

April 14

Lesson 7 (NIV)

CALLED TO REMEMBER

DEVOTIONAL READING: Acts 2:29–39

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew

26:1–13

MATTHEW 26:1–13

¹When 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.”

³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴and 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.”

⁶While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

⁸When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹“This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the

money given to the poor.”

¹⁰Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

¹¹The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

¹²When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”



Photo: elinedesignservices / iStock / Thinkstock

KEY VERSE

Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.—Matthew 26:13

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 2: Call to Ministry

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Locate events within Jesus' final week.
2. Contrast the religious leaders' hostility toward Jesus with Mary's expression of love for him.
3. Send a message of thanks to someone for his or her courageous service to Jesus.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Unintended Result
 - B. Lesson Context: Passover
 - C. Lesson Context: Jesus' Opponents
- I. Jesus Is Hated (MATTHEW 26:1-5)
 - A. Awareness (vv. 1, 2)
 - B. Animosity (vv. 3-5)
Assassination Plots
 - II. Jesus Is Honored (MATTHEW 26:6-13)
 - A. Action (vv. 6, 7)
 - B. Angst (vv. 8, 9)
An Extravagant Aroma
 - C. Approval (vv. 10-13)

Conclusion

- A. Know Any Marys or Widows?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Annas	<i>An-nus.</i>
Bethany	<i>Beth-uh-nee.</i>
Caiaphas	<i>Kay-uh-fus</i> or <i>Kye-uh-fus.</i>
Maccabees	<i>Mack-uh-bees.</i>
Sanhedrin	<i>San-huh-drun</i> or <i>San- heed-run.</i>
Zerubbabel	<i>Zeh-rub-uh-bul.</i>

Introduction

A. Unintended Result

Back in 1912 (so an oft-told story goes), President William Howard Taft was attending a Washington Senators baseball game. After the top of the seventh inning was completed, Taft (a rather large man) was feeling a bit tired, so he stood up to stretch. On seeing the President of the United States stand, those nearby did the same. Soon everyone in the ball park was standing. Thus began a tradition still observed at baseball games yet today: the seventh-inning stretch.

President Taft had no intention of creating a tradition. All he wanted to do was take a break from sitting. Yet his simple act had enduring consequences. The same is true of the woman in today's lesson. She did not intend her act to "go down in history," but it did.

B. Lesson Context: Passover

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem ([John 12:13](#)). That event occurred early in the time frame of what has come to be called passion week or Jesus' final week. So important are the teachings and events of this week that more than a third of Matthew's Gospel focuses on just these few days.

Our lesson today takes us about midway into this week, after Jesus and many others have arrived in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. On the origin of this single-day observance and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread that accompanies it, see [Exodus 12:6, 15-20, 43-49](#); [Leviticus 23:5, 6](#); [Numbers 28:16, 17](#); [Deuteronomy 16:1-4](#).

C. Lesson Context: Jesus' Opponents

Part of our lesson considers the attitudes and actions of the Jewish ruling council, which was based in Jerusalem. Some students trace the beginnings of this council to the body of elders who returned from exile in about 536 BC per [Ezra 5:5, 9](#); [6:7, 8, 14](#). The line is then said to be traceable to the priests, nobles, and rulers of [Nehemiah 2:16](#); [5:7](#). A key figure among the nobles was Zerubbabel ([Ezra 4:3](#); [5:2](#)). He was of David's royal line ([1 Chronicles 3:1-19](#)), but Zerubbabel's authority was certainly not that of a king.

As the royal authority of the house of

David faded away, the priesthood gained more and more power. The high priest became, in effect, the head of state in the time between the Old and New Testaments. Serving with him was a council of elders. A record of Jewish history of about 187 to 162 BC notes the recognition of this council by a certain king (see nonbiblical [2 Maccabees 11:27](#)). The power of the high priest continued to increase with time (see nonbiblical [1 Maccabees 12:6](#); [14:24-49](#)).

The council's power was sharply curtailed by Herod when he began to rule from Jerusalem in 37 BC as a client-king of Rome. When the Romans changed their governing system after Herod's death, the council again increased in power.

Council membership numbered 70 plus the high priest, for a total of 71. Support for this 70+1 arrangement was drawn from [Numbers 11:16](#) after the fact. The power of the council and the limits of that power are seen by comparing [Mark 10:33](#); [14:55](#); [Luke 24:20](#); [John 9:22](#); [18:31](#); [Acts 4:1-22](#); [5:17-42](#).

