

The Agony, Betrayal and Trial before the Jews  
Matthew 26:36-75; Mark 14:32-72; Luke 22:39-71  
Lesson 28 by Dellen Ludwig

In last week's lesson we studied all of the predictions and warnings Jesus made, as he prepared his disciples for the darkest hours any would ever face, because they would face them without him. Now, as our lesson picked up this week, we saw how they came to pass and we witnessed Jesus' "Agony, Betrayal and Trial before the Jews". We will learn that Jesus' agony resulted in aligning his will with that of the Father; Judas' betrayal set into action God's plan to save the world; Peter's denial marked the turning point of his life as a disciple and Jesus' trial before the Jews condemned the religious leaders, not Jesus. Jesus was in control throughout the ordeal.

Luke 22:39 explained, "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him." We learned earlier that this entire week of Passover, Jesus had not stayed in the city of Jerusalem itself. He and his disciples had visited friends in the nearby villages, and had regularly come to the Mount of Olives to pray and/or spend the night. All of the disciples were used to camping out together and often slept while Jesus prayed late into the night or early in the morning. As far as they knew, this was just another night, "as usual," so, eight of the disciples settled in for the night as soon as Jesus led them into the Garden of Gethsemane.

However, Jesus called three of his disciples, Peter, James and John,

to come further into the garden than usual. He was different this time, as sorrow grew in his heart. Jesus explained to these three, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death; stay here and keep watch.” The Greek words used here describe deep sorrow and grief can be translated deeply distressed and troubled. Jesus described it as being “to the point of death.” It was so intense that, “He was at the point of emotionally collapsing under its weight.” [John W. Lawrence; The Six Trials of Jesus; p. 24]

The word Gethsemane literally means “olive press” which referred to it being a grove of olive trees, which also had a stone olive press. Olives were harvested and placed into the trough, and then crushed to extract their oil for use in cooking and lamps. This is a description of what Jesus was going through, emotionally. He was fully aware of all he would endure from his soon arrest through the completion of his crucifixion, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He was coming face to face with the burden of sin he must bear for all mankind; the weight of which would press him to the point of death.

Jesus left Peter, James and John with instructions: “Stay here and keep watch ,” [Mark 14:34; Matthew 26:36] and Luke adds: “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” [Luke 22:40] The disciples had no problem staying there. After all, they had often nestled down under these trees to sleep for the night. It was the “keeping watch” and the praying that they would find impossible on this night. Yet these were

their most important missions for their own sake and that of their Master.

We studied that after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, "When the devil had finished all his tempting, he left him until an opportune time." [Luke 4:13] Now would appear to be that time. Not only had he motivated Judas to choose this night to betray Jesus, Satan was also pouring all of the doubt, fear, and confusion he could bring to bear upon our Lord. The weight was extremely heavy.

Jesus then walked "about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed." The disciples could hear him, until they dozed, but had no idea of the pressure that was applied to his soul. He prayed, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." [Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; Matthew 26:39] Jesus was not ready to back out of his mission to save us from our sin. But he was emotionally feeling the complete weight of all sin, from all the people who ever lived, live now, and ever will live on the earth. For all of eternity, he had been sinless; in complete unity with the Father in holy purity. But now he would face the burden of guilt for not just one sin at a time, as we face, but the mountain of weight for all sin, to be dumped upon him at his crucifixion. Could he bear so great a burden, that the Father would then turn his back on Jesus, His Son?

This was a "cup" he humanly couldn't bear, but must bear. If there was any other way for salvation to be accomplished, the man, Jesus

would do it. Because his intertwining unity with the Father would have to be ripped apart and it took all his strength, to say, “yet not my will, but yours be done.” [Luke 22:42] Jesus wanted to accomplish his mission for us, no matter the cost to himself. Later the apostle Paul described his goal this way, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” [2 Corinthians 5:21] The Godhead had planned this from before the earth was made, knowing that we would need to be saved from our own sinfulness. The cross was the only way sin could be paid-for and salvation could be accomplished.

After this first hour, Jesus returned to get reassurance from his disciples. However, they had fallen asleep. He needed them, but he understood their frailties: “Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter, 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'” [Matthew 26:40,41] Peter was ususally an man of action, but he needed to be a man of prayer. Now was our Lord's hour, but Peter too would be in Satan's cross hairs before this day was over.

Jesus then walked away and resumed praying a second time. The commentaries explained that the tense of the verbs indicate a growing intensity in Jesus' prayers saying, he “progressed from the first prayer, ... into an intense struggle of prayer and sorrow.” [Vincent's Word Studies] Here he prays, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to

be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” [Matthew 26:42] Luke records that it was at this time an angel was sent to strengthen him. [Luke 22:43, 44] This was because his anguish was so great that he had fallen on his face in prayer and “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

None of us can understand the fulness of suffering these verses explain. John W. Lawrence called it spirit suffering. He said, “In this experience in Gethsemane, Christ is experiencing what it is to be accursed; -to have the Father forsake Him. Never has the Son experienced this before and it seems more than He can bear. Physical suffering is bearable. Soul suffering is bearable. But His Spirit suffering is nigh unbearable” [The Six Trials of Jesus; p.28 ] But the physical suffering was still to come, and must come. Therefore Jesus accepted the strengthening from the angel. It was going to be a very long night indeed.

