



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Twenty Six

Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

As the time for Passover drew near, Jesus warned his disciples for one last time that his time had come, for the religious leaders were plotting to kill him. However, they would not arrest him openly as they feared an adverse response from the crowds that had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover.

With his public ministry now concluded, Jesus spent the Wednesday of Passion Week with friends at Bethany. He had a meal at the house of Simon the Leper, where Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointed his head with very expensive perfume. The disciples objected to what they saw as a waste of money that could have been used to help the poor but Jesus said that what she had done was to anoint him for burial; a beautiful thing for which she would be remembered forever.

One of Jesus' apostles, Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and offered to betray his master for thirty pieces of silver. They gladly accepted his offer.

On the Thursday, Jesus sent two of his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare a place for them to share in the Passover meal. Jesus and the rest of the Twelve joined them in the evening for the Last Supper, during which Jesus announced that one of those present, Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, was about to betray him to the Jewish authorities.

Towards the end of the meal Jesus broke bread, representing his own body that would be given for them, and gave it to the disciples to eat. Likewise, they drank from the same cup of wine, symbolising his blood that would be shed and the outpouring of God's wrath that he would bear on behalf of all. This marked the institution of the Lord's Supper or Communion, an ordinance to be continued in remembrance of the Lord until he returns.

Before the meal had concluded, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny even knowing his master and that all the disciples would be scattered. Peter protested vehemently that he would rather go to prison or even die than do such a thing; it would come to pass just as Jesus had said.

Later in the evening they went out of the city, across the Kidron brook and onto the Mount of Olives, to a place called the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus then took his inner core of disciples a little further, asking them to keep watch with him. He then prayed to his Father asking that the cup of suffering might pass, yet accepting to do the will of God whatever that might be. He returned from praying on three occasions, each time finding the disciples had fallen asleep, unable to watch with him for one last hour.

Judas then led an armed group of guards to Jesus, identifying him with a kiss. After brief resistance by the apostles to oppose the guards, Jesus intervened and was arrested. His disciples then deserted him.

Jesus was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, to face a hastily gathered group from the Sanhedrin. He was charged with blasphemy and a number of false witnesses were produced. In answer to a direct question about being the Messiah, Jesus answered that he was indeed the Son of Man, thus the high priest and those with him concluded wrongly that he was a blasphemer and a threat to national security, thus deserving of death.

Peter had been waiting in the outer courtyard and was challenged on three separate occasions that he was with Jesus. Just as Jesus had predicted, he denied it on each of the three occasions. When the cock crowed immediately after the third denial, Peter remembered the words of Jesus, was filled with remorse and wept bitterly.

XIV. Matthew 26:1-27:66 - The Crucified Messiah

Matthew narrates the events leading to Jesus' death:

1. The Passover and Lord's Supper with the events in Gethsemane.
2. Jesus' arrest, trials and conviction.
3. Jesus' flogging, crucifixion, death and burial.

In Matthew, the passion narrative reminds disciples in this age of the present testing until the final, end-time deliverance. Because the story of the Lord's death provides the historical record of mankind's once-for-all redemption, it reveals to everyone, in intimate detail, the concrete expression of God's love for all, as well as the awfulness of sin. At the same time, because Jesus' sacrifice became the model for that of his disciples, it invites all followers of Jesus to count the cost of discipleship in a world hostile to the purposes and agendas of a God of justice, holiness and compassion.

In one of the opening scenes of this major section, a woman played the role that women would continue to play in the accounts of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection; a foil that reveals the inadequate commitment of the male disciples. But of greater significance, her financial sacrifice provides a stark contrast to Judas' determination to profit somehow from Jesus, and his ultimate betrayal of Jesus to his enemies. That Jesus suffered at the hands of a close associate and disciple, should encourage all other disciples when they experience rejection from those they seek to help, whether inside or outside of the church. That most of the male disciples failed to stand firm should challenge many to watch and pray that they may be ready for their times of testing.

XIV.a Matthew 26:1-16 - Plot, anointing, and betrayal to the religious leaders

Jesus predicted his arrest and crucifixion, plotted by the religious leaders (vv.1-5). Matthew then recounts how Jesus was anointed at Bethany (vv.6-13), and how Judas arranged the betrayal (vv.14-16).

XIV.a.i Matthew 26:1-5 - The Plot to Kill Jesus

The feast of the Passover was approaching and Jesus knew that his time had come, so he gave his fourth and final warning to his disciples of what must be. Members of the Jewish Council were conspiring to arrest Jesus and to have him executed but they knew they must do so quietly otherwise the crowds that were in Jerusalem for the festival would no doubt have rioted against them.

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, ² ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.’

Matthew 26:1-2

When Jesus had finished saying all these things. His public ministry had ended in Jerusalem and he had given his last major discourse in teaching his disciples what they must do to be prepared for his return. He was now ready to face the primary purpose of his coming, to make a way for all people to be reconciled to God.

On the three previous occasions, Jesus had predicted his death as being some time in the future; now it was just **two days** away and his hour for suffering was at hand. He would not ask his disciples to do anything worse than he was prepared to do and there is nothing more supportive to a suffering Christian than to think of a suffering Christ.

The Passover was celebrated annually in remembrance of Israel’s exodus from Egypt under Moses’ leadership: <<***This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance***>> (Exodus 12:14). Refer to Exodus Chapter 12 for the full account of how the meal is to be prepared and eaten by the people.

Son of Man has been used frequently by Jesus throughout the Gospel and is his favourite self designation. Refer to comments made on Matthew 8:20.

Handed over to be crucified. This is the fourth and final time that Jesus predicted his arrest and crucifixion. Refer also to Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23 and 20:17-19. By adding another passion announcement here, Matthew provides a reminder that whatever the power of those who plotted against him, Jesus moved according to his Father’s providential plan and not their plans. No matter how strong the forces arrayed against God’s servants, God will ultimately fulfil his purposes. In contrast with Judas in this section (vv.14-16), Jesus obeyed God’s calling at great cost to himself and provided a model for those who would follow him.

³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, ⁴ and they conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

Matthew 26:3-4

The chief priests and the elders of the people were representatives of the Sanhedrin, the ruling body in Jerusalem, but not the full assembly of seventy men.

The palace was the private residence of the high priest, with Caiaphas the incumbent at the time of Jesus. He was high priest for nearly 18 years between AD18-36, longer than anyone else in the 1st Century (Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 18.35). He was certainly the high priest during Jesus' ministry, although he also consulted frequently with his father-in-law Annas, a former high priest.

Under the authority of Rome, the high priest and the Sanhedrin wielded significant political power as well. Because of the crowds he drew and incidents such as the commotion caused in the temple, those in power would have feared having the Romans remove their authority and thus their opulent life styles. Therefore, they needed to rid themselves of their problem as soon as possible.

An archaeological find in 1990 raised the possibility that an elaborately decorated ossuary, a box for reburying the bones of the dead, which has the name 'Joseph Caiaphas' or possibly 'Joseph, son of Caiaphas' crudely etched on its side, once contained Caiaphas' bones. This ossuary was found in a relatively modest tomb complex south of Jerusalem.



They conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. There had been many occasions where men had gathered to plot the removal of Jesus.

The ossuary with the name Caiaphas

This however was significantly different because it consisted of the high priest and many of the ruling elders, the most powerful of Jews. They were meeting in the palatial setting of the high priest's house, one of the main seats of power, although not at their normal meeting place on the Temple Mount. The chief priests were responsible for all ecclesiastical matters, whereas the elders of the people were responsible as judges of civil affairs; thus these men were highly influential and had power over the lives of ordinary Jews.

⁵ But they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.'

Matthew 26:5

The festival. Thousands of pilgrims made the annual journey to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, attendance at which was a requirement of the law for all Jewish men: <<*Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. You* New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

Matthew26-4

shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before me empty-handed. You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labour, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labour. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God>> (Exodus 23:14-17). Nationalistic fervour ran high as they recalled the liberation of their ancestors from bondage in Egypt.

