

## ARRESTED

*Matthew 26:45-56*

Let's turn to Matthew 26 and continue our study of Matthew's Gospel. It is now the early hours of Friday morning, the 14th day of Nisan on the Jewish calendar. Jesus and His disciples celebrated Passover the previous evening. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. They moved from Jerusalem to Gethsemane, a garden on the slope of the Mount of Olives, where Jesus spent two or three hours in prayer.

As we move through our passage this morning, we will first get the setting and some background information established. Then, we will see the actual moment when Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter will step up to defend the Lord, and Jesus will explain why He doesn't need anyone's help. Jesus will ask the crowd why they have gone to such efforts to arrest Him and then reveal why they did so.

Let's pray and begin.

## THE SETTING

*Matthew 26:45-48*

**45** Then He came to the 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** Get up, let us go; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"  
**(Matthew 26:45-46, 2022 LSB)**

The hour is at hand, Jesus says. The hour not just of His arrest but of His suffering. There was certainly a time to pray, but that time had passed.

In Matthew 20:28, Jesus says, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.* Jesus' death was not a shock or unplanned event, as many in the world say, but one that was decreed by God and planned down to the smallest detail. The timing of His death was just as deliberate and decreed. John's Gospel makes at least eight references to the "hour" of Jesus' suffering. For instance, John 7:30 says,

**30** So they were seeking to seize Him;  
 yet no man laid his hand on Him,  
*because His hour had not yet come.*  
**(John 7:30, 2022 LSB)**

Jesus didn't run or try to hide. On the contrary, He goes forward to meet His betrayer. Why do you

suppose they came to arrest Him at night? It's clear to me, at least, that they were trying to take Him by surprise, to get Him in shackles before anyone knew what was happening. I imagine Judas and the large crowd sneaking as best they could, making as little noise as possible, creeping through the olive trees, cringing every time a fallen twig snapped under someone's foot. And then they stepped into the clearing to find Jesus ready to meet them, speaking to His disciples.

**47** And while He was still speaking,  
 behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up,  
 and with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs,  
 who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.  
**48** Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying,  
 "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."  
 (Matthew 26:45–48, 2022 LSB)

Judas Iscariot is always referred to as Jesus' betrayer. He is mentioned by name 23 times in the Gospels. Each time he is mentioned, he is either identified as Jesus' betrayer or in the act of betraying Him. Even so, as Matthew writes in Matthew 26:47, Judas was still considered **one of the twelve**. He led a large crowd of heavily armed men directly to Jesus' camp in the garden. Those men have come from the chief priests, elders of the people, the scribes (Mark 14:43), guards from the Temple, and Roman soldiers (John 18:3). We don't know how many of them there were, but probably several dozen, enough to overcome any resistance from Jesus or His disciples.

Judas was not just their guide to the right place. He was also there to identify Jesus by kissing Him in greeting. That wasn't an unusual way to greet someone, but it was especially common among family and friends, less like a handshake and more like a hug.

## THE BETRAYAL

*Matthew 26:49-50*

**49** And immediately Judas went to Jesus and said,  
 "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.  
**50** And Jesus said to him,  
 "Friend, do what you have come for."  
 (Matthew 26:45–50, 2022 LSB)

Judas gave Jesus an honorable greeting – "Greetings, Rabbi!" – in the most dishonorable way possible. Psalm 12:2 describes him well:

**2** They speak worthlessness to one another;  
 With a flattering lip and with a double heart they speak.

**(Psalm 12:2, 2022 LSB)**

So does Proverbs 26:28,

**28** A lying tongue hates those it crushes,  
And a flattering mouth works ruin.

**(Proverbs 26:28, 2022 LSB)**

Judas could have stopped under the trees and pointed Jesus out in the distance: “There, in the middle. The guy on His left with the graying hair is Peter; the young guy on His right is John. Jesus is between them; He’s the one talking.”

But no, Judas came up close and delivered the blow personally, speaking worthless words, flattering with a treacherous heart, doing all that he could to work ruin.

Jesus makes it clear that He isn’t fooled: “Friend, do what you have come for.”

There are several Greek words that can be translated as “friend.”

A *philos* is someone for whom we have strong affection and personal respect. That’s not the word Jesus uses.

An *anagkaios* is a close friend, someone who is near to our hearts. Jesus doesn’t use that word, either.

A *syntrophos* is someone who is like family, like a brother or sister. Jesus doesn’t use this word either.

Jesus uses the word *hetairos*, which does not imply any affection or close relationship at all. It was often used by superiors to address inferiors in a polite, inoffensive, but fairly impersonal way. Jesus has already used this word twice in Matthew, each time in a parable.

