
Day 320 - November 16

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

Betrayal and Arrest

Trial before Sanhedrin

Readings: *Matthew 26:36-75; 27:1-10; Mark 14:32-72; 15:1; Luke 22:40-71; John 18:1-27*

Reflections:

- As Jesus completes his final words to his disciples, they cross the Kidron Valley to an olive grove on the other side on the Mount of Olives. This garden is called Gethsemane, just east of Jerusalem. The symbolism of a garden with trees inside is obviously significant. Where Adam and Eve chose independence and to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, here Jesus as the second Adam submits to the will of God, even when it means incredible suffering and death. The choice was not to eat from a tree, the tree of life, but rather to drink from a cup, the cup of suffering.
- To Gethsemane: Jesus retreats to pray as he is overwhelmed with his grief and the anticipation of the crucifixion. He takes his closest disciples with him, Peter, James and John. In times of deep sorrow or fear, we only want to be with those we trust the most. Jesus asks them to stay near him and to keep watch. When we are facing terrible times, one of the greatest gifts is simply offering our presence. Not saying anything but just staying present in the moment.
- Jesus prays in agony: The description of Jesus' prayer portrays the most intense emotional distress imaginable. An angel's presence indicates that God was with him and seeking to support him during this dark hour. Jesus didn't want to go to the cross. He didn't want to suffer. It was his Father's will and love that compelled him to do what he didn't want. The key declaration: "Not my will but may your will be done." This act of total submission lies at the very core of what it means to trust God and to reject the impulse to decide for ourselves what is right and wrong. The disciples have fallen asleep from exhaustion and Jesus now faces the frailty of his friends and the increasing sense of isolation and aloneness.
- Jesus prays a second time: Jesus says, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak." This gives us an insight into our human frailty and how God understands our weaknesses. He understands our heart condition and how we are willing to obey but sometimes our bodies are too weak to stick

with it. In those moments we need to draw near to God through prayer and stay spiritually alert so that we do not fall into temptation. The disciples here were not successful but after they are filled with the Spirit they will have open to them a greater sense of God's strength to resist temptation and to remain focused on the purposes of God. This is a good reminder that God doesn't fault us for being tempted or feeling weak. He simply invites us closer to receive the strength we need to do the things we want to do in following him.

- Jesus prays a third time: This time Jesus doesn't try to talk to the disciples but allows them to sleep. He knows they do not have the strength and he is all alone. The three-fold prayer symbolizes completion. Jesus was completely obedient to God and did not waver in his desire not to suffer and die or in his willingness to do whatever God asked of him. Once he has completed this third prayer, Jesus rises, wakes his disciples and goes to meet Judas. Jesus doesn't run but instead confronts Judas. Jesus demonstrates courage and resolve to do the will of his Father.
- Judas betrays Jesus: This olive grove was a favorite place for Jesus and his disciples to rest and meet. Judas' kiss of greeting was the ultimate attempt to play innocent. To the first century reader, Judas is the ultimate betrayer.
- Disciples' safety insured: This account in John is strange. When Jesus says, "I am" it would appear that Jesus is using the question of his identity to once again align with God. Those coming to arrest him apparently drew back and fell to the ground. This would appear to be what the reader would expect if they had witnessed an appearance of God himself. Falling to the ground suggests fear and awe. Why would soldiers draw back and fall to the ground? Did Jesus say these words with such authority that they feared ambush? Did they simply have a spiritual experience that knocked them off their feet? Whatever it was, it was something that John saw as confirmation yet again that Jesus was actually God with them. Jesus then advocates for his disciples to be let go. In this way, he fulfilled his own words from John 6:39 where he says to his Father that he has not lost any that his Father had given him. The exception is obviously Judas.
- Peter cuts off ear: This account is again an important one as all four biographies record the incident. Peter is still thinking revolution. The name of the person who is wounded is recorded to confirm the historical accuracy of this account. Jesus now makes a key statement about the nature of his kingdom. "All who draw the sword will die by the sword." In other words, those who seek to defend their lives through violence actually set in motion successive violence that leads to their own death. The sword doesn't prevent death but rather helps to guarantee death. If you don't draw the sword, then what protection do we have? Jesus' angelic army was at his disposal. This was the army that the Israelites believed would accompany the Messiah to expel the Romans. This was the army that appeared to the shepherds at Jesus' birth. The rescue forces of God could intervene if it was God's will. Jesus knew that this was not what his Father wanted and so he did not call to be rescued. Rather than defending himself physically or through spiritual forces, Jesus demonstrates love to his

enemy and heals the man who was cut. Jesus again shows us practically and clearly what enemy love looks like.

