

Matthew 26F

- Last week we studied Jesus' time of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and we stopped in the middle of the action as Judas and the soldiers approached
 - So now the moment of Jesus' arrest has come...Jesus has been intimating and explicitly stating this would happen for some time
 - Just a short time earlier at the start of this chapter, Jesus told His men He would be handed over for crucifixion
 - By that one statement, Jesus implicated both the Jewish authorities and the Romans of their parts in that transaction
 - Since only the Romans practiced crucifixion, they were obviously the ones who were going to receive Jesus
 - And the only ones who can hand over Jesus to the Romans were His fellow Jews in authority of Israel
 - And so now in v.45 the arrest of Jesus unfolds, beginning with Jesus announcing His betrayer's arrival

Matt. 26:45 Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Matt. 26:46 "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Matt. 26:47 While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.

Matt. 26:48 Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him."

Matt. 26:49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

Matt. 26:50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

- Last week we studied as Jesus challenged His disciples to remain awake and keep watch over Jesus during His prayer time
 - But now the moment has passed, because Judas has arrived with an entourage

- And as he does, Jesus announces it even as it happens, as if Jesus is narrating His own arrest
- This has been going on for a while as Jesus has made several statements about what was coming for Him
- And all this anticipation and foretelling begs one big question...why didn't Jesus run away or prevent this outcome?
 - And the answer we already know...Jesus was entering into His own death voluntarily as a matter of necessity
 - He was a willing sacrifice for our sake, not a victim in the sense of someone Who is unable to defend Himself
- On the contrary, Jesus is the author of this plan having determined it from before the foundations of the earth
 - Moreover, Jesus has the power to stop it if He desired
 - And that truth is a major theme in the way Matthew and the other Gospel writers approach the telling of this story
- They will show time and again that Jesus was in control over these circumstances, and that detail is important to understanding the events
 - If you didn't know better, you might assume Jesus was being swept away by a grand conspiracy that He was powerless to stop
 - And if that's how you see this story, then you would likely question Jesus' claims to be the Messiah and to be God
 - In fact, some argue that the Father "murdered" the Son of God by putting Him on the cross, which grossly misrepresents the facts
 - The truth is exactly the opposite: Jesus is voluntarily going to the cross just as He planned to do from the foundations of the earth
 - And to ensure it happens just as Jesus planned, by harnessing the enemy and the sin of the world to orchestrate events
 - That's why Jesus remained in the one place on that night, knowing that was the place Judas would know to look
 - Obviously, Jesus was in control to bring about these events even as His humanity dreaded them and desperately wished for some other way

- And now things kick into high gear in v.47 as Judas and a crowd arrive brandishing clubs and spears
- At first, it sounds as if Judas is being followed by a bunch of angry villagers with pitchforks following behind
- But John tells us in John 18 that this “crowd” is actually a Roman cohort with weapons, torches and lanterns
- A cohort of soldiers could vary in size from 200 to as much as 600, but in this case it’s likely the smaller number
- Even a contingent of “only” 200 soldiers still seems like overkill to arrest one man, but it makes sense given the circumstances of Passover
 - As I said in an earlier lesson, Judas would have been required to give testimony before Pilate so the priests could secure soldiers for this arrest
 - Roman law required that a witness testify to a crime before soldiers were dispatched for an arrest
 - But during Passover, Pilate would have been particularly receptive to such a request and standing by to receive it
 - Traditionally Passover was a time of unrest in Jerusalem when Jews would riot or protest Roman occupation
 - For the Jewish people, Passover was equivalent to our 4th of July or Independence Day because it remembers the Exodus
 - So every year when this feast rolled around, Jewish passions were stirred up against the Romans
 - The Romans hated anything that broke the peace, so they brought many additional soldiers into the city for Passover
 - And if the Romans heard rumors that an instigator was inciting insurrection, they reacted quickly and harshly to put it down
 - So we assume that when Judas went to Pilate claiming that Jesus was seeking to become king of Israel, Pilate responded with a Roman cohort
 - That leads to this comical scene of 200+ Roman soldiers with weapons and torches coming for one man from Nazareth
 - Since the high priest did not leave his house before Passover to avoid becoming unclean, Luke says he sent his slave instead