There may be a riot. Popular uprisings were increasingly common especially during such feast periods, and the chief priests and elders were reluctant to arrest Jesus openly because of his popularity with the people. Despite the favourable reception of James Zebedee's execution, Herod would not have Peter killed during a later Passover festival, for he too feared the consequences: *<<About that time King Herod laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He had James, the brother of John, killed with the sword. After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (This was during the festival of Unleavened Bread). When he had seized him, he put him in prison and handed him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover>>* (Acts 12:1-4).

XIV.a.ii Matthew 26:6-13 - The Anointing at Bethany

Matthew, like Mark 14:1-11, recounts Jesus' anointing at Bethany, placing it on the Wednesday of his Passion Week and he did not appear to undertake any work that day, showing the need for even the greatest of leaders to take their version of a Sabbath rest. John places the event on the previous Saturday night just before Jesus' triumphal entry. Refer also to John 12:1-11.

⁶ Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,

Matthew 26:6

Jesus was at Bethany refers to the village of modern day El Azariyeh, which is about 2 miles or 3 km from Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Refer to comments made on Matthew 21:17 for more details.

Simon the leper had most likely been healed by Jesus, since the meal was hosted in Simon's house and those with leprosy were required to live apart from the general population, as was the case with Moses' sister: *<<When the cloud went away from over the tent, Miriam had become leprous, as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam and saw that she was leprous. Then Aaron said to Moses, 'Oh, my lord, do not punish us for a sin that we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb.' And Moses cried to the Lord, 'O God, please heal her.' But the Lord said to Moses, 'If her father had but spat in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days, and after that she may be brought in again.' So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again>>* (Numbers 12:10-15). Refer to Leviticus 14:1-32 for the ritual cleansing of a person with leprosy.

⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table.

Matthew 26:7

A woman is further identified as Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus: <<Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume>> (John 12:3). She is not the same woman who performed a similar anointing in: <<And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment>> (Luke 7:37-38). Although there are many similarities in the anointing, the account in Luke occurred during Jesus' time in Galilee, whereas this final anointing occurred in Judæa.

John writes on the Bethany occurrence: <<Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill>> (John 11:2). Some commentators have put Luke and this passage from John together to cite Mary Magdalene as the woman, claiming she was a prostitute. However, John 12:3 refutes that claim. All that is known about Mary Magdalene is that: <<Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out>> (Luke 8:1-2), which does not identify her as a prostitute at all. She went on to be a faithful servant and disciple of Jesus all the way to the Cross and she was an early witness of the Resurrection.

An alabaster jar would have been an expensive, semitransparent container that resembled marble, and was often used to store costly perfumed oils. The jars would be sealed to prevent evaporation, requiring the long neck of the jar to be broken and all of the ointment to be expended at once. Access to such costly perfume indicates that Lazarus and his sisters came from a fairly wealthy family, further indicating it was not just the poor that came to Jesus. In fact, Peter and Andrew had been boat owners and not ordinary fishermen, thus they were businessmen. James and his brother John were sons of the boat owning fisherman Zebedee, yet John at least was well connected enough to be given access to the high priest's house, in fact his Gospel states that he was known to the high priest, as will be seen in comments made on v.58.

The costly ointment is pure nard: <<While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head>> (Mark 14:3), as recently confirmed in John 12:3, which was perfume oil used for solemn acts of devotion. The aromatic pure nard oil is extracted from an Indian or Arabian root, and would have been imported as a luxury item. More common household oils were used to anoint guests, as medicine, and for other purposes.

That she poured it on his head was not unusual as it was an accepted method of anointing: <<He poured some of the anointing-oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him>> (Leviticus 8:12), <<So Jehu got up and went inside; the young man poured oil on his head, saying to him, 'Thus says the Lord the God of Israel: I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel>> (2 Kings 9:6), <<You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows>> (Psalm 23:5), and Jesus complaint to the Pharisaic host in Galilee: <<You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment>> (Luke 7:46).

Washing the feet of guests was also customary: <<So he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank>> (Judges 19:21), <<She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, 'Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord'>> (1 Samuel 25:41), **an example set by Jesus:** <<After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them>> (John 13:12-17). Therefore, John's account that Jesus' feet were anointed with oil by Mary is in keeping with his head being anointed in Matthew and Mark.

⁸ But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, 'Why this waste?' ⁹ For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.' ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, 'Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial.

Matthew 26:8-12

Why this waste? The disciples indignation is less than charitable towards this woman's act of love and devotion to her Lord, whom she was anointing as her King, the one head of her life: <<The people of Judah and the people of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head; and they shall take possession of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel>> (Hosea 1:11). No one should consider what is spent on the Lord Jesus by either themselves or others as being wasteful, whether that is their time, money or effort.

The money given to the poor, as there was wide spread poverty throughout Israel that had never truly recovered from Babylonian exile. It was a land that had been ravished by a series of wars and the heavy burden of taxation by the Romans had prevented inward investment by the land owners.

Why do you trouble the woman? On this occasion the disciples were critical of Mary's actions. On a previous visit to their home, it was her sister Martha who had been critical of Mary and Jesus who gently rebuked Martha for being so: <<*She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.'* But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her'>> (Luke 10:39-42).

What seems like a waste to the disciples, Jesus calls **a good service** or **beautiful thing**: <<*"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me"*>> (Mark 14:6 NIV). If the disciples' real concern was for the poor, there would always be an opportunity to care for the poor because they will **always have the poor** with them: <<*Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land'*>> (Deuteronomy 15:11). There would not be much further opportunity, however, for them to demonstrate their love for Jesus. Given his impending death, the anointing of Jesus' body becomes a dramatic foreshadowing of the events to come.

Jesus' statement **for you always have the poor with you** in no way deflects Jesus' love and care for the financially or spiritually poor people, and this account of Jesus' anointing should not be cited by churches in order to justify extravagant use of the money they receive in offerings. People in need will always be Jesus' highest priority and that should be evident in the way the church works.

She has prepared me for burial. In her act of devotion, Mary whether unknowingly or because she better understood Jesus' predictions than did the apostles, prepares Jesus' body for being laid to rest in the tomb. Despite the rapturous welcome, Jesus never arrived in Jerusalem to be anointed king; he came instead to be anointed in preparation for his death, the main purpose and focus of his life! Whether Mary knew she was anointing Jesus for death does not matter, the fact that Jesus interpreted it as such is what is important.

Sold for a large sum. The sale of such costly oil would have yielded more than 300 days' wages for a labourer, a full working year as they would not have worked on any Sabbath Days. Some disciples were indignant over such waste, probably instigated by the group's treasurer, Judas Iscariot: <<*But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it*>> (John 12:4-6).

¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

Matthew 26:13

What she has done will be told in remembrance of her. Jesus' words prove to be accurate as the account is told here, as well as in Mark and John. It shows that Jesus not only knew that it would be written in the Gospel accounts but that they would be taken to the whole world, and not just retold in Judæa. What she did, she did in faith: *<<And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him>>* (Hebrews 11:6), and, although it is also written: *<<Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised>>* (Hebrews 11:39), she did receive what was promised: *<<For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God>>* (2 Corinthians 1:20). Therefore, what she did for Jesus has now been read by millions of people throughout the church age and will continue to be read until the return of Christ.

XIV.a.iii Matthew 26:14-16 - Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

Immediately following the great act of love by Mary, Matthew records the greatest act of betrayal and treachery as one of the chosen apostles turns against his Master, accepting payment from the chief priests for doing so. The contrast could not be clearer.

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests

Matthew 26:14

One of the twelve. The treachery of Judas' deed is heightened by the fact that he is one of Jesus' chosen apostles. It should also be noted that he was not bribed for it was he who went to the chief priests.

A complimentary account indicates the hand of Jesus' old adversary in the treachery: *<<Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present>>* (Luke 22:3-6), although that does not negate Judas' responsibility for his actions.

¹⁵ and said, 'What will you give me if I betray him to you?' They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

Matthew 26:15-16

If I betray him to you. If Judas had not been chosen as an apostle he could never have become a betrayer. Therefore, it was always part of God's plan to include one who did not truly belong to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus did not lose him: *<<This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me'>>* (John 18:9), and: *<<While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of*

them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled>> (John 17:12).

