

Seven Days and Counting – Holy Thursday

Matthew 26: 30-46

April 7, 2019

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Today is Thursday – Holy Thursday to be precise

Thursday of Holy Week was a day filled with many teachings and events.

Time was rapidly drawing to a close for Jesus and there was so much left to say, to teach and to encourage

Throughout the day:

Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple itself (some 40 years later)

He spoke of how there will always be wars and rumors of war.

He spoke of the end times in detail and warned that of that day and hour no one knows.

Jesus was anointed by a woman with a very expensive flask of ointment.

Judas consorted with the chief priests to sell out Jesus for 30 pieces of silver - \$15K ?

Preparations were made for the Passover meal and the Last Supper was held where

Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and instituted the sacrament of Holy

Communion as a remembrance of His sacrifice for us so soon to come.

So it had been a very full day and there was still much more remaining to take place



After dinner, Jesus and the now eleven disciples made their way to the Garden of Gethsemane

It was a quiet, meditative place, across the Kedron Valley away from the noise of the city.

Jesus wanted and needed a place to pray at the most challenging and desperate point in His life

This night represented the pivotal point in time for which Jesus came to earth.
Up to now, He had been a remarkable teacher and healer.

He had challenged things that had been corrupted in the Jewish faith.
And had he followed the well meant advice of some of His disciples and gotten out of town to a place of safety, that is how Jesus' life would have remained in history.
But on this Thursday night, Jesus made the difficult decision to become the Savior of the world by the giving of His own life upon the Cross – a decision that was not at all easy for Him to make as is demonstrated in the depth and desperation of His prayer there in the garden.

Jesus prayed that, if possible, some other means might be found.

He had undoubtedly witnessed the crucifixion of others – very public events:
The harassment, the beatings, the shame of dragging a cross through the streets
The excruciating pain and the lingering death
Yet knowing that, Christ went willingly to that Cross, for you and for me, unworthy as we are – is a great demonstration of God's grace and Jesus' love for us



At Gethsemane, Jesus asked His followers to wait for Him while He prayed.

They didn't grasp the gravity of what was coming in just a short time; they didn't understand the things Jesus had been forecasting regarding this night and as a result, after such a full day, feel asleep.

It causes me to wonder, how much about the Christian faith, the Christian life, we fail to grasp.
How we take it so casually, when Jesus took it so very seriously.
Something to contemplate in Holy Week.



During that time, Peter announced to Jesus that, no matter what, he was there for Him - “Though everyone else falls away, I never will” he says, with real conviction.

And Jesus replies, “before the cock crows, you'll deny knowing who I am three times”.

Nah – that isn't going to happen – but it did.

All the disciples said the same thing, and they all split within hours.

What about my own level of dedication – what about yours?

When you're not threatened you can say, “I'm a Christian”.

You can wear a cross or a lapel pin with a religious symbol.

You can go to church to worship, carry a Bible.

You can put something faith based on Facebook.

But what if a threat arises?

Presently, 1 in 9 Christians around the world face persecution on a daily basis.

In 2018 over 4100 Christians were put to death for their faith in 50 countries.

In the same year at least 2600 were sentenced to prison just for their beliefs.

And just last year 1266 churches were attacked.

To be a Christian in that environment requires real dedication and conviction.

Persecution is on the rise in our own country

This is a land in which our national motto is “In God We Trust”

Our pledge to the flag announces we are “one nation under God”.

Yet religious expression is becoming more and more restricted

Christian businesses have been boycotted because of the owner's beliefs.

People have been jailed for choosing faith over state/federal law.

You can't be a casual Christian anymore – never should have been, but now can't.



Around a fire in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter denied knowing who Jesus was.

He feared for his own life, for good reason.

He too, had witnessed crucifixions – he wanted to live, he wanted to return to Galilee and fish; he wanted to see his family again.

To speak up would do little if anything to stop the events spiraling into motion
Having escaped that line of questioning, Peter left the court yard with great remorse, which could only be healed later on after the Resurrection.



The trial before Caiaphas

was a mockery of justice.

The law forbade covert, under the guise of dark, trials, but that didn't stop them.

It was a case where they wanted Jesus out of the way so much that they would do whatever it took to accomplish that.

There were no real charges against Him, so they were determined to find something.

Nothing could be found despite a line up of false witnesses (vs 60) all offering conflicting stories, until 2 were found to say, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to build it in three days.'" - Hardly a capital crime, but it would have to do.

They didn't see that Jesus wasn't referring to marble and stone, but to Himself – no matter

So, Jesus is misrepresented, even as the faith He established is misrepresented in our time.

Jesus was there to help, to teach, to raise understanding, to heal and to encourage and yet His adversaries made Him out to be a disruptor and even a blasphemer.

When I look at the Christian faith today, in all its many expressions, I see how the church is here to do the same things Jesus did in His ministry.

To feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, heal the sick, teach of a better way of life; lead people to salvation.

Churches provide food banks, soup kitchens, clothing outlets, medical care facilities (free), educational institutions, home repairs and even building of whole houses.

We provide places for children and youth to learn about Jesus, about faith, about living a healthy life in body, mind and spirit.

And yet, what is portrayed to the world is an institution that is self serving, regressive rather than progressive, restrictive rather than freeing, corrupted and oppressive.

