

“Taken for Me” // Matthew 26:30–56 // *Instead of Me* #2

(*Instead of Me* video)—come out to **musical** pad

Matthew 26:30¹: When we left Jesus last week, he had offered to his disciples the bread and the cup, and ³⁰After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

³⁶Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he told the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷Taking along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.” ³⁹Going a little farther, he fell facedown and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, “So, couldn’t you stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray, so that you won’t enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴²Again, a second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” ⁴³And he came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open.

¹ I am deeply indebted in my approach to this passage to sermons I heard Tim Keller and CJ Mahaney preach on the passage. A few of the quotes and some of the commentary work

Works Consulted:

“The Betrayal,” John Mark Comer

“The Dark Garden” And “The World’s Sword,” Tim Keller

“Betrayed for Me,” James MacDonald

⁴⁴After leaving them, he went away again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? See, the time is near. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up; let’s go. See, my betrayer is near.” ⁴⁷And while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived.

This is the kind of passage I feel like is not in there for me to be creative with, or to illustrate and apply to your life. It’s in there for two reasons: 1) to **confront us with the magnitude of what Jesus did** for us, and 2) to **show us how to respond to that**.

PRAYER: “...one of most sacred moments in history—where your glory is displayed. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear.”

One of the first things we have to acknowledge from this scene is that Jesus does not appear to be going to his death with the defiance and bravado that we might have expected.

- In fact, if **I could be so bold**, he appears **weak—almost scared**.

A lot of the world’s other great martyrs, by contrast, died with their fist in the face of the evil empire, defiantly saying, “I’m not afraid of death. Bring it on, I’ll never back down.” (think scenes portrayed in movies like Braveheart or Gladiator).

- **Socrates, for example**, was cool and stoic when he went to his execution; when he was given the hemlock to drink, he showed no signs of fear and even cracked a few jokes. Defiant to the end.

come from them. Particularly the language about confidence of Jesus in your darkest hour because of his commitment to you in your darkest hour is from him.

- **Many Jewish heroes around the time of Jesus went to their martyrdom in a similar way:** People like Spartacus, and Maccabees.
- **Many of Jesus' followers died bravely and defiantly.** One of my favorites is the story of **Polycarp**, the student of the Apostle John. When they came to arrest him, he was 86 years old, and he asked for a moment to pray, which he did very calmly. **When they tied him to the stake**, they asked him if he had any last words before they burned him. He said in a loud voice to the crowd: *"You think I'm afraid of THIS fire? It burns for just a moment and is gone. You should be afraid of the fires of hell. I'm not scared of these temporary flames, you should be afraid of the eternal ones. Come on boys, bring on the fire."*² That's how I want to die. BOOM. That's a hero; that's a martyr.

Yet here, we see Jesus approach death with a different sort of spirit. He's trembling, stammering, going back and forth frenetically between God and his disciples. Asking God if there is another way. **Matthew even says at one point, vs. 39**, he falls facedown—he's too weak even to stand up! **Martin Luther** said, *"Never do we see a man fear death like this man!"*

And **what is really strange about this** is that everywhere else Jesus is the one who shows unflinching courage in the face of danger. **(Right before this, for example,** Jesus' disciples are trying to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem because it was so dangerous for him there, but Jesus told them it was his destiny and he had to go. **Right after this,** he's going to stare down Pilate with stone cold resolve.)

So, what has happened at this moment?

Verse 37 gives us a clue: it says that as he prayed, **"he began to be sorrowful and troubled."**

² Actual: *"The fire you threaten lasts only an hour and is quenched with just a little, but what do you know of the fires of judgment? So come on boys, bring on the fire."*

- *"began"*— means that he saw something—*while he was praying*— that astonished him. It **began** at that moment.
- The word translated "sorrowful" is a very strong Greek word that can mean **horrified**, especially when you couple it with "troubled."³ One scholar says it indicates the kind of the feeling you'd have, for example, if you came home one evening and found your family mutilated.
- Whatever he saw was so troubling that Jesus **almost died** from it—see, **38** **"I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me."** Jesus is **not one prone to exaggeration** in moments like this, which meant he saw something so horrifying he literally almost died under the strain.
- **In fact,** Luke says that what he saw caused him such strain that he begins to literally sweat great drops of blood. **A condition called "hematridosis,"** where you are under such distress that your capillaries burst.
- **Raudel's son:** He asked the doctor about them, and the doctor said that right before his son had lost consciousness at the bottom of the pool; evidently, he had been screaming so forcefully for his father that the capillaries in his face burst.
- Here is Jesus, **my friends**—the eternal Word of God, who **spoke the worlds into existence**, who walked on top of **angry waves**, calmed the **fiercest storms**, cast out **demons**, healed **diseases** and brought **life back to the dead**—so horrified at something that he sees that his capillaries burst, nearly causing his death.

