

Hymns: 89 Were You There? 90 Low in the Grave He Lay
35 At Calvary 36 At the Cross
Scripture: Psalm 22:1a, 14-19a

Big Idea: Jesus Orchestrated His Death

Just one month ago, a new virus called coronavirus began infecting people in China. As the media reported an exponential rise in cases and deaths, people **panicked** and began buying up flu masks. Cruise ships were quarantined and travel was restricted.

Despite efforts to contain it in our very connected world, the virus now has spread to nearly every continent. While over 75,000 cases and over 2000 deaths sounds frightening, with 8 billion people on the planet, the case count represents less than 0.001% with a death rate of less than 3% of that minuscule number.

Still, death is a **very scary** thing to a world without hope. Of course, Christians have hope. Our Lord died that we might have eternal life. But He didn't die of the flu. Some would say that Jesus' death on the cross resulted from a **diabolical scheme** to **murder** Him. We want to look at that theory today and utilize the clues given in the Bible as our source to begin to reconstruct His *timeline* and determine what really happened.

You may recall, we're studying the Dispensation of Law. As a major part of that study, we've ventured into difficult sayings of Jesus as a means of understanding the Bible better.

We're heading for Jesus' great prophesy in Matthew 24 and beyond, but in order to understand that difficult teaching of Jesus, we need to set the context. Matthew 24 begins what's called the Olivet Discourse because Jesus spoke these words to His disciples from the Mount of Olives. But what happened before it and what followed?

We will start with that **pivotal story** of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. Jesus intentionally delayed until Lazarus had died and lay in the tomb for four days. He then went to the grave site and joined a crowd of mourners. He commanded Lazarus to come forth. Lazarus came forth. We'll pick up John's account there.

John 11

[45] *Then many of **the Jews***

Pay close attention to that term *the Jews* in the Gospel of John. It will unlock one of the mysteries of this timeline as we proceed.

which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.

[46] *But some of them went their way[] to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

[47] *Then the chief priests and the Pharisees [gathered] a council, and said, What [shall] we [do]? for this man doe[s] many miracles.*

[48] *If we let him ... alone, **all men will believe on him:**
and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

So Caiaphas the high priest declared that for the sake of the nation, Jesus had to be put to death. “The end justifies the means.” That sounds pretty diabolical to me.

[53] ***Then from that day** forth they [the chief priests and Pharisees] took counsel together ... to **put him to death.***

This marks a pivotal point in Jesus’ life. And what did Jesus do?

[54] *Jesus therefore walked no more openly among **the Jews**; but went [from] the[re] [] to a country near [] the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim,*

about 13 miles northeast of Jerusalem

and there continued with his disciples.

We’re not told how long He and His disciples stayed in Ephraim, but the sense is, it wasn’t very long – perhaps a few days. Notice carefully here. Jesus **left** the scene. His time was near but not yet. As we’re about to see, He conducted this train of events – His personal timeline – like a **maestro** with **precision timing** as He made His way to the cross, the tomb, and then from the tomb.

[55] *And **the Jews’ passover***

That phrase *the Jews’ passover* is **very** important. We will return to it in a future message.

*was **nigh at hand:***

How near? Let’s read on.

*and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the **passover**, to purify themselves.*

Crowds of people were converging on Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

[56] ***Then** [the people there][searched] for Jesus, and sp[o]ke among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, ... will [he] ... come to the feast?*

[57] *Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he w[as], he should sh[o]w it, that they might take him.*

Now let’s return to our **timeline** continuing to the next verse in the Gospel of John:

John 12

[1] Then six days before the passover

Note this. We have a **hard time reference** here **except** we do not know precisely when the Passover is yet. For that we turn back to the Old Testament:

Leviticus 23

*[5] In the **fourteenth day of the first month at even**[ing] is the **LORD's passover**.*

*[6] And **on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread** unto the LORD: **seven days** ye must eat unleavened bread.*

*[7] In the **first day ye shall have a** [] **holy** [assembly]: ye shall do no servile work therein.*

They were to cease from their regular labors for that day. Do you see the beauty of this? The Jews were **slaves** for 400 years. God is giving them rest.

