

Matthew 26G

- The action in our story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion is heating up, and from this point forward, much of what we study in this story will be familiar to most of us
 - We've probably all read the Passion account at some point or heard a pastor teaching it or at least watched one of the many movies about it
 - And that's good and helpful to a degree, but it's also a challenge for us as we study it anew now
 - Because certainly the majority of what you've heard or seen in movies is likely an accurate reflection of the text of Scripture
 - But just as likely, some of those accounts may have overlooked important details, or in some cases even misrepresented them
 - And details make a difference in our understanding of what's happening in Jesus' death and resurrection and why it's happening
 - So as we go forward, let's try to put aside what we remember or what we think we know, and let's allow the text to speak to us
 - And that process starts today, as we move to Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders
 - The Roman soldiers have appeared in the Garden led by Judas and followed by the conspiring Jewish religious authorities
 - The Romans provided the muscle to arrest Jesus, but the Jewish leaders were the brains behind the operation
 - And Jesus knows this, which is why He doesn't even bother to address the soldiers but speaks directly to the Jewish leaders

Matt. 26:55 At that time Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me.

Matt. 26:56 "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

- Jesus asks the religious leaders why they enlisted so much force to arrest Him

- Jesus is mocking the leaders' weakness, relying on Gentile soldiers to enforce Jewish Law
- Jesus says these Jewish leaders could have seized Jesus in the temple grounds at any time but they didn't do it
- And to explain what Jesus is talking about, we need a moment of background on the relationship between Israel and Rome
- Israel was governed by two systems of law in that day...first, Israel was ruled by the Law of Moses which was both a religious law and a civil law
 - Israel's political leaders were rabbis on the Sanhedrin Counsel, their judges were Pharisaic rabbis, and their local leaders were priests
 - Every rule of society and life came out of the Law or more specifically, out of the Mishnah, which was the rabbis' rule book
 - So for a Jew, there was no distinction between church and state, so to speak, because they were one and the same
 - Before Rome conquered Judea around 66 BC, Israel ruled itself according to Mosaic Law
 - But after Rome invaded, Judea became a province of Rome, and Rome ruled Judea according to Roman law
 - They brought Roman language (Latin) and Hellenistic culture and pagan worship practices
 - And as Romans did everywhere, they forced the local populace to adopt these practices in place of the previous culture
 - But the Romans soon discovered that Jews could not be ruled in the same way as other peoples they conquered
 - They resisted Roman culture and language, and they were especially resistant to the introduction of other forms of worship
 - Unlike other cultures, Jews would willingly die rather than worship foreign gods or allow Gentiles to enter their temple
 - This posed a serious dilemma for the Romans, because though they had the military power to enforce their policies, it led to constant unrest
 - The Jews resisted and rioted almost continually, leading to endless conflict in Judea

- Quickly the Romans realized that the Jewish people weren't going to be won over to Roman ways
- So if the Romans wanted peace and stability in Judea, they must either wipe out all Jews or make an exception for their culture
- Since the Romans valued peace and stability over almost anything else, they decided to give Israel certain exemptions they offered no other people
 - First, the Caesar permitted Jews to worship Jehovah instead of Roman gods, which was the only such exception permitted in all the empire
 - Jews throughout the Roman empire were not required to pay homage to Caesar nor were they required to worship him
 - No other conquered people received this exemption, which is why the Jewish temple was the only such structure in the empire
 - Secondly, the Romans agreed to recognize the Jewish temple as sovereign territory and allowed Jews to control and police its grounds
 - In fact, Roman soldiers would not even be permitted to enter the temple except in times of rebellion or social unrest
 - So as long as the Jews kept the peace, the Romans would refrain from entering or interfering with the temple operations
 - And within the temple, Jews could conduct business in their own currency and without Roman taxation
 - Finally, Jews could govern other Jews under the Mosaic Law including conducting trials and punishing offenders with Roman approval
 - But there was one major exception to Jews governing themselves...Rome reserved capital punishment for itself
 - If Jewish authorities wanted to execute someone for a violation of Mosaic Law, they needed Rome's approval
 - And since Rome wasn't particularly impressed by Jewish law, it could be a challenge to convince Rome to allow an execution
- As a result, the Jews found a way of getting around this limitation...by seizing a Jew inside the temple grounds outside of Roman oversight and intervention
 - Because of the exception given by the Caesar, Romans were not allowed to enter the temple or police its operations

