



BETRAYAL AND ARREST OF JESUS IN GETHSEMANE

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE:

Luke 22:47–53

79th Message

Jerry Tu

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Have you ever been threatened, unjustly treated or humiliated in public? Or have you seen gross injustice inflicted on someone, especially someone you love? When we face danger or when someone we love is threatened, we can react in a couple of ways. Righteous indignation may well up inside of us, our blood boils, and we lash out or strike back. We fight. Or we may experience such shock and dismay that we turn around and run away, refusing to face the threat or challenge. The natural physiological reaction in the face of physical danger is “fight” or “flight”. In a social or relational confrontation, we may be driven by a similar adrenaline-driven response. We don’t know which reaction we’ll take until the situation arises. Then, in the heat of the moment, we fight or flee as our guts guide us. But is there another way to respond to injustice, to threats and humiliation? Is there a third choice?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus was betrayed treacherously and faced arrest by a band of his enemies in a scene of gross injustice. His disciples were there with him in Gethsemane, and they had to react. In the heat of the moment, one disciple fought back while the rest fled and abandoned Jesus. Which choice was correct? If you were in their shoes, if you had a “Gethsemane moment”, which reaction would you have? And is there a third path to take?

Today we read the betrayal and arrest of Jesus as recorded for us by Luke in chapter 22:47-53. The scene that preceded today’s passage is Jesus’ prayer of agony in Gethsemane in which he asked God to remove the cup of his wrath. At the end the prayer, Jesus submitted to God, saying “not my will, but yours be done.” Having conquered the internal battle and accepting the path to the cross, Jesus returns to his disciples, rouses them up from sleep and tells them “Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” Our passage today picks up right here in verse 47:

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And one of them struck the servant 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. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:47–53 ESV)

This narrative can be divided into several sections: the betrayal by one disciple, the reaction of the other disciples, and the response of Jesus to His disciples and to the crowd. We will examine each section separately.

Betrayal (Luke 22:47–48)

Judas is identified specifically as “one of the Twelve”—among Jesus’ closest friends and most loyal followers. This intimate relationship underlines the treachery of Judas’ betrayal. Judas was one of the specially loved disciples; how could he do this? Furthermore, as if to rub salt into the wound, Judas chooses the most disarming gesture to betray his beloved teacher: a kiss. A kiss is an outward expression of love, friendship, and trust. Yet Judas pre-arranged to use this very sign to identify Jesus. Mark 14:44 describes this arrangement: “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard.”” Judas’ kiss is a kiss of death, not of love. His betrayal is so heart-breaking and treacherous that Judas as a name has become synonymous with betrayal, and “the kiss of Judas” lives in infamy as a most despicable and heartless act.

We would never perform such treachery; we would not betray a loved one, friend or co-worker, right? Or would we? How might betrayal and treachery look like in our world today?

- In the workplace: manipulating office politics, back-stabbing to advance one’s own career
- In social circles: lying for “expediency” or for gain
- In relationships: cheating, breaking trust, spreading malicious rumors.
- In a marriage: having an affair—whether physical or emotional, whether actual or in our thoughts.

Each of these may start out innocuous or seem insignificant but they quickly spiral out of control. It’s like a little white lie that snowballs into an avalanche of deceit. I think none of us can claim to be completely innocent of this behavior. At some point in our lives, we have compromised our morals, broken promises, or betrayed the trust of loved ones. We are all sinful people and we are prone to actions that hurt others. What motivates us to do this? Judas betrayed Jesus for money—thirty pieces of silver. What is it for me, for you? Money? Power? Lust? Pride? Social status? Material wealth? We each have our own weaknesses, and we fall on our weakest side where temptation is strongest. We must be on guard in these areas of our lives.

But what about betraying Jesus? What does it mean to betray him? It means to sell your soul, to give up our relationship as followers of Jesus for profit. In Mark 8:36–37, Jesus teaches, “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?” Indeed, how can the “world” measure up to your soul? Is not your identity as God’s child more precious than all of these (money, power, position, recognition, lust)? Jesus further expands “betrayal” to denying him or being ashamed of him in the next verse. In Mark 8:38, Jesus continues,

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man

also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

This is a strong rebuke and warning to us to not be ashamed of him or deny him. Doing so is to betray Jesus, and our very souls are at stake here.

Response of the Disciples (Luke 22:49–51)

Betrayal was the response of one disciple—Judas. Let's now examine the response of the other disciples. "And when those who were around him saw what would follow... (Luke 22:49). When the disciples "saw what would follow"—Jesus' arrest—they reacted. Did they respond by fight or by flight? Well, they did both.

Let's first examine the reaction of the disciples as recorded for us by Matthew and Mark. Luke's narrative is not as explicit as these two Gospels. Both Matthew and Mark describe the disciples fleeing: "Then all the disciples left him and fled." (Matt 25:56, Mark 14:50). Mark's account curiously even added a further detail,

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. (Mark 14:51–52)

This is the flight response—to run away, to leave the situation. This, I confess, is my natural tendency. I hate confrontation and tension; I would leave a room rather than face an uncomfortable situation. I am an avoider, and flight is often my preferred choice, and that was what the disciples did.

