

STUDY 4 Matthew 26:47-68

Verse 47-56

This study follows immediately on from what we saw last time. Although it seems like Jesus is interrupted "while he was still speaking Judas came....." we need to remember what Jesus has just been saying and doing. Judas thinks he is in control, but Jesus has been preparing for this moment in prayer.

The arrest is described in terms which emphasises that it is the deepest betrayal. We are reminded that Judas was "one of the twelve". The sign of the betrayal was a kiss, a recognised mark of love and respect. Judas calls Jesus "Rabbi" and greets him at the same time that he is handing him over to his enemies. Jesus calls Judas "friend", which underlines the betrayal (this word is often used when the one using it regrets the conduct of a companion, see 20:13 and 22:12). Judas is shown here to be the ultimate hypocrite whose outward action contradicts the reality of his heart.

The crowd who have come to arrest Jesus are obviously expecting a great struggle. In verse 47 they have come with swords and clubs (and in great number). Jesus himself comments on that in verse 55. A certain disciple (we know from other accounts that this is Peter) begins to give them what they expect in verse 51 by cutting off the ear of the high priest servant. However, that simply proves that Peter had not understood what was about to happen.

Jesus was going willingly to his death. He shows his power not by resisting, but by submitting. He could have defeated this crowd had he chosen to, but he submits - not so much to them but to his father's will (remember the prayer in the last study). Jesus refers to Psalm 91 in verse 53. That Psalm states that "he will command his angels concerning you", but then goes on to say "you will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot". By submitting here, Jesus is going to the cross where he will finally and completely trample the serpent (fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15).

Jesus emphasises the cowardice and lack of control of the crowd by what he says in verse 54-56. He must go to the cross, and he must go now because the Scriptures must be fulfilled. It is probably best to take these statements as referring not imply to individual prophecies, but to the whole Scripture - the plan of God to fulfil the whole plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, at this time, in this way.

Verse 56 ends with the disciples fleeing from Jesus. But even here, Jesus' words and the words of the Old Testament are proved true (remember verse 31).

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

From what we have seen so far in Matthew 26, how do we know Jesus is in charge of this encounter?

In verses 47-50 how is the fact that this is a horrific betrayal emphasised?

What are those who have come to arrest Jesus expecting from this encounter in the garden (see particularly verse 47 and 55)? How does a particular disciple's response play into that expectation? (See verse 51)

How does Jesus show his power in this situation? What does he not do? Why?

How does Jesus emphasise the purposes of God in this situation (see verse 54 and 56)?

Why does the Father not send "twelve legions of angels" to protect Jesus here? Does Psalm 91:11-13 help us here?

What other prophecy that we have already seen in this series of studies is fulfilled in verse 56?

Verse 57-68

Jesus is now brought before the Sanhedrin, Israel's Supreme Court. Verse 57 names two of the groups that made up the court, the scribes and the elders along with Caiaphas the high priest. Jesus has already prophesied that he would suffer at the hands of all these (see 16:21).

It is clear that this is no fair "trial". Their aim is to put Jesus to death (see verse 58) and are trying to find any way to do that, including getting false witnesses against him - but this proves to be harder than they hope (see verse 60). They finally find someone who claimed that Jesus had threatened to destroy the temple and rebuild it (verse 61). Jesus refuses to answer this testimony. It is true that Jesus has said something similar to that statement - see John 2:18-22, but this is a misuse of what he has said, so Jesus in his wisdom does not respond.

The high priest asks Jesus a clear question in verse 63, and calls on Jesus with God as his witness to state whether he is God's anointed king (the "Christ", the "Son of God" - probably not a trinitarian statement here, but referring to the fact that the Davidic kings are referred to as sons of God). Jesus responds by answering in the affirmative - they have stated correctly who he is. But they need to take that statement seriously. Although he is stood before them at that time in weakness, in the future he will come in power (see 24:30).

The court do not take Jesus words seriously, but take them as an admission of guilt. They have what they wanted. Although the high priest tears his robes (an eternal sign of grief), deep down he is happy - Jesus can be put to death (see verse 59 and verse 66). The ridicule continues (verse 67-68). Those who slap Jesus now do not believe that the next time they see him he will be coming in glory as judge.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Look up Matthew 16:21 and compare it with 26:57. Who is in control?

Who is Jesus first brought before? What is their aim? How are they going about this?

What (false) charge/witness is brought before Jesus? How does Jesus respond?

What question do they ask? How does Jesus respond?

How does Caiphas and the Sanhedrin respond to this? What does this tell us about who they think Jesus is?

"The cross is proof positive that given half a chance mankind will kill its creator" (Dick Lucas)

"If you want to see the full measure of God's love for us, watch Jesus" (D.A. Carson)

How do you respond to those two statements, in the light of this study?