

As we begin this morning... I want to give you some sad news that I read this week. ... Well... truth be told... it isn't actually news. (It was to me... because I just learned about it for the first time... but this happened last year in 2017.)

Alas... break out the tissue... because it is my duty to inform you that the Monopoly thimble is no more. ... Back when the iconic board game was introduced during the Great Depression... players could choose from a variety of (very random) game pieces... including the top hat... boot... iron... racecar... and dog.

Parker Brothers... (the creators of the game)... have cycled game pieces in and out over the decades... "retiring" dated pieces in favor of more relevant ones... for more modern ages. ... Recent years have seen the company host online polls... where fans can vote to keep or replace the current pieces. ... The practice has gained popularity across the internet... with Monopoly wonks... and it has resulted in the death of the iron horse and rider... and now the thimble joins it as an icon of a bygone age. They've been replaced by ideas promising to be more exciting and certainly less "old-fashioned" to modern generations. ... Its replacement has yet to be determined (at the time the article I read was written)... but could take the form of a cell phone... computer... or even jet.

Only time will tell how long the few remaining original pieces will last in our ever-evolving world... but until then... we can all bid the thimble a warm and nostalgic goodbye. Perhaps Monopoly itself would no longer be with us... if it wasn't for McDonalds... using it to boost its sales of Big Macs and fries.

We Americans try to change so many things in our life... by popular vote. Monopoly game pieces may be American icons... but even an American icon can change... when it is no longer well-liked. ... As Americans... we like to change things by voting and popular opinion. Anything that resists this way of making change – is UNFAIR!

But try as we might... we will never be able to change anything that God has purposed to be.

We will see that this is the case in our passage this morning. In Matthew 26... we will see people attempt to alter God's plan... because it wasn't the way they wanted it. ... And then the Gospel writer (Matthew)... who was not interested in presenting a chronological order of events (in the exact order by which they happened)... but was more interested in presenting events to us in a way that we would notice a theme... cites two other events... right after showing us God's sovereignty. ... The first one (according to the way John tells it... happened 6 days before the Passover week.) But Matthew injects this story about selfless worship... during Passover week... right after he shows us how God is in complete control – not man - ...and just before another story that is a contrast of selfless worship to a Sovereign Lord. ... John was probably correct by placing the story of selfless worship BEFORE this last week of Jesus' early ministry. But Matthew puts it here to make a point (from all three stories) for us to see.

Resting in God's complete control... is essential for true worship. Without our seeing that He is sovereign over all things... and that His agenda needs to be ours... we will never worship Him properly. ... Come to church

all you want... sing as loud as you want... get as emotional as you want... give to the Lord as extravagantly as you want... but we offer no worship to the Lord – apart from making His agenda our own.... ... Find out where God is at work around you... join Him in it... then you will worship.

We come today... in our study through the Gospel of Matthew – the longest chapter in Matthew. All things recorded in this chapter and the next... (chapters 26 and 27)... should be studied in light of Jesus' determination that we first saw... when Jesus was with His disciples in Caesarea Philippi – six months earlier.

**Matthew 16:21 (ESV)**

*From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.*

Events were now moving to a climax. The King... (Jesus)... was preparing to suffer and die. ... He is moving according to God's timetable... and He is forcing the issue.

Jesus is not the helpless victim... caught between the Jewish leadership (who He offended) and the Roman power. This was never a surprise to Jesus. In fact... from Caesarea Philippi forward... Jesus kept telling His men about His coming death.

**Matthew 17:22-23 (ESV)**

*As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.*

### **Matthew 20:17-19 (ESV)**

*And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”*

Not only was His death fully anticipated... but the role of the 'chief priests and teachers of the law' as the means by which it would be brought about... were equally clear.

Sadly... Mormons blasphemously declare that Jesus blew it... by getting Himself killed too early... that He was supposed to come to America and evangelize the American Indians. And because Jesus mistakenly got Himself killed... God had to send Joseph Smith (the founder of Mormonism) to complete Christ's mission. ... .. Either THEY are correct... or Matthew is. Both cannot be right.