- Luke also says that the captains of the temple, the Jewish police force for the temple, also came along
- Finally, Luke says members of the Sanhedrin counsel were present
- The presence of the Jewish authorities is one of many injustices that take place in the course of Jesus' trial, conviction and death
 - First, the Romans were acting on the false testimony of Judas, so the charges are obviously false
 - Secondly, the Jewish authorities were in violation of their own law by arresting someone at nighttime
- Jewish law prohibited arrests or trials conducted at night
 - Yet here we have the high counsel of Jewish rulers and the temple guard and the high priest's representative arresting Jesus
 - All of them willingly disobeying the law in order to bring down Jesus
- So now to the arrest...it's dark of course and there were many people on the hillside at Passover, and the Romans don't know what Jesus looks like
 - So without photos, the Romans needed a positive ID of their suspect by someone who knew Jesus, namely Judas
 - And Judas has arranged a particularly personal way of identifying Jesus to the Romans
 - Judas tells them in v.48 that whoever he kisses is the one they should seize
 - Now why did Judas choose that method? It was Judas' self-serving means of hiding his true motives
 - By pretending to be greeting Jesus in a friendly way, Judas hoped he wouldn't appear to be working for the Romans
 - So that after greeting Jesus with a kiss, Judas could act surprised when the Romans appear out of the dark to arrest Jesus
 - His wanted plausible deniability in front of the other disciples
 - Judas is acting in a cowardly way to hide his betrayal of Jesus but Jesus ruins the game when He announces Judas' intentions to the others

- In Luke's Gospel we read this

[Luke 22:47](#) While He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them; and he approached Jesus to kiss Him.

[Luke 22:48](#) But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

- Jesus speaks up as Judas approaches and gives away the sign even before Judas carries it out, asking will you betray Me with a kiss?
 - Obviously, it's a rhetorical question, because Jesus knew exactly what Judas was doing
 - Jesus made the statement for the benefit of the other disciples to inform them of what was about to happen
 - But after being called out, Judas goes through with the gesture nonetheless because he wants to earn his money
 - Interestingly, John's Gospel tells us that even before Judas gets the chance to kiss Jesus, Jesus identifies Himself to the Romans
 - Jesus asks the Romans who they were seeking, and when they say Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responds "I am"
 - Jesus called Himself the great I AM to remind them of the Lord's appearance before Moses in Exodus 3 when He said I AM WHO I AM
 - And at that moment, the entire Roman cohort and all who were with them fall backward to the ground
 - They slowly get back on their feet, Jesus asks them a second time, and the Romans respond "Jesus" again
 - Even as He was being taken, Jesus makes clear that He wasn't being *taken* to the cross...He was *going* to the cross
 - Finally, Judas steps forward to kiss Jesus, and in v.50 Jesus tells Judas "Friend, do what you have come for"
 - Judas just used an insincere gesture of friendship to betray Jesus, so Jesus returned the favor by calling him "friend" sarcastically
 - And then at that moment, the Romans seized Jesus and placed Him under arrest

- Having heard Jesus' comment about Judas and seeing the soldiers arresting Jesus, the disciples now understand what is happening and leap into action
 - In Luke's account, we're told that the disciples ask Jesus if He wants their help to fight off the Roman soldiers

Luke 22:49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"

- The disciples' willingness to fight for Jesus was admirable, if a bit stupid, since there was literally no way they could defeat a Roman cohort
 - But it is surprising that they thought Jesus needed their help and they needed to resort to violence to help Jesus
 - They've seen Jesus walk on water, calm a storm, multiply food and escape from angry crowds without help and more
 - Surely they knew Jesus had the power to stop the arrest if He wanted to do so?
- I think there are two reasons driving their response...first in an earlier moment, Jesus told His disciples this:

Luke 22:35 And He said to them, "When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?" They said, "No, nothing."

Luke 22:36 And He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one.

Luke 22:37 "For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment."

Luke 22:38 They said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough."

- Jesus told these men a few hours earlier that the time had come for them to carry money belts and swords
 - Before this moment, they never needed such things because Jesus was their supply and protection
 - But now Jesus was preparing them for ministry after Jesus was gone at His ascension

- From this point forward, these men would be in a world that would hate them for their association with Jesus
 - They will be attacked, slandered, persecuted and martyred
 - They would need money and they might need to act in self-defense against thieves or others determined to stop them
- And since these men had just heard Jesus warn them to be prepared with swords, I think they were primed to act here
 - So when the threat materialized, they were ready to draw their swords, but of course Jesus would have said no
 - But this wasn't a moment of self-defense, certainly not the moment Jesus was talking about earlier
 - And so Jesus is prepared to tell these men to stop...except that before Jesus can answer, one of the disciples decides to act

