

# Jesus' Last Hours Before Crucifixion

by John F. Walvoord

*The sermon explores the final hours of Jesus before His crucifixion, highlighting key events and their significance in the context of His mission and sacrifice.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:10

**Topics:** "The Crucifixion", "Jesus' Passion"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the final announcement of Jesus' coming death, highlighting the events leading up to His betrayal and crucifixion, including the anointing for burial by Mary, Judas' betrayal, the Last Passover, the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus' teaching on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, His agony in Gethsemane, the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, His trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Peter's three denials, and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and trial.

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## Transcript

Final Announcement of His Coming Death, 26:1-5

Having concluded His comprehensive answer to the disciples' questions concerning the end of the age, Jesus returned to the consideration of the impending events (cf. Mk 14:1-2; Lk 22:1-2). He said to His disciples, "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified" (Mt 26:2). Lenski observes that this notation concerning the time indicates that Jesus was speaking on Tuesday of the last week and that Matthew's account of that Tuesday begins in 21:23 and extends through 26:5.<sup>145</sup>

Liberal scholars try to make the most of what they believe is an inaccuracy here.<sup>146</sup> Part of the problem is that Mark 14:1-2, in the parallel account, adds also "and of unleavened bread," referring to the seven-day feast which followed the Passover. All this, however, is much ado about nothing, because, although the expression "after two days" may have more than one interpretation, it clearly connotes that two days or more would elapse before the Passover would occur. The Passover also used unleavened bread, and if more than two days elapsed before the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which follows the Passover, there would be no real error in fact. The practical point is that they were faced with the final betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus.

There is no record of the disciples' comment on this, but Matthew records that even as Jesus was speaking, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people had assembled in the palace of the high priest Caiaphas, plotting to take Him when the people would not be around to prevent it. It is possible that they had in mind waiting until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which would be ten days later, when the pilgrims would have begun returning to their homes, but Jesus said, "after two days." And so it was. The early arrest of Jesus was to be made possible by the betrayal of Judas Iscariot. Only hours separated Jesus from the cross on Calvary.

#### Jesus Anointed for Burial, 26:6-13

During these last days before His crucifixion, Jesus stayed in Bethany on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, probably residing with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The incident, recorded here in Matthew and in Mark 14:3-9 and more in detail in John 12:1-8, occurred in the house of Simon the leper. While some have taken this as another name for Lazarus or possibly for Lazarus' father, there is no reason it should not be another home, for Jesus had many friends in Bethany. In any event, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary were there. Matthew and Mark omit any reference to them, but John states plainly that Lazarus was there, that Martha served, and that it was Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus (Jn 12:1-3). Matthew and Mark, likewise, do not give the exact date and apparently are not reciting events in their strict chronological order. John, however, specifies that the event took place six days before the Passover. If the Passover was on Friday, then Lenski may be right that this supper took place on Saturday evening after the Sabbath had ended.<sup>147</sup> The whole chronology of the week leading up to the crucifixion is debatable, and some place the crucifixion on Wednesday or Thursday instead of the traditional date of Friday, which is assumed here.

As they were reclining about the table in the cool of the evening, Mary took an expensive alabaster box containing a precious ointment, which John describes as "a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly" (Jn 12:3), and anointed Jesus. Matthew 26:7 and Mark 14:3 refer to the anointing of only His head. John adds that she also anointed His feet and wiped His feet with her hair (Jn 12:3). The fragrant perfume permeated the entire house.

This amazing act of devotion coming from Mary, who had sat at Jesus' feet and perhaps more nearly than any other really understood that He would die, aroused criticism from the disciples. John mentions that it was Judas Iscariot who spoke up and asked why the ointment had not been sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to the poor (Jn 12:4-5). John observes that Judas Iscariot said this not because of his concern for the poor but because he was a thief and was the treasurer of the twelve (v. 6). It is possible that the other disciples were also indignant, for Matthew and Mark both picture more than one of the disciples participating in the criticism (Mt 26:8; Mk 14:4). Jesus, perceiving the genuineness of Mary's devotion, rebuked His disciples saying, "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me" (Mt 26:10). He went on to say that they would have the poor with them always, and Mary had done this by way of preparing His body for burial. He predicted, "Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (v. 13).

