

Wednesday

We don't really know exactly what happened on Wednesday of Holy Week. We do know that Luke finishes covering what happened Tuesday, and then says, *"Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple (Luke 21:37-38)*. So, I think it's possible that Jesus went to Jerusalem and taught more at the temple today, but there is no way to know for sure since no specific teaching is mentioned this day. However, there was so much to cover yesterday, that it works well to be able to continue from where we left off and cover more of what Jesus taught on Tuesday, what happened Tuesday night, and speculate about when Judas may have betrayed Jesus.

We ended yesterday with Jesus calling out the teachers of the law and the Pharisees in the Seven Woes discourse. Soon after this, Jesus and the disciples leave the temple to begin the walk back to Bethany. As they are walking along, some of the disciples are looking up and around, perhaps even trailing their fingers along the massive stones that made up the temple. The temple and its surrounding walls and buildings were made of stones that could measure as long as 36 feet. The temple stones themselves were made of white marble and gold, that would shimmer so bright in the sun you could hardly look at it. This helps us understand why the disciples begin to make comments to Jesus about how large the stones are, and how beautiful the buildings are. Jesus takes the opportunity to drop a bombshell and say, *"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down"* (Mark 13:2). Interestingly, no one questions Jesus in this moment, and I can imagine their looks of disbelief as they continue to walk through the magnificent structure and out of the city.

When they get to the Mount of Olives, where they can now sit and admire the beautiful vista of the city of Jerusalem from the hilltop, several of the disciples come to Jesus privately and ask him to tell them when this terrible thing will happen, and ask if there will be a sign before it happens. What Jesus tells them now is a little hard to follow, and like many prophecies and the entire book of Revelation, what Jesus prophecies does not follow chronological order through time. First, Jesus describes a very compressed version of history from their present moment through to the end of the age. Jesus mentions wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, and false prophets, saying only those who stand firm to the end will be saved.

Next, Jesus moves on to predict the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. I think it's fascinating to have the benefit of knowing what happened historically, and compare it to what Jesus predicted. According to Josephus, a Jewish historian, who wrote several books about Jewish history in the 90's AD, the Roman general Titus began his attack on Jerusalem in April of 70 AD, during the Passover. The Roman army surrounded the city of Jerusalem in a 10 mile

radius, and as pilgrims arrived to celebrate the Passover, the army let them in, but never let them out again. The plan was to cut off all supplies to the city, and let the Jews slowly starve as food and supplies ran out. After four months of starvation and invasion, Jerusalem fell, and the temple was burned amidst a chaotic mix of wailing and fighting. Josephus mentioned that after the fire, the Roman soldiers overturned all the massive stones of the temple, and chiseled out the precious gold that had melted between the cracks during the fire. Now, compare that to what Jesus predicted. *“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written”* (Luke 21:20-22).

How amazing that around 40 years before the destruction of Jerusalem came, Jesus predicted it accurately, and even recommended the correct actions to take- run for the mountains, don't join the crowds going into the city for Passover. I wonder how many Jewish believers were saved by this advice that had been spread by this time through the writings of Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

But Jesus quickly shifts the prophecy now to describe his second coming. I'm sure that as the disciples were listening to this barrage of predictions, it didn't make much sense. Jesus says that before his return, false Christs and false prophets will appear to deceive people, but his real coming will be as obvious as lightning across the entire sky. Jesus describes disturbances to every part of creation- the sun, moon, stars, and the oceans. At that time, the Son of Man will come in the clouds with his army of angels, gathering the elect. But though Jesus has given these signs to look for, his concerning message for us is that no one knows the day or hour that his second coming and the end of the age will occur. He says, *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap”* (Luke 21:34). Matthew tells three more parables at this point to emphasize Jesus' message to keep watch and not grow weary of holding on to the faith.

After Jesus gives the disciples his prophetic answer to their question, they leave the Mount of Olives and enter Bethany. That night, Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus had dinner at a man's home, called “Simon the leper.” We don't know much about this man, but it would make sense that Jesus had healed him of leprosy. It is still Tuesday night, 2 days before the Passover. During the dinner, an unnamed woman breaks an alabaster jar of perfume and anoints Jesus' head with it. The disciples are appalled at the cost of the perfume being “wasted” on Jesus' head. But Jesus defends the woman and says she has done a beautiful thing, and that it is preparing him for burial. Wait, didn't this already happen last Friday?

There is some debate about Jesus being anointed once, or twice in the course of this week. Matthew and Mark put the anointing of Jesus here, on Tuesday, by an unnamed woman. John

puts the anointing of Jesus on the Friday before Palm Sunday, and names Mary as the anointer. Popular opinion is that this is just one story, and one anointing, but specified at different times by the gospel writers depending on what aspect they were trying to highlight. But I personally lean towards there being two anointings, partly because all the gospel writers put a time-stamp on their event, even John who is typically more poetic and less worried about chronology, puts a time-stamp of 6 days before the Passover. Another reason I lean this way, is in John's story from Friday, only Judas complains about the cost of the perfume. On Tuesday, Matthew and Mark say all, or many of the disciples are now complaining about this wastefulness. It makes sense to think that the other disciples were influenced by Judas' frustration over the first episode of wasting expensive perfume, so that by the second instance, all the disciples are chiming in. Also, if I try to imagine what it would take for a disciple and friend of Jesus to betray him, it makes sense that if Judas' anger has been brewing since Friday, that having a second episode of spillage of a year's wages might have pushed him over the edge. But that's purely speculation on my part!

No matter when we think Jesus was anointed with an expensive perfume, it is a key moment because all the gospel writers except Luke link Judas' betrayal to this incident. Luke simply says that "Satan entered Judas," prompting the betrayal. All the others say that Judas' indignation over the wasted perfume is what led to his betrayal.

Judas' betrayal of Jesus leaves me with so many questions: Why did Jesus bring Judas into his exclusive group of twelve disciples, knowing that he would betray him? Why couldn't his death have come about without this betrayal from an insider? We know that Jesus knew Judas' heart from the beginning, and was not tricked into thinking he was a true follower. It's confusing to think through, and I only have one potential answer, though I'm sure there are more. The answer comes from Hebrews 4:14-16, *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

Jesus allowed himself to be betrayed by a friend so that he could empathize with us when we are betrayed by others. He had to be tempted in every way we are, and that was one of them. I can sometimes let myself think that Jesus' main sacrifice to us was dying on the cross, and that was an unbelievably huge sacrifice for sure. But sometimes I forget how many other sacrifices he made along the way to live his life without sin, and to experience every temptation and grief that we go through so that he can be a high priest who understands us. It's amazing to know that the Son of God died for me, but even more amazing to know that he lived his 30+ years as a sacrifice too. He sacrificed his comfort, was often homeless, never married, never had kids, and

suffered grief and betrayal, torture and death, not just to save us, but also so that we could know he really understands how hard this life is. He went through it all, there is no pain we experience that he has not withstood. And now stands with us to help us through each and every hardship that comes our way. What a gift to know that we are not alone. God sees every tear, every hardship, every loss, and knows how it feels. And he holds out his hand to walk us through the hard places of life all the way home to heaven.

Extra Reading: Matt 24:1-26:16, Mark 13:1-14:11, Luke 21:5-22:6, Isaiah 53