Thirty pieces of silver. In the OT, this was the penalty paid by the owner of an ox that gored a slave to death: <<*If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slave-owner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned*>> (Exodus 21:32). Equivalent to about four months' wages for a labourer, approximately £8,000 in modern terms, this relatively meagre sum suggests the low esteem in which Jesus was held by both Judas and the chief priests. Yet it was the amount foretold by the prophet: <<*I then said to them, 'If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.' So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver*>> (Zechariah 11:12).

Look for an opportunity to betray him. Judas' treachery reveals that he was not a true believer. As an apostle, he would have had a great deal of insight into Jesus' movements and the places he would frequent when he wanted to be away from the crowds of people.

XIV.b Matthew 26:17-35 - The Passover and the Lord's Supper

Jesus and his disciples prepared for and were partakers in this final Passover meal, during which Jesus revealed his betrayer and instituted the Lord's Supper.

XIV.b.i Matthew 26:17-25 - The Passover with the Disciples

Jesus sent two disciples into Jerusalem in order to prepare a place where they could share the Passover Supper together. He gave them instructions to find a certain man who would have a room for them to eat and fellowship together.

During the supper, Jesus announced that one of them would betray him, something that astonished them and to which each asked, 'is it I?' When Judas asked the question, Jesus acknowledged that both men knew that it was him.

Despite Matthew's Gospel being the longest of the four, his coverage of the events surrounding the Last Supper are relatively brief and are almost a summary.

¹⁷ On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?'

Matthew 26:17

First day of Unleavened Bread. The Festival of Unleavened Bread lasted seven days, from Nisan 15 to 21, which is in late March or early April, depending on the lunar cycle in any given year. It is immediately preceded by the Passover, making it an eight day festival in total: <<*In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover-offering to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of the same month is the festival of unleavened bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread*>> (Leviticus 23:5-6).

Preparations for you to eat the Passover. Preparations for the Passover were made on Thursday afternoon of Nisan 14. Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover meal after sundown on Thursday evening, now Nisan 15, with Jesus instituting the

Lord's Supper later that evening. Jesus was crucified the following afternoon; now Friday but still Nisan 15.

Although he was fully God, Jesus was also fully human, brought up in Judaism: <<*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law*>> (Galatians 4:4); therefore, he would naturally have kept the statutes of God. Jesus would be executed on the day following the Passover meal, the very day that the Israelites marched out of Egypt and into freedom; true freedom for all mankind was about to come to pass. It was the time of the exodus from a world of darkness into the Kingdom of Light.

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

Matthew 26:18

Go to a certain man and say to him, I will keep the Passover at your house. Either Jesus had made prior arrangements with friends in Jerusalem in order to avoid the Jewish authorities, or the encounter was a miraculous work of God. There are no records of the former in any Gospel account.

Matthew's record of what happened this day is abbreviated and the reader would fail to recognise the significance of just what occurred here. In a comparative account it states: <<*So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.'* So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal>> (Mark 14:13-16). The whole event shows that disciples can trust Jesus in the instructions he gives them for they found things just as he said, even though there is no evidence that he had prearranged a man to be carrying a water jar, something that a woman would normally have done, or had made a room booking for the meal. It is reminiscent of what had happened with the donkey just a few days earlier, when Jesus sent two disciples on ahead into Bethany with clear instructions as to what they would find: <<*So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them*>> (Luke 19:32). Thus a donkey's colt was available for Jesus to ride into the city for his Triumphal Entry.

My time is near refers to Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection; the fulfilment of his earthly mission. His opponents wanted to arrest him long before this day but could not: <<*He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come*>> (John 8:20). It was always going to be done at an hour of God's choosing.

¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

Matthew 26:19

They prepared the Passover meal would have involved the purchase of a lamb, having it sacrificed at the temple, roasting it, preparing the room for the meal, obtaining the bitter herbs and preparing various side dishes. The wine would no doubt have been provided by the owner of the room.

²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹ and while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’ ²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’

Matthew 26:20-22

When it was evening. The Jewish day started at sundown, which was then Nisan 15, even though it was still Thursday.

One of you will betray me. Jesus dropped a bombshell during the meal and the disciples became greatly distressed, it seems not so much because one of their close fellowship would do such a treacherous thing but that they were not even sure if they would be the one to do such a thing, i.e. began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ There are things that men do that God would never contemplate: <<*And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire – which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind*>> (Jeremiah 7:31). These men may never have contemplated treachery but they were not certain they would not do such a thing in their weaknesses as men when put under pressure. Jesus, of course, always knew it would come to this: <<*But among you there are some who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him*>> (John 6:64).

²³ He answered, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.’

Matthew 26:23

The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me. The custom was to take a piece of bread or a piece of meat wrapped in bread and dip it into a common bowl of sauce containing bitter herbs that would be on the table. Each of those around the room had done so; therefore, at this point, the betrayer could have been any of the Twelve as far as eleven of them knew.

Will betray me. The height of disloyalty and betrayal is sharing a meal with a friend before turning on him: <<*Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me*>> (Psalm 41:9).

²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.’

Matthew 26:24

As it is written is a reference to the suffering servant prophecies in Isaiah Chapters 42-53, although there are many supporting references to what was about to unfold: <<*Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures*>> (Luke 24:25-27), <<*And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you'*>> (Acts 17:2-3), and: <<*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory*>> (1 Peter 1:10-11). Scripture indicates that the Son of Man's destiny included betrayal unto death, but this did not relieve the particular betrayer of his responsibility, for he would act out of personal choice and desire.

Woe to that one refers to the certainty of divine judgment that will fall upon the person who would betray Jesus. His public announcement gave Judas one last chance to repent, which he did not take. However, it must be remembered that if Judas had not betrayed Jesus then someone else would have had to do it in order for God's providential plan to be fulfilled.

²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Surely not I, Rabbi?' He replied, 'You have said so.'

Matthew 26:25

Surely not I reflects the height of his treachery. Even at this late stage, it appears Judas was hoping that his guilt would go unnoticed by Jesus, as it clearly had to the rest of his fellowship. Perhaps he was like one of whom the Psalmist writes: <<*and they say, 'The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive'*>> (Psalm 94:7); but he does see and perceive all things of the heart.

The larger group around the table address Jesus as Lord (v.22), but Judas addresses him as Rabbi, or Teacher. There is no record of Judas ever calling Jesus Lord, Greek *Kyrios*, although in earlier Hebrew language *Rabbi* could be used for Lord, changing to teacher with the institution of the rabbinic schools.

You have said so is a Greek expression that deflects responsibility back upon the one asking a question, as it does in v.64 in Jesus dialogue with the high priest at his trial. This condemnation of Judas is as explicit in its intent, as it was when the prophet passed on God's condemnation of King David for his role in having Uriah killed: <<*Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'*>> (2 Samuel 12:7a). Matthew clarifies what Mark does not make explicit, that Jesus foreknew his betrayer.

Although not made explicit, it is likely that Judas left the group around this time before Jesus would institute Communion: <<*So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night*>> (John 13:30).

XIV.b.ii Matthew 26:26-30 - The Institution of the Lord's Supper

During the meal Jesus took familiar items, the bread and the wine, and used them to symbolise the gift of his body and blood as a living sacrifice offered to God that would reconcile mankind back to their creator. By identifying his own mission with the Passover, Jesus indicated that he had come to enact the new redemption and new exodus promised by the biblical prophets.

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.'

Matthew 26:26

While they were eating. The meal was coming to an end and they would by now have consumed the sacrificial lamb. They were about to learn how the church is to remember their true Passover lamb: *<<Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed>>* (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Loaf of bread, this is my body. Jesus' body will be the once and for all time fulfilment of the ceremonies surrounding the Passover lamb and other OT sacrifices, as he would become the sacrificial atonement for the sins of all people. The significance of bread had been clearly stated on an earlier occasion when: *<<Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty>>* (John 6:36).

And after blessing it he broke it is reminiscent of Jesus feeding the multitudes: *<<Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds>>* (Matthew 14:19), and: *<<he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds>>* (Matthew 15:36). Whether miraculously feeding the crowds or offering his body for the salvation of all, Jesus always calls for God's blessing. From the beginning of time God had blessed his Sabbath to make it holy: *<<So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation>>* (Genesis 2:3), now he blessed the bread that would represent the broken body of his Son, making it even more holy.