The loving and sacrificial act of Mary has many connotations. While the disciples were slow to accept the repeated prophecies of His death, Mary seems to have comprehended it at least in part. Although she was not as active as the disciples or in a place of leadership, and though she did not serve as Martha had done, sitting at the feet of Jesus had given her insight into spiritual things which many in their busy lives

never achieve. Undoubtedly, the precious ointment had been a treasure held in the family for some time, and the reckless abandon with which she dedicated it to the anointing of Jesus was not a senseless extravagance but an act of supreme devotion. That Jesus permitted it without rebuke was to Judas Iscariot the final evidence that led him to question that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and the verses which follow record his covenant to betray Jesus.

#### Judas Seeks to Betray Jesus, 26:14-16

When Judas went to the high priest (cf. Mk 14:10-11; Lk 22:3-6), Jesus had already cleansed the temple, as He had done it on Monday morning, and they were eager to find some way by which they could lay their hands on Him privately. Nothing is said concerning how they bargained back and forth, but they agreed on thirty pieces of silver. The price was not high, as it was the same as the fine for killing a slave accidentally (cf. Ex 21:32), but Judas was all too willing to sell the King of kings for the price of a slave. No doubt, the money was immediately weighed out to him, fulfilling Zechariah 11:12 precisely, as Judas was not going to take the risk of betraying Christ and then going penniless. He knew all too well that if he did not carry out his bargain, the money would have to be returned, as the Jews could have had him arrested at any time. Matthew records, "And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him" (26:16). The time was going to come earlier than even the chief priests had thought possible.

#### Last Passover, 26:17-25

Matthew gives only a brief account of the preparations for the last Passover which Jesus celebrated with His disciples (cf. Mk 14:12-16; Lk 22:7-13; Jn 13:1-12). The parallel passages describing the preparation of the Passover in Mark and Luke give more details. The time was apparently Thursday, presuming that there were no events recorded for Wednesday and that Friday was the day of crucifixion, as most expositors have held. The two disciples, designated to find the place under the special instructions which Jesus gave them, were Peter and John, according to Luke 22:8. The rest of the disciples were not to know the place until that evening, when they would be led there by Jesus Himself.

No explanation is given for the somewhat secretive way in which preparations for the Passover were made. Jesus, of course, knew that the chief priests and scribes were plotting to arrest Him and that Judas had agreed to betray Him. The other disciples also were somewhat aware of the dangers of His being in Jerusalem, especially at night away from the crowds. Accordingly, the plan to keep the place completely secret from Judas and the rest of the disciples, except Peter and John, was necessary to avoid premature arrest and interference with the events of the evening.

None of the accounts indicate the name of the owner of the house, though apparently he was someone who recognized Jesus and was a disciple. Speculation is useless as to the identity of this man, and even the location is unknown, although visitors to Jerusalem today are often shown a traditional site for the Last Supper. The Passover was to be a hallowed occasion for Christ and the disciples, their last night together after more than three years of association, a night never to be forgotten.

The account of the Passover itself is recorded not only in Matthew but in Mark 14:17-21 and Luke 22:14-30. Luke includes in the middle of his account the institution of the Lord's Supper. John 13:1-12 records the incident of Christ washing the disciples' feet.

Matthew records that when evening (probably Thursday) came, which after sundown was actually the beginning of Friday, Jesus sat down with His twelve disciples. The verb sat down actually means to recline

or to lie down. They lay on couches arranged around a table which was low enough to permit them to feed themselves while reclining. There was probably a long table with the disciples arranged in a U shape around one end with the other end acting as a serving table. The traditional picture of Jesus and His disciples seated about a table is inaccurate. The record of the situation in the various gospels indicates there had been some contest among them concerning who would sit close to Jesus.

Judging by the conversation between Jesus, John, Peter, and Judas, John, the youngest disciple and the one whom Jesus loved, was on one side of Jesus. It may be that Judas Iscariot was on the other, and that Peter, ambitious for one of these places, ended up on the opposite side of the table. In any case, Peter does not seem to be close to Jesus (Jn 13:24). The spirit of contest among them as to which should be the greatest (Mt 18:1-4; Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48), which had been going on for six months, and which Jesus had previously rebuked, was again evident at the Last Supper and was the occasion of the demonstration by Jesus of washing the disciples' feet.

