

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 11B – Matthew 26: Jesus' Passion I: Betrayal, Arrest, and Jewish Hearing

Greetings, friends. This is Lecture 11b of our Matthew course. This is David Turner.

This is the first of two lectures that we're going to have on the Passion Narrative in Matthew 26. Our next lecture will cover the ongoing Passion Narrative in Matthew 27. Much to cover through here, and can only scratch the surface, I'm afraid.

So, here we go. The climactic events which have repeatedly been predicted since the Galilean ministry are now about to unfold as we introduce this Passion Narrative. It has been predicted several times that Jesus will be crucified in Jerusalem, going way back to 12:38 to 40, 16:4 and 21, 17:12, 22 and 23, 20:17 through 19:21, 38 and 39, 23:32.

We find our Lord Jesus here in 26 too, as being well aware of the forces which have been arrayed against him, yet he does not resist doing the will of the Father despite the suffering that will be involved. Ironically, the very Jewish leaders who oppose and seek to destroy Jesus are the unwitting instruments God uses to fulfill his plan to exalt Jesus. Jesus' last week in Jerusalem is given extended treatment in all four Gospels.

This fact, along with the almost total omission of material about Jesus' life before his public ministry, clearly shows that the Gospels are not mere historical chronicles or biographies but are theologically motivated literary works. The narrative of events from Palm Sunday on covers Matthew 21 through 28, so it is clear that the last week of Jesus' life occupies roughly one-third to one-fourth of the Gospel of Matthew. Someone has said that the Gospels are passion narratives with extended introductions, and this is only a slight exaggeration.

Matthew's narrative of Jesus' suffering is prefaced with the stories of the temple conflicts with the Jewish leaders in chapters 21 through 23 and the eschatological discourse in chapters 24 and 25. In both of these sections, Matthew's material is more extensive than either Mark's or Luke's. When it comes to the passion narrative proper in Matthew 26 to 28, Matthew and Mark are, for the most part, parallel with Luke and more so John, contributing unique material.

The general flow is the preparation of the disciples in chapter 26, the arrest at Gethsemane in 26 at the end, the trial before Caiaphas and the three denials of Peter which end 26, the trial before Pilate at the beginning of 27, the mocking of Jesus in

the second half of 27, and then the burial by Joseph of Arimathea, then the resurrection and its denial in the Great Commission in chapter 28. As we look at this material, there are several portions that are unique to Matthew despite its similarity with the other Gospels, and it would behoove us to carefully study this unique Matthean material. We don't have time to portray that on these tapes, but on page 47 of your supplemental materials, I've listed those unique passages and encouraged you to look more carefully at them as you think through the way this Gospel flows and what it has been teaching us all along.

Now we move just to a couple of comments on 26:1-5, where the plot to arrest Jesus and kill him is mentioned for the first time. In 26:1-2, for the fifth and final time, Matthew concludes a discourse of Jesus with the usual formula, except this time he doesn't just simply say when Jesus had finished these words, he says when Jesus had finished all these words. Therefore, Matthew portrays 26:1 not simply as the end of a discourse, but as the end of all that Jesus has taught in this Gospel.

That phrase reminds us of 28:20. Jesus' teaching about the rule of God, begun in 4:17, is now completed. The Passover feast begins in two days, and Jesus anticipates being handed over to be crucified. In 26:3-5, Matthew's mention of the leader's plot serves to confirm what Jesus said in 26:2. A plot against Jesus has been in place for some time, remember 12:14 and 22:15, but given the conflicts in the temple, there's more reason now than ever for the chief priests and elders to meet with the high priest Caiaphas to plan to apprehend Jesus secretly and kill him.

