

Prediction of Denials and the Garden of Gethsemane

📖 Matthew 26:31-46

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Last time we learned how the Lord's Supper for the Church grew out of the Last Passover for Israel. This occurred because that generation of Israel rejected Jesus as the King and He would build His Church beginning with the remnant of Israel during the postponement until He comes in His kingdom. Therefore, the Church is completely separate from Israel, but not divorced. In verse 26, Jesus and the Twelve were eating the main course of lamb at Passover. During the main course, Jesus, as the Head of the Passover, took some unleavened bread, representing separation from sin in Egypt, gave a blessing, broke it into pieces and gave it to His disciples, investing the bread with new meaning, saying "Take, eat, this is My body." The command to eat His body is the command to partake of Him by faith. In 26:27 He took the cup, representing the blood of the lamb that was put over the door and lintel in Egypt, He gave thanks and passed the cup to each of them, investing a new meaning, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus' blood ratified the new covenant and provides forgiveness of sins for those who partake of Him by faith. Because of this the new covenant is in effect now and Jews and Gentiles in the present age of the Church are enjoying spiritual blessings from the New Covenant. In 1 Cor 11:24-25 Paul quoted the Lord Jesus' words from Passover as part of the Lord's Supper for the Church so that we see clearly that the Church is not divorced from Israel but it still remains completely distinct in its plan and purposes. The fulfillment of the new covenant to Israel will take place in the future when they receive Jesus as their King and then the kingdom will come, which He speaks of in 26:29. Jesus added that His death must be soon because He would not drink of the fruit of the vine from that day on until the day when He drinks it anew in the kingdom. The drinking of new wine in the kingdom signifies a period of unsurpassable joy. Therefore, once again, we see that the kingdom is not here now, but it is to come.

Tonight, we will continue looking at events in the Final Week of Jesus. I am going slow because I have never been through this information in detail and it is very important information. In 26:30, the final element of Passover was to sing a hymn. They did this in the Upper Room and then departed to go to the Mount of Olives. It was while they made their way to the Mount of Olives that Jesus delivered His most extensive discourse to the Church, recorded in full in John 13-17, and known as the Upper Room Discourse, even though only the early

portion was delivered in the Upper Room and the rest was delivered along the way to the Mount of Olives. Therefore, there were two discourses Jesus gave this week; the first was on Wednesday, the Olivet Discourse, which is directed toward Israel and His final words to Israel, and the second was on Thursday, the Upper Room Discourse, which is directed toward the Church and His first words to the soon-to-be established Church. As such, it is my contention that it is confusion to read the Church in the Olivet Discourse just as it is a confusion to read Israel in the Upper Room Discourse. They are two separate discourses directed at two separate groups, though not divorced.

We come now to Matt 26:31, the discussion as they walked from the Upper Room in the upper part of the city "to the Mount of Olives" on the other side of the Kidron Valley (map picture). Somewhere along the way **Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'"** The prediction is that all Eleven of them **will...fall away**. The Greek word translated **fall away** is *σκανδαλισθησεσθε*, the word for "a stumbling block." In the passive voice it means they would be caused to stumble or trip up so as to fall. That which would cause them to fall would be something related to Jesus. Jesus says, **because of Me**. It would turn out that what would cause them to fall would be their association with Him. Others would recognize them as having been with Jesus but they would deny this association. Often Peter is picked out, because of the extensive revelation given his denials, but Jesus predicted that they would all deny Him, and they did.

