
He was Betrayed

Matthew 26:47-75

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The supper is long past. The songs sung hours ago. The garden scene is late, lit by the moon and the flickering light of torches.

Prayers are ended. The betrayer is coming up the path followed by a crowd.

The Lord stands forward, His disciples gathered with Him.

The moment has come. He was betrayed...

By His Disciple (v.47-56)

Judas comes and betrays Jesus with a mob and authorities to arrest Him.

With a Betrayal Kiss (v.47-50)

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

Matthew was there. He remembers. Jesus was saying that it was not time to sleep. The betrayer is at hand. As Jesus is saying these words, Judas appears with the mob. The mob is heavily armed. Swords and clubs because of course, Jesus and His disciples are violent, dangerous lot.

Just so the right person is arrested, Judas had agreed on a marking out sign. A kiss. And He does. He walks up and greets Jesus, not as Lord or Master, but as "Teacher". Jesus knows what Judas will do and, in some sense, what he must do.

Some of those in the crowd come up to Jesus and grab Him. This is likely officers from the religious court. Jesus is being taken into custody.

With a Misguided Defense (v.51-54)

At least one disciple is also carrying a sword...

⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

One of those arresting Jesus is a servant of the high priest. This is probably not merely a slave, but rather one who served the high priest as a functionary. A disciple strikes out in a misguided attempt to defend Jesus. His sword flashes out and cuts off the ear of the high priest's

servant. That could only happen if the blow was aimed to cut off the head and the servant turned his head, so it sliced along his ear. Blood everywhere. Hand pressed against the side of the head, shocked eyes, the start of scream of pain.

Curiously, if all we had of this account was Matthew's writing, this poor servant would go through life without an ear. So, yes, we know from other accounts that Jesus healed him. But now, Jesus sharply rebukes the disciple. In writing this, Matthew has a very clear word for God's people in the church. Two clear principles are given which God's people must apply in making wisdom decisions. Now, note. I said, wisdom decisions. Neither of these forbid the taking up of weapons for defense. There are no commands here. Principles for us to think about.

Those who take up weapons, even in a righteous cause, tend to die violent deaths.

There may be causes to fight for with weapons; but there are consequences.

God does not need or want our violent defense of His Name or reputation. God is completely able to defend Himself and His people when He chooses.

*When we are defending our nation or another nation, we do so a citizen of this country. It is not a Christian duty or not. You can be patriotic or even love other countries **as long as that NEVER supplants or supersedes** love for God and His people.*

Jesus had all of heaven's armies at His disposal. At the moment, God's will was to go to the cross. The path to the cross was marked by betrayal and denial. It was marked by mobs, wicked religious leaders and manipulated governments. It was a path of deep pain and humiliation. But it was a path marked out for us. Will we also walk it?

With an Armed Mob (v.55-56)

⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

So, this is generously called a "crowd". I wonder how it was gathered. What were they told? Who are they? Are they expecting a fight? They have come at night, very late at night. This is Passover evening.

Jesus challenges them. He is not using a sword. He is using His Word. All this time Jesus was peacefully teaching among them. He was very accessible. Now they come as after Him a criminal. Yes, this is happening in this way because that is what the Scripture prophesied.

As we knew would happen, all the disciples fled...

By His Religious Leaders (v.57-66)

Jesus is betrayed by the religious leaders with false accusations against Him.

Its Dark Setting (v.57-58)

It is night but Jesus is take into an even darker setting.

⁵⁷ Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end.

He is led to the house of Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest. All the conspirators are there. The elders probably referring to the Sanhedrin, the ruling body in Judaism. The scribes are there to hold Jesus to the letter of the Law and to their interpretation. The High Priest is there. This is at best, irregular. Many have pointed out that this meeting as a court was illegal. But this is not a regular court. This is law being subverted to serve a conspiracy.

Peter had fled like the rest. But he had turned to follow from a safe distance. Hanging back to see where they will go. Following to the house of the high priest. Making his way around the walled courtyard till he finds the gate and enters. He wants to see the outcome. How is this going to turn out?

If he has believed what Jesus has said to them several times over the last few months, he should know how this will go...

Its Troublesome Witnesses (v.59-63)

What Matthew writes next is both astounding and wholly expected...

⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent.

The religious leaders who are so, so righteous are looking for people who will testify lies. Why even bother? It is all a part of the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. They had a predetermined conclusion: they were going to put Him to death. Now, they just needed the witnesses to underwrite their accusations and justify the execution. The problem? They could not find any. All through the trial of Jesus people involved keep attesting to the innocence of Jesus. He is not a criminal. He is not a sinner. He is blameless in all that He was charged with.

They finally find two people who will give misleading testimony. They quote Jesus. It is what He said. However, Jesus was not referring to Herod's Temple. He was referring to the temple of His body. It was a prediction of His death and resurrection. How ironic!

The high priest has what he needs. Two witnesses have stood up with a genuine quote that is a threat to the Temple of God. Nothing more is needed. This is an insurrectionist who has committed a capital crime.

Jesus remains silent. He is not going to answer the charge. He is not going to cast the pearls of truth to the swine of an unbeliever.

Its Direct Challenge (v.63b-64)

Most law systems have protections against self-incrimination. Look at the situation Jesus finds Himself in.

And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now

on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

The high priest commands Jesus to say whether or not Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Now notice that Caiaphas uses Jesus own language.

Jesus responds with asserting the truth. He is who Caiaphas says He is. But more than that, He is who the Scripture says He is. If so, then He is the Lord, the authority over Caiaphas. And Judgment is coming...

Its Judicial Sentence (v.65-68)

Now Jesus has just told the truth and condemned Himself.