They left Egypt after Passover when the death angel took the firstborn of the Egyptians. God gave them a weekly day of rest – the sabbath and then added some other holidays. The day after Passover was one of those days.

*[8] But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the **seventh day is a** [] **holy** [assembly]: ye shall do no servile work therein.*

God just gave them another day off.

*[10] ... ye shall bring a sheaf of the **firstfruits** of your harvest unto the priest:*

*[11] And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: **on the [day] after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it.*

Firstfruits serves as a reminder of how the firstborn of the Israelites were passed over by the death angel that Passover night.

So we have three feasts defined here:

1. Passover on Abib (roughly April) 14
2. Unleavened Bread Abib 15 through 21
3. Firstfruits the day after the first sabbath that follows Abib 14

Now, let's return to our verse in John 12:

[1] Then six days before the passover [Jesus] came to Bethany,

Since the Passover is Abib 14, six days before would be Abib 8. That's where this study starts its timeline.

where Lazarus was
wh[o] had been dead,
whom he raised from the dead.
[2] There they made him a supper;
and Martha served:
but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.
[3] Then took **Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.**

As Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with this precious ointment,
Judas Iscariot objected to the waste of money.

[7] Then said Jesus, Let her alone: **against the day of my burying** ha[s] she kept this.

Jesus defended her act and prophesied that He would soon be buried. We shall see a very similar event four days later recorded in Matthew and Mark.

[12] **On the next day**

There's our next time reference. One day after Abib 8 would be Abib 9. Who can tell what day this was? Let's read on for more clues:

m[any] people that ... c[a]me to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,
[13] Took **branches of palm trees**, and went forth to meet him, and cried, **Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that come[s] in the name of the Lord.**

While traditionally we call this day Palm Sunday, it might be safer to refer to it as Jesus' triumphal entry as we will see as we proceed to construct this timeline.

Matthew 21

[12] And **Jesus went into the temple of God**, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

This is the second account of Jesus cleansing of the temple. The first was at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:13-16).

[17] And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and **he lodged there.**

Recall this is just a short walk over the Mount of Olives to the town where Lazarus lived. The mount is more like a hill to me. Notice that Jesus was safe when He taught in the temple during the day, but He left Jerusalem often to go to Bethany at night to seek refuge from "the Jews."

[18] **Now in the morning** as he returned into the city [Jerusalem], he hungered.

Don't miss that time reference. The Triumphal Entry occurred Abib 9 when he also performed a

cleansing of the temple. Again, Jesus spent the night in Bethany and in the morning returned to Jerusalem. So we have clicked over to Abib 10. Jesus found a fig tree without figs and cursed it. He then cleared out the merchants from the temple a second consecutive day (Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46).

What reaction did that provoke?

Mark 11

*[18] And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might **destroy him**: for **they feared him**,*

Why?

*because **all the people w[ere] astonished at his doctrine.***

Luke 19

*[47] And **he taught daily in the temple.***

Notice how Jesus was in their face and on their turf. During the daytime He was safe because all of the people there flocked to hear Him teach. He captivated them with His teaching. The religious leaders did not **dare** harm Him.

*But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people **sought to destroy him**, [48] And could not find what they might do:*

Why?

*for **all the people were very attentive to hear him.***

Mark 11

*[19] And **when even[ing] was come**, he went out of the city.*

Do you see what Jesus was doing? He was provoking His adversaries to plot to kill Him. In coming messages, we will see how He sets up the means of His betrayal and the exact timing of His death. Jesus had an appointment with the cross, and He kept it to the second.

John 10

[11] I am the good shepherd [Jesus said]: the good shepherd give[s] his life for the sheep.