What had he seen that troubled him so? The real question is what he had not seen. **You see, in vs. 39, when he called out to God his Father,** as he had numerous times throughout his life, he gets no response. He refers to God as Abba, a term of closest intimacy. But, for the first time in all of eternity, the Father was silent.

³ Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 74, fn. 19.

- Up until this point he has enjoyed the closest intimacy with the Father—so much so that it was where he consistently **withdrew** in times of trouble **to draw strength and comfort**. The Father had always radiated with openness to him, sometimes even affirming him publicly...
- **But now, only silence.**

And so, he stumbles back to his disciples looking, it seems, for some kind of comfort... He wakes them up, and says, “Guys, I need you to be up with me.” (vs. 38) **Isn’t there something really tender about all this?** It reminds of a child who just doesn’t want to be alone—maybe scared of the dark, or before they go into surgery. “Stay awake with me, Mommy, and hold my hand.”

But the disciples aren’t there to help him because they are asleep. Asleep while the most significant moment of history unfolds in front of them. **Utterly unaware** of the significance of what is happening, **disloyal to the one** who has been nothing but loyal to them. **Asleep when heaven and hell are in the balance!** Could I stop... What a revealing picture of us! That’s another sermon for another day.

But, asleep they are, and so, vs. 42, he goes back again to the Father, saying the exact same thing. “Father, if there is any other way, save me from this.” **Again, only silence.**

What is happening? William Lane, NT scholar, says that the only explanation for these events is that **here, in Gethsemane, God had already begun to turn his face away.** The judgment for our sin has already become. Before the first nail was driven into his body, Jesus’ soul was being abandoned by God.

Jesus had lived his entire life, you see, with the **approval of the Father**, and now, in the **moment Jesus needed** his Father most, God turned his face away. And **Jesus staggered under the weight** of it, almost to the point of death.

- William Lane says, **“This is the horror of one who lived wholly for the Father, who came to be with his Father for a brief interlude before his death and found hell, rather than heaven, open before him.”**

He was facing aloneness—utter aloneness. *Have you ever felt utterly alone?* Maybe it’s been on the **heels of a betrayal**, by a trusted friend or a spouse; or maybe **during a really dark period** of your life. **Jesus felt that.**

He felt not just aloneness, but **rejection.** *Have you ever been really rejected?* It’s what Jesus went through.

- I think about what it would be like to **turn away from one** of my children in a moment when they needed me—**to have them look to me in a moment of pain**, or weakness, and for me to turn from them, in scorn, and say, “You are not my child”. Can you **imagine how crushing** that would be to them? Yet my **children have only known me** for a few years, and I’m not a perfect father. *What must it have been like to lose the infinite love of the Father that you’ve known from all eternity?*

Is it possible even to describe this? I feel like there’s really nothing I can say that will make us really understand what Jesus was going through, no illustration that enables us feel the weight of this.

- **Any human analogy I come up with** only takes away from the darkness and bitterness of this moment: **“This is the horror of one who lived wholly for the Father, who came to be with his Father for a brief interlude before his death and found hell, rather than heaven, open before him.”** Somehow in that one moment Jesus glimpsed an eternity in hell for us. Because, see, that is the essence of hell is: **Complete abandonment by God.**

When I was younger, I always thought that what made Jesus’ death so bad were the **physical horrors**, and they were terrible...

- **Cicero** said that one of the Roman’s goals in the cross was utter humiliation... They beat them until they were **barely recognizable**... **Cicero said that** it was not uncommon in the scourging to see a **rib** go flying off the frame); we are almost certain he was at least partially **disemboweled**
- **9” nails, crown of thorns** pressed into his head... The prophet Isaiah said he was beaten to a point he didn’t look like a man—
- He was **nailed up on a cross, naked, in a public place** in the full light of day...

So yes, the physical horrors were terrible... but (listen) *that’s not, IN GETHSEMANE, what made Jesus stagger. It was the abandonment by God he faced. That was the horror of the cross for him. That’s why the Gospel writers, honestly, don’t focus much* on the physiological aspects of the crucifixion—they don’t go into gory detail. Because **the physical suffering, as bad as it was, wasn’t the essence** of Calvary. The essence of Calvary was abandonment by God.