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

Oh what drama. Caiaphas tears his robe. What an exclamation of righteous outrage. What he thinks he has just heard is blasphemy. The high priest of Judaism cannot even recognize the truth when he hears it.

A summary judgment is now passed. Caiaphas demands a verdict. They pronounce Jesus guilty and deserving of death. The Sanhedrin, the priests, elders and scribes who made it up have acted as a religious court and sentence Jesus to die.

Jesus begins to be physically abused. Thus will begin a long day of suffering that will culminate in dying on the cross. Isaiah 52:12-53:12 paints a graphic picture of what Jesus endured and what He attained, all for us, His people. (from the New Living Translation).

¹³ See, my servant will prosper;
he will be highly exalted.

¹⁴ But many were amazed when they saw him.
His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human,
and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man.

¹⁵ And he will startle many nations.
Kings will stand speechless in his presence.
For they will see what they had not been told;
they will understand what they had not heard about.

¹ Who has believed our message?
To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm?

² My servant grew up in the LORD’s presence like a tender green shoot,
like a root in dry ground.
There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance,
nothing to attract us to him.

³ He was despised and rejected—
a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
He was despised, and we did not care.

⁴ Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.
And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God,
a punishment for his own sins!

⁵ But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.
He was whipped so we could be healed.

⁶ All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
We have left God's paths to follow our own.
Yet the LORD laid on him
the sins of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

⁸ Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.
No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.

⁹ He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.
But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.

¹⁰ But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him
and cause him grief.
Yet when his life is made an offering for sin,
he will have many descendants.
He will enjoy a long life,
and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands.

¹¹ When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish,
he will be satisfied.
And because of his experience,
my righteous servant will make it possible
for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear all their sins.

¹² I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier,
because he exposed himself to death.
He was counted among the rebels.
He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels.

It is to be noted that nearly everything that transpires after the arrest until the dawn is illegal under both Jewish and Roman law.

By a Fearful Follower (v.67-75)

The scene changes from in the room to...

A Significant Location (v.69)

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard.

What a shift in scenes. From a chamber full of religious leaders and a lone, falsely accused and wrongly convicted Jesus, to the courtyard. There sits Peter. He has followed Jesus from a distance. He has entered the courtyard. Certainly, he is trying to be inconspicuous. That will be very hard but he wants to know what Jesus' fate will be.

Three Escalating Denials (v.70-74)

But he is recognized.

And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean."

⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." ⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man."

The first servant girl challenges him. She speaks to him directly. "You were with the one on trial in there..." She speaks of the region Jesus is from. Now understand, Jesus is being treated as an insurrectionist, a leader of a rebellion against the Jewish government. His inner circle would certainly be charged as well. She is not the only one near. Peter denies it in hearing of others. He doesn't know what she means.

Peter gets up and goes to the main entrance to the courtyard. He is trying to lose himself in a larger crowd that is coming and going. A second servant girl accosts and accuses him to others. She is pointing Peter out to those standing by. She identifies Jesus by his hometown. She knows exactly who he is. She knows where Jesus grew up. Peter's denial is accompanied by an oath. Peter probably is not using profanity. He is swearing that he does not know Jesus. His oath is supposed to signify that he is telling the truth. But, Peter has now denied knowing his Lord, twice.

The crowd now confronts him. They surely are talking among themselves. They are certain Peter is one of them. Peter's accent betrays him. Definitely Peter is feeling threatened. There is a growing crowd. Now there is both an oath in his denial and there is swearing. Absolute, total denial.

A Heart-Piercing Reminder (v.74-75)

In that instant...

And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

What an exquisite providence. At precisely the moment of the third betrayal, a rooster crows. What Jesus predicted, came true.

There is the piercing Word of God. Peter remembers. Jesus' words are the Word. Like the sword it is, it penetrated deep into Peter's heart and did its work.

There is heartbroken sorrow and repentance. He weeps, bitterly. This big, strong, fisher man, so sure of himself, so self-assertive, is broken.

Reflect and Respond

I have saved this quote for last. I want you to think deeply about it. Sean O'Donnell wrote:

Jesus' mission is at the center of his rebuke. His mission is the cross. "Peter, stop resisting the cross of Christ. Put down your sword." Perhaps Peter is not personally named by Matthew because the evangelist wants all disciples of Jesus – then and now and forever – to heed Jesus' warning. If the message is the cross, the means ought never to be the sword. "Sword" and "swords" is used six times in our text, but Jesus desires that his church use it zero times. The sword is never to be used in propagating the gospel. Never. A violent church is a dead church. A cutting-off-the-ears church is a stabbed-in-the-heart church. (O'Donnell, p.808)

There are lots of characters in this story. There are disciples. There is Judas. There is Peter. There is Caiaphas. There are people, false witnesses and false testimony. There are people standing around the courtyard and at the entrance. There are two servant girls. It is easy to tell the story and be focused on them, to wonder about them, to want to get into their heads. Don't. This is about Jesus. This is about the King, the Messiah, the Savior, who goes with majestic and humble power down the dreadful way to the cross.

Christians would not be able to read and reflect on this passage without being stirred to a deeper recognition of what Jesus had done. The old order of Judaism with its temple and priesthood is fading away. It is being replaced by the new. The judges of Jesus are themselves judged, and they will before long see evidence, in the rise and meteoric growth of the church on the one hand and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple on the other, which vindicates Jesus' claim. The temple of Christ's body, incarnate, crucified and risen, will replace the temple at Jerusalem. Caiaphas the high priest will go into oblivion. He will be replaced by the high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. (Greene, p.283)

Are you prepared to hold fast to your confession in the hour of trial and tribulation? I pray so.