

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16 “God’s Will Concerning the Cross Prevails!”

Intro. Back in 2006 Cheryl was preparing to make a sweet potato casserole for a Sunday School class Christmas dinner. She was having trouble cutting through an especially thick sweet potato, so she called upon me, with my manly strength, to cut the potato. Well, I was finally able to cut through that thick, hard sweet potato, but when I saw blood gushing from my fingertip, I realized that I had also cut off the very end of my finger! It was only the very tip of it, but I still wanted to keep it, so we looked for it and found it still clinging to the knife! Cheryl and I put it in cold water. I realized I needed help to stop the bleeding and to save my fingertip, so we rushed to a nearby urgent care facility. Well, about an hour later the Doctor finally sewed the fingertip back on. I don’t know if she saved my life, but she at least saved by fingertip. It healed up and I still have a whole finger today!

Well we all need to realize that we need help spiritually. Yet there a many people who seem to have the idea that they are OK, that they do not need a Savior. In most cases they probably see themselves as basically good people. If there is a God, surely they are good enough to enter into eternal life. Or so they think. But this morning we are going to see strong evidence of the fact that everyone does in fact need a Savior. We needed someone to pay our sin debt on our behalf.

In our study of the life of Christ we are reaching a climax. Jesus came to do many things: He taught us about God, revealing the fact that God is a God of love, mercy, and compassion. He healed the sick and even raised the dead. He founded His Church. But the ultimate and climatic goal of His life was to go to the cross. In our text today, that goal became closer to reality.

Leading up to that climatic event, different individuals and groups were making their plans. The leaders of Israel were making their plans to get rid of Jesus. Judas was making his plans when Jesus turned out to be a different kind of Messiah. God had made His plans long ago. Rev. 13:8 says that Jesus was the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” We are going to see how God caused all those plans to intersect on the exact day that Jesus died on the cross. We are also going to see why He died on the cross, and why you need a Savior. We do indeed have a sin problem and God is a just and righteous God.

So let’s put ourselves back in time and follow the drama of our story together. Now in Act 1 we see:

I. THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL MAKE THEIR PLANS

The envy of the leaders had been aroused by Christ’s miracles and popularity. So they had already planned about six months before to get rid of Jesus by killing Him (12:14; 21:38). But now they were getting more desperate due to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, which caused many people to believe in Jesus (John 11:45-53). The wrath of these same religious authorities had been further uncorked by the triumphal entry’s effect upon the crowds (Matt. 21:1-11), the cleansing of the temple (21:12, 13, 23), parables which they knew were meant for them (21:45), and the discourse of seven woes that were pronounced against the scribes and Pharisees (chap. 23). So now they gathered together to deal with the questions of how and when they would put Him to death. So we read in vv.3-4, “Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the

elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.”

We are told that the latest plot was hatched at the palace of Caiaphas,¹ the high priest. Matthew alone tells us this detail. It was a very spacious home, which could accommodate the 70 elders of Israel. Caiaphas had previously advised putting Jesus to death (Jn. 9:50), and he probably took the lead in calling this meeting. He was a rude and sly manipulator, an opportunist. He did not shrink from shedding innocent blood. So he invited the leaders of Israel to his home. This was not their usual meeting place. Just why it was held here and not at the more usual place, namely, “the hall of hewn stone” on the south side of the great temple court, is not indicated. One guess would be because secrecy was required.

As they gathered together, the leaders listened to different ideas on what to do. They discussed it. Then, they agreed on the following plan:

A. They Would Use Deception to Arrest Jesus – In v.4 we read that they “plotted to take Jesus by trickery” or deception. Imagine those who claim to be the *religious* leaders of God’s people planning to use deception! Yet they felt it was necessary due to the popularity of Jesus. Perhaps they were going to tell Jesus some lie to get Him to meet with them in some remote location, or at night. Or perhaps they were going to take Jesus by surprise. Perhaps they hadn’t even decided what form the deception would take. They may have only agreed on the method of obtaining His arrest in such a way that it would not cause an uproar.