*[17] Therefore ... my Father love[s] me, because **I lay down my life**, that I might take it again.*

*[18] No man take[s] it from me, but **I lay it down** [by] **myself**.*

*I have **power to lay it down**, and I have **power to take it again**. ...*

Jesus was no victim of evil Jews or cruel Roman soldiers. The Lamb of God came to **die** to redeem sinful man. When the time was right, He **deliberately** set His face toward Jerusalem and His destiny:

Matthew 20

[18] Behold, we go up **to Jerusalem**; and the Son of man shall be **betrayed** unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall **condemn him** to death,
[19] And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to **mock**, and to **scourge**, and to **crucify** him: and the third day he shall **rise again**.

Jesus knew **exactly** what was coming and said so.

Let's recall also that Jesus had many opportunities to die earlier, but the timing was not right. The first was very early. Do you remember?

Matthew 2

[13] ..., behold, the angel of the Lord appare[d] to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and [remain] there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child **to destroy him**.

Early in His ministry, after healing the man with the withered hand on the sabbath, we have this:

Mark 3

[6] And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, **how they might destroy him**.

John 7

[1] After these things

What things?

Jesus had said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood.

He explained it meant to dwell in Him and He in them, but they didn't get it.

Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

His half-brothers urged Him to return to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of Tabernacles.

[6] Then Jesus said unto them, **My time is not yet come: ...**

[8] Go ... up []to this feast: I [will] not [go] up **yet** []to this feast;

Why?

for **my time is not yet full[y] come**.

[10] But when his brethren were gone up, then **he [went up] also [] []to the feast,**

*not openly,
but as it were in secret.*

Once in the temple, He taught saying:

[19] ... *Why [do you] go ... about **to kill me?***

[20] *The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: **who go[es] about to kill thee?***

But of course, Jesus knew their hearts. Some even testified to that fact.

[25] *Then said some of them of Jerusalem, **Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?***

[30] *Then **they** [His enemies] **sought to take him:** but no man laid hands on him,*

Why?

*because **his hour was not yet come.***

Then remember the reaction after Jesus explained that He is the Messiah and co-equal with God:

John 10

[31] *Then **the Jews** took up stones again **to stone him.***

[39] ... *but he escaped out of their hand,*

Although the time was not right, it was drawing near.

After some delay, Jesus headed out to raise Lazarus which brings us full circle to where we began.

Application

Jesus kept his appointment with destiny. As we witnessed, that last trip that we're starting to map out began with the raising of Lazarus from the dead. He went deliberately.

John 11

[7] ... [Jesus said,] *Let us go into Judaea again.*

[8] *His disciples sa[id] unto him, Master, **the Jews** [recently] sought to **stone thee;***

We just read that in John chapter 10.

and [you go] th[er]e again?

[9] *Jesus answered, Are there not **twelve hours in the day?** If any man walk in the day, he stumble[s] not, because he see[s] the light of this world.*

[10] *But if a man walk in the night, he stumble[s], because there is no light in him.*

Jesus knew what He was doing. During the daylight hours as He taught in the temple He remained safe,

but He sought refuge at night.

The forces of evil sought to **destroy** Jesus, but He **turned the tables** – a bit like His cleansings of the temple. How?

Hebrews 2

[14] says that Jesus became a man

... *that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

Everyone in this room has his or her unique timeline. It has a starting point at conception, a line that keeps moving forward up to the present moment, and somewhere in the future, an endpoint for this physical life. The Bible says, *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment* (Hebrews 9:27).

Less than three weeks ago, my brother-in-law, Paul, nearly died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism. He's still in intensive care but has turned the corner to recovery. Paul was athletic, fit, and three years **younger** than I am. Unlike Jesus, none of us knows when that end of our timeline shall be.

Are you ready for that future appointment to meet your maker? Jesus Christ prepared the way (John 14:6). We need only *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Acts 16:31).

Benediction

*Unto him that loved us,
and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father;
to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)*