- In fact, a sign was posted at the entrance of the Court of Women declaring that Gentiles would be killed if they entered
- So the Jews had almost free reign to apprehend, convict and even execute criminals inside the temple walls
- Technically, the Romans did not approve of such things, and if the need arose, they could intervene to put down unrest in the temple court
 - But in most cases, the Romans just looked the other way, as long as the event didn't turn into a riot or disturbed the peace
 - And that's what Jesus is talking about now as He mocks the Jewish leaders for arresting Him with the help of Romans
- If these men had wanted to seize Jesus, they could have done so without Roman intervention at any time in the temple
 - Jesus has spent the better part of the last four days in the temple, and Jesus is asking them why not take Me there?
 - In other words, the religious leaders' choice to arrest Jesus with Roman soldiers outside the temple proves they have no case
- If they had arrested Jesus in the temple, they would have charged Jesus in full view of the people and the ruling counsel of the Sanhedrin
 - Under those circumstances, their accusations would have been subject to public scrutiny – yet they lacked any hard evidence
 - Under those circumstances, the Jewish crowds would have rioted against them, as they mentioned earlier in the Gospel
- Moreover, they would have likely lost the resulting trial, since they didn't have evidence against Jesus and their eye witnesses were inconsistent
 - So the religious leaders couldn't risk those outcomes, which is why they chose to use Romans at night away from the crowds
 - And Jesus is mocking the weakness of their case and their own cowardice in arresting Him in this underhanded way
- Jesus adds that all this happened to fulfill Scripture, referring to His own prophecy that He would be handed over by the Romans to the Jews
 - Jesus also predicted that he would be abandoned by the disciples and notice at the end of v.56 it happens as He said

- This little detail is one of those key moments you find recorded throughout the Gospels that proves their authenticity
- If the apostles had invented the story of Jesus, we would not expect to find moments like this recorded in their account
- Throughout the Gospels, the apostles report themselves in a negative light either bumbling about, making poor choices and acting cowardly
 - But if these men had invented the Gospel accounts, we wouldn't have expected them to depict themselves so poorly
 - On the contrary, liars who invent tall tales portray themselves as heroes or at worst innocent bystanders
- But these men represent themselves as weak, ignorant and foolish, which argues for their authenticity
 - In fact, in Mark's account of this moment in the Garden, he describes his own behavior this way

Mark 14:51 A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him.

Mark 14:52 But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked.

- Not the the most flattering way to remember your part in that evening's events, yet Mark reported it
- The fact that these men tell it like it was is strong proof for us to know these accounts came from accurate, eye-witness reports
- So Jesus is now in Roman custody, but how did we get to the point that the Messiah and Creator of the Universe is being manhandled by godless Gentiles?
 - Luke tells us that God gave Satan the upper hand over the Light of the World for a brief moment that God planned and purposed

Luke 22:52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?"

Luke 22:53 "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours."

- God appointed Satan and his forces to accomplish this plan, yet Satan doesn't even realize he's following God's script
- Once again, Jesus is in control here with events going just as Jesus said they would over 4,000 years earlier in the Garden

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity

Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

- After the fall of Man in the Garden, the Lord told Satan that He would establish enmity or conflict Satan's forces and God's forces
 - The Lord called those who belong to Satan his "seed" and those who belong to God are the "seed of Woman"
 - The seed of Woman is an oblique reference to a virgin birth, since women don't have "seed," biblically speaking
 - And as Paul explains in Galatians 3:16, the term seed was singular, not plural, because it refers to a certain person: Christ
 - So the seed of Woman is Jesus, therefore those who are born of this seed are those born again by faith in Jesus Christ
- So there will always be enmity or conflict between the enemy's followers (unbelievers) and Christ's followers (believers)
 - Ultimately this conflict comes down to a battle between Christ Himself and Satan, which climaxes at two different moments
 - In v.15 the Lord summarizes these two moments, saying Satan will strike at Christ's heel but Christ will strike at Satan's head
- The Lord was foretelling His plan of redemption, where Satan would first strike Jesus but in a limited way
 - This was a prophecy of the cross, where Jesus is struck on the "heel" by Satan indicating that this blow won't be strong enough to destroy Christ
 - Jesus will die on the cross as a result of Satan's blow, but Jesus is raised again by the power of God

