



Matthew 26:47-75
Professing and Denying

Summary: As crisis unfolds, we see the outcome of walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit. Jesus is betrayed by Judas, tried by the Jews, and denied by Peter as He works for their salvation.

Today we track storms using radar. We can see what's coming hours, or sometimes, even days in advance. The weather might look fine outside right now, totally peaceful to the casual observer, and yet those with access to the weather report and radar know it's all going to change in just a few hours. In the case of a major storm people use that time to stock up on food and water, stack firewood, recharge batteries, board up windows, or in some cases, evacuate.

Well, you could say Jesus has spiritual radar – He knows a Category 5 hurricane is about to make landfall in His life. He knows what's coming and last week we saw how He prepared - He reached out to His friends and up to His Father in prayer and He encouraged His disciples to do the same. Only they didn't, and now we're going to see what happens when the storm strikes.

We left off last week as Jesus told His sleeping disciples to wake up, He could hear and see the crowd coming to arrest to Him.

Matthew 26:47 And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people.
48 Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." 49 Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

Now, I don't know what you picture when you think of Jesus, but Scripture never tells us anything extraordinary about Him. He wasn't physically large. He certainly wasn't the best dressed or most fashionable. He didn't have a faint glow. He was absolutely normal in appearance and hard to pick out of a crowd.

Standing in the dim moonlight, with a group of other men, it would have been hard to recognize Him, so Judas walks up to Jesus, makes positive identification with physical contact and now the soldiers know who to arrest.

The kiss was a common form of greeting at the time, and it still is in many cultures, perhaps you have seen people grasp each other and kiss on the cheeks. It wasn't weird or unusual; it was completely normal.

And, it shows us how approachable Jesus was. He wasn't stern or intimidating, He wasn't cold, distant, and unaffectionate. He was imminently accessible, and still is. You can come to Jesus; you can approach Him as an older brother, as a close friend. Scripture and those who know Him describe Him as meek, merciful, gracious, friendly, and kind.

Even as Judas is betraying Him, look how Jesus responds.

50 But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"
Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. 51 And suddenly, one of those *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.

By reading the other gospel accounts we learn that it was impulsive Peter who pulled the sword. Sword is probably not the right word though. Roman soldiers carried broadswords, but the Greek word used for what Peter held is different, it describes something smaller, more of a long knife or dagger; this was probably what Peter used to dress, or butcher, the lamb they had for Passover just a few hours ago.

John's gospel also tells us the servant's name was Malchus, and that after Jesus stopped the fighting, He healed Malchus's wound. If He hadn't there might have been four crosses set up the next day instead of three. Peter could have been arrested and crucified for attempted murder. But Jesus fixes the mess Peter made and saves him from any consequences.

Now think about that. Because, it's impossible to know for sure, but how many times do you think God has reached down and fixed something you did or said in your clumsiness or impulsiveness? How many times has He rescued you from consequences without you even realizing or asking? Let us give endless thanks to God for all the stupid things He has saved us from, and let us ask Him to keep us from even swinging our sword next time. Let us admit that it is easy for us to get out of step with God, to react impulsively, and to do things we will later regret. And may God keep us from it.

52 But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

Jesus is facing a cohort of men who have come to arrest Him – that's a technical term – a cohort was a unit of around 500 men. He says He could call more than 12 legions to their defense if He wanted to – that's one legion for Himself and one for each of the faithful disciples and a legion was made up of ten cohorts. So, you would have around 60,000 angels facing 500 people.

In the book of 2 Kings (19:35) we're told about the time Sennacherib, the king of Assyria came down to invade Israel and one atomic angel wiped out 185,000 troops. You may remember that one angel passed through Egypt on the night of the Passover and brought about the death of all the first born, or how two angels visited Sodom and Gomorrah and

destroyed both cities. So, you have to imagine 60,000 could do the job. But Jesus never calls them.

Here's what we need to learn from all of this: it's not our job to protect, defend, or avenge Jesus. He's got that one taken care of. Instead, He calls us to love people in His name.

There is a place for the sword and violence. In our fallen world, it is necessary to use force and violence at times to protect the innocent or beat back oppression, invasion, assault or attack. But the sword is a weapon of the state which has an obligation to protect its citizens. It is not a weapon of the church. For Christians the fight is first and foremost spiritual. The Bible says

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Christianity should never advance at the tip of the spear or the sword. It is always calling and compelling. I want to encourage you to think about that, and how it applies to the people you love – are you going to war in prayer for them?

2 Cor 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds

Do you ever think of prayer that way? Do you think of prayer as a weapon that can have as much impact as a sword or machine gun?

