

Part 45: Treasure and Treason

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The Japanese author Shusaku Endo wrote a novel describing the trial Christianity faced in 17th Century Japan. In the novel we read about Jesuit priests who are encountering the poor and oppressed believers in Japan under imperial persecution. And a Japanese peasant named Kichijiro approached one of the priests and asked on simple question in the face of all this suffering, "Father, what have we done wrong?"

Endo then describes the internal thought of the priest as he attempted to make sense of Kichijiro's question. This is what he said: "Kichijiro was trying to express something different, something even more sickening. The silence of God. Already twenty years have passed since the persecution broke out; the black soil of Japan has been filled with the lament of so many Christians; the red blood of priests has flowed profusely; the walls of churches have fallen down; and in the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to Him, God has remained silent."

"In the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to Him, God has remained silent." We live in a world far removed from 17th century imperial Japan. But we might have similar experiences in our hearts. Moments where it seems God is silent or indifferent to whatever we are going through. Or maybe you are someone who is ready to believe in God if only he would make himself clear. The death of a family member, the loss of a job, a spiritual dryness in our hearts. All of these experiences can leave us feeling alone and confused when it comes to our relationship with God.

But in our text today we are going to see the very son of God plotted against and betrayed and God is going to do nothing. Even more than that as have been working through the gospel of Matthew we have seen Jesus active on just about every page. He is teaching, traveling, healing, warning, and working miracles. But in today's text, Jesus is passive, he is still.

Today we are beginning the end of Matthew, and we will finish the book of Matthew concurrent with our Easter series here at Sovereign Hope. And today's passage is an interesting pause in the otherwise busy events which surround the final three days of Jesus' life.

It seems in this passage that there are blurs of activity everywhere around Jesus, but Jesus himself is relatively static, inactive, and calm in the face what we know will be his imminent death. But in this text Matthew is showing us two important truths which shape not only the specific events in this passage some 2,000 years ago, but which also shape our lives and the seeming silence of God even today.

What we are going to do today is take time and look at two realities in Matthew 26. And here is what we are going to see. First we are going to look at the whole of our text today, and in looking at it on a broad level we are going to see the **Comfort of Control**. And after we have seen that we are going to go back and revisit verses 6-16 as we examine the **Cost of Worship**.

So what I want to do again as we get started is read the whole of our text for us once more. But what I want you to listen to specifically is the background of this text. Try and pay attention to the order of events and the experience of the characters in each scene. Our first point today is going to be the

Comfort of Control, and what Matthew is doing in this text is actually giving us a clear picture into who is really in control as it might seem that everything is spiraling out of control.

Matthew 26:1-16.

The first thing that Matthew is emphasizing in this text is the irony of this public and private tension inside this text. By the end of this text everything is going to be set up for Jesus' enemies to finally enact their devious plan. They are going to have the access and the opportunity to finally arrest Jesus.

This desire of the Pharisees started years ago not long after Jesus started his ministry. Way back in Matthew 12 we see this: **Matthew 12:14**. This continued throughout Matthew: 22:46, "although they were seeking to arrest Jesus, they feared the crowds," 22:15, "then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words." And here we see in our text today the increased effort by the officials to arrest and destroy Jesus.

But that public and private tension is this: in verse two Jesus publicly says to his disciples, "The Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Then in private they gathered, they plotted, they tried to think up the most secretive way to arrest and kill Jesus.

In verse 14 Jesus publicly signals the preparation of his death by saying, "She has done this to prepare me for burial." Then privately, he went out. He proposed, they counted out the gold, and he sought to betray him.

Do you see the kind of call and response of this text: Jesus predicts his death, men gather to scheme for it? Jesus is prepared for burial, a man goes out to assure it. Three times the Greek word for "hand over" is used. Once in vs. 2 where Jesus predicts he is going to be handed over, and then in vs. 15 and 16 Judas, asks how much to hand him over, and then begins looking for an opportunity to hand him over. The drum beat of this text is advancing towards Jesus' death, but you can't help but feel it's Jesus who is playing the drum!

