

26:36 *A place called Gethsemane*- The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

*Sit here*- The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

*Yonder*- Literally, 'there', as if the Lord was pointing out a location not far distant. He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not* to give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

26:37 *Took with Him*- As Moses took Joshua with him.

*Began to be sorrowful... very heavy*- This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as

He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

Mk. 14:33 adds that He was “amazed”. The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac’s at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question “Why have You forsaken Me?”. This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

26:38 *Unto death*- The Lord’s psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord’s death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says

that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

*Exceedingly sorrowful*- The same word is used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

*Stay here*- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

*Watch with Me*- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

26:39 *A little further*- Lk. 22:41 "About a stone's cast", pointing us back to David's conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord's final conflict with sin.

*Fell on His face*- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being "buffeted" by Satan's servants, using the very word used of the Lord being "buffeted" straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God's presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father's presence even though there was no visible sign of

it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

*If it be possible, let this cup pass from me-* This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. "Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even* to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that "with God all things are possible" (19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: "If it be possible". He recognized that God's plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resolvable, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God's ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

*Let this cup pass-* Interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour... even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

*From Me-* Paul uses the same Greek term in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to “depart *from me*” (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord’s struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

*Nevertheless-* The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. “Could you not watch with Me for one hour?” (:40) suggests not ‘even just for one hour’ but rather ‘We’ve been here an hour, and you couldn’t watch with me even for that short period of time’. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

*Not as I will, but as You will-* Trinitarians need to note that the Lord’s will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

26:40 *Comes... and finds-* These are the very words used of the Lord’s coming in judgment to ‘find’ the state of His people (21:19; 24:46 “whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing”; Lk. 18:8 “When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith...?”). And His ‘coming’ to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: “Watch... lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping”. We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

*Could you not watch-* Peter later urged his converts to “be watchful” (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord’s rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn’t do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest’s house.

Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4;1 Acts 22:7= 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

*26:41 Watch and pray-* The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records.

*That you enter not-* These words are addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

*Temptation-* Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

*The flesh-* The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

*Weak-* The word is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 “weak” = Rom. 5:6 “without strength”). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

26:42 *Again the second time-* This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

*Father, If...* The Lord in Gethsemane took a long time to pray the simple words: “Father, if ....”. It was long enough for the disciples to fight a losing battle against drowsiness and fall fast asleep (the Greek implies). But how do you pray? With simple, staccato words and phrases like His? Or do you desperately seek for words, any words, just to make it seem you prayed, trying to be like the more mature brethren you hear praying at gatherings? Or after many years of prayer, can I ask, are you just churning out the same old phrases and ideas, with little meaning put into the words...? If the Son of God Himself prayed in such simple terms, surely we ought to likewise.

*This cup-* The use of “this...” suggests the Lord had so clearly in mind the course of events which were to follow. ‘*The cup*’ would have been less specific, as if He simply knew that an ordeal was ahead. But “*this cup*” suggests He knew what the cup was specifically, and was holding that understanding in His mind as He prayed to the Father.

*May not-* The same word translated “possible” in :39 “If it be possible”. Both Father and Son clearly were aware that all things are possible for the Father, and yet those who seek to do His will must accept that He will not use that possibility in a boundless sense. The contrast is between the Father's will / desire on one hand, and His boundless potential possibility on the other. If we seek to do His will or desire, to please Him, as the Lord did, then the fact He can

potentially do anything for us somehow recedes in significance. We above all wish to please Him. Therefore the fact He could save us from any pain no longer weighs so heavily with us. It is primitive indeed to complain that God could have stopped a certain painful course of events. He indeed could have done. But the issue is, whether or not we wish to do His will, to please Him, to do His work in this world. This is the significance of the Lord saying “Your will be done”.

