

ARREST IN THE GARDEN

12th March 2017

Reading: Matthew 26:47-56

What do you think are the two most famous betrayals in history? What springs to mind?... The most obvious for Christians will be Judas, betraying Jesus with a kiss. A kiss that led to death by crucifixion. This is one example. What's another? Most famous? The one that sprung to my mind and made famous by William Shakespeare, is... Julius Caesar betrayed by his good friend Brutus. In Shakespeare's play Caesar's last words are "Et tu, Brute?" Words spoken as a knife blade flashes and he recognises Brutus among the assassins. "Et tu, Brute" is Latin for "Even you Brutus" and is still used today as an expression of dismay at the treachery of a friend.



"Betrayed by a kiss" and "Et tu Brute" have such vivid imagery they've passed into common use long after many understand their background. And, what do these betrayals have in common?... They're of a significant historical figure by a close companion that lead to death. And what was different? Jesus was not surprised. Though Caesar was taken back, not so with Jesus.

This morning we're going to explore the events surrounding the arrest of Jesus and how he was Master of the situation. We'll do this by looking at how Jesus deals with the three main players and one major implication. Three main players and one implication. Who're the three I refer to?

- I. Judas, ready to betray
- II. Peter, ready to defend
- III. The Mob, ready to arrest

Let's pray

We pick up the story in Matthew 26:45 with Jesus still in Gethsemane. Remember Jesus has agonised in prayer, asking to be spared the cup. Last time we learned the cup was the cup of God's wrath - the cup that all who rebel against God must drink. This includes you and I for we "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). And the only way we can escape this fearful cup is for Jesus to drink it for us. On the cross Jesus hung in our place and drunk the cup, in our stead. Jesus drunk the cup of God's wrath so we could drink the cup of God's salvation. We covered this a couple of weeks ago and I encourage you to download the message off the church website.

But now Jesus, arising from prayer, rousing his disciples is ready for what faces him...

Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" Mt 26:45b–46

I. Judas, ready to betray

Jesus is right. The disciples barely have time to stagger to their feet when trouble arrives. From verse 47...

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.

Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Mt 26:47–50.

What's happening here? Well back in the beginning of chapter 26 we saw the chief priests frustrated because of the crowds favored Jesus. However, with the help of Judas they can now arrest Jesus in a secluded place, at night, with no risk of a riot. But there's a problem. How will the mob distinguish Jesus from the disciples in the dark? They can't have the mob arresting the wrong man by mistake. To overcome this there must be a signal that can't be mistaken. So Judas tells the mob, "Arrest the man I greet with a kiss. He's the one. Leave the others".

And so Judas approaches Jesus, "Greetings, Rabbi" and betrays the Son of Man. Now back then a kiss was a socially acceptable convention – as with us today. A kiss in public was a sign of solidarity among family members. It was used to farewell, or greeting after a long separation, It also was a sign of respect to someone in higher authority such as a king or rabbi. So with dark irony Judas gives the appearance of a respectful disciple paying homage to his rabbi, when in reality he's betraying his Master to a horrendous death.

Yet Jesus is not surprised. He knows all things must be fulfilled, including the words of Psalm 41

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. Psalm 41:9

"Friend, do what you came for," is Jesus's response to Judas, whom he'd shared bread with just hours before and who was now lifting his heel against him.

Events escalate, for the mob has its signal - verse 50

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. Matthew 26:50

Now the disciples are dumbfounded and dumbstruck. They're surprised and dismayed. Think about it from their perspective. As they leave the garden Judas arrives. They're thinking, "Ahhh Judas. That's right he slipped out during the meal. I wondered where he went too. And here he is with some new friends. Hmm... I wonder what they've up too. These friends are bit rough looking. And look one or two of them have clubs and is that a sword I see? I hope Judas hasn't fallen in with the wrong crowd". The next thing Jesus is seized and Judas' new friends look like they'll do the same to them. What are they to do? What would you do? Well one of them knows!

With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Matthew 26:51

II. Peter, ready to defend

Who did this? Who might have drawn a sword? Well... which disciple often took the lead, spoke and acted without thinking and had a flair for the dramatic. No surprises... it's Peter - confirmed in John's Gospel¹. And what can we say about this sword-swinging incident? Two things - it wasn't an accident and Peter wasn't aiming for the ear - he was aiming for the head! And by doing so he shows he has no idea what's happening; absolutely no idea. We can see this by Jesus' words to Peter.

Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "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 26:52-54

"Peter, you've no idea. No Clue. Haven't you learned that my kingdom is not enforced by the sword. For all who draw the sword, die by the sword". What's Jesus meaning here? Now he can't be talking literally as not everyone who bears arms dies by said arms - otherwise there'd be no retired soldiers. So the sword must mean more than a physical weapon you can hold in your hand. No the sword is a symbol. A symbol of what? Well even today the sword is a symbol for power - military, political and financial power. It's a symbol of the way the world does things, it is a symbol of force, coercion and beating down the opposition. He who lives by these things will be overcome by these things. And this is not the way of God.

Peter had no idea in more ways than one for if this was merely a showdown of force then the mob would be overwhelmed by twelve legions of angels ready and waiting to rescue their Master. Twelve legions equates to about 72,000. That's a lot of angel warriors!

Finally Peter had no idea because this arrest was all part of God's plan. The Scriptures must be fulfilled. Jesus must walk the way of the cross.

¹ Incidentally it's Luke's gospel that tells us Jesus put the ear back on.

iii. The Mob, ready to arrest

After speaking to Judas and then Peter Jesus now turns his attention to the mob. Not with scathing, critical or even expletive laden words but with a firm rebuke, even with an appeal to their sense of fairness.

Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled. Matthew 26:55–56

Notice again that for a second time Jesus highlights what is happening is according to what has been foretold. Peter was just reminded the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Now Jesus refers to the prophets. Both the scriptures and prophets refer to what we call the Old Testament. To Peter Jesus says, “You might think this is hopeless but God has a plan - the Scriptures will be fulfilled.” To the angry mob Jesus says, “You might think you are in control but God has a plan - the Scriptures will be fulfilled.”

Now Matthew, in his Gospel, from first to last, makes it clear all that Jesus did - from his birth to his death was to fulfill Scripture.

We see this in Matthew 1:22-23 in reference to Christ’s birth.

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. Matthew 1:22–23

We see this in Christ’s death as Jesus is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea - whom Matthew describes as a rich man, referencing Isaiah 53:9

He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death. Isaiah 53:9

Especially in The Passion of Christ - Jesus last 24 hours, events are soaked in Old Testament fulfilment. Listen, Jesus himself just after the Last Supper quoted to the disciples from Zechariah 13:7

“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” Matthew 26:31

And how does our section finish?

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. Matthew 26:56b

So, as the disciples scatter the armed mob man handle Jesus away into the night. This then is the arrest of Jesus. One step closer to cross. One step closer to our rescue.

And what are the implications? What can we take away from the arrest? Well the take-homes are many and varied but let's focus on Peter wielding his weapon. What can we learn from the sword?

The Upside Down Nature of the Gospel

By using the sword Peter showed he'd no idea of the upside down nature of the Gospel. Nowhere is this upside down nature best shown than by Jesus words in Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45

Jesus came not to be served but to serve. This is not how kings operate - even today. Servants wait on kings - hand and foot. But not Jesus. Though the King of Kings, Jesus came to serve and rescue. Now, how does a king normally rescue? He sends in the sword. Old Testament kings would lead themselves, first in battle, first to the rescue - drawn sword at the ready. But not Jesus. He died by the sword so that we might be set free. Remember the sword symbolises how the world gets things done. Yes, the sword of military and political power put Jesus on the cross so that we might be set free.

And I want to take you back to the very beginning, to the Garden of Eden. We remember in their rebellion Adam and Eve where evicted from God's presence. Yes, from the garden - where there was free access to God, even walking with him in the evening - they were barred. How was it barred? Who was on guard. to stop them returning? A mighty angel wielding a flaming sword, flashing back and fourth, to guard the way.

After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:24

Listen, because of our sin and rebellion we were driven from the presence of God. But because Jesus took the sword in our stead, died on the cross, we have open access back into the presence of God. Indeed not only to God but to the tree of life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Today Jesus invites you back into the garden, back into God's presence, back to the tree of life. When we believe in Jesus, his death and resurrection, when we ask him into our life, when we confess him as our Lord, we are born again and all the blessings of God lay before us as dearly loved children. We have this because Jesus went to the cross. How can we possibly say no. Amen