It's hard to shake that sort of portrayal; Christians are indeed held to a different standard



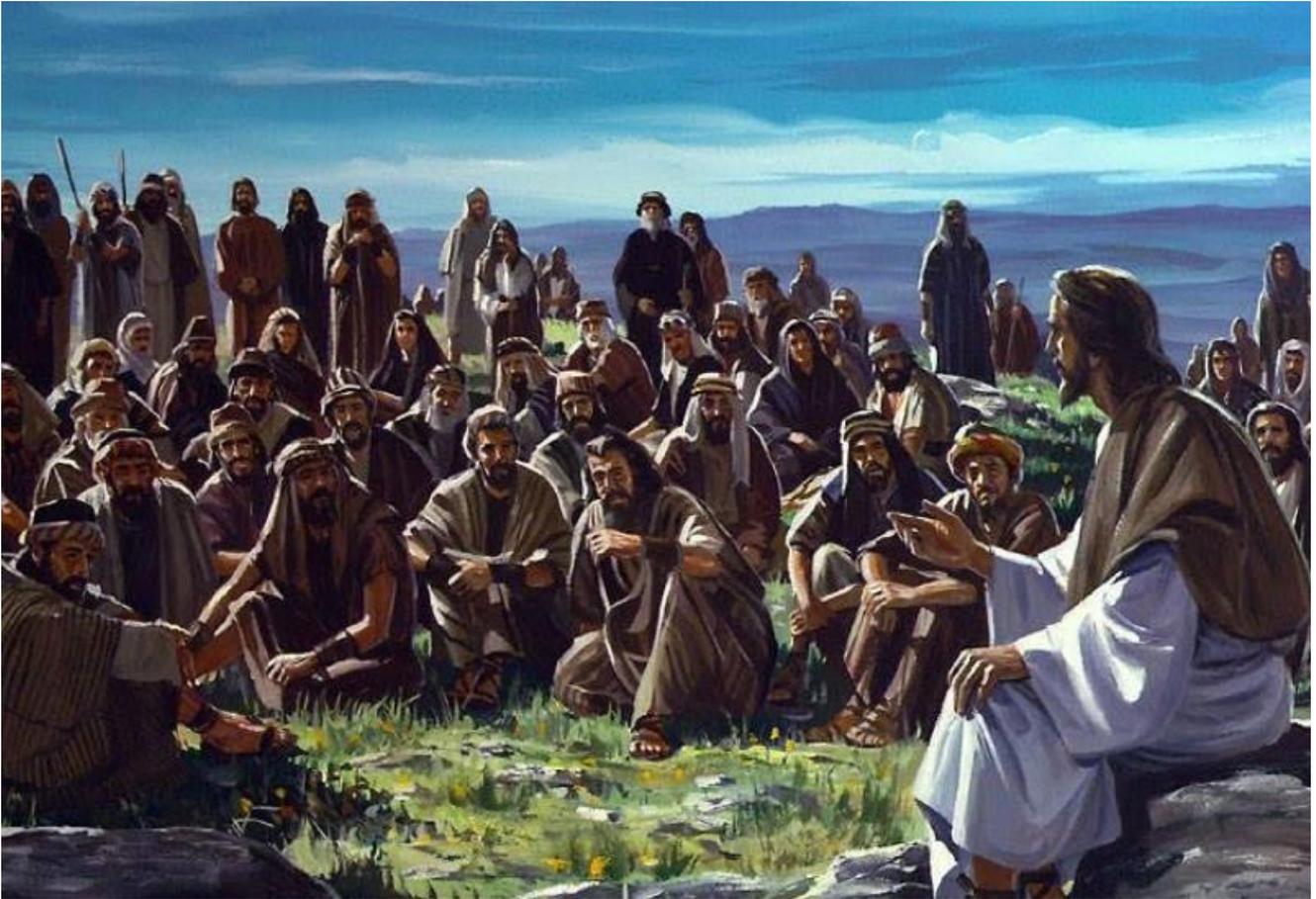
After everyone left the scene of the arrest; apparently only Peter went to the courtyard.

The Bible doesn't tell us where everyone else went.

Maybe back out to Bethany to put a little distance between them and the potential for arrest.

Maybe back to the upper room where they had just been for the last supper.

Maybe just wandering the streets of Jerusalem, fading into the shadows of night or among anyone who might be out that late.



What might they have been thinking? Jesus is arrested; He's in serious jeopardy with no one to defend him.

These past three years they've been together, what of those?

What has been accomplished? It all seemed so good, so vital, so full of potential...

The crowds, the accolades of Palm Sunday just a few days earlier...

The great lessons Jesus presented on the Galilean hillside.

The lives touched and restored, the encouragement, the healings - the blind see again – the lame walk – the afflicted are healed of every kind of disease.

People were grasping a new understanding of a loving, caring, benevolent God

And now, it looks like it's over – what will they do? What will they do?

Has it been worth it? Will any good come of all this? Will it have made a difference?

Those were dark hours indeed – hope was gone, fear replaced confidence.

Maybe any one of them would be the next to be dragged into court, not for anything they may have done, just for being associated with Jesus.

Just for being a Christian.

There's more to the story...

Yet, there's more to the story. While Thursday night is dark as it can get, it's not over. Sometimes things get worse before they get better, as would be the case here. Friday would prove to be even more devastating, but even there, the story does not end. So, come again next week to hear where things go next and what that all means to each of us.

Memory Verse – *Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” (Matthew 26:34)*

Next Steps *Recall in what circumstances you have in some way denied Christ
Consider how you might respond the next time your faith is challenged
Can others see in you that you know and follow Jesus?*