Here we see another evidence of the sinful nature of man. Even the religious leaders are willing to stoop to using deception. Not only that, but they manifested jealousy, hatred, and even murderous intent. Jesus had said to these people in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” Notice two prominent characteristics of Satan. “He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” Sin originated in the heart of Satan. Then Eve listened to Satan, Adam listened to Eve and willfully disobeyed God. Then they plunged the whole human race into sin! As a result, part of our human nature comes from God, because we were created in His image. But another part of our human nature comes from Satan. And so too often we act more like Satan than like God. And these religious leaders were being like Satan. Their hearts were filled with hatred and deception. They even had murder in their hearts. Oh, how we need to be saved from our sin!

So they planned to use deception to carry out their plot. Secondly:

B. They Would Seek a More Opportune Time than the Passover – They were not only crafty, but also cautious. Notice in v.5 they said, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” They were talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began at Passover, and continued for 7 more days. Around one million people would be in Jerusalem and the surrounding area at that particular time. The recent demonstration of popular support for Jesus during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem gave those wicked men pause. They were afraid of a riot.² So they decided to wait until the Galilean pilgrims, who were enthusiastic on His behalf, had gone home again. If He were arrested publicly, at that time especially, they would make “an uproar.” That wanted to avoid that. The last thing they wanted was to make the Roman

¹ He was the son-in-law of the previous high priest Annas.

² Luke 21:2 says “they were afraid of the people.” They may well have remember the uprising in the temple at the Passover after the death of Herod the great in 4 B.C. (Wilkins, 827).

authorities upset at them. They enjoyed their political power and position, and they didn't want to do anything to jeopardize that. Like many today, these were privileged, self-serving politicians who would do anything to preserve their power and position. They feared a popular revolt. Does that sound familiar?

So we see that the leaders of Israel made their plans. They would patiently wait for the best opportunity to make their move. Next we see:

II. JUDAS MAKES HIS PLANS

Judas had been unhappy with Jesus for quite some time. He saw in Jesus the hope for Israel's political freedom. When Judas agreed to be one of the twelve disciples, he expected to be one of the key figures in the Kingdom. But Jesus was turning out to be a far different kind of Messiah than he had hoped. Judas was disillusioned by the Lord's refusal to capitalize on the enthusiasm of the crowd, by His repeated withdrawals, and by His unwillingness to show Himself openly in Jerusalem. He showed no inclination to work with those who wanted to overthrow Roman rule. What kind of a King, he wondered, would avoid all the normal paths to power? The last straw was the incident that we read about in vv.6-13.³ Out of great love for Jesus, Mary came to Jesus while He reclined at the table. She poured out very expensive perfume on His head. We know from John's gospel that Judas took the lead in criticizing this action. He and others thought it was a waste.

So it was clear to Judas that Jesus was not heading toward an earthly throne, but to His own death, as He Himself had affirmed many times, as recently as v.2. Enough of that kind of Messiah! Judas was ready to cut and run from Jesus and His band of disciples.

But being a self-centered man, he saw little value in just running away. Why not make one last, desperate attempt to force Jesus to defend Himself, and manifest His great power? If He extricates Himself, as He did several times in the past, well and good. Judas would be the richer and perhaps no one the wiser. If He does not escape, that will prove Him to be a phony and he'll be better off out of this business. So perhaps he thought, "I will turn Him over to the authorities. They want to arrest Him. Let's see what happens when I do that. And why not make some money in the process?" Judas was a greedy man.

