

Arresting Developments – Matthew 26:47-56

We continue to walk through the Gospel of Matthew. We have been exploring the Passion week for a few weeks now, but we are nearing the end of it. We have progressed to Thursday evening in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had instituted the communion memorial and identified that Judas would betray Him. Jesus also told the disciples that they all would flee from Him and abandon Him. Of course, they all denied it would happen.

This morning our text walks us through the actual betrayal and arrest of Jesus. So let's dig into the text

Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (26:47-56)

Last week we saw Jesus take His disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane. He told some of the disciples to wait for Him at a place inside the Garden. He then took Peter, James, and John a little further into the Garden and told them to wait there. Jesus then went a little further to pray by Himself. Three times He agonized over what was coming. The physical and spiritual pain that was coming. In between Jesus praying, He would return to Peter, James, and John to find them sleeping and wanting them to just be present with Him. The pericope we worked through last week concluded with Jesus telling His disciples to get up His betrayer was there.

Matthew 26:47 (ESV)

47 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 Jesus was telling His disciples that His betrayer was there, Judas, who Matthew identifies as one of the 12, came with a large crowd. We need to remember that Matthew is writing 20 to 30 years after these events. Matthew is writing to early church Jewish Christians.

Question: **Why does Matthew point out that Judas was one of the original 12 disciples?** Wait for an answer.

I think that Matthew identified Judas as an original disciple and apostle to reflect on the enormity of Judas' failure. I also think Matthew was highlighting the pain Jesus had to feel in betrayal from the man who sat next to Him at the Passover. Remember the ANE principle of who you eat with. It was traditional to only eat with people you trusted and who trusted you. Of course, Jesus already knew Judas would betray Him, but Judas' betrayal had to add to the pain Jesus was going through.

We also see that Judas came with a large crowd of armed with clubs and swords. Matthew is the only gospel that indicates the group's size that came with Judas. Again, I think Matthew wanted to highlight the the enormity of the situation.

The fact that the group with Judas came armed with swords and clubs indicates they were prepared for resistance. While Jesus and the disciple had never exhibited any kind of hostility, other than Jesus twice clearing the temple courtyard and turning over tables, the Jewish leadership had inside information. Even though it appears that Judas was already gone from the Passover meal when Peter said he had a sword and would defend Jesus, I have to believe that that was not the first time Peter made such a claim. I am sure that all the disciples knew Jesus had a small sword. I suspect that some of the others did as well. I suspect that there were all sorts of machismo and bravado going on in the group. You might even say it was locker room like. I do not doubt that Judas gave that information to the leadership.

I worked in Narcotics for six years during my career. First, as a detective specializing in electronics and later as a supervisor. During our raid preparation, we would seek every bit of information we could get on who would be there and the potential for any weapons. I would guess the same thing was happening before they went out to arrest Jesus.

Question: What should we make of Matthew's statement that the crowd that came to arrest Jesus came from the people's chief priests and elders? Wait for an answer.

I think this little factoid is very important for us to understand. This was not a rogue group out to get Jesus. This was the official Jewish leadership. Leadership from the religious and civil

organization of Israel. This was Judaism in action. This group of men had the highest authority in Israel, the high priest, and the rest of the Sanhedrin. This was an arrest of a blasphemer and enemy of the state. This was not a little jaywalking charge. This was a capital crime, perhaps the most significant crime in Israel. We don't know if the High Priest and the other Sanhedrin members were present, but we do know that a servant of the high priest was present.

I think Matthew gives us this factoid so that his original readers, as Jews, would understand what their religious system had done. That they would understand the departure of Judaism from the instructions of God and from the original intent of their religious system. I think Matthew was displaying for his Jewish readers the juxtaposition of what Judaism had become and what Jesus taught and practiced.

Matthew 26:48–49 (ESV)

48 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.

I have often wondered why Jesus needed to be identified by Judas. It is not like Jesus was an unknown to the leadership of Israel. They had just spent at least one day trying to trap Him. But they were not the ones out in the middle of the night with clubs and swords to arrest Jesus. We have also to remember that

it was dark in the olive grove. So it would take someone who knew Jesus personally to identify Jesus to the crowd.

But I think that is only part of the reason that Judas had to identify Jesus. The kiss was a customary method of greeting between friends and acquaintances. It was also a sign of respect from students for their master or teacher. I think Judas may have picked a signal like this to voice his displeasure with the direction Jesus took. Jesus kept reminding the disciples that He was headed to the cross. But Judas was following Jesus because he thought it was a great way for him to get rich and in charge. When it became clear that Jesus was not going to accomplish that for Judas and the other disciples, he decided to betray Jesus. The sign of kissing the master would just present Jesus with a twinge of what could have been, at least from Judas' perspective. I think that the fact Judas called Jesus rabbi corroborates that idea.