That he broke it is symbolic that his body, although none of his bones, would be broken in the process of reconciliation. However, his Spirit would never be bowed.

Gave it to the disciples. It was the role of the head of the household to provide the explanation behind the Passover ordinances as he passed the food around to his family. Jesus was not just a teacher to these disciples, he was establishing a global family over which he would be the head, his church.

Take, eat; this is my body. Jesus had given similar instruction before: *<<I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh>>* (John 6:51). That had led to many of his disciples turning away from him as they misunderstood his teaching. Although this faithful group had remained with him, it

is unlikely they would have fully grasped what was happening until after his death and resurrection that would occur that very weekend. There are perhaps some today who do still not fully understand the significance of what Jesus taught and did for all of mankind.

Although the tradition of Passover has continued in the Jewish faith, Jesus would fulfil all the requirements of the Law on the Cross, thus rendering the tradition defunct. Jesus was to become the once for all sacrifice as atonement for the sins of all people. For all those that would believe in Jesus their personal slate would be wiped clean forever.

The expression this is my body has been the subject of varying interpretations throughout the history of the church:

- Roman Catholics understand it literally and claim that the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ, a process known as the doctrine of transubstantiation.
- Lutherans hold that the literal body and blood of Christ are present in, with and under the bread and wine in the same way water is present in a sponge.
- Some Anglicans refer to the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine.
- Most other believers have argued that the body and blood of Christ are not literally, physically or really present, but that Christ is present symbolically; most would also add that Christ is present spiritually with and in the believing recipients of the bread and wine, strengthening their faith and fellowship in him and thereby feeding their souls. Christ's spiritual presence can be supported in: <<*For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*>> (Matthew 18:20), <<*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:20b).

That the bread is Jesus' body means that it 'represents' it. Readers should interpret his words here no more literally than the disciples would have taken the normal words of the Passover liturgy: 'This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate when they came from the land of Egypt'. Even had that bread not been eaten already, one might fear it a trifle stale after some thirteen centuries! That Jesus was also in his body at the time he uttered these words further militates against interpreting the bread as literally equivalent to his actual body.

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you;

Matthew 26:27

Cup most likely refers to the third of four cups at the Passover; that is, the cup of blessing, or the cup of redemption, corresponding to God's third promise to his people: <<*Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement"*>> (Exodus 6:6).

After giving thanks he gave it to them should be a reminder to all disciples of the need to always look to God for all their needs and to thank him in faith and expectation before they are received, not waiting until afterwards.

Drink from it, all of you. This was symbolic of Jesus' blood that was to be shed and had caused uproar when he had taught on it before: <<*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink*>> (John 6:54-55). The disciples would do so on this occasion and continue to do so today, with thankful hearts for what was achieved for each of them on Calvary's Cross.

That Jesus expressly stated all of you clearly went against the tradition that came into the church for many centuries that only allowed ordained ministers to participate in communion. It was clearly Jesus' intention that all who would believe in him should participate in this act of remembrance and celebration of what it meant for all of mankind.

²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:28

This is my blood of the covenant. The cup foreshadows the shedding of Jesus' blood and the absorbing of God's wrath, which opens the way for the redemption of all peoples through the new covenant relationship with God that was promised initially to the people of Israel: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*>> (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It also signifies that many of the requirements of the old covenant law had been superseded, although of itself it too was perfect, just not achievable by mankind without the help of a mediator in God's presence. What the old covenant did was to show God's perfect faithfulness, man's unfaithfulness and the need for an intermediary to reconcile the two.

The blood of the OT had been that of domesticated animals: <<*For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you'*>> (Hebrews 9:19-20), the blood of the NT was to be that of God himself: <<*But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out*>> (John 19:33-34).

The blood of the covenant had been prophesied by a dying Jacob, even if it is symbolised through grape juice: <<*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes*>> (Genesis 49:10-11).

²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'

Matthew 26:29

Jesus said I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine because he was about to leave this world: <<*And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one*>> (John 17:11), and would have no need for even the pleasures it provides until the time of his Second Coming. He did eat with them again during the 40 days between his resurrection and ascension but that was to help strengthen their faith, not as part of a celebratory banquet: <<*While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?'*>> (Luke 24:41), <<*Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead*>> (John 21:12-14), and: <<*but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead*>> (Acts 10:40-41).

When I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom refers to the messianic banquet: <<*I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*>> (Matthew 8:11), <<*And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God'*>> (Revelation 19:9).

This is an abbreviated account of the Last Supper but it produced one of the most significant ordinances for the Christian church that all believers should participate in until Christ's return: <<*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Matthew 26:30

Sung the hymn would most likely be from the the *Hallel* (Psalms 113-118), or perhaps the last great *Hallel* psalm (Psalm 136), which are traditionally sung at Passover.

They went out to the Mount of Olives. The law required that participants in the Passover were to stay in Jerusalem until daybreak but since the Mount of Olives formed part of greater Jerusalem, Jesus was not in breach of the law: <<*You shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents*>> (Deuteronomy 16:7).

XIV.b.iii Matthew 26:31-35 - Peter's Denial Foretold

The news of Jesus' betrayal would have soured the celebrations of the Passover meal, although Jesus' blessing and explanation of the meal that introduced the Lord's Supper may have lifted spirits for a while. This was about to change once again as Jesus would not only tell his disciples that they would desert him in his hour of greatest need but that their spokesman, the faithful Peter, would even deny any knowledge of Jesus.

Yet despite their apostasy, Jesus' announcement that he would meet them again in Galilee after he had risen would be an indication that he would be reconciled to them. A disciples' walk to maturity is never straight forward and many trials must be faced until they would be reunited.

³¹ Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,

"I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

Matthew 26:31

You will all become deserters shows that it will not just be Peter but all the disciples who will forsake Jesus and run (v.56). They will not cease being his disciples, but they will fail to stand with him in the face of persecution. Jesus quoted Zechariah 13:7 to reinforce his message to them. Refer also to comments made of v.52, when this prophecy would again come to mind.

This may not be fully true of John for, after his arrest, he followed Jesus all the way into the High Priest's house, along with Peter, and is the only apostle recorded as being an eye witness at the Cross. However, all disciples have moments of weakness either when tested or simply in their daily lives, often succumbing to temptations or personal desires.

Because of me. The Cross has been a stumbling block for many, especially those who profess to be his followers yet find their calling too hard for them at times. Paul explains this: <<*For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*>> (1 Corinthians 1:22-24), and Jesus had given due warning: <<*Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks! Occasions*

for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!>> (Matthew 18:7).

³² But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.’

Matthew 26:32

After I am raised up refers to a time immediately following his resurrection, which would be discovered by the women the following Sunday morning.

I will go ahead of you to Galilee. Jesus will graciously restore the disciples back to fellowship with himself following their failure to stand. The angel at the tomb confirmed that Jesus would keep his promise: *<<But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you>> (Mark 16:7)*, although he also met with them in Jerusalem in the locked upper room on the first Sunday: *<<When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you’>> (John 20:19)*, with two disciples on the Emmaus road: *<<Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognising him>> (Luke 24:13-16)*, as well as by the lake in Galilee: *<<Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus>> (John 21:4)*. His final meeting was with them in Jerusalem before he ascended: *<<Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven>> (Luke 24:50-51)*, and: *<<While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’>> (Acts 1:4-5)*.

³³ Peter said to him, ‘Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.’ ³⁴ Jesus said to him, ‘Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.’

³⁵ Peter said to him, ‘Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And so said all the disciples.

Matthew 26:33-35

I will never desert you. Peter failed to heed Jesus’ warning and underestimated the extreme test of faith they would all soon encounter. In another account, Jesus was explicit about Satan’s role in Peter’s weakness: *<<Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat>> (Luke 22:31)*.

The cock crows was symbolic for the arrival of the day at sunrise, the day on which Jesus would be crucified. It would remain a lifelong reminder to Peter, for every morning he heard a cock crow he must have thought back to this lowest point in his life, no doubt thanking God for his subsequent restoration.