So our story picks up with vv.14-15, "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?'...." Only Matthew adds this detail. This probably took place shortly after the incident of the anointing of Jesus. Here we see two sins that are manifested by the words and actions of Judas:

A. His Plans Involve Greed⁴ – In v.15 he asks the leaders of Israel, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" Judas was a materialist. His mind was on the things of this world. He was willing to sell Jesus for cold cash. Now in Mark 14:11 we read that they "promised to give him money."⁵ In v.15 Matthew adds the detail of how much money they

³ Notice how Matthew places a connection between vv.6-13 and the plans for betrayal in vv.14-16 by beginning the later text with the word "Then...." This event is not actually in chronological sequence, but logical sequence. The feast at Bethany took place "six days before the Passover" (John 12:1) in the house of Simon the leper.

⁴ Only within the last day or two Jesus had manifested another example of greed. I have already noted that Judas led the chorus of disciples complaining about the so-called waste in pouring the expensive perfume on Jesus. Jesus must have said to himself, "If I could have gotten my hands on those three hundred pence, what a generous commission I could have skimmed off!"

⁵ Likewise, Luke 22:5 says that they "agreed to give him money."

offered. Right then and there, they “they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver.” Actually, the Greek indicates that they placed in a balance 30 pieces of silver, weighing it out. Seeing the money weighed out before him just made him lust for it all the more. And the fact that they weighed it “to him” makes it likely that they went ahead and paid him in advance, right then and there! (cf. 27:5). They knew very well that if Judas had the money “in his pocket” he would not have dared to back out before committing the deed.

By the way, Matthew doesn’t mention it, but the leaders of Israel failed to realize that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. Zechariah 11:12 says, “So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.” That was the market value of a slave (cf. Ex. 21:32). That wasn’t very much money. Slaves were abundant in the Roman Empire, and so they were fairly cheap. Thirty pieces of silver was about a month’s wage. At \$10/hour that was about \$1600. This was the Sanhedrin’s contemptuous evaluation of the worth of One who had healed their sick, their blind, their lame, their demon-possessed; who had raised their dead and fed their multitudes. For such a modest sum Judas betrayed the Master! The Bible says, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (my translation of 1 Tim. 6:10). It led Judas to one of the most serious sins of all time. Watch out, or it will lead to sin and destruction in your own life.

On Dec. 31, 1986 there was a hotel fire in San Juan, Puerto Rico. 97 people died. The fire started near the hotel casino. It spread rapidly, reaching the casino. A huge fireball was blazing through the room toward one witness. There were screams and crashing glass, and everything the ball of fire hit was completely consumed. The witness saw a friend and casino employee, Santiago Torres, scooping up money, or chips. When the ball of fire hit him, the flesh of his face shrank tight against his bones, and shortly his skin burst into flames, and he perished in the flame. He may have been saved had he quickly left the building, but instead he died because of the love of money.⁶

What about you? Are you afflicted with the love of money? Here’s a little test: At Christmas what were you looking forward to the most: giving or receiving?

B. His Plans Involve Betrayal and Disloyalty - In sharp contrast with Mary’s manifestation of loyalty stands forever Judas’ deed of disloyalty. Notice those words in v.14 “one of the twelve.” That made the crime even worse, that someone so close to Jesus would betray Him. The Old Testament predicted the Messiah would be betrayed by a close friend. Ps. 41:9 says, “Even my bosom friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (cf. 55:12-14). So Judas Iscariot, one of our Lord’s own 12 disciples, sought opportunity to betray Him. V.25 specifically says that Judas was betraying Jesus. Elsewhere Judas is called a betrayer or traitor at least 6 times (27:3; Mk. 3:19; Lk. 6:16; Jn. 6:71; 12:4; 18:5). Now his loyalty shifts from Jesus to His enemies. In Luke 22:6 we read that he “sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.” That’s exactly what they wanted. The arrest had to take place when Jesus was away from the crowds. Judas waited for such a time. Judas would keep in touch with them as to the whereabouts of Jesus; then in a suitably secluded spot, at a conveniently quiet hour, they could seize Him and have Him arraigned, tried, and sentenced before anyone could drum up effective opposition. That is why Jesus was arrested in the wee hours of the morning, outside of Jerusalem, when it was dark and hardly anyone was around.