Now, having said that, let me also say this: it's too deep a topic to enter at this moment, but there is a place for Christians to defend themselves, passively and actively, and we do both each Sunday when we gather. We use technology like cameras throughout the building and grounds to keep an eye on things, but we also have people who serve as part of our safety team watching over everything that happens here. We want to be both welcoming and wise so we pray and we protect.

But getting back to Matthew, Jesus did not defend Himself or call on angels because something else was happening, as He says:

54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

This is super important, you have to understand, this wasn't an ambush, it didn't take Jesus by surprise. He had the spiritual weather app, He saw the storm's path, He knew it was headed straight for Him, but He had to brace for the impact because enduring the storm was critical to accomplishing a much greater good.

55 In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and

you did not seize Me. 56 But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

Do you see again, this reference to the fact that *things had to be this way*? God sent prophets throughout the centuries who told of what God would do and now it was all unfolding. Unfortunately, no one seemed to understand:

(56 cont.) Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Let that sink in. These were the men who swore, just a few hours earlier, they would stick with Jesus through anything.

Friends, you don't know how weak you are until you are tested - any one of us could stumble and fall as well. Any of us could wither in the face of opposition or judgment or even dirty looks and snarky remarks about your faith. Fortunately, when they all left Jesus, He stood firm for them, for us.

57 And those who had laid hold of Jesus led *Him* away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. 58 But Peter followed Him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard. And he went in and sat with the servants to see the end.

At some point Peter stopped running and turned around feeling brave again and followed to see where they were taking Jesus and what was going to happen. We know from the other gospels that John went with him.

They end up at the home of the High Priest, a large house with a courtyard in the middle. The leaders know Jesus is coming, after all, they sent the troops to go grab Him, so they've gathered a bunch of "witnesses" and officials to put him on trial immediately upon arrival.

59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, 60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward 61 and said, "This *fellow* said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

They misunderstood what He was saying because He was talking about His body, not their building – and in fact, when they destroyed His body, He was resurrected in three days.

This trial isn't going anywhere, and that's frustrating to some people, so finally the high priest steps in:

62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? *What is it* these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are

the Christ, the Son of God!"

You can just sense the frustration here, can't you? These men are trying to find a reason, any reason, to pronounce Jesus guilty of something. Finally, Caiaphas asks Him, are you or are you not the Messiah? Not so they can accept Him as the long awaited and promised Son of God, but so they can tell the Romans Jesus is a revolutionary and opposition leader, someone who opposes Rome and should be put to death as an enemy of the state.

And here comes the answer:

64 Jesus said to him, "*It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*"

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes [this was a common expression of outrage or great sorrow], saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! 66 What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."

67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him* with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"

Now remember, Jesus could have easily avoided this. He didn't have to come to Jerusalem for Passover; didn't have to enter the Temple and cause a scene; didn't have to have confrontation with the religious leaders; didn't have to come out to the Garden; didn't have to stand His ground. He could have slipped away in the darkness; could have called on 12 legions of angels, could have demonstrated His own raw power at any time, but He said all of this had to happen *that the Scriptures might be fulfilled*.

Scriptures like those written by the prophet Isaiah some 700 years before these events took place. Writing in the eighth century BC, Isaiah described the suffering servant of God who would come one day to rescue His people. In Isaiah 53 we find this description

Is 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;

We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

We'll talk more about this next week when we look at the power of the cross, but for now, allow me to make the point that human beings did this to Jesus.

That's amazing, isn't it? That Jesus suffers at the hands of men because God is working to save men who obviously need salvation. Is there any better proof of the sinfulness of man than the fact that men put Christ on the cross?

Instead of responding to their anger and violence with anger and violence of His own, instead of demonstrating power, conducting a miracle, or providing an intellectual answer to their probing questions, Jesus suffered their wrath, absorbed their hatred, contempt, and mockery, while working toward the salvation of the very kind of men who would do this.

And lest you think that's just a problem for those people out there, those people who don't really know Jesus, lest you think that "good Christian people" are somehow better, remember what happens with Peter:

Matthew 26:69 Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."
70 But he denied it before *them* all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying."
71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *girl* saw him and said to those *who were* there, "This *fellow* also was with Jesus of Nazareth."
72 But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!"
73 And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are *one* of them, for your speech betrays you."
74 Then he began to curse and swear, *saying*, "I do not know the Man!"
Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.

This day and this chapter started with Jesus telling the disciples He would be arrested and crucified. At dinner, Jesus told the disciples one of them would betray Him. After dinner He told them they were all going to be scattered in just a few hours as something happened to Him. And Peter and all the rest said "No way, never Lord."

In a matter of hours everything He warned about has come to pass and Peter who once felt so sure of himself, so committed, so strong, so self-confident, even ready to take up a

weapon, is weeping bitterly. Jesus told him temptations would come, and to prepare himself for them with prayer, but Peter did not and now we see the consequences: a grown man weeping bitterly.