Secrecy is necessary because of Jesus' popularity with the multitudes of pilgrims who have arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover festival see 21:26 and 27:24. The leaders think they'll need to wait until Passover to arrest Jesus, but Judas' offer to betray Jesus will allow them to accomplish their goal more rapidly. Now on to the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in 26:6-13. In this passage, one is struck by the fact that an obscure, unnamed woman seems to have greater recognition of the shortness of Jesus' remaining time on earth than Jesus' core disciples have. Nevertheless, the disciples do have a legitimate point.

One should care for the needy, but their timing is all wrong. Despite their being at Jesus' side and hearing his repeated passion predictions, including one which should still be ringing in their ears, they act as though it was time for business as usual. As the chapter proceeds, excuse me, as the story of this chapter proceeds, this woman is portrayed sympathetically as serving Jesus while the disciples misunderstand and are corrected.

Jesus, of course, the betrayer, is the foil to the unnamed woman. On page 48 of your notes, I have listed there for you some of the literary issues involved in these characterizations of the woman and the Jewish leaders, with the disciples sort of

being neutral in the midst of all this. Jesus' words about the poor here should not be misused as a substantiation for a callous attitude about their needs.

His comment that the poor are always present alludes to Deuteronomy 15:11, which speaks realistically about needy people in the context of the sabbatical year of remission when debts were to be forgiven, Deuteronomy 15:1 and 2. God commands the Jews not to withhold a loan because the sabbatical year is near and the loan will be forgiven before it can be completely repaid, 15:7-10. God's blessing will be made up for what is lost when the loan is not repaid, Deuteronomy 15:4, 6, 10, 14, and 18. Overall, then, Deuteronomy 15 is about helping the needy so that there will be no poor people in the land, 15:4. Jesus' allusion to 15:11 and 26:11 of Matthew is a reminder of an ongoing responsibility, not a stoic statement about an inevitable situation. But the ongoing responsibility of caring for the poor pales in comparison with the urgency of caring for Jesus during his last days on earth.

Now, Judas's betrayal of Jesus in 26:14-16. Judas is a pathetically and enigmatically evil person. 26:24 compared to John 17:12. And the motivation for his betraying Jesus is one of the more inscrutable matters in the Bible. Some believe he took his action out of greed since Judas asked how much the leaders would pay him.

He was disgusted at the waste of money when Jesus was anointed with the expensive perfume by the woman at Bethany. Compare John 12:4-6. Others theorize that Judas was looking for a military, politically oriented Messiah and had become disillusioned when Jesus' spiritually oriented message was not widely received, especially by the leaders of Israel. Luke 22:3 and John 6:70-13.2 cite satanic influence behind Judas's action.

Bomberg's commentary is probably stretching things a bit and suggesting that Judas had perhaps committed the unpardonable sin. In any event, Judas sells out Jesus, later regrets doing so, and commits suicide. 27:3-10. The allusion here to Zechariah 11:12-13 is subtle but important in that it connects Judas' betrayal to Old Testament prophecy and thus supports the themes of Matthew 26 that God is in control even of the betrayal of Jesus.

This profound matter deserves reflection. Every follower of Jesus should also reflect on the monstrous treachery of Judas and grieve with the original disciples that one of the twelve could betray the Lord. Even more, each one has to ask, I'm not the one, am I, Lord? 26:22. Now, Passover and the Lord's Supper in 26:17-30. This passage contains four parts.

First, the preparation for the Passover in verses 17-19, the prediction of betrayal during the meal in verses 20-25, the institution of the Lord's Supper in verses 26-29, and the transition back to the main plot in verse 30. Despite the confidence of some, it's not clear at what point in the Passover meal Jesus predicted the betrayal and

instituted his supper. Matthew's interests are to associate these events with a historical Passover meal, but he does not provide historical details that are extraneous to his theological purpose.

In Matthew's theological purpose, the Passover meal is both a beginning and an end. It is the Last Supper, Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his arrest, trials, and crucifixion, but it is also the First Supper, the inauguration of the remembrance of Jesus by his new community. Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament pattern and prediction is, as it were, bringing from his treasure things new and old.