Once again we see the fingerprint of Satan in the crime. Luke 22:3 says that “Satan entered Judas....” That took place before Judas went to the leaders of Israel. Remember, Satan

⁶ Readers Digest, 1/88.

was the first to commit the sin of disloyalty and betrayal. God had created Him. He was perhaps the greatest of the angels, adorned in splendor. And yet he turned against God and led an angelic rebellion against Him.

Have you ever been guilty of disloyalty? Children and young people, your parents have given you life; they have sacrificially cared for you and provided for you. Are you guilty of disloyalty to them by your disobedience or lack of respect? Adults, have you ever betrayed your spouse, or been disloyal to them in what you have said about them or to them? Have you ever been disloyal to a friend, by talking bad about them to others? Oh, all too often, Judas is not the only one guilty of disloyalty. And so here we see just another evidence of our sinful nature, and how we need to be saved from our sin.

So we see in our text that the leaders of Israel made their plans. They wanted to use deception to arrest Jesus away from the crowd, and they cautiously wanted to wait until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, after the Galilean crowds and gone home. We have also seen that Judas has made his plans. He plotted and planned with the leaders to deliver Jesus over to them at a time when Jesus was away from the crowds, which gathered every morning to hear Him (Lk. 21:38). Ah, but now we also see in our text my third point, that:

III. GOD SOVEREIGNLY CONTROLS THE PLANS OF MEN

The leaders of Israel specifically said in v.5, “Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.” But Jesus said in v.2, “You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered⁷ up to be crucified.” This was the first time He predicted the timing of His death. He said that He would be arrested and crucified around the time of the Passover feast. For 6 months now Jesus has been predicting His death, and He steadfastly set His face toward Jerusalem (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Nothing would deter Him from coming to Jerusalem for the Passover. He knew what His mission was: to die for the sins of man. That was the reason that He came into the world. Again, Rev. 13:8 says He was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world. And what better time for that sacrifice to take place than at Passover! It would demonstrate the significance of the death of Jesus. Each year at that time the Passover lamb was slain. It pointed back to the time when many lambs died and shed their blood to save the firstborn of each Israelite home in Egypt. Those homes that had the blood on the doorposts were spared the wrath of the death angel. And the Passover lamb also pointed forward to the day when God would provide the ultimate and true sacrificial Lamb, who would die and shed His blood to save us from our sins. So what a fitting time for Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross to take place! In fact I Corinthians 5:7 Paul said that Christ is our Passover. The cross is the fulfillment of the Passover.

So on the one hand, God determined that His Son would die as a sacrifice for sin at Passover. But man said in v.5, “Not during the feast...” So even though the leaders of Israel were determined to postpone their plot to kill Jesus until after the Passover feast, God sovereignly worked to speed up their plan to coincide with Passover. So here in chapter 26 there was an unexpected twist in the story. Judas showed up at a gathering of the chief priests. He may have approached them as they were concluding their meeting at Caiaphas’ house. Or perhaps he met them the next day, called “Silent Wednesday,” because nothing else is recorded in the gospel accounts for that day. And when he came to them with his unexpected offer, they must have been

⁷ “Delivered” is actually a present tense, for the plot was being conceived even as Jesus spoke “is being delivered”, or it was a prophetic present, i.e. a future event is so certain that it is spoken of in the present tense.

delighted. Here was an end to their difficulties in “taking” Jesus. They probably saw this as an answer to their prayers. They were not going to let this opportunity slip through their fingers; it might never come again. It was too good of an offer to pass up. So they were now willing to take the opportunity to arrest Jesus *even* during the Passover if a good opportunity presented itself. They didn’t intend for this to happen during this season, but it happened because that is when *God* said it was going to happen.