Deny me three times. This prediction was of course fulfilled and will be commented on in vv.69-75. This must have come as a real shock to Peter that his Lord would accuse him of such a thing. However, Peter had been rebuked before: <<*But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things'*>> (Mark 8:33), yet had remained faithful. Ultimately, he would prove faithful again, eventually dying for his Lord and thus his statement even though I must die with you, would prove to be said in all sincerity and truth. It was part of the terms and conditions of his discipleship: <<*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple*>> (Luke 14:26).

So said all the disciples shows they may have been swayed by Peter's bravado, for he was often their spokesman and unofficial leader. However, they were almost certainly sincere in their own belief that they would remain faithful, failing to understand what they were about to become part of or the temptation they would naturally feel to save themselves when tested: <<*My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted*>> (Galatians 6:1).

XIV.c Matthew 26:36-46 - Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Jesus experienced a time of overwhelming sorrow and distress as he faced the Cross, and he expressed this to his Father in three agonising prayers. Eleven disciples were with him although he called only his inner core to remain close by, to watch and pray; yet they would fail in this duty and fall asleep.

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'

Matthew 26:36

Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane. Although this lay outside the city wall on the Mount of Olives, Jesus and his disciples would have no trouble finding their way as Passover was always held during the full moon period, and this would light their way, just as God had intended it to: <<*God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good*>> (Genesis 1:16-18).

Gethsemane means oil press, indicating a garden area among the olive groves on the Mount of Olives, where olive oil was prepared. The traditional location of Gethsemane is now marked by the modern Church of All Nations, which was built over a 4th Century Byzantine church.



The Church of All Nations



The Garden of Gethsemane

³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’

Matthew 26:37-38

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. Once again, it would be Jesus’ inner core of disciples that would witness this intimate moment. They had been with him on other significant occasions, most notably the raising of Jairus’ daughter to life: <<*He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James*>> (Mark 5:37), and his transfiguration: <<*Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves*>> (Matthew 17:1).

I am deeply grieved, even to death. Jesus had spoken earlier in the week of how he was troubled by what he would face: <<*Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour*>> (John 12:27). Now that the time was fast approaching, his human emotion was magnified.

Grieved is the Greek word *ademunein*, which signifies such a sorrow as makes a man neither fit for company nor desiring it. King David had felt similar emotions and described them: <<*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast*>> (Psalm 22:14), and perhaps Jonah’s despair inside the great fish: <<*Then I said, “I am driven away from your sight; how shall I look again upon your holy temple?” The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head*>> (Jonah 2:4-5).

Stay awake with me. Jesus asked his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James and John, to share with him this agonising time of anticipation and sorrow as he faced the Cross. This is not like his call for the church to remain awake for his Second Coming; this was Jesus the man in need of support from those closest to him - a prime responsibility for those in church.

³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’

Matthew 26:39

Going a little farther. Although Jesus wanted his disciples close by at this time, he also wanted some time to be alone in prayer to his Father. Martin Luther wrote on the need and benefits of prayer in solitude, *'It is useful to pray apart; for then the faithful soul develops itself more familiarly, and with greater simplicity pours forth its petitions, groans, cares, fears, hopes and joys, into the bosom of God'*. There are also times when it is good to pray together, such as the church celebrating the release of John and Peter after their trial before the Sanhedrin: *<<After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant: "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah." For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'* When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness>> (Acts 4:23-31), and in similar fashion when Peter was in prison: *<<While Peter was kept in prison, the church prayed fervently to God for him>> (Acts 12:5)*. These were just two occasions where God has honoured corporate prayer.

Threw himself on the ground or fell on his face. In this typical posture of abject humility in prayer, Jesus laid his life before his Father in complete honesty and surrender. This is what has been termed his reverent submission: *<<In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission>> (Hebrews 5:7)*. Jesus was facing the most severe temptation of his life, at the moment when he was ready to accomplish the culmination of his life's mission, to bear the sins of the world and the consequential wrath that sin deserves, which is what this cup signifies.

The cup in Scripture is symbolic of one's divinely determined destiny, whether blessing: *<<The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot>> (Psalm 16:5)*, or disaster: *<<For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it>> (Jeremiah 25:15)*; salvation: *<<I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord>> (Psalm 116:13)*, or wrath: *<<Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering>> (Isaiah 51:17)*. Here it refers to Jesus' forthcoming suffering: *<<He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want'>> (Mark 14:36)*.

Yet not what I want but what you want. Jesus had always performed the will of the Father: <<Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day>> (John 6:37-39), including being willing to lay down his life: <<For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father>> (John 10:17-18).

⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?’
⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’

Matthew 26:40-41

Found them sleeping. Their temptation was to succumb to physical sleep and so fail in their responsibility to support Jesus. It may point also to the temptation to deny Jesus when he is led away to the Cross, as foretold in vv.31-35.

He said to Peter, ‘So could you not stay awake with me one hour?’ If staying awake on this one night was a test, the disciples failed it. Peter undoubtedly came in for special rebuke because he had most vehemently pledged his faithfulness, even until death (v.33). However, this seems more of a plea than an admonition given the situation. Jesus also knew of the benefits to them had they stayed awake and held their own time of prayer, for Jesus had not been alone, he had been in his Father’s presence, who had sent an angel to support and serve him in this time of need: <<Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength>> (Luke 22:43).

Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial. Their time of trial or temptation was to succumb to physical sleep, partly due to their emotional experience, and partly due to the wine consumed at the supper, and thus fail in their responsibility to support their Lord and teacher. The fact they would soon desert Jesus was all part of this same period of testing.

The sixth and final petition of ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ (Matthew 6:9-13), addresses the disciples’ battle with sin and evil. The word translated ‘time of trial’ can indicate either temptation or testing. The meaning there most likely carries the sense ‘Allow us to be spared from difficult circumstances that would tempt us to sin’. Although God never directly tempts believers: <<No one, when tempted, should say, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one>> (James 1:13), he does sometimes lead them into situations that test them. In fact, trials, hardship and persecution will inevitably come into believers’ lives: <<Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted>> (2 Timothy 3:12), and believers should: <<consider it nothing but joy>> (James 1:2b), when trials do come, for they are strengthened by them. Nevertheless, believers should never pray to be brought into such situations; they should always pray to be delivered from them, for hardship and temptation make obedience more difficult and will

sometimes result in sin. Believers should pray to be delivered from temptation and led in: <<*paths of righteousness*>>, in accordance with Psalm 23:3b (ESV).

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. This refers to the purpose of the human spirit versus the weakness of mortal humanity. Paul recognised this in himself: <<*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin*>> (Romans 7:25); which is a contrast between God's Spirit and human flesh. In his fully human nature, Jesus could speak these words from experience, thus he had asked for the cup to pass from him (v.39). Jesus had to be tested in order to fulfil his role in the church: <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus clearly had compassion for his disciples and it seems that, throughout history, he has cared more for his followers than many of them have cared for him. He took into account the weakness of the flesh and demonstrated the nature of his own meekness: <<*Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again*>> (Psalm 78:38-39). What their failure also reminds us is that they were fallible human beings just as we are and not some super spiritual people whom God would use because they had earned his favour. Their failings and subsequent forgiveness also gives us hope in that we do not have to pass every test, although we should always seek the help of the Holy Spirit and try to resist all weakness and sin.

⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.'⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

Matthew 26:42-44

He went away for the second time and prayed. A parallel account speaks of the depth of emotion in his prayers. Jesus was actually agonising in prayer: <<*In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground*>> (Luke 22:44), a condition known as hematidrosis, where extreme anguish or physical strain causes one's capillary blood vessels to dilate and burst, mixing sweat and blood.

If this cannot pass unless I drink it. Jesus knew in his heart that his death had to come about in the manner in which the counsel of God had ordained it, otherwise the world could not be reconciled to him: <<*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*>> (John 12:24).

Your will be done. Being fully human, Jesus experienced the full human dread of death; because the Son is distinct from the Father, his own desire might differ from the Father's, although he was ready to submit to the Father. Jesus' obedience is thus an example for all disciples. Loving God does not always mean

that disciples want to face what God calls them to face; it does mean that they choose to face it anyway. Thus when the test arrives, Jesus summons all his disciples to rise to face it, whether they are ready to or not.

