

Sent: Wednesday, April 22, 2020 12:07 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 26

"Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak!" (Matthew 26:41)

Matthew 26 picks up after Jesus finished His "Olivet Discourse" in Matthew 24-25--where He addressed the "surprising" questions the disciples had asked concerning the "signs of the last days" and the timing and events that would accompany His "second coming"! Strange and surprising questions since they didn't even know, or understand, what was about to happen in the days ahead that were about to bring His first coming to an abrupt end! So, we concluded that these "inspired" questions--and Jesus' answers--could only have been "God-inspired" for the benefit of those "future" followers (including His disciples) who would become known as "Christians" and would live in the "church age"! (And that would include us as well, who are amazed by God's redemptive plan, but continue to struggle with a full understanding of "things to come"!)

Thus, Jesus' opening statement to His disciples in Matthew 26 must have been "shocking" to them! He told them that "after two days" He, the "Son of Man" would "be handed over for crucifixion"! Not that this was the first time He had shared this with His disciples! In Matthew 16:21-23 (while they were still in Galilee), He told them that He "must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and raised up on the third day"! To which Peter, the ever-tempestuous disciple, took Him aside and began to "rebuke" Him (and to which Jesus said: "Get behind Me, Satan!") He told His disciples the same thing about His coming death (and resurrection!) in Matthew 17:22-23 (while still in Galilee), and Matthew writes that they were "deeply grieved"--but nothing else! Then, in Matthew 20:18-19, "when they were about to go to Jerusalem," Jesus said it once again, but this time He added "crucified"! And so, in today's passage in Matthew 26--now in Jerusalem--they must have been "shocked" once again--but, again, no reaction from them is recorded by Matthew!

What's clear about all these passages, however, is that Jesus not only knew what was ahead, but that He had come into the world for this very purpose (as articulated in many Scriptural references) and was, in essence, "orchestrating" it all (as one writer put it)! Isaiah prophesied about how He would be "pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities...and like a lamb led to the slaughter!" John the Baptist spoke of Him as the "Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world"! (John 1:29) Galatians 4:4-5 says that "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons"! And Jesus Himself said to Nicodemus (in John 3) that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life!" And so many more references explaining His reason for coming into this world!

Interestingly, just as Jesus was speaking to His disciples about it, in Matthew 26:2, the "chief priests and the elders of the people were already gathered together in the court of the high priest to plot together to seize Him by stealth and kill Him"! But they had a problem! It was Passion Week and against the law to have a "capital trial" during a religious festival! And they were concerned about the reaction of the people! But, nonetheless, it was God's will, and His exact timing, for all this to happen on the day of the Passover! And so, it would! And, as we'll see, Judas would play a critical role in allowing it to be, in the midst of darkness!

But before Matthew gets into all that, he takes his readers back to Bethany, with Jesus in the home of Simon the leper, and where a woman (named Mary, the sister of Martha)--somehow seemingly aware of what was about to happen--came with an "alabaster vial of very costly perfume" and anointed Jesus (presumably "for His burial"), much to the anger and chagrin of at least one of the disciples (John's gospel identifies him as Judas), who considered it a "great waste"! Jesus, again knowing what's to come, noted that what she did would be remembered and "spoken of wherever the gospel would be preached in the whole world" (as It was to us last nite)!

Well, we next see Judas going to the chief priests and--for 30 pieces of silver--conspiring to betray Jesus (and thus help the Jewish religious leaders carry out their evil plot)! And Jesus taking the initiative in preparing for the Passover meal! It would be the final time for Jesus to be with His disciples before the crucifixion! And Jesus would institute what we all now know as the "Lord's Supper"! Transforming, in effect, the last Passover into the first observance of the Lord's Supper! Revealing (and memorializing!) His sacrificial death, which He was about to make--and ratifying the "new covenant"! (Jeremiah had prophesied, in Jeremiah 31:31-34--"Behold, days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...and I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more!")

Matthew 26:26-29 says that "while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body"! And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins! But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom!" Wow!

The apostle Paul would later write, in I Corinthians 11:23-26, that he received from the Lord these same words concerning the Lord's Supper and that we, as believers, are to "celebrate" it in like manner as Jesus did, "in remembrance of Him (Jesus), and as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes!"

After celebrating the Lord's Supper, Matthew writes that they "sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives," where Jesus told His disciples that they would all "fall away" (after Jesus is tried and crucified) but that He would "go ahead of them to Galilee" (presumably after His resurrection)! We again see Peter's reaction! "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away!" To which Jesus (again knowing all of what would take place!) noted that he would actually deny Christ three times before the rooster would crow"! (Which turned out to be the case, by the end of the day, leaving Peter "weeping bitterly"!

Then, in verses 36-46, Jesus came with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray to His Father--and became "deeply grieved, even to the point of death"! Knowing that His Father would forsake Him when He died, because He would bare the punishment of God's wrath (His great wrath!) against the sins of humanity! "Shepherd's Notes" notes that "no other recorded experience of Jesus reveals His human side so vividly" as this! Dr. John Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, put it this way: "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!"

Verse 39 says "He fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will!" And it was clearly the Father's will that He go to the cross and pay the price! II Corinthians 5:21 says: "He (God the Father) has made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!"

Jesus' prayer in the Garden is certainly a model for us to follow, particularly in time of temptation, as our memory verse (in verse 41) suggests! Hebrews 4:15-18 says: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin! Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need!" (Matthew Henry writes that "prayer is the offering up, not only of our desires, but of our resignations, to God!")

After persistent and agonizing prayer, Jesus "came upon" the disciples, who were supposed to be praying but had fallen asleep, and announced that "the time was at hand, and that the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners"! And, while He was speaking, Matthew writes, "Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs," and betrayed Him with a kiss! Peter immediately "drew out his sword and struck off the ear of the slave of the high priest," whereupon Jesus told Peter to put away his sword, noting that twelve legions of angels (70,000) were at His disposal, if He wanted to resist! And that the "Scriptures must be fulfilled, which just happened to say that "it must happen this way"! (Jesus again demonstrating that He is in total control over the events leading to the cross!)

Then followed the illegal, and shameful, "trial" by nite! With Jesus remaining silent before His accusers (another fulfillment of prophecy)! Except when Caiaphas demanded that He tell them "whether He was the Christ, the Son of God" (Christ's "identity" always was and still is the most important question one not only should, but must, ask--and have answered!) Jesus acknowledged that He was, in fact, the Christ, the Son of God--and that "hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven"! At which point, Matthew 26:65 says, Caiaphas "tore his robes and cried out, "He has blasphemed!"--giving him the grounds he needed (but which was not sufficient for the Roman rulers) to have Him crucified!

Meanwhile Peter was outside in the courtyard--following Jesus "at a distance," Matthew reports--but quickly denying, three times in succession, that He was a follower of Jesus, or even knew Him!--whereupon the rooster could be heard crowing! Fulfilling what Jesus had said about what would happen! And so, Matthew 26 ends on the note of Peter "going out and weeping bitterly"! (Joel Benson shared, in our large group session, how much the thought of Peter "following at a distance" has always troubled him!)

Well, the stage is set for the crucifixion of Jesus, as we head to Matthew 27!

Until then, men, let's "keep watching and praying, that we don't enter into temptation"--and that we follow Jesus, and His Word, closely! Knowing that "the spirit is willing but that the flesh is weak"!

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