

Week 18: Mark 14:32–65: Passion Week: Thursday Night

Hook



Main Point: On Thursday night, Jesus was mistreated by both His enemies and His friends.

Q: What movies, television shows or plays surprised you when a hero turned villain?

The 2013 smash hit film *Frozen* made more than \$1.2 billion at the box office and countless dollars in toys, merchandise and music sales.¹ And while the movie inspired moments of joy, one plot line was so shocking, it left children in disbelief. The heroic Prince Hans seemed to be a charming, perfect fit for Princess Anna of Arendelle. The film made millions of children trust his steadfast and compassionate leadership, only to have their faith dashed when his treachery was revealed in the closing moments of the film. It turns out that the royal suitor sought to kill the very princess he was seemingly protecting.

Q: Why do you think moments such as Prince Hans's betrayal feel so shocking or personal, even though it's just a movie?

Q: How does betrayal from someone we trust wound us differently than other kinds of hurt?

Transition: Today's passage in Mark will find Jesus failed by His inner circle, unfairly attacked by His enemies, and betrayed by one of His own disciples.

RECAP: In the first part of Mark, the story moved quickly, emphasizing Jesus' great power and the urgency of His mission: His preparation for ministry (1:1–13), then His ministry in Galilee (1:14–9:50), His journey to Jerusalem (10), and His ministry there (Mark 11–13). Now that we have arrived at the Passion Week, the story slows down dramatically. Last week, we saw the events of Tuesday through Thursday night – the

plot to kill Jesus, His anointing at Bethany, Judas's betrayal, the Passover dinner, and Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial. This week we'll see the events of late Thursday night, when Peter, James and John couldn't stay awake with Jesus in the garden; His betrayal by Judas; His arrest; and His appearance before the Sanhedrin in a sham of a "trial" that was actually illegal by their own standards.

In the next few lessons, things will really slow down as Jesus experiences the events of Thursday night and the Crucifixion on Friday. This is the climax of the story, the moment all hope seems lost. Except we know He will rise again. Which is what the last lesson is about – Resurrection Sunday and the hope and mission we find in it.

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Book

Main Point: On Thursday night, Jesus was mistreated by both His enemies and His friends.

Mark 14:32–42 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Peter, James and John were unable to stay awake with Jesus.

Q: What did Jesus ask of the Father in His prayer? What does this tell us about Him?

Q: Why did Jesus tell His disciples to keep watch and pray?

Q: Why do you think the disciples repeatedly fall asleep despite Jesus' clear warnings?

Gethsemane (which means “oil presses”) is a garden of olive trees on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley from the Temple Mount. Jesus and His disciples often met there, which is why it was where Judas arranged to have Him arrested (John 18:2). This garden of olive trees remains to this day. Some scholars estimate the trees there are more than 2,000 years old, which would make them the same trees Jesus saw. Other methods of dating put them at 900 years old, but since olive trees grow back from roots after being cut down, they would still be an outgrowth of the same trees.² Regardless of whether they are the exact same trees, visiting the olive grove would feel just as it did for Jesus' disciples. The tranquil atmosphere invites contemplation, making it a perfect spot for prayer or meditation.

Olive trees are well suited for the Mediterranean climate, so they played a significant role in the economy, providing olives, olive oil, and wood. As a valuable resource, it was often used as a symbol in Scripture representing peace, prosperity, and divine blessing (Deuteronomy 8:8; 28:40). The olive branch has been a symbol of peace, reconciliation, and new life since the account of the Flood (Genesis 8:11). The olive tree's fruitfulness, strength, and beauty made it a symbol of a righteous person (Psalm 52:8; Psalm 128:3; Hosea 14:6). Olive oil is symbolic of the anointing of the Holy Spirit; it was used as the base of the holy anointing oil with spices (Exodus 30:23–24). It was also a symbol of healing because it had medicinal uses.

