

The Gospel of Matthew
Week 30
Matthew 26:36-68

Day One

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

v. 36 – Another gospel tells us that Gethsemane was one of Jesus’ favorite spots. There is a church today on that very spot and a few of the olive trees in the courtyard there are 2,000 years old. They could very well have “witnessed” the events of this particular night when Jesus visited with His men. Jesus instructed His disciples to sit and wait while He went a little distance away to pray. This gives us a good idea of what Jesus did when He was under pressure. He had a favorite spot and He went to pray. **Do you have a favorite spot? Do you go to pray when under pressure?** I woke up at 1:30 AM this morning and I was troubled, so I went to pray. I am not portraying myself as a prayer warrior, but on this particular morning, I can identify with Jesus in this regard.

v. 37 – Jesus took His three closest associates with him. **I wonder how the others felt, being “left behind”?** It doesn’t seem that Jesus cared what they thought, for He was looking for, some friendly support in His hour of trouble and need. This picture shows just how human Jesus was, yet without sin. He was troubled and sorrowful and He did the one thing He knew would do the most good; He went to pray to the Father with His closest workers nearby. We know that Jesus did this often by what was written in Hebrews:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:7-10).

v. 38 – The disciples had ample warning of what was about to happen, and this was a confirmation to them once again of Jesus’ impending death. Jesus asked that they stand watch with Him in this critical time, yet we know that they could not do so. Jesus had to go this road alone and He did so with great courage in the midst of emotional pain. **With whom are you keeping watch as that person suffers or goes through a hard time? Who would call you to be one of their trusted watchmen or watchwomen as they go through a difficult trial?**

v. 39 – This cup was the cup of suffering to which Jesus alluded during the Passover meal. Jesus fell on His face in anguish and asked the Father if there was any way that this cup could be taken away. Yet Jesus did not insist on His will, but submitted to the Father's will. Notice the honesty and transparency with which Jesus prayed. He did not hide how He felt, but freely communicated it to the Father. Jesus did not try to use prayer to change the Father's purpose or manipulate His will. **Are you honest when you pray? Do you try to use prayer as a tool to get the Father to do what you want Him to do?** If so, you are misusing prayer.

Day Two

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." 42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

v. 40 – How disappointed Jesus must have been when He came back to the disciples, only to find them asleep. What Jesus was going through, however, He had to go through alone. No one could assist Him in His hour of sorrow. Keep in mind that the men had drunk some wine at the Passover meal, plus the hour was late. What's more, they were spiritually dull, still not realizing the impending events that would lead to Jesus' death. They did not accurately assess the spiritual situation, and therefore they did not pray as they should or could.

v. 41 – Jesus uttered an oft-quoted truth, saying that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Many of our spiritual disciplines are designed to bring the body into alignment with the desires and inclinations of the spirit. Yet our bodies often scream for attention and preeminence. When you fast, for example, your body clamors for food. When you go to pray early in the morning or late at night, your body demands sleep. Yet we can often stay up late to watch a comedienne, movie or sporting event with no trouble.

Jesus knew what was ahead so He prayed. The disciples did not know and therefore they did not pray. **Are you spiritually watchful at this point in your life? Or has your prayer life waned, paling in significance and attention when compared to other activities?**

v. 42 – Jesus did not let His disappointment with the disciples affect His own prayer life. He returned to prayer a second time, also returning to His original theme of the cup that He was about to drink. Jesus inquired as to whether or not the cup could pass Him by, yet He reiterated that it wasn't His will that mattered most, but the Father's. **Is there any**

cup that you must drink at this point in your life? Are you submitting to the Father's will in that, or are you resisting, perhaps even sounding spiritual as you resist?

v. 43 – The disciples did not respond to Jesus first admonition to watch and pray, for they were asleep once again when Jesus returned to where they were. Their eyes were heavy. I have felt this kind of heaviness when I have traveled overseas across many time zones. No matter how hard I tried, I could not keep my eyes open. Yet Jesus was able to stay awake because He understood the priority of prayer when one is being tested. He overcame His humanity to apply the proper spiritual discipline. If Jesus did it, you and I can do it, too!