No! Jesus was in complete control. He operated according to God's timetable... God's sovereign plan.

Let's turn to our passage now... and observe how much control Christ had... on a matter that some think that He wasn't in charge... (But He was!)

### **Matthew 26:1-5**

Things are moving along very quickly. On Sunday... Jesus and His disciples had arrived in Jerusalem – to the applause of the crowds. Now this is Wednesday... two days before His crucifixion. This was God's

timetable and none of this is a surprise to Jesus. He tells His disciples that He will be crucified *in two days* – ***during*** Passover. (Not after)

That Jesus would be betrayed and crucified during Passover was deeply significant. God chose this time for a reason. Passover has always pointed to Jesus' death. They are intimately related.

The "Passover" commemorated the night the Israelites were freed from Egypt ([Exodus 12](#))—when God "passed over" homes... marked by the ***blood*** of a lamb. This was the last great plague on Egypt when, in unmarked homes, the firstborn sons died. After this horrible disaster, Pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave. Annually, Hebrew families would celebrate the Passover meal, a feast with the main course of lamb. The sacrifice of a lamb and the spilling of its blood commemorated Israel's escape from Egypt, when the blood of a lamb painted on their doorposts had saved their firstborn sons from death. This event foreshadowed Jesus' work on the cross. As the spotless Lamb of God, his blood would be spilled in order to save His people from the penalty of death brought by sin.

Now... the group that met at the palace of Caiaphas... (the High Priest)... to plot Jesus' arrest... was the Sanhedrin Council. This consisted of seventy two Jewish leaders... (the highest Jewish body allowed to exist by the Romans.)

Jesus had made them look foolish and uneducated during their futile attempts to discredit Him. They were convinced that any attack designed to discredit Jesus was not going to work. Every time they had tried to discredit Him... they were thoroughly outflanked by Jesus' knowledge of the

Scriptures and His divine wisdom. They... therefore... concluded that they would have to use some deceit and evil cunning in order to capture and execute Jesus.

This council had powers to exercise both civil and criminal jurisdiction... though it could not administer a death sentence. Only the Roman authority could do that.

But this group was well aware... that as long as they could maintain a good relationship with the Roman governor... he normally approved any recommendation for the death penalty that they would make. They also knew that a riot in Jerusalem would bring them into disfavor with the Roman governor. So they needed to avoid that... if they wanted to execute Jesus.

Exercising caution... we read in verse five... that they said... "*Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people.*" ... They were afraid of a riot... afraid of Pilate's anger and violent revenge. The Jewish leaders were still determined to get rid of Jesus. ... They just wanted to avoid the feast.

But God had already decreed that Jesus would be taken on the feast day. Christ was to die as the Passover Lamb. From the beginning... the Passover had been set as the date for the crucifixion. The Sanhedrin had a very good reason to wait. (It should have been a sure thing... and probably was as sure as any human government can guarantee.) But Who has greater sovereignty...?

Now... immediately after this lesson about the sovereignty of God... Matthew takes us (at once) to a lesson about worship. And the event on which this lesson is based... John said happened earlier. So Matthew must want us to see a connection. I think it may be: Discovering where God is at work... and joining Him in it... is our vital worship.

First I will read John's account... and then we will read Matthew's.

### **John 12:1-8**

### **Matthew 26:6-13**

This was an expensive demonstration of worship. The Greek text and most translations state that the flask was made of alabaster, a substance of virtually pure white crystal. The flask most likely would have been shaped like a gourd with a narrow neck. When the flask was broken, the neck would have opened and the substance would have poured out. According to Mark's gospel, this perfume was spikenard, a rare oil made from the root of a plant found in the Far East. Because it was so rare and came from such a great distance, it was extremely expensive. ... Mark's gospel sets the value of this perfume at three hundred denarii, which was basically equivalent to one year's wages. Surely this represented the wealth obtained from a lot of hard work over a relatively long period of time.

