

PURPOSES IN OPPOSITION

Matthew 26:1-5

1 Now it happened that when Jesus had finished all these words,
He said to His disciples,

2 “You know that after two days the Passover is coming,
and the Son of Man is to be delivered over for crucifixion.”

CHRIST’S PURPOSE

Matthew 26:1-2

Jesus and His disciples were still on the Mount of Olives, where He had just finished delivering the Olivet Discourse, which is contained in Matthew 24-25.

Jesus states God’s purpose with simple clarity. In *two days* He will be *crucified*.

Two Days

It was *Wednesday* of Passion Week, the 13th day of the month of Nisan. Passover was the 15th day of Nisan, which means that Passover will take place on *Friday*. There’s been a lot of discussion about how Jesus could celebrate Passover on *Thursday*, with Passover also taking place on *Friday*. Most of those discussions fail to recognize that a Jewish day did not begin at midnight but at sunset. The 15th of Nisan, the day of Passover, did not begin at midnight, but at sundown, probably around 6 pm or so, which is roughly the time of sunset in April in Jerusalem.

On the 15th of Nisan, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, instituted the Lord’s Supper, delivered the Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16), prayed in the Garden, was arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified, died, and was buried, all before the 16th of Nisan began at sundown.

Crucified

The fact that Jesus would be crucified told the disciples at least two things.

First, the Romans would be in charge of putting Jesus to death. Roman law would not permit the Jews to put anyone to death. They could and did carry out very severe punishments. For

instance, they could give someone thirty-nine strokes with a scourge (a multi-corded whip), but not forty, since forty was considered the death penalty. Paul writes in Second Corinthians 11:24,

**24 Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one.
(2 Corinthians 11:24, 2022 LSB)**

Which was not the death penalty. If Paul had died – which was certainly a possibility since scourging was such a violent act – that would have been on him, not them.

Most certainly, the Jews were not permitted to crucify anyone, and I can find no records that they did.

Second, crucifixion meant that Jesus' death would be public. The Romans practiced different means of execution. They beheaded people, strangled them, killed them with spears or swords, and stoned people. Crucifixion was reserved for the worst kind of violent criminals and political insurrectionists and was always used as a means of warning others not to commit those crimes. There was no such thing as a private or secret crucifixion. It was a public service announcement from the Roman government: don't do as this person did, or you will die too, and badly.

PUBLIC ATONEMENT

All of the sacrifices commanded by the Law of Moses were public. The most significant sacrifice was the sin offering. The offering would bring an animal to the Tabernacle or Temple. They would publicly lay their hands on the head of the animal, appointing the animal as their substitute. They would publicly confess their sins. They weren't required to shout their confession, but certainly, the priest and anyone standing nearby would hear them. The public watched as the animal was slaughtered, dismembered, and offered on the altar for their sins. None of these things happened in secret or in some dark, out-of-the-way place. No sacrifices took place at night. Atonement, even for a single person, was a public event.

PUBLIC PREACHING

Jesus' crucifixion was obviously a public event. The Gospels describe various people being present. I believe that the crucifixion site was next to a road at the foot of Golgatha, not an out-of-the-way hilltop.

Romans 3:25 says,

**25 God displayed publicly [Jesus Christ] as a propitiation in His blood
(Romans 3:25, 2022 LSB)**

The crucifixion of Jesus was not hidden or glossed over by the apostles. Every culture that understood crucifixion saw it as shameful and degrading. But the apostles preached it anyway.

**22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom,
23 but we preach Christ crucified,
to Jews, a stumbling block
and to Gentiles, foolishness,
24, but to those who are the called,
both Jews and Greeks,
Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.
(1 Corinthians 1:22–24, 2022 LSB)**

I recently read an article that said churches that expect to reach unbelievers ought to have the best coffee they can have. You see, unbelievers are so fragile that if we don't give them the best coffee in town, we can't expect them to stay and listen.

The apostles walked into a town and stubbornly proclaimed a Savior who had been publicly crucified and humiliated, suffering the greatest embarrassment and humiliation imaginable, dying the death of a condemned criminal. Most of the Jews who heard them were offended at the very idea. Most of the Gentiles who heard them mocked the idea. But not those whom God had called to salvation. To them, both Jews and Gentiles, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God to save sinners.

What about the humiliation of being stripped naked and hung out in the open for all to see? What about being exposed to the greatest public shame that anyone can imagine? Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus embraced the joy of redeeming His people, and so disregarded any idea that the cross was shameful.

Summarizing God's Purpose

To summarize God's purpose, then, Jesus would die two days after He spoke those words, on the 15th day of Nisan, Passover, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. What's more, He would be crucified, requiring the involvement of the Romans and making His death a public event,

guaranteeing that the news of His death would be spread throughout the Jewish world.

MAN'S PURPOSE

Matthew 26:3-5

As we see, the chief priests and elders had a very different purpose in mind.

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people
were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas;
4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him.
5 But they were saying, “Not during the festival,
lest a riot occur among the people.”
(Matthew 26:3–5, 2022 LSB)

Who were these men?

The **chief priests** were the current high priest – a man named Caiaphas – and the living former high priests, which included Caiaphas’ father-in-law, a man named Annas. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the 24 high priests who served during the Roman period of Israel’s history all came from a small number of families. They were all of the Sadducee party. They denied the existence of the supernatural world, including the existence of angels and demons, heaven, hell, and the resurrection. For the Sadducees – and ironically, the chief priests – the purpose of Israel’s religion was purely cultural. They dominated the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Israel.