... they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. (vv. 49–50)

Now to the fight instinct. We know from Luke 22:38 that the disciples had two swords with them for protection. So they could use them to prevent the unlawful arrest of their leader. One of the disciples does exactly that; he strikes with his sword and wounds the ear of the servant of the high priest. John 18:10 gives a more detailed account of this scene, "Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)" Knowing Peter's impulsive personality, we expect this hot-headed reaction. This reaction is natural for him, but it was rash. Peter fought with zeal and righteous indignation, thinking he was righting a wrong. But his actions were without knowledge and not prepared for by prayer. The result of Peter's fight response is literally spilt blood in the name of God.

The Third Choice (Luke 22:51)

This is Jesus' choice: He says, "No more of this!" Jesus teaches that we are not to engage in violence, not to use the world's weapon against injustice, for the kingdom of God does not come to earth in this way. In Matthew's parallel account of this scene (Matthew 26:52, 54), Jesus adds, "For all who take the sword will perish by the sword..." The sword will not bring life or redemption nor God's kingdom. The sword will only bring pain and death to the victim and the perpetrator.

"And he touched his ear and healed him." Jesus physically heals the wound of Malchus, symbolically showing that the way to battle injustice is with love and compassion, not with the sword and violence. Show love to the enemy, Jesus demonstrated, and win the enemy for God. He himself is willing to be wounded even unto death. He alone must bear the wounds, not Malchus. Neither his

followers nor even his enemies will share the pain of his passage into death and hell itself. He overcomes injustice by healing, by taking the punishment on behalf of others. This then is the third choice: love, compassion, and strength to receive injustice for the sake of God's kingdom.

Note that Jesus did not have to suffer this way. He could have summoned legions of angels to protect him, to fight back. He could have fled, walked through the crowds invisibly as he did in Luke 4:28–30. Neither fight, nor flight. He chose the third way—to stay and let God's will be done. Jesus' attitude was not passive or defeatist. He stayed actively; Jesus faced his arrest with dignity and in full command of all that was happening.

How did he have the strength to do so, to face the angry mob so calmly? The answer is he prayed *in advance*. Earlier that evening, Jesus wrestled in agony in his soul and prayed earnestly. As an answer to prayer, God strengthened him, and Jesus emerged victorious, resolute, ready to offer himself freely for the sins of the world (Heb 9:14). This is strength. This is dignity. This is the third choice—Jesus' way.

Jesus Addresses the Crowd (Luke 22:52–53)

In the final scene, Jesus turns his attention to the crowd, which consists of the *chief priests* (the religious leaders); the *officers of the temple*, who were Jewish temple police as well as a cohort of Roman soldiers; and the *elders* (political leaders of Sanhedrin). There may have been dozens of people representing all of Jesus' enemies in the community: religious, political, and military factions. They are armed to the teeth, all arrayed against an unarmed teacher defended by eleven very frightened followers.

Jesus exposes the treachery of the crowd's intention in one stinging rebuke. He reminds them that he taught in public in the temple every day, yet they did not arrest him there. The leaders knew that such an action would have triggered a huge public uproar, for Jesus had a popular following in Jerusalem after the triumphal entry into the city less than one week prior. This unlawful attack on Jesus must be carried out at night when the multitudes were asleep and outside the city confines. Jesus unveils their hypocrisy: your conscience convicts you; you know this arrest is illegitimate, and that's why you are doing it in the dark, away from public view. You are despicable cowards!

Jesus identifies the crowd as servants of the dark powers, or what Paul calls in Eph. 6:12 "the cosmic powers over this present darkness... the spiritual forces of evil..." Satan is ultimately behind the cowardly leaders. This hour of Gethsemane belongs to the devil, and Jesus allows darkness to play itself out as part of God's redemption plan. We may recognize that in certain situations the powers of darkness are reigning even today. Mass genocide occurs, injustice is inflicted on innocent bystanders of civil war, atrocities are committed. These reflect God's permissive sovereignty in the world; he allows evil for the time being while a grander plan is being fulfilled.

But this hour of darkness in Gethsemane will be overcome by the hour of light in three days, when the Son rises, the light shines and the power of the Resurrection overwhelms all darkness. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). That hour of victory will crush this hour of darkness and seal the doom of Satan for all eternity.

Reflections and Applications

For the application of this passage, I want to focus on how we respond to injustice, threat, or confrontation: fight, flight, or choosing the way of Jesus. We make choices like these in many areas of our lives, from the macroscopic society to our personal relationships.

As a society, we can choose to fight injustice not with the world's weapons of war or violence, nor retreat into our Christian cocoon and ignore the injustice. Rather, we can choose to put our efforts into compassion to the downtrodden and victims of injustice as Jesus would. An example of this is the ministry of RealOptions, which we heard about last month. To honor the sanctity of life of unborn babies, this organization chose not to fight with pickets or threats to abortion doctors, but rather to reach out with compassion and healing. They offer practical physical help and spiritual guidance for the women and men in this situation. They are the hands and feet of Jesus into our community in Silicon Valley.

