

## Matthew's Gospel – Chapter 26: Betrayal and Arrest

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
The New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Hello! Today we are going to study chapter 26 of Matthew's Gospel. This is a good long chapter – it's seventy-five verses! – and it covers a lot of ground. Although it is a long chapter, it only takes a bit over five minutes or so to read through, so I encourage you to invest the time in reading it through so that you can see and remember the big picture, and in particular so that you can see some of the wonderful aspects of the Lord Jesus's character that are brought out.

As I said, the chapter does cover a lot of ground, but there are some unifying themes which are worth considering here at the start. When I read through the chapter in preparation for this talk, I gained several impressions of what the Lord Jesus was like at that time. And of course, that tells us what He is like now, which is very encouraging for us. So many sad and solemn events took place in this chapter, but they all brought out the Lord Jesus's wonderful way of dealing with them. The following themes stood out to me:

- **Firstly, the aloneness of Jesus** – no-one really entered into what He was going through. He was surrounded by His disciples at the start, but they did not seem to really understand. After His arrest, He was alone in the presence of His enemies, without friends or supporters.
- **Secondly, the composure of Jesus** – He was facing a terrible prospect, and yet He was calm, caring and in control all the way through.
- **Thirdly, the faith of Jesus** – He was convinced that He would be raised from the dead, and that all the Scriptures about Him would be fulfilled.
- **Fourthly, the supreme love and worth of Jesus** – He willingly went to the cross for our sakes. This chapter shows us how awful it was for the Lord Jesus, but He went through with it, nonetheless.
- **And fifthly, the failure of man and our need of Jesus** – even the best intentions of his disciples fell so far short, and one of His disciples turned against Him and deliberately betrayed Him. If this chapter teaches us anything, it is that we absolutely need the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, because we cannot rely on ourselves.

Keep these themes in mind as we go through the chapter.

Matthew 26 begins with a statement that must have horrified the disciples.

“Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, “You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified”” (verses 1 – 2).

This was not the first time that Jesus had spoken about His crucifixion. In Matthew chapter 20 verses 18 – 19 He said,

“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

The title in my Bible over that section states, ‘Jesus a third time predicts His death and resurrection.’ But the disciples did not appear to take it in. Perhaps they wished and hoped that it would not happen in the end. It shows us the aloneness of Jesus as He endured this prospect, and also His unshakeable faith – He knew that He would rise again on the third day.

We then see two very different gatherings, in Matthew 26 verses 3 – 4, and in verses 6 – 7. In verses 3 – 4,

“The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him.”

In sharp contrast, we read in verses 6 – 7,

“And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table.”

What a difference! On the one hand, His enemies, full of hatred towards the One who had gone about doing good, were working out how they could best seize Him and kill Him. On the other hand, a small group of those who loved the Lord Jesus, who made a dinner for Him and one who showed how much He meant to her by anointing Him with fragrant oil. We don’t know for sure who ‘Simon the leper’ was, but we can safely assume that he was someone whom the Lord Jesus had cured of his leprosy and was no doubt profoundly grateful. A comparison of this section with John’s gospel chapter 12 suggests that it was Mary of Bethany who anointed the Lord Jesus with the oil.

Not everyone was happy with this anointing. Verses 8 – 9 tell us,

“But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.””

We get some more information in John chapter 12 verses 4 – 6:

“But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it.”

So, it seems as if it was Judas who started it off. He was quick to value the oil at three hundred denarii, which would have been a considerable sum. [It’s always really difficult to convert ancient monies into present day values and purchasing power, but we can make a rough comparison. Matthew chapter 20 verses 1 – 15 give us the parable of the workers in the vineyard, and if this parable indicates that one denarius would have been the expected wage for one day of a labourer’s work, then three hundred denarii would have been about a year’s wages.](#)

Was it a waste? Definitely not! This was the one opportunity the disciples had to show love and honour for the Lord Jesus in view of His burial. Only the woman seized the opportunity and the Lord Jesus showed how much He appreciated it. Tragically, it seems to have been the last straw for Judas. Now he was not going to be able to profit from the sale of this oil, and so he planned to betray Jesus. It is hard to imagine how such malice could have arisen over this money, but it shows how much it had Judas in its grip. What a terrible warning to us!

