

LESSON #26

“TO THIS END WAS I BORN”

MATT. 26:47-27:66; MARK 14:43-15:39; LUKE 22:47-23:56; JOHN 18-19

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This lesson could be a book, or many of them, and they have been written. There are so many messages, such profound insights, and numerous events of incomparable importance taking place in these chapters. I do not intend to make a comprehensive examination of these passages. I will shine a light on some insights that might otherwise be missed, suggest some applications that are worth some pondering, and share some stories that may help in understanding and believing. The rest is up to you.

I. JESUS IS BETRAYED, ARRESTED, AND ACCUSED OF BLASPHEMY; PETER DENIES JESUS THREE TIMES.

Consider what has just happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Savior pled with three of his apostles to “watch and pray” with him, but they could not, “for their eyes were heavy.” (Matt. 27:43) We wonder how early this day started. The trip over the Mount from Bethany, the search for the upper room, the preparation of the Passover feast, the meal itself, and then the walk to the garden must have taken many, many hours. Three times Christ came to them in his agony and found them sleeping. The first time he said, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” (Matt. 27:40)

Boyd K. Packer, speaking at BYU, said something most provocative about this inclination to let what seem to be the little things go. He said:

Some of us suppose that if we were called to a high office in the Church immediately we would be loyal, and would show the dedication necessary. We would step forward and valiantly commit ourselves to this service.

But, you can put it down in your little black book that if you will not be loyal in the small things you will not be loyal in the large things.

If you will not respond to the so-called insignificant or menial tasks

which need to be performed in the Church and kingdom, there will be no opportunity for service in the so-called greater challenges. (Boyd K. Packer, BYU Speeches, March 23, 1965, p.4)

Another lesson appears from these moments before the betrayal.

31 Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

32 But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

33 Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

35 Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.

I love Peter! He is powerful and impetuous and devoted. But, like all the rest of us, he had a tendency to overestimate his ability to resist temptations. Even though he had just listened to a prophecy about his own inherent weakness from the Son of God, Peter declared that he would never be offended enough to abandon the Savior. And when the Lord then told Peter that he would also deny him (Christ) three times before the morning came, Peter proclaimed that even in the face of death, he would never do such a thing. Peter though he knew himself. “There is nothing that the Jewish leaders can throw at me that I cannot handle.”

He then proceeded to go to the place where Jesus’ enemies were strongest—Caiaphas’ palace—and before the day had come, had done the very thing he had sworn he would never do.

The lesson is stated best I think in Alma 39. When Alma called his son, his rebellious and immoral missionary son, for a Personal Priesthood Interview, he chided him for not hearkening to counsel like his brothers had done. Then he began

to describe the mistakes this son of his had made during his mission among the Zoramites. “Now this is what I have against thee; *thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom.*” (Alma 39:4, *emphasis added*) Corianton was pretty sure he could get close to Isabel without committing any transgressions. He was the son of the Prophet/Mission President. You can almost hear him saying what Peter said: “Everybody else might succumb, but not me. I would die before I would commit a moral transgression. I am smart enough and strong enough to handle it.”

I knew a missionary who decided one night to take a walk while his companion was asleep. He needed space and he needed air. He went and returned without incident. No one else knew. He was certain that he was (I heard him say this at the court when he was excommunicated) “smart enough and strong enough to avoid trouble.” A few nights later he went again. Then again. One morning his companion awoke to find him gone. Missionaries searched the city and found him finally in a hotel room with a young prostitute.

This is a lesson worth learning. When my children fight counsel by saying, “Don’t you trust me?” I always respond in the same way: “No. I don’t even trust myself.”

We are not nearly as strong and smart as we think we are, and we are waging war against a being of frightening intellect who has been perfecting his craft for 6000 years. We are not sufficiently bright and tough to take him on. Our safety is not in our own power and discretion, but in our obedience:

Heber J. Grant said:

There is but one path of safety to the Latter-day Saints, and that is the path of duty. It is not a testimony, it is not marvelous manifestation, it is not knowing that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that it is the plan of salvation--it is not actually knowing that the Savior is the Redeemer, and that Joseph Smith was His prophet that will save you and me; but it is the keeping of the commandments of God, living the life of a Latter-day Saint (CR April, 1915, p.82).