John says that she poured it on the feet of Jesus... and wiped them with her hair. ... Matthew says that she poured it on His head. ... There is... however... no contradiction. She probably poured it *both* on His head and His feet... and then wiped His feet with her hair. ... A woman's hair is her glory (1 Cor. 11:15). She surrendered her glory to the Lord and worshiped

Him with the precious gift that she brought. It was an extreme act of love and devotion.

But Judas led the disciples in expressing their indignation. Judas probably had a different reason than the others. He was the group's treasurer... and he stole money from the purse... for his own use.

The law commanded God's covenant people to care for those who were less fortunate ([Deuteronomy 15:11](#)). In keeping with Jesus' expressed concern for the poor, it would have been a logical alternative to sell this product, recover its value in hard cash, and then distribute the proceeds to those who were less fortunate.

J Vernon McGee writes:

*I wonder how much they really cared about the poor. They remind me of folk in our contemporary society who are always talking about taking care of the poor but are doing nothing about it themselves. In our government there are quite a few legislators who are millionaires and are always talking about a poverty program and other aid for the poor. Have you ever attempted to find out how much they personally have done for the poor? I don't care for that kind of hypocrisy! The evidence of the sincerity of your concern is always in what you yourself are doing. Are you trying to make an impression, or are you really trying to help folk?*

### **Matthew 26:10**

Jesus responded to the disciples' opposition with a strong reprimand to leave the woman alone. ... Jesus... contrary to their expectations... commended her act of devotion.



Imagine the astonishment on the part of Jesus' disciples. ... Why did He always seem to be so critical of them? ... Why did He now commend this woman and instead reprimand them? ... Were they not correct in their interpretations of his teachings? ... Had they not been exhorted to give to the poor even at the expense of their personal interests? ... The disciples' argument certainly seemed valid... yet... Jesus rebuked them.

### **Matthew 26:11**

I have actually heard Christians quote ONLY the first half of this verse... to justify why we do not need to help those who are less fortunate than us...  
*“You always have the poor with you...”*

But Jesus does not play down giving to the poor. He actually plays **up** the second part of that verse. This is what He says: our devotion to Him must **precede** and **inform** all other important and godly agendas. Giving to the poor is important... It is a Christlike thing to do. But what can possibly be even more important...? - Discovering what Christ is actively doing and joining Him in it. THIS is to be our agenda. We are to trust His sovereign leading – and not **presume** we know what He wants... because it makes the most sense to our understanding.

### **Matthew 26:12**

Jesus wanted His men to focus their attention on His coming death. He wanted their concern at that moment to be His concern. Giving to the poor is a good thing... but it wasn't Christ's immediate agenda. They were too busy ignoring Christ's immediate agenda. ... Good activity... good involvements... can be the enemy of God's plan for us.

His statement must have shocked the disciples. The Twelve probably thought Jesus was too preoccupied with His death when it seemed all of the recent events should have convinced Jesus that His life was not endangered. With much fanfare... He had ridden into Jerusalem thronged by a huge crowd shouting, "Hosanna!" ... He had been in the temple and had a very successful campaign against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. In confronting the members of the Sanhedrin... He had gained the favor of the common people... who privately may have relished the humiliation of these self-righteous leaders.

“She has done it to prepare me for burial.” Such rare spices usually anointed a dead body. ... So does this mean Mary fully comprehended her actions...? ... She may have... but here is the point we are to see: The religious leaders were pre-occupied with their own agenda... ***not*** God’s... AND... so were the disciples! Not even the closest followers of Christ ... (except for ***maybe*** Mary)... was tuned into Christ’s agenda.

