

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:31-56

Matthew 26:31-56 - *"Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"* ³² *But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."* ³³ *Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."* ³⁴ *Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* ³⁵ *Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples."*

Background Notes

After the Seder (Passover dinner) and the institution of The Lord's Supper, the Lord and His disciples left the upper room and went to the Mount of Olives. They walked out of the city and down into the Kidron Valley, and then a short way up the slope of the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. The walking distance would have been about a mile. Along the way, the Lord predicted that all the disciples would forsake Him and flee when He was crucified, fulfilling the Messianic prophecy in Zechariah 13:7 - *'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

However, notice how the Lord encouraged His disciples: *"But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee:"* (v32). The Lord not only promised His resurrection, but the restoration of fellowship with the disciples as well. Even though they would forsake Him, He promised to join them again in Galilee.

How gracious and loving He is!

Peter claimed that he would never deny the Lord. In fact, all the disciples said the same thing. The Lord told Peter that he would deny Him three times that very night – a prophecy that was fulfilled just a few hours later. Because Jesus is God, He is omniscient. He knows everything. He knew exactly what Peter would do. And this is still true today. The Lord knows everything about us. He knows all our strengths and all our weaknesses. He knows us better than we know ourselves, so He can help us with our weaknesses if we will look to Him and accept His help.

Doctrinal Points

God rebukes the spiritual sleep of believers.

Matthew 26:36-46 - *“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go and pray over there.”³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.³⁸ Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.”³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?⁴¹ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

The Lord came to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with His disciples. His soul was greatly troubled in view of what lay before Him, and He wanted His disciples to keep watch with Him and pray. The Lord went further into the Garden and prayed alone to the Father: *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”* And again He prayed, *“O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”*

The “cup” was the cup of suffering and anguish that the Lord would have to endure when He took upon Himself the sin of mankind. The Lord’s cup of suffering would include the wrath of God against sin and the shame of the cross. In addition, He would have to endure the unprecedented temporary separation from the Father, with Whom He was ONE! God the Father would have to turn away from and forsake His Son when Jesus Christ *“became sin for us”* - when He became the substitute for sinners. All this (and much more) was involved in the cup of suffering that Jesus faced.

Was there any other possible way for the problem of sin to be dealt with – for the penalty for sin to be eliminated? That was the essence of our Lord’s prayer in verses 39 and 42: *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me...”* There was no other way! And the Lord didn’t shrink back from the time of desperate pain and anguish before Him. He steadfastly went on to the cross, following the plan laid out for our salvation. He drank the full cup of suffering and wrath of God against sin, in accordance with the will of the Father.

While our Lord was praying, the disciples had fallen asleep. The Lord rebuked them: *“What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?”* And a little later: *“Are you still sleeping and resting?”* They were sleeping because they were very tired, and

yet the Lord still rebuked them. There's teaching here for us, isn't there? There is a time to sleep, and there's a time not to sleep! I'm sure all of us have fallen asleep while we're praying, right? And all of us have experienced fighting to keep our minds alert during a prayer meeting! What's the solution? Pick a time for private prayer when you'll be awake and alert because, just as the Lord said, *"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* And try to get a quick nap before prayer meetings so you don't drift off - because once again, your spirit is willing - but your flesh is weak!

Many of us have problems with spiritual sleep, as well as physical sleep. The Lord said, *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (v41). Too many Christians are spiritually asleep. They don't study their Bibles and they're not growing in their faith. They're not alert for spiritual battle. They're tripped up by spiritual slumber. We need to wake up! The Lord said. *"Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."* God rebukes the spiritual sleep of believers.

2. God uses the sinful acts of unbelievers.

Matthew 26:47-56 - *"And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him."⁴⁹ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"*

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. ⁵¹ And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. ⁵² But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" ⁵⁵ In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. ⁵⁶ But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."

It was nighttime, and it was probably very dark in the Garden, and Judas betrayed the Lord by kissing Him. His "kiss of greeting" designated Jesus to the large armed force that had come from the Jewish leaders. The fact that Judas had to identify Jesus with a kiss indicates that the Lord didn't wear some kind of white robe, or have a halo, or look different from other men. Why would such a large group of men armed with swords and clubs come to arrest Jesus? The chief priests and elders probably feared a riot by the common people, or that Jesus would possibly escape.

It was at this point that impetuous Peter drew out his own sword and cut an ear off the high priest's servant. John's Gospel identifies Peter as the man who did this, and John also names the high priest's servant, Malchus. Peter may have been trying to cut off Malchus' head, but he missed and only got his ear. Luke's account says that the Lord immediately healed the severed ear. The Lord assured Peter that He didn't need swords to accomplish His purpose, because at any

time He could ask His Father for twelve legions of angels to come to His defense! One legion consisted of 3,000-6,000 swordsmen. Just imagine - twelve legions is a **lot** of angels!

Verses 54 and 56 indicate that this whole sequence of events was working according to God's sovereign plan of salvation for mankind. Through the sinful actions of unbelievers, all the prophetic Scriptures about the Lord's betrayal, suffering and crucifixion were being fulfilled. God uses the sinful acts of unbelievers.

Practical Application

Are we willing to pray, "Not my will, but Thine be done"?

Too often we pray, "Not Thy will, but **mine** be done!" Of course we wouldn't pray those exact words, but in essence that's our prayer: Lord, give me **my** health, **my** happiness, **my** popularity, **my** success. Are we willing to pray, "Not my will, but **Your will** be done?"

When we're facing difficult circumstances, or times of trial and trouble, it's certainly not wrong to pray, "Lord, if it is possible, please take this bitter cup away from me". I've prayed that prayer a number of times when faced with a tough situation. Our Lord Jesus prayed those words, so clearly it's not wrong to pray that way.

But - **are we willing to pray the rest of the prayer?** Are we willing to pray, "Lord, if it's not Your will for this trial or loss or difficult situation to be taken away from me, then **Your will be done.**"

Are we willing to pray, "Not my will, but Thine be done?"