Prayed for the third time, saying the same words does not contradict Jesus' teaching against the empty phrases that he had spoken against: <<*When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words*>> (Matthew 6:7); this was earnest repetition expressing the deep longing of his heart. The apostles saw no harm in repeating their teaching or offering reminders of things already known: <<*Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God*>> (Romans 15:15), and: <<*Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard*>> (Philippians 3:1), as does the Lord's brother: <<*Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe*>> (Jude 5). The Lord himself reminded his disciples of what he had been teaching them: <<*Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also*>> (John 15:20).

There are other biblical instances of repetition in prayer: <<*And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory'*>> (Isaiah 6:3), <<*Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me*>> (2 Corinthians 12:8), <<*And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come'*>> (Revelation 4:8).

⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

Matthew 26:45-46

Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Luke records it from a different perspective: <<*When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief*>> (Luke 22:45), for it had been a long day and the disciples were emotionally and physically exhausted. They would also have consumed no small amount of wine at Passover. 'Sleeping for grief' or sorrow appears only in Luke, giving further insight to the stress the disciples were experiencing, having learned all that Jesus had told them that evening as recorded in John Chapters 13-16. Paul notes: <<*as it is written, 'God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day'*>> (Romans 11:8), and Jesus had warned that the church could still be asleep when he returns: <<*As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept*>> (Matthew 25:5).

In one of King David's times of testing in a very similar location, he and his supporters wept together: <<*But David went up the ascent of the Mount of*

Olives, weeping as he went, with his head covered and walking barefoot; and all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went>> (2 Samuel 15:30), but the Son of David was left to weep alone during his own trial.

The hour is at hand indicates that Jesus' destiny with the Cross was upon him. Yet there was still much disgrace, hardship and pain to be faced before that with the trials, mocking, beatings and floggings that would precede his execution.

My betrayer is at hand shows that Jesus sensed this would be the location to which Judas would lead the soldiers. This may have been divine insight or just human logic as it was a secluded place away from habitation where Jesus had no doubt brought the disciples before for private teaching. As it was a large armed group that was coming for him and, despite the moonlight, using torches to light their way no doubt, it could be that Jesus could hear or even see their approach from some distance away.

XIV.d Matthew 26:47-56 - The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and the temple guards arrested him. In this passage everyone who was close to Jesus, from Judas to the disciples who planned to follow him to death, either betrayed or abandoned him to his opponents. As Jesus faced injustice alone as a victim, he demonstrated the depth of his love: when not another human being stood with him, the Lord nevertheless continued in the Father's plan to save humankind.

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

Matthew 26:47

Matthew emphasises Judas' treachery by referring to him as one of the twelve. Although in many ways it was not Judas but his old adversary Satan that led them out: <<*After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'Do quickly what you are going to do'*>> (John 13:27), although Jesus had no fear of Satan or man: <<*Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out*>> (John 12:31).

A large crowd may have consisted of a detachment of Roman soldiers assigned by Pilate to the temple for security, for they were carrying swords, something forbidden for Jews to do openly. There were also Levitical temple police and personal security guards of the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin, i.e. the elders of the people, who were permitted to carry clubs.

⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.'

Matthew 26:48

The betrayer had given them a sign. Although the Jewish authorities and indeed many of the ordinary people would have readily recognised Jesus, it may be that the temple guards and certainly not the Roman soldiers would have been as

familiar with him. In the darkness there was to be no mistake as to who it was they were going to arrest.

The kiss represented a sign of respect, love and devotion. It was a customary way for friends or family in ancient and modern Israel to greet one another: <<*Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son'*>> (Genesis 27:26), but now it became the means of betrayal.

⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him.

Matthew 26:49

As recorded in comments made on v.25, when Jesus challenged his disciples over betrayal, it was Judas who had called him Rabbi then, whereas the others had called him specifically Lord.

Kissed him. Elsewhere, Jesus responded to Judas' act of treachery: <<*While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'*>> (Luke 22:47-48).

⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

Matthew 26:50

Friend represents the Greek word *hetairos*, implying not the closeness and affection of the usual word for friend, *philos*, but only an acquaintance or association. It was used previously by Jesus in parables concerning someone who had taken advantage of a privileged relationship, such as the disgruntled vineyard worker: <<*But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?"*>> (Matthew 20:13), and the uninvited wedding guest: <<*and he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" And he was speechless*>> (Matthew 22:12).

Laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Some of what happened to Jesus during the rest of the night is recorded in the Gospel accounts but it appears not all, for tradition has it that he attended two trials before the Sanhedrin, one immediately following his arrest and one in the early hours of the morning before being taken to Pilate. In between this time he was held in a drain, a deep pitch black covered pit into which he would have been lowered. Thus the words of Jeremiah were fulfilled: <<*The Lord's anointed, the breath of our life, was taken in their pits – the one of whom we said, 'Under his shadow we shall live among the nations'*>> (Lamentations 4:20).

⁵¹ Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Matthew 26:51

Put his hand on his sword. The disciples had only a small supply of arms for their defence: <<*They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.'* He replied, *'It is enough'*>> (Luke 22:38), and when the time came requested permission to use force to protect Jesus and themselves: <<*When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?'*>> (Luke 22:49).

It was likely the Roman short sword called a *gladius* that could be hidden under a person's garment, as it was illegal to openly carry a weapon. Although this was probably overlooked by the Romans if it was used for general protection against robbers.

One of those with Jesus has been identified as Peter: <<*Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to*



The Gladius - a Roman short sword

Peter, 'Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?'>> (John 18:10-11), which also names the slave of the high priest. He was immediately healed by Jesus: <<*Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him*>> (Luke 22:50-51), both out of compassion and in order to take the heat out of this volatile situation.

Although Peter had asked for permission to defend his Lord, showing great courage in doing so due to the overwhelming odds against the apostles, it appears he did not wait for a reply but jumped straight into action; once again he received a rebuke, albeit a mild one.

With regard to cutting off his ear, the short sword that Peter would have carried was for stabbing not slicing, thus it is considered a possibility that Peter intended to kill the man with a lethal blow to the head, but the servant was able to evade the blow, suffering only the loss of his ear.

Peter would later come to realise that his use of violence was an issue of mindset and that he did not need to use an actual sword in defence of the Gospel: <<*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God*>> (1 Peter 4:1-2), or as Paul writes: <<*Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The sword of God is his Word: <<*Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which*

is the word of God>> (Ephesians 6:17), and: <<*From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty*>> (Revelation 19:15).

⁵² Then Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’

Matthew 26:52

Put your sword back. True disciples of Jesus do not seek to advance or impose God’s will on others through violent means. Jesus knew this was not the time to oppose those who sought his death and it is likely Peter would have known it too, for Jesus had quoted a Scripture earlier in the evening that would have alluded to this very moment. The disciples would have known the full prophecy to read: <<‘*Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,*’ says the Lord of hosts. *Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones*>> (Zechariah 13:7). Refer also to v.31.

For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. This was neither the time nor the manner for this group of disciples to meet their end. They had work to do in taking the Gospel to the world and Jesus needed to preserve their lives at this time in order for them to fulfil their calling. Jesus had asked for God to protect them and knew that he would answer that prayer: <<*And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one*>> (John 17:11).

Another aspect of Jesus forbidding his disciples from avenging themselves with violence is summed up by Paul: <<*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’*>> (Romans 12:19). God did indeed use the Roman sword to avenge his Son when he had them destroy the temple and drive the Jews from Jerusalem in AD70. In his revelation about the beast to come, Jesus would have it made known that: <<*If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go; if you kill with the sword, with the sword you must be killed. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints*>> (Revelation 13:10). This too was a time for the endurance and faith of these first disciples; a time of severe testing was coming upon them.

⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Matthew 26:53

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father. Even at this late stage, Jesus could have been released from his mission but he would have to have done so at the cost of the reconciliation of humankind to God. That was a price he was not willing to pay, showing just how great God’s love truly is. It should be noted that he had the choice! According to Rob Bell, ‘Love wins’.