The **elders of the people** were notable men in the social and political structure of Israel. They occupied a distinct social position. They served as an advisory body for the other leaders and represented Israel in matters involving the nation.

The topic that occupied their minds and brought them together was Jesus, the Nazarene carpenter who had caught the attention of the people. This was Wednesday. Three days before Jesus had entered Jerusalem surrounded by a multitude shouting out praise to His name.

9 And the crowds going ahead of Him,
and those who followed, were crying out, saying,
“Hosanna to the Son of David;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Hosanna in the highest!”
10 And when He had entered Jerusalem,

all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?”

11 And the crowds were saying,

“This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.” (**Matthew 21:9–11, 2022 LSB**)

Then Jesus entered the Temple and caused a tremendous disturbance.

12 And Jesus entered the temple

and **drove out** all those who were buying and selling in the temple,

and **overturned the tables** of the money changers

and the seats of those who were selling doves.

13 And He said to them, “It is written,

‘**MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER**’;

but you are making it a **ROBBERS’ DEN**.”

14 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.

15 But when **the chief priests** and the scribes

saw the marvelous things which He had done,

and the children who were shouting in the temple,

saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,”

they became indignant ...

(**Matthew 21:12–15, 2022 LSB**)

The chief priests approached Him and demanded to know what authority He possessed. He, in turn, asked them whether John’s authority to baptize was from heaven. They refused to answer Him, so He refused to answer them. (Matthew 21:23-27). Instead, He told them three parables that answered their question – the parable of the sons, the parable of the vine-growers, and the parable of the wedding feast. They tried to trick Him into saying the wrong thing by asking Him about paying taxes to Caesar, about the resurrection of the dead, and about the greatest commandment of the Law. They failed in all of this. (Matthew 21:28 to Matthew 22). Jesus went on to publicly condemn them (Matthew 23).

And they had had enough. It was time for Him to die. But it was better to wait until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day feast that started with Passover. Wait until the crowds that filled Jerusalem had gone home. Then they could figure out how to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him without anyone knowing.

WHOSE PURPOSE STANDS?

So here's our entire text once again.

1 Now it happened that when Jesus had finished all these words,
He said to His disciples,

2 “You know that after two days the Passover is coming,
and the Son of Man is to be delivered over for crucifixion.”

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people
were gathered together in the court of the high priest, named Caiaphas;

4 and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him.

5 But they were saying, “Not during the festival,
lest a riot occur among the people.”

(Matthew 26:1–5, 2022 LSB)

Jesus was determined to die publicly on the cross two days later, on Passover. The chief priests and elders were determined to wait more than a week and then seize and kill Jesus secretly.

There is no need to ask whose purpose would stand. We know the rest of the story. These men were powerless to prevent the Son of God from offering His life as a sacrifice for sinners.

Psalm 115:3 applies here. Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Psalm 135:6 says the same thing: Whatever Yahweh pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.

What was it that the Lord Jesus was pleased to do? He was pleased to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sinners, taking upon Himself the full guilt of His people, completely satisfying the righteous, eternal judgment of God.

This is why we sing, *Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe.*

This is why we sing, *My sin – O the bliss of this glorious thought – my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

We have redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of His grace (Ephesians 1:7). Yes, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but are justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:23-24). We were not redeemed with corruptible things like gold and silver, or by good works or good intentions, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (First Peter 1:18). He bore our sins in His

body on the cross, so that, having died to sin, we would be able to live to righteousness (First Peter 2:24).

This was why Jesus came. Every purpose of God was focused like a laser on those hours that Jesus Christ hung on the cross. First Timothy 1:15 says that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. As John Owen wrote, this was not to open a door for sinners to come if they want to or are able to, nor to make a way for them to come if they wanted, nor to make reconciliation possible, but to actually save sinners from all the guilt and the power of sin and from the wrath of God against sin.

And this is what the devil tried to stop. Satan certainly knows the Bible word for word, but that doesn't mean that he understands it. I don't think Satan understood that the cross of Christ meant his destruction until very close to it. In his panic, he tried to convince the chief priests and elders to avoid the cross. He caused Pilate's wife to suffer nightmares so that she would send a message to her husband that said, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of him!" (Matthew 27:19). He convinced Pilate that Jesus was innocent and should not die on the cross (Luke 23:22).

But Jesus had to die on the cross.

7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man,
 though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.
 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us,
 in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us [on the cross].
 (Romans 5:7–8, 2022 LSB)

BRINGING IT HOME

So this morning, we celebrate and rejoice in the cross of Jesus Christ. We rejoice in what Isaiah 53 says.

We rejoice that He bore our griefs and sorrows.

We rejoice that He was pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

We rejoice that the chastening for our peace was upon Him.

We rejoice that God caused our iniquity to fall on Him.

We rejoice that He was oppressed and afflicted like a lamb led to slaughter and that by oppression and judgment, He died in our place.

How can we rejoice in such things? Because Jesus Christ bore it all in our place and then rose from the dead! The judgment that would have ended us forever did not end Him. The death that would have kept us for eternity could not keep Him. He rose from the dead, and instead of turning toward us in anger, bitterness, and hatred, He turned toward us with mercy, peace, and love.

In His prayer for us in the garden before His death, Jesus prayed,

24 “Father, I desire that they also,
whom You have given Me,
be with Me where I am,
so that they may see My glory which You have given Me,
for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” **(John 17:24, 2022 LSB)**

Jesus didn't resent having to die for us. Instead, Jesus, the author and perfecter of our joy, endured the cross for the sake of the joy of redeeming us. He ascended to heaven in order to intercede for us before the Father. He is our holy, innocent, undefiled high priest.

Let's pray.