Jesus then says this will happen because **it is written**. The Greek word translated **written** is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense means a past, completed action, with ongoing results into the present. We may translate it, "it has been written" or "it stands written" but the full sense is that it was written and remains written. The word of God once given remains forever. The word of God He quoted comes from where? Zech 13:7. Often these quotes come from the LXX version of the OT, but this quote deviates substantially from the LXX, making it less of a quote and more of an allusion. In the original context of Zech 13:7 it predicted, "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered;" whereas here it says "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered." The difference is in who is "scattered." In Zech it is simply "the sheep," which is all. In Matt it is "the sheep of the flock," which is a subset." Therefore, Zech was predicting the scattering of the total nation Israel for their rejection of their Messiah and crucifying Him, an event which was fulfilled in AD70; whereas Jesus was predicting the scattering of a subset of the nation His disciples, because they were ashamed of Him and feared the repercussions of being associated with Him. The truth is, they were not prepared for what happened. The betrayal, the arrest, the trials and especially the striking of the Shepherd, was to them a horror beyond anything they could imagine. Putting these things together we see that the disciples still did not believe His repeated statements that He would go up to Jerusalem, be betrayed, suffer and be crucified.

In 26:32 Jesus said, **But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee**. Jesus meant here to encourage them, to repeat to them again, that even though He would be struck down, He would then be **raised**

victorious. A further encouragement is that He would **go ahead of them to the Galilee**. There they would meet again. As the course of events unfolded, He was raised and did go ahead of them to the **Galilee**, but He first met them in Jerusalem before going ahead of them to the **Galilee**.

But that encouragement being given, Peter was more focused on what Jesus had predicted of the Eleven, that they would all fall away. And so in 26:33 **Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away."** In other words, the impetuous **Peter** disagreed with Jesus' prediction of what he would do when the time came. The voice of the verb **fall away** is the same as before, it is passive. Peter is saying that the others may be caused to stumble because of their association with Him, but he would never be caused to stumble. He had an overestimation of his loyalty to Christ and the strength of his flesh.

In 26:34 Jesus predicted just how weak Peter really was when He **said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."** Peter had no clue how weak his flesh was. But so weak is the flesh that even within a few hours he will have denied Him not once, not twice, but **three times**. The word **Jesus said** is in the imperfect tense and emphasizes that Jesus was saying this to Peter, perhaps several times.

In 26:35 we have Peter's strong reaction. **Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."** This is a very strong response in the Greek text. The words **Even if I have to** are *καὶ δεῖ* and mean "and if it is necessary" and I have to die for refusing to deny you, I will choose death over denial. The words **I will not** are *οὐ μὴ*, a very strong Greek negative. Peter is saying he will by no means deny Him. In his mind, there was nothing that could happen that could deter his loyalty to Jesus. The parallel in Mk 14:31 says that Peter said this insistently. And Matthew adds at the end of verse 35, **All the disciples said the same thing too**. They all agreed that there was nothing that could deter their loyalty to Him and that if it came to death or denial they would choose death over denial. In the parallel in Luke 22:31 we are told that Satan had demanded permission to sift Simon like wheat and that Jesus had prayed for him that his faith not fail. What Jesus prayed for is not that Peter would refuse to deny Him, but that after the denials His faith would not be destroyed, but he would be restored and take this experience with him as one he could use to strengthen his brothers. Pentecost said, "Christ did not pray that they would not deny Him. Had that been His prayer, it would not have been answered. But Christ did pray that after they had denied Him, their denial would not destroy them. He prayed that their denial would not cause their faith to fail (Luke 22:32). He also prayed for their restoration. He anticipated that after the denial they would be restored to fellowship with Him, and then they could strengthen their brothers. Having failed themselves, they would be able to have compassion on others who failed."¹ This would be an important lesson to take with them. It's an important lesson for all of us. We all fail and there is no excuse for failure. Failure is deplorable, but after we have failed we need to be restored and keep walking. When we do we move into the position of being able to encourage others who fail to be restored and press on and not give up.

A word about the denials. Matt 10:33 says, "...whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." 2 Tim 2:12 says "If we deny Him, He also will deny us;" These passages are often claimed to mean that if we deny Him we can lose our salvation. That is not what it means at all. Peter denied Christ three times, and all the others denied Him too. They had an opportunity on those occasions to confess Him. It actually means a denial of rewards for failure on an occasion. If they had confessed Him rather than deny Him they would have been rewarded for confessing Him. Therefore, the confess-deny paradigm is not related to loss of salvation or even a total life evaluation at the judgment seat, but an opportunity by opportunity evaluation at the judgment seat. Sometimes we deny Him and sometimes we confess Him. When the occasions are evaluated at the judgment seat of Christ, those occasions when we denied Him will not be rewarded, but the occasions when we confessed Him will be rewarded. Peter would deny Him this night, but afterward he would be restored and would confess Him before men on many occasions. The challenge is to confess and not deny Him when we are in a pressure situation. But the motivation is reward and fuller enjoyment of our eternal life.

