

The Betrayal and Arrest

📖 Matthew 26:47-56

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I want to take a moment to clarify the separation between the Father and the Son that we spoke about last week, as these are difficult theological points and it is easy to err. The point came up about how such a separation could be viewed in light of the hypostasis of the Son who is both God and man and yet one person. Part of our trouble is seeing the whole of what is happening on the cross at one time. Surely Christ died as man and not as God, for God cannot die. But at the same time the relationship of Christ to God is an intimate connection necessary to the cross work. And at the same time there is a relationship of Christ to man that is equally important to connect. Pressing one way or the other leads to a distortion contrary to the NT. When it comes to what happened on the cross, there is mystery to some extent, something beyond our ability to penetrate, but what we are certain of is that He did not die because of sin, but rather He died in our stead, taking the penalty for our sin upon Himself. But we must never imagine that He became sin in the sense that He was defiled by our sin, but rather that He bore the guilt of our sin. In this sense, He felt the pressure of separation from the Father as He became one with us in identifying with our sin. But there was no transfer of sin to Him but rather the transfer of the penalty for our sin.

We are in the last narrative section of Matthew's Gospel. Dr. Pentecost had a good summary of the events up to this point. "The Sanhedrin at the suggestion of the high priest had determined to kill Christ (Matt. 26:3-4). Judas had entered into an arrangement with the priest to act as the betrayer (vv. 14-15). It had been decided to postpone the execution until after the Passover season (v. 5). But Judas was continually watching for an opportunity to deliver Christ into the hands of the authorities (v. 16). During the Passover supper, Christ had revealed to Judas that He knew the arrangement he had made with the priests (v. 25). Judas had rejected the offer of forgiveness that Christ had extended in giving him the piece of bread (John 13:30). Having left the company of the apostles, Judas had consorted with the priests. Even though the Jews had planned to defer the execution until after the Passover crowds had dissipated, they now decided to move ahead with the execution."¹ Meanwhile, Jesus and the Eleven were making their way from the Upper Room within the city to the Garden of Gethsemane on the west side of the Mount of Olives. During the walk Jesus predicted that all of the Eleven would fall away, saying, you will all be caused to stumble because of your association with Me this night. Their

denials would be the stumbling (Matt 26:31). Not just Peter but all of them would deny Him. The reason stated is a rather free quote from Zech 13:7, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered." Jesus was the shepherd. He would be struck down in the crucifixion. The events leading to His crucifixion would be so stunning that the apostles would deny they knew Him. In the parallel of Luke 22:31 Jesus revealed that He prayed for Peter that his faith not fail, meaning that in the aftermath of the denials Peter would be restored from his failure. He also offered some encouragement in light of His crucifixion. "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." As a prophet Christ predicted His resurrection and future fellowship with the Eleven in the Galilee (26:32). Peter, however, denied that he would fall away saying, "Even though all of the others may fall away because of you, I will never fall away." He had an overestimation of his loyalty to Jesus and the strength of his flesh. So weak was Peter's flesh that Jesus said to him, even this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times (26:34). But Peter even denied this, saying "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." And all the disciples said the same thing too. In effect, they all said that if it came to death or denial, they would choose death. In the end they all chose denial rather than death (26:35). The Eleven had overestimated the strength of their loyalty to Christ. Seeing this example, we would all do well to realize that when the rubber meets the road we may think that we will maintain loyalty to Christ but the weight of the pressure to deny Him and save our own skin may bring us to collapse under the weight as it did the Eleven. The only remedy is constant intake of the word of God and prayer in order to have strength in that hour.

The scene now moves to the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Lord faces an intensification of agony in light of the soon separation from the Father due to our sin. The place called Gethsemane was a customary place for Him to go. Judas knew the place well and it was Jesus' intention that Judas lead the large band to arrest Him here that night. Jesus and the Eleven reached the garden before Judas. When He came to the place He said to eight of His disciples, "Sit here while I go further into the garden and pray" (26:36). He then took the inner circle Peter, James and John further into the garden so they might share His burden in this hour (26:37). While there He became grieved and distressed and said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death, remain here and keep watch with Me." This presents an escalation of grief as He ponders the thing that is coming, the felt separation between Himself and the Father due to taking upon Himself the penalty for our sin and bearing the guilt as a substitutionary sacrifice, without experiencing sin Himself or being personally defiled by it. He then went a little beyond the three, fell on His face and offered His first prayer, "My Father, since it is possible, let this cup pass from Me," that is, since the Father is omnipotent and nothing is too hard for Him, then in that light, let the felt separation caused by the wrath of the Father being poured out on Him who had no sin pass over. That is His first prayer. Yet He is resigned to the Father's will on the matter, "Not as I will, but as You will" (26:39). Afterward He came to the three disciples and found them sleeping and said to Peter, "So you men could not keep watch with Me for the betrayer for even one hour?" Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation, the temptation to deny Him when the hour comes; for the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Their flesh needed to be strengthened through prayer to withstand the temptation to deny (26:40-41). He then

