

Gospels: Lesson Eight, Road to the Cross

Matthew 21-23, John 11-12

Subject: After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead tension between Jesus and the religious leaders reached a crisis point.

Main Idea: Jesus walked purposefully toward His destiny with full confidence in His Father.

Principles:

1. *When one walks according to God's will (in the light), there is no true danger.*
2. *When the time is right, we must speak the truth in love to our enemies.*

Introduction

Every one of us knows the sense of panic, that sick feeling in your gut, and the sudden rush of adrenaline that charges through you when you become aware of a threat or danger: your small child starts to run into a busy road with traffic coming; a deadline looms over you for which you are unprepared; your spouse is diagnosed with terminal cancer; your teenage daughter tells you she is pregnant; a mugger grabs you and reaches for your wallet; and a million other (often lesser) crises. The term “fight or flight” came to describe the human and animal physiology of panic, after researchers noted that threatened animal either fought or ran.

In the last lesson, we discovered that Jesus’ Galilean ministry came to a close and that the time for His crucifixion was near. In this lesson, we see Him enter His final week. Jesus was fully aware of the evil intentions of His enemies. Yet He walked purposefully toward His destiny, the Cross, with full confidence in His Father. He did not run. He did not fight. At every moment, we see Jesus fully in control. His life was not stolen from Him; He laid it down by choice (Matthew 27:50, 1 John 3:16).

Some unspecified amount of time (but not more than a few weeks) before the April Passover, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. He and His disciples then retreated to Ephraim where they remained until Passover week, Jesus’ final week leading to His crucifixion. The chronology of that week is not perfectly clear, but by comparing all four Gospels we can have a basic idea:

- On Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey to the shouts of “Hosanna!” We celebrate this event today on Palm Sunday.
- It may have been Monday when Jesus cleared the Temple and caused the fig tree to wither.
- Some suggest it was Tuesday when Jesus again entered the Temple courts (Matthew 21:23), was questioned and tested by the religious leaders, and made a harsh, final appeal.ⁱ

Matthew 21:17 indicates that Jesus spent the night after He cleared the Temple in Bethany. We might suppose that Martha, Mary, and Lazarus once again offered Jesus their home, just a mile and a half outside Jerusalem, and that after His Triumphal Entry on Sunday, this is where He slept at night until His arrest.

As the Friday Passover grew nearer, Jesus surely felt a sense of dread and great sorrow, but He was not panicked. He walked purposefully toward His destiny with full confidence in His Father.

I. Raising of Lazarus and Anointing by Mary – John 11:1 – 12:11

A. Jesus' Decision to go to Judea – 11:1-44

- i. Lazarus' Family: Lazarus is mentioned for the first time in John 11. However, Luke 10 introduces us to his sisters Mary and Martha. There we learn that Martha opened up her home in Bethany to Jesus. Martha was an energetic, busy, take-charge kind of woman, whereas Mary is portrayed as more sensitive and thoughtful. This Bethany (there is another mentioned in John 1:28) lay on the east side of the Mount of Olives, less than two miles from Jerusalem (11:18). It seems likely that these siblings had much contact with Jesus prior to Lazarus' illness and death. Jesus may have stayed in their home on a number of occasions. John 11 mentions twice that He loved the small family (11:3, 5). Although Mary's anointing of Jesus did not take place until after these events (John 12:1-8), John (who wrote his gospel much later than the synoptic writers) assumes the reader's familiarity and identifies her as "this Mary" in verse 2.
- ii. Jesus' Delay: When Jesus received the message that Lazarus was ill, He delayed his departure for Bethany another two days, indicating, "This sickness will not end in death." He clarified, "No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." The story would not end with Lazarus' death but with Jesus' glorification in raising Lazarus. Have you made an appeal to God and has He delayed in answering? God's delays are never cruel and ultimately, always for His glory.
- iii. Walking in the Light
 1. When Jesus finally decided it was time to return to Judea, His disciples were concerned and argued with Him. They were not eager to be anywhere near Jerusalem. The religious leaders had tried to stone Jesus the last time He was there (8:59).
 2. Jesus addressed their concern, saying "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light." When one walks according to God's will (in the light), there is no true danger. Moving outside God's will (walking in darkness) is where true danger lies. Jesus knew He would die. He considered His death part of God's good plan, the only path to His glorification, and therefore, not an ultimate danger. Passover was the time His Father had set for His death and Jesus trusted that as long as He obeyed God's will in each step He took, His Father would not allow His death to occur prematurely.