*Your will be done-* He had the authority to call down legions of Angels to change the course of events- implying the Father would have allowed that. All things were possible to God. The fact this possibility remained for the Lord suggests that the prayers in Gethsemane were really the Lord coming to the conclusion that He Himself wished to go ahead with the cross. It wasn't so much that He asked for the cross to be taken away from Him, and the Father said “No”, and He meekly accepted it. Prayer functioned for Him as it often does for us- a means of dialogue with God and thereby with ourselves, the process of which in itself provides the answers to our deepest questions. The will of the Father is never presented in Scripture as immutable and some predestined code which we are to follow. Rather is God open to change in response to the cry of His beloved people. So the Lord's conclusion “Your will be done” is not a shrugging acceptance that in this case, He couldn't change some preordained will of God; but rather a willing desire on His own part to do the ideal wishes / will of the Father. The Lord's statement was therefore His own conclusion, His own decision to continue in the way of the cross, even though the practical realities of what it meant were now becoming more practically apparent to Him than ever before. No wonder the Father sent an Angel to strengthen His beloved Son in this fine resolve. See on 26:54 *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?*

26:43 *Came and found-* See on :40 *Comes... and finds.*

*Their eyes were heavy-* It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated “heavy” occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: “Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep”. Mk. 14:40 adds that “They did not know what to answer Him”, and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of

Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

26:44- see on :39.

*He left them-* The language of leaving to be with the Father and coming again to the disciples is very much the language of the Lord's ascension and return (Jn. 16:28 has just recorded the Lord using this language in the Upper Room). His coming to them and finding them sleeping is therefore an enactment of the condemnation of the last day- but we can be condemned in this life, but be saved out of it by repentance.

*The third time-* The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

*The same words-* If the idea was simply that He repeated again the previous words, another word would've been used. *Hautou* definitely means something like 'His own words', 'The words of Himself'. And in this we see a powerful picture of what prayer to the Father really is- praying our very own words to the Father. The intimacy of the Son with the Father is thus brought out.

26:45 *Sleep on now-* The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :46 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

*Take your rest-* Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

*The hour is at hand-* Gk. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in :46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

*Betrayed into the hands of sinners-* Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (17:22), to the chief priests (20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

26:46 *Rise-* See on :45.

*Let us be going-* If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself.

*He is at hand-* See on :45 *The hour is at hand.*

26:47 *While He was still speaking-* This, along with the repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas...", to encourage us to re-live the incident.

*One of the twelve-* Emphasized in all three synoptics.

*A great multitude-* This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

*Swords and staves-* This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross. See on :48 "That is He".

26:48 *Gave them a sign-* These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is *against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

*Kiss-* The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

*That is He-* The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

26:49 *Hail, Master*- Most of the 74 NT occurrences of *chairo*, "hail", are translated "rejoice". Perhaps the Lord was reminded of His recent words about the cross being His "joy". But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :50 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

26:50 *Said unto him*- During the few seconds between the kiss and the appearance of the armed men. See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

*Wherefore*- The Greek *epi hos* doesn't simply mean 'Why?'. In this a word like *tis* would have been used. 'For what' is a reasonable translation. RV "Do that for which thou art come"- confirming a wicked man in the evil way he had chosen to take. And yet it seems to me that the Lord tried to save Judas to the last. This rhetorical question asked Judas to consider *why* he was doing this. One reason which the record gives is that he was interested in the money. He was a chronic materialist. He enquired how much he could receive for the job of betraying, and only then did he do it. The way he flung the coins down before committing suicide surely indicate how significant the money was to him. And the Lord knew that, and was asking him, even at this late moment, to consider *why* he was doing this- just for coins, pieces of metal. The Lord really was the good shepherd who searched for the lost until the very end, and sets a supreme example to us all.

'For whom' would be another possible translation of *epi hos* ["Wherefore...?"]. But why say this, when it was obvious? The Lord clearly knew what was happening- He knew the armed men were with Judas although hidden, and that they would now appear. He also knew that at least Peter had a sword and was keen to use it. In the crucial few seconds between the identification of Jesus with the kiss and the appearance of the armed men from the trees, the Lord knew that Peter could easily have killed Judas. The Lord may have been playing for time- to preserve Judas' life. Primarily this would've been in order to give Judas the possibility of repentance; but it was also to enable the foreseen sequence of events leading to the cross to happen. This makes sense of the Lord's statement at His trial, that if His Kingdom was immediate, then His servants would fight (Jn. 18:36). They wanted to fight, as Peter's rash action with his sword made clear, but the Lord disallowed them from doing this. We marvel at how conscious the Lord was on so many levels in

bringing forward God's purpose, whilst allowing men the maximum possible opportunity to display faith, loyalty and repentance.

*Then came they-* See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

*Laid hands on-* The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

*Took Him-* Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the 'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

26:51 *One of them-* Peter.

