

Week 31: Matthew 26:47 – Matthew 27

Hook



Main Point: Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will even though it meant enduring the most humiliating death of the time.

On September 11, 2001, four planes were hijacked by al-Qaeda terrorists resulting in the most lethal terrorist attack in history.ⁱ Two of the planes crashed into the World Trade Center, a third plane crashed into the Pentagon, and a fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, missed its target thanks to the heroic efforts of passengers.

United Airlines Flight 93 was traveling from Newark, New Jersey, to San Francisco, California, before terrorists overtook the cockpit 46 minutes into the flight rerouting the plane toward Washington, D.C. After the terrorists seized the cockpit, the passengers and crew were forced to the back of the plane. The passengers and crew began using Airfones to communicate with their family and friends, and they soon discovered two other planes had been hijacked and flown into the World Trade Center. Upon this discovery, they banded together to attempt to overtake the hijackers, risking their lives for the sake of whoever would be targeted by the plane. When the passengers and crew attempted their assault on the hijackers, the hijackers decided to crash the plane instead of allowing the cockpit to be retaken. The plane crashed in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, leaving zero survivors.ⁱⁱ

Q: What can drive someone to risk everything, including their life, for the benefit of another?

Q: What motivates someone to follow Christ, regardless of suffering and persecution, for their faith?

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Book

Main Point: Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will even though it meant enduring the most humiliating death of the time.

Matthew 26:47–68 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus was obedient to the Father's plan, even though it meant being arrested, tried, and punished for a crime He didn't commit. (arrest and trial before the high priest)

We already know from the last chapter that Judas would be the one to betray Jesus, but seeing him do it in this way is rather jarring. He arrived with an armed crowd, which Jesus said wasn't necessary. He wasn't a dangerous criminal (ESV) or leading a rebellion (NIV). This style of arrest was typically used for social revolutionaries.ⁱⁱⁱ He had been teaching every day in the temple and they hadn't tried to arrest him, but suddenly, under the cloak of night, they came with crowds and weapons (v. 55)? The crowd was not a Roman guard, but the Levite temple guard (v. 47) who took Him to Caiaphas, the high priest.^{iv} Jesus was accusing them of both political cowardice and an unjust arrest.^v

Worse than that, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss and Jesus called Him "friend." The kiss was a signal. Because it was dark, the authorities wanted to make sure to arrest the right person quickly, before there could be an uprising from His followers.^{vi} Yet this action and Jesus' response emphasized that Jesus' betrayer was one of His closest friends and disciples. A kiss was a sign of intimacy and respect, a gesture of devotion that made Judas's act even more heinous.^{vii}

One disciple (identified as Peter in John's Gospel) tried to stop the arrest by striking "the servant of the high priest" (the leader of the guard). Jesus stopped him, using a Jewish proverb that encouraged non-violence because violence always destroys those who use it (v. 52).^{viii} But Jesus also told them that if God wanted to save Him from this, He could. This was all part of God's salvation plan and the fulfillment of the Scriptures (vv. 53–54). This is not only significant for Jesus' story, it is also a teachable moment for all disciples, that the path God has for us often includes suffering, picking up our own crosses and losing our lives (Matthew 16:24–26).

When Jesus arrived at the house of Caiaphas, the whole Sanhedrin was there, the 71 judges who acted as the supreme court of Israel. It would be unlikely for them to be assembled in the middle of the night; this was clearly arranged. The trial was suspiciously quick, secretive, and *illegal*. The Sanhedrin broke their own laws with Jesus' trial, including:

- Capital trials had to be held during the day.

- The meeting was held in the high priest's home, not the official chambers in the temple.
- A verdict could only be rendered after an entire day and night had passed.
- Trials were forbidden on the Sabbath and during festivals.
- Flogging was not illegal, but spitting, striking, and taunting Him were against Jewish law.^{ix}

Any ancient Jewish reader would have recognized these illegal moves. The Gospel writers were exposing an *intentional* breach of procedure and a completely corrupt religious leadership. The priestly aristocracy was in a hurry. If they waited until morning, supporters of Jesus might arise in the crowd. So, they did a quick "trial," then pressured the Roman governor to crucify Jesus that very night.^x And Jesus just let it happen, fulfilling the prophecy of being oppressed, yet not opening His mouth, like a lamb led to slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).^{xi}

Finally, after many false witnesses, the only thing they could charge Him with was blasphemy (vv. 61–68), which would have warranted the death penalty, except He was telling the truth. When they asked if He were the Messiah, He took it up a notch. He is not just the Messiah, He is the Son of Man, a figure they knew to be divine, God Himself in human form. The irony is that they mocked Him as a false prophet at the very moment His prophecy about Peter was being fulfilled and in His moment of fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies about Himself.^{xii}

Q: How would it have felt to be one of Jesus' followers, seeing Him be treated so unfairly, yet feel as if there was nothing you could do about it?

Q: What does this teach us about how we are to respond when we are mistreated or falsely accused? Should we let it happen or should we defend ourselves? Why or why not?