- And by His resurrection Christ conquers Satan's only power, which is the power of death
- The second battle comes much later, when Christ one day strikes Satan on the "head," meaning with a fatal blow
 - This striking will result in Satan's destruction at the end of the Kingdom when Jesus casts Satan into the Lake of Fire
 - That's the plan that Jesus Himself wrote, since He is both the Author and Perfecter of our Salvation
- So as we watch the first of these battles unfolding here, remember that darkness gets the upper hand only because Jesus ordained it
 - The enemy is striking Christ on the heel with a blow that accomplishes the plan of redemption
 - But in a day to come, the Lord will return that promised death blow to Satan once and for all
- And if the Father allows Satan this hour of authority over His own Son, then we shouldn't be surprised when the Father opens the same door for us at times
 - As He did with Jesus, God will allow Satan and his forces opportunity in our life to bring trial and even suffering as part of His plan for good
 - First, remember that we are not above our Master, so if Jesus was persecuted by Satan, so will we be persecuted at times
 - But persecution isn't merely someone pressuring us not to practice our religion or attacking us for our faith
 - More often, the enemy brings persecution in the form of temptations for us to disobey God or to walk away from practicing our faith
 - He brings us trials or other temptations that lead us into sin of one kind or another, and that's the purest form of persecution
 - If you've never understood your own tendencies to give in to sin as a form of persecution, then you haven't understood the battle
 - And if you don't understand the battle you're facing, then you're certainly not prepared to triumph in it
 - Remember the story of Job...the Lord allowed Satan to persecute a righteous man in horrible ways to prove his faithfulness

- But how did Satan bring that persecution? Did God cause the government to attack Job's freedom of religion?
- Did Job's neighbors protest his desire to worship God?
- No, Satan's persecution of Job came in the form of hardships that made life so hard for Job that it removed the joy of obedience
 - Satan was hoping that Job would become so upset and discouraged that he would become unfaithful and curse God
 - And although Job was very unhappy and couldn't understand why this was happening, nonetheless Job said this about God

Job 13:15 "Though He slay me,

I will hope in Him.

Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him.

- The Bible says that Satan is allowed to attack believers at times, just as he attacked Jesus, so that God might use the trial to accomplish something good
 - That is the enmity God promised would exist between unbelievers and believers, and it's the purest form of persecution
 - But when the enemy persecutes you, you can be sure the enemy is just following the Lord's script
 - The Lord is bringing that trial for a good reason, and it requires spiritual maturity to recognize and benefit from that purpose
 - Moreover, the Bible says that the Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle
 - Nor will we be without the Lord's help to withstand the trial

1Cor. 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- Successfully enduring persecution is first and foremost recognizing there is something larger going on behind the scenes
 - Persecution is bigger than some enemy coming against you

- It's evidence of the fight between God and His enemies, between Satan and Christ, and we're just foot soldiers in that battle
- So when we experience temptations to sin or to walk away from serving Jesus, you need to know that is persecution from the enemy
 - And therefore, when you resist the enemy's schemes, you are battling with God, in the name of Christ and for His glory
 - On the other hand, when we give in to temptation to sin...when you neglect the disciplines of your faith and fall away into sin...
 - Then you are essentially throwing your support behind the enemy and his purposes...you have put on the enemy's uniform
- But the Lord will provide ways of escape from moments of temptation, if only we look for those opportunities
 - I think of these ways of escape as "off ramps" that allow us off the freeway of our sin desires
 - God gives us ways to say no to temptation or to stop what we're doing, and all we have to do is take the off ramp
 - Once we take it, God guides us along that new path and the farther we go, the more that sin desire fades in our rear view
- So with that, the trial of Jesus begins

[Matt. 26:57](#) Those who had seized Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together.

[Matt. 26:58](#) But Peter was following Him at a distance as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and entered in, and sat down with the officers to see the outcome.

[Matt. 26:59](#) Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.

[Matt. 26:60](#) They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward,

[Matt. 26:61](#) and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"

[Matt. 26:62](#) The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?"

[Matt. 26:63](#) But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God."

[Matt. 26:64](#) Jesus said to him, “You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.”

- The trial of Jesus was a complicated affair involving two separate trials held in four different locations and we’re just going to introduce it today
 - First there will be a Jewish religious trial conducted by the two High Priests operating in that day
 - That trial begins in the home of the High Priest, Annas, and we learned in an earlier lesson about Annas
 - Annas had been High Priest of Israel about 30 years earlier, but had been deposed by the Romans when he failed to cooperate
 - In his place, the Romans installed their own choice as high priest, a man named Caiaphas
 - Because Annas was still alive, the Jewish people still honored him as God’s choice for high priest, even as Caiaphas ruled by Rome’s approval
 - So in that day, there were two men who could lay claim to be High Priest, and both these men wanted a turn at Jesus
 - So that meant there was a joint religious trial split between the two homes of the high priests
 - And according to John’s Gospel, the trial starts at Annas’ home and then moves to Caiaphas’ home
 - Matthew only records the second part of the trial at Caiaphas’ house, but both trials proceed in a similar way
 - Both involve multiple abuses of the Jewish justice system, including physical abuse of the prisoner and false testimony
- And following closely is Peter who watches at a distance so as not to be associated with Jesus yet wants to know what’s happening
 - So in v.58 we’re told that as the trial moves from Annas to Caiaphas, Peter gets a little more brave and enters the courtyard
 - John tells us in Chapter 18 that he helped Peter gain access
 - John was known to Caiaphas, probably through a family connection, so John was allowed access to the courtyard

