

Jesus' Last Week – 2

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Jesus gave these last messages to His disciples.

Part 1

Last week we asked, “What would you do if you knew you had only one week to live?” That led us to the question, “What would Jesus do if He knew He had only one more week to live?” We know that answer because the gospel of Matthew told us what He did. We began reading in Matthew, Chapter 21, and saw that Jesus publicly taught a series of end-time judgment parables, emphasizing the need for repentance.

But privately, He gave a different end-time message to His disciples. They had already repented. They didn't need to be told that again. Instead, Jesus told them what was about to happen to Him so that they would not lose their faith when He was crucified. Let's continue from where we left off last week.

Jesus left Jerusalem to stay at the home of Simon the Leper in nearby Bethany. It was there that a woman of ill repute anointed Him with perfume. Some of the disciples were indignant at the waste. We will pick up the story at Matthew Chapter 26, verse 12.

When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” (Matthew 26:12-13)

Jesus knew that he would die so close to the beginning of the Sabbath that His disciples would not be able to anoint His body. He said this so that the disciples would know that He knew exactly when He would die, and was permitting it to happen. But Judas could not see that. He just saw money wasted on perfume.

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Matthew 26:14-16)

Jesus knew that He was the true Passover Lamb, whose blood would save us from our sins. In order to help all of His disciples, including us today, understand His sacrifice for us, He instituted the communion service at the Last Supper. We are told how it happened in Matthew 26, beginning at verse 17.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord?”

Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Matthew 26:17-30)

[music – Becky Richardson, “Communion”]

Part 2

As Becky Richardson just sang, Jesus final message to His disciples was much more personal than the last day judgment message He gave to the public. The disciples had already repented and fully devoted themselves to God, so there wasn’t any need for Him to encourage them to repent. Instead, Jesus gave them prophecies to give them strength to endure the coming test of faith. It was going to appear that Jesus was defeated by the civil and religious authorities. Jesus wanted them to know that He was going to allow himself to be captured and crucified, and so they should not be discouraged when it came to pass.

Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. (Matthew 26:31-35)

Yes, Peter was rash to say that he would never disown Jesus. We may think we know what we would do in a difficult situation, but we can’t be sure until it actually happens. But let’s not miss the point that “all the other disciples said the same.” Judas had already left. The 10 remaining apostles said they would never disown Jesus, and they never did. So let’s let the faithfulness of those 10 faithful apostles encourage us, and not be discouraged by the unfaithfulness of Peter.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he

began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” (Matthew 26:36-46)

Jesus knew what was coming; but that doesn't mean He was happy about it. Let's try to capture that mood as the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir sings, “In Dark Gethsemane.”

[music – Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir, “In Dark Gethsemane”]

Part 3

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.”

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

At that time Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. (Matthew 26:47-56)

John tells us that it was actually Peter who cut off the ear. Presumably Peter and the rest of the disciples would have fought for Jesus, had He not told them not to. But when Jesus told them not resist, they took that as a cue to flee.

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. (Matthew 26:57-58)

Peter didn't completely desert Jesus. He apparently wanted to stay close enough that he could help Jesus, if need be. So he followed along at a distance to see what would happen.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'"

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent. (Matthew 26:59-63a)

If Jesus actually did abolish the Ten Commandments, broken the Sabbath, or even nullified the Old Testament prohibition against eating unclean meats, there would have been no need for false witnesses. He could have been found guilty of these crimes. But in Matthew 5 Jesus made it quite clear that He would not set aside one of the least of these commands, or teach others to do so. He was not guilty of sin.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?" (Matthew 26:63b-68)

Jesus could not lie. He truthfully told them that He is the Messiah. They condemned Him to death for telling the truth. Peter, on the other hand, could lie.

Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. "You also were with Jesus of Galilee," she said.

But he denied it before them all. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth."

He denied it again, with an oath: "I don't know the man!"

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.”

Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!”

Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matthew 26:69-75)

It happened just as Jesus said it would. Jesus gave the prophecy not to prevent it from happening, but to prove that He knew what was going to happen, and would allow it to happen. Jesus gave us many prophecies about what will happen just before the second coming so that we will see the fulfillment and it will strengthen our faith during that difficult time.

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.” So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.” (Matthew 27:1-10)

Hundreds of years before Jesus prophesied about His death, Jeremiah gave details about how Jesus would be betrayed. He told exactly how much money would be paid to Judas, and how the money would be spent. Prophecies like these are convincing proof that Jesus, and no other person, is the Messiah.

Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.

When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." (Matthew 27:11-19)

Pilate's wife wasn't a follower. Nor was she a prophet. But God still spoke to her. The Bible doesn't tell us any more about what she said to Pilate in subsequent days; but I'll bet she said to her husband, "I told you so!" Despite this, Pilate never became a follower. Isn't it amazing how God can give such compelling evidence of His omniscience, and people still refuse to follow Him?

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

"Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.

"Barabbas," they answered.

"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

"Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:20-25)

Sadly, some people have used the statement, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" to justify anti-Semitism. In the fourth century, it enabled the Roman emperor Constantine to absolve Rome of all guilt in regards to the murder of Jesus, and put all the guilt on the Jews. Because Constantine wanted to "have nothing in common with that nation of father-killers who slew their Lord," he changed the day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath to pagan Sunday, and changed the celebration of the resurrection from the Jewish Passover to the pagan Easter.¹ He felt justified in doing this because the Jews had cursed themselves and their children.

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:26-31)

¹ See Constantine's letter announcing the decision of the Council of Nicea at the Wisconsin Lutheran College website, <http://www.fourthcentury.com/index.php/urkunde-26>

Here now is Maddy Couperous to tell us what happened on Golgotha's Hill.

[music – Maddy Couperous, “Golgotha's Hill”]

Part 4

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Matthew 28:1-8)

Here are Mike and Netty Miller to tell us what happened next.

[music – Mike and Netty Miller, “I've Just Seen Jesus”]

Part 5

Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day. (Matthew 28:9-15)

Of course, the lie doesn't make any sense at all. If the soldiers were asleep, how would they know the disciples stole the body? It just goes to show, people will believe any lie, no matter how foolish, if they really want to believe it.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

The good news is that we can go into all the world making disciples of all nations because Christ is risen, and is with us today.

Now let's end our broadcast as Susan Pogge and JoAn Witzel play "Jesus Christ is Risen Today"

[music – Susan Pogge and JoAn Witzel, "Jesus Christ is Risen Today"]