While none of the accounts in the four gospels give all the details, it is obvious that Matthew is providing only a concise summary. The extended discourse of Jesus in John 15-17 is not mentioned by Matthew. The events in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are treated topically and not necessarily in order chronologically. From Matthew's point of view, the important point was the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, and this is what he introduced immediately into the narrative of the last Passover.

It is probable that most of the Passover feast was observed before Judas was identified. After washing the disciples' feet and making introductory comments, the order of events was probably this: (1) Jesus gave thanks and they drank from the cup; (2) the bitter herbs were introduced, symbolizing their rigorous life in Egypt; (3) Jesus introduced the unleavened bread and the lamb which had been killed and roasted according to the instructions, as well as any other sacrificial meat; (4) Jesus ate the bitter herbs, and the others followed suit; (5) Jesus mixed the wine and the water for the second cup, which, in an ordinary home situation, would occasion the son asking the meaning of the Passover feast and the father explaining; (6) they sang the Hallel, Psalms 113 and 114 and then they drank again from the cup; (7) Jesus ceremonially washed His hands, then taking two cakes of bread, went through the ceremony of breaking one, laying it on the unbroken bread, blessing the bread, wrapping the broken bread with herbs, dipping in the juices of the roasted lamb, and eating of the meat; (8) the rest joined Him in eating the food that had been prepared.

While it is not possible to pinpoint the time when Judas was exposed, Lenski is probably right that it occurs at this point.<sup>148</sup> The Passover celebration was normally concluded by the drinking of a third cup, the singing of Psalms 115-118, and then one or more drinks from the cup. The conclusion would be singing from Psalms 120-137. Whether all these details were followed by Jesus, the Scriptures do not make clear. It was probably at the end or near the end of the Passover that Judas was identified and the Lord's Supper was instituted.

It must have been a great shock to the disciples, in the context of this hallowed feast, for Jesus to have said, as He did in Matthew 26:21, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." Matthew records that they all were extremely sorry and asked the question, "Lord, is it I?" Judas himself apparently was strangely silent for a time. In answer to the question of the other disciples, Jesus affirmed simply, "He that dippereth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me" (v. 23). The whole incident must be interpreted as a gracious attempt on the part of Jesus to make Judas realize his terrible sin and turn from it before it was too late. That he would reject His pleas and harden his heart is all too evident in the words of

Jesus in verse 24, "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born."

Up to this time, Judas had not been identified clearly. According to John 13:21-26, Peter motioned to John, who was leaning on Jesus' bosom, to ask who it was. John was informed, according to John 13:26, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon." Peter and John accordingly knew that Judas was the betrayer.

Whether this prompted Judas to ask the question is not revealed, but according to Matthew 26:25, "Then Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said." If Judas was immediately to one side of Jesus, it is possible that the other disciples did not hear. The Scriptures do not indicate whether any heard the conversation between Jesus and Judas. Matthew does not record Judas' response, but John 13:27-30 indicates that immediately after the conversation and his identification by receiving the sop, Judas went out into the night. Jesus had said to him, "That thou doest, do quickly" (Jn 13:27).

The question had apparently arisen in Judas' mind whether Jesus actually knew that he had plotted against Him. Judas was torn between faith and unbelief, but with the cunning of a heart that is desperately wicked, he reasoned that if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, his betrayal of Him would not be effective. On the other hand, if He were not the Messiah and He were crucified as He had predicted, Judas at least would be ahead thirty pieces of silver. With the crooked reasoning of the natural mind, Judas concluded that he could not lose. His problem was that while he wanted to follow a King who would reign gloriously, he did not want to follow a crucified Saviour.

#### Institution of the Lord's Supper, 26:26-30

Probably at this point in the sequence of events, after Judas left, the Lord's Supper was instituted, something new and additional to the Passover feast. All the gospels record the event (Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:17-20; Jn 13:12-30). Further instruction is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. It was while they were involved in eating the major portion of the Passover feast that this special ceremony was introduced.