In Gethsemane, Jesus looked full into the cup of God’s wrath, and it overwhelmed him so badly that **it almost killed him**.

- **Gethsemane means “oil press,”** and that’s what is happening: The reality of God’s wrath against our sin is pressing in on Jesus, and it is literally squeezing the life out of him.
- **(I hesitate to use this**, but it’s like the scene in "The Force Awakens," when Rey is drawn to Luke’s light saber. And **as soon as she puts her hand on the light saber**, she gets a swift but overwhelming glimpse of what is about to happen. And it knocks her to the ground.) Jesus knelt down in prayer and **got a sudden but overwhelming glimpse of the wrath of God** and he almost died from it—just the sight of it!

So, he prayed, 3 times, *“Father, if there is any other way, let this cup pass from me.”* **Had Jesus ever prayed another prayer** that had not been answered? Yet this one was not. **Because there was no other way.**

- **Isa 51:17** describes God’s wrath against our sin is like a toxic poison kept in a cup. As that cup was offered to us, Jesus stepped in the way, and drank it for us, to the dregs.
- **J. Edwards** described it like a **dam breaking**
- **Spurgeon compared it to a gnat being run over a freight train**
- If I had been there and tried to stop Jesus he would have said to me, *“No, J.D., this cup is your cup. There is no other way.”* Our salvation was **something only God himself** could accomplish.

You know... J. Edwards asked the question, *“Why would God open up for Jesus the horrors of the cross like this here in Gethsemane?”* **It almost seems cruel**; and, in one sense, a little risky: What if seeing these things made Jesus want to back out? Why not wait until Jesus was secured to the cross to show him all this?”

Edwards’ answer: *“It was so we could see Jesus could go to the cross voluntarily knowing full well what he was about to experience, so that his love for us would be put on display even more.”* It was so we could see the extent of the price he was willing to pay to redeem us.

- **Romans 5:8, But God demonstrated...**
- **One of the accounts say an angel** came to minister to him at this point... Did he give him a John Piper book on suffering to read? What did the angel say? We don’t know.
- **But we do know that the writer of Hebrews** says that when Jesus got up from here to go to the cross... he did so **“with joy” because of something** that had been set before him.
- **What had been set before him now?** What did Jesus see that he was going to obtain that made the cross “worth it”? Well, what did Jesus not have on that side of the cross that he would have on this side?
- **There’s only one thing:** *You. 1 John 3:1*
- *I stand amazed in the presence, of Jesus the Nazarene. And I wonder how he could love me—a sinner condemned unclean!*

For me it was in the Garden, he prayed not my will but thine. He had no tears for his own griefs, but sweat drops of blood for mine!

He took my sin and my sorrow, and made them his very own—he bore my burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone!

There was no other way to save us—this was the only way. And so, he did it gladly!

Honestly, **can you think of any greater insult to Jesus than to say that there really were multiple ways of salvation?**

- I know you think you are being compassionate and open-minded when you say there are multiple ways to God and **put a co-exist bumper sticker on your car, but is there any greater insult to Jesus?** That Jesus looked at God his Father and said, “If there is any other way let this cup pass from me...” and there were other ways—lots of other ways—but God just didn’t tell Jesus?
- **Stop trying to act like you are more loving than Jesus.** Stop arguing and just stand amazed. **This is not a time for you to philosophize and speculate how you would have done it, but it’s a time for you humbly to receive.**

This passage shows you the **incredible love** that Jesus had for you and the **terrible judgment** that awaits you if you reject him.

Well, I told you this passage was in there for 2 reasons: **to confront you with what Jesus did**, and to show you how to respond—because **what we’re going to see next** is Peter respond in the *wrong way*.

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. A large mob with swords and clubs was with him from the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸His betrayer had given them a

sign: “The one I kiss, he’s the one; arrest him.” ⁴⁹So immediately he went up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.⁴

⁵⁰“Friend,” Jesus asked him, “why have you come?” BTW, this is sincere, not sarcastic. The use of the term “**friend**” throughout Matthew’s Gospel indicates **patient warning**. Jesus was faithful to Judas to the end. Even here, **he’s giving him one more chance!**

- **I want you to understand that** if you die and go to hell, it won’t be because God has turned his back on you. The **last voice you’ll hear** as you step off into hell is the voice of Jesus saying, “You don’t have to do this!”

