



## **Matthew 26:1–5**

26 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 2 “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” 3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 5 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may

be a riot among the people.”

## **Reflection**

It has been a long day for Jesus and his disciples, but also a long day in terms of Matthew's gospel. Already, Matthew devotes one quarter of his entire gospel to the last seven days of Jesus' life, seven chapters, but of those seven, five of them are devoted to just one day, Tuesday of the Passion week, the day that comes to an end in today's passage. Matthew has slowed his narrative right down because of the importance of this day, the day that we've been concentrating on for the better part of the last two months.

And it has been an explosive day. Most of it was spent in the temple courts in Jerusa-

lem in a show down between Jesus and all the key players of the Jewish religious establishment. He publicly exposed their hypocrisy, pride and secret sin in front of the huge crowds that were filling the temple courts in the lead-up to the Passover festival. Not the elders, not the chief priests, not the Pharisees nor the Sadducees or the teachers of the law – none of them were a match for Jesus in public debate. He silenced them. And then in one of the most scathing chapters in the entire bible, Matthew chapter 23, Jesus condemned them with the kind of language that makes us wince even today, 2,000 years removed. ‘You hypocrites, children of hell, you blind guides, blind fools, blind men, tithing your garden herbs and yet neglecting justice and mercy and faithfulness. You whitewashed tombs, all beau-

tiful on the outside, but inside, filled with corruption, wickedness, greed and self-indulgence. You snakes, you brood of vipers, you whose ancestors murdered the prophets, go ahead and complete what your ancestors started! Why don't you kill me as well?' Which of course was exactly what they were plotting in their hearts.

Jesus' words that day sealed his fate. They'd kill him alright, it was just a matter of time. They would have done it right then and there but they were afraid of the people. On leaving Jerusalem, late in the afternoon, Jesus had told his disciples that one day soon the temple would be torn down with not one stone left upon the other. On the walk back to Bethany, a town just outside of Jerusalem, his disciples had pondered what Jesus had said.

And then when Jesus stopped for a rest on the Mount of Olives they'd asked him about the destruction of the temple and about his Second Coming. In Matthew chapters 24 and 25 Jesus went on to fully answered their questions, prophesying in great detail about the destruction of the temple which happened in AD 70 and about the timing and nature of his Second Coming.

All this teaching has come to an end. Jesus has just one prophesy left before heading out to meet his fate. And it's not a new one, we've heard it many times before in Matthew's gospel. Here it is again,

26 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 2 "As you know, the Passover

is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

After a day like today these words can hardly come as a surprise. Jesus has invited and orchestrated his own death by what he has said and done in the temple over the past couple of days. In two days, he will be crucified. But these words also come as no surprise because Jesus has prophesied about his death on many occasions throughout Matthew’s gospel. Explicitly and in plain language this is the fourth time. But if you add in his parables and his other more veiled references Jesus has predicted his death at least twelve times. Matthew’s gospel makes it very clear, Jesus came to die, on his terms and in his timing.

As if to prove this point the scene shifts in verse 3. Jesus has just predicted that he'll die in two days' time and the scene shifts to the chief priests and elders plotting to kill Jesus after the Passover festival, in ten days' time; after the Passover because the risk of an uprising amongst the people is too great. They've gathered in Caiaphas' palace and are scheming to arrest Jesus and have him executed. And, just as an aside, there is no small irony here that Jesus, the son of God, who was born in a manger, is about to be murdered by the high priest over God's people who lives in a palace.

How will Caiaphas be able to pull this off? Aren't the Romans in charge after-all? Well, yes they are, before, during and af-

ter Caiaphas' eighteen-year tenure as high priest, a position which was appointed not by the Jews but by the Romans. The Romans swapped in-and-out many high priests before Caiaphas, and in the thirty years after he held the office, they appointed no less than twenty-eight high priests. But Caiaphas, political powerbroker that he was, managed to cling to office for eighteen years (up until his death) which speaks volumes as to his relationship with the Romans. The Sadducees who made up the majority of the chief priests were the same, materialists who'd compromised their faith for political expediency. These men, with Caiaphas as their head, gather to plot the murder of Jesus. And they will succeed, although not on their terms, as we will see over the next couple of days, but on his.



## Think & Pray

Take some time to read back over our passage. As you do I'd like you to think about the irony of what is about to occur. The high priest over God's people in Jerusalem is plotting with all the leaders and powerbrokers of the Jewish faith to murder the Messiah that they'd been waiting for, for almost a thousand years. They're doing so in a luxurious compound given to them by the enemy, the oppressors of the Jewish people, the Romans. They're meeting secretly and planning to kill Jesus quietly after all of the most zealous religious pilgrims have left the city so as to not cause a popular uprising. Why? Isn't a popular uprising exactly what the Jewish people want? To be rid of their Roman

occupiers and take back control of God's holy city? It may be exactly what the devout Jews want, but their corrupt leaders are very happy with the status quo. They're very happy with the positions of power that they have under their relationship with the Romans, and are particularly concerned that this Jesus might cause even more damage to their public standing with the people. Consider the way their pride and the lure of the world has compromised their faith, little by little, until they find themselves plotting to murder the son of God.

My pride and yours, and the lure of the world around us, daily places us at similar risk to what these religious leaders succumbed to. In what ways are you tempted to compromise your faith? What cultural

or relational pressures are you under that may lead to you compromising your faith? Could it be that as you have become more successful in your career, as you have grown in wealth and status, that you've begun to drift away from the Christian you once were and become more of a Christian of the world? Has Monday to Friday become more characteristic of who you are than Sunday?

Lot's of questions. Think deeply over your personal answers. Then close this time today by recommitting your life to Jesus. Pray that he would keep you from temptation and distraction and enable you to honour him with your whole life. If you've drifted in your faith pray that he would bring you back. Pray that Jesus would bring your Sundays and Mondays together as one,

that you'd live your whole life in worship of him, and that you'd lead the world to him, instead of being led away from him by the world.