But the main teaching of this short pericope is to show two things. First, that the disciples still did not understand that He was going to die. Peter was even willing to get in the way and suffer martyrdom to keep Him from dying. Peter was a man of action. He had said this before. He will take action when the betrayer arrives. He will try to stop it. He did not understand that Messiah had to die. This is hard for us to understand, but we live in hindsight, and hindsight is 20-20. Second, that the disciples had an overestimate of their flesh. The flesh is weak and when the rubber hits the road most of us may think that we will not fold, but we may very well fold. It is not good to overestimate oneself. The only thing to remedy this weakness is to stay in the word, be transformed by the renewing of the mind and to let His word dwell richly within us.

Now, having made their way from the Upper Room through the city, across the ravine of the Kidron Valley they now come in 26:36 to **a place called Gethsemane**. The parallel in John 8:1 says that in this place there was a "garden." Therefore, it is referred to as the garden of **Gethsemane**. **Gethsemane** means "oil press" a fitting name, for in this place our Lord would face His greatest pressure. The parallel in Luke 22:39 says that Jesus proceeded here as was His custom. Therefore, Judas knew the place well and we are to gather from Jesus' last words to Judas, "What you do, do quickly!" that Jesus intended for Judas to lead the religious authorities to **Gethsemane** to arrest Him. If you go to Jerusalem today, you will find the place commemorated for Gethsemane just north of *The Church of All Nations* on the lower west side of the Mount of Olives. From the description of the location in Scripture this is very near to the actual location. In that place, there are many olive trees, some very ancient, perhaps 1,000 years old. They have built a walled in area with a garden for visitors to enter, find solitude and pray. This is all reflective of the text that lay before us.

In 26:36 Jesus **said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."** It is apparent that He wanted to create some distance between Himself and some of the disciples. Verse 37, **And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee**. The parallel in Mark 14:33 tells us the names of the **two sons of Zebedee** were

“James and John.” These three; Peter, James and John were the inner circle of Jesus. Walvoord said, “Asking eight of the disciples to sit down, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and they went farther into the garden. These three, who seem to form the inner circle, had been with Him on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36), had seen the girl raised at the house of Jairus (Mt 9:18-25; Mk 5:35-43; Lk 8:40-56), and were apparently the three from whom Jesus could most expect sympathy and understanding in this hour.”² As He took them further into the garden we read that He **began to be grieved and distressed**. The word translated **grieved** is λυπεω and means “sad,” and might be translated better “sorrowful.” The word translated **distressed** is αδημονεω and means “distressed” or “troubled.” Here is the beginning of an inner turmoil unparalleled by any previous description.

In 26:38 **He said to** Peter, James and John, **My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me**. The word translated **deeply grieved** is περιλυος. The prefix περι serves to intensify the sorrow expressed beforehand. Therefore, by this time the inner turmoil is even more intense. It was in His **soul** that He faced this intense sorrow. This is to say that it was an extreme inner conflict, not a physical conflict. And He requested that His three closest disciples **remain** with Him **and keep watch with** Him. He wanted them to **remain** with Him to have their sympathetic understanding with Him in this hour. He also wanted them to **keep watch**, especially for the betrayer.