You can imagine that the death of Jesus was a hard concept for Matthew's audience to wrap their minds around. Matthew is writing this book to Jews a few decades after the death of Jesus, and it would be natural for those people to wrestle with the tension between the claims Jesus made to be God's forever king, and the death he died at the hands of earthy rulers.

If Jesus was God, why would he die? And why would he die in such a seemingly disgraced and defeated way? But here Matthew is showing that the events surrounding Jesus' death were not individual sequences of events spiraling out of control. But instead, it was God ordaining by his sovereign will things to go exactly how he wanted.

As Jesus sat and ate, men schemed, men plotted, men traded, men counted, men betrayed, and God was in complete control. You see for every glimpse Matthew gave us of the hearts of Jesus' enemies, he also gave us a glimpse of Jesus' mind: Matthew 16:21: "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," Matthew 17:23 Jesus says, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men and he will be killed and raised on the third day," Matthew 20:18: "See we are going to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will kill him and he will be raised on the third day."

Who is plotting against whom? Who is in control? Here is what I love most about this text. Look back with me at **Matthew 26:2-6**. While the officials were trying to find a private time to kill Jesus, Jesus' full address is listed by Matthew. He was not hiding, he was not scared, the priests were. And the fear of the priests is seemingly assuaged by the idea that they won't kill Jesus until after the seven day feast of the Passover is over.

Jesus has all along been saying that he was going to be killed by these guys and rise again. You would think that these men who are scheming and plotting might be able to at least have the ability to plan according to their own desires at what time they would do this. But Jesus is going to be killed at the peak time of the Passover feast. The one thing that they wanted to control in regards to Jesus' death, they couldn't control. "The best laid plans of mice and men often go askew."

Why? Because it would please God that the true and ultimate spotless lamb would be sacrificed concurrent with Israel's feast memorializing the sacrificial lamb that was offered in Egypt. On a night where all of Israel celebrated the salvation of their first born children by sacrifice, the God of the world sacrificed his first born so that everyone might experience salvation.

Now maybe we got lucky. That's what one atheistic scholar claims. He says the problem with Christianity is it needs history. This is the trickiest hurdle for many people. Other religions have stories of their gods or deities, but those stories don't necessarily need to be true he says. But for Christianity, if the life and death of Jesus were not true, it would lose all validity. Which poses a problem he says, when we see the events of Christianity being validated by history. So what he concludes is that Christianity is the luckiest idea humanity has ever had.

They won history roulette and by chance everything went right for them. But if it hadn't, our world would be different. If Paul wasn't converted after Jesus' death to Christianity, if Constantine didn't sign the Edict of Milan in 313, if Theodosius didn't declare Christianity the state religion in 380, if Augustine wasn't converted in 387, Christianity would be nothing more than a short lived and quickly gone ideology.

Yes, if human history didn't exist, our world would indeed look quite different. Maybe the church got lucky, and despite the murder of its leader and core disciples, and the persecution and discrimination that followed, it had a wonderful string of luck. Or maybe, this Jesus is exactly who he said he was. And maybe behind our history is a God who labors all things according to the council of his will.

Maybe there is a God who planned, and works in our world so that we might see and know God even when it seems God is silent? And the question and comfort for us then ought to be this: "If God planned for the events leading up to and including the death of his only son for the sins of the world, perhaps that same God has a plan in your life."

The hope of this passage is the comfort of control in a world which seems to be out of it. I love the Mission Impossible movies. I love them because it's not stressful for me. I know that at some point it is going to seem that everything possible has gone wrong, but then there standing and smiling on a pile of rubble will be Tom Cruise who explains to us that everything went according to plan.

But so many times in our life it just seems that when things go wrong, they go wrong. But do you hear the roar of silence in this text? Jesus is in control in the moment it seems he has finally lost it. That same

Jesus who just predicted in detail the events which will come on judgment day, the same Jesus who predicted his death and his resurrection, is the same Jesus who will rise again in a few chapters and leave us with this hope: **Matthew 28:20b**.

