

File No. 159

MATTHEW 26:30–32; 36–68

Mark 14:26–65; Luke 22:39–54; John 18:1–14

GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE / HIGH PRIEST'S COURT

(SBS Bk 5 Story No 52 & 53)

Story Notes

Jesus told his disciples they would desert him. Zechariah (13:7) foretold the day when the Shepherd would be struck and his people scattered. No unity could be had without the Shepherd, and they needed to know this. People would never have the power to be united apart from the Shepherd, and, he would not have power to gather them until he had been murdered and raised from the dead. The disciples did not like hearing this truth about themselves but Jesus insisted on it.

Jesus had prepared the disciples for their hour of trial and told them that he would meet them in Galilee. Their failure through this time would not be the end of the kingdom or the failure of the covenant. In the garden, he took three disciples for companionship as he prayed about his own hour of trial.

Jesus was grieved and deeply anguished and told Peter, James and John that this was 'to the point of death.' *Luke* adds that, as he prayed, an angel strengthened him but that his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:43-44).

There were many reasons for Jesus' grief. He would 'save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21) and he had come to 'give his life a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:28 with Isa. 53:12). This identifies him as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and as one who would bear our sorrows (Isa. 53:3-4). He had already begun to do this (Matt. 8:17), but now, the full weight of it seems to press in on him. Peter would later say that 'he bore our sins in his body on the cross' (1 Pet. 2:24).

Our approach to this hour of Christ's sorrow should be modest. There are no sorrows like his sorrows. In this hour, his resolve to do his Father's will came to its climax. His temptation in the desert was an attempt by Satan to divert him from the cross. He opposed the temptation with Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11). The belief of Jesus that he should die on the cross was contested from first to last. He kept his course by deliberate choice and, finally, rested his life in the will and love of his Father by watching and praying. He would also have loved the support of his disciples.

The disciples succumbed to temptation and, when the time came, could not take up their cross. However, God's covenant purpose was never in doubt. It was, and is, as sure as Jesus' love for his Father and his will.

We should follow these hours of Christ's suffering with grateful joy. What follows is tragic if taken as a commentary on human actions, but as a revelation of God sending his Son to save the world, it is a revelation of love, a love which takes us to the Father. They also show that Jesus did not have his life taken from him (John 10:18). His life was upheld by the Father and Jesus directed all of the proceedings without recourse to this world's powers.

Jesus then had dealings with Judas the deceiver, Peter the zealot and the cowardly party coming to arrest him. In the first place, Jesus directed his own arrest. In doing so, he showed us the way to deal with opposition to him and his church: he called Judas his 'friend'; he ruled out the use of force; in this case, he even ruled out the help of angels; everything must fulfill God's word and purpose and nothing else mattered. Weapons, Peter found, were not for the church and it was shameful that weapons would ever be used against him or his people. Jesus had encompassed the deed of Judas in his own

purpose, he had curbed the fleshly zeal of his own followers and shamed those who had acted in the dark, all in the hope that they would awaken to the evil they were doing.

The disciples were now out of their depth, and fled. While they could use fleshly powers they were bold, but not bold with the boldness of holy love which Jesus had.

Jesus set the agenda for his own trial. In the High Priest's home, with Peter in the background doing his best to keep his promise, scribes and elders deliberately sought falsehood on which to convict Jesus; the truth would expose them rather than Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:18). Even a statement Jesus made about himself (perhaps John 2:19), now misapplied, could not convict him. They were false witnesses to whom Jesus did not respond (cf. Isa. 53:7). But his silence may have given Caiaphas the opportunity to ask if he presumed to being the Messiah or the Son of God. They knew that David's son (Messiah) would build a house for God (II Sam. 7:14).

Jewish law required that Jesus respond to the question put to him in this solemn way, and Jesus had no reason not to answer. They had now come to his core business. He had come as Israel's Messiah. Moreover, nothing they did would prevent his completing his task. He would receive the kingdom appointed to him and to all who followed him (Dan. 7:13-14, 18). A claim to be Messiah by one, who, from Israel's point of view, did not qualify, was seen as blasphemy, and this was a chargeable offence, at least warranting a stoning. Israel's (and the world's) hatred had reached its peak.

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