this cup of Passover wine, part of the old, Mosaic economy. Next year we will drink together in an entirely new way *in the Kingdom!*"

His words, however, must not be mistaken for a somber refusal to drink, as if, by a supposed Nazarite vow of abstinence, He were consecrating Himself for the imminent sacrifice of His life. Nor is there any indication that He were fasting, rather than participating in the Passover. *I shall not drink henceforth* implies, without distinctly affirming it, "I have drunk up to now." It is *henceforth*, i.e. from now on, that the change would come. Otherwise, the disciples must wonder why, of all people, Jesus alone did not participate with them in the Passover in the normal way. But of His non-participation there is not a word in Scripture. That He neither ate nor drank is a hypothesis contrary to His strong desire expressly declared (Luke 22:15f.). In fact, *henceforth (ap'arti) . . . until (héos)* means that He ate the Passover meal, but this is absolutely the last time to do so under these conditions. From this Passover feast forward, He would not participate in such a festal celebration until it could be shared with His people in a new way *in the Kingdom*. Thus, He says farewell to the Passover, and consequently, to the Mosaic dispensation founded on it. Edersheim (*Temple*, 233f. with bracketed additions from his *Life*, II,492) described the Passover as specially suited to typify Christ and end with His death:

It was a sacrifice, and yet quite out of the order of all Levitical sacrifices [and distinct from all others]. For it had been instituted and observed before Levitical sacrifices existed; before the Law was given; nay, before the Covenant was ratified by blood (Ex. 24). In a sense, it may be said to have been the cause and foundation of all the later sacrifices of the Law, and of the Covenant itself. Lastly, it belonged neither to one nor to another class of sacrifices; it was neither exactly a sin-offering nor a peace-offering, but combined them both. And yet in many respects it quite differed from them. In short, just as the priesthood of Christ was a real Old Testament priesthood, yet not after the order of Aaron, but after the earlier, prophetic, and royal order of Melchisedek, so the sacrifice of Christ was a real Old Testament sacrifice, yet not after the order of the Levitical sacrifices, but after that of the earlier prophetic Passover sacrifice by which Israel had become a royal nation.

No wonder, then, that Jesus should make a definite break with the Mosaic institution once the completion of His own mission should bring it to final fulfillment. It is this finality that causes this particular Passover to be called "the Last Supper." But the break is not so radical that He must be seen as refusing to participate in the last Hebrew Passover. *This fruit of the vine* means "this Passover wine" (Luke 22:15-18), because not only had Jesus given the wine new meaning, but now categorically affirms that He would nevermore taste it until this new meaning had been realized in the Kingdom. On the question of wine versus grape juice, see below. He cannot mean He would nevermore eat common meals with the disciples before the Ascension (Acts 10:41). The fact remains, therefore, that for Jesus the cup still contained simple *fruit of the vine*, not blood, even after referring to it as His "blood."

Until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. Did Jesus see the Last Supper as a prelude to the great Messianic or to the Lord's Supper, or both?

1. THE MESSIANIC BANQUET (8:11f. = Luke 13:28f.; 14:15ff.). *That day in my Father's kingdom* has an eschatological ring to it, since *that day* commonly points to some great day of the Lord. (Cf. Isa. 10:20, 27; Hosea 1:5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 12:3-11; 13:2, 4; 14:4-21; Matt. 24:36; Luke 21:34; I Thess. 5:4; cf. 5:2; II Thess. 1:10; II Tim. 1:18; 4:8.) Further, even in Matthew the Christian era is distinguished from the eternal Kingdom (5:10?; 13:43; 25:34 as opposed to 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; 13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 44-47; 16:19, 28, etc.). And in that realm of eternity we may anticipate full, uninterrupted, unsullied, restored fellowship with the Lord. (Cf. I Thess. 4:17; Rev. 3:20?; 7:14ff.; 19:9; 2:1-4.) Not only does this supper commemorate; it anticipates, looking backward to the cross and forward to our future celestial fellowship. Our present, earthly communion is not mortal like our bodies, but has a joyous, eternal future. We celebrate in hope of that grand reunion with our Lord in His eternal Kingdom.
 - a. But the true eschatological fellowship with the Lord cannot exclude all fellowship with Jesus now or be thought to be postponed until the Lord's Supper find its heavenly fulfillment in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This view discounts the high importance Jesus attributes to His real fellowship with His Church on earth now (cf. 18:20).
 - b. *In my Father's kingdom* may rightly be thought parallel to Luke's expressions "until the Kingdom of God comes . . . until