The olive tree was also a powerful symbol of Israel itself; as a beautiful tree with good fruit for all to eat, it represented Israel's mission to bless the nations as a beacon of God's covenant and blessing. Yet, Jeremiah warned that because Israel had been unfaithful, their branches would be broken off (Jeremiah 11). In the New Testament,

Paul picked up this metaphor to describe how faithful Gentiles are grafted into the olive tree of God's people. Thus, the olive tree serves as a symbol of God's redemptive plan and the unity of all believers in Christ (Romans 11:17–24).

The process by which olives are beaten and crushed to produce olive oil reminds us of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus was the most righteous person (olive tree) who ever lived, the only Righteous One of Israel. He was beaten and crushed so the Holy Spirit would be poured out like olive oil on His people. Jesus' agonized prayer asking God to spare Him from this horrible crushing death took place in the garden of "olive press."

Jesus took Peter, James and John, His inner circle, with Him to pray. He was deeply distressed and sorrowful about the cup of wrath He knew He would soon drink. This moment shows us the true humanity of Christ. His divinity didn't make Him immune to pain, either physical or emotional. Just as His stripes on the cross were real, so was His anguish in the garden. In this moment, we see His very human desire to avoid the pain of the cross yet His complete submission to the Father's will. This moment of vulnerability is key. If we hadn't seen His desire to avoid the horror of the cross, then His submission to the Father wouldn't seem so big.

Jesus' prayer also lets us know it's perfectly OK to tell God what *your* desires are in prayer, as long as in the end, you submit yourself to His will. The models of prayer from Jesus and the psalms show us it's OK to pour out our anguish before Him, to lay our doubts and fears at His feet, to even rage against Him in prayer. Whatever emotion we are feeling is OK to share with God. He knows it all anyway. But the key is to end our prayers by trusting Him and submitting to His will. This is part of what prayer is for. It's a process of bringing our feelings before the Lord, seeking His guidance, and submitting to His will. Our goal in prayer isn't to convince God to do what we want but to discover His will for our lives.

We see here a stark contrast between Christ's obedience and His disciples' inability to even stay awake while He prayed. He told them how upset He was and asked them to keep watch. That word literally means "stay awake"; it's the word used for the soldier who stays awake to keep watch for danger while the others sleep. It is used in the New Testament more than 20 times to talk about staying alert in spiritual warfare. The imagery is that we are in a spiritual battle and must stay awake and alert, ready for attack. It was about so much more than staying physically awake this one night; He was showing them they would need to be vigilant going forward as His people in a hostile world.

Q: How does prayer help us to be vigilant in our spiritual battles? What else can we do to “stay awake” in spiritual warfare?

Q: In what areas is God calling you to submit to His will?

Mark 14:43–52 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus was betrayed by one of His closest friends.

Q: Why did Judas kiss Jesus? Why might this particular kiss feel hurtful to Jesus?

Q: What did Jesus say about them arresting Him at night, with clubs and swords?

Q: Why is it significant that Jesus does not resist arrest, even though He could?

We already knew Judas was the one who had made a deal to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10). We also know it was the chief priests and scribes who wanted to arrest and kill Him. But they didn’t want to do it publicly, during the feast, to avoid causing an uproar (Mark 14:1). So they plotted to arrest Him under cover of night, in a relatively quiet place. Jesus often went with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was a quiet and relatively secluded place as opposed to more public locations, such as in the temple when He was teaching.

The crowd with Judas was “from the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders (Sanhedrin).” This meant they were the temple guard, whose primary responsibility was security of the temple, not going out and arresting people. The role of “gatekeeper” was one of the roles of the Levites, specifically the clan of Korah (1 Chronicles 9:19). Their job was to maintain order in the temple and guard the temple treasury and the gate, including acting as night watchmen. This is also an intentional contrast. Jesus had just been asking Peter, James and John to keep watch for Him – and they failed. Now the night watchmen of the temple were coming to arrest Him.