- Jesus chides arrest: Jesus asks a profound question now. "Am I leading a revolution?" The answer would appear to be no, as Jesus only taught publically and organized no underground revolutionary force. Yet, in fact Jesus was leading a revolution, a spiritual irreligious revolution.
- Jesus arrested: The disciples all run away. It is important to note the difference between being faithless like Peter when we run away from God's will and being rebellious and directly opposing God's will like Judas. Sometimes we fail God from being faithless and this is not the same as actively opposing God's will. When we are faithless, God looks to restore us out of his love for us. Those who willfully choose to rebel against God are on much more dangerous ground as they are using all of their resources to try to oppose God's purposes. There is also an interesting note in Mark's biography about a young man running away and only having a linen cloth on. When Jesus was seized, apparently someone tries to grab him and he runs away naked. Some scholars think that this is Mark himself noting that he was there. It would be common for an author like Mark not to give his own name. There is also another possible explanation. A letter from one of the early church leaders, Clement of Alexandria, indicates that there was a version of Mark that had the story of a young man being raised from the dead and then staying the night with Jesus to learn the mysteries of God. This youth is described in this deleted account as only wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. The location of the supposed deleted text fits perfectly in Mark 10:46 where there is a strange sequence in the Greek. As Mark reads now it states, "Then they came to Jericho. As they were leaving Jericho...." It is an obvious hole in the narrative. The letter indicates that this story was edited out of the biography because of the obvious concern it may have caused. This version of Mark is called "The Secret Mark." No copies of this version of Mark were ever found. Only the letter was found. If this letter is not a forgery and in fact an authentic letter of Clement (as Clement scholars agree) than this young man who was following Jesus was the same young man who learned the secrets of the kingdom. Now having said this, both stories may refer to Mark as it seems strange that his name is not included. In any case, this is a small bit of scholarly research that is hardly ever discussed but is quite intriguing.
- Trial before Sanhedrin: Jesus is now led before a number of religious leaders. Annas (only recorded by John) was a retired high priest and apparently still influential. He was high priest from 6 to 15 CE. Caiaphas, Annas' son in law, served as high priest from 18 CE to this time. Caiaphas also presided over the Sanhedrin (or The Council) the highest ruling court of Israel which was composed of 71 Elders from among the religious elite. It is the religious leaders of Israel that set in motion Jesus' execution.
- Jesus led to Annas: Annas' position was that it was better for one man to die for the people. He unwittingly is prophetic of Jesus' spiritual mission as the final sacrifice for all of humanity's sin.

- Peter's first denial: We now follow Peter's emotionally tortured failure. He doesn't want to leave Jesus and so he tries to follow him. Yet, his fear of death moves him to deny knowing Jesus over and over again. One of Jesus' unnamed disciples knows the high priest and gets Peter into the crowded courtyard where Jesus is being interrogated. Peter first denies knowing Jesus to the girl letting him into the courtyard.
- Jesus before Annas: Annas is called high priest because it was a permanent title. Once you were high priest, you were called high priest for the rest of your life. Jesus confronts Annas for the false premise of his arrest. Jesus is not timid but speaks the truth boldly. Here we are reminded that speaking the truth in love means that we can speak boldly and ask the tough questions. Enemy love doesn't mean that we allow people to do whatever they want to us but that we engage them verbally rather than attack them physically.
- To Caiaphas, high priest: Annas apparently doesn't have an answer for Jesus and sends him on to the acting high priest, his son-in-law.
- Peter denies again: They move Jesus to a courtyard with a fire and Peter follows at a distance among the crowd. Again he is questioned by a girl and he denies knowing Jesus. Peter's repeated denial before a girl shows how fearful he was. He was not denying at sword point but in front of young harmless girls.
- Before Caiaphas and council: The religious leaders are looking for evidence against Jesus but can't find any. Their witnesses don't agree as they try to quote Jesus. It is interesting that they reference Jesus' statement about destroying the temple and building it again in three days. The focus of their concerns over Jesus is his attack on their religious institution. Finally they ask Jesus if he is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus confirms his identity by using the well-known Messianic title "Son of Man". As noted previously, the Son of Man passage of Daniel refers to the Messiah coming in power as a divine deliverer. Jesus indicates that they will see him sitting at the right hand of God, the ultimate position of power reserved for a son of a monarch, and coming on the clouds of heaven (or coming with the armies of heaven – when armies come across a plain the chariots create clouds of dust). This statement of Jesus affirms his ultimate authority and the warning of him coming in judgment against the religious institution. The obvious response? Blasphemy. Jesus is condemned as worthy of death.
- Jesus is abused: Jesus is mocked, beaten and abused. Their hatred and anger is now poured out. We see how religion turns people directly against the purposes of God in the most violent and evil ways.
- Peter denies still again: Peter is asked again about his association with Jesus as people notice his accent from Galilee. He now calls down curses on himself as he denies Jesus. A relative of the high priest questions Peter and Peter continues his stance of denial.
- Peter weeps: Finally the rooster crows and Jesus turns and looks directly at Peter through the crowd. Peter sees Jesus staring into all of his failure and shame. Peter can't hide from

Jesus. Jesus knows who he really is. Peter flees outside and breaks down and weeps bitterly. Peter has failed completely.

- Council condemns Jesus: Finally it is morning and the Council members, both the chief priests (Temple leaders) and the teachers of the law (Pharisees), want to confirm Jesus' blasphemy. Jesus calls the religious leaders on the fact that they don't believe what he says nor will they answer him when he asks them the tough questions. He simply restates his identity as the Son of Man. They then ask if he is the Son of God. He confirms this truth and thus settles the matter. They agree to put Jesus to death.
- Judas commits suicide: The account of Judas' death is tragic. Judas is filled with remorse once he realizes what is going to take place. His motivation was not ultimately from hating Jesus but rather rejecting Jesus' mission and wanting to force Jesus into his own agenda. He apparently wanted to set up a conflict so that Jesus would be forced to start a war and instead he becomes an agent to Jesus being executed. Whenever we reject God's plans and rather try to force our own agenda then we should remember Judas and take grave warning. Judas tries to appease his conscience by giving back the money for his part in the conspiracy against Jesus. The religious leaders refuse to take it back and so he throws the money into the temple. The religious system is a willing party to the death of Jesus and accepts the money. Judas hangs himself in despair. There is no redemption for Judas as he willfully rejects grace to the very end. Matthew records what happens from Judas throwing the money into the temple. A field is purchased for Gentiles to receive a proper burial. Matthew sees in this the fulfillment of a number of Old Testament references: Zechariah 11:12,13; Jeremiah 19:1-13, 32:6-9. The field serves as yet another symbol of how Jesus' life and death opened up grace to the Gentiles. Just as this field creates a place for Gentiles in their physical bodies at death, Jesus' death and resurrection creates a place for all people, Jews and Gentiles, for eternity.