When Judas came with a great multitude, and “they laid hands on Jesus, and took him,” Peter drew his sword and attacked. (Oh! How I love Peter!) He cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest. Christ said to Peter, “The cup which

my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:10,11)

Jesus healed the man (Luke 22:50-51), but then made a most astonishing statement to Simon Peter: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" A legion in the Roman army consists of about 6000 men and a contingent of cavalry (Bible Dictionary, p. 723) Thus the Savior is saying that this cup he is about to drink, he is drinking of his own unfettered will. He has not been made to do it. He was a volunteer in the pre-mortal life when he said, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27), and he is still a volunteer. If he were to ask his Father, even now, Elohim would send 72,000 angels and a rather impressive contingent of cavalry to save him. I suspect that would be enough fire-power to put even the Sanhedrin to flight.

He was taken first to Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Many false witnesses came but could not agree (Mark 14:56) finally, Caiaphas spoke to the silent Son. "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God," (Matthew 27:63) and Christ told him:

Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. (Matt. 27:64)

Of what crime was Jesus instantly accused? (Matt. 27:65) Who was the only mortal in the history of the world who was utterly incapable of committing this crime? Once they had determined that they had a crime which (under Jewish law) merited the death penalty, what did these religious leaders permit?

And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? (Luke 22:63,64)

Matthew 27:67 adds that they spit in his face, and shoved him. Of course they did not know their peril, but what if those who spit and struck and shoved and mocked had for the briefest instant seen the faces of those twelve legions of angles just beyond the veil as they watched these horrendous events.

But this too was a part of the manifestation of the love of God.

And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men. (1 Nephi 19:9)

II. JESUS IS SENTENCED TO BE CRUCIFIED

The Jews may not have had the power to impose capital punishment. That right probably remained with the Roman rulers. Therefore, the next morning, early, the Jews took Christ to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. But when they made their case before Pilate, the charge had been changed. Blasphemy, which is not a crime under Roman law, was not mentioned. And so they said, “We found this man perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying, that he himself is Christ, a king.” (Luke 23:2, JST) The charge has changed to treason, among the most serious of crimes under Roman law.

By the way, note the content of John 18:28. When the Sanhedrin brought Christ to the Antonia Fortress, “they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled.” Since the Passover was at hand, they could not run the risk of entering the home of a Gentile or of exposure to leaven, which they might certainly find in the dwelling of a Gentile. How often are we afraid of the wrong things. These men did not fear to stand at the gate and accuse Christ of uncommitted crimes, but they were terrified of exposure to leaven. A similar episode of stunning hypocrisy occurred at the cross when they requested of the Roman guards that the legs of the victims be broken so that they would die more quickly and the Sabbath would not be defiled by their being on the cross at night and on that holy day to follow.

But Pilate knew what was happening: He knew Christ was innocent, and a “just person.” He tried many times to release and/or save the Savior.

T Luke 23:4—“I find no fault in this man.”

T Mark 15:10-- “For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.”

T “Matt. 27:19—“His wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.”

T Matt. 27:23—“And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done?”

- T Matt. 27:24—"When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."
- T Luke 23:15—Pilate sent Christ to Herod for his judgement: "I sent you to [Herod]; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him."
- T John 19:4—He said unto them, "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him"
- T Luke 23:16—"I will . . . chastise him [scourge him], and release him."
- T Luke 23:20—"Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them."
- T Matt. 27:17—Due to the tradition that one criminal should be released at the feast, Pilate offered them a choice between a man guilty of sedition and murder (Luke 23:19) and Christ: "Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?"
- T John 19:12—"And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him . . ."

III. JESUS IS SCOURGED AND CRUCIFIED

And after all of this, Pilate capitulated. He washed his hands (as if that would make him clean) and sent the Savior to his death. And on the way, another lesson . . . Christ was too weak to carry his own cross, and Simon, the Cyrenian was compelled to carry it for him.

