

Gospel Doctrine
Karl Diether
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Matt 26:47–27:66, Mark 14:43–15:39
Luke 22:47–23:56, John 18–19
Next Lesson
Matt 28, Luke 24
John 20–21

[PDF version of the lesson notes.](#)

I. Lesson Coverage and Structure

- The reading for today's lesson covers the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and events leading up to the crucifixion. It certainly covers more material than we can cover in class with any depth at all. Thus today's lesson will be less systematic than usual (and I don't think I am usually that systematic). I am going to skip around to different parts that caught my attention.
- First, I want to step back a little bit and take a look at the big picture presented by the narrative. Thus I am going to outline the reading in Matthew as follows[1]:

Outline of Matthew 26:47–27:66

1. The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus (26:47–56)
2. Jesus Before the Sanhedrin (26:57–68)
3. Peter's Denial of Jesus (26:69–75)
4. Jesus Brought Before Pilate (27:1–2)
5. The Death of Judas (27:3–10)
6. Jesus Questioned by Pilate (27:11–14)
7. Jesus Sentenced to Die (27:15–26)
8. The Soldiers Mock Jesus (27:27–31)
9. The Crucifixion of Jesus (27:32–44)
10. The Death of Jesus (27:45–56)
11. The Burial of Jesus (27:57–61)
12. The Guard at the Tomb (27:62–66)

- *Is there anything that jumps out at you when you look at an outline of the Matthew portion of the lesson?*

A. Jesus and Peter

- I guess one thing that jumps out at me is the change of main character focus (for lack of a better phrase) that we see at the beginning of the outline involving Jesus and his disciples. I think the change in focus from Jesus to Peter is interesting. *Why do you think there is a change in focus from Jesus to Peter?* I mean the story will still largely work if you leave the parts regarding Peter out. *Why highlight Peter's denials? Also, do you think it is important that Peter's denial is highlighted right after Jesus faces the Sanhedrin?*
- First, let me point out that I don't want to come across as being particularly hard or harsh

on Peter. I think President Kimball was right; we should keep all of Peter's accomplishments as a disciple of Jesus Christ in mind and not just focus on denial when thinking about Peter in general.[2] Second, Peter's denial of Jesus is almost certainly important because it fulfills the prophecy uttered by Jesus earlier in the chapter during the last supper:

(34) Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. --Matt 26:34

- However, I don't think the fulfillment of the prophecy is the only reason why it is important to the overall story. *Can you think of other reasons why including Peter's denials are important? Does it provide contrast?*
- Jesus is questioned critically by the Sanhedrin (Matt 27:62–68):

(62) And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? (63) But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. (64) Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. (65) Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. (66) What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. (67) Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, (68) Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

Peter is also questioned (Matt 27:69–75):

(69) Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. (70) But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. (71) And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. (72) And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. (73) And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. (74) Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. (75) And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

- Given, their placement next to each other I tend to think the contrast between the two pericopes is quite important. *How do Peter's denials and the contrast with the questioning of Jesus by the Sanhedrin affect the reader? Does it further or continue the*

theme of Jesus' isolation? Does going back to the experiences or trials of Peter help us, as readers, to be introspective about these events? What can we learn from this situation?

B. Jesus and Judas

- I also find the shift in character focus involving Jesus and Judas quite interesting. Judas is inserted into the narrative in an interesting way. Take out the pericope involving Judas and it still makes perfect sense. The story involving Judas really interrupts the story of Jesus before Pilate. Also, this aside or interruption is not found in Mark. In other words, Matthew closely follows Mark, but then departs from the Markan account and inserts the story involving Judas into the middle of the Pilate pericope.
- *Why the insertion? Why does Matthew want us to know about the fate or actions of Judas post betrayal? How does it affect the narrative? How does it affect your focus as a reader?*
- *Does inserting the Judas pericope provide another point of contrast for the reader? Is it important that it is another (former) disciple? Does this contrast or shift in character focus allow for introspection? Is the same (in terms of introspection) as the shift to Peter? How is the introspection different?*

II. Betrayal

- Read 26:47–56:

(47) And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. (48) Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. (49) And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. (50) And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. (51) And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. (52) Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. (53) Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? (54) But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? (55) In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. (56) But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.