3. Knowing Jesus had determined to go, Thomas proved His commitment to Christ by encouraging the other disciples to go with Jesus, even though they assumed they too would likely be killed.

iv. Jesus' Interaction with Martha

1. The custom was to bury a dead person the same day they died, because of the effect of the warm climate on decomposition. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already been in the grave four days. This is an important fact because the general Jewish belief was that “the spirit of the deceased hovered around the body for three days in anticipation of some possible means of reentry into the body. But on the third day it was believed that the body lost its color and the spirit was locked out. Therefore the spirit was obliged to enter the chambers of Sheol (the place of the dead).”ⁱⁱ By the fourth day, all hope was lost.
2. Martha rushed out to meet Jesus when she heard He was approaching. She expressed faith that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus’ death and then said, “But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask” (11:22). If it weren’t for her subsequent hesitation to remove the tombstone, we might think she expected Jesus to raise Lazarus. Perhaps she feared that she offended Jesus by expressing what might have been if He had arrived sooner and merely meant to affirm her faith in Him as God’s Messiah (as she did straightforwardly in verse 27).
3. Jesus declared to Martha, “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (11:25). This is one of seven “I am” statements Jesus made, according to John’s Gospel. In the Old Testament, the phrase “I am” is used as a description of God Himself (Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 46:4). In John, Jesus identifies Himself as the Bread of Life (6:35); the Light of the World (8:12); the Door/Gate (10:7); the Good Shepherd (10:11); the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6); and the Vine (15:1). In each of these expressions, He revealed some aspect of His person and work. Jesus explained to Martha, “The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (11:26). A believer’s death is the gateway to eternal life. Spiritually, they never die. On another occasion, Jesus said a time is coming when “all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out” (John 5:28-29).

- v. Jesus Wept: Mary had been waiting at home. When she came to Jesus, the mourners followed her. Jesus saw her weeping and was “deeply moved in spirit and troubled” (11:33). The Greek words here are stronger than what is implied in English translations and connote anger. Why was Jesus angry and why did He weep? Possibly because the mourners around Him failed to truly believe that He is “the Resurrection and the Life,” but it seems more likely that Jesus was deeply distressed by the consequences of sin. He would raise Lazarus, but it angered Him that those He loved had to experience death at all!
- vi. Jesus’ Loud Command: When Jesus ordered that the stone be removed from the cave that served as Lazarus’ tomb, Martha objected because of the odor of decay. Jesus challenged her that if she believed, she would see the glory of God. Jesus prayed aloud and ordered Lazarus to “come out” (11:43). At His command, Lazarus got up and walked out of the tomb. As if witnessing this event didn’t already have a tremendous impact on the mourners, Jesus then instructed them to get involved by freeing Lazarus from the binding grave cloths in which he was wrapped.

B. The Sanhedrin’s Decision Resulting From Lazarus’ Raising – 11:45-57

- i. The Sanhedrin’s Concern: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard this, they called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the 71-member Jewish Council of religious leaders, which Rome had granted limited governing power in the region. The Sanhedrin’s concern was that belief in Jesus would lead to an uprising they couldn’t control. If that happened, Rome would clamp down on Judea, revoke the Sanhedrin’s authority, and possibly even demolish Jerusalem. The results of this meeting were an official plot to take Jesus’ life and Jesus’ withdrawal from Judea to Ephraim, most likely about twelve miles to the northeast.
- ii. The High Priest’s Prophecy: During the Sanhedrin’s meeting, Caiaphas, the high priest, suggested that it was better that one man (Jesus) die for the people than for the nation to perish. John inserted his comment that this statement was prophetic in that Jesus would die a substitutionary death, not only for the Jews, but for all of God’s elect.

C. Mary’s Anointing of Jesus – John 12:1-11

i. Four Gospel Accounts

1. One Anointing or Two: John 12 opens with the beautiful account of Mary’s anointing of Jesus at Bethany during His final week. All four Gospels tell of Jesus being lavishly anointed (Matthew 26, Mark 14:1-11, Luke 7:36-50, John 12:1-11). However, in Luke’s account, an unnamed sinful woman anoints him.