went away and offered His second prayer, saying, "My Father, since this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Here is a progression in what the Father had revealed to Him. He now knows, in His humanity, that there must be a felt separation between Him and the Father while the guilt of the sins of the world are borne by Him. And He remains fully submitted to the will of God, "Your will be done" (26:42). He then came to the three again and they were sleeping again (26:43). This time He simply left them and went to offer His third prayer, a repetition of the second prayer (26:44). Then He came to them again and said in the Greek, "Keep sleeping." Don't wake up. He knew they had a long night ahead of them. They had not been able to keep alert and watchful and by this time it was useless. He is seen here as all alone. He only notes that Judas and the soldiers were on their way saying "Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners" (26:45). Most think some time passed between verse 45 and 46. Then as the betrayer drew near He said to them, "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" Judas and the evil band were very near. Jesus rose with His disciples to go forth to meet them head on. There was no retreat but a frontal assault upon the oncoming enemy.

Tonight, we come to the Betrayal and the Arrest in 26:47-56. Once more we want to make sure we understand the expression at the end of verse 46 that is so important to understanding Matthew's Gospel, the phrase "at hand." Note in verse 46 that "the betrayer is at hand" and compare this with verse 47, "While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up..." This shows in real time the meaning of the expression "at hand." When something is "at hand" it can occur at-any-moment. It is right on the verge of taking place. It is something hanging overhead that can suddenly fall. So, when John, Jesus and others said that the kingdom was "at hand" we are to understand they meant that it could suddenly come, not that it was already here in some sense, but that the kingdom was on the verge of coming. And here we see an excellent example of this concept in that Jesus said the one who betrays Me is at hand and then while He was still speaking Judas arrived. He was right around the corner and they went forth to meet the enemy.

26:47 describes it, **While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. While Jesus was still speaking, behold, there was Judas, and with him a large crowd.** The parallel in Luke 22:47 says Judas was "preceding them." So, Judas was leading the way. The reason is because Judas knew the way. He was the one who had been to this place so many times in the past. And with so many pilgrims in Jerusalem and the environs, to find a small band of twelve would be difficult in the midst of the thousands who undoubtedly were upon the Mount of Olives. The hour must have been late, perhaps midnight, since the Eleven continued to fall asleep. Now we are told explicitly that this **Judas** was **one of the twelve**. Why do we need to be told this? Of course, he was one of the Twelve. That may be obvious to us in hindsight, but it was necessary to indicate that this was **Judas** Iscariot and not some other Judas, for Judas was a common name and besides, this Judas still had the opportunity to repent, still had the opportunity to change his mind. But the fact that this **Judas** was **one of the twelve** means he had not changed his mind. He was done with the idea that Jesus was the King. And he

came up accompanied by a large crowd. The parallel in John 18:3 says “a cohort and officers.” At the time a Roman cohort was 600. The cohort was stationed at the Antonia Fortress on the NW corner of the Temple Mount. The Sanhedrin had 200 of these soldiers at their disposal. Walvoord said, “...this was a large company of possibly several hundred people, including the chief priest and elders, a motley crowd which had been gathered by Jewish leaders to assist them, and may have included the two hundred Roman soldiers assigned to the use of the Sanhedrin.”² Matthew does not tell us the composition of the crowd, only that they had **swords and clubs**. But Lenski noted that the **swords and clubs** give us a hint as to the composition of the crowd. “The only hint Matthew gives as to its composition [the crowds] is the mention of the weapons, *μαξαιραι*, “short-swords” that were carried only by the Roman legionaires, and *ξυλα*, “clubs,” the regular weapons of the *υπερηται*, “underlings,” or Temple police.”³ Therefore, the weapons betray the fact that the **large crowd** was composed of Roman soldiers with their swords and Jewish Temple police with their clubs.

Why such a large crowd armed **with swords and clubs** to arrest just one Man? Even Jesus, in the parallel in Mk 14:48 and Luke 22:52 asked why they had come out with swords and clubs to arrest Him, as they might a robber? Several explanations for such a large armed force. First, because they did not want to get in a conflict with Jesus’ supporters, who might seek to defend Him if arrested. That would only draw unwanted attention and possibly stir up other followers. Such a show of force would surely be a deterrent to a small band seeking to defend Jesus. They turned out to be right that at least one of the Eleven did seek to defend Him. Second, because of the very real danger of Jesus using a supernatural force of power. If He were to use His power to resist arrest they would be embroiled in a conflict requiring large numbers to overcome Him. They turned out to be right on this count also, in a sense, but they were no match, at least according to the occasion reported by John 18:4-9. As the two parties met Jesus spoke first saying, “Whom do you seek?” And they answered, “Jesus the Nazarene.” And when Jesus said to them, “I am.” They all drew back and fell to the ground. Some have thought they voluntary fell down but I am inclined to think this was a manifestation of His supernatural power. The message was clear. No armed force of any magnitude could arrest Jesus without His permitting it. After composing themselves He asked once more, “Whom do you seek?” And again they answered, “Jesus the Nazarene.” And He told them again, “I told you that I am He.”