In the silence and seeming absence of God, the cross proves that it is often in that absence that he is laboring for your greatest good. Trust in this Jesus. You who are lowly, you who feel that life is out of control and Jesus is reclining at a table unaware of what is going on, know that he is near, he is active, and he has shown his love for you. Charles Spurgeon says this: If any man walk in darkness, and see no light, let him trust in God, and look to Him for brighter days.

God is in control not only in every event we are about to look at in the book of Matthew, but also in your life. And because God's control did not spare him his own son, we know that the hardships of our life are still part of God's plan for his good, even if we, just like the disciples in this text are unable to see what is going on in clarity.

And that is what leads us to our second point today: **The Cost of Worship**

We have the privilege of looking back on this text and knowing with certainty what is going to happen with Jesus and his death. But the disciples didn't have that privilege. They were living life just like we do of trying to synthesize what they know about Jesus and what they were experiencing in real time. That's where this story picks up: **Matthew 26:6-16**.

In this passage we see Jesus and three other characters: a woman, the disciples, and Judas, one of the disciples. And everyone in this text is working with the same information. They know Jesus has predicted that he is going to die. But each party responds in a different way. We see two costly pictures of worship with two different ends.

This story is recorded in Matthew, Mark and John and in John's account we find out that this woman is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. And I want to talk about the contrast between Mary and the disciples as a whole. But first off I want to look at the contrast between Mary and Judas.

Judas sees that Jesus is about to die and he thinks, what can I gain. The woman sees that Jesus is about to die and she thinks, what can I give. And we see this tension built out in two ways the first is in the value each of the two perceived Jesus to have.

The woman in this text takes an alabaster flask of "very expensive ointment," one all the disciples recognize could be sold for (vs. 9) a "large sum of money." In John's account we find out that they estimate it to be worth 300 denarii, which is the equivalent to a whole year's wages. But in Matthew the emphasis is on how invaluable it is. It isn't even quantified: very expensive and of great value. And she took it, and poured it all out on Jesus. The word carries with it a weight of extravagance, it poured not only out, but down, covering, lavishing Jesus in the ointment.

But Judas on the other hand saw Jesus' value differently and acted in line of his own valuation. He obviously didn't think much of Jesus because he asked what they would give for Jesus. And they counted out, they weighed, they paid him 30 pieces of silver (what was in the Old Testament the given as the price for a slave). Nothing extravagant, but cold, measured, clinical. Different valuations produce different acts of worship.

The other point of tension is in the rewards each of these individuals received based off their valuation of Jesus. Judas gained thirty pieces of silver, but a chapter later his guilt is going to lead him to hang himself. Mary offered an extravagant sum, but gained the affirmation and love of Jesus. Judas gained to lose, and Mary gave to gain. Judas worshipped his pockets which broke open on the gallows. Mary worshipped Jesus, breaking all that she had over his head and was filled.

What we worship always comes at a cost. It's just a matter of where you incur that cost: at the feet of Jesus, or at your own death. Now none of us in here will do what Judas is going to do. None of us will betray Jesus. But how many of us often ask the question: "What will you give me if I hand over my Jesus?"

When we are tempted by sin, when we enter a new community, we often think and weigh the cost of following Jesus. And what we are really asking is: "What is the benefit I will get if I give over my faith in Jesus?" What social benefit would be mine if I threw aside my faith in this context? Who will I be able to date or marry if I just stop looking for a Christian spouse? What satisfaction would be mine if I stopped worrying about sin? What relief would I have if I just indulged this once?

Just as Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and just as Judas betrayed Jesus for a zip-lock of coins, so too we must guard ourselves from the lie that we gain by setting aside a life of costly worship. Mary saw who Jesus was, and she was willing to do anything to worship him. She left it all on his head, and suffered no loss.

That was Mary in contrast to Judas, but there is a second contrast between Mary and the disciples right? Both Mary and the disciples loved Jesus. They saw him rightly. Yet look back at what the disciples did when they saw this happen: **Matthew 26:8-13**.