Some have attempted to reconcile the gospel accounts by suggesting that the unnamed woman of Luke 7 was Mary Magdalene, out of whom Jesus cast seven demons (Luke 8:2), and that she and Lazarus' sister Mary are one and the same. It is far more likely that Luke describes an earlier anointing in which Mary of Bethany played no part. Both took place in the home of someone named Simon, but the sinful woman came to the home of Simon *the Pharisee*, while Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus in the home of Simon *the Leper*. Lazarus' family must have been closely connected with this Simon since all three family members are mentioned in the account.

2. *Order of Events:* The difficulties concerning chronology in Jesus' last week include Mary's anointing of Him. Matthew and Mark suggest it occurred after His Triumphal Entry while John places it before. It is important to remember that Matthew organized much of his material topically. John seemed far more concerned with chronology. Regardless, all three writers record it as a significant event in the week leading to Jesus' crucifixion.

3. *Jesus' Head or Feet?* John tells us that Mary anointed Jesus' feet, while Matthew and Mark tell us that she anointed Jesus' head (Matthew 26:7, Mark 14:3). Given the large quantity of perfume (John 12:3 says it was a pint), it is likely that Mary anointed Jesus from head to foot. The emphasis on Jesus' head is consistent with the theme of Jesus' royalty, while John's mention of Jesus' feet points out Mary's humility.

ii. *Mary's Gift:* Mary used a pint of pure nard to anoint Jesus. She disregarded Jewish custom and publicly let down her hair in order to wipe the excess from His feet. This was an act of true humility. But her gift was also costly in a more literal sense. *Nard* is an oil extracted from the root and spike of the nard plant, grown in India.ⁱⁱⁱ Judas later stated that it was worth a year's wages! Perhaps an item of such great value was part of her dowry, although we are not expressly told. Nevertheless, by God's sovereign determination, Mary used the expensive perfume to anoint Jesus for His burial (a common practice, normally performed on a corpse before burial). Jesus had certainly foretold His death. Could it be that the sensitive Mary observed a certain sorrow in Him and recognized His time was near? It seems so. Regardless, the costliness of her gift and loving act of anointing must have greatly encouraged Jesus, reminding Him of those whom He came to save and strengthening His resolve to lay down His life.

iii. Judas' Indignation and Jesus' Response

1. John 12:3 says that the house was filled with the fragrance. John includes details omitted from the other Gospels, details that seem to hold deeper, sometimes theological, significance (for example, “and it was night” in reference to Judas’ betrayal [13:30]). The filling of the house obviously suggests that the gift was extravagant. Since the comment immediately precedes Judas’ objection, perhaps John intended to draw our attention to the fact that sacrificial acts of devotion to Jesus impact those who witness or hear of them, like an aroma, offending some while encouraging others. John emphasizes its offense to Judas, who objected that the gift could have been sold to feed the poor. In truth, he was greedy, and as keeper of the coffer, often helped himself to what was put into it.
2. Jesus defended Mary, telling Judas, “Leave her alone. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me” (12:8). Jesus did not mean that feeding the poor was unimportant. Such a comment made by a mere human being would have shown extreme vanity, but Jesus understood the significance of the work before Him for all people, for all time. Furthermore, He is worthy of all honor (John 5:23).

iv. The Plans of the Chief Priests: A large crowd came when they learned Jesus was in Bethany, not only to see Him, but also to see the miraculously raised Lazarus. John tells us that on account of Lazarus, many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in Him (12:11). The presence of the living Lazarus was evidence for Jesus’ divine authority that the religious leaders found impossible to argue against. Thus, Lazarus himself became a threat and they determined to kill him as well as Jesus.

Summary Statement: Jesus was in complete control of His destiny and planned to lay down His life in a matter of days. Although He surely experienced dread and sorrow, He had no fear that He was making a mistake. The death of Lazarus had been part of God’s good plan and Jesus’ own death was also part of God’s good plan. He knew He was walking in the light of God’s will.

Principle: *When one walks according to God’s will (in the light), there is no true danger.*

Application: What threatening situation is alarming you? Are you on the verge of panic? According to 1 John 1:5-7, walking in the light is remaining in obedient fellowship with God. Living in the realm of evil is dangerous and will leave us without full confidence in the providential control of our Heavenly Father. But if we obediently walk in the light of His will, as revealed in the Scriptures, regardless of what happens (even death), there is no true danger to us.

Transition: Jesus' raising of Lazarus had forced His enemies to make a decision about Him. The Sunday of Passover week, His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem ensured that decision would be carried out soon (as it turned out, only days later).