Another hour passed and Jesus “...again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.” [Mark 14:] Jesus went away again, and the Gospel writers do not explain what Jesus said the third time he prayed, but that it was the same. However, the disciples were again sleeping when he returned the third time. Barnes reasoned in his commentary, “He returned repeatedly to his disciples, doubtless to caution them against danger, to show the deep interest which he had in their welfare, and to show them the extent

of his sufferings on their behalf. Each time that he returned these sorrows deepened.” And now, Jesus added to his “wake-up-call,” “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” [Mark 14:41,42]

Judas, when he left the last supper, had gone to the home of the chief priests and announced that this night, Passover or not, had to be the night of Jesus' arrest. Why? -because Jesus was onto his betrayal. He had announced to everyone that someone would betray him and had answered Judas' question, “Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi,” personally, by saying, “You have said so.” So Judas was revealed and knew it was now or never to earn his bag of silver.

The religious leaders didn't want to arrest Jesus during the Passover festival, because “there might be a riot among the people.” [Matthew 26:5] For this very reason, historians explained that a cohort of about 600 Roman soldiers were assigned to the high priest during holidays like the Passover, to put down any trouble that came, in the over-crowded city of Jerusalem. So, on this occasion, John, in chapter 18:3 witnessed the betrayer's arrival, “So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.” Matthew and Mark noticed they carried swords and clubs also.

On the night of the last supper, discussing the dangers to come, Jesus had mentioned that his disciples would now need to carry swords. Now we see why. Satan had not been successful in defeating Jesus' determination in the garden, but now he sought to defeat his followers. Jesus roused the disciples with the sight and sounds of over 600 people coming into the garden, their torches flickering through the trees and off of their swords and clubs. The eight disciples hurried to Jesus side while Jesus himself stepped forward to meet the mob with Peter, James and John.

If things had not taken the disciples by such surprise, they might have noticed the change in their Master. He was no longer weighed down, nor suffering in spirit. He was in control of this whole situation. John W. Lawrence described this change: Jesus "no longer needs them. He has the victory of the Father's grace being sufficient. The Father has answered him. He knows what his Father's will is, and goes about to do it. Not once from the Garden to the cross is the Lord tempted to despair. His spiritual torment is over – for now. His physical torment begins."

[The Six Trials of Jesus; p. 29]

Now, Judas had thought this through. He knew where Jesus probably was, because he had often been there too. He had the crowd bring torches, in case Jesus was hiding, and swords and clubs, in case the disciples would use those swords they had, to defend Jesus. He even arranged a sign to indicate which of these men was the one they were

looking for: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” [Matthew 26:49] However, as Judas stepped closer to give Jesus the betraying kiss, Jesus interrupts and commands, “Who is it you want?” The people replied, “Jesus of Nazareth.” “I am he,” came Jesus' reply, to which “they drew back and fell to the ground.” [John 18:5] In the original language the word that we translate “I am he” was equal to the name, Jehovah. It was so sacred that even priests would often use some other name as they read the scriptures so as not to profane His holy Name. Jesus here clearly shows that it is he who is in charge, even when it came to his arrest. Satan could not keep his minions from involuntarily bowing before the Creator and Lord of the universe.

John's Gospel added another command. In chapter 18, verse 8 & 9 it says, “Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.' This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'” Even at this hour of his arrest, Jesus seeks to protect his disciples, and deftly stepped between the crowd and his disciples. Barnes described his action in this way: “This shows his care and love even in the hour of danger. He expected to die. They were to carry the news of his death to the ends of the earth.”

Finally, Jesus allowed Judas to approach him saying, “Judas are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?” [Luke 22:48] Then Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Do what you

came for, friend.”” [Matthew 26:49,50] Notice Judas never called Jesus “Lord” showing his lack of belief in him as Messiah. But Jesus called him “Friend,” showing his lack of malice toward his betrayer.

Suddenly, Peter remembered he had brought a sword. He asked, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?”[Luke 22:49; John 18:10] but before he got any answer, Peter reached out with an overhead swing and sliced off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. Then Jesus stopped Peter from further attacks, which could have gotten him killed and perhaps all of the disciples arrested too. He said, “Put your sword back in its place...for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” [ Matthew 26:52,53] And Jesus reached out and touched the man's ear and healed him. Now there was no crime to use as cause to arrest the disciples too.