Remember 13:52. In this light, the Lord's Supper is not the Passover, but it is associated with the Passover. In the future, when they reenact the Last Supper, as they eat the bread and drink the wine, they will remember that Jesus did indeed shed his blood for them through the forgiveness of their sins, and they will remember that his promise to share at the table with them in the future kingdom.

As Paul put it, every time they eat the bread and drink the cup, they will be announcing the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26. The Lord's Supper is divinely ordained to remind Jesus' followers of what he has done and what he will do.

Their present existence is framed by his past first coming to redeem them and by his future second coming to reign over the earth. These truths are powerfully sealed to the hearts of his people when they participate in faith at the table. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is neither an impotent memorial, an empty sign, nor is it an automatic magical source of saving grace.

But when it is received in faith, it dynamically strengthens the people of God as it proclaims the central truth of the gospel of Jesus. The early Christians probably observed the Lord's Supper in the context of a regular fellowship meal or love feast. Despite the current popularity of Passover Seder celebrations in Christian churches at Easter, the order of the meal in New Testament times is not really known.

The attempts to read later Jewish Passover liturgy or Agadah back into the New Testament and to invest it with Christian typological significance may be edifying, but the practice rests on a weak historical foundation. Mishnah Pesachim 10 is evidently the earliest source for the Seder liturgy, but the Mishnah was not redacted and written until after 200 of the Common Era. It does seem clear that Jesus used the Passover meal as the context for the institution of his own supper, and one could say that for Matthew the Lord's Supper fulfilled the Passover, but the precise details of the correspondence are not known.

Now a few brief comments on 26:31-35, where Jesus predicts his disciples will desert him. This passage is an instance of Peter against Jesus, as we saw back in 16:22.

Twice, Jesus predicts Peter's future behavior, 26:31-34, and twice Peter strongly denies it in 26:33-35.

Told that all the disciples will scatter and be met by Jesus in Galilee, Peter affirms that he will never desert Jesus, even if everyone else does. Told that he will do worse than desert Jesus, he will, in fact, deny him three times, Peter affirms that he will die first. The ensuing narrative shows just how wrong Peter is on both counts, but Peter has been wrong before, and he has nevertheless overcome his failings.

The resurrection of Jesus will be the event which turns grief to joy, defeat into victory, and desertion into renewed allegiance, 26:32, 28:7, and 10, and 16 through 20. At this point, Peter does not know himself well enough to acknowledge his propensity to desert and deny Jesus, but he will learn this bitter lesson in 26:75, and he will be restored to fellowship with Jesus and ministry for Jesus. Compare John 21, especially for this, and eventually, according to tradition, Peter will die before he denies Jesus.

Now, in 26:36-46, we look briefly at our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. The three cycles of Jesus praying and the disciples sleeping are clear in this passage. It is amazingly clear and amazingly sad.

This repetition of three times when Jesus comes back to his disciples and finds them sleeping makes the point about Jesus and the disciples very clear. The solitary prayers of Jesus in Gethsemane are remarkable for several reasons. First, in these prayers, Jesus puts the Father's will ahead of his own.

He realistically anticipates the pain and suffering ahead of him. Compare 27:46, and he wishes that he didn't have to endure it. At the same time, he is resigned to obeying the Father's plan.

In this, he models the model prayer he taught the disciples, where they are to pray, God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. His prayer also models his own exhortation to pray alertly and recognize the weakness of the flesh in 26:41. The God-centeredness of the Gethsemane prayers of Jesus should be put alongside the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4:1 through 11.

Jesus will live on God's Word, whether or not he has bread. He will not test the Lord as God. He will worship only the Lord as God.

He will do the will of the Lord as God, even if it leads to suffering and death. And so should we. But if it is thought that this understanding of Jesus' prayer does not do justice to his deity, one has only to consult the book of Hebrews, which stresses how Jesus' sufferings equipped him to be a sympathetic high priest for his followers.