### **Matthew 26:13**

Because Christ honored Mary like this... I think she had some understanding of her actions preparing His body for death. She even used the ***very*** spice that was used for burial. I think that she was in tune with Christ’s agenda. She would have known about His many predictions. She took them to heart... when His other followers wouldn’t. She knew that He said He was coming to Jerusalem to die. No doubt... she didn’t ***want*** Him to die. But she submitted her agenda to His.

By the way... this Mary... (the sister of Lazarus)... was not one of the Marys that we read about... who came to anoint Jesus on that first Easter. She had already anointed Him. In fact we don't see her at all in any of the scenes of Jesus' stunned and disoriented followers. She had submitted her agenda to Christ's.

What about you...? Do you actively seek (every day) where God is at work around you... and attempting to join Him in it...?

Some of you may have thought that my lesson today about worship... in seeing this odd act... was going to be: "We should all be like Mary... So let's all ask ourselves... "How can I be more over-the-top in my giving money to the church?" - Even if someone felt led to impulsively write out a check today in excess of \$5,000.00... that would be the wrong application to this passage. This passage is not about acting on our own instinct. It is about making sure we are making God's agenda our own. (So ***if*** you believe it is God's agenda for you to do that – we'll make an exception!)

Well... Jesus' rebuke to His disciples made it very clear to Judas... that his agenda was different from Christ's... and he didn't want Christ's. We see now a stark contrast to Mary's act of submitting to Christ's agenda.

### **Matthew 26:14-15**

The members of the Sanhedrin must have been delighted. They had searched for some devious way to get rid of Jesus. ... What could be more devious than to have one of Jesus' inner circle betray his Master to them?

The chief priests would gain tremendous advantages by employing Judas because an "insider" could track Jesus' movements about Jerusalem. He might even be able to quietly get Jesus off the streets to a place where the

Passover crowd could not offer any opposition. Though the religious rulers had decided to postpone attempts on Jesus' life until after the Passover... this proved to be an opportunity too good to pass up... so they changed their plans and now waited upon Judas... who sought an opportune moment to betray Jesus. ... They ended up bowing to God's sovereign plan... that Jesus would be crucified DURING Passover.

It is much better if we willingly bow to God's plan.

I can relate so well to a lot of things John Ortberg writes. I found this illustration of his... and repeat it as the application to our passage this morning.

When it was time to take our first child home from the hospital, we put her in the car seat in the back of the car, and then I got in the front seat to drive. She was so small even the baby seat was way too big. She looked so fragile to me that I drove home on the freeway going 35 miles per hour with the hazard lights flashing the whole time.

That first day, when your kid is in the car with you, is a scary day. Does anybody want to know what the next really scary day is with your kid in the car? It's when they turn 16, and now you're handing over the keys. Now they're moving from the passenger seat, from the ride-along seat, into the driver's seat. That's a scary moment.

It is a big moment in your life when you hand someone else the keys. Up until now, I've been driving. I choose the destination. I choose the route. I choose the speed. You're in the drive-along seat. But if we are to change seats, if you're going to drive, I have to trust you. It's all about control.

Whoever is in this seat is the person in control.

A lot of people find Jesus handy to have in the car as long as he's in the ride-along seat, because something may come up where they require his services. Jesus, I have a health problem, and I need some help.... I want you in the car, but I'm not so sure I want you driving. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my life anymore. If he's driving, I'm not in charge of my wallet anymore. If I put him in control then it's no longer a matter of giving some money now and then when I'm feeling generous or when more of it is coming into my life. Now, it's his wallet. It's scary. If Jesus is driving, I'm not in charge of my ego anymore. I no longer have the right to satisfy every self-centered ambition. No, it's his agenda. It's his life. Now, I'm not in charge of my mouth anymore. I don't get to gossip, flatter, cajole, deceive, rage, intimidate, manipulate, exaggerate. I get out of the driver's seat and hand the keys over to him. I'm fully engaged. In fact, I'm more alive than I've ever been before, but it's not my life anymore. It's *his* life.