

## Jesus Arrested

Matt. 26:47-56

**Intro.** When filling out an employment application or being interviewed for a job, the question is often asked, *"Have you ever been arrested or convicted of a crime?"* Somebody evidently thinks it's important to know if you're a law-keeper or a law-breaker. Am I right about that? And if when driving we're ever stopped by the police, why do we slink down in the seat and hope no one we know passes by? And why do those arrested and hand-cuffed tend to duck away from reporter's cameras? In our current membership class we're happy to have a man and wife who are retired from law enforcement. Since I first met Daniel, I've been wondering where I'd seen him before. When, I learned he was a retired policeman, I asked if maybe I'd seen him in court. (I quickly added that I served jury duty twice. And I've also been in court several times to support some of our members...they were innocent don't you know. I wanted to assure him I'd never personally been arrested for a crime.

I think you get the point. We all recognize the humiliation, embarrassment, shame and negative stigma attached to arrest by law enforcement and the whole day in court scene. Seriously, the times I've had to be in court, I felt compelled to tell the parking attendant why I was there.

Now hold those thoughts and consider what happened to the Creator when He was here. The only sinless person ever to walk earth's dusty paths was rejected, despised and arrested like a common criminal. The only innocent man who ever lived was falsely accused and condemned. Yet here's the great mystery...Jesus allowed it to be so. He accepted the appearance of guilt and shame and every negative connotation attached to a law-breaker. We shouldn't read the verses before us this morning without a full awareness of who Jesus is and the outrageous fact that God would allow wicked men to arrest and roughly handle His sinless Son. **Isa. 53:4, 5 - ...we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** Notice...when Jesus was arrested, condemned and crucified, onlookers felt He was getting what He deserved. And God didn't intervene to correct them...He allowed the general public to have those thoughts. This is divine mercy and grace on full display. This is how low our Savior stooped to reach us and lift us up. **He was pierced for our transgressions** not His own!

It was now very early Friday morning. The night before Jesus and His disciples had left the fellowship of the upper room and crossed the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. Taking 3 of the disciples into the garden, Jesus asked them to watch and pray while He went further into the garden to be alone with His Father. But Jesus returned 3 x's only to find them sleeping. **Lk. 22:45** says, **When He rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, He found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.** As the section ends, Jesus said, **"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!"** Knowing the agony He would suffer was just hours away, Jesus went out to meet the crowd that was coming to arrest Him. He was resigned to do His Father's will despite the terrible cost.

**1. The Arresting Squad and the Traitor's Kiss – vs. 47-50 - 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.**

The phrase, **large crowd** is like an understatement. When all the Gospel accounts are considered, this crowd included Judas / the High Priest and his servants / the chief priests / scribes / elders / temple police / and a cohort of Roman soldiers.

The **cohort** could have been as many as 600 men. So the **large** Jewish and Gentile crowd coming to arrest Jesus numbered nearly 1,000! Carrying lanterns and torches, they came like a brute squad armed with swords and clubs. They came expecting resistance. But doesn't the sheer size of this posse suggest that some acknowledged the miracles Jesus performed? Why else would this many be summoned to arrest one man and His followers whose mission to date had been entirely peaceful? They came with overwhelming force because of the unusual power Jesus possessed. Their extensive preparations bore an unintended testimony to the divine power resident in Jesus. But little did they realize how badly they underestimated the power of heaven at Christ's disposal. But coming as they did, they unwittingly confessed that Jesus is out of the ordinary and His power defies any rational explanation. The adage is true...*"none are so blind as those who refuse to see."*

And Luke tells us Judas was leading them. (**Lk. 22:47**). Judas told those in charge that he would kiss the one they had come to arrest. As is customary in many parts of the world, Judas came directly to Jesus said, **"Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him.** The words of the Psalmist were fulfilled. **Psa. 41:9 - Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.** Notice that Jesus called Judas, **friend** or *companion*. Jesus still loved this man who was now thoroughly under Satan's control. Though the heart of Judas was hardened, he must have been haunted by the unconditional love he was shown. And it's interesting to note that none of the Gospel writers spoke evil of Judas though given opportunities to put them in writing. They didn't shy from labeling him the betrayer, but they didn't pour epithets on Judas or malign his character. They saw him as a man to be pitied. He was a fallen comrade. As Jesus said...a **friend**. It would seem that each Gospel writer had already grown to realize the truth that, *"there but for the grace of God go I."*

To get more of the picture we need to turn to **Jn.18** and read **vs. 4-9.** **Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am He," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."** Notice this...when Jesus said, **"I am he,"** the entire brute squad suddenly backed away and fell all over themselves.