it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16, 18). These are similar in thought to Luke 9:27 (= Matt. 16:28 = Mark 9:1) and refer, not to the post-judgment eschatological Kingdom, but to the Kingdom of Christ which began during the lifetime of the early Christians, i.e. the Church.

- c. Certainly, we proclaim His death "until He comes again" (I Cor. 11:26), but to suppose that His promise refers exclusively to the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, is to minimize the present participations of all living saints *in the Kingdom*.
2. THE LORD'S SUPPER. Jesus officiated at the last Passover supper ever truly celebrated according to God's will. That very next day at three o'clock in the afternoon,—at the hour of prayer and the offering of the last daily sacrifice (cf. Acts 3:1; Mark 15:34)—the Passover was fulfilled when the Lamb of God was sacrificed (I Cor. 5:7; Col. 2:14). The following Pentecost the Kingdom of God was fully inaugurated on earth and the new covenant executed. From that date on, Jesus began to have communion with His disciples *in the kingdom* as it is now in anticipation of the Messianic banquet in the eternal Kingdom. So, even now the eschatological fellowship with the Lord may be ours in foretaste and promise at His Table. Even now, therefore, Jesus communes with His own (18:20; I Cor. 10:16). He is not content to be without us at His table where He is Master Host and our Fellow-banqueter. So, there is joyful optimism in His promise: *I shall . . . drink it new with you in the Kingdom*. How this prospect inspires us to be at that Table, meeting Him there as the Church to have fellowship with Him!

FRUIT OF THE VINE: WINE OR GRAPE JUICE?

Would first-century Hebrews ask this question? Or, is not this a query typical of a sympathy for a dogmatic position of total abstinence, rather than temperance, toward all forms of alcohol? (See author's study: "Should Jesus Drink Wine?" my vol. II, 526ff.)

The question of wine versus grape juice does not revolve around whether grape juice were available in the spring at Passover time or whether Jews anciently used hermetic sealing methods to prevent it from spoiling or fermenting. The question is what they did, when both wine and grape juice were available.

Fruit of the vine, as Jewish sources reveal, is but a beautiful paraphrase for wine. (See Davis, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 818ff., where Mishnah *Berakoth* 6:1 is cited; *I.S.B.E.* art. "Wine," 3086ff.; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V, art. *oīnos*, 163.167; also I, art. *généma tês ampèlou*, 684.) According to the Mishnah, *Pes.* 2, fermented drinks of grain that had had contact with the yeast of bread were forbidden. Edersheim (*Life* II,485) contends that "the wine was the ordinary one of the country, only red; it was mixed with water, generally in the proportion of one part to two of water." To this he appends the footnote: "The contention that it was *unfermented* wine is not worth serious discussion, although in *modern* practice (for reasons needless to mention) its use is allowed." He cites the Jerusalem *Pes* 37c as indicating that each of the Paschal cups generally contained only about 94 grams (or 3 ounces) of watered-down wine. By the end of the traditional four cups, if the wine were diluted to half water, the most alcohol anyone would have drunk would be about 11-12% of a third of a liter (or about 1.4 oz.)! Today, normal Jewish table-wine straight from Israel, labelled "Pure for Passover" (*kosher le Pesach*), is 11-12% alcohol.

The argument that the *fermentation* of wine, as opposed to unfermented grape juice, would disqualify wine for use on the Passover Supper, assumes that Jewish authorities considered such fermentation to be equal to leaven or yeast. This view, however, does not accurately reflect Biblical logic. The fermentation of wine was obviously not considered "leaven," since wine could be poured out as a libation on God's altar during a burnt-offering (Exod. 29:39-41; Lev. 23:13; Num. 28:7f.), whereas no leaven must ever appear there (Exod. 23:18; Lev. 2:11). (Only when offerings were to be eaten by priests, Lev. 7:12ff., or by other, Lev. 7:16ff., could yeast be allowed with offerings. Cf. Lev. 23:15-20.)

McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 658) decides,

The word "wine" is nowhere used in any of the accounts of the Lord's Supper, the terms "cup" and "fruit of the vine" being employed in its stead. Those, therefore, who choose to use unfermented grape juice are guilty of no irregularity.

However, such brethren usually also insist that the original type of Passover bread, i.e. Mazzoth, or unleavened bread, be restored in

the Church's faith and practice. Would not consistency demand that they respect Jewish Passover practice in their "fruit of the vine" as much as their "unleavened bread"?

Then, are those who use grape juice sinning, because they do not use Passover wine along with Mazzoth (unleavened bread)? While the unfermented grape juice they drink in the Lord's Supper is probably not what Jesus distributed among His disciples, nevertheless, their conscience is weak due to their acceptance of total abstinence taught for Christian doctrine (despite Col. 2:16-25). So, they cannot change until they be convinced of the Scriptural validity of using wine. To change without conviction is sin (Rom. 14:23). However, until they are persuaded, they must never condemn their brothers who use wine with understanding and Scriptural bases. Similarly, their wine-drinking brothers must not sneer at their abstaining brothers' conscience against using wine.

THE LORD'S SUPPER, A PERMANENT INSTITUTION

That Jesus intended a perpetual observance of His Supper is suggested in His plea: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; I Cor. 11:24f.). Paul points to the only appropriate termination of our participation: "until He comes" (I Cor. 11:26). Although no specific rule determines the frequency of participation, our love for Jesus is our highest norm. Subsequent early Christian practice illustrates their understanding that Jesus expected His Church to observe it perpetually (Acts 2:42, 46?; 20:7; cf. Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, Chap. VI).

Logically, by virtue of our continued need to feast our souls on Christ Himself, the Lord's Supper would be a continuous reminder of our dependence on Him and on the terms of the covenant under which our forgiveness is secured. The question, "How often should we observe the Supper?" is thus already answered in a non-legalistic way: "No more than you need to be reminded of the cost of your salvation, no oftener than you need to express your dependence on Jesus, no more regularly than you need forgiveness for your violation of the covenantal terms of your relationship with God, no oftener

than you need to meditate on your responsibility to the whole Body of Christ, the 'many' for whom this sacrifice was made." Therefore, observance of the Supper every week could never be too often for those who are spiritually sensitive to these needs. From this point of view, then, every Lord's Day may not be enough, but merely the accepted minimum for the local assembly of Christians to be able to get together.

Edersheim (*Life*, II,491) saw the symmetry in Jesus' ministry as it relates to us:

With a sacrament did Jesus begin His Ministry: it was that of separation and consecration in Baptism. With a second Sacrament did He close His Ministry: it was that of gathering together and fellowship in the Lord's Supper. Both were into His Death: yet not as something that had power over Him, but as a death that has been followed by the Resurrection. For, if in Baptism we are buried with Him, we also rise with Him; and if in the Holy Supper we remember His Death, it is as that of Him Who is risen again—and if we show forth that Death, it is until He come again. And so this Supper, also, points forward to the Great Supper at the final consummation of His Kingdom.

God's son defies with a triumphant song

26:30 **And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.** Much preceded this *hymn* that Matthew does not report. John penned the fuller account of those last, precious hours with the Eleven during which Jesus unburdened His heart in a discourse that forms the content of John 13:31—17:26. Although John 14:30 reports Jesus' order, "Rise, let us leave here," they may have stood up to go, but lingered further in the Upper Room, while Jesus continued His instruction, His intercessory prayer, and finally this *hymn*.