Now this makes for an interesting scene, because these were the first words spoken in the confrontation. Jesus had already been identified, and yet we read in Matt 26:49 that **Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and kissed Him.** But why was this necessary? As Wiersbe said, “It would not even have been necessary for Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss, for Jesus told the soldiers who He was.”⁴ At most for two reasons. First, in order to confirm that this one was indeed Jesus the Nazarene. Even though many may have been able to recognize Him in the day, it was night and the only light they had to go by were the torches and lanterns they carried with them. Secondly, to fulfill his contract. Judas had entered into an agreement with the religious leaders to give **a sign** that would identify Jesus. **Whomever I kiss, He is the one, seize Him.** This kiss, known popularly today as a Judas kiss, a kiss of betrayal, was said by J. Vernon McGee, to be “...one of the worst things

in recorded history.”⁵ In the master-disciple relationship the disciple would kiss the master to indicate respect for his person and submission to his authority. Judas used it hypocritically as a sign of identification. Judas was finished with the idea of Jesus as the King of all Israel. What could bring a man to such a state? Walvoord asked, “Why, indeed, would one who heard the matchless sermons of Jesus and witnessed hundreds of miracles turn away from such a wonderful person? Such is the hardness of the human heart and the blinding of satanic influence that one who had every reason to trust in Christ and had been blessed as no unsaved man had ever been blessed, would persist in his hardness of heart and unbelief.” By this time the root of bitterness and deceit in Judas was under the complete control of Satan. Of the kiss, Pentecost said, “The compound word Matthew used to describe this kiss implies that he kissed Him warmly or fervently.”⁶ It was a kiss of great hypocrisy.

In 26:50 **Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.”** Only Matthew reports these words. The word **friend** is *etairos*, is used only by Matthew, and means “comrade” or “companion.” It is not an address of close intimacy but of camaraderie. Jesus had spent more than three years with Judas in close companionship. His address to him in this manner is another extension of grace. Walvoord said, “...it was also the last attempt of Jesus, even in this hour, to let Judas repent of his sin and unbelief.”⁷ Of course, Judas would not repent.

The words he addressed to Judas, **do what you have come for** are either a statement or a question. The Greek is unclear. If it is a question, then Jesus is asking what Judas has come for and it would be another extension of grace. If it is a statement, then Jesus is saying that He is in sovereign control over what is taking place, and by it He is making clear that He is in total control of His arrest. I prefer this approach. Jesus seems to be making a statement. The statement is that He is in control of His arrest and He is going to let them arrest Him and not put up any resistance.

In 26:50b it says, **Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.** Judas’ contract was fulfilled. He was pushed aside and Jesus was apprehended. But it is important to remember that He was in total control. He allowed them to take hold of Him. The Greek word implies, “so as to bind.” They bound the One who has all power on heaven, on earth and under the earth to bind. Therefore, He must have allowed it. He could have stopped it. Why did He not stop it? Because He was on a mission to go to the cross. This is the way things had to be.

However, in 26:51, one of the Eleven did not want this to be the way things had to be. **And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.** Who is this **one**? Only the parallel in John 18:10 tells us it was Peter. He was making good on his promise in Matt 16:22. The occasion there was Jesus’s first prediction that He “must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised upon the third day.” At that time “Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” Peter was willing to do whatever it took to keep Jesus from being killed. On that occasion, Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on

God's interests, but man's." Peter was opposing the Messiah's work. If He had thwarted it there would be no cross and no salvation. But Peter apparently did not understand and so he **reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.** The parallel in Luke 22:50 tells us it was his right ear. From this we see clearly that Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman, for in the first place, I don't think Peter meant to cut off the slave's right ear. I think he meant to hit him on the head and kill him. The sword Peter had was the *μαχαίρα*. We know this because earlier in the day Jesus had told them that if they did not have a sword they would need to sell a coat in order to buy one. The reason was because He was leaving soon and He would not be able to protect them in the coming days. They would have to protect themselves. And they said, "Lord, look, here are two *μαχαίρα*." And Jesus said, "It is enough." Now Peter thought was the time to use it. But he was no swordsman because he tried to use this sword like a Roman broadsword, to bash one on the head, but this was a Roman short sword. And in the second place, he missed his head and struck off his right ear. The slave may have dodged and the blow struck off his ear and struck his right shoulder armor. The parallel in John 18:11 tells us the name of the slave was Malchus. He served the high priest and was probably standing next to the high priest.