The NIV usually refers to this council as *the Sanhedrin*. That designation is just a transliteration of the underlying Greek word, which occurs 22 times in the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament. A transliteration is a simple process whereby the letters of a Greek or

Hebrew word are merely swapped with English letters that sound the same. There are many transliterations in the Bible (examples: *apostle*, *baptism*, and *Christ*).

I. Jesus Is Hated (MATTHEW 26:1-5)

A. Awareness (vv. 1, 2)

1. When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples,

All these things refers to teachings recorded in [Matthew 24](#); [25](#). There Jesus has just discoursed at length on events in the distant future.

2a. “As you know, the Passover is two days away—

Switching gears, Jesus turns the attention to what will take place in *two days*. There are many time indicators in Scripture that have been used to construct timelines of Jesus’ final week. We list these below:

Matthew [12:40](#); [16:21](#); [17:23](#); [26:2](#), [17-20](#);
[27:62](#); [28:1](#)

Mark [14:1](#), [4](#), [12](#), [16](#), [17](#); [15:42](#); [16:2](#)

Luke [3:2](#); [9:22](#); [18:33](#); [22:1](#), [7](#), [8](#), [13-15](#);
[23:54](#); [24:1](#), [21](#)

John [11:55](#); [12:1](#); [13:2](#); [18:13](#), [28](#), [39](#); [19:14](#),
[31](#), [42](#)

Acts [10:40](#) 1 Corinthians
[11:23](#); [15:4](#)

Given all this information, one might think that a timeline would be relatively easy to construct. But it’s not as easy as it may seem. One hurdle centers on the intent of the word *day(s)*. Jews of the time use that word to refer both to part of a day and to a whole day. Thus the word *day* does not necessarily indicate a precise 24-hour period.

Another problem with properly interpreting the word *day* is that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke seem to consider the passage of days as being from sunrise to sunrise; Galilean Jews and Pharisees are said to use this method. The Gospel of John, however, seems to follow the method of Judean Jews and Sadducees, who are said to measure days from sunset to sunset.

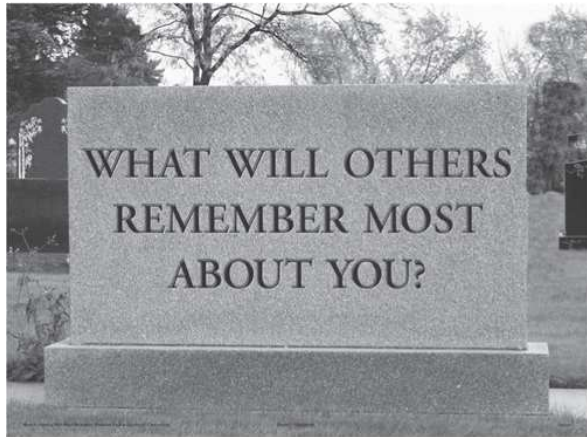
Thus it is with a bit of uncertainty that we propose that Jesus is speaking these words on Tuesday evening of his final week, which not a few might consider to be Wednesday, depending on the two issues above. In any case, Jesus’ fateful and final Passover observance is drawing very near.

2b. “and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Jesus has spoken to his disciples of his coming death at least three times to this point (see [Matthew 16:21](#); [17:22](#), [23](#); [20:17-19](#)). Two of those three previous occasions included, as here, predictions

of betrayal and crucifixion.

The phrase *Son of Man* is the most used designation for Jesus in the Gospels (about 80 times) other than the name *Jesus* itself (occurs more than 900 times).



Visual for Lesson 7. Pose the question on this visual for application of [Matthew 26:13](#) or at the lesson's conclusion.

B. Animosity (vv. 3-5)

3a. Then the chief priests and the elders of the people

The scene now changes to those plotting to carry out their murderous intentions against Jesus. *The chief priests and the elders of the people* are members of the Jewish ruling council (compare [Matthew 26:59](#); [Mark 15:1](#); [John 11:47](#); see also the [Lesson Context: Jesus' Opponents](#)).

3b. assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas,

Caiaphas is the son-in-law of Annas, who had served as high priest AD 6–15 (compare [Luke 3:2](#); [John 18:13, 24](#)). Annas

has managed to keep the office of high priest in his family and is influential enough to be regarded as high priest while Caiaphas carries out the official duties of the position (compare [Acts 4:6](#)).

To meet where *the high priest* resides rather than in the temple area where the council normally convenes may be attributed to the secretive nature of what is being discussed. One theory is that the meeting is held here in the event that it lasts well into the night, since night meetings are not allowed in the temple area.

4. and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him.