*Stretched out his hand-* The camera, as it were, is zoomed in close upon Peter. Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 added in square brackets:

“The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and

said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]”.

*26:52 Put up again-* When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will ‘turn away’ sinners from their sins (Acts 3:26), he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to “put up again” his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Whether Peter's allusion was conscious or unconscious isn't clear; we tend to use language which has recently been used to us even in other contexts, especially if we have meditated upon it and feel it personally relevant to us. Again we see that Peter's appeal to Israel to repent in Acts 2 and 3 was so successful because it was shot through with reference to his own failures and experience of repentance, conversion and forgiveness. Peter's appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his ‘Maschil’ (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. The same word used of how Judas "brought again" his pieces of silver to the Jews (27:3). This is part of a series of similarities between Judas and Peter at this time. They both in essence did the same thing, but Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace, whereas Judas didn't know the Lord's grace.

*They that take the sword-* Peter was the one who had literally just put forth his hand and taken a

sword (:51). So it was by grace that he didn't "perish" by the sword at this time. Again, we see how grace ran through the Lord's actions at this His greatest moment of personal stress. The same word *lambano*, "take", is used of how Judas had 'received' a band of men armed with swords in order to capture Jesus (Jn. 18:3). Again, the similarities are being developed between Peter and Judas; both in essence made the same mistakes and committed the same sins, in this case, taking the sword. But Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace.

*Shall perish*- Not particularly in this life, but at judgment day, because "perish" is repeatedly used about final condemnation (e.g. 5:29,30; 10:28,39; 16:25; 22:7). The word is specifically used of the 'perishing' of Judas (Jn. 17:12, AV "lost"; 18:9). Again, the warning to Peter was not to be like Judas, even though the similarities between them were great at this time.

Jn. 18:11 adds: "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?". If Peter had entered into the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning the cup, then he wouldn't have made this mistake of attempting violent resistance. But he fell asleep, and as with us so often, failure or laziness at one point leads to failure in others later on.

26:53 *I cannot now pray...*- The word "now" is all significant. Even then, the Lord could have changed the nature and sequence of events which lay ahead of Him, and this possibility was uppermost in His mind, the temptation He struggled with. This factor must be given due weight in seeking to understand His struggle in Gethsemane. It wasn't a case that He Himself didn't want to drink the cup, but the Father insisted He must, and therefore He resigned Himself to the Father's will. There was another way, indeed there were multiple ways forward. He could have called down legions of Angels. But He made the Father's will His own, He willingly agreed to do it, because He wanted to fulfil the Scriptures, to be obedient to them rather than merely bring about a neat correlation between them and events. He rose up from the final prayer in Gethsemane having committed Himself to do this, even though there were other options. So His willing giving of Himself over to death wasn't merely an iron-willed submission to the Father's will, in the spirit of 'islam' [submission]. Rather did He arise from the final prayer resolved to do the Father's will as His will, and this meant turning His back upon all the other possibilities before Him. This makes His decisions and death even more awesome, knowing that there could have been other legitimate ways to bring about the plan of salvation- indeed, it could be argued that God's hands were not tied, and He could forgive and save who He wished with no requirement for the cross. But the cross was powerful in order to persuade others of the need to respond to it, and therefore the Lord died as He did for our sakes, in order to persuade us. And we should therefore allow the cross its full and maximum persuasive power in our lives. See on :28 *The new testament*.

*Give Me more than twelve legions of Angels*- But the Lord had learnt the lesson of Elisha, who could have himself seen legions of Angels but chose not to, so certain was he that they were

potentially there (2 Kings 6:17). "Give Me", *paristemi*, has a wide range of meaning, and it is used of how Peter was one of those who "stood by" the Lord in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:47); the Lord is saying that as Peter stood by Him with drawn sword, just one man against so many, so in fact there were legions of Angels standing by or 'given' to assist the Lord; but He was not going to make use of them. The same word is used of the officers who "stood by" Jesus and struck Him at His trial (Jn. 18:22; Acts 4:26 s.w.); the Lord must have reflected that actually there were legions of Angels standing by / given unto Him. His self-restraint in not using them is remarkable, and highlights the way in which His life was not taken from Him but He willingly gave it. The reference to "twelve" legions of Angels was perhaps therefore in contrast with the twelve disciples; even if all twelve of them had stood up to fight for the Lord's deliverance, actually He had not twelve men, but twelve *legions* of Angels at His disposal. But He was not going to use them, and so He would not make use of the twelve disciples. The use of "legions" naturally contrasts with the Roman legions who were ultimately going to be used by the Jews to destroy the Lord. Peter's letters are absolutely full of his reflections upon these incidents, and this is why he could write of how the Angels are not subject unto the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 3:22).