Matthew 26:69–27:26 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Those who deny or betray Jesus feel deep remorse. (Peter, Judas, Pilate)

Q: Why did Peter deny Jesus, even though he had just promised he never would?

Verse 56 tells us that all the disciples deserted Jesus and fled when He was arrested, but Peter now sat in the courtyard of the high priest during the trial. John's Gospel tells us that he was there, too, and they were able to get in to watch because John knew the high priest (John 18:15–16). Peter's denials were quick and grew increasingly more intense. His second denial was accompanied by an oath and the third one with a curse. Like the story of Judas, this story serves to remind us that even Jesus' closest disciples can deny Him in times of persecution. The juxtaposition of the stories of Peter and Judas makes a clear contrast between their responses and their sins. Peter wept bitterly, but Judas killed himself. Tragically, he would never be able to repent and return to Jesus. But Peter did repent and became one of the most important leaders of the early church, teaching us that no matter what we have done, we can always repent.^{xiii}

Judas's story is tragic. Unlike Peter, his betrayal of Jesus was premeditated and intentional. Also unlike Peter, his remorse led to despair unto death. This story also reveals even more of the heartlessness of the religious leadership. One of their flock came to them, confessing his deep sin (v. 4) and they answered "What is it to us? See to it yourself." These were not religious leaders who cared for the spiritual lives of their people. Judas did repent ("changed his mind" v. 3), but his repentance was rejected by the very people who were supposed to be his connection to God, whose very job it was to make atonement for sin on behalf of the people.^{xiv}

Both the accounts of Judas and the crowd before Pilate address the issue of being guilty of shedding innocent blood, something ancient people took very seriously. Once Judas realized Jesus was condemned, he despaired being guilty of innocent blood. Pilate washed his hands of the situation and claimed himself to be innocent of Jesus' blood. But the crowd gladly accepted the responsibility of His blood, not believing Him to be innocent. Most ironic of all, the religious leaders willingly paid blood money to Judas, but were too "pious" to accept the return of their own blood money for the temple treasury (v. 6). This, again, exposed a religious leadership that was hopelessly corrupt and hypocritical, just as Jesus said they were.

When Jesus came before Pilate, the fact that Jesus gave no answer amazed him (v. 14). Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and the religious leaders only wanted to kill him out of envy (v. 18). His wife even had a prophetic dream about Jesus' innocence (v. 19). Yet, Pilate allowed Him to be crucified. He saw the rumblings of a riot (v. 24) and wanted to keep the peace, so he allowed for the conviction and death of a man he knew to be innocent. They sent him to Pilate because only the Roman governor could order a crucifixion, but it was the crowd who drove the decision.^{xv} Blindly following their blind religious leaders, they took responsibility for the death of Jesus, they and their children.^{xvi}

Though Pilate didn't show repentance and remorse as Judas and Peter did, he did wash his hands of the whole ordeal, refusing to accept responsibility for Jesus' death. Though these three men all betrayed Jesus in some way even though they knew He was innocent, and they all played a role in what happened to Him, it was the religious leadership who were to blame. They were the impetus behind the entire event. Yet none of these men stood up and did anything to stop it. It all happened to fulfill God's plan for Jesus to be sacrificed for the sins of the world, and yet, that doesn't absolve these men of their responsibility.^{xvii}

Q: Why do you think people are afraid to stand up for Jesus in a crowd? What about our culture makes it hard? How can we have the courage to stand up and do what is right?

Q: What responsibility do we *all* have in Jesus' death?

Matthew 27:27–66 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus willingly suffered and died, fulfilling prophecy and making Himself an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (mocking, crucifixion, death, and burial)

Q: How did the mocking of Jesus add to the pain of His Crucifixion?

Q: Why is it significant that the temple curtain was torn in two when Jesus died?

The irony of the soldiers' mocking of Jesus is that He actually was who they sarcastically claimed Him to be, the King of the Jews. He deserved a real crown but got only a crown of thorns. He deserved a throne but got a cross instead. He deserved a kiss of honor but instead was spit on and mocked.

Normally a prisoner carried his own cross, but because Jesus was so weak from the beating, the soldiers found someone else to do it (v. 32). Roman soldiers could legally force non-Roman citizens to do any kind of labor or task.^{xviii} The fact that a stranger, not one of the disciples, carried His cross only emphasizes the fact that all His disciples had abandoned or betrayed Him.^{xix} The wine mixed with gall was a painkiller, but Jesus refused to take it because He wanted to experience the whole of His suffering.^{xx} Jesus, the new covenant Passover Lamb, was crucified at the same time the old covenant Passover lambs were being slaughtered in the temple.^{xxi} The Old and New Testament parallels were substantial. Jesus fulfilled a number of Old Testament Scriptures in His crucifixion, including:

- The soldiers cast lots for His clothes (v. 35; Psalm 22:18).
- They gave him sour wine to drink (v. 34, 48; Psalm 69:21).
- None of His bones were broken (Psalm 34:20).
- They looked on the One they had pierced (v. 36, 54; Psalm 22:17; Zechariah 12:10).
- He was sold for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- He was oppressed and yet didn't open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7).
- They mocked Him (Psalm 22:7-8).
- They spat on Him and shamed Him (Isaiah 50:6).
- His body was scourged (Isaiah 52:14).
- He was brought like a lamb to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7).
- He was counted among sinners (Isaiah 53:12).
- His hands and feet were pierced (Psalm 22:16).
- They mockingly asked why God didn't deliver Him (Psalm 22:8).