In personal relationships, we may face situations where misunderstandings occur, feelings are hurt, relationships are threatened. Suppose you and a fellow believer said things to each other that caused unintended hurt. Should you fight for your position, defend yourself and explain what you meant? This would be fighting for what you believe to be right (from your view). Or do you stuff your feelings, run away, let the wounds fester and the relationship break? That would be fleeing. Or can you accept the blame, however unfair, swallow your pride, and put the other person first, mending the relationship first rather than insisting on your rights? What would Jesus do?

In my workplace, I had a “Gethsemane” situation some years ago, when I had to make a choice to fight or flight. I was a system engineer working on mathematical algorithms on a wireless product. I had a colleague who headed up the radio design team. During a critical system design review meeting, it was clear that the product was not working well, that some portion of the system was designed improperly. Schedule and budget were at risk, so tension in that meeting was high.

My colleague at that point began to attack me verbally, blaming me for the subpar system performance. He pinned all the problems on my supposed incompetence, accused me of ineptitude, completely trashed me and humiliated me before everyone. It was devastating! What was I to do?

I could fight back; I *needed* to fight back and protect my innocence! I must not be made a scapegoat, right? My job was at stake here. But my reaction to fight back would have been unwise. I would have had to use my colleague's weapons—yelling, attacking, finger-pointing. That would have been inadequate and inappropriate. Most everyone knew I was a Christian, and my outburst would have dishonored God in public.

Or I could flee. I hate confrontation and tense situations. Running away like the disciples did at Gethsemane would have been natural for me, but it would also have been wrong. It would mean that I didn't want to face humiliation, didn't want to take the blame, refuse to face questions that have no easy answers. Rather than clinging on to Jesus and trust God, I would run from him, fearing that he can't be trusted during difficult times.

What could I do?

I chose the third way. I took the abuse, accepted the blame of design error, and submitted to my colleague's rage. I promised to work overtime and design new algorithms. In doing so, I had to trust that God would grant me the knowledge to do the algorithms, or that I would not lose my job by shouldering the blame. Maybe I would be vindicated in the future, or maybe not. But that did not matter. The point was to trust my technical ability, my job, and my future to God.

I wish I can say I chose Jesus' way conscientiously and prayerfully, but I don't remember if I did or not. But what is important is that during my “Gethsemane moment,” I obeyed the Spirit's prompting, trusted God's sovereignty, and responded as Jesus would have responded.

The way of the Lord is like this. You trust in him and become alive for him. You fight, but you use weapons of the Spirit: humility, love, grace. Behave with dignity and do not insist on your rights.

But this is easier said than done! How do you embrace humility and love in the heat of the moment? How do you prevent yourself from lashing out or running away? You prepare by praying *in advance*. Since you don't know when trials will occur, make sure you are constantly in prayer, consciously aligning yourself with God in everyday tasks, so that when the Gethsemane situation does arise your instinctive reaction will align with God's will. It will be like muscle memory, but in the spiritual realm. As I preached last week, Jesus encouraged the disciples to “*pray so that you may not enter into temptation.*” By praying, you can conquer your frailty, your doubt, and your insecurity *ahead of time*, before confrontations arise. Through prayer you submit to God, and the victory is won in your heart and your attitude even before injustice befalls you, even before the battle is fought. Jesus' example in Gethsemane teaches this to us: he prayed in advance, and was victorious; the disciples did not pray, and they failed the challenge by either fighting or fleeing.

Our challenge today is this: be prepared at all times, pray early and often for strength and for God's will to be done in and through us. Then, when our Gethsemane moment comes, when injustice and darkness reigns in the hour, we are able and ready to walk in Jesus' way, accepting the cup of injustice, knowing that the victory of God has already been won. And in this way, we give light to those who watch our reaction and we point them to God.

You may wonder what is the end of my story, what came of my Gethsemane moment at work. It turns out that the technical flaw in the system was not mine; it was in the radio system design. My colleague realized the error after the confrontation and corrected it in the next layout and revision of the radio board and fixed the performance issue. So the system ultimately worked properly. My colleague, however, never admitted his error, and I was never vindicated in the company.

Spiritually, God opened a door during my Gethsemane moment. Another colleague came to my cubicle after my humiliation and asked how I could have remained calm under the blistering attack. What enabled me to take the full blame of someone else's design error and suffer the consequences? It just wasn't fair! I told him what was in me—*who* was in me—that gave me the strength. I told him about my trust in God, that my model was Jesus. I invited him to find out more about Jesus in a bible study I led during lunch time. My colleague started coming. A year later I brought him to an evangelistic outreach in San Jose, and he accepted the Lord during

an altar call. He is now a friend, and more importantly, a brother in the Lord.

This is what happens when we fight injustice with humility, love, and prayer, when we take the path of obedience: God's greater plan is accomplished. May God's will be done on Earth through you and through me, as we walk the way of Jesus in our daily lives.

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