The Lord Jesus could've called upon legions of Angels to help Him; but He chose not to (Mt. 26:53); He could have taken power there and then in His ministry and declared Himself King- but He walked off to the hills instead (Jn. 6:15). In these examples we see what we could call a renunciation of power. Time and again we are called upon to decide whether we will renounce what power we have, or use it or abuse it for our own selfish ends. A parent faces this issue so often with a young child. The parent has more power; but how and for what reasons should she / he use that power? We can use 'power' in many ways in the trivia of daily life; but actually in most of those micro level decisions we are challenged with a choice as to what level of spirituality and unselfishness we are going to show.

26:54 *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?*- See on :42 *Your will be done*. The Father was willing to allow another way- legions of Angels could have been sent to change the course of events. In this lay the intensity of the temptation, and the height of the Lord's achievement in rising up to the highest level. Scriptural prophecy has all kinds of possible fulfilments, as we noted in discussing the Olivet prophecy. There is not only one possible fulfilment. I suggest therefore that the Lord saw the Scriptures as speaking to Him by way of personal commandment, and He knew that to fulfil them was to obey them. To be disobedient to those Scriptures would not have falsified them, because another way of fulfilment could have been found. But the Lord felt strongly the need to make the word become flesh to utter fullness and perfection.

26:55 *To the multitudes*- The size of the crowd of armed men is an indirect indication of the fierce loyalty of the eleven disciples to the Lord. Judas expected that they would or at least could put up major resistance.

*Come out*- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

*I sat daily with you*- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas*, not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

26:56 *But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled*- This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps.

31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

John inserts at this point that the Lord was revealed in glory and the crowd of armed men fell to the ground; He asked them to let the disciples "go their way". And yet He had earlier lamented that their scattering from Him would be related to their lack of faith: "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad". This has to be compared with John's account in Jn. 18:4-9: "Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one". The scattering from the Lord was part of their falling away. And yet the Lord sets them up to flee, he apparently urges them to do so, in order that He would not spiritually lose any of them. We see here a profound principle- that there are times when it would be better to allow disciples to follow a lower principle, to even fail, to run away from the highest principle of dying with Christ; lest otherwise the height of the demand means they become lost totally. The church of my youth forbade divorce and remarriage, and yet by forcing disciples who divorced to never remarry, they ended up causing many of them to be lost to Christ's cause. And there are multiple other examples.

*Forsook Him-* Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

*And fled-* Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

26:57 *Led Him away*- There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

*The elders*- Sometimes a technical term for the Sanhedrin.

*Were assembled*- Gk. 'gathered together'. This word is often used in connection with the Lord's opponents being gathered together against Him at His death (Mt. 26:3,57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12; Lk. 22:66; Acts 4:26,27); and yet it is also used of the gathering together of the faithful, especially at the breaking of bread, around the symbols of the Lord's death (Acts 20:7,8; 1 Cor. 5:4). The cross becomes the essence of the division between the believers and the world; each group gather together around it. The cross and the person of the Lord Jesus therefore divide the believer from the world; and this is where the line really is, rather than between believer and believer. To make the breaking of bread service and the emblems of the crucified Jesus the means of dividing between believers is therefore extremely serious; at best, it totally fails to perceive the intention of the Lord Jesus and His death. His suffering, He there in His time of torture, is intended to be the focal point of the gathering together of the believers for Him, and likewise it becomes the focal point of the unbelieving world's gathering together against Him.

26:58 *Peter followed Him afar off*- This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we are those likewise described in Ephesians as "far off" as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

*Went in-* The same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

*Sat with the servants-* The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publically, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

*To see the end-* Critically, we could say that the Lord had called His men to participate in His "end", to die with Him, to carry His cross, and Peter (like us) wished merely to observe His end, rather than participate in it personally. I have thought the same about myself often in self-examination at the breaking of bread. And yet Peter's love for the Lord cannot be questioned, for it was not mere curiosity that led him to take the risk he did of sitting amongst "the servants". The only other time the Greek phrase occurs is in James 5:11, where James says we have all seen the end of the Lord [the Lord Jesus?], that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Writing as James was in the context of an early church led by Peter, it is not impossible that he is hinting that we are all in the place of Peter, and have an experience of pity and tender mercy none less than he experienced.

