

Jesus: Faithful in the Garden

Matthew 26:47-56

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Ames, Iowa

February 16, 2025

Last Sunday, in vv. 36-46, Pastor Dean preached on Jesus' agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. This morning we will finish up the scene in the Garden with Jesus' betrayal and arrest. This block of text is like Part 2 of the scene in Gethsemane. The whole scene, vv. 36-56, is extremely dark. The only light in the Gethsemane scene is Jesus, so with this in mind, let's pray and get to work on our text.

When it comes to reading the Bible, we need to understand the genre we are reading. Here's what I mean: 43% of the Bible is narrative, 33% is poetry, and 24% is prose/discourse. When we understand that the narrative genre in the Bible is a massive 43%, we understand that we are studying a story and not just any story but the grand story of redemption.

The grand storyline of redemption in the Bible is sometimes expressed in the outline: *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration*. This outline is seen in smaller narratives, and as you study smaller narratives, you learn how they fit into the larger redemptive narrative.

Listen, we love stories, don't we? One of the beauties of narratives is that we often find ourselves in the stories. So, when we thoughtfully study the Bible, we are pulled into the story of redemption. We not only find ourselves in it, but we also encounter the Savior, who the story is about, and how He came to save us.

So, with this in mind, let's think about the grand redemptive theme that we find in our text and then drill down into the smaller narrative.

Did you know there are three major garden scenes in the Bible? The Bible opens with the *Creation* of the universe and a Garden scene. When God *created* Adam and Eve, He placed them in the Garden of Eden.

There, they are given only one commandment: Don't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then along comes the serpent, and he successfully tempts them to abandon God's plan and eat from the Tree. They ate, and they sinned against God. They broke the only commandment God had given them. We call this the *Fall* and as a result, they were exiled from the Garden of Eden to prevent them from eating from the Tree of Life and be eternally condemned for their sin.

Fast forward to Matthew 26:36-56 and the Garden of Gethsemane. This is the second major Garden scene where we will see *Redemption* in the Garden.

Since Genesis 3, God has been moving history to this point where Jesus Christ, the second Adam, would be faithful in the Garden where the first Adam failed. Jesus didn't simply obey one commandment but all of the Ten Commandments. As a matter of fact, He kept all 613 commandments found in the Old Testament perfectly. He not only kept the letter of the Law but also the spirit of the Law. By doing this, Jesus earned righteousness for all who trust in Him so they would stand justified and innocent before God.

Now, when we come to Jesus and confess our faith in Him and trust in His sacrifice on our behalf, His righteousness is credited to us, and our debt of sin is credited to Him. In this, we are declared righteous, and we stand before God sinless for all eternity.

In other words, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus submitted to the will of God in order to *Redeem* His people. He joyfully obeyed His Father and went to the cross. Because Jesus was faithful in the Garden, all who call on Him for salvation may be saved from the wrath of God in Hell and saved to have a relationship with Him and inherit everlasting life with Him in Heaven. Think about it this way: *Jesus died on a tree (the cross) for those who were dead in their sin then He rose from the dead to become the Tree of Life for them.*

Now, let's fast forward to the end. This is where the third major Garden scene comes into view. Here, we see *Restoration*.

In Revelation, Jesus gave the Apostle John a vision of what would happen at the end time, and He would bring all who trust in Him back to the Garden.

Listen to what Jesus says in Revelation 2:7,

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise [garden] of God.

The Greek word for *paradise* in v. 7 is also translated as *garden*. Jesus is leading His people back to the Garden, but this time, there is no serpent and no sin. So, all things will be restored to their original beauty, but only better.

God's people will dwell with Him in peace and perfection. We will be in perfect relationship with Him, and the desires of our hearts will be met in Jesus.

Revelation 22:1-2 tells us that the Tree of Life is now open to God's children,

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life . . . on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Jesus' faithfulness in the Garden of Gethsemane leads His people back to the blessed Garden of God, where the Tree of Life dwells for our full and final restoration. Friends, Jesus is our Tree of Life in the Garden.

