

Good Friday

Jesus on Trial: The Resistance

Matthew 26:47-56

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Jesus on Trial: The Resistance

Scripture

Two years I began what I planned to be a seven-year series of messages. It is based on the book by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken that is titled, *Jesus on Trial*.¹ My goal is to teach on seven important aspects of the trial of Jesus Christ: the diabolical *conspiracy* to kill him (which I covered two years ago); his night-time *arrest* in the Garden of Gethsemane (which I covered last year); the short *resistance* that the disciples mounted in his defense (which I plan to cover this evening); the *witnesses* who accused him of blasphemy during his ecclesiastical trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin; the *verdict* reached in his civil trial by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate; the *sentence* of death that his enemies demanded; and his *execution* by crucifixion.

Let us read Matthew 26:47-56:

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. 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. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. 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. 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?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as

¹ James Montgomery Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *Jesus on Trial* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002).

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. (Matthew 26:47-56)

Introduction

Have you ever witnessed someone resisting arrest? We often see it on the news. Sometimes people resisting arrest simply run away. However, on other occasions they fight back, and at times it can get very violent.

Review

If you had been privy to what was going on behind the scenes regarding the trial of Jesus, you would have been aware that it all began with a conspiracy. The religious leaders and the political leaders had conspired together to get rid of Jesus. But they were having great difficulty doing so because of Jesus’ immense popularity with the people. However, a stunning development took place when one of Jesus’ own inner circle of friends stepped forward to betray him to the authorities. Judas Iscariot volunteered to betray Jesus for some unknown reason.

Then, on the evening of 14 Nissan, 30 AD Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. A large band of soldiers had managed to arrest Jesus without too much trouble. The brief resistance from Jesus’ disciples did not amount to much.

Lesson

Tonight, I would like to examine the brief resistance accompanying the betrayal and arrest Jesus.²

² The outline and material for this message is from J. C. Ryle, *Matthew*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 263-66.

I. Jesus' Gracious Dealing with His Disciples (26:47-50a)

First, let's notice Jesus' gracious dealing with his disciples.

Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had gone there after he instituted the Lord's Supper during the Passover meal in Jerusalem (Matthew 26:17-30). Jesus left the disciples in the Garden to go and pray by himself. Three times he returned to the disciples to find them sleeping (26:31-46).

It was at that point that **Judas came** to the Garden of Gethsemane. He brought **with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people** (26:47). Judas **had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him."** And he came up to Jesus at once and said, **"Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him** (26:48-49).

Now, kissing on the cheek was and still is the custom in many countries when greeting a friend. When Judas kissed Jesus he was only doing what all the disciples were accustomed to doing when they met Jesus after an absence.

But I want you to notice how graciously Jesus dealt with Judas. He knew that Judas was betraying him. And yet **Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do"** (26:50a). Even at the moment of his betrayal, Jesus still called Judas **"friend."**

Jesus is a most gracious Savior. He is not harsh and unloving, repelling sinners and keeping them at a distance. He does not want us to view him with dread and fear, but rather he wants us to regard him as warm and loving and affectionate. He wants us to think of him as an older brother and a dear friend. His heart in heaven is still the same as it was on earth: he is loving and merciful and gracious, and he meets people—even betrayers—in their sin.

So, let us view Jesus as gracious in his dealing with us.

II. Jesus' Condemnation of Force (26:50b-52)

Second, let's look at Jesus' condemnation of force.

As soon as Judas kissed Jesus, the crowd who were sent to arrest Jesus **came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him** (26:50b). Immediately, one of Jesus' disciples jumped to Jesus' defense. We know from John's Gospel that Peter had a sword (John 18:10). He **drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear** (Matthew 26:51).

But Jesus would have none of that. He said to Peter, **"Put your sword back into its place."** And then he added a solemn declaration of perpetual significance, **"For all who take the sword will perish by the sword"** (26:52).