Note Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16, and 5:7-9. In no way should a high Christology deter us from appreciating the reality of Jesus' distress in the garden. 26:37-39, 42-44.

The wonder of the incarnation of the Son of God is that Jesus was truly divine and truly human. He was not the ancient equivalent of the apparently mild-mannered reporter Clark Kent, who in reality was not a human at all but a visitor from the planet Krypton. Jesus' Gethsemane experience reminds us of the weakness of his disciples, as eloquently as it does his strength.

Their lack of perception as to the significance of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany shows that their minds were not focused on Jesus' reminder of the nearness of his death. Their unanimous denial that they would desert Jesus just after his prediction that they would amounts to outright unbelief caused by sinful self-confidence. One would think that each of these supposedly brave men would be able to keep watch with Jesus through the night, but even his inner circle of disciples fails him in his most vulnerable moment.

The sons of Zebedee, who were with him in Gethsemane, wanted the highest place of honor in the kingdom and promised Jesus they could drink his cup in 2022, but they could not even stay awake to share his burden over the cup that he had to drink alone. Given their performance in Gethsemane, their desertion when Jesus is arrested is hardly surprising. The sleep of the disciples cannot help but remind the reader of the necessity for spiritual alertness in the face of moral testing.

Once we're reminded by Jesus' Gethsemane experience of the disciples' weakness, we can't help but be reminded of our own weakness. Yet the promises of our Lord sustain us as we serve him until he returns. Now we move to the arrest of Jesus in 26:47-56.

As Hagner points out, with 26:47 the preliminaries are over. Jesus has finished preparing his disciples for his inevitable suffering and death and their own failings. Now, in the middle of the night, Jesus is arrested and deserted by his disciples, whose departure illustrates Matthew 16:25. He will be subjected to a heavily biased trial or hearing.

In the morning, he will appear before Pilate and be handed over for crucifixion. By three in the afternoon, he will be dead. But in the midst of all this, one gets the unmistakable impression that Jesus, or rather his Father in Heaven, is really in charge.

These verses seem to show quite clearly that Jesus and his disciples were not subversives or zealots, even though that is the implication of the false charges soon to be alleged against Jesus in 26:61. Jesus is resigned to drinking the cup, his Father's will is placed before him, and he teaches his disciples that violence only leads to

more violence. Despite their boasts, in 26:35 the disciples offer only token resistance to Jesus' arrest, and then they all run away.

The group sent to arrest Jesus, apparently composed of temple guards commanded by the high priest, also comes across very unsympathetically. Why such a large group? Why all the weapons? And why such an obscure place under the cover of darkness? One can rightly explain the bravery of Jesus, the treachery of Judas, the cowardice of the disciples, and the aggression of the arrest party as voluntary actions in the character of each of the involved parties. But one must also notice the strong emphasis on God's predetermined plan in this passage.

Look at 26:2, 18, 24, 31, 39, 42, 54, and 56. Here, then, is another example of the scriptural pattern of the compatibility between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. As Jesus appears before Caiaphas for the first stage of his trial or his hearings, things are not very pleasing, are they? This passage, 26:57 to 68, lays out the first of Jesus' two trials, although the term trial may be too strong here.

The narrative of the trial before High Priest Caiaphas accomplishes two literary purposes. First, the sordid nature of the whole process is clearly exposed in 26, 59 to 61. Second, and more importantly, the claims of Christ to be Israel's Messiah are climatically pressed before the leaders of Israel.

In a clear allusion to Daniel, 7:13, Jesus acknowledges that he is the messianic son of man who will return to judge his false accusers and judges, 26:64. Yet the leaders reject Jesus' testimony, accuse him of blasphemy, and treat him with sarcasm and utter contempt in 26:65 to 68. It is Jesus' affirmation that he will return his glorious son of man to judge his judges, which seems to infuriate them.