v. 44 – Jesus went off a third time to pray, having checked to see if He had any conscious partners to join Him. Once again, we see that Jesus did not let the failures of others impact His own spirituality. He was committed to do what He needed to do whether or not anyone joined Him. **Have you allowed your own spiritual life and disciplines to suffer because of the failures of others?**

vs. 45&46 – Jesus returned to alert the men that the hour had finally arrived when He would be betrayed. Jesus had prayed and was now convinced that the cup was not going to pass, so He embraced it. Betrayal is a part of every person's walk with the Lord, it seems. I wonder if it isn't to prove that the only One who will *never* betray or fail you is the Lord. You cannot put your trust in man, but only in God. That doesn't mean you should not expect people to behave in a godly or loyal way. If and when they don't, however, you cannot let that affect your own walk with the Lord. **Are you hurt or wounded over some betrayal of a friend?** Then allow the Lord to prove to you that He is ever faithful and loyal.

Day Three

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50 Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

v. 47 – Judas had left the disciples to go and fetch the guards so they could seize Jesus in His garden hideaway. The crowd that came with Judas was armed with clubs and swords, perhaps expecting some armed opposition. They found no such thing, however, for the disciples were not fighting men. The chief priests and elders sent others to do their dirty work and they showed their mentality when they sent them armed. They were determined to use force if necessary to capture and execute Jesus. These were not spiritual leaders, but rather secular thugs masquerading as spiritual.

vs. 48&49 – I have always held the opinion that Judas employed a kiss as a signal so that the crowd would not seize the wrong person! After all, Jesus had nothing that would distinguish Him from everyone else. He had no special dress and was afforded no special treatment that would set Him apart from everyone else. If Judas doesn't kiss Jesus, they could have easily arrested Peter or John. This has implications for church leadership today, who often do what they can to set themselves off from the common people with special garb, seating and reserved parking spaces. Many of them try to make a case for the necessity of doing this, but I have always found their reasoning flawed. Jesus is our model where life and leadership are concerned, and Jesus didn't do anything to separate or distinguish Himself from others.

v. 50 – Jesus referred to Judas as His friend, at least indicating from Jesus' perspective that He did not resent or dislike Judas, even as Judas betrayed Jesus. Jesus asked Judas a question, which Judas never answered. I suppose Judas didn't have to, for the mob came forward and seized Jesus, answering the question on Judas' behalf. Judas had come to betray the Lord into the hands of sinners. As I stated earlier, this wasn't really necessary, for the mob could have identified Jesus eventually and arrested Him. Judas made their job easier, however, and certainly neutralized the disciples' potential opposition, for they would not have suspected what Judas was up to as He approached.

v. 51 – One of the disciples, however, was determined to fight and grabbed a sword. Having swung it, the disciple cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. I believe the defender was swinging for the man's head and missed, and of course we know the defender was Peter. While you cannot condone what Peter did, he at least attempted to follow up on his pledge to die with and for Jesus. Yet Peter and all the men still had no idea what was going on. This must have been a bloody mess, for any facial cut draws a lot of blood. This was not the kind of blood that was to be shed for the forgiveness of sin.

A few years ago, there were people trying to blow up abortion clinics because they disagreed with what was going on in those clinics. Violence like this can never be justified in striving against sinful behavior, except for what some theologians have defined as a "just war." Many believe World War II was such a "just war." Violence is a last resort, however, for God's ways and purposes are not consistent with man's tendency to take matters into his or her hands.

Day Four

52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" 55 At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

v. 52 – Jesus uttered another “quotable” statement. Those who live by the sword will die by it, and of course that makes perfect sense. You may have some success with knives, swords or guns, but it is just a matter of time before a stray bullet or random thrust takes you down. Jesus was not into worldly power and He didn’t need the disciples to *defend* Him. He needed the disciples to *obey* Him. Too many still believe that they must defend God’s honor when He is insulted or attacked, but that just isn’t the case. I don’t have to defend God’s doctrines either, but that doesn’t mean I can believe anything I want or stand idly by while error triumphs. I can always count, however, on the power of the Spirit to assist me any time I must step forward to present the truth. I don’t have to cut off anyone’s ear to make my point or to defend the honor of my God.