If Jesus had not said 26:52 there probably would have erupted an all-out conflict and the Eleven would have perished. **Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword."** If the Eleven had perished then the apostolic foundation of the Church would have vanished before the Church even began. The last 2,000 years of world history stand or fall on this single sentence. Jesus changed the course of the world saying, "Put your sword back into its place."

Now, was Jesus a pacifist? Was Jesus telling Peter that there was no place for taking up the sword? No, Jesus was saying that this was not the time for the sword because He had to go to fulfill prophecy. Verse 54, **How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"** And again, in verse 56, **But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.** It had to be. But there may be other times for the sword.

The parallel in Luke 22:51 tells us that Jesus did something else that quelled an all-out assault on the Eleven, He "touched his ear and healed him." Malchus enjoyed a miracle in the midst of the arrest. What a touch of mercy for Malchus was a member of the opposing forces and the slave of the high priest, the man considered to be the most holy in all Israel.

In 26:53 He said to Peter, **Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?** In the time of Augustus a **legion** was 6,000 men. **Twelve legions** would be 72,000 **angels**. Given that in the OT one angel killed the 185,000 man army of Sennacherib in one night (2 Kgs 19:35), 72,000 **angels** was far more than necessary to destroy this motley band led by Judas. And all of these **angels** could be at the disposal of Jesus if He simply appealed to His **Father**. This is the command of a majestic King. Carr made this interesting comment, "It is characteristic of this gospel that the authority and kingly majesty of Jesus should be suggested at a moment when every hope seemed to have

perished.”⁸ The point is that He is still very much the King and very much in command. Pentecost said, “If His goal had been deliverance from arrest and death, He would not have needed to depend on impotent men but could have called for twelve legions of angels to deliver Him.”⁹ The conclusion is clear: the King was allowing Himself to be arrested.

Why? 26:54, to fulfill Scripture. **How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?** Toussaint said, “This factor is so important that attention is drawn to it twice (verses fifty-four and fifty-six).”¹⁰ What is happening in the sequence of events and in the manner the events are carried out is fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. Why is this the key to this section? Because this is a lynchpin in Matthew’s argument to His Jewish audience. What is Matthew’s argument? That Jesus is indeed the Messiah because Jesus fulfills Messianic prophecy. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew the sub-theme of Jesus fulfilling Messianic prophecy is set forth. These events were fulfilling Messianic prophecy play-by-play.

At this time, in 26:55, Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.” They had ample opportunity to arrest Him in the past. Why hadn’t they? They knew that He would not resist. Why then did they **come out with swords and clubs** like they might **against a robber?** One reason. Because they were cowards. They feared the people. What Jesus is doing here is exposing their cowardice resulting in surreptitiousness.

But the ultimate reason He states in verse 6, **But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.** What an irony. Those who said they upheld the Scriptures actually opposed the Scriptures ended up **fulfilling the Scriptures. All this took place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.** The enemies of God can never win. Whatever they do ends up fulfilling His plan rather than thwarting it. What wisdom is this?

Now, having finished the exposition, one may wonder what the response might have been by some in the large crowd. Think of what they had seen. First, Jesus, the One they were seeking, seeking them, coming right up in the face of the opposition, meeting them head on. Jesus was not weak; He was powerful and courageous, even in the face of enormous opposition. Second, Jesus, answering the question about who was Jesus the Nazarene, gave a grand display of power which knocked hundreds to the ground with the simple words “I am.” He retained His composure and was in total control. Third, Jesus, whose enemies were preparing to arrest and crucify Him, healed the ear of one of the enemy. Who is this One? Cool and collected, powerful and in command of His total environment, yet submitting to arrest and crucifixion. He could have done this only if He wanted to. One must wonder what kind of response one in the crowd might have had to the enigmatic events of that night. Were some of these who saw the majesty of the King those who came to believe in Him fifty days later at Pentecost? They may well have been.

But the concluding words of verse 56 report a different response by the disciples. **Then all the disciples left Him and fled.** He had predicted in v 31 that they would all fall away because of Him. Here begins the falling away. He would go to the cross alone. He would bear the guilt for our sin alone. He would voluntarily give His life up for us as no one else could. He would not die because of our sin. He would die for our sin.

¹ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 457.

² John F Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 219.

³ R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, 1046.

⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 97.

⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (Matthew 14-28)*, electronic ed., vol. 35 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 170.

⁶ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 458.

⁷ John F Walvoord, *Thy Kingdom Come*, 220.

⁸ Carr, *St. Matthew*, 295, quoted by Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 306.

⁹ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 459.

¹⁰ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King*, 306.