They will not contemplate this eschatological reversal. The confession of the Roman soldier in 27:54 presents a contrast in keeping with Matthew's stress on mission to the Gentiles. In the aspect of how Jesus is presented in this passage, Hagner is correct when he says that nowhere does Jesus reveal himself more than here.

The time frame implied by Jesus' words in the future, 26, 64, is rather broad. Jesus will be installed as the glorious Son of Man at his resurrection, and Caiaphas himself will be confronted with this reality eventually. Sadly, Caiaphas refuses to acknowledge that the person he unjustly judged will someday judge him.

Jesus will speak as the exalted son of man when he prefaces his commission to the disciples with the words, All authority has been given unto me, 28, 18. But the resurrection only inaugurates the glorious reign of Jesus. Compare John 7:39, 12, 23, 12:32, and 33, 17:4, and 5, Acts 2:32, and 33, 13:33 to 37, Philippians 2:9 through 11, and Revelation 5:5 through 10.

That reign of Jesus will be consummated by his return to judge and rule the earth. Notice 6:10 of Matthew, also 13:41 to 43, 16:27, 19:28, 24:30, and 25:31. The resurrection vindicates Jesus' claims and seals the doom of his enemies.

The return to earth realizes the final judgment, where all humanity will stand before the Son of Man. Unbelievers will be condemned and believers will be rewarded, and Jesus will reign in glory over his people in a new world from which the curse has been removed. Now there is the matter again of anti-semitism pertaining to this passage.

On the historical level, it's clear that this trial was not carried out according to just legal procedures which are found in the Mishnah, Tractate Sanhedrin 4 through 7. According to this tractate, trials were not to be held at night, and capital cases could not be decided in one day. Several other details of Matthew's narrative are at odds with the Mishnahic laws for trials. One can explain this anomaly in different ways.

One line of reasoning argues that the Mishnahic traditions are theoretical, not actual, and that they were written down over 150 years after the trial of Jesus. But these traditions purport to be orally transmitted from earlier times. Non-evangelicals accuse Matthew of inventing much or all of the story for propaganda purposes.

In this view, Behr's, excuse me, Behr's commentary does that. In this view, Matthew's goal was to blame the Jews and exonerate the Romans in order to curry favor for Christianity with the Roman authorities. But if Matthew and his community are still identifying themselves as Jews, this argument breaks down.

Instead, Matthew preserves accurate historical information in his narrative in order to show that the Jewish leaders did not follow their own standards in dealing with Jesus. Notice also the case with Stephen in Acts 6:11 and following. It was expedient for them to break their own rules in order to quickly be rid of Jesus before the crowds became aware of it and before the Feast of Unleavened Bread went into full swing.

Matthew does not wish to indict Israel as a nation, not even all the Jews of his own day, let alone all Jews who have lived subsequently. Rather, the trial narrative must be seen as part of Matthew's consistent, bluntly negative portrayal of the Jerusalem establishment of Jesus' day as corrupt leaders who leave Israel like scattered sheep without a shepherd. Compare 9:36.

These leaders did not interpret the law and the prophets in a manner that focuses on weightier matters. Instead, they seek to follow human traditions which obscure the righteousness of the law, 15:1-14. When Matthew, as a Jew, writes to Jews, highlighting the corruption of the Jerusalem establishment, he is not being anti-semitic, and Christians who take him that way are seriously in error.

Those who support their own anti-semitic bias by appealing to Matthew should be roundly condemned in the strongest possible terms. For Matthew's own theological standpoint, it was not ultimately the corrupt Jewish leaders or the weak Roman governor who were responsible for killing Jesus. Rather, it was God's plan being accomplished by the deeds of sinful men, Jews and Gentiles alike, so that sinners from every ethnic group might believe in Jesus the Messiah and be forgiven by the shedding of his blood.

And finally, the last section of this chapter, Peter's sad three denials. The Sanhedrin has mocked Jesus' prophetic insight, and now Peter's denials vindicate it. The passage clearly consists of three accusations that Peter was a follower of Jesus, followed by three increasingly intense denials.

