

“The Arrest of Jesus”
Sermon Series – The Cross #2
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(Mk. 14:41-52)

Introduction.

Have you ever been arrested or found yourself on the wrong side of the law? I have, and it was one of the most frightening experiences of my life. When I was in high school, I made a very poor decision when school was canceled on a rare snow day in Atlanta, and some friends and I hotwired some golf carts at a country club and took them for a joy ride on the snow. There was a silent alarm on the shed which notified the police, and it wasn't long before we were apprehended.

The police handcuffed us, put us in a patrol car, and they took us downtown to the Atlanta city jail. It was a frightening place to be for a middle-class kid who had never been in trouble before. We were fingerprinted and booked, and I was taken up to the 7th floor of the Atlanta city jail where I was put in a cell with three men who were criminals. I remember the guard closing the door and hearing it lock. I had completely lost my freedom, and it was one of the scariest nights of my life.

Eventually I was bailed out early the next morning, and my parents and an attorney worked very hard to have the charges dropped and the arrest expunged from my record. The officials at the country club wanted to make an example of us boys, and they wanted to frighten any other teenagers from trying something foolish like that again. It worked. We paid for the repairs to all the golf carts and the shed, and we learned our lesson. And you better bet that the next time someone had a dumb idea and suggested we do something stupid like that again, I spoke up. I never wanted to be arrested again.

Because of that experience in high school, I have always had a special appreciation for the part of the story of the passion of Christ which talks about His arrest. I can identify the feelings of panic He experienced that night, the fear that came from losing His freedom, and the anxiety Jesus must have felt as He headed to court.

However, there is a world of difference between a middle-class white kid being arrested for hotwiring a golf cart and taking it for a joy ride on the snow and being arrested for sedition and insurrection and facing execution by the Roman empire. My record was expunged; Jesus ended up on a cross. I was set free; He was tortured and crucified. I can't even imagine the pain and fear of what He went through – and all this for me.

As we study the arrest of Jesus, I want you to give careful attention to the various characters in this drama. Notice that Jesus is the one who appears to be in charge, and far from being a victim, it seems that in some ways He orchestrates the events that led to His death. He is resolute and determined in making His way to the cross of Calvary where He would die for you and me.

I. The Setting.

The setting for Jesus' arrest is the garden of Gethsemane. I have been to that garden in Jerusalem, and I have seen the olive trees there, some of which are now over 2,000 years old. They were there when Christ was in that garden. The Bible tells us that when Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn after the Last Supper, they left the upper room and walked through the streets of Jerusalem in the stillness of the night. In the soft light of the Paschal moon, they crossed the Kidron Valley and began to climb the Mount of Olives.

As they walked along, Jesus and His disciples turned off into an olive orchard named "Gethsemane." The name means "oil press," and it was evidently a favorite retreat for Jesus, because the gospel John says that Jesus "*had often met there with His disciples*" (18:2).

After arriving at the garden, Jesus left the other disciples behind, and He urged them to watch and pray. Then the Lord took Peter, James and John, the inner circle of His three disciples, a little farther into the olive grove with Him, and there He fell to the ground and began to pray.

Luke uses the word *agonia*, from which we get our English word "agony," to describe what Jesus was going through. Matthew and Mark share two expressions which speak of trouble of soul and despondency. Mark uses another word of his own, which is translated "deeply distressed" in verse 33. It's a term which can also mean "horror-struck" or "alarmed dismay." Put together these expressive words indicate that Jesus was feeling acute emotional pain which caused Him to sweat profusely as He looked with apprehension and almost terror at what lay ahead of Him.

II. The Betrayer.

Earlier that evening at the Last Supper as Jesus and the disciples celebrated the Passover feast, Christ startled the Twelve by saying, "*One of you will betray me.*" Judas had already received the 30 pieces of silver from the chief priests as a reward for his promised deed, and yet he had the audacity to say, "*Surely not I, Rabbi?*" (Mt. 26:25). Later that night Judas served as a guide for the detachment of soldiers from the temple police to arrest Jesus, and he identified Christ to those who had come to seize him.