Engaging the disciples' attention, Jesus took the ceremonial bread and after prayer broke it, giving pieces to the disciples with the instructions, "Take, eat; this is my body." Following this, He also took the cup, and, again giving thanks, He gave the cup to them saying, "Drink ye all of it." He then explained the ceremony in Matthew 26:28, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The new ceremony, instead of relating to the lamb slain in Egypt, now was referring to Christ as the new Passover Lamb, the one who would be slain on the cross. Although it was a new ceremony, it was also their last meal together, and He concluded the introduction of the Lord's Supper with the words of verse 29, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Here He was referring to the millennial kingdom, when Christ will return to the earth with His resurrected disciples and participate once again in the earthly scene. There is no indication anywhere that wine will be drunk in heaven. Concluding with the final hymn of the Passover feast, they left the upper room and went to the Mount of Olives.

The ceremony of the Lord's Supper has been a point of controversy in the history of the church. Of the bread and the cup, the Roman church holds to transubstantiation, that the elements actually are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. The Lutheran church, historically, has held that while the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine, it is actually invested with the character of the body and

blood of Christ, and that partaking of one is the same as partaking of the other.<sup>149</sup>

Calvin held that the Lord's spiritual presence was in the elements but not His physical presence.<sup>150</sup> Zwingli suggested that they were merely symbols and represented the body of Christ.<sup>151</sup> The controversy cannot be settled, but many have concluded that Zwingli was probably right and that the bread and the cup become the body and blood of Christ no more than Jesus became a vine because of His words, "I am the true vine." These are figures of speech, although wonderfully eloquent in their meaning. The important point is to partake of Christ in reality, not physically. The truth is that the believer is in Christ and Christ is in the believer in a wonderful, organic union of eternal life.

#### Jesus' Teaching on the Way to the Garden, 26:31-35

As the group walked from the upper room toward the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives, Jesus delivered His final teachings to His disciples, recorded mostly in the gospel of John (13-17). Matthew records Jesus' prediction in 26:31 that all the disciples would forsake Him on that fateful night; "Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." The word translated "shall be offended" is a Greek word from which we get the word scandal, with the meaning here of causing one to stumble.

The events of the evening were to be too much for all the disciples, and Matthew records in 26:56 that they all "forsook him, and fled." Jesus called their being offended a fulfillment of prophecy, as recorded in Zechariah 13:7, "Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered."

Jesus, however, also had anticipated His resurrection (Mt 26:32) and that they would meet again in Galilee. Actually, of course, Jesus met His scattered disciples first in Jerusalem before they all went to Galilee. Peter had been previously informed, according to John 13:38, that he would deny Jesus, but apparently Peter could not believe it, and here again, Matthew 26:33 records Peter's renewed conversation with Jesus on this point and with the same warning from Jesus in verse 34 that Peter would deny Him before morning. The other disciples joined in their profession of faithfulness to Jesus even unto death (v. 35).

#### Jesus in Gethsemane, 26:36-46

Having left the city of Jerusalem, and having crossed the Kidron Valley, Jesus was now at the foot of the Mount of Olives. They had come to a place called Gethsemane, meaning "oil press," probably located in a grove of olive trees for the purpose of pressing oil from the olives. Visitors today are shown a place called Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. There is no way to identify the place accurately. In a parallel account in Mark 14:32-42, Gethsemane is also named, but in the account in Luke 22:39-46, it is called simply the Mount of Olives. John 18:1 calls it a garden beyond the Brook Kidron.

Asking eight of the disciples to sit down, Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and they went farther into the garden. These three, who seem to form the inner circle, had been with Him on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:2-13; Lk 9:28-36), had seen the girl raised at the house of Jairus (Mt 9:18-25; Mk 5:35-43; Lk 8:40-56), and were apparently the three from whom Jesus could most expect sympathy and understanding in this hour.

These three disciples perceived that Jesus was greatly agitated. A comparison of Matthew's description with that of Mark and Luke emphasizes the fact that Jesus was experiencing great sorrow and inner struggle such as the disciples had never before witnessed. He said to them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me" (Mt 26:38). This did not mean that Jesus was in danger of dying on the spot, but it did mean that He was in extreme inner conflict. In this hour, He desired the sympathetic understanding of the three disciples. However, He went a little farther into the garden, away from even the three, and there began to pray (v. 39).