What Judas actually bargained for seems to have been about ten percent of the oil's worth if we take a denarius to be equivalent to a piece of silver. What a difference between how much the woman valued Jesus and how much Judas valued Him! She was willing to sacrifice what was described as "very costly fragrant oil", and whether the woman was fully aware or not, it was done in view of what the Lord Jesus was about to experience. He interpreted it as done out of love to honour Him in His burial, knowing that He would soon die in a brutal and shameful fashion on the cross, without any care for His honour. Judas appears to have been consumed with hatred and was happy to accept a mere ten percent in return for committing a most horrific crime of betrayal. It wasn't a great sum, although evidently it had reasonable purchasing power in that we read in Matthew chapter 27 verse 7 that the chief priests bought a field with it. It wasn't just a moment's madness with Judas either – we read in verse 16 of chapter 26,

"So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him."

This is perhaps worst of all – despite everything that he had seen and experienced during his discipleship, he was determined to turn against Jesus.

In verses 17 – 25 we read about the final Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with His disciples. Here we see the perfect composure of Jesus:

"And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples"'" (verse 18).

He knew that His time had come, and so He wanted to keep this final Passover. The disciples seemed not to have really taken in the predictions about His crucifixion and death, but now the Lord Jesus said something that really made them sit up:

"Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me'" (verse 21).

It must have been terrible to hear this, and so each of the disciples (except Judas of course) wanted to be sure that it was not him that the Lord Jesus was speaking about.

"And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?"" (verse 22).

The Lord gave a sign as to who it would be. [A great German preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Friedrich Krummacher, said that he felt that the most awful and appalling words in the Scripture are those of verse 24:](#)

["The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."](#)

[What a tragic figure Judas is!](#) The next verse seems to demonstrate Judas's completely hardened heart:

“Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?” He said to him, “You have said it.””

It could almost appear as a cynical ploy on Judas’s part to try and work out whether Jesus really knew or not. Certainly, it shows a complete lack of repentance. John’s gospel chapter 13, verse 27 fills in further details and seems to indicate that Judas had gone beyond his last chance:

“Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.””

We move to a happier scene in Matthew 26 verses 26 – 30, where Jesus instituted what we know as the Lord’s Supper.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission 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.” And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”

Here we see our Saviour pledging Himself to the new covenant. What an amazing Person He is! Rather than concentrating on the terrible events about to happen, He delights in the truth that His death will liberate us from our sins. There is no question about whether or not He will go through with it; this was the purpose of His coming into the world. His perfect love, composure, and faith shine brightly. He looks forward to being with His disciples in His Father’s Kingdom, where He will enjoy the fruits of His work. And then, despite all that lay ahead, we read that they sang a hymn!

The Lord Jesus then predicted some more events in verses 31 – 35.

“Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” Peter answered and said to Him, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” Peter said to Him, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And so said all the disciples.”

Notice the absolute faith of the Lord Jesus in the Word of God, both for the predictions of sorrow – the disciples being scattered from Him – and of triumph – His rising again from the dead. The predictions made to Peter demonstrate His perfect knowledge of us, and our imperfect knowledge of ourselves. We, or at least I, can often be quite unaware of how badly we could fail if placed in certain situations and trusting in our own strength of purpose. But the Lord Jesus had perfect knowledge of Peter and loved Him just the same, and indeed fully restored Peter. It is a great comfort to know that He knows all about us, past, present, and future, failures and all, but loves us anyway and has pledged Himself to be our perfect Saviour. It is easy to focus on Peter but note the end of verse 35:

“And so said all the disciples.”

Peter truly loved the Lord Jesus and became a target for the devil, who tried to knock him down, but the Lord Jesus had prayed for His disciple and made sure that Peter would ultimately be restored. The Lord Jesus never lets us down. We belong to Him and He is not going to let us be taken away from Him.

We have a change of scene in verses 36 – 44 as we see the Lord and His disciples move into the garden of Gethsemane. Let us consider verses 37 – 38:

“And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.””

According to the language tools on the Blue Letter Bible, the word translated as ‘deeply distressed’ in verse 37 is the strongest of the three Greek words we find in the New Testament for depression.<sup>1</sup> And then in verse 38, Jesus speaks of being “exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.” This gives us some indication of the true cost of what He was about to do. It was no simple or light matter for Him to take our sins upon Himself and suffer for them. And so, we have the record of His prayers to His Father, where we see His submission to the Father and His love to us.

The three disciples were not able to handle it. They fell asleep, and so the Lord Jesus had to warn Peter once again. The latter half of verse 41 is very true:

“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

It would be tempting to think that we should just try harder and have more resolve. But the answer is in the first half of the verse:

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.”

If this passage teaches me anything, it teaches me that I cannot rely on my own strength, but that I can rely on our perfect Saviour.

Verses 47 – 56 record the actual betrayal of Jesus. Judas came with a big crowd – “a great multitude” as the Bible says – and betrayed Jesus with his infamous hypocritical kiss. We read Jesus’s response in verse 50:

“But Jesus said to him, “Friend, why have you come?””

