

24 Hours That Changed the World

Part 2 - The Arrest

Matthew 26:47-56 March 15, 2009

It began at the Passover table. The disciples were in a mood to celebrate the victories of the past, both ancient and recent. They could hardly wait for the next day to come, prepared to rejoice in that day's victory. But Jesus was looking at the prophecies of pain and degradation that were about to be fulfilled, trying to get ready for the tribulation that was to come. He wanted to explain it to the disciples but they were in no mood to listen, much less understand. While Jesus was praying with such intensity that he began to perspire, the disciples fell asleep without a care in the world. But all that was about to change.

At first it was the appearance of a few strange lights, some torches around the edge of the garden. Then the murmurings of many voices. Then the mob was upon them, led by one of their own, Judas, who stepped forward to meet and greet Jesus, with a word and a kiss. And immediately Jesus was arrested.

As I look at that scene there is one consistent thought that comes to mind: "What were they thinking?" Judas and Peter and the mob, what were they thinking? Whatever they were thinking, these were the thoughts that led to the death on the cross. Maybe we should examine those thoughts.

First we need to look at Judas. What was Judas thinking? After all, he had spent 3 years with Jesus. He had heard the teachings first hand. He had seen unbelievable miracles, far beyond what we know. Why would he turn away and betray like that? Some think that he was trying to force the hand of Jesus. That through his actions he would force Jesus to kick off the revolution against both the religious leaders and against Rome. Others believe that it was all about the money. He had been the treasurer of the group, and as some treasurers have done throughout history, he began to think the money was his own and he treated it like his own. And some have even come to the conclusion that Judas did not really betray Jesus, but that he was simply following the plan that Jesus had laid out. There is no consensus to what Judas was thinking.

Whichever school of thought you might accept, I think behind it all, Judas was thinking that "Jesus isn't doing this right." Judas looked at the situation and for whatever reason; he decided that he had a better plan. Judas knew how the world works. He knew that nobody voluntarily gives up their power and control. It would not happen with the leaders in the Temple, and it certainly would not happen with Rome. In a scene on the old show "Dallas", Jock Ewing told son Bobby, "If I did give you power I gave you nothing. Real power has to be taken, not given." Judas believed that.

Jesus had a different point of view. In Luke we read, "*Then he said to them all: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'*" (Luke 9:23) Deny yourself! Don't insist that it is your way or the highway. Judas knew that would not work. And many of us live our lives in ways that are more consistent with Judas than Jesus. We think we know what is better than Jesus does. And in lifting up our opinions over the advice from God, we conveniently forget that the Apostle Paul wrote, "*For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.*" (1 Corinthians 1:25)

It seems to me that the motive behind the betrayal was that Judas wanted the power to control what was going to happen. And to accomplish that, he would do everything he could to get that power. He deceived the other disciples, and he tried to deceive Jesus himself. He even betrayed Jesus with a kiss, a sign of respect and

honor. But he showed no respect. Sometimes those patting you on the back are simply looking for a good place to stick the knife.

Judas was not following the orders of Jesus, for then he could have just pointed to him. But the kiss was a sign of deception and betrayal. And I don't think that it was just about the money because he later threw that away. I believe it was all about the power to control. Like Ford Motors, Judas thought he had a better idea. And sometimes we think that we do, too. But we are as wrong in our thinking as Judas was. And when we go our own way, we betray Jesus again.

Of course when that mob first showed up, Jesus was not alone. The disciples were with him, led by Peter, James, and John. On that night, at that time, what were the disciples thinking? Three things: First, not knowing what was happening, they were ready to fight for their leader. We are told 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) It was a very impulsive thing to do, and Peter was a very impulsive guy. He would almost always do the macho thing, and the macho thing would be to protect, even when the odds are against you. And I do not think that Peter was really trying to cut off the man's ear. That was a mistake. He was trying to split his skull, but he missed.

Jesus was not amused. But then, Jesus knew that things had to go down this way. He turned to Peter and said, "You really think I need protection? There are thousands of angels watching over me, ready to come whenever I call, and you think that you and your sword are going to change what has been planned for centuries. Put your sword away."

Having been rebuked for impulsively trying to protect their leader, their Lord, the disciples did not know what to think. They began to honestly appraise the situation. It was dark and they were weak. They were outnumbered and told not to fight back. Suddenly all the disciples were like Peter when he looked at the winds and the waves while walking on the water. Like Wiley Coyote when he finally sees that he has walked off a cliff, when he realizes that this can't be happening, he is filled with fear, and then he starts to fall. But for the disciples, who, too, could not believe that this was happening, the fear caused their faith to fall, and so they began to flee. Matthew 26:56b: *Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*" It came as no surprise to Jesus. Just a few hours earlier he had told them it would happen this way. *Then Jesus told them, This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.*" (Matthew 26:31)

Disciples have not changed a whole lot over the years. Though our Lord is the Prince of Peace, still we fight; both beyond and sometimes even within the church. Though called to be a people of faith, trusting in God's plans, God's way and God's will, we succumb to fear when things do not go as we plan. And often when we don't get our way, rather than stand for what we believe, we flee. We go away and sulk or hide. Fight. Fear. Flee. The disciples are still here.

