

The Passion of Our Lord

SIGNED, SEALED (... DELIVERED)

Matthew 26:14–27:66

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Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

Chapter 26

14Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

17On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 18He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" 19So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

20When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; 21and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." 25Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

26While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27Then he took a cup, and after

giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

30When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

31Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

32But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

33Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." 34Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." 35Peter said to him, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And so said all the disciples.

36Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." 39And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." 40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." 43Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45Then he came to the disciples and said

to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

47While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." 49At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" 55At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

57Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. 58But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. 59Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" 62The

high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" 63But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." 64Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

65Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. 66What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death." 67Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him, 68saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?"

69Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." 70But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." 71When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." 72Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." 73After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." 74Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. 75Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Chapter 27

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. 2They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

3When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he

repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." 5Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. 6But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." 7After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. 8For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, 10and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

11Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." 12But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. 13Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" 14But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

15Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. 16At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 17So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" 18For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. 19While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." 20Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. 21The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do

you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas."
22Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!"
23Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

24So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." 25Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" 26So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

27Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 30They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. 31After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

32As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. 33And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), 34they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. 35And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; 36then they sat down there and kept watch over him. 37Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

38Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 39Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads 40and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of

God, come down from the cross.” 41In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 42He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. 43He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, ‘I am God’s Son.’” 44The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

45From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 47When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “This man is calling for Elijah.” 48At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

55Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

57When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. 58He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. 59So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth 60and laid it in his own new tomb, which he

had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. 61Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

62The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate 63and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." 65Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." 66So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

DIAGNOSIS: (Con)Signed to Death

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Signed: This Is Jesus, King of the Jews*

"Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'" (26:37). So read the sign that the Romans placed over Jesus' head; and like most signs it pointed to a greater truth: namely, Jesus' true identity. But this sign was no faith statement; it was a legal sentence claiming that Jesus was a pretender to the throne.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Sealed in the Tomb*

Such a sentence might have been expected of a capricious power like Rome, but what of the religious authorities—who were Jesus' own people? Surely Jesus could expect his Jewish compatriots and, especially, his own disciples to stick with him. But they do not! Judas betrays him (26:14-16, 23-25). Peter publicly forsakes him (26:69-75). Even the disciples who do not verbally

deny him, inquire of Jesus about their own potential to betray him (26:20-22). And the religious authorities of Jesus' day have been seeking to undercut his authority since he first began preaching and healing, and have only increased in their animosity toward him by this point. What is most sad, is that Jesus is not surprised to be treated with such disdain; he even seems to know to expect it from his closest followers, when he disappointedly declares: "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'" (26:31).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Delivered to Death*

So it's no wonder that the sign hung over his head announces the sentence that leads to his death. The Romans had more than enough help to bring him to the cross—not just his enemies, but his friends. But the sentence of death does not loom only over Jesus' head, for when the Son of God (27:54) is put to death by mere "tenants," the tenants are bound to be ousted (Matt. 21:40). So the sentence of death is declared by God—the ultimate, impartial authority—who holds the power to deliver his sentence on friend and foe alike. And all of us fit somewhere on that continuum between friend and foe: the damned.

PROGNOSIS: (Life) Concealed in the Tomb

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Signed by the Cross*

But the last breath that Jesus breathes (27:50)—while it appears to be the end of him and us—conceals a truth that won't be discovered for three days. When Jesus breathes out, those in the tombs have life breathed into them (27:52-53; they don't come out of their tombs yet, but life is being stirred up!). And while the cross and the tomb seem to indicate that the last word has been spoken, the temple curtain torn in two (27:51) reveals

an unexpected and contrary sign: This Jesus who was loose in the world in life, is exposed as the “Holy of Holies,” whose death on the cross is able to let loose something new—life after death for him and for all the dead.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Sealed with the Holy Spirit*

But those who are raised with Christ after his death, first are sealed with Christ in the tomb. There, in the tomb, Christ undoes the death that sin condemns us to: Call his faithful-but-deadly work “anti-denial,” or “un-betrayal.” Call it repentance: Jesus repenting of life to give us life. And so, even while it is true that we are having our sin put to death, it is also true that Jesus is the best undoing of us that can be done. And the power of his work is so potent that it blows the stone off the tomb for him and us, so that the only thing left for us to be sealed with is the Holy Spirit. By Christ’s death (and all in us that he takes with him to the grave), we are made impervious to the lasting damage that sin, death, and the devil would do to us. Marked with the cross of Christ, bound with Jesus to death, given the Holy Spirit, we come out of the tomb signed and sealed.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Delivered into This Life*

The only thing left is for Christ to deliver us into this new, old life. It’s a “new” life because we are not who we were before Christ’s tomb; it’s “old” because while we are yet in this life it is the same world—but with completely new circumstances. What new circumstances? We have been signed by (marked with) the cross—the cross where Christ cried out about the forsakenness that we have encountered and will again. We are sealed with Christ’s Spirit—keeping in Christ’s righteousness and life-giving love for the world, and sealing out the sin that makes us sick unto death. And, like those dead on Good Friday,

who were stirred to life, we are delivered by Christ's resurrection—into this world. Christ is alive, the dead are raised, and this world is where Christ delivers us to live faithfully. And delivered into this world we, with the centurion before us, declare life, saying: Truly, this man is God's Son (27:54).