⁵⁰Then they came up, took hold of Jesus, and arrested him. ⁵¹At that moment one of those with Jesus reached out his hand and drew his sword. He struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his ear. From John’s Gospel we know this is Peter who did this.

⁵²Then Jesus told him, “(Peter) Put your sword back in its place because all who take up the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Or do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will provide me here and now with more than twelve legions of angels? **A legion consisted of 5,000 soldiers**, so 12 legions would be 60,000 angels. Just for frame of reference, it only takes **4 angels to destroy the earth** at the last judgment (Rev 7). **4 angels to destroy every army on earth**. Jesus has at his disposal 60K. **The point is: Jesus has plenty of power**. He is not dying because he’s been caught in a bad situation.

So, he continues (*Peter, if I don’t die...*) ⁵⁴How, then, would the **Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?** (IOW, this is all according to plan, foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament, **such as...**

⁴ Moses Aberbach (Jewish scholar in *Anchor Bible*) writes that “in any group of teacher and disciples the disciple was never permitted to greet his teacher first, since

this implied equality. Judas’ sign, therefore, was not only a final repudiation of his relationship with Jesus and a signal to the mob, but also a studied insult.” Judas was saying *I’m as good as you. I always resented your claims to authority.* – Tim Keller

- **Zechariah 9**, which tells us that the Messiah would be betrayed by 30 pieces of silver
- **Or, Isaiah 53**, which tells us that the Messiah would be wounded for our transgressions
- **Or, Psalm 22**, which explains that the Messiah's clothes will be divided up and his hands and feet pierced, though not a bone will be broken.
- And nearly **300 other** such prophecies.

But Peter, and **none of the other disciples**, see this yet, so ⁵⁶...Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away.

Last week we talked about how all of us are Judas, this week I want to show you that we are all also Peter. Peter has a **wrong understanding of** 2 things, which we instinctively have:

- **First, ...his own condition**: When Peter pulls out the sword, he is thinking, *“Lord, I’m with you. I’m one of the good guys. Let’s execute judgment together on these bad guys.”*
 - **But Jesus says, Peter, there are no good guys**, and the only way I can save you is if I am slain by the sword of judgment, not wield it.”
 - **Back in the Garden of Eden**, after Adam and Eve had sinned, God had blocked their way back into his presence by an angel with a flaming sword.⁵
 - **Here we are, back in the Garden**, and Jesus, who has the right to use that sword, steps forward to take it instead. Slain by the sword **in our place**.
 - Peter doesn’t understand the gospel of substitution because he still believes in a gospel of self-salvation.
- **And when you think you are a good person that doesn’t need saving**; or you think you can be good enough to save yourself, that always leads to **bearing of the sword** against others.

- **When you think that you are one of the good guys**, you look down in judgment on others.
- **According to Jesus, there are no good people and bad people.** Only rebels against God. Thank God that **Jesus saves bad people** because that’s the only kind of people there are!
- **Most of us, like Peter**, divide the world in 2 categories—the bad guys and us. **Whatever group you are in**—say conservatives or liberals—the other side is bad. And we want to wield the sword against them—**maybe not a literal sword**; but we stand in judgement on them because they are bad.
- Scripture teaches that there is no you and them, there is only we—we are all bad people under judgment.
- Thus, **none of us** deserves to **bring the sword** against another.
- The **only one who truly could have used the sword** against us stood under it for us instead!
- That’s why we say, **“Jesus didn’t just die for you; he died instead of you!”**

Second thing Peter doesn’t understand...

- **...Kingdom power**: Peter picks up the sword because he thinks, like most people in the world think, that the way you bring change in the world is through coercive power. But Jesus says, **“Through my death I’m going to release a power** that is greater than the sword—greater than 12 legions of angels!
 - **Whenever I get interviewed by a secular journalist** they always want to know who I vote for and who I push you to vote for. Because they think that the power that makes a difference in our world is the kind that sits in the Oval Office and controls the Federal Budget.
 - **But can’t we see from this story how wrong that is?** Think about it—EVEN IF YOU’RE not religious, ASK: **Who is the most influential person in the history of the world?** Who has changed more societies and lives than any other person? Jesus

⁵ Gen 3:24

Christ, of course. And how many elections did he win? How big was his endowment? How many lands did he conquer?