Some of these men were present when Jesus spoke the parable of the wicked tenants ([Matthew 21:33–44](#)), and they recognized that the wicked tenants referred to them. They are the ones who bear responsibility for killing the servants and the son of the owner of the vineyard ([21:23, 45](#)). The religious officials had wanted to arrest Jesus right then and there, but they feared the reaction of the crowds ([21:46](#)).

Now, gathered at the residence of the high priest, they conclude that they will have to arrest Jesus not openly, but *secretly*. The word in the original language is also translated “deceit” in [Mark 7:22](#) and [1 Peter 2:1](#). The phrase *and kill him* indicates they have already decided the outcome of a trial before a trial even

begins!

ASSASSINATION PLOTS

History tells us of more than 30 attempts to kill sitting and former presidents and presidents-elect of the U.S. Four such attempts have succeeded.

Some assassination attempts are attributable to mental instability. But historians generally agree that most such attempts have been politically motivated. Such motivations may include a perception that the target is a threat to vested interests.

The Bible is clear about the mental state and motivation of the religious leaders who plotted against Jesus. They were methodical, weighing the best way to carry out the plan. [John 11:48](#) gives the motive: eliminate a threat to vested interests.

We rightly recoil in horror that such a motive led to the crucifixion of the innocent Son of God. Our horror should give way to a resolve not to do that which would be “crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” ([Hebrews 6:6](#)).

—J. E.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to protect yourself from being influenced by the wrong motives of a larger

group?

Digging Deeper

Consider these passages as you form your plan: [Exodus 23:2](#); [Jeremiah 9:2](#); [Matthew 27:17–25](#). Also research the psychological phenomenon known as groupthink.

5. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

The festival is the Passover observance (see the [Lesson Context](#): Passover). Studies of population densities of ancient cities lead some to estimate that the population of Jerusalem can be upwards of 80,000. This number temporarily swells greatly during Passover. The plan of the ruling council takes into account the danger that this fact poses.

II. Jesus Is Honored

(MATTHEW 26:6–13)

A. Action (vv. 6, 7)

6. While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper,

Matthew proceeds to record an incident that happened “six days before the Passover” ([John 12:1](#)). The village of *Bethany* is the one noted in [Matthew 21:17](#); [Mark 11:1](#); and [Luke 19:29](#). Its distance from Jerusalem is “less than two miles” ([John 11:18](#)). The town is the location of the home of Mary, Martha, and

tion of the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus ([John 12:1-3](#); compare [11:1, 2](#)). As such, it should not be confused with a different Bethany in [John 1:28](#).

The designation *Simon the Leper* is not to be taken that this man still has leprosy. Rather, it is likely that he is one of the many lepers already healed (compare [Matthew 8:2, 3; 10:8; 11:4, 5](#)).

7. a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

The woman, not named in Matthew's account, is Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus ([John 12:3](#)). She is mentioned elsewhere as possessing a singular devotion to hearing what Jesus had to say ([Luke 10:38-42](#)).

The *very expensive perfume* Mary brings is further specified as "pure nard" in [Mark 14:3](#) and [John 12:3](#). This designates a plant that is imported from northern India, thus very costly (see further below). The technical measure behind the translation "about a pint" (16 fluid ounces) in [John 12:3](#) actually converts to about 12 fluid ounces. Either way, this is more than enough to anoint Jesus' head. So Mary anoints his feet as well, again per [John 12:3](#).

B. Angst (vv. 8, 9)

8. When the disciples saw this, they

were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked.

Ten of the *disciples* had previously been *indignant* with the other two ([Mark 10:41](#); same Greek word). Now this reaction is directed at Mary for her seeming waste.

9. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

John's account tells us that it is Judas Iscariot who is the most vocal in objecting. He even provides an estimate of the ointment's value: "worth a year's wages," a rather free translation of the underlying "three hundred denarii" (compare the NIV with other Bible translations at [John 12:5](#); compare also [Matthew 20:2](#)). But Judas has his own sinful motive for voicing his objection (see [John 12:6](#)).

What Do You Think?

Under what conditions, if any, would we be justified in declaring something or some act in the church to be "waste"?

Digging Deeper

Under what conditions, if any, would the good intentions of the one who is seen to be wasteful influence our answer?

AN EXTRAVAGANT AROMA

For centuries, women have known

that the scent of the perfume they wear can enter a room before they themselves make their appearance. Thus, good perfumes always fetch a high price. But how much is perfume really worth in that regard?

The cost of the world's most expensive colognes will shock most people. Poivre by Caron is costly for its wonderful fragrance but also for its jewel-encrusted bottle with gold trim. The bottle contains two ounces of perfume and costs \$2,000. Notorious by Ralph Lauren is available only from Harrods in London. It is said that the "beautiful people" believe it to be the perfect scent for the Christmas holidays. The price tag affirms the notoriety of its name: \$3,540 per bottle!