- *What part of the betrayal scene sticks out to you?*

- *Is it fair to say that Jesus is betrayed twice in this pericope?*
- I don't want to make too much of this but I do think there really is a double betrayal in a sense. The pericope certainly focuses on the explicit betrayal by Judas, but then in verse 56 we find out that the disciples forsook him and fled (the disciples "deserted him and fled" in the NRSV). This strikes me as a very natural and human action by the disciples but at the same time it had to be heartbreaking. I think it is particularly heartbreaking given the backdrop of the events of the garden. Also, I think it continues the theme of Jesus being increasingly isolated.
- *Is it important that Judas betrays with a kiss given the backdrop that such a kiss was "the customary practice of greeting between friends?"[3]*
- *Why is the cutting off of the ear important? Is it an accident or an important symbolic gesture? Are you surprised by what is missing (that's actually not a bad pun?) when you read the Matthean account?*
- Benedict Y. Viviano has suggested the following backdrop to the ear incident:

This is not an accident in a scuffle but a deliberately intended symbolic gesture. The servant was not a minor domestic but vice-president of the Temple administration. He thus represents the high priest. A mutilated ear, according to Lev 21:18 LXX, disqualifies one from serving as high priest. Thus, the gesture says that a priest who would arrest God's emissary is unfit for office, spiritually bankrupt.[4]

Do you think Viviano is correct? Why or why not?

III. The Soldiers Mock Jesus

- Read Matt 27:27–31:

(27) Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. (28) And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. (29) And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! (30) And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. (31) And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.
- *What is the first thing you notice about this story? How would you describe the images? Ironic? Grotesque? Heartbreaking?*
- I think the thing that jumps out at me is the action. The verbs are so active; it is almost

like they are fired from a machine gun: took, gathered, stripped, put, bowed, mocked, spit, took, smote, mocked, took, put, and led. Strung together they almost seem to be grotesque and the certainly underscore the violence of the moment.

- One reason these verses are important is that they fulfill earlier prophecy by Jesus:

(17) And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, (18) Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, (19) And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. —Matt 20:17–19

- *How would you outline this pericope? How does the structure focus the reader's attention?*
- *Do you think these verses continue the theme of isolation that starts in the garden?*
- I think it is interesting how gentiles play a prominent role in this part of the narrative. Both Pilate and the soldiers are important to the narrative. Of course, this may be just a natural part of the story. I wonder, however, if there is more to it than that. *Is it important to show a universal rejection? Is Matthew really contrasting a rejection of Pilate and the soldiers with the rejection by the Jewish leadership? Is there a danger in making too much of this contrast?*

IV. The Crucifixion

- Read 27:32–44:

(32) And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross. (33) And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, (34) They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. (35) And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. (36) And sitting down they watched him there; (37) And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. (38) Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. (39) And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, (40) And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. (41) Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, (42) He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. (43) He trusted in God; let

him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (44) The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

- Note, Matthew seems to allude to Psalms such as 68, 69, and 22 in this pericope.
- "[G]all' refers to something bitter tasting and can on occasion mean something poisonous. Probably this word was chosen because of an intended allusion to the first line of the LXX of Ps 68:22." [5]
- *What details or images stick out to you when you read this passage?*
- *Are you surprised that Matthew doesn't focus on the suffering of Jesus? The crucifixion is really described without much pathos: "And they crucified him." How does that affect the focus and the reader's attention?*
- *What is the role of mocking and reviling in this pericope? Do you think it is important that Jesus is mocked by four different groups (soldiers, passers-by, the authorities, and the robbers [5]? What does the mocking emphasize? Does it continue themes we have encountered earlier in the larger crucifixion narrative? Why is it an important part of Jesus' death?*
- *Is it important that Jesus died a "slave's death" [6]?*

V. The Death of Jesus

- Read Matt 27:45–56

(45) Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. (46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (47) Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. (48) And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. (49) The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. (50) Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. (51) And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; (52) And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, (53) And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. (54) Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God. (55) And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: (56) Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of

James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.

- *What details or images stick out in this pericope? What part do you like to focus on?*
- *What themes or motifs continue or come to a climax here at the death of Jesus?*
- *Do you think that Jesus' proclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," express despair? Abandonment? Something else?*
- *Does the crowd's response to Jesus' agonized proclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," seem really strange? Why would they think he was calling for Elijah? Is this an important detail?*
- Donald Hagner notes that similarities between God and Elijah in Hebrew: Eli and Eliyah.[7] That certainly makes the response of the crowd understandable, but why include this detail? *Why take time to tell of this misunderstanding by the crowd when Jesus is dieing in agony?*
- *How does Matthew describe Jesus' death? Are your surprised by any of the details?*
- *Why are the woman important? How do they affect the story? How do they focus the reader's attention? What do they remind the reader of?*
- *Matthew also mentions the centurion. How does the part of the centurion continue themes in other parts of the large crucifixion narrative and the gospel? Is it important that Matthew mentions both the woman and centurion?*

Endnotes

1. Slightly adapted from Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 670–673.
2. Kimball, Spencer W, "Peter, My Brother," *BYU Speeches of the Year*, July 13, 1971.
3. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic.
4. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 671.
5. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic, 834.
6. Brown, Raymond E. (editor), Joseph A. Fitzmyer (editor), and Roland E. Murphy (editor), 1990, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, Prentice Hall, 672.

7. Hagner, Donald A., 1988, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14–28*, Nelson Reference and Electronic, 845.