

Sessions 18, 19, 20 & 21

Jesus' Passion, Death, Resurrection and Final Commission

Mt 26-28

Context

We now arrive to the final chapters of Matthew's Gospel. This is the highpoint of Matthew's narrative, anticipated from the earliest chapters. Everything has been directing the Gospel audience to these final stories: Jesus' passion, death, resurrection and his last words commissioning his disciple on a universal mission to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28.18-20).

Learnings in Videos 18-21

Through these videos we see that:

- The passion narrative is not eye-witness account of what actually happened. Though founded in historical events, Matthew's narrative is essential theological and pastoral. It is designed to offer hope for suffering Jesus followers in Matthew's day;
- Matthew's narrative craft refashions the Markan tradition into a new form relevant for an audience different from Mark's;
- The trials, religious and political, are essentially theological and Christological;
- The evangelist summarises the Gospel's Christology in these final chapters: Jesus is God's anointed Beloved One and Son of Humanity who dies with a spirit of courage, victory, even majesty releasing his spirit into God's hands;
- Jesus' death is cosmologically significant.
- The Gospel ends with Jesus' commissioning his disciples as his agents into the whole world and promising to be with them until the "end of the ages" (Mt 28.20)



The tears of Saint Peter, by El Greco, late 16th century
(Attribution: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

Mt 26-28: Matthew's Story of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection

The Passion Narrative is divided into four. Each division highlights a particular theological and pastoral insight for the Gospel audience:

Part I: 26.1-56—Reminder of Jesus' identity and preparing for what unfolds

Part II: 26.57-27.31: The Trials of Jesus, Peter and Judas

- Religious
- Jesus, Judas & Peter
- Political

Part III: 27:32-66: Jesus' Crucifixion, Death & Burial

Part IV: 28:1-20: Easter and Aftermath

Given the richness of Matthew's Passion Narrative the above four divisions deserve in-depth study in their own right.

Video Session 18 = Part I: 26.1-56—Jesus' identity remembered

- 26.1-2, 14-16: A plot is concocted by the religious leaders and Judas to have Jesus arrested.
- 26.3-13: The faithful anointing of Jesus by an unnamed woman contrasts to the male acts of infidelity that frame this scene.
- 26.17-30: Jesus gathers with his disciples for a final meal.
- 26.31-35: Jesus warns his disciples, especially Peter, that they will desert him.
- 26.36-46: Jesus prays with and for his disciples in Gethsemane.
- 26.47-56: Judas betrays Jesus and he is taken under guard.

Video Session 19 = Part II: 26.57-27.31—The Trials of Jesus, Peter and Judas

- 26.57-68: Jesus' trial before the religious authorities: Mt's Christology explicit. Trial ends in his mockery.
- 26.69-74: Peter's trial, failure and repentance.
- 27.1-2: Jesus brought before the "governor", Pilate
- 27.3-10: Judas' suicide.
- 27.11-31: Jesus trial before Pilate. Trial ends in Jesus' mockery.

Video Session 20 = Part III: 27:32-66—Jesus' Crucifixion, Death & Burial

- 27.32-44: Jesus is crucified between two robbers.
- 27.45-50: Jesus dies.
- 27.51-54: On Jesus' death an earthquake, revelatory phenomena and resurrections occur. A centurion acclaims Jesus as "God's Son".
- 27.55-56: The women who witness Jesus' death are identified.
- 27.57-61: Jesus' body is laid in a new tomb. Women observe the sepulchre.
- 27.62-66: Pilate posts guards to secure the tomb.

Video Session 21 = Part IV: 28:1-20—Easter and Aftermath: Disciples' commissioning

- 28.1-10: The story of Jesus' resurrection and appearance to the women.
- 28.11-15: The political and religious fabrication for the absence of Jesus' body at the tomb.

- 28.16-20: The Risen Jesus gathers with his disciples on a mountain and commissions them.
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Summary

In Mt 25-28:

- The final chapters of the Gospel summarise the Gospel's Christology: Jesus is God's beloved one, suffering for humanity, who brings victory in the moment of death.
- Frank Matera sums up Matthew's portrait of Jesus in the Passion Narrative:

'Mark's passion narrative is eminently Christological with an accent upon Jesus' weakness and suffering. The passion is the moment during which Jesus' identity is revealed; the centurion confesses that he was truly the Son of God. Matthew's passion narrative is also profoundly Christological stressing that Jesus is the Son of God even in the midst of suffering and humiliation...the one who suffers is the exalted Son of God, the Messiah of Israel... Matthew achieves the paradox of presenting an exalted Christology without diminishing Mark's portrait of the God forsaken Son of God.'

F. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theology*
(New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 81-2.

- Jesus is portrayed as resolute in his commitment to God and what unfolds in his suffering and death. He offers a way of hope for those who face death or are reflecting on faithful disciples who have died.
- The explosion of imagery at the moment of Jesus' death (temple veil splitting, earthquake, the release of the dead from their graves, the cosmological imagery) witness that Jesus' death is not defeat but victory.

For Reflection

- How might Matthew's story of Jesus' passion and death offer hope to those you know who are suffering, even dying?
- In what ways could the Christian community, with its conviction of "Emmanuel", God-with-us in the person of Jesus, live out this conviction in its mission ?



Plaque with three saints rising from the dead, Limoges artwork.
(Attribution: Victoria and Albert Museum, creative commons via Wikimedia Commons)