v. 53 – Jesus had access to a host of angels who could do much more damage than one man with one sword. Yet Jesus had settled the issue that He had to drink this cup and that there were no shortcuts to dying on the cross. He had help at His disposal but He would not utilize it because it was not the Father’s will. Some people place a lot of focus on angels, even praying that God would send His angels to protect them and do certain things. I don’t think I have ever prayed for an angel to do this or that under God’s direction. I pray for God’s help and, if He wants to send angels, that’s fine with me. If not, that’s fine, too, as long as He answers my prayer! I will probably never know if He does or does not, so I am glad to put and keep that matter in His hands.

v. 54 – Jesus did not want to interrupt the events that needed to take place, so He refused to allow a “military” intervention. What’s more, He even performed a miracle in the process:

But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him (Luke 22:51).

v. 55 – Jesus asked the crowd a question but He knew they would not answer. At no point did Jesus ever present a security threat to security, yet they came out with swords and clubs. He had been a public figure, teaching and performing miracles for all to see, and no one had arrested Him. Yet now they came out to take Him like they would a violent man.

v. 56 – Yet Jesus knew why all this was happening and it was all according to God’s plan as outlined and explained in the prophets. This was an important point for Matthew’s Jewish readers to grasp. God was in control of this political situation that not only permitted this to happen but also directed it! **Do you have that kind of confidence in God’s plan for your life and the lives of those around you?** If not, perhaps this would be a good day to settle that issue – either God is in control or He isn’t!

Then what Jesus had predicted and the disciples had failed to grasp took place – they ran away and left Him to stand alone with His captors. They fled the scene after making pledges of loyalty and commitment. **Have you ever made a commitment, fully convinced you could keep it, and then failed to do so?** It is a painful thing to face the reality that your words were “bigger” or more noble than your performance.

Day Five

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. 59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward 61 and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

v. 57 – Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the high priest, for interrogation and examination. This was their chance to have Jesus away from the crowds where they could find a way to kill Him. They didn't want to exile Him or discredit Him. They wanted to kill Jesus! This is the nature of religious thinking. They would do all that and believe they were representing God's will in the process. Religion isn't just harmful; it's dangerous to those who employ it and to those who feel its effects.

Lord, deliver me from religion. I want to know You and not just know about You. I don't want to talk one way and act another; I want my actions to be true to my values and beliefs. Keep me from religious deception that can be so pervasive that I can destroy others and feel like I am doing Your will in the process. Amen.

v. 58 – Peter at least stayed close to Jesus and the situation in accordance with His vow to die with and for Jesus. Although he was powerless to do anything, Peter at least wanted to see the outcome of the so-called trial that Jesus was about to undergo. This required a measure of courage to do this, so while Peter comes out looking badly in this scenario, he certainly did more than the other disciples in trying to stay close to Jesus. It is important that we judge people not according to their failures but rather according to the positive things that they do. I admire Peter for his courage in this instance. I also identify with his cowardice as he later denied he ever knew Jesus.

v. 59 – Meanwhile the leaders were going about the task of gathering evidence to secure a guilty verdict against Jesus. They needed false evidence because there was no true evidence to convict the innocent Lamb of God. How ludicrous for sinful men to sit in judgment of the sinless One! Remember Jesus regular assurance, "I tell you the truth." It didn't seem to matter to these officials. They were determined to find a lie that would counter the truth that Jesus regularly told.

vs. 60&61 – I wonder where they were able to secure witnesses that were willing and able to come forward at that time of the night. This shows how desperate these men were to put Jesus away for good. These false witnesses did tell a measure of the truth, for Jesus had said that He would rebuild the Temple in three days if it was destroyed. Of course, He was referring to His own body, but the witnesses took what He said to be literal. People who aren't spiritual take spiritual things and twist them. This should never surprise us, for even Paul wrote about this phenomenon:

This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:13-16).

Is anyone misunderstanding you, twisting what you say to fit their own ends? If they are, it means that you are making a difference and touching some people at a deeper level, perhaps scaring them or alarming some special interest group. This is what they did to Jesus and you should expect it to happen to you if you are following Him as well.