And then we have the newcomers on the scene: the mob. I find them to be an amazing crowd. Often I have asked, what was the mob thinking? Just like disciples have not changed all that much over the years, neither have the mobs. So their excuse is probably the same one that has been used to justify bad behavior ever since, "We are just following orders." Somehow being under orders removes the responsibility or even the possibility that we will think for ourselves. But the Lord has given us a mind and the power to choose. We

have a free will, and we can choose to do what is right. There was a time after the resurrection when the Temple leaders ordered Peter and John to stop talking and teaching about Jesus. But they did not follow orders. In Acts we read, *"But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.'"* (Acts 4:19-20)

Now I think that really becomes important when we consider what the mob did see. Remember that when Jesus was arrested, Peter pulled a sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest. After reprimanding Peter, Jesus healed the man's ear. Now if you are arresting a man for being a fraud and right in front of you he spontaneously performs a miraculous healing, wouldn't that give you a reason to say, "Wait a minute. What are we doing?" But instead, the mob collectively said, "We know what we believe don't confuse us with the facts " And they continued to go about arresting Jesus, and they took him to the home of the high priest.

There was another occasion when Jesus miraculously healed a man who had been blind from birth, and the Temple leaders had trouble accepting it. When the man who had been blind challenged them about their beliefs and feelings about Jesus they said, *"We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from."* (John 9:29) They did not know Him, and yet they were ready to condemn Him. And even when Jesus showed them what He was able to do, after showing them the grace of healing someone who was coming to do Him harm, still that mob continued to follow orders, not allowing the facts of who Jesus was, who Jesus is, to stop them or confuse them.

There was still one more character in the garden. On that night, at that time, what was Jesus thinking? I think that largely Jesus was filled with frustration. You know how it is when we are stressed out and nothing seems to be going right. Every little thing becomes another problem that adds just that much more to our stress. Imagine the stress under which Jesus was operating. Yes, He knew all this had to happen. And He tried to explain it to His disciples, but they did not have a clue, and neither did anyone else. So as Jesus looked at the foolishness of friend and foe alike, he must have thought about the mindless, malicious, misunderstanding of man. In Mark 9 we see that frustration fully on display when we read, *AO unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, Ahow long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"* (Mark 9:19a)

But beyond the frustration, Jesus thought about the mission that lay before Him. Earlier He had explained it to Nicodemus, telling him *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him."* (John 3:17) Jesus understood that deep down inside He had not come to bring judgment, but redemption and salvation. What love that must have taken for Jesus to stay focused on that mission. For so often we are so focused on revenge and punishment. We call it justice, but it is really our personal pronouncement of judgment, because, like Judas, we think we know better. Like Judas, we want the power to control the world around us. And yet like the disciples, like the mob, we have our minds made up, and often we refuse to change our thoughts and opinions even when confronted with the Word of God; even when we are taught otherwise by the very Son of God.

Rather than focus on His frustration or on thoughts of justice and judgment, ultimately Jesus was thinking about mercy. From the cross we hear, *AFather, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34) So many times Jesus could have said that about Judas, Peter, and the disciples. So many times He could have said that about the mob. So many times He could have said that about us, because so often we

don't know what we are doing, even though we think that we have a better idea than God.

If we are honest with ourselves, when we look at the arrest of Jesus in the garden, we see ourselves all over the place. Like Judas we want control rather than submit to the will of God. Like the disciples we fight rather than understand what is at stake. We allow fear to overwhelm our faith. And we flee rather than stand for what and who we believe. And like the mob, we go through the motions without thinking about what we are doing, not allowing the facts or God's grace to change our thoughts of judgment. We see ourselves in Judas and Peter, in the fleeing disciples and the advancing mob. But it doesn't have to be so.

Let us look to Jesus, first to understand the power of His love that enabled Him to suffer for us, taking our place in death that we might find true life in Him. And then to emulate Him, that we might focus on the mission of carrying His gospel to the world, sharing His grace in Word and Deed, that our relationship with the Lord might be rectified, and that we might return to His side. And may we learn to respond to the hatred and violence, to respond to the foolishness of this world not with more hatred, violence, and judgment, but with the grace that says, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." That God's will might be done in us and through us. That God's grace might be experienced all around us. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.