

MATTHEW 26: 47 – 75 BETRAYAL, REJECTION, DENIAL AND EVENTUAL RESTORATION

We have been in the book of Matthew for somewhere around a year now. And events are steadily moving forward towards the climax of the story. The disciples have left the stage, or in the case of Peter following at a distance trying to remain anonymous. Jesus is now in the hands of his enemies. The enemies of Jesus take the initiative but Jesus offers no resistance. Even Peter's attempt at armed resistance is quickly quashed. Jesus makes it clear that it isn't that He can't resist, but that He won't. This event has to happen on the stage of history in order that the will of the Father can be done. In Gethsemane, Jesus accepted His fate and His Father's will.

Eventually we will see three main phases of this pericope:

1. The Jewish trial: A kangaroo court.
2. Eventually we will see the Roman trial, which is but a mere formality by the time it comes around. Legally speaking it is the Romans and only the Romans who have the ability to carry out the death penalty, but Matthew makes it clear that it is the Jewish (mock) trial that really matters. The Romans are almost participants only because of the shrewd legal manipulation of the Sanhedrin.
3. Within the context of these two trials is a contrast of two disciples. Both involve a disciple repudiating Jesus then regretting his decision. History tells us that for Peter it was a temporary, though costly lapse. But for Judas the story ends in despair and suicide. Peter buckled under pressure, whereas Judas deliberately changed sides. Jesus however remained true to His calling and to His Father's will.

We now take back up with the passage as Jesus has finished praying. He has gotten His answer and is resigned to the will of His Father.

47 And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. 48 Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. 51 And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He

will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

55 In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. 56 But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

If we look closely at the passage there are a few things we can glean from the back-story. While Jesus seems to have no chance of escape, He is still in charge of the situation. And we see a striking contrast between the sorrowful Jesus just a few minutes prior. He is now resolute, calm and authoritative.

That is what happens when we know and then yield to the will of God for our lives. Jesus prayed and then got His answer. But in that whole scenario, was His allegiance to follow the will of God no matter how painful it may be. Look at how that plays out in the insinuating circumstances.

Jesus made no attempt to resist arrest.

He quashes Peter's attempt at armed resistance. (John 18:10)

He heals the wound inflicted by Peter on the High Priest's servant. (Luke 22:51)

He speaks of the supernatural resources available to Him, though He insists they stand down.

Why? His purpose in not calling on the legions of angels available to Him is so that the scriptures may be fulfilled.

He reprimands his captors for even thinking an armed posse was necessary.

The posse was probably no more than a contingent of temple guards with some zealous civilians wielding clubs. There were no Romans involved as yet. They are oblivious to all this at the time. It is dark and the posse is not that familiar with Jesus and how He looks, so Judas identifies Him by kissing Him on the cheek. This was quite common in that culture and still is in the Middle East. We see a manifestation of how Judas now sees Jesus in the way he addresses Him. He refers to Him as "rabbi" instead of Lord, which was how he and Jesus' other followers have consistently referred to Him throughout His ministry. So we have a window into the mind of Judas at this time, but his story is not yet over. People are very complicated beings. There isn't that much that is "black and white" when it comes to people.

Finally, in the final moments of the arrest scene, the disciples leave Jesus, just when He needed them most. They are scared, but this didn't take Jesus by surprise and after they get away from the scene, Jesus' prediction of their failure will begin to sink in and weigh on them. Not even Judas will escape this. **Here we have the betrayal of Jesus.**

57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58 But Peter followed Him at a

distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.

59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'

" 62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!"

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! 66 What do you think?"

They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."

67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"

Jesus is taken to the home of Caiphas, the high Priest where a mock trial has been staged. At first there are only a few members of the Sanhedrin present, but eventually the entire counsel is there. (Verse 59)

Peter follows at a distance. According to the Gospel of John, Peter was accompanied by another disciple – most likely John himself.

Many false witnesses were brought in to testify against Jesus, but their testimonies are inconsistent.

Eventually Jesus' prior statements regarding the destruction of the temple are used against Him. The thought of the temple being destroyed, let alone rebuilt by Jesus wasn't conceivable to the Sanhedrin and bordered on blasphemy, though His words were taken out of context.

The tension is increasing as Jesus remains silent and offers no defense. Caiphas, obviously frustrated, then puts Jesus under oath, compelling Him to testify.