But look at how Jesus responds to the betrayal.

Matthew 26:50 (ESV)

50 Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

Jesus uses a word that we do not find anywhere else in the Gospels in reference to the disciples. The word Friend in the ESV is the Greek word ἑταῖρε (Hetaire). It means comrade, companion, associate, even pupil. The sense of the word is not

of a close friend or someone with a close relationship. Think about what is being said without being said. Just an hour or two before, Judas was with Jesus in one of the most honored seats at the table, a position reserved for close and trusted friends and allies. But now he was being called someone Jesus was not close to. Jesus was acknowledging the utter failure of Judas. Jesus was expressing sorrow over someone who had been counted as a friend but now led the group in betrayal. I have to believe that as Jesus called Judas “Friend,” He did so with pain and frustration.

After Judas kissed Jesus and Jesus called him “Friend,” the crowd laid hands on Jesus. The sense of the phrase laid hands on Him is so much more than just grabbed him. Laid is the Greek word ἐπέβαλον (epe-bal-on), which means to put upon one, to beat, to impose, to throw, etc. in my 30 years in law enforcement, when we said we went hands-on, it typically meant that it was physical, sometimes more physical than was necessary.

The temple police, possibly some Roman soldiers, and a large crowd of people with swords and clubs were there to get Jesus. When they went hands-on Jesus, it was not to turn Him around and put the cuffs on Him. It was to rough Him up and cause Him some pain. The abuse and torture of Jesus began at His arrest, not later.

Matthew 26:51 (ESV)

51 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 does not tell us, but John does, the one who was with Jesus who drew his sword was Peter. The sword that Peter had was probably nothing more than a long knife by our standards today. When we think of a sword, we most often think of something 3 or 4 feet long with two edges and very heavy. Like the knights of the round table would use. The word sword here is typically used to speak of a much shorter sword often thought of as a dagger. The Greek word is μάχαιραν (mach-ai-ran), which sounds a lot like a machete. This word refers to knives for war or dagger. It was not uncommon for people of the day to have knives about 12-18 inches in length sewn into their out coats. The zealots were known for this. The zealots, there was at least one in the 12, were known to quietly stab Roman soldiers with the knife and then move on in the crowd. The possession of these knives was common at that time. Or perhaps the long knife that Peter was what was common for fishermen to have on their waist.

I suspect Peter was not the only disciple to have a knife. He was just the only one willing to go up against the crowd. A further example of Peter acting before doing much thinking. They were

vastly outnumbered. They could not win the fight. But Peter still swung his knife first. John and Luke tell us that Peter cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant. I suspect Peter was trying to take off his head but with a dagger, that is pretty difficult to do. Luke being the physician, tells us that Jesus put the ear back on and healed the man. Think about the emotion of the crowd at that point.

Matthew 26:52–54 (ESV)

52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

For our fellowship and the others that stem from the original group, this passage has been central in the doctrine of non-resistance. Our faith tradition taught, fairly passionately, that Scripture teaches that we should not resist evil with physical force. This passage has been part of their exegetical framework for this teaching. Jesus prevents and actually rebuked Peter for his physical response. I don't think that Jesus' rebuke of Peter here constitutes a normative principle for the entire church. I think this was a very specific situation that needed to play out the way God had planned it to play out; Peter's involvement was an attempt to thwart the plan. You can't blame Peter; he did not

yet understand salvation by grace based upon the blood of Jesus on the cross. He was simply doing what he had told Jesus he would do.

Let's take a look at what Jesus says here.

Matthew 26:52 (ESV)

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Jesus says to Peter that Peter needed to put his sword away because it will only get you killed. You can imagine the scene with a large group with swords and clubs. It is like Jesus is saying to Peter, keep it up, this mob is going to kill you. Put that knife away.

Question: **What is absent from Jesus' response to Peter that would make this a command for non-resistance?** Wait for an answer.

What's missing is Jesus telling Peter to get rid of the knife, or Jesus telling Peter to completely disarm. If this was a command for non-resistance, then I think that Jesus would have also had to tell Peter to disarm and stay disarmed. But that is not what we see here. Jesus told Peter that using his knife in the middle of the mob would result in Peter and probably others being killed.

Matthew 26:53–54 (ESV)

53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

Jesus then asks Peter a question. Do you really think I need your help here? Think about this situation and what Jesus is asking Peter. The disciples had seen Jesus feed thousands of people. They had seen Jesus raise the dead and heal the sick. Peter, James, and John had seen Jesus in the shekinah glory on the mount of transfiguration. They had seen Jesus cast out demons. They had also seen Jesus cleanse the temple twice. So when Jesus says to Peter, do you think I can't appeal to my Father, who will send an overwhelming force of angels for Him.

The way that Jesus says this leads me to conclude that he was making a conscious decision to follow through on the plan of the Father. We know He was in agony over the decision, but He was ready to go through with it. Now was the time for it to happen. All Peter was doing was attempting to thwart the plan of God to provide salvation to the world. Of course, Peter could not have understood that.

Jesus says that He was not calling legions of angels because it was time for Scripture to be fulfilled. Scripture like:

Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,

yet he opened not his mouth;

like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,

and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,

so he opened not his mouth.

Jesus did not resist, and he did not want the disciples to resist because the plan all along was to go to the cross to make a legal way for God to forgive us. Jesus agonized in the Garden about what was coming, but He was never uncommitted to following it through. It was always the plan, and it was always what Jesus was going to do.

Jesus also spoke to the mob that came to arrest Him.

Matthew 26:55–56 (ESV)

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.

Jesus also calls out the mob who came to arrest Jesus in such an over the top way. Jesus says that He had been in the temple for days; they could have come and simply arrested Him there. But they did not. It is almost like Jesus was poking the temple police for not arresting Jesus by just sending a couple of temple guards. Rather they had to form a mob to be able to get Jesus. They had to come out with a huge force to arrest Him and rough Him up.

It seems to me that Jesus was pointing out to them their hypocrisy. The arrest of Jesus was not about following the law. It was all about removing an obstacle to power. The charges were trumped up to get Him out of the way. Let me be clear here. The charges were legitimate if it was true and if the leadership even cared about that. But they did not. They cared about their own power and position, and Jesus was a threat to that power and position. They sent a mob to arrest Jesus and to rough Him up because they opposed Him taking their power.

Our last verse is often viewed as the end of the story. But I think it is much more than the end of the story I think it is a principle part of the story.

Matthew 26:56 (ESV)

56 But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Jesus told Peter that this all had to happen because of the scriptures. Jesus tells the Jewish mob the same thing. I think the primary factoid here is that all the disciples left Him.

Look at what had just happened. Jesus was betrayed by Judas. Peter attempted to fight back and got shut down by Jesus right away. Jesus stopped Peter from waging any type of resistance. Then Jesus said that it was all part of what Scripture had previously said.

How did the disciples who had invested more than three years following Jesus after giving up their previous lives, respond? They left Him. They gave up. They quit.

The word that we have in the ESV that the disciples left him is a word that is sometimes used for divorce, abandonment, or walking away. They were done. Jesus was not going to fight, so they were all defeated and said that we are done.

They did not flee to not get arrested. They quit Jesus and really had no intent of anything else to do with Jesus. He was being arrested; they could have no thought other than He would be dead the next day. He did not fight back, even though He could have and would have won. It was over. We are out.

Conclusion

This is an interesting passage that presents some interesting things for us. Things I think are sometimes missed if you do not dig deep and think deeply about what is being said.

Jesus is betrayed by the man who sat next to Him just a few hours before. That indicates that Judas was trusted, and even though Jesus knew Judas would betray Him, Jesus shows grace.

We also see that the effort of the Chief Priest and Sanhedrin was not all above board in this event. They could have arrested Him at any time right there in the temple, but they didn't. They sent out a large mob of men with swords and clubs to rough Him up as they were arresting Him. This was personal and not professional. This was about protecting their power and not keeping the law. Jesus pointed that out to the mob.

Jesus also resisted any attempt to protect Him and prevent this from playing out. While that was a fulfillment for the Scripture, it was a big frustration to the disciples. They did not, nor could they, understand what was happening. It resulted in the disciples leaving Jesus. Not fleeing for their life but leaving Jesus. It sets up a very difficult few days for the disciples. It also sets up a fantastic Sunday morning for them as well.

Here is the principle we need to remember here. God's plan is always supreme, even when we can not figure out how it will work. I can pretty much guarantee that no one saw this pandemic coming and the effect it would have on the church. But it is what the church needed in order to get it out it seats on Sunday morning concerts and return to serving the people and the Lord.

We must always be focused on following God's plan and not turning tale and giving up when it does not go the way we think it should. FGBC recently passed 23 years in existence. I have been told by many of my peers they would have given up a long time ago. But the leadership fo this church is convinced we have done everything we can to be obedient to God's plan and call. It sometimes seems like it can never, will never, work out. But we are in the minority of Charis Churches that have done well under the pandemic. So well that we even sent money to the benevolent fund to help other Charis Churches who were struggling. We did not have to adapt to new practices when the pandemic hit; we were already doing those things. We did not have to figure out how to care for people we already were.

Jesus was going to the cross to fulfill the scriptures, and the disciples did not know what was coming. It did not go their way, and they just quit. We are not going to do that. We are not going to run away. We are going to remain loyal to God and His plan, prepared for comes next.

Let's Pray!