Okay, now that we have the big picture of the story of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, let's drill down into our narrative in Matthew 26:47-56.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the beauties of narratives is that we often find ourselves in the story. See if you find yourself in this story and how you relate to Jesus.

Look in vv. 47-51. These are some dark and sad verses:

While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

As Pastor Dean mentioned last Sunday, there was a large mob coming to arrest Jesus. It was so large that He most likely heard them coming. However, His disciples were asleep. He had to wake them. Remember, He had just said:

Rise, let us be going; see my betrayer is at hand.

Matthew tells us that Judas came with a great crowd, and they had swords and clubs. When we take the account of Matthew, Luke, and John, we get a fuller picture of who accompanied Judas. Judas secured some men from a Roman cohort and the Jewish Temple Guard. Many religious leaders were there. There were men from the Sanhedrin, the Scribes, the elders, and the Pharisees. It was a very large crowd that had come to arrest Jesus.

Next, in vv. 48-49, we see the betrayer carrying out a wickedly dark deed:

Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him.

Let's drill down into these two verses. Notice that Matthew calls Judas one of the twelve in v. 47, and immediately in v. 48, he labels him the "*betrayer*." He wants us to feel the dark irony of the crime Judas was committing.

Next, we see that Judas gave Jesus a cruel greeting. He said:

Greetings, Rabbi!

This is the second time Judas has called Jesus “*Rabbi*.” He was intentionally misidentifying Jesus. He didn’t believe Him to be the divine Son of God, the very God Himself.

Judas’ next act was even more dark and cruel. He took the greeting of a friendship kiss and turned it into a sign of betrayal. He literally gave Jesus a *kiss of death*.

Most likely, Judas kissed Jesus on the hand or the foot. This act should have been a sign of affection and honor between true friends, but it was not. With his kiss, Judas dropped a pin on Jesus so those who wanted Him dead could identify Him and arrest Him.

Matthew uses a simple Greek word for the kiss in v. 48 and then uses a compound Greek verb in v. 49. Scholar F. F. Bruce says that the shift from the simple “*phileo*” kiss in v. 48 to “*kataphileo*” in v. 49 expresses the intensity and enthusiasm of Judas’ actual kiss.

Matthew signals to us that Judas is a hypocrite of the highest order. His outward action disgustingly contradicts the inner reality. His expression of friendship becomes the very device for handing the friend over to death.

Luke 22:48 captures Jesus’ response to Judas’ kiss:

Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”

Jesus sounds surprised, but He is not. His words confront the wickedness and darkness of Judas’ hypocritical act. It’s like Jesus was saying, “*Really? A kiss?*”

Next, in v. 50, Jesus lets Judas and the crowd know He is in control and not them. Look at what He says in v. 50:

“Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

Jesus’ reply was a command. He tells Judas to do what He came to do, and the men seized Him at His command.

In vv. 51-52, Peter continues to misunderstand Jesus’ mission to come and die for the sins of His people:

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

Matthew doesn’t tell us that it was Peter who cut off the servant’s ear. John’s Gospel records that it was Peter.

What was Peter thinking when he did this? He probably thought the moment of his testing had arrived. In v. 34, Jesus told him he would deny him. Yet, in the Garden, he fell asleep praying. He awoke suddenly to find the mob moving toward Jesus in the garden. He wanted to show his courage and that he wouldn’t abandon or deny Jesus. So, he drew his sword and tried to decapitate the servant but only cut off his ear. Again, Peter had missed the purpose of Jesus’ mission. He missed it in Matthew 16 and again in Matthew 26.

What Peter didn’t realize was that this was not the test Jesus had referred to. That test would come just a few hours later when a servant girl would ask him if he had been with Jesus of Nazareth. At that moment, what little courage he had left – evaporated.

In v. 52, Jesus rebuked Peter. Jesus said:

Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Jesus made a statement about violence that is frequently used and misused today. It is usually spoken this way:

All who live by the sword will die by the sword.