Arresting people was not originally part of their job; they weren’t police. But the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had begun to use them like police. This shows the level of their corruption; this was religious authority wielding worldly power.³ They came armed because they believed Jesus to be a messianic revolutionary. They expected an armed resistance from Him and His followers, as with other false “messiahs.” Clubs were useful at controlling riotous mobs but were not supposed to be carried on festival days; they were breaking the law by bringing them. They also weren’t supposed to arrest and try people on festival days; these were sacred times for worship, not for legal proceedings.

Judas gave the guard the signal of the kiss because it was dark; this way they would have no doubt who was the rabbi. In their culture, a kiss was a greeting reserved for close relationships, family or those like family, such as a rabbi and his disciples. In a rabbi/disciple relationship, the kiss signified loyalty, which makes it even more ironic that Judas used it as the signal of his betrayal. Betrayal requires intimacy; you can't feel betrayed by someone you were never close to. This kiss shows us how betrayal is the perversion of intimacy.⁴

Only one of the disciples tried to fight back. Matthew records Jesus telling him to put his sword away, but Mark just describes Jesus speaking to Judas and the guard. He called them out on their secretive arrest under the cover of night; they could have arrested Him in broad daylight anytime He was teaching in the temple. If He were really a physical threat, they would have. They didn't need weapons to capture Him, He wouldn't resist. He even said His arrest would fulfill Scripture; He would be betrayed by a close friend who had shared His bread (Psalm 41:9), for 30 pieces of silver, which would be used to buy the potter's field (Zechariah 11:12–13), and when He was arrested, His disciples would scatter (Zechariah 13:7).

At this point, the night was dark and things were starting to look dark for Jesus. He had poured out His heart to God in anguish. His friends failed to stay awake with Him in prayer. One of His own disciples betrayed Him, and the rest fled when He was arrested. He was alone and in chains, being led to the religious leaders He knew wanted to kill Him. It was a dark hour for Jesus, but partly because of His time of prayer in the garden, He would have the power to persevere through the intense suffering and fulfill His mission.

Q: Why is the betrayal of a friend particularly devastating?

Q: How can you turn to God for strength when it feels as though you're at your darkest moments?

Q: What practical steps can help believers remain faithful when pressure or danger arises?

Mark 14:53–65 [Read]

Talking Point 3: The religious leaders held an illegal "trial" against Jesus.

Q: Why were Jesus' words about the temple part of the testimony against Him?

Q: Why were Jesus' words in this passage considered blasphemy?

Q: Why is Jesus' statement about destroying and rebuilding the temple misunderstood?

Jesus was brought before the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish council, which functioned as their supreme court, taking appeals from lower courts. There were 70 members of the Sanhedrin from three main groups: chief priests (from powerful priestly families), scribes (experts in the Law), and elders (respected community leaders), plus the high priest, who was the presiding officer. For formal trials, they met in a particular room in the temple, the Hall of Hewn Stones, but here they met in the courtyard of the high priest. This emphasizes that this was an informal trial, last-minute and in the middle of the night. This detail highlights the great injustice of the trial against Jesus, an innocent man.

Also highlighting the injustice is the fact that the witnesses were all false, and they couldn't even get their stories straight. The text explicitly says the council sought testimony against Jesus but "found none" (v. 55). Some of the witnesses tried to accuse Him of threats against the temple, twisting words He really did say. After Jesus cleansed the temple, the religious leaders questioned His authority, and He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John said He was talking about the "temple" of His body, but they thought He meant the building of the temple (John 2:19, 21). In this trial, they accused Him of saying, "I will destroy the temple." In His actual statement, the implied subject is clearly "you," not "I." He was telling the religious leaders if *they* destroyed the temple (His body) ... They twisted His words to sound as if He had threatened to destroy the temple. But even with this, the text tells us they didn't agree enough to make their testimony viable in court. When the high priest asked Jesus to defend Himself, He remained silent. He could have easily explained, but He remained silent, fulfilling the prophecy of the suffering servant (Isaiah 53:7) .