Shortly after the parade of death began, certainly by the time the melancholy marchers reached the gates of the city, Jesus was no longer able to bear the burden of the cross. Thereupon the soldiers laid hold upon Simon of Cyrene, who chanced -- or was it an instance of an intervening providence -- to be coming in from the country; him they compelled to bear the cross of Jesus. (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, Vol.4, p.207)

Consider the source of this weakness. The night before, in the garden, the disciples were already too exhausted to stay awake and pray with the Savior. At the same time, Jesus was suffering the most appalling agony in the history of the universe. Since that time, the Savior had been arrested, forced to walk to Caiaphas' Palace, to the Antonia Fortress, to Herod's palace, back to the Antonia Fortress. In addition, he had been slapped, beaten with fist, palm, and reed [rod}. He had been mocked and scourged. He had certainly been without food for about twelve hours. He had

walked, since leaving Bethany until the final return to the Antonia Fortress, about 5 miles. No wonder he was too weak to carry the cross! And so someone helped him.

The sentence of death by crucifixion required that the Condemned person carry the cross upon which he was to Suffer. Jesus started on the way bearing His cross. The terrible strain of the preceding hours, the agony in Gethsemane, the barbarous treatment He had suffered in the palace of the high priest, the humiliation and cruel usage to which He had been subjected before Herod, the frightful Scourging under Pilate's order, the brutal treatment by the inhuman soldiery, together with the extreme humiliation and the mental agony of it all, had so weakened His physical organism that He moved but slowly under the burden of the cross. The soldiers, impatient at the delay, peremptorily impressed into service a man whom they met coming into Jerusalem from the country, and him they compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. No Roman or Jew would have voluntarily incurred the ignominy of bearing such a gruesome burden; for every detail connected with the carrying out of a sentence of crucifixion was regarded as degrading. The man so forced to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, bearing the cross upon which the Savior of the world was to consummate His glorious mission, was Simon, a native of Cyrene. From Mark's statement that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus we infer that the two sons were known to the evangelist's readers as members of the early Church, and there is some indication that the household of Simon the Cyrenian came to be numbered with the believers. (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, Ch.35, p.652 - p.653)

Eleven different places in the scriptures, we find verses about our responsibility to “take up” the cross and follow the Savior as Simon did. Certainly with our mortal abilities and our immortal testimonies and aspirations, we can find a way to help the Savior with his work in our day.

As you know, the Savior made seven statements while on the cross. They are found in

< Luke 23:34

< Luke 23:43
< John 19:26,27
< Matt. 27:46
< John 19:28
< John 19:30
< Luke 23:46
<

John 19:30 reports the Savior's declaration, "It is finished." John 19:28 tells us that "Jesus *knowing that all things were now accomplished*, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." (*Emphasis added*) Having fulfilled the will of the will of the Father in every particular, and the prophetic description of the crucifixion in every detail, he said, "It is finished." I feel like this was not a sigh of release and escape, but a great cry of conquest. The echoes of this declaration shattered the gates of hell and destroyed the power of the grave. Certainly since his banishment from heaven and hope, Lucifer had never heard words to cause such terror. For with that cry, his hope to subdue and rule the human race was shattered forever. Those keys now belonged to the Redeemer:

I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore
. . . and have the keys of hell and of death. (Revelation 1:18)

Satan might continue to claim to be the god of this world, but when the work of Christ was finished, the devil knew and all of heaven knew that the claim was meaningless.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil--

And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works. (3 Nephi 27:14,15)

CONCLUSION: At the beginning of this course of study we spoke of the angels who visited the shepherds to announce the birth of Christ, and who burst into song. I

suggested that we might have been among them. Where else would we have been during the birth of the Redeemer? Watching *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*? Having a Rook tournament?

And on the day of his death, where were you? We know what the departed spirits of the just were doing:

And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality; And who had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer's name. All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. I beheld that *they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together* because the day of their deliverance was at hand (D&C 138:12-15, emphasis added).

The joy of the spirits of the just is a sobering contrast to the sorrow of the mortal disciples whose hope was on the edge of evaporation.

Again, what would we have been doing. If we shouted for joy and sang together at the time of creation (see Job 38:6,7), what were we doing at the time of the redemption? Jesus told the Pharisees that if believers had held their peace during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, “the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).

I believe that we did not hold our peace. Every righteous eye in the universe must have been on Gethsemane and Golgotha. Every voice in Heaven must have been raised:

Let your hearts rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Let the earth break forth into singing. Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise to the King Immanuel . . . (D&C 128:22).

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