Topping the list is Imperial Majesty Perfume by Clive Christian. In its dazzling bottle that is embedded with white diamonds, it commands a price of \$215,000! Do we wonder why only 20 bottles were ever produced?

When we think of such expensive perfumes, we begin to sympathize with the disciples' objection. Given that the average salary for a blue-collar worker is about \$43,000, the cost of any of these perfumes seems like a waste. Isn't there a better use for the money? While caring for others is essential, the recognition of God's extravagant gift is the greatest of all necessities. Thus we may have differ-

ent answers depending on whom the expensive perfume is for. See the next verse.

—J. E.

C. Approval (vv. 10–13)

10. Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

Undergirding the disciples' objection and Jesus' rebuttal is an important fact: Mary has recognized something about Jesus that the disciples have not. Thus Jesus' approval of the *beautiful thing* she has done. Were the disciples to recognize that the king of the universe sits among them, would any expenditure on his behalf be too much? The pettiness evident back in [Mark 10:35–45](#) in the request of James and John—two of Jesus' inner circle!—indicates a lack of awareness, among other things. Their spiritual discernment seems not to have progressed much since a similar "who's greatest" incident in [Luke 9:46–48](#).

What Do You Think?

What guardrails can we put in place to avoid making the same mistake that Jesus' disciples made?

Digging Deeper

What should we do, if anything, if we see others making the same mis-

take that Jesus' disciples made?
Why?

11. “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

Jesus' statement echoes words found in the Law of Moses: “There will always be poor people in the land” ([Deuteronomy 15:11](#)). Poverty is a consequence of living in a broken, fallen world. The world still reels from the impact of sin's curse (see [Romans 8:22](#)). The Scriptures are filled with many expressions of compassion for the poor and exhortations to God's people (under both old and new covenants) to demonstrate compassion tangibly. [Deuteronomy 15:11](#), for example, is preceded by commands to God's people not to harden their hearts against the poor ([15:7-10](#)).

Similar is [1 John 3:17](#). But just because the poor will always be among us does not mean that we should make no effort to address their condition. As Jesus has already indicated in his teaching, helping such individuals is the same as ministering to him ([Matthew 25:40](#)).

Jesus' point in saying what he does about the poor in the context at hand is that there will be many opportunities in the future to demonstrate care for the poverty stricken. He, on the other hand, knows that his time on earth is short. (At

this point, the crucifixion is less than a week away.) If someone such as Mary desires to express her devotion to him in a personal though unconventional way, now is the time to do so.

What Do You Think?

What are some extravagant gifts that can demonstrate our love for Jesus openly?

Digging Deeper

In what contexts might extravagant gifts not result in demonstrating love for Jesus? Why?

12. “When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial.

Jesus states a significance to Mary's act that the critical onlookers have not recognized. The *perfume* Mary has poured on Jesus is similar to the kinds of spices that accompany a burial in that day, in order to offset the effects of decomposition (compare [John 11:39](#); [19:39](#)).

Does Mary herself possess this understanding of what she has done? It is hard to know for certain. Perhaps Mary, whose heart for the words of Jesus has already been noted, senses that Jesus' death is imminent. Therefore, if she is going to demonstrate awareness of Jesus' approaching death, she must do it now—as unorthodox as her actions may appear to be. Her critics have had their

say; all that matters to Mary is what Jesus thinks. And he has judged Mary's action to be a "beautiful thing." [Mark 14:8](#) records this commendation from Jesus: "She did what she could."

13. "Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

Regardless of what Mary may or may not understand of Jesus' impending burial, she cannot foresee what Jesus now says about her action. Her demonstration of her devotion to Jesus, though scorned by most who witness it, will be cited as exemplary and praiseworthy.

Certainly her public action is to be contrasted with the private hatred and scheming of the religious leaders noted earlier. They too want to prepare for Jesus' burial. But their motives and methods are far different from humble Mary's.

(Note: This account should not be confused with the similar but different one in [Luke 7:36-50](#).)

What Do You Think?

What can you do to help honor the unsung servants in your church?

Digging Deeper

In that process, how can you prevent the honoring or memorializing of faithful Christians from robbing honor that is due Christ? How does the memorializing of the

faithful in [Hebrews 11](#) help you answer this question?

Conclusion

A. Know Any Marys or Her Critics?

Many followers of Jesus choose to serve him in dangerous or primitive settings, thousands of miles from home. They have exercised their devotion to the cause of Christ and his kingdom in what appears to be a radical manner.