So in 23:39 **He went a little beyond them**. The parallel in Luke 22:41 says “He withdrew from them about a stone’s throw.” Here He is all alone and there is a definite movement in the whole scene from the Upper Room with the Twelve to this point of solitude. Morgan describes it this way, “Jesus first had left the multitude in order to be with His disciples in the upper room. There Judas had forsaken him. He went with the remaining eleven to the entrance to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He had left eight of the disciples and took the faithful three with Him into the inner garden, Then He had left the three and retired to pray. The incidents relating to the whole scene emphasize the loneliness of Christ as He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world.”³ As He withdrew into the inner garden alone we read that He **fell on His face and prayed**. His posture in prayer as He first went to His knees and then full onto **His face** expresses the deep agony His soul was facing in this hour. And at this point we see the first of three prayers, each riddled with difficulty. In Matthew it is said, **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.** The parallel in Mk 14:36 says His address was “Abba! Father!” The expression “Abba!” is an expression of deep intimacy experienced only in a father-son relationship. It signals that something is about to happen that would sever that intimacy. The cry **if it is possible** has no **if** in the Greek text. An **if** would signal a 3rd class condition. But this is a 1st class condition and should be translated “Since it is possible.” The reference is to the Father’s omnipotence. Jesus is affirming the Father’s power to do anything; that nothing is too hard for Him. The parallel in Mark 14:36 confirms this interpretation because it simply says “All things are possible for You.” His request, in light of the Father’s ability to do anything, is **let this cup pass from Me**. What exactly is meant by **this cup** is difficult to ascertain. To drink a **cup** was usually to partake of something difficult. That is all we will say for now but we will return to the identification **the**

cup later. He then closes with the statement, **yet not as I will, but as You will**. What Christ affirmed was that with the Father all things are possible, and on those terms, He was completely surrendered to the Father's will.

In 26:40 **He came to the disciples**, the three who were nearest and who He hoped He would find keeping watch with Him but He **found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?"** He obviously felt even more alone considering that He brought them with Him further into the garden. A real question arises at this point. If they could not even stay awake with Him for one hour, how could they stand against the temptation to deny Him? The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. That is Jesus' point. In verse 41 He instructs them saying **Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation;** the **temptation** to deny Him when the time came; and then states explicitly, **the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**. They did not realize how weak but it becomes painfully obvious by the end of this narrative.

It's at this time that the parallel in Luke 22:42-43 reports that an angel came and strengthened Him and that His sweat became like blood, not blood but like it in its dripping to the ground, intermittently in streams and drips saturating the ground below. But these verses are not in the earliest and best manuscripts and seem to have arisen out of a particular interpretation of the prayers which is not certain and therefore I consider them to be spurious.

So bypassing these spurious ideas, we come to 26:42 where **He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done."** The word **if** is wrong again. It is not a 3rd class condition but a 1st. There is no doubt. It should say, "My Father, since this cannot pass away unless I drink it," in other words, since there is no other way, the cup cannot pass from Him, He must drink it. This is a negative petition in contrast to the first petition and shows a definite progression in the revelation of God's will regarding Christ's taking the cup, whatever it is. Note the progression by observing in verse 39 that the first petition is positive, "let this cup pass from Me", but the second in verse 42 is negative, "this cup cannot pass from Me," and both end with an affirmation of the Father's will, **Your will be done**. The overwhelming conclusion is that the Son was completely surrendered to the Father's will regarding the cup. In 26:43 **Again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy**. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. This time He did not wake them. But verse 44, **And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more**. So, prayer three was the same as prayer two. Prayer two is the negative statement, "This cup cannot pass from Me." And again, the affirmation of the Father's will, "Your will be done." The main point of all three prayers is that Jesus was completely surrendered to the Father's will regarding the cup.

In 26:45, **Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting?"** The Greek text says "keep on sleeping," not "are you still sleeping." Jesus knew they had a long night ahead of them and so He told them at this point to just keep on sleeping. Nevertheless, He told them **Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners**. The expression **the hour is at hand** uses the word translated "at hand" throughout the Gospel of Matthew. It means "near." The perfect tense means it had

drawn near. The **hour** of His betrayal had drawn “near,” it was not yet here. He then indicates how He knows it is near saying, **the Son of Man is being betrayed**. The present tense **is being betrayed** shows that Jesus knew full well that Judas and the band of sinners were on their way to arrest Him. The fact that He was **being betrayed into the hands of sinners** may be the key to unlocking what the **cup** represents and what Jesus knew by the power of God was avoidable; **being betrayed into the hands of sinners**. If He were **betrayed into the hands of sinners** it would sever the close communion that He had forever had with the Father. This may be what Jesus thought was possible to avoid, since the death itself could not be avoided.

