

The Arrest in Gethsemane

Matthew 26: 47-56

The events of that faithful night so long ago were moving at a rapid pace. Jesus had eaten the Last Supper with the disciples in the Upper Room. He shared an abundance of truth with them as they made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Along the way, our precious Savior paused to offer His high priestly prayer. Upon arriving in Gethsemane, He spends time in intimate prayer with God the Father concerning the upcoming crucifixion.

As we come to our text verses, Judas arrives with the multitude. He had secretly agreed to betray the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, the going price for a slave in that day. He has led them to the place of solitude that Jesus frequented for rest and prayer. Judas has promised to identify Christ to His accusers and betray the Lord with a kiss.

This is just the beginning of the arrest, false accusation, mock trial, and subsequent crucifixion of our Lord. Let's take a moment to reflect on the [details](#) of Matthew's account as we consider: [The Arrest in Gethsemane](#).

I. The Betrayal of Jesus (47-49) – Here Matthew records the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Notice:

A. The Throng (47) – [And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.](#) This was not a small gathering of people that came to arrest Jesus. They are described as a great multitude, armed with swords and staves. The Sanhedrin, led by the Pharisees, had heard enough of Jesus and they were determined to silence the voice of the one they perceived a threat to their agenda. Most agree this number would have been in the hundreds, possibly as many as 600 men.

- Having a multitude around was not out of the ordinary for Jesus, but this crowd had not come with good intentions. They had not come to hear from the Master or receive a miracle. These had come to arrest Jesus and bring Him before the Sanhedrin. Their determination is evident based on the numbers they sent: hundreds to confront a party of twelve.

- We see an ominous picture that remains in our day as well. Those who are opposed to Jesus and His message greatly outnumber those who embrace Him. However, we need not be alarmed; we serve the King of kings and Lord of lords!

B. The Traitor (48) – [Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.](#) We know Judas had led them to Gethsemane, knowing Jesus would be

there. Prior to their arrival, the sign had been given: Judas would kiss Jesus, revealing Him to be the one they sought.

- I have thought of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas many times. What a tragedy this was. Clearly an innocent Man was being betrayed, but this was all within the sovereign plan of God. The tragedy lies in the deceit and denial of Judas. He had walked with Jesus as the others had. He had experienced the same truth they had witnessed. There could be no doubt Jesus was the Christ, and yet Judas chose to ignore the truth and deny Jesus as the Christ. He refused to embrace the means of salvation, choosing rather a few pieces of silver.

C. The Treason (49) – *And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.* If ever an act of treason were committed, this is it. Judas came to the Lord as if all was well. He greeted Jesus in a friendly manner and addressed Him as Master. He then identified Jesus with the kiss. This was not a mere peck on the cheek, but a genuine portrayal of affection. Judas did not love the Lord, but he put on a good show for those who were there.

- With the kiss of betrayal, Judas identified the one the multitude sought. He had kissed the Door of salvation, but would deny Jesus and walk away lost and condemned.
- Isn't that tragic? We wonder how Judas could've done such a thing and yet many follow his deceitful portrayal. Many offer public affection to the Lord, but there is no change of heart and no genuine desire for Him. Offering a public kiss did not generate salvation for Judas and public shows of worship or affection won't in our day apart from being genuinely born again!

II. The Rebuttal of Jesus (50-54) – Here we discover the words of rebuke Jesus spoke. We see:

A. A Word to Ponder (50) – *And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.* Clearly Judas had come with animosity in his heart, seeking to appear friendly. Jesus was well aware of the intent and desire of Judas and yet He addressed him as a friend. By asking about the intent of his coming, Jesus wasn't seeking to learn why Judas had come. Jesus knew why Judas was there, and yet He offers an opportunity for him to repent and respond to grace by faith.

- Many today argue their past actions are too bad to be forgiven. They claim there is no hope for their salvation. As long as we are alive, there is hope! Jesus extended this offer to Judas and He continues to call men to repentance and salvation today, regardless of their past actions.

B. A Word to Prepare (51-52) – And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out *his* hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. ^[52] Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. John's gospel reveals it was Peter who cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. Luke reveals that Jesus immediately healed Malchus and restored his ear. With this action, Jesus instructed Peter to put up his sword. This was all within the will of God and there was no reason to fight against God's sovereign plan. Jesus refused to fight the multitude; this was His purpose for coming into the world.