In my mind's eye I replay a hilarious scene I witnessed some years ago. I see the offensive squad of a freshman football team seated on the bench anxiously waiting their turn to be on the gridiron. But suddenly this squad was confronted by a good sized running back with three pursuing defenders racing at them at full speed. To evade the collision, those in the impact zone leaned back which caused the entire bench to overturn. From where we were seated, it was nothing but several dozen flailing legs and cleats. That's the picture that comes to mind when I imagine what happened here. Overwhelming strength was instantly licking dirt and humiliated.

Now my advice to you is this...don't believe everything just because it's in print or on the internet. Here's what one commentator writes about this upended posse. *"Older preachers have long regarded this as a miracle. The more contemporary thought is they didn't fall down, but bowed to the dignity and majesty of Jesus."* I guess I'm one of the "older preachers" he's talking about. But in my mind, this more enlightened idea makes no sense at all. This mixed crowd armed with swords and clubs didn't come to worship anybody. They came to arrest a man who was perceived to be a rebel and a threat to the Roman peace. Besides that, every indication from the text leads us to believe what happened here was miraculous. God gave this crowd a powerful demonstration they would never forget. When Jesus said, **I am He,** He used that mysterious and holy name of Yahweh that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush. (**Ex. 3:14**) I AM was the name Jesus frequently applied to Himself. (**Jn. 8:58**)

When Jesus said **I AM** the legs of Israel's finest and the cohort of sturdy Roman soldiers went limp. It was like a rug had been pulled out from under them. They fell like dominoes. **Jer. 46:12b** says, **One warrior will stumble over another; both will fall down together.**" People falling to the ground in the presence of God are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (for example, **Ezek 1:28; Dan 10:9; Rev 1:17**), I believe this was God again speaking to this crowd and saying, **"This is my beloved Son!"** And when the crowd was momentarily immobilized and scrambling to get to their feet...a window of escape was opened for the disciples. John's account suggests that in **18:8, 9** where Jesus said, **"If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."** So the disciples escaped into the darkness. In the terror and chaos of the moment, no one thought to pursue them. All this was part of God's plan to protect Christ's followers. But let's get back to Matthew's account.

**2. The Sword-swinging Reaction and the Savior's Response – vs. 51-54 - 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?"**

Piecing together the sequence of events is a little tricky. Each Gospel writer had his own distinct purpose for writing. Matthew presents a more condensed account leaving voids that are filled by the other Gospel writers. In the sequence of events, I tend to think Peter reacted this way immediately after the men laid their hands on Jesus. After this, Jesus identified Himself and the crowd fell down. But make no mistake...Peter was aiming for the head. Because the man ducked, Peter's sword only lopped off an ear. The whole story might have been different if Peter's sword killed him. Matthew says the unlucky target of Peter's sword was the servant of the High Priest. John says his name was **Malchus** and that it was his **right ear. Jn. 18:10** (Why do we need to know that?) Later it was a relative of **Malchus** who challenged Peter saying, **"Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"** Peter's response became his third denial...and at that moment a rooster crowed.