Day Six

62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 63 But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

v. 62 – The high priest decided to go directly to Jesus to obtain some incriminating evidence. If the high priest could have Jesus tell the truth, it would be far more damaging than any false witness. Caiaphas asked Jesus to comment on the witnesses' testimony, but Jesus remained silent. Jesus refused to answer His critics or those who misrepresented Him. Peter wrote about this and urged us to have this same attitude and behavior:

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:20-25).

How do you respond when people misrepresent or insult you? Do you respond like Jesus did?

v. 63 – Then Caiaphas used a tactic that forced Jesus to tell the truth, putting Him under oath to tell the truth as to who He was. Jesus had no choice but to respond in the

affirmative, since the priest basically ordered Jesus in the name of God to answer his question.

v. 64 – Then Jesus did utter the truth for all to hear: He was the Christ! This should have caused those present to bow in worship, but instead they responded in anger and glee, for they had what they needed to convict and execute Jesus. They had what they needed, but they were the ones who were condemned, not Jesus. They now had the truth but they used the truth to justify themselves and condemn an innocent man and sinless Son of God.

Jesus told them that they would see Him coming on the clouds of heaven. This probably had all kinds of implications for the listeners, and most modern readers would interpret this as a reference to Jesus' ultimate return. I have read convincing cases, however, that this was a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem forty years hence, since Jesus was using apocalyptic language that indicated an earth-shaking experience. Since the fall of Jerusalem was directly related to Israel rejecting Jesus and His mission, then this could easily have been such a reference. This would also explain why the Jews got so angry. They would not have understood anything about the Second Coming, but they certainly would have understood a message about the fate of their beloved city and Temple.

Day Seven

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. 67 Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him 68 and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

v. 65 – The high priest got what he wanted – incriminating evidence – and God got what He purposed – the circumstances that would cause Israel to slay the Lamb of God for the sins of the world. It is amazing how God achieves His will and purpose without violating man's free will. These Jews and Judas acted of their own accord, yet they carried out the will and intention of God as they did so.

What is your view of God's sovereignty? Does He rule and reign in all the affairs of men? If He rules, does this interfere with man's free will? Are we just puppets or pawns in God's cosmic plan? If He rules, why are you uptight when things sometimes go the way you don't like or understand?

v. 66 – The judge called for the verdict and Jesus' accusers cried, "Guilty!" Jesus was totally innocent but declared guilty by His creation. God was judged and found wanting by the true guilty parties. This is how perverted things had become in Israel and this is why it was all coming down just four decades hence. Not only did they declare Jesus to be guilty, they also pronounced the death sentence to go with the verdict. They did not declare Jesus insane, for they knew He had control of all His mental faculties. They judged Him, His actions and motives and determined that He was a fraud.

Through all this, however, Jesus did not respond or react. He remained calm and entrusted Himself to the Father. Even in His death, when He was wrongly tried, found guilty and condemned to death, Jesus was sinless. He was condemned by sinners and did not sin! Hallelujah! I love Jesus because of who He is. I worship Him as well, for He is a God worthy of praise.

vs. 67&68 – It was not enough to condemn Jesus; they also had to humiliate Him! They hit and spit on Him. Then they mocked His spirituality, hitting Him and demanding that He reveal by the Spirit who it was that hit Him. What cruelty!

I do not want to trivialize these events by focusing on a minor point, but I find it interesting how they tried to pervert the prophetic office and gift in this scenario. People still do the same thing today. They want the prophetic to predict the future or tell them the secret things, not necessarily of God, but of silly, everyday life situations. This has caused some who have a gift of clairvoyance to be considered prophets because they can tell someone what they had for breakfast earlier that day. I have seen so-called prophets tell people what their house number is where they live. Of course, the people ooh and aah at this supposed sign of “prophecy.” This isn’t prophecy; it’s more of a spirit of divination such as Paul encountered in Acts:

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her (Acts 16:16-18).

Notice that this girl spoke the truth, but her source for the truth was a lying spirit. Paul would not tolerate such nonsense and cast the truth-telling spirit out of her. This girl wasn’t a prophet; she was a fortune-teller and Paul discerned the difference right away.

Are you enamored with those who can somehow tell people what only they could know? If you are, please make sure you judge what they say carefully and especially judge the fruit in or missing from their lives.