This verse is often used to develop a doctrine of passivism, but I don't believe that is what Jesus meant by this statement. Jesus meant that the Kingdom of God and the gospel would not advance through violence.

To be clear, I believe the Bible teaches that there is a place for self-defense and defense of the vulnerable and weak.

There is a place for the sword. There is a place for just warfare to prevent greater evils done to others. *"That place is in the hands of a legitimate and properly functioning government with its legitimate and properly functioning armed forces and police force."*¹ Friends, God doesn't need us to defend Him, nor should we advance the gospel with the sword.

In v. 53, Jesus showed His sovereignty and power that was available to Him. If He wanted to be defended, He could call on twelve legions of angels to do His fighting. Look at what He said:

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Jesus is calm and in control of the situation. If He wanted to be delivered, He could call on at least seventy-two thousand angels to show up and overwhelm this mob. Actually, one guardian angel would have been enough, but to show the power He was laying aside, He told them He had seventy-two thousand angels at His fingertips. Yet, He did not call on them. He laid aside that power and prepared to take up His cross. That was God's plan, and He intended to obey God and fulfill all of the Scripture.

Listen, Jesus was not going to be who Judas wanted. He was not going to be who Peter wanted. He was not going to be what the crowd wanted. He was not what the religious establishment wanted. He was, however, the Son of God who had come from heaven to die for His people. This moment in the Garden was by design. On the cross, Jesus would obey God no matter the cost.

Look at vv. 54-56:

*But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"*⁵⁵ *At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me."*⁵⁶ *But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.*

Everything that had happened was according to the plan of Almighty God. It was heartbreaking, and it was a dark scene, but Jesus was in control. Nobody took the life of the Light of the World. He willingly laid it down according to God's plan.

To show the crowd that they were acting according to God's plan by arresting Him under the cover of darkness. He pointed out that they didn't arrest Him in public at the temple because even this act was to fulfill Scripture.

They were not pulling a fast one on Him. They would not escape justice because they were acting under the cover of darkness. However, they were fulfilling Scripture.

Our narrative in the Garden of Gethsemane ends with the sad statement that Jesus' closest friends abandoned Him. Think back to the disciples' protests about standing by him to the end; yet, when push came to shove, the disciples fled into the darkness of the garden.

Jesus said that the writings of the prophets must be fulfilled, and here, before He had fulfilled the most important prophecies by dying on the cross, His closest friends fulfilled at least one of them by fleeing. Remember what Jesus said to them on the way to the garden in v. 31 when He quoted Zechariah 13:7,

¹ Daniel O'Donnell, *Preaching the Word Series: Matthew*, 808.

You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

This closes Part 2 of the scene in the Garden. Besides Jesus, there are five characters in this scene. Did you see yourself in any of these people? When we look closely, we see that we are in the Garden with Jesus.

Let me give you four takeaways from this final Garden scene.

Takeaway #1: *Beware of trusting in your own strength instead of Jesus.* The preceding context of the story and what comes later has been hammering this point. Peter and the disciples have been thinking they could handle what was coming. In vv. 30-35, they declared they wouldn't deny Jesus, but just a few verses later, they couldn't even stay awake at Jesus' moment of crisis in the Garden and pray with Him. Now, in v. 56, we see that they fled the scene after Jesus was arrested.

Friends, beware of making rash commitments to Jesus. Beware of saying what you will and will not do as a believer. Beware of saying you would never do what the disciples did. Times of testing and persecution will come, and except for the grace of God, there you will go.

The shift to this mentality is subtle and dangerous. Often, it begins in our prayer life when we are frustrated with ourselves, and we are determined *to do more and try harder*. So, we begin to pray things like, *"Lord, I'm going to do this and that in order to stop sinning. I'm going to be more obedient to Jesus."* Have you ever said those words or prayed that way? I have. It's a subtle change in our minds and heart.