Dr. Luke is the only Gospel writer to say that Jesus miraculously restored the man's ear. **Lk. 22:51 - But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.** The Lord provided this crowd with yet another miraculous demonstration...but again, that's just the opinion of an *"older preacher."* First, the mention of Christ's name knocked them off their feet. Then Jesus re-attached a severed ear. But why? Why were these miracles part of God's plan? He did it because heaven is not willing for one soul to perish. Even in this hour when Satan was smiling and darkness reigned, God's mercy was available and His grace was detectable. And here's my idea...Who can say...maybe in heaven we'll meet someone who was part of this crowd that arrested Jesus...and maybe one we meet will have a scar on his right ear. We'll ask...what happened to your ear? And he'll say, "Ask Peter." You think it's not possible? Was anyone a less likely candidate for salvation than Saul of Tarsus? We might be surprised who we meet there. Just be sure to be there yourself!

When Jesus visited the towns in Galilee, the Scripture says He sometimes healed everyone who was sick. He cured incurable diseases and restored missing limbs. He cast out demons and raised the dead to life. John tells us Jesus did so much more than is written in this book. But thinking about this miracle of restoring a severed ear...it's astounding to read that Jesus bypassed hours of micro-surgery and simply **touched the man's ear and healed him.** But that's how Jesus healed people. His miracles were instantaneous and complete. These miracles should have made an impression too hard to forget...miracles that should have produced faith. But the Scripture is clear when it says faith comes by hearing the message not by seeing the miracles. (**Rom. 10:17**) Just think of all the miracles Judas witnessed without trusting Jesus in a saving way. Miracles support and perhaps strengthen

faith, but they can never produce faith in those who refuse to believe. **Lk. 22:49** says, **When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?"** Even before Jesus and the disciples crossed the Kidron to Gethsemane, we're told that two of the disciples were carrying. Jesus authorized them to have a concealed weapons permit. **The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That is enough," He replied. - Lk. 22:38** Reading between the lines Jesus may have thought to Himself, two swords is actually two too many. Two swords against so many armed men...the odds weren't very favorable for the disciples. But that didn't stop Peter. Remember, impulsive Peter boasted he was willing to die with Jesus and now he's about to prove it. We have to admit, no one could start swinging his sword against a force this large who expected to come out of it alive! So whether courageous or foolish but certainly impulsive...Peter drew his sword and took a swipe at the first guy in line. As John tells us, Jesus had to repair the damage. He responded by telling Peter to put his sword away and added, **"for all who draw the sword will die by the sword."** In other words, Jesus said, *"violence leads only to more violence and doing this will kill you."*

You may not have realized this, but my sister in law, Michele is a formidable woman no one should ever mess with. She grew up in New York City where a friendly greeting goes like this, *"So, what are you lookin at?"* My brother Tom tells of a traffic accident that happened immediately ahead of them. A younger guy slammed into a guy driving a pick up truck. No one needs to tell you this, but Michigan guys love their trucks. Am I right? When things got heated, Tom intervened and tried to calm down the truck's owner. Watching tensions escalate, Michele saw the young man reach into his glove box and take out a hand gun. She immediately jumped of the car, raced up to the driver and told him to put it away. She said, *"no good will come from this...put that gun away!"* And guess what?...he did. So as the Marvelettes sang, *"Don't mess with Michele...no, no, no, no."* (or was it Bill?) But Michele knew what Jesus meant when He said, **all who draw the sword will die by the sword.**

So, Peter was impulsive and ill-advised for drawing his sword in the first place. Later that day Jesus told Pontius Pilate, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."** God's plan was not to establish His kingdom by force but through His gracious offer of salvation. Like the Muslim Intifada today all forced conversion is a terrible distortion of the true God's plan. The Crusades are an historical aberration...a black eye the Church has not been able to escape.

But then Jesus added the second reason Peter's reaction was so foolish. He said, **Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?** Twelve full legions is 72,000 angels. Think of it...If just one angel...the Angel of the Lord, put to death 185,000 troops belonging to King Sennacherib's Assyrian army, what chance did this brute squad have against 12 legions of angels? (**II Kings 19:35**) In the pressure of the moment, Peter seems to have forgotten who Jesus is and who has His back. Jesus could have taken care of Himself if it was God's will for Him to do so.

