

Commentary for Lesson 2

March 8, 2020

Jesus in Gethsemane

Focal Passage: Matthew 26:36-46

Background Text: Same

Purpose: To realize that suffering can come to all parts of our lives

Note: For those readers who use supplementary commentaries to prepare for each week's lesson, we will post downloadable commentary on AdultBibleStudies.com through the summer quarter. We will publish an annual commentary for purchase for Fall 2020–Summer 2021.

Introduction

Chapter 26, along with Chapter 27, constitutes what has come to be known as the Passion story, the narrative account of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem before his death on the cross. The content of the Passion story contains important content: the conspiracy against Jesus by the high priests and elders; his Last Supper with his disciples; his agony and arrest in Gethsemane; the two trials before Caiaphas and Pilate, which condemned him to death; his torture by the Romans; the Crucifixion on Calvary, and his burial in the tomb. These are the definitive events in the Christian story in which believers ever since have found the primary meaning of their faith.

All evidence indicates that the Passion story was the earliest part of the Gospel to be brought together, circulating first in oral form and then as a written document. Mark 14–15 is as close as we can get to that original source, long since disappeared as a separate document. Matthew had no other independent Passion material beyond those chapters in Mark. Matthew introduces a number of Old Testament verses that he believes were being fulfilled by the events in the story.

Chapter 26 begins with Jesus' fourth announcement of the Crucifixion and carries the story through the hearing before Caiaphas and Peter's denial.

The Garden of Gethsemane (26:36-46)

Here is where Jesus wins his victory over Satan. Alone, with the disciples sleeping (a metaphor for infidelity), Jesus chose not to run away, as it would be tempting and easy to do. Instead, he stayed to bear witness through his death to God's forgiving love.

No one heard Jesus' prayers; the disciples must have known by intuition in retrospect how he would have prayed. Notice that Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John, the same three who went with him up the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1).

The Message of Matthew 26

The Lord's Supper is a time to remember the meal Jesus ate with his disciples on the night when he was betrayed. Each time we drink the cup at Communion, we receive forgiveness of sins. And we remember Jesus' promise that he will drink the cup anew with us in God's kingdom. That promise and that gift make Communion an occasion no less for joy than for sorrow.

Peter sometimes stands as a mirror in which we see ourselves reflected. "I will never fall away," he fervently proclaimed. But in the same night, maybe no more than six hours later, he cried with equal ardor, "I do not know the man." On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter wanted to build three booths so the disciples and Jesus could stay there, little understanding why Jesus must go down the mountain to his death (17:4). And while Peter slept, his master went far into the valley of the shadow of death, alone! Words echoed from the apostle Paul: "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

One of the most pathetic sentences in the entire Gospel occurs in 26:56: "All the disciples deserted him and fled." We have read much in this Gospel about the responsibility of true shepherds of the sheep. Here is a frightening picture of sheep abandoning the shepherd!

Shepherds need warning about fidelity to shepherding. And who cannot think of shepherds who forsook the sheep? But sheep can also forsake the shepherd and run away. Or, as a preacher once reminded his flock, "Sheep can nibble themselves lost."

Adult Bible Studies Commentary

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