Twelve legions of angels would number 72,000 if based on Roman legions that would normally have had 6,000 soldiers at full strength. It shows that one or two swords were of no consequence compared with the forces that Jesus could have mustered had it been the Father's will to have the cup pass from his Son. Jesus may have had to submit to death in weakness but he did so willingly from a position of great strength: <<*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again*>> (John 10:17).

Indeed, Jesus may not even have needed to call on the angels to protect him had he so desired, for elsewhere it is recorded that those coming to arrest him fell involuntarily to the ground when simply faced with his presence: <<*Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, 'For whom are you looking?' They answered, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus replied, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I am he', they stepped back and fell to the ground*>> (John 18:4-6).

⁵⁴ But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Matthew 26:54-56

It must happen in this way for that was what was ordained by the Counsel of God before the creation of the world. Therefore it is the will of God that it should happen that way. All those present when Paul said he was prepared to face death in Jerusalem as well had said: <<*The Lord's will be done*>> (Acts 21:14b).

Day after day I sat in the temple teaching. The fact that Jesus taught openly in the temple, whereas bandits would have operated clandestinely, shows that he was not a revolutionary in the sense they were meaning, although he was the greatest revolutionary to have ever lived in its purest form. Jesus here offers a severe rebuke to his captors and their employers, although he would offer no further resistance to being taken captive by them, thus it was later claimed that: <<*You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you*>> (James 5:6). The real reason why they had come to arrest him in this way was that the religious leaders feared the very people they were supposed to represent and serve: <<*When the scribes and chief priests realised that he had told this parable against them, they wanted to lay hands on him at that very hour, but they feared the people*>> (Luke 20:19).

The scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled. Their scheme had been predicted in the Scriptures of the prophets, especially Psalm 22, Isaiah Chapter 53, and Zechariah Chapters 12-13. Refer to Jesus use of Zechariah 13:7 in v.31 and the allusion to it in v.52.

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled, although Peter and John would follow at a distance back into the city and to the house of the high priest. For the disciples of a teacher to abandon him under any circumstances would have brought shame on the teacher in their culture. From this point on until his death on the Cross, Jesus would endure much shame that would only enhance his personal suffering and raise the cost of this most remarkable act of love and devotion.

XIV.e Matthew 26:57-27:10 - The Jewish trial of Jesus

Matthew narrates the events surrounding the trial of Jesus by the Jewish authorities: his stand before the Sanhedrin (vv.57-68), Peter's denials (vv.69-75), the condemnation and deliverance of Jesus to Pilate (Matthew 27:1-2), and Judas' remorse and suicide (Matthew 27:3-10).

XIV.e.i Matthew 26:57-68 - Jesus before the High Priest

Jesus was brought before some of the Sanhedrin, sufficient in number no doubt to make the meeting quorate. It is unlikely that these 1st Century aristocrats were as concerned with legal procedure as later rabbis were. It is also unlikely that they would have agreed with all the careful stipulations of later rabbinic legal theories.

Perhaps of greatest significance, the Gospel writers probably intended to convey breach of procedure, and not to give the impression that the mock trial and abuse they depict were standard Jewish custom. However, based on what is known of 1st Century Jerusalem leadership practice, the portrait of Jesus' trial in the Gospel accounts actually fits quite well. The Romans usually executed only those brought to them as condemned by the local aristocracies.

⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered.

Matthew 26:57

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest. Since Jesus was arrested on the Mount of Olives, he would have been led back into the city via the Sheep's Gate, the way that sheep to be slaughtered for sacrifice would have been brought in from the open field to be presented to the priest prior to being sacrificed: <<*This is in order that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and offer them as sacrifices of well-being to the Lord*>> (Leviticus 17:5). Yet this was: <<*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*>> (John 1:29b).

The house of Caiaphas the high priest was likely a palatial mansion, probably on the eastern slope of the upper city of Jerusalem, overlooking the temple area (Josephus, Jewish War 2.426). This was not the normal meeting place for the Sanhedrin, who would normally hold counsel on the Temple Mount.

Josephus' depiction of a high priest's house has suggested to some scholars the possibility of identifying Caiaphas' house with some residences amid the wealthy Roman-era houses excavated on Mount Zion. Others contend for the traditional site of Caiaphas' house beneath Saint Peter of the Cockcrow Church toward the base of Mount Zion.



The traditional house of the High Priests Saint Peter of the Cockcrow Church

58 But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.

Matthew 26:58

Peter was following him at a distance and was accompanied by John: <<Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in>> (John 18:15-16). Some commentators claim Peter was brave to follow his Lord into such an environment; others that it was foolish, for it placed him outside of God's influence when his time of testing would come upon him. David had said: <<Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers>> (Psalm 1:1); Peter was in with the scoffers and the trap for his denial of Jesus was set.

59 Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward

Matthew 26:59-60

The whole council, or Sanhedrin, need not denote all 70 members but may just indicate those hastily assembled in the middle of the night, since 23 members made a quorum. It is likely that the majority, if not all, of those present were the aristocratic Sadducees.

Sanhedrin is the Greek *synedrion*, and could refer either to a local Jewish tribunal, e.g. council: <<But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire>> (Matthew 5:22), or courts: <<Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison>> (Matthew 5:25), or as here to the supreme ecclesiastical court or council of the Jews, based in Jerusalem. The Romans were ultimately

in control of all judicial proceedings but allowed their subjects some freedom to try their own cases.

Under Jewish law it was illegal to hold trials during the hours of darkness. Neither would such a trial normally be held on the eve of a Sabbath or festival day. That the leaders were looking for false testimony against Jesus was nothing less than despicable and surely they must have realised they would face the wrath of God for doing so. However, since the majority Sadducees did not believe in the next life, they probably had little fear of God's wrath in this one.

The whole council tried to find false witnesses who would credibly testify that Jesus had violated the law, so that they could find him guilty as quickly as possible. Using false witnesses itself violated the law: <<*If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you*>> (Deuteronomy 19:16-20), something the Pharisees would not have tolerated, despite their own opposition to Jesus.

Had the Pharisees been present, they would normally have insisted on at least one full day between the trial and any sentence being passed, allowing time for prayer and reflection. The whole trial was a sham and they cared not that they were mocking God in holding it at all.

The High Priest was *Abbethdin*, the father of the house of judgment, but he had become the patron of wickedness; his house should have been the sanctuary of oppressed innocence, but it had become the throne of iniquity; and no wonder, when even God's house of prayer was made a den of thieves: <<*He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you are making it a den of robbers'*>> (Matthew 21:13). Solomon wrote: <<*Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well*>> (Ecclesiastes 3:16).

⁶¹ and said, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days."' ⁶² The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?'

Matthew 26:61-62

Have you no answer? Despite their disregard for Jewish legal procedure so far, the high priest did acknowledge the defendant's right to speak for himself, although Jesus would choose to forego that right. He was innocent of all and any charges, before any human or even the celestial court, yet he would submit in silence to the findings of this sham trial.

I am able to destroy the temple of God. This saying was misquoted and taken out of context from: <<*Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'* The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he

was speaking of the temple of his body>> (John 2:19-21), and was easily distorted by Jesus' opponents.

⁶³ But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.'

Matthew 26:63

That Jesus was silent fulfilled prophecy: <<*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*>> (Isaiah 53:7), and places the responsibility for his death squarely on his accusers who were fleecing him by their corrupt judgement. He also remained silent as he did not want to refuse their punishment: <<*the punishment that made us whole*>> (Isaiah 53:5c), that his proved innocence would have allowed him to avoid. Instead, he would leave it for his blood to speak: <<*and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel*>> (Hebrews 12:24).

I put you under oath before the living God was a command that Jesus would not refuse for it would bring his Father's name into disrepute not to honour it by answering.

Tell us if you are the Messiah. This is a question that had been asked before: <<*So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'* Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me'>> (John 10:24-25). Caiaphas did not ask the question in order to hear the truth, for he would never accept that Jesus was the Messiah. Caiaphas wanted Jesus to admit to this charge so that he can be accused of insurrection against Rome by claiming to be a king in opposition to Cæsar, for which he could be tried before Pilate on a charge of treason, a capital crime, for the Jews could not put him to death even if he were guilty of blasphemy; only the Roman governor Pilate had the authority to pass the death sentence: <<*Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.'* The Jews replied, 'We are not permitted to put anyone to death'>> (John 18:31).