- **Literally, he had nothing.** He gave his life in sacrificial service.
- **Mohammad, the founder of Islam**, rode in on a horse and conquered cities. **Jesus was born in a manger** and washed his disciple's feet.
- **Salvation** did not come in riding on the wings of **Air Force One**, but **in the womb of a poor**, immigrant woman.
- **The cross means that the world's values** about power are wrong. The **way to really change the world** is by serving people, not by conquering them. **We change them by speaking the Word of God** to them in the power of the Holy Spirit and serving them with love and forgiveness.
- **Now, note here that we're talking about kingdom power.** **This passage is not teaching** a total approach to **pacifism** or saying that nobody in government should ever bear the sword—**In fact, both Jesus and the Apostle Paul taught that God established** governments and gave them the power of the sword to keep peace and establish justice.⁶
- **Here, we're talking about Kingdom power.** When it comes to believers extending the Kingdom of God, that happens not by the power of the sword or the power of talent or money, but by a greater power, the power of the cross.
 - **Go back to any great movement of God** and you'll see people who embrace the way of the cross. God's way of releasing his power into the world is not through superior force or superior riches, but through the power of the cross.
 - **Which is why we say** God doesn't need your money... God is not sitting in heaven thinking "If I had their money..."
 - **What he will USE is** sacrificial, cross-based giving
 - **Woman with 2 mites**
 - **Don't flatter yourself that** you have enough money to make a difference.

- **He has 12 legions of angels**
- And he won't bless your money and multiply it with his power no matter *how much it is*, if it doesn't represent sacrifice!

- **A few weeks ago, I brought up the story of** Jim Elliot, Nate Saint and the Auca 5. It might be the most significant missionary story of the last century. Basically, it goes like this: In 1956, after a few years of trying to reach one of the most unreached and violent tribes in Ecuador—the Auca Indians—Jim Elliot and four other men landed their little plane on a beach to establish contact.

Their first meeting went well, but at their 2nd meeting, on January 8, 1956, a group of Auca warriors stabbed the 5 men with spears and left their bodies floating in the river.

Their story has a beautiful ending, I told you—a few years later the men's wives and children continued the effort to reach the Auca: they re-established contact, built schools and hospitals for them and taught them the Bible. In fact, **Steve Saint, the son of Nate Saint, led to Christ and baptized the very man** that had killed his father and they adopted him into their family as a surrogate grandfather for his kids to replace his murdered father.

But here's a part of the story most people don't know: The moment they were murdered, Jim Elliot and his friends were armed. They had loaded guns with them—but when they recovered the bodies they saw that not a single shot had been fired. In fact, in one of the recovered journals Jim Elliot recorded that several days before the five men had decided they would never fire a weapon at the tribesmen who didn't know Jesus.

As Steve Saint explained put it later, "My dad knew that if he died he would go to heaven. He also knew that if the men

⁶ Luke 3:14; John 19:11; Romans 13:1–4

attacking him died, they wouldn't go to heaven. So, he did for them what Jesus did for him—when it came to the hour of decision, he decided not to take life, but to offer it.”

The church—the true church—is built not through the power of the sword but the power of the cross.

Or, I think of another story, in which **Branch Rickey** famously told Jackie Robinson that he would have to have the strength not to fight back against bigotry and racism—at least, not to fight hate with hate—because **then he would show the world** that there was Someone, capital S, behind his cause. And ultimately that spirit turned the tide.

So, in short, by pulling out the sword Peter shows that he doesn't get the cross. In that way, ironically, he's got a lot in common with Judas.

- **Peter and Judas look, at first, like they are on opposite sides**—Judas betrays Jesus, Peter defends him.
- **But they actually suffer** from the same core problem: Both think that suffering is incompatible with Jesus's mission. Neither understands it is central to Jesus's mission.
- **Judas wanted to see Jesus go to the cross to get rid of him.** Peter wants Jesus to avoid the cross to protect him. **Both** men are clueless that the cross is why Jesus came.
- **Jesus had to take the cup of God's wrath.** He didn't come to wield the sword but to step under it for us: It was the only way!

True salvation is not something we can achieve, but something we must receive.

Please don't say the really popular but silly thing that all religions basically teach the same thing. Christianity turns religion upside down because it says that salvation is not something we can achieve, but something we must receive as a gift.

Eph 2:8–9

He went to the Garden alone so that he could purchase salvation for you—so that he could drink your cup, so that he could bear your sword.

Have you received it?

He walked into the Garden for you. Are you ready to take the first step for him?

You say, “What are they?”

- **Receive Christ**
- **Baptism**