But when the high priest asked Him if He were "the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed," Jesus responded with a reference to Daniel's vision of the "son of man." This figure looked like a man but was clearly divine and came on the clouds to the throne of the Ancient of Days, to whom God gave all authority, dominion and power forever (Daniel 7:13–14). In His answer, Jesus was not only saying He was the Messiah who would rule Israel forever (Daniel 7:14) but also that He was the Son of Man who would rule the whole universe forever. Not just a human king, but divine. This is what made His statement blasphemous to them. But it wasn't blasphemy because it was the truth. He was more than just a human Messiah; He was God-made-flesh. What He came to do was so much more than conquer Rome and restore the throne to Israel. He came to conquer sin and death.

The Sanhedrin broke several Jewish legal rules in this sham of a “trial.” They didn’t meet in their formal hall. They didn’t give advance notice but met last-minute in the middle of the night, not during the day. The trial was over in one day; He was not given time to find witnesses in His defense. They held a trial during a holy festival. The witnesses were lying. Even their behavior of spitting on Him and beating Him was against Jewish law for a prisoner on trial.⁵

They were not concerned about legal propriety. They knew they couldn’t execute anyone anyway, the Roman government had to do that, so their goal was to stir up a mob against Jesus and take Him to Pilate. This shows us just how corrupt the Jewish religious system was at this point. This was supposed to be the highest court of the land, and they were breaking every law in this “trial” just to get rid of Him because they saw Him as a threat. This shows us humanity’s capacity for sin, deceit and injustice. Wicked hearts don’t want to objectively evaluate the claims of Jesus. They just want to silence Him.

Q: How can we respond when people today unfairly judge Jesus, Christians or the Church? What does it look like to speak the truth in love in those situations?

Q: If you had been called to be a witness in defense of Jesus at the trial that night, what would you have said?

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Took

Main Point: On Thursday night, Jesus was mistreated by both His enemies and His friends.

The scenes in today's passage remind us not only of the humanity of Jesus, but also of His unwavering faithfulness in the face of abandonment, betrayal, and cruelty – from both friends and enemies. Scripture tells us, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus knows the pain of mistreatment and rejection firsthand. And yet, through unimaginable emotional and physical suffering, He remained faithful to the Father's plan of redemption.

As we close, reflect on the depth of that love. Consider the words of Ephesians 3:17–19 in light of what we studied tonight, and thank Jesus for His immeasurable, faithful love:

“... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17–19)

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on the way Jesus must have felt, knowing what He was about to endure, going through each of the experiences He did. Watching His friends betray Him, deny Him, and desert Him out of fear for their own lives. Enduring an unfair sham of a trial. Allowing Himself to be arrested, judged, and eventually killed for something He didn't do. Meditate on what it must have been like for Him. Then reflect on what this tells you about how you should live as a disciple (imitator) of Jesus today, when many have deserted Jesus, misrepresented Him, spoken lies about Him, or even actively tried to discredit Him.

PRAY for God to give you the boldness, passion, wisdom and love to be a positive witness for Jesus. Ask Him to give you the opportunity to speak the truth in love in dark places. Ask Him to give you the words when people irrationally reject Him. Pray for perseverance to endure through times when it's really hard to share the Gospel.

ACT: Share your testimony. This week think about one person you know who is vehemently opposed to hearing the truth about Jesus. Consider someone who has turned away from following Him in the past or someone who, like these religious leaders, is just looking for something to hate about Him. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share your testimony with that person in a way that is gracious and loving, just sharing what Jesus has done for you, how He has changed your life, and why you love Him and follow Him.

¹ <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt2294629/>

² Mauro Bernabei, "The Age of the Olive Trees in the Garden of Gethsemane" *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Vol 53 (Jan 2015).

³ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 6.5.3

⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Intervarsity Press, 1993).