- He prayed for those who killed Him (Isaiah 53:12).
- He committed His Spirit into God's hands (Psalm 31:5).

Matthew pointed out Old Testament connections throughout His entire Gospel and in the Crucifixion, every sign pointed to the truth that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

The mocking continued at the cross. In addition to the soldiers and those walking by, the chief priests, scribes and elders all mocked him, derisively saying things that really were true. Jesus could have come down from the cross; He could have saved Himself (v. 40). Just as He had told the disciples at His arrest, God could have saved Him (v. 43). He is the Son of God (v. 43). Jesus could have come down from the cross, but He chose not to because of His great love.

Jesus actually died quickly for a typical crucifixion; prisoners often survived for days on a cross. Because He had been badly beaten, he was too weak to keep lifting His body up to breathe. In His last cry on the cross, Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1, crying out in despair at being forsaken by God (v. 46). There has been much debate about what this means, but this is the moment in which Jesus took on the sins of the world and was separated from God the Father by that sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).^{xxii} This cry does *not* show a lack of faith; "my God" implies continuing trust in God, even as He felt abandoned.^{xxiii} His cry was not a last ditch effort for God to save Him; He remained committed to sacrificing Himself. Just afterward, He gave up His spirit. Jesus *chose* to sacrifice His life.

The three hours of darkness surrounding Christ's death recall the three-day plague preceding the sacrifice of the first Passover lamb.^{xxiv} The fact that it was in the middle of the day meant it was certainly supernatural. The curtain of the temple being torn was also a supernatural event; it would have been impossible for any human to tear it. The veil was 60 feet high and four inches thick – so strong that even two horses tied to either side pulling in opposite directions could not tear it apart.^{xxv} This veil separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place, therefore separating God's Holy Spirit (which dwelled on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant) from the people. This was a symbol that Jesus' death meant there was no longer any separation between God and man. Through Christ's sacrifice, we now have every confidence to enter the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 10:19–22).

Other supernatural signs include the earthquake, rocks splitting, opened tombs, and the resurrection of some of the dead (vv. 51–53) – enough for the Roman guards who were with Him to declare that He really was the Son of God (v. 54). This acknowledgement provides a stark contrast to the religious leaders, who should have recognized the Messiah when they saw Him. The religious leaders had Jesus killed out of envy while the Gentiles declared Him the Son of God!^{xxvi}

The Twelve had all deserted Jesus, but other disciples were there to bury His body – many women who followed Him, Joseph of Arimathea, and in John’s account, the Pharisee Nicodemus who had come to Him under cover of night. Out of respect, Joseph made sure His body was properly buried, and the next day the chief priests and Pharisees ordered that a group of soldiers should guard the tomb since Jesus had said He would rise again after three days. A guard was set outside of the tomb and the entrance even sealed, which may have made them feel more secure, but only served to enhance the miraculous nature of Jesus’ Resurrection!^{xxvii}

Q: How does it make you feel to hear of all the horror, mocking and pain Jesus went through?

Q: How does it affect the way you think of Jesus’ statement that to be His disciple, you have to take up your cross and follow Him and lose your life to save it?

Q: How can we honor His sacrifice for us in our day-to-day lives?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus willingly submitted to the Father's will even though it meant enduring the most humiliating death of the time.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the New York City Fire Department and the New York City Police Department scavenged the rubble of the World Trade Center looking for survivors. The New York City Fire Department lost 343 service members and the New York City Police Department lost 23 service members on that day with several more dying years later due to exposure to toxic and hazardous conditions.^{xxviii} These service members gave up their lives for their duty.

Jesus willingly gave Himself up to be a sacrifice for our sins. He went through the ultimate humiliation for our benefit. As we take up our cross daily and honor Jesus, we are to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1b-2).

CHALLENGES

THINK: Imagine the pain, suffering, and humiliation Jesus went through, all while knowing He could jump right off the cross if He wanted to. What kind of motivation would He have to have had to stay on the cross? How much strength, obedience, commitment and love would it take to follow through, to endure it all without defending Himself or saving Himself?

PRAY: For those in your life (and in your community and around the world) who don't know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Pray for their eyes to be opened to see His great sacrifice for them. Pray for them to understand how deep and wide and complete His love is for them. Pray for opportunities for you to share the Gospel with whomever you come into contact over the coming weeks, months and years.

ACT: Lay down your life as Jesus did. Imagine your life as an offering before Jesus. What things can you lay down at the foot of the Cross before Him? What things do you need to lay down? Choose at least one practical way you can sacrifice to the Lord, one way to offer yourself as a living sacrifice to Him.

i <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/911-investigation>

ii <https://www.nps.gov/flni/learn/historyculture/sources-and-detailed-information.htm>

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- xxviii <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nypd/about/memorials/9-11-tribute.page>