Notice the word Matthew used in this text: "But Jesus aware of this said to them." He didn't say "when Jesus heard this," he said "when he was aware of it." Which probably means that after the woman came in and poured the sacrifice on Jesus' head the disciples may have pulled her aside in private and challenged her.

Why would they challenge her? Perhaps because they know that Jesus is about to die, and they remember what Jesus just said earlier that day: **Matthew 25:44-46**.

The disciples weren't wrong or sinful when they said this, it seemed to be a reasonable thing to do in light of what Jesus said about his death and what he said about the poor. But here is what I love about Mary in contrast to the other disciples. They all know Jesus is about to die, he's made that clear. They are all together eating, hanging out in what was probably a somber silence.

And the disciples perhaps out of confusion, perhaps out of some sense of wanting to appear stoic or brave, are doing nothing of note towards Jesus. But this woman knows that if Jesus is not long to be with them, that it is better to make much of him while he is here, while she has the chance. So she runs and grabs what was most likely her dowry for marriage, and she sacrifices what was most valuable in her life in order to honor Jesus in the moment.

And this is what Jesus affirms, the poor you will always have, but you will not always have me. She has done a beautiful thing in preparing me for burial.

Mary understood something, something we are not quite sure of, that led her in contrast to the other men to live a life of active and sacrificial worship even when she wasn't fully aware of what was next. Now I can say as a point of application: worship like Mary. But Mary's offering wasn't one of calculated intellect. It was an offering flowing out of the love she had for Jesus.

We will not have the opportunity to prepare Jesus body for burial like Mary did. But don't we have the opportunity to know what Mary didn't? Don't we have a greater picture, and therefore a greater appreciation of the love Jesus had for us? Remember back to what the angel said to Jesus' mother in **Matthew 1:21**.

Do you think Mary fully understood how Jesus would save her? Do you think Mary understood that when Jesus died, he died for her sins? That Jesus' loving sacrifice, was an offering to graciously cover up all of her wrongdoings? Do you think that Mary understood that as she was pouring out her extravagant oil that Jesus was preparing to give her his extravagant perfection on the cross? Do you think Mary understood that the death of Jesus meant never again will she have to endure another moment of deafening silence because Jesus promised, "I will be with you always?"

No. She didn't. But we do. There is much which will happen in this world that we do not know about. We will encounter times of silence and times of confusion where we won't really know which end is up. But what we do know is enough to stir us to love this Jesus, and where love is costly worship joyfully follows.

You see what we have seen is the full investment not only of Mary's invaluable offering, but of Judas' thirty pieces. This Jesus, anointed with oil invaluable, and sold for something so quantifiable, but will produce the greatest service to the poor the world will ever know.

Mary became poor in her worship, but Jesus was going to rise so that he might make her rich in his mercy and love. In this night of odd silence in Matthew we see the control of God and the costly call to worship in the stillness.

Where might God be calling you to move forward in worship? What would it look like for you to find your own jar and break it on the head of Jesus? What would it look like for you in the shadow of darkness and the poverty of sacrifice to be filled by the love of Jesus?

It was Jesus' controlled and costly sacrifice on the cross which enables us to offer costly sacrifices even when it seems we have no control. The church was built on such a sacrifice, and we want our church to be typified by such a sacrifice.

You see the main character in Endo's book "Silence" comes to a stunning conclusion at the end. In light of a world filled with the seeming silence of God, he turns to experience and worship, and this is what he says: "But our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day would have spoken of Him."

All the hidden events of our whole world speak to the reality and the worth of our God, does your life as well? Does your worship make visible the God who right now is invisible?

In the stillness of sorrow, will the idea of Jesus' love carry you onward? In the silence of temptation, will you endure the cost of worship? In the absence of affection, will you continue to draw near to him? In

the comfort of conveniences, will you lay them all on his head? Because in so doing you might find yourself reminded of the God who was never far off.