II. Triumphal Entry and Final Appeal – Matthew 21-23, John 12:1-19

A. The Triumphal Entry – Matthew 21:1-11, John 12:12-19

- i. Riding on a Donkey: As Jesus and His disciples approached Jerusalem, Jesus sent two of them to find and bring to Him the never-before-ridden colt (Mark 11:2) along with the mother donkey, both belonging to certain unnamed individuals (Luke 19:33). Jesus would ride this colt into Jerusalem. Mothers often accompanied unbroken foals.
 - 1. Horses symbolized war and conquest, but Jesus came into Jerusalem riding a donkey, a symbol of peace. Within a week's time, He would purchase our peace with God (Romans 5:1; Revelation 5:9).
 - 2. But the symbolism had another clearer meaning to the Jews: the donkey told them that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem for non-political reasons.
 - 3. Most importantly, by entering Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus was fulfilling a well-recognized Messianic prophecy of Zechariah (9:9), "See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus purposefully staged His entrance as a way of proclaiming that He was indeed the Messiah. It is uncharacteristic of what we have seen in Him thus far. Until now, Jesus has shunned popularity. With this act, He intentionally put Himself in the limelight. The implied challenge to the people was, "What now will you do with me?"

ii. The People's Response

1. *The Large Crowd:* John informs us that the crowd present when Lazarus was raised had spread the word so that many people came out to meet Jesus (John 12:17-18). Additionally, Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week leading up to the Passover celebration. During the Passover, the population would swell greatly. William Barclay notes that thirty years after this, the Romans took a census of the lambs slain in Jerusalem during Passover and found the number to be 250,000. Given the Passover regulation that one lamb served a minimum of ten people, more than 2.5 million people crowded Jerusalem on that occasion!^{iv}
2. *The Crowd's Excitement:* Matthew tells us the whole city was stirred (21:10), better translated “in turmoil” (New Revised Standard Version) or “wild with excitement” (New English Bible).
 - a. Flowers, branches, and garments were normally strewn along a pathway before a conqueror, great prince, or others to whom honor and respect was being paid.^v
 - b. They shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Hosanna” meant “God save us” and the “Son of David” was a Messianic designation. Their question, “Who is this?” was not because they had never seen or heard of Jesus. It was an expression of wonder over the meaning and implications of Jesus’ action. In other words, “What will come of this? Is this the beginning of something momentous?” The answer, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” shows that, although the crowd knew something about Jesus, they didn’t fully grasp His true identity or the implications of what was taking place. John tells us that even Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand that all these events were occurring in fulfillment of prophecy until after Jesus was glorified (12:16).
3. *Pharisees' Reaction:* John concludes that the Pharisees were incensed by all the fuss: “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after Him!” (John 12:19; see also Matthew 21:15).

B. The Clearing of the Temple – Matthew 21:12-17

- i. History of the Temple: Many of the events described in these few days leading up to Jesus' crucifixion took place at the Temple. The first temple, built by Solomon nearly a thousand years earlier, was small but very ornate (1 Kings 6-8). That temple was destroyed when the Babylonians overran Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Chronicles 36:18-19). Approximately seventy years later, a much less expensive and elegant temple (sometimes referred to as the Second Temple) was built by those who returned from exile (Ezra 1:2-5, 7:14-18). Herod's Temple was built between 19 and 9 BC, although work on it continued throughout Jesus' lifetime. His project greatly enlarged and enhanced the existing structure, and stood on the same site as the original temple, Mount Moriah (the place where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac). Herod's intent was to impress and please both the Romans and the Jews. Between AD 66 and 70, Jewish resistance to Rome climaxed. In AD 70, Jerusalem was conquered by Rome and the Temple destroyed by fire.
- ii. An Abused Place of Worship: John tells us of a temple cleansing that occurred early in Jesus' ministry (John 2:13-25). Perhaps Jesus cleansed the temple on several occasions, but all three synoptic writers tell us that He did so after His Triumphal Entry and prior to His crucifixion. The Old Testament often speaks of temple abuse and empty worship. In Jesus' day, the required animal sacrifices were sold at greatly inflated prices. Currency was exchanged in order to pay the temple tax and that business transaction was also abused. No doubt Jesus, to whom all the temple furnishings and functions pointed, was deeply distressed by these corrupt distractions.
- iii. An End to the Sacrifice System: This particular temple cleansing may have served another purpose as well. By tossing out these businesses, the sacrifices couldn't continue (at least for the time being). Perhaps Jesus was foreshadowing the end of the Temple as a place of sacrifice. Indeed the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and never to this day have sacrifices been offered, but as the Book of Hebrews explains so beautifully, the system of sacrifices anticipated the only true and worthy sacrifice for sin made by Jesus Himself. With Jesus' crucifixion, no further sacrifices were needed (Hebrews 10:14-18).