What happened? Let me outline five steps for you:

First, as we saw last week - *Peter had confidence in himself instead of trusting God.* He said, “even if everyone else leaves you Jesus, I am ready to go to prison or even die for you.” It’s always good to be willing to go, to do whatever is required, to have that go-getter mindset. But don’t go-getting ahead of God. And don’t trust in yourself. Trust in what God can do through you, but remember, “*nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done Lord.*”

Listen to the words of Psalm 20 and the contrast between trusting in self and trusting in God:

Ps 20:1 May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you;
2 May He send you help from the sanctuary,
And strengthen you out of Zion;
3 May He remember all your offerings,
And accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah

4 May He grant you according to your heart’s *desire*,
And fulfill all your purpose.

7 Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses;
But we will remember the name of the LORD our God.

Make yourself available to God, increasingly available to God, but ultimately trust in Him and not yourself.

Second, Peter *neglected the time of prayer.* These two: self-confidence, and prayerlessness often go together. Why pray if you’ve ‘got this?’ But prayer is meant to protect us, to keep us from wandering, and to hold us in relationship with God – don’t give up on prayer, especially if you’re not seeing immediate answers, come time and again and spend time with God. Rely on Him, tell Him you can’t do this without Him. Whether you know the storm is coming or not, you will not regret spending time in prayer. Discover why David was able to say

Ps 55:16 As for me, I will call upon God,
And the LORD shall save me.
17 Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice.
18 He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me,

For there were many against me.

That leads us to our third point, David says the Lord has redeemed him from the battle, even though there were many against him, but *Peter tried to take action on his own*. Do you see how all of this flows together – self-confidence leads to prayerlessness which eventually leads to self-directed action.

But what happens when Peter swings his dagger? What happens when he responds on impulse without being saturated in the Word and prayer? People get hurt. And how true is that of you and me? When we take action on our own, when we try to solve things, or force things, or fix things, on our own without having spent time in the Word and prayer, people get hurt and Jesus has to reach down and heal someone.

Fourth we notice that Peter *followed Jesus at a distance*. This one REALLY interests me, because you don't know whether to commend Peter or condemn him. You see, something in him was loyal, something wanted to stay, but there was also something that wanted to go, something that wanted to keep a safe distance, not get too close. He couldn't leave, but he couldn't press in either. I am absolutely certain that there are several Peters and Petras with us this morning – you want to be close to Jesus, but not too close, you're following, but at a distance.

My friends, press in. Come closer.

James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

The battery on your phone will die if you don't plug it in. It can only hold a charge for so long. The same thing is true in your connection with Jesus; it gets stronger when you plug in.

But have you ever done something like watch a movie or play a game and suddenly your phone, tablet, or laptop just dies? You couldn't see your battery indicator, because you were in full screen mode, you were caught up in what you were doing and your battery was dying. The same thing happens to your soul when you're disconnected from Jesus. And you wind up weeping bitterly because you recognize how easily you could have prevented it by just plugging in your device.

Well, here's good the news. You can plug your device back in and turn it back on, and you can do the same with your soul.

The whole reason Jesus is suffering through all of is so that we can have a relationship, a connection, with Him, so that we can plug in and recharge our dead souls.

After this trial, He will go to the cross and He will hang there and suffer and die innocent of all crimes, as the Passover lamb that makes it possible for us to escape the judgment of God. That evening, they will take His body down and bury it. It will stay in the tomb for three

days and then He will rise and proclaim forgiveness of sin to all who trust in Him.

And He'll go, and He'll seek out Peter, and Jesus will give Him three opportunities to confess his loyalty, one for each time Peter denied. Jesus will restore Peter and Peter will never be the same again.

He will no longer trust in himself, no longer think "I've got this!" No longer avoid prayer, take action on his own or follow Jesus at a distance. In fact, he'll write letters to the church describing himself as a servant of Christ, encouraging them to call on the Father in prayer, telling people about all that God has done for us, and encouraging them to stick close to Him even during terrible times of persecution, trial, and difficulty. He'll learn the lesson and try to pass it on.

The question is, will we?

We're going to receive communion now, to remember the body and blood of Jesus, to take a bit of a time warp right back to the day we just read about, to the hours before Peter completely blew it, and hold in our hands the bread and the cup that remind us of what Jesus is going through and why. As we do, I want to encourage you to take the time to consider: in what ways am I like Peter, and what has Jesus done for me?

Repent of any sin God brings to your mind. Expect Him to do that. In fact, you might even weep bitterly like Peter, but take the bread and the cup anyway if you ask for forgiveness, because God knew you were going to blow it, He never expected you to make it on your own, that's why He sent His Son.

Hold on to the elements, and we'll all partake together in just a moment.

Let's pray.