Now Jesus was not saying that the sword should never be used. The sword has a legitimate role in society. It has been given to the government to be used in a number of situations. For example, it may be used against one who has murdered another. It may be used to suppress a violent uprising. And it may be used in defense of one country against the unlawful attack by another.

However, the sword is never to be used in advancing or maintaining the gospel. Christianity is never to be enforced by use of the sword. Christianity, unlike Islam, is never to produce disciples by force.

The Crusades took place during the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries as an attempt to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims. Centuries later those wrong actions are still brought up by those whom we are trying to win to Christ, and the gospel is impeded because of the wrong use of the sword by Jesus' disciples.

The Bible teaches us that the weapons of Jesus' disciples are not physical but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:4). The only weapon at our disposal is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). And it is most effective when accompanied by the love of God.

So, let us heed Jesus' condemnation of force.

III. Jesus' Submission of His Will (26:53-56a)

Third, let's notice Jesus' submission of his will.

We should never think that Jesus was arrested against his will, and that he could do nothing about it. Jesus voluntarily submitted himself to being arrested. He said, **“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”** (26:53). If he wanted to do so, he could easily have scattered the crowd that evening.

But there was an extremely important reason for Jesus to submit himself to being arrested. He said, **“But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”** (26:54). The reason for Jesus’ voluntary submission to being arrested that evening was to fulfill the Scriptures. He knew that God had sent him to be “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He was to be the final and supreme Passover Lamb, who voluntarily took upon himself all of the sins of his people. Everything about Jesus’ life was done voluntarily with the goal of providing salvation for sinners.

Now, listen carefully: the willing Sufferer will surely be a willing Savior! The almighty Son of God, who voluntarily allowed men to bind him and lead him away captive, when he could easily have prevented it with just one word, is surely ready to save any soul who flees to him for salvation.

So, if you are not sure of Jesus’ commitment to you, be assured that he submitted his will for you and your salvation.

IV. The Disciples’ Defection from Jesus (26:56b)

And finally, let’s notice the disciples’ defection from Jesus.

The narrative closes with the sad account of Jesus’ disciples, **“Then all the disciples left him and fled”** (26:56b).

Earlier in the evening, while they were still enjoying a meal with Jesus, the disciples declared their willingness to go to prison and even die for Jesus (Luke 22:33). But now, when they could demonstrate their confident assertions, they forgot everything as danger stared them in the face. The possibility of imprisonment and death caused the disciples to leave Jesus and flee.

But they were not the first disciples to defect from Jesus. How often have we promised that we would never be ashamed of Jesus? How often have we said that we would be faithful to Jesus, just like his disciples in persecuted countries? And yet, how often have we not even told our loved ones or neighbors or colleagues about Jesus? The fact is that when the name of Jesus is brought up outside the church or home, we often don't say a word in his defense. Like those first disciples of Jesus, we too have deserted him.

It is easy to talk a good game when nothing is on the line. Let us learn from those first disciples of Jesus how easy it is to talk when nothing is on the line. Let's be humble about what we would do in the face of real danger. And let's ask God to give us his helping grace to help us in our time of need.

Conclusion

We are prone to act in unexpected ways when put to the test. We may try to defend Jesus or we may flee. However, it is important to see that although Jesus could have called twelve legions of angels to rescue him, he did not do so. And the reason is that it was necessary for him to die. Jesus had to die in order to pay the penalty for our sin. That was God's plan to bring salvation to sinners.

I am so grateful that Jesus was faithful to the end. His faithfulness brought about the salvation of his people. Let us thank God that the brief resistance of the disciples did not succeed. Jesus immediately stopped them so that he could be arrested, beaten, tried, convicted, and put to death to save sinners like us. And because Jesus suffered and died, God accepted his sacrifice as sufficient to save sinners.

This evening, as we contemplate the crucifixion of Jesus, let us renew our trust in Jesus and in his sacrifice for us. Amen.

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equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org