So here we see yet another example of how the will of God prevailed over the will of man. Those wicked men, for all their power and plans, could no more alter the divine decree than they could reverse the spin of the world on its axis in space. The divine decree always wins. In Isa. 46:10 we read that God declares “the end from the beginning, ... Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.’” Christ is moving according to God’s timetable, and He is forcing the issue. He is not the helpless victim caught between the upper millstone of religious intrigue and the lower millstone of Roman power. Here we see that Jesus is the master of circumstances, and He is never more kingly than when He draws near the cross.

Now there are two applications I want to make from the reality of the sovereign control of God over all of His creation:

A. It Is Foolish to Resist the Sovereign, Omnipotent God – You have a big choice in life. You can either line up your life according to the will of God, or you can try to resist God’s will. When you live according to God’s will, you will be blessed. When you resist God’s will, you will suffer the consequences, and you will not ultimately prevail in your plans anyway. In Acts 9:5 Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” When we try to set ourselves against what we know to be God’s will, it is like a child trying to stop a train by pushing against the locomotive.

So don’t try to resist and fight against God’s will for your life. Just line up your life to God’s will and you will be blessed.

B. The Believer Should Be Comforted by the Truth of God’s Sovereign Control – You see, God’s sovereign control means that no plot against you will succeed unless God allows it to accomplish a higher good. As a result, God will often thwart the plans of men against you.

King Saul repeatedly tried to kill David, to prevent him from taking the throne. And yet God overruled his plots and plans, protected him, and David became King, and the ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Also, this is the ground for the security of our salvation. Eph. 1:11 says that we have been “predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” And as we can see in our text, God’s purpose will ultimately prevail. We can be sure of our ultimate salvation. The medieval poet Dante wrote, “In His will is our peace.” God is ultimately in control of all the events around us. Human power structures, no matter how powerful they look, are not powerful enough to thwart God’s intention to fulfill his ultimate desires and ends.

IV. GOD CARRIES OUT HIS PLAN

Let’s look beyond our text. In the ages past Satan set out to destroy man, God’s highest creation. But knowing our need, God set out to save us from our sins. We have already seen how He planned to save us. We see in v.2 the determined plan and purpose of Christ to die on the cross. We see another reference to His impending death in v.12. In Acts 2:23 we read that Christ

was “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” (cf. Acts 4:28). And the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was fulfilled in chapter 27.

Why was Christ so determined to go to the cross? Why did God so overrule the circumstance and plans of men that His Son would die on the cross at Passover? It was because that was the only way to save us from our sin. We have seen in our text today abundant evidence of the sinful nature of man. In the dark sinful heart of man lurks sins such as deception, hatred, jealousy, greed, self-centeredness, and even murder. Some have more sin than others, but we all have a sin problem. And the Bible declares, “The wages of sin is death” and “The soul that sins shall die.” But God’s love found a way to satisfy His justice, and yet save the sinner. He determined from the foundation of the world that a sinless substitute could die in our place. Yet only a man could die for other men. An animal, such as a lamb, could only foreshadow the ultimate sacrifice. And Jesus Christ, the virgin born Son of God, was the only One who qualified. He was a man who was free from sin. So when He died on the cross, He did not die for His sins, but for our sins. 1 Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God....” So because of the multitude of souls His Son would save, we read in the prophecy of Isa. 53:10, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin....”

Now just because Jesus died on the cross does not mean that we are automatically saved. The Passover pictures that also. Just as the Israelites had to believe God and apply the blood to the doorposts, even so we must apply the blood over the doorposts of our heart. And behind the blood we are safe. And death cannot destroy us because Jesus already paid for our sins by the shedding of His blood. The same sin cannot be paid for twice. Have you applied the Blood to your own heart? Have you trusted in Christ as your Savior? If not, do so today!

Conclusion: Out of gratitude to God for His saving love, let us resolve all the more to live according to His will, which is good and perfect. Let us no longer foolishly resist His will.

Sources: Stan Coffey (notes from his sermon on vv.1-31); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, reprint, Christian Publishing Co.; Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal: Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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