As a translation of Matthew's words, the phrase, *when they had sung a hymn*, is misleading, because it points to a single *hymn*, whereas Matthew wrote *humnésantes*: "they having sung hymns or having hymned." This aorist participle does not specify how many hymns

they sang or for how long, but merely views the action as an event. It was traditional to bring the Passover celebration to a close by singing Psalms 115-118. It is not necessary to treat these Psalms together as a bloc to be sung together as one *hymn*. So, they could well have sung these Psalms. Edersheim (*Life*, II,488) affirmed that, during the actual slaying of the Paschal lambs in the Temple, while the blood was being applied to the altar, the Levites led the worshipers in chanting Psalms 113-118. This repeated Psalm-singing vividly brought the slaying of the Paschal lamb right into the Passover supper itself. Sometimes also Psalms 120-137 were sung at the close of the feast (Edersheim, *Temple*, 244, note 2).

The original precept required, "Not one of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning" (Exod. 12:22). That *they went out*, rather than remain in the Upper Room, cannot be cited as proof that Jesus did not participate in the truly Last Passover. The Jews in Palestine distinguished the characteristics of the original "Egyptian Passover" from those of the permanent institution, since some of the former were considered out of harmony with the true meaning of the Passover, once Israel arrived in the Promised Land. These features were not to be considered an essential part of the ordinance itself. So, as was His custom (Luke 22:39) every night during His Last Week (Luke 21:37), He left the City.

They went out to the mount of Olives. Leaving the Upper Room they started walking through the dark streets of the City toward their specific destination, the Garden of Gethsemane. This ended Jesus' privacy, because He was aware that Judas knew His habits well enough to predict He might eventually make this move (John 18:2).

So, after singing of the victory over sin and death, of zeal for the glory of God, of the joy of service to God, of the goodness of God in all of its manifestations, Jesus went out to Gethsemane and the cross, SINGING, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever" (Ps. 118:29). How could He SING with the doom of divine judgment and human infamy awaiting Him just a few hours later? In those Psalms He sang of consecration to God, calm truthfulness and fortitude in trial. Because Jesus SANG, we too can sing, even if our eyes and hours are now washed with tears.

For a rich spiritual experience, why not turn to Psalms 113-118 and read those great songs aloud, as if you stood with Jesus and the Eleven in the Upper Room, knowing what He knew about the coming cross? What thoughts go through your mind as you contemplate the

cross through the language of those Psalms? What must Jesus have thought about? How do these Psalms calm your troubled soul, as you too say, "The LORD is my strength and MY SONG"? Or, "The LORD is with me: I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Cf. Heb. 13:6.)

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List five ways the Scriptures use the term "Passover."
2. During the Last Week did Jesus eat the regular passover meal at the normal time? What texts show whether He did or not?
3. On what day of the week did Jesus eat the passover meal? Prove your answer.
4. Identify "the first day of unleavened bread": Why call it by this title? What was its function? What two major preparations did the Jews usually make on this day? How do the Synoptics distinguish this day from "the day of preparation?"
5. What does Jesus mean by the expression, "My time is at hand"?
6. What specific arrangements would normally be needed to be made for Jesus and His men to eat the Passover?
7. Name the two disciples commissioned to make the arrangements.
8. How were these two disciples instructed to proceed from the moment they left Jesus to make the arrangements?
9. Why did Jesus eat the Passover in the evening?
10. When, precisely, did Jesus point out Judas as the traitor? List the various events at the supper in order to show this moment.
11. How did Jesus indicate the traitor to be Judas?
12. How did Jesus hide the betrayer's identity until his departure from the Upper Room?
13. How did the other Apostles react to Jesus' announcement that one of them would betray Him?
14. Quote the text wherein Jesus absolved God of all responsibility for Judas' betrayal and contemporaneously established Judas' complete freedom of choice.
15. At what general point in the Passover did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper?
16. What was the original symbolism of the unleavened bread in the Passover?
17. Name the figure of speech involved in the expression: "This is my body . . . my blood," then explain how Jesus' words are to be understood.

18. Explain how blood and covenants are connected in the plan of God, then apply this understanding to Jesus' use of these terms in connection with forgiveness of sins.
19. Jesus said, "I shall . . . drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." To what astounding reality does this promise point?
20. Were Jesus and His disciples accustomed to sing a hymn in connection with Passover? If so, what hymn was it?
21. What does the Lord's Supper say to the participant about the purpose of Jesus' death?
22. Show the meaning(s) of the Lord's Supper by quoting passages of Scripture that state or imply its meaning.

