

Maundy Thursday April 9, 2020

Matthew 26:30-35

30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 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.'" 32 But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." 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 (NRSV).

To fully understand today's message it is necessary to understand the Old Testament background. Centuries before Christ God made a covenantal promise with Abraham "I will be your God and you will be my people." The only condition of God maintaining providential care is that the people keep their end of the covenant with God. So, God grants to the people the promised land and the people know God keeps promises. A big problem arises when the people refuse to keep covenant. So, God withholds providential care and this brings us to the exile.

The exile is a hard time for the Hebrews. They are conquered, captured, and defeated. A good portion of the people are annihilated. Refugees fled and were scattered throughout world. This is known as the diaspora. Many people were deported to Babylon. It is very important to understand the exile because it is during this time that God promised through the prophets a redeemer.

At the end of the exile life was not rosy; they did not live happily ever after. There were many ups and downs with the various empires that dominated them. The Babylonians were conquered by the Persians and Cyrus the Great freed the Judeans. Then there was the Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids. Then there was Alexander the Great and the Greek empire. Then came the Roman empire.

It is during the Roman occupation that Jesus conducted his ministry. The people had a certain degree of expectation of God's providential care. They thought that if the whole nation was obedient enough then God would intervene and free them from the Romans. So, they got stricter and stricter with the law trying to get everyone to conform. The problem with this rigid system of laws was that they ended up abusing authority and hurting the people, which is what God loves and cares about the most. The people also had certain expectations of the Messiah. They expected God to serve their wants and send to them a warrior king in the likes of King David. The human imbedded ideology and expectations of the Messiah being a warrior king to lead the people in a successful rebellion against Rome was a direct contrast to the will of God.

Jesus comes to the earth and does three important things. He does pastoral care; he cares for the people spending time and energy healing people and helping people. He also does a lot of teaching. These are the learning opportunities that are individualized and get presented in daily life. And, of course, Jesus does some preaching. These are the sermons that are given to the crowds. One thing I like about Matthew is the marvelous job that he does in laying out the path, the geography of Jesus traveling back to Jerusalem and tethering it to the passion predictions. The first passion prediction is outside the

country, the second passion prediction is when they get back into country in Galilee, the third passion prediction is when they get into the region of Judah. Then they get to Jerusalem.

This brings us to Today's Scripture. This is an extremely tough time for Jesus. His hour has come, he is about to face the cross, betrayal, and desertion. Jesus tells it like it is. All of them will desert him tonight. Matthew records Jesus quoting the Scripture of **Zechariah 13:7** Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered. Peter denies it, but it's not just Peter; all of them fall away. Peter is adamant. If all of the others fall away he swears that he will not. Jesus and the disciples go to Gethsemane where the disciples fall asleep on guard duty. While they are sleeping Jesus spends his time in prayer. I point out that Jesus put a lot of faith and confidence in prayer and we can learn from Jesus to do the same when we face trials. Jesus is betrayed just like he said he would be. He is taken by a mob. This is a crowd with clubs and swords. It is more like a mob for lynching than a detachment for arrest. Then Peter tries to go to battle with the mob which is extremely foolish. Jesus intervenes and says something that is very interesting. He could call upon God to send 12 legions of angels. A roman legion is 6,000 soldiers, so 12 legions would be 72,000 angels. Jesus knows what is important and what needs to be done **Matthew 26:54** "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" Matthew shows that Jesus knows the prophecy and that Jesus is the one that fulfills it.

There is one more thing that is very interesting that I emphasize. Notice what Jesus says according to **Matthew 26:32** "after I am raised up." This coming Sunday we will celebrate the good news of the resurrection. However, as it was happening, the disciples were lost. In the first passion prediction found in **Matthew 16:21** Jesus said he would be raised. Coming down the mountain in **Matthew 17:9** Jesus said he would be raised. In the second passion prediction found in **Matthew 17:23** Jesus said he would be raised. In the third passion prediction found in **Matthew 20:19** Jesus said he would be raised. Now, here in **Matthew 26:32**, once again Jesus says he will be raised. The main thing out of all of this is that Jesus willingly went to the cross, for us, as only the Son of God can.