C. The Cursing of a Fig Tree – Matthew 21:18-22

- i. Israel, the Barren Fig: At first reading, the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree seems strangely out of place and irrelevant to the weighty events that surrounded it. However, it begins to make sense if we consider that the fig tree is a common symbol of the fruitful land of Israel. This particular fig tree had bloomed prematurely. The Passover season falls in April.

Normally, a fig tree bore late spring fruit (in June) and the leaves appeared after. Since the leaves were on the tree, it should have borne fruit. However, seeing that it had no figs, Jesus cursed it. Israel was like this tree. The people professed fruitfulness, but when Jesus looked at them, He saw none. Micah 7:1-6 and Jeremiah 8:13 compare Israel to a fruitless fig tree. Mark interwove the account of the fig tree with Jesus' temple cleansing, as if to emphasize that the Jews' empty worship was like the barren tree (Mark 11:12-25). Just as the tree was judged and withered, in another 40 years, the Temple would no longer be standing. Unless the people repented, they too would perish.

- ii. Faith and Prayer: When the disciples witnessed the quick effect of Jesus' words on the tree, Jesus used the opportunity to make a statement about the power of faith. "Removing mountains" was a figure of speech for what was impossible. However, the impossible is made possible by faith. Although Jesus did not give any specific restriction concerning what could be asked in prayer, the association of the verse with the cursing of the fig suggests that He was thinking of prayers in line with the priorities and coming of His kingdom.^{vi}

D. The Reaction of the Pharisees – Matthew 21:23 – 23:39

i. Jesus' Authority Questioned – 21:23-27:

1. Matthew 21:23 shows Jesus back in the Temple courts. Tension between the religious community and Jesus was tremendous. The chief priests and elders of the people understood that Jesus was claiming authority. Thus, they attempted to trap Him, demanding to know by what authority He was doing these things (a reference to His recent Triumphal Entry and temple cleansing, but probably also intended to include all of His signs and teachings).
2. If Jesus answered their question directly, they would accuse Him of blasphemy, the penalty for which was death. The time for that was approaching quickly but was still a few days away. Therefore, Jesus answered them indirectly, with a question of His own: From where did John's baptism (his baptism of others) come? In other words, who authorized it? Heaven? Or was it of human origin? This brilliant response was far from evasive. John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:36). If the leaders acknowledged that John's ministry had divine approval, they would also be admitting that Jesus' authority was "from heaven." In truth, they had rejected both John and Jesus, but admitting this was equally difficult, since the people believed John the Baptist was a true prophet. If they spoke against John, the crowd was sure to riot. So they lamely responded, "We don't know" (21:27).

3. Jesus then said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” However, He went on to give three parables that answered the question indirectly.
- ii. **Jesus' Parabolic Responses – 21:28 – 22:14**
 1. *Parable of the Two Sons:* The first parable told of two sons. The first refused to work for his father but later changed his mind and went. The second told his father he would work but never did. Jesus concluded that that tax collectors and prostitutes (like the first son) were entering the Kingdom of God ahead of Israel’s religious leaders (who were like the second son). Then Jesus applied the parable to the religious leaders’ refusal to believe John’s teaching, which Jesus called “the way of righteousness” (21:32). If John’s teaching was “the way of righteousness,” John’s baptism was clearly from heaven. With that fact established and since John approved of Jesus, the implication was that Jesus’ authority also came from heaven.
 2. *Parable of the Tenants:*
 - a. The second parable, the Parable of the Tenants, was also an accusation. In it, Jesus used Old Testament imagery (Isaiah 5:1-7), telling of a landowner (representing God) who planted a vineyard (representing Israel). The tenants who cared for the vineyard represented those whom God has entrusted to care for His people, Israel. However, when the landowner sent his representatives to collect the fruit (first his servants [representing the prophets] and later his own son [representing Jesus]), the tenants beat and killed them. The chief priests and elders listening to the parable apparently hadn’t quite picked up on the implications of the imagery yet and agreed that the tenants deserved judgment. Jesus then said, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” This was another well-recognized Old Testament Messianic prophecy (Psalm 118:22-23). Jesus was applying it to Himself: the Jews had rejected Him, just as predicted. This parable also answered the question about the origin of His authority: He claimed to be Messiah and therefore, His authority must be from God.
 - b. This second parable condemned the religious leaders not only for rejecting Jesus but also for failing to care for God’s vineyard, the people of Israel. Jesus explained the result: their authority would be taken away and given to a new community, a people who would “produce fruit” (21:43).