A third reason Peter's reaction was so ill-advised emerges in **v. 54** where Jesus said, **But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"** Earlier Peter had to be corrected when He presumed to tell the Lord He would never be crucified. Now he again behaves in way that was contrary to the will of God revealed by the prophets. Isaiah said God's servant would be silent like a lamb led to slaughter. (**53:7**) The Scriptures also said He would do no violence and no deceit would come from his mouth. (**53:9**) Peter's outburst was completely out of character with the meek and lowly Jesus and His mission to seek and save the lost. As Dr. Wiersbe has pointed out, *"Peter has argued with the Word / denied the Word / disobeyed the Word / and now he ran ahead of the Word."* He didn't wait for the Lord to tell him what to do but rushed ahead still confident of his own wisdom and abilities. He's really quite a guy!

If Jesus hadn't restored the man's severed ear, there might have been four crosses at Golgotha! But the fact that Jesus wasn't arrested at the Temple and Peter wasn't arrested later when recognized at the Palace of Caiaphas is evidence of divine control and protection. None of these things happened by accident or chance. This was all part of God's plan to provide salvation for the world through Christ's death and to see that the Good News of it got out by way of the disciple's survival.

**3. The Indicting Questions and the Scriptures Fulfilled – vs. 55, 56 - 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.**

What Jesus said to the crowd is still further evidence of the grace that reaches out to sinners time and time again. Jesus called Judas **friend** and then healed a sinful man who came determined to arrest Him. Now He asks the crowd a question designed to give them something to think about. He said, **"Am I leading a rebel-lion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?"** Why did they feel it necessary to take Him by force? Why so large a posse? Why all the swords and clubs? Why did they think it necessary to arrest Him at night? Jesus had not been in hiding like a wanted felon. He said, **Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me.** If Peter and the other disciples were wrong to think force was necessary to God's program, this unbelieving crowd was just as wrong. They'd come prepared for a fight but there was no fight. Jesus wasn't the rebel His accusers claimed Him to be. He went to them with perfect knowledge of what lay ahead.

This section ends with these words...**Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled.** 600 years earlier in a cryptic prophecy, Zechariah had said, **Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.** – **Zech. 13:7** This ancient prophecy was now coming to pass. Listen...God's Word can be trusted. What God has promised will come to pass and nothing can stand in its way. The disciples deserted Jesus and fled. From this point on, Jesus would face His adversaries alone while His friends watched from a distance. I don't want to end on that note, but the disciples fleeing and hiding dramatically illustrates who is faithful and who isn't. It teaches us to count on Jesus and to not expect more than we should from anyone else.

But something incredible was happening in and around Jerusalem that nearly everyone was oblivious to. In **v.56** Jesus said, **"But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled."** Behind the movements of men, the Word of God spoken through the prophets was being fulfilled. The world's redeemer had come and the focal point of His mission was unfolding. Like a news reporter who now understands the scope of what happened a few months earlier, on the day of Pentecost, Peter gave this explanation. **Acts 2:22-24 - "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.**

In his classic work, A Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens wrote the famous line... *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."* That line fits the Passion Week perfectly. It was the best of times for all who have benefitted from the salvation Jesus purchased, but it was the worst of times for Jesus on earth and the Father in Heaven who loves His Son. It's astounding to realize how oblivious people were to the wonderful things God was doing. Israel's Messiah had come. He was handed over and put to death according to **God's set purpose and foreknowledge.** Heaven's plan was unfolding. God's love was about to be shown in its greatest and most conclusive display.

The Scriptures were being fulfilled. A fountain of cleansing from sin was being opened. And Christ's kingdom was advancing. God had opened His heart and proved He was willing to extend mercy and grace to everyone...even to Christ's betrayer and to the blood-thirsty mob who came to arrest His beloved Son.

Let me leave you with a verse. **The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all he has made.**  
**- Psa. 145:9** The saddest story in earth's history is a story of unrequited love. It's the story God expressing His redeeming love through a costly sacrifice, only to have that love scorned and rejected. Please understand that Jesus suffered the humiliation of arrest and the horrors of the cross because He loves you and wants to save you. You can't do anything to stop God from loving you. But you can refuse His love and reject His desire efforts to save you. Don't do that. Trust Jesus today and experience a saving love you can never be separated from.