Matt. 26:51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

- One of the disciples gets carried away by the moment, leaps forward and strikes a blow to a member of the arresting party
 - I'll give you one guess which apostle chose to act so impulsively... according to John it was Peter
 - Peter jumps in front of Jesus and attacks the high priest's slave by cutting off his ear with a sword
 - The Greek word for sword describes a small dagger that can be concealed underneath clothing
 - Peter's act of "bravery" is actually a story of pride and cowardice, and this is the second reason for why this scene turns violent
 - Earlier at the Passover meal, Jesus told Peter he would abandon and betray Jesus three times that same night
 - And knowing Peter's pride, I imagine Jesus' comment weighed heavily on Peter's heart in the hours following
 - Peter was probably brooding and looking for a way to prove Jesus wrong about His prediction

- Then when the Romans move in to arrest Jesus, Peter sees his opportunity to use that sword Jesus told him to carry
 - But Peter isn't as brave as he appears, because Peter carefully chose to attack probably the only unarmed man in the crowd
 - As I said earlier, the High Priest couldn't join this party for fear of becoming unclean, so he sent his representative
- This man was a servant or slave of the High Priest, and as such, he would not have been allowed to possess a weapon
 - All the Romans and the temple guards had weapons, as did the Sanhedrin members most likely
 - So Peter attacks the one guy in the crowd who had no weapon and couldn't defend himself or retaliate
- It appears Peter wanted to look like he was willing to die for Jesus without actually having to die, further proof Peter is doing this out of pride
 - The final proof is in the way Peter attacks the slave...Peter doesn't land a lethal blow but instead only cuts off the man's ear
 - That move seems calculated on Peter's part to avoid a serious charge or counterattack
 - We could give Peter the benefit of the doubt and assume he was trying to cut the guy's throat and just missed the mark
 - Even still, it hardly makes Peter look better, since it would just show how inept Peter was at swordplay
 - So Peter comes off looking prideful, impulsive, foolish and even a bit silly trying to defend Jesus against a cohort of soldiers with a dagger
 - And in the process, he almost ruins the plan of God and gets himself imprisoned or worse
 - He could have prompted the Romans to react with force killing Peter, Jesus and everyone else
 - Imagine the problems if Peter is convicted for murder or Jesus dies by a Roman sword instead of on a cross?
 - Obviously, Jesus wasn't going to allow any of this to happen, for two reasons:

[Matt. 26:52](#) Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.

[Matt. 26:53](#) “Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

[Matt. 26:54](#) “How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?”

- First, Jesus objects to Peter’s methods
 - He orders Peter to put his sword away, and you get the sense that Jesus is primarily concerned that Peter was going to hurt himself or Jesus
 - And then Jesus warns those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword
 - To take up the sword means to relying on violence to achieve our objectives
 - Jesus is saying those who resort to violence will find violence returning back upon them
 - And that is hardly a controversial statement...it just makes sense...violent people invite violence in return
 - But violence or force in any form will not be a tool of the Church in accomplishing the mission of Christ
- Secondly, violence only leads to more suffering, and conflict, which is the opposite of our calling
 - Jesus makes this point, Luke tells, by turning to help the unfortunate victim of Peter’s violence

[Luke 22:51](#) But Jesus answered and said, “Stop! No more of this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.

- This is the only record in the Gospels of Jesus treating a violent injury and it’s also the final healing Jesus performs in the Gospel
- Jesus’ healing of the slave was an act of compassion, of course, but it was also an act of necessity to correct Peter’s mistake
- Consider what would have happened had Jesus not healed the slave from this injury?

- First, more than likely Peter would have been arrested as well, and possibly executed or at least imprisoned
 - Peter's place as Christ's appointed leader in the early church could have been in jeopardy
 - And it would have changed the entire course of that night
- Secondly, this incident gives support to the Jewish charges against Jesus and His disciples that they are violent insurgents against Rome
 - No longer would the Jewish leaders need to concoct lies against Jesus
 - The fact that Jesus' chief disciple attempted to murder a member of the delegation could be used to convict Jesus of rebellion
- Jesus is determined to go to the cross willingly, but for that reason He must also go without just cause
 - He will be a willing sacrifice, but He must be an innocent sacrifice
 - So Jesus heals the man to eliminate any evidence to legitimize the conspiracy against Him
- So by His words and actions, Jesus make clear that violence and opposition to authority are not the way of His church – not in the Garden nor afterward
 - And this gives us an important corollary to Jesus' earlier command to His disciples to begin carrying a sword
 - During that earlier moment Jesus was addressing the need to be prepared in self-defense when faced with violence
 - Being a follower of Jesus doesn't require that we become helpless victims or surrender our right to self-defense
 - But on the other hand, neither are we to instigate violence or force or circumvent law to achieve our goals in the Church
 - In this case, Peter used violence in the hope of protecting Jesus' ministry, but violence is antithetical to Jesus' mission
 - Jesus came to save the lost with a message of self-sacrifice, and Peter was turning that message on its head
 - He was ready to *kill* the lost in the name of Jesus, which is nothing less than murder and not something God said to do