The passage supports the transference of the kingdom from Israel to the Church (which includes both Jews and Gentiles).

- c. After this second parable, Matthew says the chief priests and Pharisees looked for a way to arrest Jesus but were afraid of the crowds who believed He was a prophet.

3. *Parable of the Wedding Banquet:*

- a. In Jesus' third parable, He stated that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. Jesus had often called God His Father and had claimed to be God's Son. The parable taught that God would reject the religious leaders of Israel because they had rejected His Son, but He would invite others into the kingdom in their place. Not only was the parable an indictment against the Jews, the language concerning "the king" and "his son" once again implied that His authority had indeed come from God.
 - b. This third parable is really two stories in one. The second half tells of a wedding guest who arrives without being appropriately dressed. Several Old Testament passages speak of being clothed in righteousness (Job 29:14, Psalm 132:9, Isaiah 61:10). Thus, this part of the parable reminded those who accepted the invitation to the Kingdom of God that they were committing to a life of reform.
4. *Summary:* The three parables indirectly answered the religious leaders' question about the origin of Jesus' authority. They also indicted them for their failure to lead the people well and their rejection of Jesus. However, the parables were also a final plea of sorts to Jesus' accusers to consider the outcome of their decision to reject Him and change their minds.

iii. Intent to Trap Jesus – 22:15-45

- 1. *Tax Question:* After this, the Pharisees and Sadducees sought other means to trap Jesus in His words. First, the Pharisees sent their disciples, along with the Herodians, to ask Jesus whether or not it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. It is worth noting that the Pharisees had nothing in common with the Herodians. Politically, they held opposing views: one resented Roman taxes and the other supported it. The fact that they were willing to unite to trap Jesus shows just how deep their hatred was of Him. Jesus avoided entrapment by affirming the view of both groups. Even a tyrannical government is better than anarchy and one should pay their government what is due. On the other hand, one must give to God what belongs to God (our very lives).

2. *Hypothetical Resurrection Scenario:* Next, the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question about the resurrection.
 - a. The Sadducees only acknowledged the Books of Moses (the first five books of our Bible) and found no strong evidence of any concept of resurrection in them. The Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection, held that all of the Law and Prophets (our Old Testament) were authoritative. Thus, when the two groups argued over the resurrection, the Pharisees were left with the burden of proving it from the five books the Sadducees recognized.^{vii}
 - b. In this scene, Jesus accomplished what the Pharisees never had. He quoted Exodus 3:6, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” a statement God made long after these three patriarchs of Israel were dead. Jesus then concluded that God is not the God of the dead but of the living. In other words, although these three men had died, they still live. The Sadducees’ hypothetical story and question had also involved marriage in the resurrection. To this, Jesus replied that people will neither be married nor be given in marriage in heaven.
3. *Test About the Law:* Finally, the Sadducees and Pharisees “came together” (22:34) to test Jesus with the question of which commandment in the Law is the greatest. The Law contained so many commands that this question was often debated. Jesus answered by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” He then went further and told them that the second most important (found in Leviticus 19:18) was, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A pure heart motivated by love for God first and then others will keep all God’s commandments in a way that pleases Him.
4. *Jesus’ Question about the Son of David:*
 - a. *Knowing His time was near*, Jesus made His final appeal to the religious leaders. Turning the tables on them, Jesus asked a question of His own: “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?” (22:42).
 - b. When they gave the expected answer, “the Son of David,” Jesus quoted yet another Messianic prophecy in which David wrote, “The Lord [referring to God] says to my Lord [a reference the Jews recognized as belonging to the Messiah]: ‘Sit at my right hand...’” (Psalm 110:1).