Jesus then responds with the same statement He made in the Olivet discourse, which is a quote from Daniel seven.

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

This drives Caiphas crazy! He tears his clothing, which was a cultural way of expressing anger and sadness. Then he accuses Jesus of blasphemy. Is it because Jesus said He was coming again? No! It is because of the enthronement language in the passage. The "coming" is not one of the Son of man coming to earth but ascending "coming" to the throne! Jesus now clearly states that He is the Messiah and as such will reign in Heaven. This pushes Caiphas and the rest of the Sanhedrin over the edge. They now have what they wanted in the first place. Jesus

can now be charged with blasphemy! Only when they take Him to Pilate, they will charge Jesus with sedition. The Romans weren't interested in crucifying a Jew for blasphemy, but they couldn't tolerate sedition and rebellion. The Sanhedrin was shrewd.

While all this is going on (over the course of at least a couple hours) Peter is a witness to all of it.

Jesus has now been officially rejected!

69 Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."

70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying."

71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth."

72 But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"

73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."

74 Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!"

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Please notice the crescendo, the build-up of what is happening.

A servant girl confronts Peter. (A young servant girl would have been considered to be of little or no significance in that culture.) She apparently recognizes him.

He attempts to deflect and fames ignorance as well as innocence.

Peter is then confronted by another young girl who accuses him of being with Jesus of Nazareth. Whether you know it or not, there is a cultural pejorative here. Jesus and His disciples are outsiders to the people of Jerusalem. They are "hillbillies." Nothing or no one good is known to have come out of Nazareth. We will see this again in the third denial by Peter. Peter then swears that he doesn't know "the man." Jesus is now "the man." And He isn't "the man" in a good way. But it doesn't stop there. Peter's referral to Jesus is now like that of Judas.

73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you."

Jesus and the disciples spoke with a different accent and dialect than the people of Jerusalem. He is singled out here because of his speech. Once again, he is painted as an outsider. Peter responded by cursing and swearing, denying that he even knew Jesus.

Please notice that with every denial, Peter was moving further and further away from the trial and thereby further from Jesus. He began with a front seat, of sorts, in the courtyard. He then moved back from the inner courtyard towards the gateway to the courtyard and finally is accosted by those a little further away. And there you have it. Under pressure, the man who swore he would never leave or betray Jesus denies him three times – each time more adamantly, while physically distancing himself from Jesus.

And we can do the same thing. We have all failed Jesus – missed the mark – fallen short of the glory of God. And in doing so, we distance ourselves from Him. Peter attempted to physically remove himself from the situation just as Adam and Eve hid from God after realizing their sin. But the story doesn't end there.

Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus has now been denied – 3 times.

The rooster crowed and Peter was signaled that what Jesus prophesied came to be. While in the midst of the situation it wasn't so apparent, but now it has hit him in the face. And he weeps bitterly with this realization. But the story still isn't over. Luke's account gives us another insight to the conversation between Jesus and Peter. Once again, Jesus knew what was coming.

Luke 22: 31 – 34

31 And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

33 But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death."

34 Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me."

Jesus knew that Satan was aiming at Peter, as well as the others and therefore He (Jesus) prayed for him. But look at the prayer. Jesus prayed that Peter's strength wouldn't fail and that when Peter returned that he would be an encouragement to his brethren.

Peter did fail temporarily, but this didn't end his relationship with the Lord. It was a setback, like the ones we experience. But the silver lining to this storm cloud is that Peter was restored, even more so, that Jesus wanted him to be restored! And Jesus wants the same thing for us!

Peter obviously took this failure hard, as did the others, but they still knew, because of their time with Jesus, that they would meet Him again in Galilee. Those that fled would be restored and used to take the Gospel to the world! And we are to do the same. Even the underhanded human schemes of this world serve only to advance the declared purpose and will of God. That should ring true in all our lives. Later on Peter would write these words to his readers.

1 Peter 5:1 – 11

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. 11 To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Look at Peter’s words. You can see he has been restored and that his failure has strengthened him in the end. He didn’t let it or any of the others stop him from completing his mission. And we can’t either. The same grace and restoration that Peter experienced is also there for us. Praise God for that. No matter what you may have done, God is not yet through with you. Your restoration is there.