Friend! It strikes us as we read it! It makes me think of Psalm 41 verse 9:

“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”

This verse was quoted by the Lord Jesus in John chapter 13 verse 18, so we know that it applied to this situation. The friendship that the Lord Jesus had extended to Judas had been totally genuine. That is why Judas’s betrayal must have hurt Him so much.

One of the disciples – Peter, in fact, as we learn from John chapter 18 – tried to defend Jesus and ended up wounding the servant of the High Priest. But the Lord Jesus was not going to defend Himself. He could have called upon His Father for more than twelve legions of angels – more than a match for the great crowd that had come against Him! But as He said in verse 54,

“How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”

The Lord Jesus had pledged Himself to this work, and therefore He ensured that the Scriptures concerning Him were fulfilled. This appeared to have completely dispirited the disciples, for we then read at the end of verse 56,

“Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.”

And so, the prediction of verse 31,

“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night”

came about. Once again, we see the composure and faith of the Lord Jesus, and the failure of man.

Verses 57 – 67 describe what happened next, as Jesus was taken to the High Priest, scribes, and elders. It is fascinating to see that, despite trying to get hold of false testimony, no witnesses could be found to incriminate Jesus. If people look hard enough, they can usually find something with which to smear or embarrass someone else. We come across this in politics, when political enemies look for something someone once said or did that they would not like to be unearthed or broadcast. But with Jesus nothing could be found.

It strikes me that character of Jesus could not have been the product of human invention. No-one else has ever existed who has never done anything wrong. The depiction of Jesus in the Gospels is indeed a miracle. Whereas one might initially focus on the miracles that He performed, I have found over the years that it is His perfect response to every situation that is perhaps more miraculous. My opinion is that such a person could not have been invented. This is, for me, one of the strongest arguments convincing me of the truth of the Bible – Jesus as described in the Bible could not have been a fiction, nor His life embellished by later writers. I do not think that anyone could have risen above their own nature and written so convincingly of a perfect man.

In the end, it was the Lord Jesus’s own testimony about who He really was, and His future glory that, humanly speaking, sealed His fate. Verse 64 reads:

“Jesus said to [the high priest], “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.””

The prophecies concerning the betrayal of Jesus, the abandonment of His disciples, and His sufferings had been and were about to be fulfilled. Similarly, this great prophecy of the future will also be fulfilled to the letter.

Finally, we come to the sad story of Peter’s denial, in verses 69 – 75. I have no intention of criticising Peter. He was a true disciple and became a great and worthy apostle of the risen Lord Jesus. I would not have done anything like as well as he did. But what happened to him is written down for us to learn from. We cannot and must not trust in our own strength and resolve. We need to place our faith in the Lord Jesus and rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to accomplish anything for God. Peter was in a risky position, humanly speaking, and quickly realised it. It would have been dangerous to admit that he was a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, who was now being mistreated and falsely condemned, and so Peter attempted to deny it. It would have been better if he had not been there in the courtyard in the first place.

But there was a deep and fundamental difference between Peter and Judas. Peter was overcome by fear, and so he reacted instinctively. Once he heard the rooster crow, we read in verse 75 that,

“Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, “Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.” So he went out and wept bitterly.”

The shame of what he had done came over him. Judas, on the other hand, had hatched and carried out a settled plan to betray Jesus. He would have had opportunity to give it up, but even when Jesus showed him unmistakably that Jesus knew what he was doing, Judas did not repent. Later we read in chapter 27 that Judas was overcome with remorse, but by then it was too late.

And so, we have gone through this long chapter about the Lord Jesus’s betrayal, and His arrest and condemnation. As we have looked at the various incidents that took place, we have seen how the perfect character of Jesus shone even in the darkest of situations. His composure, faith and love never wavered. But He is not given to us as an unattainable example, which would lead us to despair. Instead, He is given to us as a perfect Saviour, the only One who could really take on our sin and failure and deal with them once for all, so that we could be saved and share in all the joy that His perfect work on the cross achieved.

It also shows us that all events were always under His perfect knowledge and control. He allowed Himself to be taken and arrested, but He knew that all these things were to take place as a fulfilment of the Scriptures. Despite knowing that His disciples would forsake Him, and that Peter would deny Him, they were kept safe, and Peter was restored. The events of this chapter might have seemed like a disaster to the disciples, but Jesus was always fully in control, fully aware. We really can place our faith and trust in Him!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today message on ‘Betrayal and Arrest’, talk number T1354, in the series on Matthew’s Gospel. I hope it has encouraged you!

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