- Then later, John goes back out and convinces a guard to allow Peter to enter the courtyard as well
- So Peter seats himself by some officers, and Mark tells us Peter begins to warm himself over a fire in the courtyard
 - These men may have been the same temple police who accompanied the Romans in arresting Jesus in Gethsemane
 - But in the darkness, they don't recognize Peter at first
- Meanwhile, inside the house Jesus is undergoing interrogation and the priests are calling witnesses to testify against Him
 - Under Jewish law, a court could only convict upon identical testimony from 2 or more witnesses
 - But the religious leaders were so disorganized in their conspiracy that they are having trouble finding two witnesses who agree
- Matthew says in v.60 that many false witnesses come forward to testify falsely against Jesus, and the fact that it is many means they don't agree
 - If the testimony of two witnesses had agreed, then the religious leaders would have had all the evidence they needed to convict
 - And surely at that point, they would have concluded the trial and pronounced a guilty verdict
 - But it's been a kangaroo court of one form of slander or another with no two liars able to say the same thing twice
- Then in v.60 Matthew says they finally succeeded in finding (or coaching) two witnesses to testify to exactly the same charge
 - Two men testify that Jesus claimed He was able to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days
 - One of the witnesses' statement is recorded in Matthew's Gospel and the other witnesses' statement is recorded in Mark's Gospel
 - If we compare the two statements, we find they are not exactly the same, which should have disqualified their testimony also
 - But after a night of frustration, the priest has judged it close enough to convict Jesus, and so he turns to Jesus demanding He offers defense

- In v.62, the high priest tries to goad Jesus into making an incriminating statement, which was against Jewish law
- Under Jewish law an accused was not permitted to make a statement at trial to protect them from self-incrimination
- And notice in v.63 Jesus follows Jewish law by not defending Himself at this point but remains silent
- Obviously, the Jewish authorities were not interested in justice nor worried about breaking rules to get the result they want
- Then out of frustration, Caiaphas says I adjure you by the Living God to answer my question
 - With this phrase, Caiaphas has officially placed Jesus under oath and according to Jewish law a person under oath must answer
 - So where before Jesus followed Jewish law by remaining silent, now Jesus follows Jewish law by answering the question
- And in v.64 Jesus responds under oath saying “you have said it” meaning you are speaking the truth, and in Mark’s Gospel Jesus adds “I am”
 - Jesus specifically and directly answers the question affirmatively...He is the Son of God, He is the Messiah
 - Moreover, Jesus says one day you will see Me in My glory, and in that day you will realize how true your words were
- By the way, you may have heard some scoffers think to claim that Jesus never declared Himself to be the Son of God or to be Messiah
 - They suggest that Jesus spoke of the Messiah, but He never claimed to be that Messiah
 - That’s one of the easier lies to disprove, and here’s one of several places where we find Jesus openly declaring His identity
- So after Jesus declares under oath that He is the Messiah, the high priest has heard enough, and from here the religious trial ends and the next one begins
 - The Jewish leaders can’t pronounce a death sentence on Jesus without Roman approval
 - If they tried to kill Jesus outside the temple grounds, they could be charged with murder under Roman law

- So they will hand Jesus over to the Romans while making a case for the Romans to execute Jesus for offenses under Jewish law
- But before they do that, the Jewish authorities will take their opportunity to abuse Jesus viciously while they still have Him in custody
 - This will begin Jesus' physical abuse, and before the abuse ends, Jesus will be rendered unrecognizable in appearance
 - We will study the physical effects of Jesus' torture in coming weeks
 - But more importantly, we will also study the godly purpose in Jesus receiving this treatment
- If you're one to shrink back from the troubling details of Christ's suffering or from studying the events of His passion, then I sympathize
 - But trust me when I say, there is something good for us in this study, something God intended
 - And I hope you will be with us through this study in the two remaining chapters
- Moreover, if we are to face our own trials of persecution and suffering in the way God intended, then we must learn from Jesus' own suffering
 - We need to learn from Jesus' courage, His perseverance, His godliness and His submission
 - So we study His suffering to learn from His example