Many have commented on this experience of Jesus and have attempted to enter into the struggle which is revealed in the threefold prayer, and to discuss the contrast between Jesus in His agony and the sleepy disciples. While many truths can be derived from a study of this passage, the overwhelming impression is one of the loneliness of Jesus in His hour of crucifixion.

G. Campbell Morgan describes the progression of Jesus away from the multitude and toward the loneliness of the cross. Jesus first had left the multitude in order to be with His disciples in the upper room. There Judas had forsaken him. He went with the remaining eleven to the entrance to the Garden of Gethsemane. There, He had left eight of the disciples and took the faithful three with Him into the inner garden. Then He had left the three and retired to pray. The incidents relating to the whole scene emphasize the loneliness of Christ as He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world.<sup>152</sup>

As Christ retired from even His closest three disciples, Matthew records that He "fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (v. 39). Luke 22:41 states that He "kneeled down"; it is probable that He kneeled first, and then, in the process of His prayer, sank down until He was completely on His face on the ground. Hebrews 5:7 is the commentary on this prayer, speaking as it does of "strong crying and tears." This was an hour of supreme agony on the part of Jesus.

He addressed His prayer to "my Father," claiming Their intimate eternal relationship. The clause, "if it be possible," and the petition, "let this cup pass from me," indicate the natural desire of Jesus' human heart to avoid the supreme issue that was before Him. No man, in sinful and mortal flesh, can understand the conflict in the holy soul of Jesus who had never experienced the slightest shadow of sin and had never known any barrier between Himself and the Father. Now upon this holy One had come the hour when He would bear all the terrible sin of the world--past, present, and future--and would experience being the sin offering forsaken by the Father.

The human desire to avoid such an issue is not incompatible with the immutability of the divine nature. While this presents no theological problem to anyone accepting the full humanity as well as the full deity of Christ, at the same time, it offers no basis for men to understand the agony of Jesus. It is clear that whatever the desire of the human nature may have been, the will of Jesus was always without wavering to do the will of the Father.

After His first prayer and petition, Jesus returned to the three disciples, who probably were very near, and found them asleep. Matthew records that He addressed His words to Peter, and Mark 14:37 adds "Simon." The address, however, was in the plural, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" In the hour of Christ's supreme need, Peter, who had affirmed that he would die with His Lord, could not even keep awake. Recognizing the limitations of the human flesh, Jesus exhorted them, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41). Christ did not

question their desire to stay alert, but their will was not equal to the occasion.

Leaving the disciples a second time, He prayed, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (v. 42). This time, the condition is stated in the negative, which may indicate a progression in His prayer and a recognition that the cup could not pass away. Returning to the three disciples, He again found them sound asleep. Leaving them a third time, He prayed again, repeating the same words as in the second petition.

Luke 22:40-44 records only one of the three petitions, probably the last of the three, and indicates that Jesus withdrew "about a stone's cast" from the three disciples. Luke records, however, the appearance of an angel from heaven to strengthen Him as He continued praying, and that His agony was so great that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (vv. 43-44). Short of death itself, Jesus could not have been in more agony of soul.

Coming back to His disciples for the third time, He found them again asleep, and to them He said the sad words, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mt 26:45). Many have tried to analyze this statement of Jesus as being sarcastic or cutting. It probably was said in sad recognition of His own loneliness. Jesus said, in effect, that they should take their rest, for He knew that in a few moments, their rest would be interrupted, and a sleepless night was ahead of them all.

Matthew does not indicate that any time elapsed between verses 45 and 46, but probably there was a brief interval. Then Jesus, awakening them for the third time, said, "Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." The agony of Gethsemane was behind Him. The brutality of His arrest, beating at the hands of the soldiers, and the crown of thorns were ahead, but even this was just the prelude to the cross itself.

#### Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus, 26:47-56

As Jesus was awakening His disciples, the crowd led by Judas was seen approaching the garden. In the parallel accounts of Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53; and John 18:3-11, it is apparent that this was a large company of possibly several hundred people, including the chief priest and elders, a motley crowd which had been gathered by Jewish leaders to assist them, and may have included the two hundred Roman soldiers assigned to the use of the Sanhedrin.