As we come to verse 46 there seems to be some time elapse between verse 45 and 46. In verse 45 He told them to “keep on sleeping.” Here He says, **Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!** It is often thought that when Jesus said **let us be going** that He was saying let us flee from here. But that is emphatically not what is meant. What He meant was let us go and meet this peril head on! He took Himself and the disciples to meet the enemy. He was anxious to do the will of the Father which was to be **betrayed into the hands of sinners**. A clear progression has taken place and Walvoord said, “The agony of Gethsemane was behind Him. The brutality of His arrest, beating at the hands of the soldiers, and the crown of thorns were ahead, but even this was just the prelude to the cross itself.”⁴

We come now to what exactly was the cup? In verse 39 He admitted that with the Father all things were possible and that being the case, He positively stated, “let this cup pass from Me.” First, some think the cup refers to having to taste physical death and so He was praying to avoid having to die on the cross. However, this seems unlikely because elsewhere we are told that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Lk 9:51) knowing that His death was necessary to take away the sins of the world. And in another place He says, “what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ ‘No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.’” And it should go without saying that if He was praying to avoid physical death then the Father denied His prayer request. It therefore, seems unlikely that the cup refers to having to taste physical death. Second, others think that the cup represents premature death and so He was praying not to taste death prematurely. This is essentially the same view as the former with only the timing element added. Thus, it has the same weaknesses and seems unlikely. Third, others think the cup represents the separation from the Father due to the Son’s taking upon Himself the sin of the world and so He was praying that He be delivered from the separation brought about by spiritual and physical death by way of resurrection and restoration. In this way, the spiritual death that Jesus experienced on the cross, which effected a separation between the Father and Son never experienced from all eternity, would be reversed and a full restoration to the Father would occur. This seems to be the true sense of the prayer, especially when we see that Hebrews 5:7 is a commentary on this prayer. The author of Hebrews said, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.” Therefore, we should never imagine that Jesus was praying to avoid the cross. He was firmly determined to go to the cross. As Paul said in Phil 2:8, “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” His obedience never wavered. The cup that He prayed He might

pass was the separation from the Father that took place while He was on the cross paying for the sins of the world. The Father could have justly been separated from the Son for all eternity. But Christ prayed that the Father would accept His death as the payment for all sin and bring Him out of death and into restoration of life with Him again. His prayer was answered by the resurrection and ascension. Pentecost said, "...the prayer should be understood to be a prayer for restoration to physical life by resurrection, and a restoration to full fellowship with His Father out of the spiritual death into which He would enter."⁵ And because God answered this prayer by raising Him from the dead and ascending Him to His right hand, we read in Phil 2:9 that "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The prayer moves Jesus from separation on the cross, to resurrection from the grave, to ascension to heaven, to exaltation at His right hand.

What can we learn? First, the weakness of the flesh. The apostles claimed they would not deny Him. But they could not even stay awake one hour to steadfastly encourage them. In the end Jesus' words would prove true as not just Peter but all eleven denied Him. The confess-deny paradigm teaches that each opportunity to confess or deny will result in reward or no reward, not loss of salvation or a total life evaluation. Second, the resoluteness of the Son to the Father's will. There was never a moment's hesitation in trying to go to the cross. The Son was determined to fulfill the Father's will in paying for the sins of the world. His prayer was to be restored from the separation caused by Him who was sinless taking upon Himself the sin of the world and the consequences of spiritual and physical death. This prayer was answered in the resurrection and ascension to glory.

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 432.

² John F. Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 216.

³ Morgan quoted by Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 217.

⁴ John F. Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 219.

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 456.