

## **Study Guide 6: Matthew 26-28**

### **The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus**

#### **The Importance of the Passion Narrative**

The previous five “books” of Matthew (the 5 discourses with narrative we have read in study guides 2-5) have prepared us for and led us to this point. In fact, the story of the passion and resurrection of Jesus is the key part of all the Gospels. Each evangelist faced the challenge of explaining, to his particular community of believers, how one proclaimed as the Messiah and the Son of God could be rejected by his own people and executed as a common criminal.

While we are very familiar with the Passion story, we tend to merge the details that are presented in all four of the Gospel accounts. As we study the story of the Passion in Matthew, we will see how he explained its meaning to his community.

Here are the key elements in outline:

- Anointing at Bethany
- The Last Supper
  - Betrayal by Judas
  - Institution of the Eucharist
- Agony in the Garden and Arrest
  - The Disciples flee
- Trial by the Sanhedrin
  - High Priest: Caiaphas
  - Jesus condemned to death
  - Peter’s denial
- Trial before Pilate
  - Offer to release Jesus or Barabbas
  - The “crowd” chooses Barabbas & condemns Jesus
  - Jesus scourged and mocked
- The Crucifixion
  - Jesus dies on the cross
  - Witnessed by Mary Magdalene & other women
  - Dramatic signs of a new age
  - Jesus is buried and guarded
- The Resurrection
  - Tomb visited by the women, found empty
  - Angel announces that Jesus “is risen” & gone to Galilee; women tell the male disciples.
- The Great Commission
  - Disciples see Jesus
  - They are told to spread the Gospel to all nations in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  - Jesus abiding presence in the Eucharist

## The Major Objectives of Matthew 26-28

Matthew addresses the “scandal” of the Crucifixion in light of the Resurrection.

The scandal and stigma associated with crucifixion is difficult for moderns to understand. Crucifixion was a horrible form of execution used by Romans as a deterrent to keep order. It was a form of institutional terrorism primarily used against slaves, rebels, and foreign enemies; it was not permitted by law to crucify Roman citizens. St. Paul recognized it as major problem for evangelization:

“but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” - (1 Corinthians 1:23)

Why was the Messiah Crucified? Matthew’s comprehensive answer is contained in his presentation of the Passion:

- Jesus suffered in fulfillment of Scripture.
- Jesus suffered and died in obedience to God.
- Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins.
- Jesus died to initiate a new covenant with God.
- Jesus was rejected by Jewish leaders who misled their followers.
- Jesus was executed by the Romans as a revolutionary Messiah.

Matthew has prepared his readers by introducing all these elements in the first 25 chapters of his Gospel.

Matthew’s Passion account also presents additional teaching on Discipleship. The life of a disciple is always challenging & difficult: Judas betrays and Peter denies Jesus. Even after the Resurrection “some doubted” (Mt 28:17). But faith and repentance overcome failure. Examples include the devotion of the women who followed Jesus and the recognition of Jesus as Son of God by the Gentiles.

It is also important to clarify Matthew’s presentation of the rejection of Jesus in the Passion story. Jesus’s rejection is blamed on *the leaders* of the Jewish people. Matthew sees *the destruction of the Temple* as the punishment for *them and their children* (the generation that immediately followed and was present during the destruction). **He does not condemn all Jews for all time.** Matthew makes clear that the Kingdom of God is offered to *all those who accept the risen Jesus*.

Matthew does not spend a lot of time on the Resurrection and appearances of Jesus, probably because it was already well established in the earliest oral tradition and familiar to his community. The appearances of the risen Christ are already documented in St Paul (1 Cor. 15:5-7). Matthew reminds his readers that the resurrection vindicated Jesus as true Messiah and true Son by God.

The appearance of Jesus to his disciples in Galilee serves as a summary to Matthew's Gospel:

1. All authority and power in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus.
2. The disciples of Jesus (and Matthew's readers) are given the Great Commission to evangelize *all nations* and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, - the new understanding of God that Jesus taught.
3. The evangelized are to be taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded as reflected in the teaching Matthew has provided in his Gospel.
4. Finally, all those who read Matthew's Gospel are reminded that Jesus is with us always, in worship and in the breaking of bread in the celebration of the Eucharist, until the end of the age.

**Questions for reflection:**

1. What is the significance of Passover in the Passion Narrative and how does it relate to the celebration of the Eucharist?
2. Was Judas completely evil? What are your thoughts about Judas?
3. How do you reconcile Peter's denial of Jesus with the role Jesus assigns him?
4. In what ways were both Pilate and the Jewish authorities responsible for the execution of Jesus? What were their respective reasons for killing him?
5. How would you explain the Resurrection as an historical event?

S. Csontos, revision 4, 21 March 2020.