

In our story it is now the **Wednesday** of the last week of Jesus' life. He has forty-eight hours of work left on earth. He spends the day at Bethany not far away from Jerusalem.

**1. A Passover sacrifice**

• *The Passover pattern*

1. We see **how God viewed the cross: the death of Jesus is a Passover sacrifice**. There is an attempt to prevent Jesus from being crucified at Passover time<sup>☞1</sup>. Yet it was God's plan that Jesus should fulfil the pattern of Passover. In the original story<sup>☞2</sup> the Passover was the occasion when the people were about to be judged. The firstborn in each family would die. But instead of the firstborn Israelites, a lamb was to die to bear the sentence of execution. The families were to shelter inside a house which had been marked by blood. If they sheltered under the blood of a lamb in this way, judgement would pass over them and they would be safe. From that point on they would be 'Israel', God's chosen nation.

☞1 14:1-2  
☞2 Exodus 12:1-13

• *The Blood of Jesus*

It was God's plan that Jesus should be a 'Passover lamb'. He too was a substitute sacrifice. He too was dying for the sins of the people. Salvation would again come by trusting in His blood.

• *God's perfect timing*

The priests and theologians wanted to get rid of Jesus but were trying to prevent it happening at Passover time. They wanted to rush things through. We are invited by Mark to see what happens. In the event the plans to get rid of Jesus were delayed; Pilate took longer to make a decision than was expected. Jesus died on the Friday at about the same time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered; He was a Passover lamb after all.

**2. A stimulus to great adoration**

• *A woman who believed Jesus*

2. We see **how one woman viewed the cross: the death of Jesus was a stimulus to great adoration** <sup>☞1</sup>. Three times Jesus had given very clear predictions of His approaching crucifixion. His disciples had not taken Jesus seriously and seemed to think He was simply depressed. '*This shall not happen to you, Lord*', Peter had said.

☞1 14:3-9

• *Anointed for burial*

But there was one woman who had come to believe that Jesus meant what He was saying. They were in Bethany at the home of a one-time leper who had been healed<sup>☞1</sup>. A woman came and poured over Jesus a large quantity of extremely expensive perfume<sup>☞2</sup>. We know from John's Gospel that it was Mary of Bethany<sup>☞3</sup>. She was severely criticized<sup>☞4</sup> but Jesus defended her <sup>☞5</sup>.

☞1 14:3a  
☞2 14:3b  
☞3 John 12:1-3  
☞4 14:4-5  
☞5 14:6-9

• *Great love*

**She believed in Jesus' approaching death.** Jesus said she anointed Him '*to prepare for my burial*'. It is an amazing sentence. It means that Jesus has on His mind the fact that in two days time He will be dead and buried! Imagine thinking of oneself as being dead and buried in two days time! Mary of Bethany was the only person who took Jesus seriously when He spoke about His death. She must have said to herself 'I do not know what is going to happen. I may not get a chance to use my precious perfume to anoint His body when He is killed. And it would be better to let Him know while He is alive how I love Him for showing me the way to God. I will pour my precious perfumed oil over Him now!' She believed in His cross. Her love to Him arose because in some way she knew He was about to die for her.

**She wanted to show her great love to Jesus.** Jesus had done a great deal for her and she wanted to express her love to Jesus in

gratitude for what He had done for her.

• *The opinion of others*

**She cared little about what others thought of her.** She must have known that she was inviting criticism in what she was doing. Others would think her slightly crazy for wasting something that would get a year's wages if it was sold. But she was not bothered about any of these things. She became an 'extremist' for Jesus.

### 3. A Great betrayal

• *A pretender not a backslider*

3. We see **how Judas viewed the cross; the death of Jesus was brought about by great betrayal**<sup>□1</sup>. It was on the same day as the woman's act of great devotion that Judas acted to betray Jesus. Judas was a man who had claimed and pretended to be one of the disciples of Jesus. He never was a believer. From the very beginning Jesus knew He was a betrayer. He was never 'clean' <sup>□2</sup>. He was not a 'backslider' (a Christian overtaken by some serious sin); he was rather a pretender, a person who mixed with the disciples and claimed to be one of them, but he had no faith.

• *There will always be Judases in the Church*

The church has to accept the fact that it will always have Judases within its number. There are always those who find it convenient to pretend to believe what the Christians believe. They can even join in God's work. They may be used by God although Jesus has never known them<sup>□1</sup>.

• *No repentance*

Jesus had to live with the knowledge that close at hand was Judas. Although He had always shown Judas as much affection as He had shown the others, Judas was never brought to repentance.

• *Motivation – personal advantage*

Why did Judas join the disciples in the first place? No doubt he thought the kingdom was to be a kingdom of power and he wanted to get advantages for himself by being part of the new regime. When Jesus made it increasingly clear that He was walking to the cross, Judas thought he was on the wrong side after all! The woman who wasted a year's wealth to show how much she loved Jesus was the end of Judas' pretended loyalty to Jesus. In utter disgust he decided to change sides! He regarded the cross as folly!

• *What shall we believe about the cross?*

This is the way it is. God views the cross as His 'Passover', His way of passing over the sins of the human race so that those who trust His Son may be saved. Shall we be like Judas who thought the cross was just a piece of foolishness, or like the woman who loved Jesus because she knew He had died for her?

□1 14:10–11

□2 John 13:10, 11

□1 see Matthew 7:22–23

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