What caused Judas to betray Jesus? Some have speculated that it was injured pride, or disappointed ambition. Perhaps it was financial greed, or a fear of being put out of the synagogue? Maybe all of these things were involved at some level, but I think the most basic reason he did it was because Judas couldn't reconcile his selfish heart with the unselfish and magnanimous love of Jesus. Scripture tells us that Judas was unable or unwilling to understand the selfless and beautiful sacrifice of Mary of Bethany who broke the expensive jar of perfume and anointed Jesus' feet with it. In his criticism of the act, Judas couldn't comprehend such a lavish demonstration of love as being a good thing.

We're also told that Judas was entrusted with the job of being the treasurer for the disciples' common purse, and that he stole from it regularly. The chasm between Judas' selfishness and Jesus' sacrificial loving spirit was so great that either Judas had to give himself wholly and completely to Christ, or he had to offer his help to get rid of Jesus. Tragically, he chose the latter.

When did the change begin in the heart of Judas? We get a hint of this in the gospel of John. About a year before this time, when Jesus resisted the attempt of His followers to take

Him by force and make Him king, and when many of His disciples turned back and stopped following Him, Jesus warned Judas against the evil spirit he was allowing to take possession of his heart and mind. Jesus said, *"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"* (Jn. 6:30).

But Judas didn't heed the warning, and perhaps it was at that point that he began to steal from the purse he kept for the group. Maybe he felt like he should have some tangible reward for following Jesus, or perhaps he justified his stealing in his mind by saying to himself that what he was taking was infinitely less than he thought he had been led to expect. As he practiced this secret sin, his character deteriorated, and eventually he succumbed to the temptation to betray the Lord for financial profit.

Be careful about what you do in secret, friends. Small acts of dishonesty and efforts to hide your private sins will sow a seed of corruption which will affect your character long-term. Root out the sin in your life when it starts, and heed the warnings of the Holy Spirit when He convicts you of something you've done wrong.

III. The Arrest.

What is most disturbing about Judas' betrayal was the sign by which he agreed to make Jesus known to His enemies. As long as there is true love in the world, this act will be hated by everyone who has ever given or received as kiss as a token of affection. In ancient Judaism, a kiss was a sign of discipleship, and students would kiss their rabbis on the cheek. It was with a kiss that Judas signaled to the soldiers the one they were to arrest.

That night and on into the next day, Jesus' face was marred in many ways. Bloody sweat poured down his head. His face was bruised by the fists that hit it, soldiers spat in Jesus' face, and his forehead was pierced with a crown of thorns. But I think nothing went so close to the heart of Jesus in affecting His face as the betrayal of that kiss.

Judas seemed to be expecting armed resistance. Why else would he need a detail of soldiers to come in the fashion they did? But Jesus responded, *"Am I leading a rebellion that you come with swords and clubs to capture Me?"* The word that is translated "rebellion" here is a Greek word that means guerrilla warfare which uses violent tactics to overthrow the existing order of things. It's as though Jesus was saying to Judas and the others, "If you come at Me with swords and clubs because you think I will retaliate with force, then it shows you don't understand anything about Me and My kingdom at all. The kingdom of God is different from the kingdom of this world."

What Judas and those with him didn't realize is that Jesus was indeed leading a rebellion, but it was a different kind of revolution than any they could ever imagine. It was a revolution of the heart – a greater revolution than anyone has ever seen in history. Jesus' rebellion was against sin and death and evil, and it isn't the kind of revolution you can stop with swords. That's because He's not about the power of the sword at all. And Judas didn't get it.

IV. The Reactions.

However, Judas wasn't the only one who didn't get it. Peter didn't get it either. We read that when Jesus was arrested *"one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the ear of the high priest, cutting it off"* (Mk. 14:47). In John's gospel we're told that it was the disciple Peter who did this. Even though he had heard Jesus talk about loving one's enemies, turning the other cheek, and praying for those who persecute you, when push came to shove Peter's

first instinct was to pull out a sword.