The desire is noble, but what we subtly do is begin to live the Christian life in our own strength. Then we fail again and again until we simply give up and just walk away from Jesus, or like the disciples, we run away.

Then we're ashamed and feel like we can't return to Christ. We feel like we've gone too far away and sinned too much to return to Jesus. We believe Jesus wouldn't want us and couldn't love us because we have abandoned Him. We deserted Him. And . . . we did, but Jesus knew what was coming, didn't He? At this point, we must remember that Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. Remember what Jesus told the disciples in v. 32 after He told them they would desert Him? He said:

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."

Jesus knows we will fail, and He comes to us even after we have deserted Him. He was raised from the dead to restore us to a right relationship with Him. That is His purpose.

So, brothers and sisters in Christ, beware of trusting in your own strength and ability to follow Jesus instead of looking to the One who obeyed in your place and took your sin upon Himself in order to give you right standing with God and purchase your ability to love and obey God.

Takeaway #2: *We need to know God's word well and live in light of the gospel.* When we look at the five characters in vv. 47-50, we realize they all had their own idea of who Jesus should be.

It's like the old country song *Me and Jesus We Got Our Own Thing Going*. This song is not about having a personal relationship with Jesus but about making Jesus out to be who you want Him to be. Songs like this grow out of misunderstanding who Jesus is because you don't know who Jesus truly is. How do you prevent this kind of misunderstanding? Bottom Line: You must know God's word.

In Matthew 16, Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Then Jesus told His disciples that He was to go to Jerusalem and die. Peter tried to stop Him. Now, in this text, Peter is doing it again. He misunderstood what Jesus came to do because He didn't know God's word, God's plan, or listen to Jesus' words. Are you like Peter?

Judas most likely misunderstood Jesus because He wanted a military Messiah to defeat the Romans. Jesus was a means to getting into power and fixing the government. Does this sound familiar? Are you like Judas?

The crowd that came to arrest Jesus had been taught wrongly about who Jesus was so they hated Him for no reason. They just mindlessly believed bad information. They just did what they were told. Are you like the crowd?

The religious establishment wanted a Messiah who would not change their lives or take their power. Is the kind of Jesus you want? A Jesus who will get you to heaven without changing your life? A Jesus who will not call you to confess your sins and repent of them. Do you say you want Jesus and heaven, but you don't want to change? Are you like the religious establishment?

All of these characters wanted their own personal Jesus to do their bidding. None of them understood God's word, and those who did wouldn't obey it. Beware when you want your own personal Jesus, and you make Him out to be what you want Him to be instead of the Jesus of the Scriptures.

Friends, it is so important to spend time reading the Bible and knowing what it is about, who Jesus truly and what He came to do. We need to know the big picture of the Bible, and we need to be able to drill down into small texts and mine for the diamonds that are in there. It will be a labor of love to study the Bible this way, and it will change your life, and you will love it.

Takeaway #3: *What is the Christians' weapon?* Again, Jesus said in v. 52:

For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

This is not a call for Christians to be passivists. As I said earlier, there is a place for self-defense and protection of the weak in order to prevent great evil. We live in a broken world, and on this side of heaven, sometimes we practice a style of rough justice in order to maintain peace and civility.

Serving in the military is not a sin but a privilege, and we are grateful for those who have served and are serving. We pray for those who serve and strive to maintain peace and order in a world filled with chaos.

Yet, let us remember that the gospel is not advanced by force or military might. Ultimately, we are in a spiritual war. The gospel is advanced through the work of God's people being in a church and everyone putting on the armor of God. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus and said in Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Takeaway #4: *Marvel at the sovereign Son of God who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and scorned its shame.* Friends, every detail in the betrayal, Christ's arrest, and His death on the cross came at the hands of sinful men and was ordained by God. As the Apostle Peter eventually learned and said in his first sermon in Acts 2:22-24,

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Friends, behold the Savior who willingly gave His life to ransom you from the wrath of God, eternity in Hell, and set you free from the power of sin.