Tensions were high. So Jesus refocused everyone's attention to the chief priests, officers of the temple guard, and the elders in the crowd by saying, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.” [Luke 22:52, 53] As the guards began to bind Jesus' hands, Mark records, “Then everyone deserted him and fled.” The disciples fled, in fear and confusion. Even John Mark fled. He is believed to be the young man

who lost his “linen sheet” covering as he did so. But Jesus again revealed that he was in control of the situation, as the soldiers led him away to his “trial.”

I use the term “trial” loosely, because as you will see, the religious leaders did not follow their own strict regulations regarding a legal trial, by the Jewish Law. Jesus was taken first to Annas' home. [John 18:13] Remember, Rome regularly changed off the high priestly duties, but the Jewish law stated that the position of high priest was assigned for life. So, although Caiaphas was appointed to be the high priest at this time, Annas, his father-in-law still swayed authority in the eyes of the people.

This began between 2:30 a.m. and 3 in the morning. Jesus was brought to Annas while Caiaphas was gathering the other priests, elders and scribes for a formal trial later. Already two regulations were broken. No trial was to be conducted during the night, and no person could be convicted by the “testimony” of a paid witness. “Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you.” [Deut. 16:19-20]

Under Annas, Jesus was asked about his disciples and his doctrine. But Jesus referred only to his teaching: “I have spoken openly to the world, I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why ask me? Ask those who

heard me. Surely they know what I said.” [John 18:20,21] Jesus was challenging the court that witnesses should be brought to testify about his teachings. He had openly taught, knowing that often representatives of the leaders in Jerusalem were present. Yet none were brought forward to condemn any doctrine Jesus had presented. But for his tone in answering Annas, “one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. ‘Is this the way you answer the high priest?’ he demanded.” [John 18:22,23] Annas had attempted to get Jesus to incriminate himself, but Jesus replied, “If I said something wrong,...testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” And so with that challenge, Annas sent Jesus to stand before Caiaphas, the current high priest.

The Jewish law required at least two witnesses to condemn someone of breaking the law. However, this became a problem because, “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.” [Matthew 26:59,60] Among the many guards, scribes, elders and priests, no witnesses or accusation could be found. Although any trial should be the act of deciding the innocence or guilt of the accused, this one was attempting to find an accusation! As these false witnesses paraded before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Jesus remained silent. He never spoke to clarify their testimony or to contradict it. Even when two

finally, almost agreed that Jesus said something about knocking down the temple and raising it up again in three days, he said nothing.

Finally, Caiaphas stood up and asked why Jesus did not speak. He did not understand how perfectly Jesus fulfilled the prophesy of Isaiah 53:7 “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” Even if he used these two “witnesses” against Jesus, he could not have him condemned to death for bragging, as this statement appeared to be saying: “We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'” [Mark 14:58]

The night was passing, yet no crime could be placed upon Jesus. So, Caiaphas pulled out his trump card, challenging Jesus, under oath to answer his question, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” In his teachings, Jesus had often referred to himself as the Son of Man, or the Son of God. Now, sworn to tell the truth before God, Jesus replied, “You have said so, ... But I say to you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” [Matthew 26:64]

The high priest knew that Jesus claimed to be Messiah, and by saying he was the Son of God was to claim deity. If Jesus answered affirmatively, he was guilty of claiming to be God, and was blasphemy,

if it wasn't true! If he answered negatively, he would be a false prophet and worthy of death anyway. Jesus' answer was a definitive "yes" which went further than Caiaphas ever expected. Not only was he claiming to be the divine Son of God, but also he claimed that he was the One who would sit at the right hand of God to judge them at the day of judgment!

At this announcement, Caiaphas tore his clothes in mock terror and charged Jesus with blasphemy, stating there was no further need of witnesses. [Matthew 26:25,26] In their legal regulations, a vote should be taken one by one, from the lowest member on the Sanhedrin to the highest, so the younger members would not be swayed by the senior, more experienced members. Here, the high priest declares his decision and in one declaration announced, "He is worthy of death." [Matthew 26:65,66] And with that announcement, "Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, 'Prophesy!' And the guards took him and beat him. In this manner, they passed the time until dawn, when they would convene the official trial in the Hall of the Sanhedrin, so their decisions would be "legal".

While this travesty took place, two of the disciples followed the proceedings as best they could from the court yard. Although Peter and John had fled the garden with the other disciples, Peter remembered his proud words to Jesus saying, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will!" 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'this very night, before the

rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' But Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.'" [Matthew 26:33-35] Therefore, John helped Peter get admitted into the gate of the court yard of the high priest.