Lenski points out that the fact that they carried short swords would identify the Roman soldiers, and the clubs would identify those hired as temple police. Some also carried torches and lanterns.<sup>153</sup> The size of the company indicated the apprehension of the Jewish leaders that, even at such a late hour in the night, the pilgrims who thronged Jerusalem might interfere with the arrest of Jesus. The importance of the event to the chief priests and scribes is indicated by their presence on the night of the Passover for the occasion of Christ's arrest.

Judas kept his sordid bargain with the Jews, and, in keeping with the prearranged plan to identify Him with a kiss, he came out of the multitude to Jesus and said, "Hail, master," and kissed Him (Mt 26:49). His respectful address was the extreme in hypocrisy, and his kiss expressed, as no other means could possibly have done, his wicked unbelief, which rejected the evidence that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. In his heart, he was done with the whole concept that Jesus was the King and that he would reign with Him. The Greek verb translated "kissed" indicates that he kissed Him again and again, so that in the

darkness, all would see and understand.

The fact that Christ permitted him to do it was in keeping with His purpose to be submissive to the will of God, even unto the death on the cross. But for Judas himself, it was also the last attempt of Jesus, even in this hour, to let Judas repent of his sin and unbelief. Jesus addressed Judas as "friend" which is translated from the Greek *hetaire* meaning friend or associate, but in contrast to *phile*, which would have meant a beloved friend. There was no hypocrisy in Christ's words, and He asked searchingly, "Wherefore art thou come?"

Why, indeed, would one who heard the matchless sermons of Jesus and witnessed hundreds of miracles turn away from such a wonderful person? Such is the hardness of the human heart and the blinding of satanic influence that one who had every reason to trust in Christ and had been blessed as no unsaved man had ever been blessed, would persist in his hardness of heart and unbelief. Judas, like Pharaoh of old, had gone beyond the point of no return.

Only John records the conversation between Jesus and those who had come to arrest Him (18:4-9). According to John's gospel, Christ asked the question, apparently after He had already been identified by Judas, "Whom seek ye?" When they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," Jesus replied, "I am he." John records that after Jesus said, "I am he," that "they went backward, and fell to the ground." Apparently, there was a momentary display of divine power, a final witness to Judas who betrayed Him, to the disciples who were to flee from Him, and to the crowd that was filled with hatred for Him. Jesus then told them again that He was the one that they sought and then added that they should let the disciples go their way.

It is at this point that Matthew picks up the story and records the incident of Peter smiting a servant of the high priest. Only John identifies the disciple and gives the name of the servant, Malchus (Jn 18:10). By the time this was recorded in John, Peter was already dead.

Jesus had told them in the upper room that the time had come when one not having a sword should sell his garment and buy one, and they replied that they had two swords, which the Lord said were enough (Lk 22:36-38).

When it became apparent that Jesus was about to be arrested, Peter, with sudden courage, drew his sword and struck at the servant of the high priest, no doubt intending to hit him on the top of the head and kill him. He missed, however, and the sword cut off the ear of the servant and probably hit the armor covering the shoulder. If Peter had killed the servant, it is possible that he would have been crucified at the same time as Jesus. To him, however, Jesus addressed the words, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mt 26:52). The time would come when Peter would die as a martyr for the faith, but this was not the hour, nor was the sword the way by which he should serve Christ.

To make it plain that Jesus needed no defender, He told Peter that all He needed to do was to pray to the Father and He would be given twelve legions of angels. A Roman legion consisted of from three thousand to six thousand men, and therefore, twelve legions was a company far in excess of the multitude that had gathered against Jesus.

It was not, however, the will of God that Jesus should be so rescued, and Jesus posed the question, "But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (26:54). Complete submission to the will of

God and to the path that led to the cross is evident in the words of Christ.

To the multitude who had gathered, Jesus addressed the biting words, "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me" (26:55). He was reminding them that the force that was gathered here was not because He would resist arrest but because the chief priests and the scribes feared the retaliation of those who had put their trust in Him. Matthew adds, "But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." This was the will of God.

At this point, fear overtook the disciples, and Matthew records sadly, "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled." Jesus was indeed alone in this tragic hour, but out of the tragedy would come salvation and restoration even for those who had forsaken Him and fled. The majestic person of Christ may have impressed some of those in the multitude that arrested Him. Who knows whether some of them may not have been included in the multitude who became His followers on the day of Pentecost and afterward?

#### Trial of Jesus Before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, 26:57-68

Having arrested and bound Jesus as a dangerous prisoner, they led Him away, according to Matthew's account, to Caiaphas--the high priest--and the Sanhedrin. A parallel account is given in Mark 14:53-65. John mentions that Jesus first had a brief trial before Annas (Jn 18:13-23) and that Annas had sent Him to Caiaphas (Jn 18:24). Matthew and Mark do not mention the trial before Annas, and Luke does not mention either of these trials. The whole procedure was highly illegal, as they were not to hold trials like this at night.<sup>154</sup>

The purpose of these preliminary trials was to find a legal basis on which Jesus could be condemned to death. Matthew 26 indicates that they sought false witnesses, but they could not get even the false witnesses to agree, until finally they found two that agreed, as Matthew quotes them in 26:61, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." Even this, however, was not a sufficient ground for condemnation.

In desperation, the high priest addressed Jesus saying, "Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" (v. 62). Jesus, however, did not answer until the high priest said to Him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (v. 63). At this official and direct question, Jesus responded, "Thou has said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (v. 64).

It is strange that the high priest was unable to produce any witnesses to confirm his charges, as Jesus had freely claimed His deity and Messiahship, but the words of Jesus were all the high priest needed. Jesus not only claimed to be "the Christ, the Son of God," but He added that He would sit at the right hand of God and come in clouds of heaven as the predicted Messiah. This clear claim of deity prompted the high priest to tear his clothes and say, "He hath spoken blasphemy. What think ye?" The crowd answered, "He is guilty of death" (vv. 65-66).

The issue was clear enough. If Jesus were not all He claimed to be, indeed He was guilty of death, according to the Jewish law. What the chief priests and the scribes ignored was the fact that Jesus had not only made the claim but He had fully supported it by the very credentials and miracles which the Old Testament had attributed to Him.

Then, contrary to both Jewish law and Roman law, they abused Him. "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" (vv. 67-68). This cowardly abuse of Jesus was not limited to servants; the text indicates the Sanhedrin itself lowered its dignity to participate. Tasker is too kind when he states, "It would seem highly improbable that such an august body would have demeaned themselves by such undignified behaviour."<sup>155</sup> They hated Jesus and delighted in this opportunity to hurt Him. In all this abuse, Jesus was silent. He was ready to answer sincere questions of faith but not the slanted questions of unbelief.

#### Peter's Three Denials, 26:69-75

Peter, who had followed Jesus into the high priest's court at a safe distance and had gone in to sit with the guards (26:58), hoped that no one would notice him. However, he was drawn to the scene as if by a magnet and wanted desperately to know what would become of Jesus. Parallel accounts of his denial are found in Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; and John 18:15-18, 25-27. The three denials recorded by Matthew were probably interrupted by some of the other incidents.

The first to detect Peter's identity was a maid who accused, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee" (Mt 26:59). But Peter was loud in his denial. Peter then went out into the porch, where another maid saw him and accused him, "This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth" (v. 71). This time, Peter denied more emphatically and even denied with an oath that he did not know Jesus. Mark 14:68 records that after the second denial, the cock crowed. The third denial came some time later, which Luke refers to as after "about the space of one hour" (Lk 22:59). The third denial came when the crowd itself said to Peter, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech [betrayeth] thee" (Mt 26:73).

At this third accusation, Matthew records, "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man" (v. 74). It was then that the cock crowed the second time. Matthew, Luke, and John record only this crowing of the cock, but Mark records that the cock crowed twice, "And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mk 14:72). Luke records that at this point, "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Lk 22:61). It was the look of Jesus that caused Peter to remember the prediction of Jesus that he would deny Him thrice. Peter, who thought he was willing to die for his Lord, now faced the bitter truth that in the hour of testing, he had failed.

145 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 1002.

146 Cf. W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, pp. 266-67.

147 Lenski, p. 1005.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 1017.

149 *Ibid.*, pp. 1026-31.

150 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:641-711.

151 On the contrast of Zwingli's and Luther's views of the Lord's Supper, see Albert H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 2:312-13.

152 G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Matthew, pp. 300-303.

153 Lenski, pp. 1046-47.

154 Cf. Lenski, p. 1056.

155 R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 255.

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