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you,

From now on you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven.'

Matthew 26:64

You have said so. This seems reluctant affirmation from Jesus, although it is a Greek expression placing responsibility back on the one asking the question as in v.25, when Judas had asked whether Jesus thought he was the traitor. Here, no doubt, it was the wording of the high priest's question, or more likely its purpose, that Jesus objected to. However, he went on to clarify who he really was, once again using Scripture as evidence.

From now on shows that Jesus' reign in his Kingdom commenced there and then and not at some future point associated with his Second Coming. The rule of God's Kingdom had come to earth and would never come to an end.

Jesus declares that he is not only the human Messiah anticipated by the Jews but also the divine Son of Man: <<*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed*>> (Daniel 7:13-14 ESV), who is seated at the right hand of Power, i.e. God the Father: <<*The Lord says to my lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.' The Lord sends out from Zion your mighty sceptre. Rule in the midst of your foes*>> (Psalm 110:1-2), and who will be seen coming on the clouds of heaven in power to reign over the earth. Yet another messianic prophecy was being fulfilled in their presence: <<*See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high*>> (Isaiah 52:13).

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy.'

Matthew 26:65

The spirit of Jewish law opposed condemning a criminal on his own admission, but the Sanhedrin treated Jesus' words here not as an admission of a crime but as the crime itself, blasphemy, to which they themselves were witnesses, obviating the need for other witnesses. Although the spirit of Jewish law prohibited witnesses from participating in sentencing the accused, here the court acted as both witness and judge.

Tore his clothes. Although this was the normal response for a Jew hearing blasphemy, it was something expressly prohibited for the high priest to do: <<*And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, 'Do not dishevel your hair, and do not tear your vestments, or you will die and wrath will strike all the congregation; but your kindred, the whole house of Israel, may mourn the burning that the Lord has sent*>> (Leviticus 10:6), and: <<*The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing-oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the vestments, shall not dishevel his hair, nor tear his vestments*>> (Leviticus 21:10), but this astounding claim by Jesus evoked a vehement response.

Although his actions may be understandable from his viewpoint that this was blasphemy, it was still an ordinance from God not to do so on punishment of death, showing how seriously God viewed such actions.

You have now heard his blasphemy is a reference to Jesus' claim of divine status as the Son of Man and was the worst possible crime in the eyes of any pious Jew.

⁶⁶ 'What is your verdict?' They answered, 'He deserves death.'

Matthew 26:66

If Jesus had been lying by claiming to be divine, then indeed he deserves death from the standpoint of the Jewish law: <<*A man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian came out among the people of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a certain Israelite began fighting in the camp. The Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name in a curse. And they brought him to Moses – now his mother's name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan – and they put him in custody, until the decision of the Lord should be made clear to them. The Lord said to Moses, saying: Take the blasphemer outside the camp; and let all who were within hearing lay their hands on his head, and let the whole congregation stone him. And speak to the people of Israel, saying: Anyone who curses God shall bear the sin. One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death*>> (Leviticus 24:10-16). The irony is that Jesus would be executed for telling the truth: <<*Pilate asked him, 'So you are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.'* Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?'>> (John 18:37-38).

⁶⁷ Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him,
⁶⁸ saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?'

Matthew 26:67-68

They spat in his face and struck him. The Jewish leaders' physical abuse of Jesus, and their mocking question who is it that struck you, demonstrated their disbelief in his prophetic gifts and thus their scorn for his claims to divinity (v.64). Their despicable actions were in the same way that their forefathers had treated God's prophets, such as: <<*Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, slapped him on the cheek, and said, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?'*>> (1 Kings 22:24), and once again fulfilled messianic prophecy: <<*I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting*>> (Isaiah 50:6), and the observations of Jeremiah: <<*to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults*>> (Lamentations 3:30), and Micah: <<*with a rod they strike the ruler of Israel upon the cheek*>> (Micah 5:1b).

Whatever else may have been illegal, the physical mistreatment of a prisoner certainly was; this would have shamed Jesus as well, for such treatment was more than inappropriate to the status he had claimed, let alone for the status as a teacher from God that at least many people accepted: <<*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God'*>> (John 3:1-2).

From the condemnation of Jesus as God's Son (vv.63-68), to the centurion's recognition that Jesus really is God's Son (Matthew 27:54), the dominant Christological title became the 'King of the Jews'. This title constitutes a

double irony: those who apply it intend it ironically, but the Gospel tradition inverts the irony so that they have described him accurately. God's irony is vital; even in the deepest of trials, God provides hints of his coming triumph to those with the eyes of faith. If Jesus accurately prophesied his hardships, one can likewise depend on the victory he promised.

XIV.e.ii Matthew 26:69-75 - Peter's Denial of Jesus

The prophesied denial of his teacher and Lord by Peter came to pass in just the manner it had been described just a few hours previously. By including the denial account, Matthew warns disciples against apostasy in the face of persecution. By placing two responses to betrayal side by side, Matthew also points out how disciples should respond to failures of their discipleship. Peter wept with remorse (v.75); Judas killed himself (Matthew 27:5). Only the former was able to be reconciled to Jesus.

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, 'You also were with Jesus the Galilæan.'

⁷⁰ But he denied it before all of them, saying, 'I do not know what you are talking about.'

Matthew 26:69-70

Peter was sitting outside. Peter had demonstrated courage by his presence in that hostile environment, but it failed him when his own personal safety was threatened.

A servant-girl was about the lowest position in all of society and there are some commentators who criticise Peter's cowardice before her, but the reality is she was on the one posing the question with many others present for he denied it before all of them. Even disciples who have remained faithful to Jesus should not be judgemental of Peter for no one really understands the situation he faced. Anyway, the command from Jesus is clear: <<*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged*>> (Matthew 7:1).

⁷¹ When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, 'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' ⁷² Again he denied it with an oath, 'I do not know the man.'

Matthew 26:71-72

An oath was probably not profanity but calling upon something sacred, e.g. God's name: <<*So whoever swears by the altar, swears by it and by everything on it; and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the one who dwells in it; and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the one who is seated upon it*>> (Matthew 23:20-22), in order to guarantee that what one said was true. Jesus warned against making such oaths, as they called into question one's ordinary truthfulness and integrity: <<*Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his*>>

footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one>> (Matthew 5:33-37).

⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.'

Matthew 26:73

Your accent betrays you. All the apostles except Judas were from Galilee, and the Judæans in Jerusalem looked down on Galilæans, and not just for their regional pronunciations.

⁷⁴ Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, 'I do not know the man!' At that moment the cock crowed.

Matthew 26:74

He began to curse, and he swore an oath. Despite the comments made on vv.71-72, there are commentators who believe these to be profanities, spoken either to deflect attention away from the charges or because of his own weakness in denying Jesus. However, some believe he was likely calling upon God's wrath to strike him if he was lying, which he was of course, perhaps hoping for mercy from God in not fulfilling the oath.

⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

Matthew 26:75

Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said. Luke portrays either a literal, or more likely a metaphorical situation, where Jesus was able to look straight at Peter at this moment: <<*The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times'*>> (Luke 22:61). This look from Jesus could mean many things: anger; resentment; disappointment; an 'I told you so' look; pity; or sorrow; but most likely it was done with grace, love and forgiveness. This was probably one of the key turning points in Peter's ministry.

Before the cock crows. Each morning cockerels crow a number of times, separated by a few minutes. In Luke, Jesus simply states: <<*the cock will not crow this day*>> (Luke 22:34b). However, in Mark 14:30 he specifies the first two individual crowings, confirmed again in Mark 14:72. Here, Matthew, like John, refers to the entire time of several crowings. The key point is not the cock but Peter's denial.

The sound of the rooster brought Jesus' prophecy directly to Peter's mind and the magnitude of what he had just done must have pierced his heart just as his own *gladius* would have done. Therefore, inconsolable, he went out and wept bitterly.

This genuine sign of remorse was to be the first stage of his reconciliation that would be completed on the shore of the Sea of Galilee about two weeks later: <<When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me'>> (John 21:15-19).