- c. Jesus asked how the Messiah could be merely a physical descendant of David since David had called the Messiah “Lord.” The question was intended to challenge Jesus’ audience to consider that the Messiah was more than a political deliverer. He was the Son of God with divine authority and a spiritual agenda. If the Messiah was David’s Lord (worthy of his worship), He could not be merely human. Would the Pharisees change their minds, even at this last hour, and receive Him? The challenge was set before them.
 - 5. Matthew says, “No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask [Jesus] any more questions” (22:46).
- iv. Jesus’ Final Appeal—23:1-39
1. Following this, Jesus turned to the crowds and His disciples who were witnessing these debates in the Temple and gave a scathing public denunciation of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in their presence. He called them hypocrites (verses 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29), saying that they did not practice what they preached (23:3). They burdened people with rules, all the while showing no real interest in helping them (23:4). They were only concerned with making themselves look good (23:5).
 2. Then, Jesus pointed out seven specific examples of their false religion. Each begins with the words “woe to you,” emphasizing the destruction that awaited these leaders if they continued in their present course.
 - a. Jesus condemned them for:
 - i. preventing people from finding the true way to heaven (verse 13),
 - ii. winning converts who became even greater hypocrites (verse 15),
 - iii. mincing words to serve their purposes (verses 16-22),
 - iv. insisting on compliance to the details of the Law while missing altogether the main thrust of the Law (verses 23-24),
 - v. observing religious ritual and neglecting right attitudes (verses 25-26),
 - vi. being more concerned with externals than internals (verses 27-28),
 - vii. and claiming moral superiority over their forefathers while acting just like them (verses 30-31).

- b. However, these “woes” were more than condemnations, they were Jesus’ plea. He was making a final appeal to His enemies to turn and recognize Him before they brought condemnation on themselves.
- 3. Sadly, Jesus concluded by predicting the Jews’ continued rejection of Him and persecution of His followers, culminating in the “righteous blood [of the martyrs] coming on them” (23:35). This judgment probably refers to the burning of the Temple and destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in AD 70. Jesus also predicted God’s abandonment of the Jewish “house” until they (at some future, unknown time) recognize Him as Messiah.
- 4. Jesus’ words were harsh, but His final words reveal that they weren’t pronounced with glee but with sorrow. He had hoped for a better response in Jerusalem. His intent, even in giving these warnings, was that some might turn and receive Him. From this time forward, Jesus made no further public appeal, yet He looked forward to a better reception at some future, unspecified time. At that time, any prepared to receive Him would say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (23:39). Jesus perhaps was indicating a future mass conversion of Jews just prior to Jesus’ Second Coming (which Romans 9-11 seems to support), but the statement itself is open-ended. It was Jesus’ final public appeal. He would not appear in public again until His arrest and crucifixion.

Summary Statement: Knowing His time with them was short, Jesus had declared He was Messiah more clearly than ever before and forced the religious leaders to decide what they would do with Him. He knew what they would decide: they would put Him to death. Yet He did not panic. Instead, He gave them one last opportunity to repent.

Principle: *When the time is right, we must speak the truth in love to our enemies.*

Jesus studied the Scriptures carefully and walked in intimate fellowship with His Father. As a result, He knew the week of His death had come. He knew the time was right to force His enemies into a decision about Him. What would they do with Jesus? He asked that very question: “What do you think about the Messiah?” (Matthew 22:42).

Conclusion

Matthew 24:1 says that after making His final appeal, Jesus left the Temple and walked away. He would not appear in public again until His arrest and crucifixion, no more than three days from then. He was walking in the will of His Father and had spoken the truth in love to His enemies. His remaining hours were spent in private with His disciples.

How do we know when the time is right to speak the truth in love to our enemies? We have already learned that to “walk in the light” is to remain in obedient fellowship with God. If you are walking in obedience to the things God has already revealed to you in the Scripture, He will guide you to speak the truth in love at just the right time.

Earlier, when Jesus sent His disciples on a mission, He told them, “When they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matthew 10:19-20). Although our Christian brothers and sisters around the globe regularly face the threat of arrest or worse for representing Jesus, the climate in western countries currently is not that severe.

What will you do when enemies threaten you tomorrow... or some day? Will you panic? Or will you walk purposefully toward whatever destiny the Father has for you with full confidence in Him? If we walk according to God’s will, there will be no true danger.

ⁱ Daniel, Orville E. *A Harmony of the Four Gospels, Second Edition*, p 149-216. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, 1966.

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ⁱⁱⁱ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel According to John* (p. 428). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

^{iv} Barclay, William (1958). *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 2*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

^v Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (p. 450). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

^{vi} Nolland John. (2005). Preface in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (p. 855). Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^{vii} Schroeder, David E (1995). *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom* (p. 229). Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications.