

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years we've been following the footsteps of Jesus through the Gospel According to Mark. We have witnessed the reMARKable power of Jesus. This is message number fifty-seven in the series and after today we have five more remaining messages as we follow Jesus to the cross and an empty tomb.

In the last message we were with Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus looked into the bitter cup of suffering, He shuddered with horror. He prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible. Take this cup away from me. But not my will, but yours be done." I called that the great battle for our souls. Jesus embraced His Father's will and was ready to go to the cross.

If this were a movie, we would be coming to the climax. An innocent man is violently arrested by a mob at midnight and subjected to a sham of a trial.

Mark 14:43-65. Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Then everyone deserted him and fled.

A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree.

Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.'" Yet even then their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

They all condemned him as worthy of death. Then some began to spit at him; they

blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

In every drama, there is a cast of characters. In this message I want to examine five of the people who played a role in the action of this night in Jerusalem. We can learn a practical lesson from all five of them.

I. JUDAS: You can kiss the door of heaven and never get in

In the darkness of the evening, it would have been hard for the guards to identify Jesus, so Judas arranged a signal. He would go up and kiss Jesus. Judas walked up and said, "Rabbi! Teacher!" It sounded like a friendly greeting. And then he kissed Jesus on the cheek. You can almost hear the hiss in that kiss. You can almost smell the venom of hell in that kiss. In Matthew's account, Jesus asked, "Friend, why have you come?" Jesus still calls him a friend. After all, Jesus is a friend of sinners, and Jesus loved Judas to the end.

Whenever I think about Judas, I think about a summary of the life of Jesus written by a little boy. "Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a barn. (I wish I had been born in a barn too, because my mom is always saying to me, "Close the door! Were you born in a barn?") It would be nice to say, "As a matter of fact, I was.") During His life, Jesus had many arguments with sinners like the Pharisees and the Republicans. Jesus healed many leopards and even spoke to some Germans on the Mount. Jesus also had twelve opossums. The worst one was Judas Asparagus. Judas was so evil that they named a terrible vegetable after him."

Judas was an evil guy. There are many names that will go down in infamy. Hitler, Stalin, Sadaam Hussein, Osama ben Laden. But perhaps no name is as despised as is the name of Judas Iscariot.

In Dante's "Inferno," he portrays many levels of hell. And in the center of the deepest hell is Satan. And Dante places Judas in the mouth of Satan being torn to pieces by the razor sharp fangs of the devil.

Judas came close to getting into heaven. He kissed the very door of heaven. In John 10 Jesus was talking about how His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. At night shepherds placed their sheep within a stone sheepfold with an opening for a door. Then the Shepherd would sit and sleep in the door to protect them. He literally became the doorway to safety. That's why Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved... The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (John 10:9-10 NKJV)

Judas is a warning to all of us that you can have both religious association and religious participation and not really be saved. Judas was associated with the followers of Jesus; in fact, he was in the top 12! He was sent out on the same mission as the other disciples. He had an association with Jesus and participation for Jesus, but he didn't have salvation.

Could Judas have been saved? I think He could, but he wouldn't. We read later that Judas regretted what he did, but he never repented of what he did. In Mark's account, Judas is never mentioned again. But in Matthew and Acts we read that Judas felt such remorse for what he did that he tried to return the blood money to the Sanhedrin. He said, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" They, of course, could not accept the tainted money. So Judas threw the thirty pieces of silver on the courtyard and went out and killed himself. And Acts 1:25 says Judas went to his own place, sadly that place wasn't heaven. The Jewish leaders used the blood money to buy a field, Potter's field. And to this day, when we drive around the old city of Jerusalem, you can see this field lying barren 2,000 years later. To this day, it is called the Field of Blood and nobody would dare build in that location. Judas kissed the door of heaven and never got in. What a warning to those who think religious affiliation and activities will get you to heaven.

II. MALCHUS: Your understanding of Jesus can change in an instant

The mob Judas led to arrest Jesus was a contingent of Jewish Temple Police sent by the High Priest. Some scholars believe there might have been as many as 200 men in this midnight posse. That's quite a detachment to arrest an unarmed teacher. Under the iron-fisted control of the Romans, the Temple Police were the only men who had an open carry license. They could legally carry a sword, which was illegal for any other Jewish man.

All four Gospel accounts mention a sword being swung and an ear being severed, but only John identifies the swordsman and the victim. The Bible says, "Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)" (John 18:10) Then Dr. Luke is the only writer to add this miraculous detail: "But Jesus answered, 'No more of this!' And he touched the man's ear and healed him." (Luke 22:51)

The scene is one of utter chaos. It's dark, there are shouts and screams and the disciples are running through the olive grove. Now imagine Malchus screaming in agony as he falls to one knee clutching the side of his bleeding head where his ear had been moments before. Blood is pouring down his neck, drenching his cloak. He begins to grow weak as blackness engulfs him. Then to his surprise He feels a warm hand slip under his hand, and instantly the pain ceases. He looks up into the eyes of Jesus kneeling before him. He sees eyes full of compassion and mercy. And Jesus says, "You'll be alright now." Strong, rough hands jerk Jesus to His feet and tie ropes around his arms. Malchus reaches up and feels his head. How could it be? The ear is there, all of it. The only evidence of his wound is his blood-soaked tunic and the pool of blood in the dust at his feet.

We don't know what happened to Malchus after that, but I'd like to suggest what might have happened, and we'll have to wait until we get to heaven to prove or disprove my theory. I believe Malchus entered the Garden that night brainwashed into believing Jesus was a dangerous radical—a threat to the Jewish way of life. It was out of a sense of obedience to his boss that he was happy to go arrest this false Messiah, this grand imposter.

But I believe Malchus' opinion about Jesus changed in an instant. He met Jesus. Jesus touched him and healed him. He couldn't deny that. In one moment his ear was gone and in the next instance it was restored. I believe he thought, "This man is no imposter." And perhaps Malchus

believed. Then over the next twelve hours he watched Jesus tortured and nailed to a cross. He heard Jesus say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Perhaps Malchus was one of the 120 who were praying in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

And decades later, when John finally penned his gospel, perhaps that's why he identified him. Because he knew there would be followers of the Way who would recognize their fellow believer. All that is speculation. But I'd like to think Malchus believed.

Who is Jesus to you? Just a religious teacher? If you have one encounter with His grace and mercy you can be changed in an instant as well. But for sure, Malchus is the answer to a Bible trivia question: Who was the last person Jesus healed? You got it: Malchus.

III. PETER: You don't have to defend the Lord; just trust Him

As I just mentioned, when the mob arrived, Peter drew his sword took a hefty swing at Malchus. He wasn't trying to cut off his ear; he was trying to split his skull. But remember, Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. Let's stop for a minute and admire the foolish courage of Peter. He was outnumbered and outgunned. But still he was ready to slash away for His Lord. But He was clueless about what was really taking place, so Jesus immediately rebuked Peter. "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11) In Matthew's account Jesus said, "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?" (Matthew 26:52-53)

A. Peter fought the wrong enemy

Peter made three mistakes that night. First, he fought the wrong enemy. Malchus wasn't his enemy; he was just a servant of the High Priest doing his job. As Christians we sometimes think we're in a physical fight against physical foes. But the Bible says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) Our battle isn't against other people; our battle is against the devil and his demons.

B. Peter used the wrong weapon

Peter made a second mistake when he used the wrong weapon. Jesus told Peter to put away his sword. The Bible says, "We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

Fifty days later, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and used another sword—the two-edged sword of the Word of God. And when he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ in Acts 2 here's what the Bible said happened: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37) Peter told them to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name and 3,000 of them were saved that day. The Word of God is the best sword to use!

C. Peter had the wrong attitude

Peter's final mistake was the wrong attitude. He was angry. He was livid that they were attacking his Lord, so jumped forward to defend Jesus. Jesus said, "Peter, put away your sword, I'm doing something here today that goes beyond your understanding. Don't mess it up!" One of our problems today is that we have a lot of angry Christians who think it's their job to draw their swords and defend Jesus. But the Bible says we should be, "Slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." (James 1:19-20)

Peter was trusting in his sword for his confidence, but as long as his sword was drawn, He couldn't trust in Jesus. What sword are you tempted to rely upon rather than upon God? Is there something going on in your life right now and you have your sword drawn and you're slashing away with all your might? Jesus says, "Put your sword away. I'm up to something here, don't mess it up." The battle isn't yours; it's the Lord's! God doesn't need us to defend Him. He didn't call us to be His defense attorney; He called us to be His witness!

IV. CAIAPHAS: Religion can blind you from seeing God

There were two stages to the trial of Jesus, the Jewish trial before Caiaphas and the Roman trial before Pilate. The Jewish trial was actually illegal, because the Jewish Talmud stated, "The members of the court may not alertly and intelligently hear the testimony against the accused during the hours of darkness." This trial was taking place in the wee hours of the morning, after midnight. As you might imagine, there have been dozens of lawsuits filed before the current Israeli Supreme Court proposing the legal charges against Jesus be dropped on the basis of the trial at night. To this point the Israeli Supreme Court has declined to hear any of those cases.

We see the role of Caiaphas in the Jewish trial of Jesus. The Bible says, "Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest." (Matthew 26:57) "Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?' 'He is worthy of death,' they answered." (Matthew 26:65-66)

There is a disease of the soul that could be called spiritual blindness. We've all heard the old saying; "There is none so blind as he who will not see." Caiaphas is the patron saint of spiritual blindness. He was so enamored with the trappings and traditions of his Jewish religion that he was unable to see God in the flesh standing right in front of him. The Creator of life stood before him and he sentenced Him to die. His religion had blinded him from being able to recognize God.

Religion is a system of rules, rituals, and regulations people follow to try to earn acceptance from God. By contrast, true salvation is admitting you can never be good enough to earn God's approval, so you repent and accept His offer of a full pardon.

Today there are millions who are trusting in a set of religious rules and practices to get them to heaven. They know the language, and they perform religious acts, but it takes more than that to go to heaven. In Matthew 7 Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter

the kingdom of heaven." And the people said, "Lord, Lord in your name we did many wonderful deeds." But Jesus will say, "Depart from me, you evildoers, I never knew you." Religion won't get you to heaven. Only a personal relationship with Jesus will. Do you know Him?

V. JESUS: Earthly appearance has nothing to do with heavenly reality

If you had been there that night, you couldn't have missed the stark contrast between Caiaphas and Jesus. Caiaphas was dressed like a king. The outfit of the high priest was an elaborate costume that included ten holy articles of clothing. He was backed up by at least 23 other members of the Sanhedrin dressed in their judicial outfits. By contrast Jesus was standing there alone. He was tied up and already suffering from the physical abuse of the mob that had manhandled Him to the house of Caiaphas. But earthly appearance has nothing to do with heavenly reality.

Over the next fifteen hours He was going to be subjected to horrific torture and crucifixion. Yet, during it all, He only uttered a few poignant statements. He was fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:7 that said, "As a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

According to Matthew's account Caiaphas issues an oath that was like a binding requirement for Jesus to answer, so the only thing Jesus said to Caiaphas had a profound impact. The Bible says, "The high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' 'I am,' said Jesus. 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Mark 14:61-62)

Caiaphas tore his priestly robe as a sign of horror. He screamed, "Blasphemy! He deserves to die." But He was innocent, and we're guilty ones. Immediately the torture began. The guards spit in the face of God. They blindfolded Him and hit Him with fists and sticks.

He didn't look much like a king at that moment. But He endured the pain, and scorned the shame so that we could be forgiven.

CONCLUSION

In 1997, Ryan Matthews was seventeen years old. He was arrested and charged with the murder of a convenience store clerk in Bridge City, Louisiana. When asked to enter a plea, he said, "Not guilty." He claimed he had never been to that convenience store. Surveillance video showed the shooter wearing a ski mask, but Matthew's attorney never had the DNA in the mask tested. After only an hour's deliberation, the jury declared Ryan Matthews guilty of murder and sentenced him to death. Ten years later, the trial was reopened when DNA from the mask and other evidence excluded Matthews as a suspect. After ten years on death row his conviction was vacated and he was released. Can you imagine how it must have been for an innocent man to be arrested and sentenced to death?

That was the case with Jesus. He was an innocent man. And even though He could have defended Himself eloquently, He chose to accept the sentence of guilt and go to the cross. Jesus

was the innocent man who was declared guilty, so that guilty men and women (all of us) could be declared forgiven through the blood of the cross.

Imagine you are standing before the Judge of the Universe and He asks: "You have been charged with sins against a Holy God. How do you plead?" You answer should be, "I am guilty of sin, but I plead the blood of Jesus and cast myself on His mercy and grace." The gavel falls and the Judge says, "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleanses us of all unrighteousness. So you are declared...forgiven!"

OUTLINE

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"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?" *Matthew 26:52-53*

Peter

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B. Used the wrong weapon

C. Had the wrong attitude

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For the Joy...
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