SECTION 66

JESUS PREDICTS PETER'S DENIALS AND OTHERS' FAILURE

(Parallels: Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-38)

TEXT: 26:31-35

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. 32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee. 33 But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. 34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. 35 Peter said unto him, Even if I must die with thee, *yet* will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why do you think Jesus announced the disciples' failure ahead of time? Would not this tend to discourage them from doing better? What specific advantage(s) did He seek, by giving them this advance notice?
- b. What does it mean for someone to "be offended in" Jesus?
- c. Why did Jesus inform the disciples that, "After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee"? How could the anticipation of His return to Galilee do anything for them in their bewildered state?

- d. Do you think Peter heard Jesus' clear reference to His resurrection and anticipated return to Galilee? What makes you think so?
- e. What combination of traits caused Peter to deny the possibility of his failure? Why did Peter react this way? How does his reaction to Jesus' warnings differ from that of Judas when the latter was faced with Jesus' predictions of his betrayal?
- f. Why do you think Jesus predicted Peter's denials? to show Peter how wrong he was? to show Himself omniscient? or something else?
- g. In what ironic way did the disciples practically deny their discipleship by their vigorous protests of unswerving faithfulness?
- h. Jesus predicted Peter's denials would occur in connection with a cock's crowing. What does this tell you about the time intended? What does it tell you about Jesus?
- i. Luke says "this day" whereas Matthew says "this very night" Peter would deny the Lord. How would you resolve this apparent contradiction?
- j. On the basis of this incident what may we learn about: (1) Satan and temptation? (2) the weakness of human nature, even in disciples? (3) Jesus?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

"Tonight," Jesus said to His men, "you will all feel deeply shocked because of me. In fact, the Scriptures say, 'I [God] will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of his flock will be scattered.' However, after my resurrection from the dead, I will be back in Galilee before you are!"

To this, Peter protested, "Even if everyone else stumbles and loses faith in you, I will never desert you!"

Jesus demurred, "I solemnly assure you—yes, you Peter, today, in fact this very night, even before the rooster crows twice, will disown me three times!"

But Peter protested even more vehemently, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!"

All the other disciples kept saying the same thing.

SUMMARY

In harmony with Zechariah's prophecy, Jesus warned the Twelve that they would be deeply shocked because of Him. Impetuously,

Peter refused to accept this possibility and led the others to affirm their undying loyalty, despite Jesus' predictions of their failure.

NOTES

Deserters unanimous

26:31 **Then saith Jesus unto them. All ye shall be offended in me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.** *Then*, as they were leaving the City to make their way toward the Mount of Olives. The following warning is probably not the first. Rather, as Luke (23:31ff.) and John (13:36-38) indicate, Jesus broached the subject with Peter while still in the Upper Room, distinctly predicting his failure. Now, because of the rapid approach of their break-down in courage, the Lord repeats His warning, first generalizing it to include everyone, then specifying Peter's denials again.

That two separate warnings could occur and be followed by two distinct protestations of faithfulness is psychologically possible both for Jesus and for Peter as also for the others. During the washing of the disciples' feet, several arguments were required before Peter genuinely acquiesced. Since the disciples remained so naive as to their own strength under fire and so unbelieving as to His rapidly approaching suffering, Jesus must bring them back to reality in the hope of saving them from their not inevitable cowardliness. But His repeating this prediction would undoubtedly result in the repetition of the same bad scene Peter played earlier, with the difference that now the others second his vehement objections.

All ye: was there to be no one left faithfully brave until the end? At first "all deserted Him and fled" every man for himself (26:56). However, John boldly infiltrated the arresting contingent and succeeded in entering the palace of the high priest himself and later procured Peter's admission too (John 18:15ff.). *Shall be offended in me:* Earlier (11:6), Jesus had challenged John the Baptist to believe Him without wavering due to his personal concepts of what the Messiah had to be. Now the meaning of His strange Beatitude touched His men personally. The personal prejudices of the Twelve would leave them exposed to extreme psychological shock when they saw their Lord tied and dragged away to the slaughter like a common criminal. Even though He had revealed it many times before, they had not the faith to see Him as God's Lamb taking away the sins of the world.