

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW – PART TWENTY-SEVEN

For the last two chapters Jesus has been spelling out the final phase of His message. The King was about to be murdered for the sake of His subjects but He would rise again, return to heaven, live in them as His Spirit, and one day return to take over the world. In the meantime, without knowing when He would come back, they had a job to do – to serve Him,(24:45-51) be the light of the world,(25:1-13), multiply His message of grace,(25:14-30) and care for the needy.(25:31-46)

Now the last act of the drama was about to be played out. The twelve disciples were not just to be a passive audience but would be invited to choose between His way and the Devil's, and so become part of the action. On the one hand were the chief priests and their supporters determined to be rid of Him because His message threatened their power but well aware that public opinion favoured Jesus. On the other hand were two unnamed friends of Jesus who simply and lovingly demonstrated the message He had been teaching. The woman who came and poured expensive perfume over Jesus' head had presumably been inspired by Mary in Jn.12:3, who in turn had almost certainly heard of an earlier woman in Galilee who had recognised that Jesus was the one man who would forgive her immorality and accept her.(Lk.7:37,38) The 11 disciples imitated Judas' criticism that the money could have been used for the poor, by which he meant himself.(Jn.12:4-6) Jesus commended her and predicted that her outrageously loving sacrifice would inspire countless others in years to come.(26:1-13)

The first of the audience of disciples to make a choice was Judas, perhaps disgusted by yet another loving gift which could have enriched him, but certainly lured by money, to receive the price of a slave,(Exod.21:32) as promised in Zechariah 11:12. In beautiful contrast another unnamed friend of Jesus had made his upper room available to the Lord whenever and for however long He wanted it, without charge. That room was to be the disciples' headquarters for the next seven weeks.(Lk.22:12; Acts 1:13) Jesus began to tell them how they would all choose. He let Judas know He was aware of the decision he had already made, yet He still treated him exactly the same as the rest. Together they celebrated the Passover which remembered how the angel of death passed over the Hebrew homes before they left Egypt.(Exod.12:1-20) First they would have eaten the lamb whose blood had been smeared around the door of the house. The following day Jesus' blood was to be shed for them as the Lamb of God.(Jn.1:29) Next they would begin to eat unleavened bread as He explained to them they were from here on to feed on His word and so be part of Him, in heaven and on earth. His final picture must have shocked them. In the Old Testament they had been clearly forbidden to drink the blood of the sacrifice because it represented the life of the animal which was not to be in them.(Lev.17:14) But now at last with His coming, His death and resurrection, by His Spirit, the life of the Lamb could be in them.(26:14-29)

From the comfort of the upper room, Jesus led them out onto the Mount of Olives, a place of deep significance in scripture. From here He would later ascend to heaven.(Acts 1:9-12) To this same place He would one day return.(Zech.14:4) Again Jesus spelled out the choice they must make. For the moment even the remaining 11 would get it wrong as Zechariah had predicted.(Zech.13:7) Peter was determined to

be the exception, but he too would fail that very night.(26:30-35) As on several previous occasions, Peter, James and John were privileged to be invited to share in a very special moment, as in intense pain Jesus prayed to His Father. The agony of anticipating our sin becoming His responsibility was almost killing Him.(Lk.22:44) Believing the plan to be death on the cross the following day He asked the Father to take Him through this moment, but still He accepted whatever happened. His prayer was granted,(Lk.22:43) but His prayer companions kept falling asleep. Supporting Jesus was beyond their ability as yet. Peter failed even at this point.(26:36-46)

A great crowd was approaching through the trees. The noise and the lights would have given plenty of time to run away, but Jesus stayed. Leading the crowd was Judas who knew the arranged meeting point. His kiss of greeting has been remembered in history as the ultimate in hypocrisy and treachery. Amazingly Jesus responded by calling him 'friend', knowing full well the reason for his coming. For Jesus nothing had changed. John identified the crazy swordsman who challenged a whole Roman cohort of 600 men as Peter himself.(Jn.18:10,11) Instead of cutting off heads, Peter only scored one ear! Luke recorded how even that wound was healed by Jesus.(Lk.22:51) Imagine Peter's humiliation as his heroism was rejected. Again Peter had failed. The sword Jesus wanted His followers to carry was the word of God.(Heb.4:12) Once more He reminded them that His Father was in charge of what seemed like defeat. This was too hard. Peter and the rest ran for their lives.(26:47-56)

The prisoner was taken to the courtyard of the high priest's home for an illegal trial. Justice had to be done in daylight. First there were all kinds of ridiculous false accusations until there was one which seemed like it might stick regarding Jesus' words about the temple.(Jn.2:19-21) Even this was misquoted and misunderstood. Jesus remained silent, as we are to remain silent when criticised personally. Frustrated, the high priest asked Jesus a straight question. Was He the Christ, the Son of God? He would never deny His ministry so He readily acknowledged Who He was, and how He would return according to scripture.(Ps.110:1; Dan.7:13) The high priest accused Him of blasphemy. The rest began to abuse and mock Him.(26:57-68)

Peter, perhaps more angry than afraid, had followed the crowd in the shadows. Now three times, as Jesus had warned, he denied his relationship with the Lord. The cock crowed, Jesus' words came back to him, and he burst into tears.(26:69-75)

Chapter 27 described the darkest and brightest day in human history.

27:1-10 Q.1 Why did Judas feel remorse? What is the difference between remorse and repentance? How did Judas try to deal with his conscience? Why did he hang himself? How did the chief priests deal with their predicament? What does this passage teach us about guilt and forgiveness?

27:11-26 Q.2 How did Jesus respond to the charges against Him this time? What can we learn from this? Make a list of the pressures on Pilate at this point, for or against him crucifying Jesus. Why did he eventually decide the way he did? How did he try to escape responsibility? Again, what can we learn from his struggle with his conscience?

27:27-44 Q.3 What did the soldiers do to Jesus and why? What insight does this story give us into why those with power may abuse or torture the helpless? What else do we know about Simon of Cyrene?(Acts 13:1) What impact did the events of this day have upon his life? Who else abused Jesus and for what reasons? Check the events described here against Ps.22, Ps.69 and Isa.53. What impact would seeing the crucifixion have had on those who believed the word of God?

27:45-56 Q.4 Why did Jesus question His Father as He hung on the cross? Was He doubting Him?(Ps.22:1) What natural events accompanied the crucifixion? How would they have affected watching believers?(Joel 2:10, 30, 31) What reactions were there to Jesus' death at the time?

27:57-66 Q.5 Following Jesus' death, what further reactions were there? Who took Jesus' teaching about His resurrection seriously at this time? Do we?