In Matthew 20:1-12 He tells the parable of the vineyard owner. That man hired workers throughout the day to work in his vineyard. At the end of the day, he paid all of them the same amount, and those who had worked the longest were offended and said so.

**13** “But [the vineyard owner] answered and said to one of them, ‘*Friend*, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?”

**(Matthew 20:13, 2022 LSB)**

And in Matthew 22:1-13 Jesus tells the parable of the wedding feast. Those who were invited to the wedding feast refused to come, so the king sent his servants out into the streets to bring in everyone they could.

**11** But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, **12** and he said to him, ‘*Friend*, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. **13** Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

**(Matthew 22:11–13, 2022 LSB)**

The grumbling man and the ill-dressed wedding guest were not true friends of the vineyard worker or the king. In fact, the king has his “friend” cast into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth!

Judas approached Jesus and pretended to be full of honor and respect. Jesus answered him in a way that shows that He wasn’t fooled at all by Judas’ deception and never had been.

## DEFENDING JESUS

*Matthew 26:50b-54*

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

**51** And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew out his sword and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

**52** Then Jesus said to him,

“Put your sword back into its place;  
for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.

**53** 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?

**54** Therefore, how will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?”

**(Matthew 26:50b–56, 2022 LSB)**

These wicked men took physical hold of Jesus so that He could not escape; they couldn’t imagine that He had no desire to escape! In fact, within the decree of Yahweh, this large group of men were escorts who made sure that Jesus made it safely to the trials and, ultimately, the cross.

But one of the disciples exploded into violence. John 18:10 identifies this disciple as Peter; Matthew, Mark, and Luke all leave him unnamed. They were written while Peter was alive; he had been executed by the time John wrote his Gospel. Perhaps they didn’t want people in the church to see Peter as a violent man; perhaps it was to spare him any harassment from the authorities. But John tells us that Peter cut off the right

ear of Malchus, the slave of the high priest.

Jesus makes two points.

**The first point is important: those who take up the sword will perish by the sword.** Jesus did no violence, ever, and never harmed anyone. He rebuked James and John when they offered to call fire down from heaven to destroy Jesus' enemies (Luke 9:54-55). It's not that the wicked don't deserve destruction; they do. It isn't that the wicked won't ultimately be destroyed; they will. It's that Jesus came to save sinners from that destruction. The Gospel cannot be advanced by force, violence, or coercion. We are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Our God will deal with them in His time, not ours. If we really understood the nature of hell, we would beg everyone, even those who hate us and bring evil upon us, to repent and trust in Christ.

**The second point is even more important: Jesus didn't need Peter or anyone else to defend Him.** The Father had placed more than twelve legions of angels at His disposal. A Roman army legion was comprised of 6,000 infantry and 700 mounted soldiers. Twelve legions would be more than 80,000 angels. Isaiah 37:36 says one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians in a single night. More than twelve legions of angels could have easily defended Jesus against 15 BILLION enemies. Jesus could appeal to His Father, and the angels would have surrounded Him. He didn't need Peter or anyone else to come to His aid. But just as Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many, neither did He come to be defended, but, we can say, to defend others by suffering in their place.

John writes this about Jesus' arrest:

4 So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him,  
went forth and said to them,  
"Whom do you seek?"

5 They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene."

He said to them, "I am He." [literally, "I Am," the divine name]  
And Judas also, who was betraying Him,  
was standing with them.

6 So when He said to them, "I Am,"  
they drew back [that is, they lurched backward]  
and fell to the ground [the sense is a sudden or violent fall; they didn't willingly kneel but were  
shoved].

7 Therefore He again asked them,  
"Whom do you seek?"

And they said [**probably in a state of shock**],

“Jesus the Nazarene.”

**8** Jesus answered, “I told you that I am He;

so if you seek Me, let these go their way,”

**9** in order that the word which He spoke would be fulfilled,

“Of those whom You have given Me, I lost not one.”

**(John 18:4–9, 2022 LSB)**

The **word which He spoke** was spoken in John 17:12, just a short time before. Jesus didn’t need Peter to defend Him. He didn’t need angels. His divine nature was enough. If He had not willingly and voluntarily gone with them, no power in the universe could have forced Him.

## THAT THE SCRIPTURES WOULD BE FULFILLED

*Matthew 26:55-56*

This episode ends with Jesus speaking to the crowds.

**55** At that time 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.

**56** But all this has taken place

in order that the Scriptures of the prophets would be fulfilled.”

Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

**(Matthew 26:55–56, 2022 LSB)**

There were already three robbers in custody. One, Barabbas, would be released by Pontius Pilate at the insistence of the Jews; we’ll come to that event in a few weeks. The other two were crucified for their crimes. The word **robber** describes a criminal who is both violent and utterly opposed to the lawful government. Some were political insurrectionists or revolutionaries, but more often, they were violent men who just wanted to destroy the world around them. If they had wanted posters in those times, they would have read “armed and dangerous.” In that day, when battle was almost always hand to hand, without guns or pepper spray, it took a large number of men to restrain even one robber.

But why did they come against Jesus that way? As He says, He spent many days in the Temple, calmly and quietly teaching. The scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, chief priests, and elders had approached Him on many occasions without bloodshed. There were several failed attempts to kill and capture Jesus. They did not fail because He fought His way free but because it was not His time. Early in His ministry, in Nazareth, the people became offended,

**29** and they stood up and drove Him out of the city,  
and led Him to the edge of the hill on which their city had been built,  
in order to throw Him down the cliff.

**30** But passing through their midst [**calmly and quietly**],  
He went on His way.

**(Luke 4:29–30, 2022 LSB)**

So why have they come against Him this way? Jesus tells us: in order that the Scripture would be fulfilled. His arrest was necessary to fulfill the various Scriptures regarding His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. But this particular way of arresting Him was necessary to fulfill two other Scriptures. The first is Psalm 41:9, which foretells Judas betraying Him. And the second is Zechariah 13:7, which foretells His disciples abandoning Him.

And, at the perfect moment, according to the decree of God,

**56** Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

**(Matthew 26:56b, 2022 LSB)**

What Zechariah had foretold came to pass. What Jesus had said just a short time before came to pass. As painful as it was for them to experience, it demonstrated that the decrees of God are settled and unchangeable, all glory be to Him! And remember, while Judas, the Son of Perdition, was certainly lost, the others were not. Jesus protected them even in their falling away. They were restored to Him with a greater humility toward themselves, and reliance on His strength, then they had known before.

Let's bring this home.

## **BRINGING IT HOME**

First of all, Jesus came to die for sinners. He wanted to die for sinners. He was glad to die for sinners. It was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). He delights to forgive sin. When He died for me, it was for every sin that I would commit, even the ones I didn't think were sin, and the ones I committed knowing they were sin, and the ones I've forgotten about, and the ones I haven't committed yet. All were covered by His blood. None are retained against me. Confession is not how we get forgiveness as Christians but how we are restored to a right relationship with the Lord when our consciences condemn us (First John 3:20).

Second, it's pointless to try to pretend with Jesus Christ. He knows who we are far better than we know ourselves. He is always superior to us, and we are always inferior to Him. Since He knows everything there is to know about us, we may as well be honest with Him. And, we may as well accept His rebukes and

correction since He is always justified when He speaks and pure when He judges (Psalm 51:4).

Third, none of the men who came to arrest Jesus thought that He was anyone special. As far as they were concerned, He was just like everyone else. That's why they needed someone to point Him out to them. They were right that He was a man, but they were obviously wrong as well. Jesus was not just a man; He was and is also Yahweh, the great I AM. When He spoke His name, they were driven to the ground as though felled by angels.

Likewise, no unbeliever looking at the Gospel ever thinks that it is anything special or unique to it. In fact, generally speaking, religious types are offended by it, and secular types are amused. Just this past week at the jail, when I shared the Gospel, one man said, "That's not MY god!" He believes that he will be reincarnated and that every human spirit is the "holy spirit." He is one of those religious types that is offended by the Gospel. But the Gospel, which offends so many and amuses so many, is actually the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, whether they come to as religious people or secular people (Romans 1:16). When God's elect hear the Gospel and He calls their name, they fall to their knees before Him, in spirit if not in body, and believe.

Finally, I imagine that Judas felt vindicated during these moments. Here was Jesus at the mercy of these soldiers and guards; there go His disciples, running like rabbits. Yes, the crowd fell back at one point, but then they took hold of Jesus. Without question, Jesus' disciples were terrified and humiliated. Mark writes that one young man even ran away naked when they tried to seize him (Mark 14:51). Nevertheless, this was all according to the decrees, foreknowledge, and purpose of God.

What distinguished Jesus' disciples was not their cowardice when they fled but their faith when they returned. Later on, they would mostly abandon Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 11:19). They would suffer more than embarrassment for His name's sake. Their faith was not destroyed but rather strengthened by these things. And, the glory of God was magnified as His grace and mercy were poured out upon them.

The same is true for us. We have all failed. We are all going to fail. We are not distinguished by our sin and failure; after all, every human being is a sinner by nature. Rather, we are distinguished by the grace and mercy of God that keeps restoring us, strengthening our faith, and bringing glory not to us but to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Let's prepare our hearts for the Lord's table.**