Because of their decision to do so, some of their family members and friends may look upon them as "wasting" their talents and education. As family and friends think and talk that way, they echo the criticisms of the disciples who viewed Mary's action toward Jesus as a waste.

Sometimes the labor of those who invest their lives for Christ may not seem to be bearing much fruit. That can give skeptics even more cause to question what others have chosen to do with their lives. And let's face it: sometimes critics are right. But in those frequent cases where they're wrong, they can cause doubt. That's why people who invest their lives in kingdom work need encouragement. They need affirmation that what they are doing is the right thing.

Think about it: What if Jesus had merely remained silent as the disciples

merely remained silent as the disciples voiced their criticism? What would that have done to Mary? As we ponder that question, we may also examine whether our own extravagant giving is being held back by what we imagine critics might say were we to make that potential gift a reality.

To receive words of encouragement from others can be a great source of blessing to those who serve in difficult mission fields. Perhaps your class or your congregation is aware of an individual or family who has such a need. What can you do to keep in touch with them? How about keeping track of their birthdays or anniversaries? How about communicating with them on holidays? What gifts can the class or congregation provide to assist in the work being done?

One great blessing can be to ask them what specific prayer needs exist. To know that others are praying for you can be one of the best sources of encouragement there is!

Expressions of kindness and gratitude will lift the spirits of both those who offer them and those who receive them. And Jesus, who sees such acts, will certainly not view them as “waste.”

B. Prayer

Father, help us to examine our motives lest we become scornful toward

people whose expressions of devotion to you may seem wasteful to us. Help us be as generous as Mary was in our service to you. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Nothing done for Jesus is wasted.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Begin class by reading this true story:

Thomas Archibald Brown (1889–1959) was known as “Big Tom,” the tough police chief of St. Paul, Minnesota, in the 1930s. To the public Tom Brown was a tough lawman who killed an escaped murderer. He was an important member of the city’s “Purity Squad,” a task force that fought corruption.

But there was a hidden side to Big Tom. This public crime fighter was actually a criminal himself! He worked hand-in-hand with mob boss Leon Gleckman. Brown secretly assisted infamous criminals such as John Dillinger and the Barker gang. Big Tom’s double life was suspected, but he was never prosecuted.

Over the years, many people thought they knew Big Tom the lawman, but they did not know the real Big Tom the criminal.

Pose the following questions for discussion: 1–What other stories do you know about people who led double lives? 2–How did they get away with it for as long as they did? 3–What percentage of ourselves is hidden from others?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “The Real Me” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually for no more than one minute to complete as indicated. Allow volunteers to share parts of their lists. Ask why we allow only those closest to us to know personal details about us.

After either activity say, “People who are merely acquainted may not really understand one another. Let’s see why Jesus commended a woman whose action demonstrated that she ‘got’ him.”

Into the Word

Write this at the top of the board: “How does what we believe about Jesus affect the way we spend money?” Under that create three columns headed this way: To attack Jesus and the gospel ([Matthew 26:3–5, 15](#)) / To do good works in the name of Jesus ([Matthew 26:8, 9](#)) / To honor Jesus as Savior ([Matthew 26:7, 12](#)).

Have the class fill in the chart as you ask these questions: 1–Who in today’s account go in each column? 2–What motivated each person or group? 3–What are some present-day examples of people spending money in each of these ways? 4–What criticism can be leveled at each group?

During discussion point out that

those hostile to Jesus tried to silence the message of the gospel. The woman (Mary of Bethany) was criticized by other Jesus followers for an act that recognized the saving work of his sacrifice—the very crux of the gospel!

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Who Is Jesus?” activity from the reproducible page. Have students work in pairs to analyze how the main characters in today’s text understood Jesus.

After either activity, make a transition by saying, “People hostile to the gospel still seek to silence Jesus. This happens through ridicule, dismissiveness, and even persecution. The real Jesus is also marginalized when people reduce him to being no more than a good, moral teacher. How can we support those we know who live lives to lift up Jesus as Savior?”

Into Life

Help the group think of those they know personally who live sacrificially in a way to honor Jesus as Savior. Distribute blank thank-you cards. Encourage each learner to write a brief thank-you note to someone who has faithfully served Jesus with little recognition. Suggest that learners structure their thanks by writing, *Your understanding of who Jesus is can be seen in all you do. This is what I have learned about Jesus from watching you:*

Allow them to finish and deliver their notes from home. Close in prayer, asking for courage to live in a way that reveals the real Jesus to the world.