It's striking that Peter is intimidated by a mere servant girl and that his denials become increasingly punctuated with oaths and expletives. Compare 26:70, 72, and 74. These denials become even more emphatic as Peter moves away from Jesus, from the courtyard in 26:69 to the gateway in 26:71 to his departure in 26:74.

The disciples who left all to follow Jesus have now all deserted him, and the one called first has left last. One could easily sympathize with Peter denying the Lord once due to fear or embarrassment, but it's impossible to justify a triple, increasingly vehement denial. The Bible, in many cases, presents its heroes warts and all, as the saying goes.

Think of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Solomon. Matthew is no exception since he does not attempt to edit the inconsistencies and failures out of the disciples, out of his narrative of the disciples of Jesus. He does not even mention Jesus' subsequent rehabilitation of Peter, which is mentioned in John 21:15 and following.

So, the reader is left with another blunt testimony to the weakness of the disciples. This is tempered somewhat when one is reminded of the forgiveness mentioned in 12:32 and the promise that Jesus will later meet the disciples in Galilee, found in 26:32, repeated in 28:7, 10, and 16. Peter's denial underlies the weakness of all the disciples, 26:35, but it will not terminate their messianic mission if they are true to the resurrected Messiah and live by his power and presence.

It is instructive to compare Peter and Jesus. As Jesus confesses his messianic identity before the supreme leader of Israel, Peter denies any knowledge of Jesus before a servant girl. Peter is immediately grief-stricken over his sin, but so is Judas in 27:3. Therefore, it's also instructive to compare Peter and Judas.

Judas betrays the Lord just as Jesus predicted. Afterwards, he feels remorse, is rebuffed by the Jewish leaders, and commits suicide in 27:1 through 10. Peter also denies the Lord, just as Jesus predicted.

Afterwards, he does feel remorseful. Jesus restores him, and he resumes his role as leader of the disciples. How can such opposite results come from such similar actions? In the case of Peter, human weakness led to momentary failure, but the pattern of Peter's life was one of discipleship. In all fairness to Peter, evidently, he was the only disciple to follow Jesus into the high priest's courtyard.

Granted, he failed miserably there, but the others didn't go at all. On the other hand, Judas's remorse is not accompanied by deeds fitting true repentance. Just as we have seen before, here we have it again now in this narrative.

In Matthew, Peter is first among the disciples of Jesus. He's singled out throughout the narrative as the representative disciple. He speaks for the group.

All followers of Jesus should therefore be horrified by Peter's denials and thrilled by his restoration. Peter is the representative disciple both then and now. Now, a summary and transition into the next chapter.

As the plot to execute Jesus progresses, Jesus prepares his disciples for the end of his ministry on earth. In a touching scene, the inner circle of disciples cannot even stay awake with Jesus during his agonizing struggle in Gethsemane. Judas then betrays the Lord to the Jewish leaders, who lead Jesus away for trial before Caiaphas.

Peter denies the Lord three times. The plot of Matthew 26 then interweaves Jesus preparing his disciples for his death and the Pharisees' scheme to hasten that death. As the events of the chapter rapidly unfold, Jesus remains in control as he repeatedly predicts his death.

26:2, 12, 21, 23 and 24, 28, 32, 45 and 54. It also stresses the trials that this will bring to his disciples in 26:31 to 35. Even his struggle in Gethsemane does not take away from the theme of his control, since he is always obedient to the will of the Father.

26:39, 42, 44. Another strong theme is the sovereignty of God, especially as it relates to the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Notice 26:24, 31, 54, 56, and 64.

Thus, it appears that the monstrous treachery of Judas and the evil machinations of the Jewish leaders are both culpable acts and divine necessities that graciously provide forgiveness of sins. This chapter is therefore a profound testimony that the sovereignty of God and the responsible agency of people are compatible biblical truths, even though we may only articulate these truths feebly.