The palace or home of the High Priest, where the trial had been conducted so far, was a few blocks away from the Temple complex itself. Peter thought he could blend in with the servants. But immediately as he entered the gate, the servant girl who let Peter in, on the authority of John, asked him as he came in, "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" [John 18:17]. Her wording lent itself to Peter's automatic "no" answer. And so began Peter's downward slide, to deny his beloved Lord. He wanted to be faithful, to stick by Jesus to the death. But step by step, those surrounding him raised his anxiety level, and urged Peter to further denials of knowing Jesus.

First it was a simple "no" and then, "I don't know what you're talking about." [Matthew 26:70-74] Next he denied being with Jesus: "He denied it again, with an oath, 'I don't know the man!'" And finally Peter removed himself from the group of servants warming themselves by the brazier, into the cold early morning air of the gateway. Yet even here, the servants challenged him as being a Galilean, by saying, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." [v. 73]

Four things happened at the same time. First Peter, "began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" One

commentator suggested Peter reverted to his rough fisherman life-style and language with this swearing. Another suggested that Peter used a common oath such as, “May God do so to me and more also if I’m wrong...” [Ellicott] All we took notice of, was his passion and fear. He felt surrounded by the enemy, alone, and in danger of arrest himself if found out. The tension, by Satan’s design, had grown throughout the hours of this watch, until Peter’s frustration can’t take any more.

Next, as his oath still rang in his ears, “Immediately a rooster crowed.” [Matthew 26:74] Mark 14:72 suggested that the rooster had already crowed a first time, but Peter had not noticed it until this second time. Now, the third part of this scene occurred. While Peter was swearing and cursing, he had not noticed that the guard was leading Jesus down the stairs, through the court yard, and right past Peter, on the way to the gate. Luke recorded, “The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Finally, Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’” [Luke 22:61]

It was day break. It was finally dawn and the Sanhedrin could legally convene for the “official trial” of Jesus. They had again bound his hands and began to lead him though the streets to the Hall of the Sanhedrin, so they could officially condemn him to death. Jesus in step turned his swollen, bruised and battered face to look at his faithful, denying disciple. What did that look “say”? In the Pulpit Commentary

it is described in this way, “Then, as he passed, the Master turned and looked on his old friend, that disciple who so lately had declared that even if all others deserted the Lord, he never would! The glance of Jesus was full of the tenderest pity; it was not angry, only sorrowful; but it recalled Peter to his better, nobler self.”

All of the gospels record that Peter went out and wept bitterly. The Cambridge Bible examined those tears. The Greek word used here in Luke 22:62 was in the form to indicate weeping aloud. Mark used a tense that indicated “he continued weeping”; perhaps as he flung his mantle over his head, Peter began to weep following the exit of the high priest's entourage, and he himself left the court yard in another direction.

We cannot help but put our thoughts and emotions in Peter's sandals. Don't you remember, as I have, those times we too have denied our Savior? Perhaps it was before you came to know him? Perhaps it was out of fear of those around you? Perhaps it was out of anger or frustration or weariness over suffering that just didn't seem fair? Perhaps in grief over the loss of a loved one? Are we, like Peter, in danger of being overwhelmed by our grief and tears?

But then, we just need to look into our Savior's face. Our remorse over our denial and anger at God does not of necessity lead us to the despair Judas experienced. But instead it should lead us to repentance, as did Peter's experience. Jesus gave us his promise to forgive us, if we repent from our sins. 1 John, chapter 1 and verse 9 is a verse we all

should commit to memory. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” MacLaren explained it this way: “The assurance of Christ's knowledge of our sins against him melts the heart, when the assurance of his forgiveness and tender love comes with it. Then the tears, which are wholly humble but not wholly grief, flow. They do not wash away the sin, but they come from the assurance that Christ's love, like a flood, has swept it away. They save from remorse, which has no healing in it.”

Peter didn't know it at the time, but Christ was leaving in arrest, to establish his justice over all of our sins by pouring out his pure righteousness, in grace, making the payment we could never make on our own, for us. The Lord would return to restore Peter, establishing all of his disciples by his Holy Spirit to never again be fearful of what men might try to do to them. Then he would send them out to tell the whole world about this gift.

The crowd brought Jesus to the Hall of the Sanhedrin, adjacent to the Temple complex, and only asked him the basic questions Caiaphas had chosen. “If you are the Messiah, … tell us.’ Jesus answered, ‘If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.’ They all asked, ‘Are you then the Son of God?’ He replied, ‘You say that I am.’ Then they said, ‘Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.’” [Luke 22:67-71] And

with that said, the religious leaders completed their trial of Jesus.

It was a trial of presumed guilt. It was a trial without witnesses. It was a trial done in darkest secrecy and speed, so that they could deliver Jesus to Pilot before the people who loved him could have a chance to oppose them. And next week we will study the Roman trial that decided his crucifixion.

What did we learn in this lesson?

God the Father loved his Son and helped him in his darkest temptation.

God's will was accomplished in this betrayal, arrest and mock trial.

God made a way that our sins could be paid for, and forgiven.