You and I are a lot like Peter, aren't we? We say we want to be on the side of love, we want to be pursuers of peace, but when confrontation comes, when a crisis arises, we look for a sword of power we can use. We tend to merge the kingdom of this world, which involves power, with the kingdom of God.

To Peter, and to all of us, Jesus says, "Put your sword away. My kingdom is not of this world. It's completely different. The way I'm going to bring a revolution is by putting others ahead of myself. I'm going to love my enemies, and I'm going to serve people. I'm not going to repay evil for evil, but instead will try to do good. I'm going to give up My power, and I'm actually going to lay down my life. That's why the Father sent me into this world." This was the revolution Jesus was bringing.

Notice how the disciples react to Jesus' determination to reject the power of the sword. The text says that they all ran away and deserted Him. All of them abandoned Jesus in His greatest hour of need. Mark even tells us that one young man was so intent on saving his own skin that he ran away naked. Many scholars believe the young man here was Mark himself, the author of this gospel, and it was his way of identifying the fact that he was an eyewitness to these events, and, sadly, that he, too, abandoned Jesus.

In the Bible, nakedness in public is usually a sign of shame and disgrace. By recounting his naked flight from the garden, Mark may be reminding us of another garden. You'll recall that in the book of Genesis in the Garden of Eden there were two people there who were also given a test, and they failed, too, just like the disciples did here in Gethsemane. Adam and Eve were also naked, and they fled in shame as well. The Bible says that they hid themselves when God came walking in the cool of the day. It seems that all of us are either waving swords of power, or we're running away naked and ashamed.

But there is one person in this scene who doesn't fail the test. It's Jesus. He is faithful to His heavenly Father to fulfill His calling and become the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus confronted the injustice of what was happening, and He protested the manner of His arrest. He had been teaching every day in the Temple courts, and they could have arrested Him there. But, He says, they chose to come at night, like this. It was as if the Lord was saying, "This is your hour, because it is the hour of darkness. This midnight hour is your hour because you are the children of the night. And the power you wield against Me is the power of evil. It is the power of darkness."

Conclusion.

At the beginning of my sermon I mentioned the time I was arrested. As I shared with you, the record of my arrest was expunged because of the advocacy of my parents and an attorney. But I have to tell you, I have another record of far worse things that I've done in my life that has also been expunged. It is the moral record of my sin. And because of Jesus' death and His advocacy on my behalf, He secured my spiritual freedom, and so I am no longer stand condemned before a holy God. My record has been expunged. The good news of the gospel is that God's loving forgiveness is available to everyone through Christ. All you have to do is just receive it as a gift.

As we close, let me ask you, in what ways **have you abandoned Jesus when He needed you?** When have you betrayed the Lord or sought to save your own skin or look out for your

own interests above His? How should can you repent of this and determine that you will live in a different way in the future?

When have you been like Peter and tried to take matters into your own hands? How are you tempted to reach for a sword of power when you're in the middle of a crisis, and in what ways does God want you to put away your power and instead lay down your life and sacrifice your ego? The will was made to yield to God, and when you surrender, you step into another reality of goodness and power you cannot even imagine.

Finally, **has the agony of Christ's passion truly gripped your heart?** Do you fully appreciate all that Jesus went through for you? Have you taken time to think about the pain that He experienced to provide for your salvation? And do you know that He became sin for you in order to give you eternal life?

If there is anyone listening to me this morning to whom the Holy Spirit has been speaking, and you are starting to understand perhaps for the first time all the Christ did for you in His suffering and death, I encourage you to open your heart to Jesus and invite Him to take up residence in your life. Exchange your rags of sin for His royal robes of His righteousness and receive His gift of eternal life.

If you had been the only person on earth, Jesus still would have come just for you. He loves you that much, so much so that He was willing to be arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and experience the horror of the cross of Calvary – all for you. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice of love, and give your life to Him today. Amen.