- There is a greater thought in mind here though. Jesus wanted Peter and the others to know this was not a physical altercation. The warfare they would be called to engage in would be of spiritual nature, not physical. Jesus was committed to fulfilling the plan of redemption and He wanted to prepare the disciples for the battles yet to come! 2 Cor.10:4 – For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Eph. 6:17 – And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

C. A Word to Proclaim (53-54) – Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? ^[54] But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? As Jesus spoke these words, He served notice to all who heard that He was in fact the Son of the Living God. This was not something that had gotten out of hand. This night had been ordained since before the foundation of the world. He was not being forced to submit to arrest against His will. He was fulfilling the plan of God to become the sacrificial atonement for sin! He knew these things must come to pass in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled.

- This group likely never realized the minimal power they possessed. They thought they were in charge, but in fact Jesus allowed this to transpire as it did. Consider the thoughts of John MacArthur: *A full Roman legion was composed of 6,000 soldiers. **More than twelve legions of angels** therefore would be in excess of 72,000. If a single angel of God could slay 185,000 men in one night, as with the Assyrian troops of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35), the power of 72,000 angels is unimaginable. Jesus explained to his impetuous disciple that He had immediate access to supernatural forces that easily could destroy the entire Roman army, not to mention the mere cohort of 600 soldiers (John 18:3) they now faced.* ⁱ

III. The Committal of Jesus (55-56) – Our closing verses reveal the sincere commitment of Jesus to accomplish the will of the Father. Consider:

A. His Rebuke (55) – *In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me.* This was not an effort to avoid arrest and escape the cross, but to rebuke the absurdity of their appearance and weaponry. This was the One known for compassion and revealing of truth. He had not come to destroy or kill, but to heal and provide life. They had come as if they would face a dangerous criminal, but He was only guilty of love and sacrifice. Jesus had sat daily in the Temple, teaching the Word of God. They hadn't tried to apprehend Him there. Instead they waited for the cover of darkness to carry out their sinful deed.

- Is that not how Satan and those who follow him continue to operate? They wait for a time when their genuine motives and tactics can be hidden from view. They seek to work when others cannot see them for who they truly are!

B. His Resolve (56a) – *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.* This night would be the beginning of the greatest injustice ever committed. The cowardly acts of the multitude and betrayal of Judas were unwarranted, but they were carried out for a purpose. Jesus revealed He had power to defeat them if He desired, but He had resolved to submit to the will of the Father. He knew He must go with them and die for the sin of humanity!

- It seems unnatural to rejoice in such a situation, but I am thankful Jesus was willing to fulfill His Father's will. I am glad He went to the cross for me! Had He not been willing to suffer the agonies of the cross and die in our place, we would have no opportunity for salvation. We would not have an Intercessor who identifies with our infirmities. Jesus did all of this because He was determined to secure our salvation!

C. His Rejection (56b) – *Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.* We know that Peter will follow Jesus to the home of the high priest, and I believe John is also there as Jesus is tried. We do know that John is found at the feet of Jesus as He hangs upon the cross, but at this moment, Jesus is forsaken by all the disciples. As He is arrested for crimes He had not committed, He is lead away alone!

- This reveals two great truths to us. Many continue to forsake Jesus when it comes to the crucifixion. Many agree that He was a great teacher, prophet, and man, but refuse to embrace Him as the Christ. It also reveals that what Jesus was about to do, He must do alone. No one else was worthy to die for our sin. No one else could drink of the cup He was about to taste and drink. Jesus alone secured our redemption as He offered His body the perfect, living sacrifice for sin.

Conclusion: The arrest in Gethsemane reveals the true nature of mankind. We are all sinful and stand in need of salvation. Regardless of our position in life, we must come to Christ by faith if we are to be saved. Just being in His presence or knowing of Him is not enough. We must repent of sin and receive salvation by faith in His finished work.

There are many characters pictured in this passage. Some are like Judas and deny the truth, choosing to reject Jesus. Others are like the disciples and flee when struggles come. Many today are like the multitude and want to rid the world of any influence of Christ.

Where do you stand? We likely were all like Judas at some point. I am glad I finally saw my need and embraced Jesus as the Christ. There have been times since that I have fled in fear, but He has always welcomed me back. Whatever the need is, Jesus stands and the Savior and friend of sinners. Why not seek Him if He has spoken to you!

ⁱ MacArthur New Testament Commentary, The - MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Matthew 24-28.