- Paul tells us the way Christians are to operate in the world in Romans 12

[Rom. 12:18](#) If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

[Rom. 12:19](#) Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

[Rom. 12:20](#) "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD."

[Rom. 12:21](#) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- When we act violently or unlawfully to avenge ourselves or defend God or advance our agenda, we become as an enemy of God...how?
 - Three ways...breaking the peace interrupts our participation in the plan of God, hurts other people and forfeits our opportunity to overcome evil
 - For example, back in v.54 Jesus asked how can the Scriptures be fulfilled which say Jesus must be arrested unless Peter allows it?
 - Jesus isn't suggesting that Peter *could* change the plan of God; on the contrary, Jesus was saying it *can't* be changed
 - Therefore, Peter's fight against events ordained by God was sin and bound to fail in the end so why work against God?
 - That's what Paul means when he says leave room for the wrath of God
 - When we break the peace, we separate ourselves from the plan of God, and we get in His way, so to speak
 - We need to leave God room to work...not that we change God's plan in the end but we do change our ability to participate in it
 - Secondly, when we resort to force or violence or law breaking thinking we are helping advance God's plan, we inevitably hurt someone else
 - And though Jesus can heal and restore anyone we hurt, why be the kind of person who makes that restoration necessary?
 - So far as it depends upon us, be at peace with everyone
 - Finally, forcing things to go our way means we become the source of evil instead of being the one overcoming evil by doing good
 - Ironically, the only one who used their weapon that night was Peter

- That night evil was at work to bring Jesus to the cross, and Jesus was working to overcome evil with good by dying in our place
- And here's Peter trying to stop that plan by assaulting an innocent man...becoming evil instead of overcoming evil
- Peter made all those mistakes by interfering in the plan of God and foolishly, trying to stop what God had ordained, and in the process he hurt someone
 - Here's a simple rule...if you can only accomplish your ministry by breaking laws or resorting to violence, you have the wrong ministry
 - Because self-evidently, the Lord isn't working for those outcomes or at least He isn't accomplishing them through you at that time
 - You need to back up and figure out where and how God is truly working and then join Him there without sinning
 - So that as far as it depends upon you, you remain at peace with all men
 - It comes down to trusting in God's sovereignty knowing He has the power to accomplish anything...He doesn't need us to force anything
 - Look back at v.53...Jesus reminds Peter that He could call down twelve legion of angels to stop this arrest if He so desired
 - Jesus refers to legions of angels to make a comparison to the cohort of Roman soldiers standing around Him
 - A cohort was a few hundred soldiers, but a legion of Roman soldiers was about 5,000 men
 - So 12 legions of angels would be 60,000 angels, which is a lot of angelic power
 - Peter should have thought about that before leaping forward with a sword to "protect" Jesus
 - And that's what we need to remember too when we feel tempted to force an outcome in ministry or otherwise
 - If God isn't doing things your way or in your timing, then there is some good reason why a delay or another path is better
- I bet many of us have been tempted to force things lately, because it seems everywhere we turn the pressure is building to force things our way

- Whether it's the pressure to get back to work or school or to get sports going again or to open our churches
 - Or maybe we feel the pressure to fight for political outcomes
 - Or our family relationships are struggling under the pressure of too much time together
- These pressures have the potential to bring us to the same point Peter was on that night
 - We feel our ego threatened, we feel defensive and on edge, we have something to prove
 - We're tired of limits or restrictions...we feel mistreated or unheard
 - And suddenly we're determined to take matters into our own hands
- If that's you, it's time to put that sword away, and turn to the Lord in prayer and ask Him for patience and understanding to work with Him
 - Don't step out of His plan by trying to force outcomes in your life or ministry
 - Don't hurt someone or become the evil you're trying to correct
 - As far as it depends on you, be at peace and look for how God is at work in the circumstances around you
 - And then ask Him how He wants you to minister in the midst of that turmoil