26:59 *All the Council-* Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal. In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publically in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along

with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

*To put Him to death-* The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

26:60 *Found none-* This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

*Two false witnesses-* The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

26:61 *I am able to destroy the temple of God-* They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the

temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

26:62 *The high priest arose-* As a judge arises to give the verdict.

*Do You answer nothing?*- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves- see on :61. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

*What is it that these testify against you?*- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man's witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn't work out; see on :5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave His life.

26:63 *Jesus held His peace-* The High Priest 'answered' to this silence. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

*Tell us whether You be the Christ, the Son of God-* The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

26:64 *You have said-* Again, the Lord sought to elicit confessions from men in their own words.

*You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven-* The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled

over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

*26:65 Rent his clothes-* Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin 7.5* outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (1). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

*He has spoken blasphemy-* Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

*26:66 They answered and said-* No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records

were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

*Guilty of death-* The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

26:67- see on :39.

*Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists-* This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

*Slapped Him with the palms of their hands*- A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

26:69

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I do not know what you	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor understand what	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!

	say.	you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.		
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known.	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And	Peter denied again; and immediately the

	know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

*Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard-* But likely within earshot. "Outside" translates *exo*, and the idea of being 'outside' from the Lord Jesus, especially in the context of Him being in a court, is exactly the picture of the rejected- Jesus at the day of judgment, with the rejected 'outside', away from Him. The term is used of the rejected being "cast out" (5:13), the rejected 'standing without' seeking entrance with the door closed (Lk. 13:25), the Jews "thrust out" of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28), saltless salt 'cast without' (Lk. 14:35), the rejected 'cast out' (Jn. 6:37; 15:6). The word is used again to describe how Peter finally "went out[side]" into the final darkness (:75). He was living out the very picture of condemnation. We too can sin and be condemned in this life, yet the verdict can be changed. And that explains the intensity of zeal and desire in responding to such grace with all our hearts. If we do not perceive our condemnation nor the gracious change of verdict, there can be no real flame of zeal in response, no true humility, no deep seated motivation to service, forgiveness and grace to others.

*A maid-* Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for "the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them.

She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to describe the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

*Came unto him-* Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

*Of Galilee-* Another passing evidence of the Lord's utter humanity; He spoke like a Galilean and was clearly a man brought up there, and not a pre-existent Divine being that came to earth.

*26:70 Denied before all-* Again, Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

*I know not-* Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

26:71 *Another maid-* John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :69. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" in :70 suggests he kept on and on denying.

*Said unto them that were there-* Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial (:72). This is absolutely psychologically credible.

*With Jesus-* She meant, 'There in the Garden', for *meta* Jesus is how the disciples are described there. See on :69 *A maid*.

26:72 *With an oath-* Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not... neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation.

*I know not-* See on :70 *I know not*.

*The man-* As if he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

26:73 *After a while-* Luke says it was after an hour.

*They that stood by came-* Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. See on :71 *Another maid*. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

*You also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known-* This implies that the band of disciples were perceived as a group of Galileans. Matthew has earlier recorded the first accusation as being that “You also were with Jesus the Galilean”. Mark is explicit that they now said: “You are a Galilean”. And Luke records the statement of their simplistic logic: “Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean”. The fact Jesus was a Galilean and Peter was clearly a Galilean didn’t, surely, have to mean that therefore Peter had to have been with Jesus as one of His disciples. But their reasoning shows to what extent they perceived Jesus and His followers to be all from Galilee. Remember that Galilee was despised as the most backward and least spiritually ‘Jewish’ of all of Palestine; their accent was noted and perceived as harsh and crude, full of grammatical mistakes. But it was from the larynx of a Galilean Jew that there came the words of God Almighty, clothed as they were in the country accent and provincial style which was so despised. Christianity began as a peasant religion, a group of men perceived as simpletons. And it is in such communities or those perceived as such that the true spirit of Christ has often prospered most. Christianity has become a culture, and often the culture of the Western wealthy. But that is not at all how it began, and ‘Christianity as culture’, merely following the faith of our fathers, churchianity, is not the real, raw Christianity of Jesus and His Galileans.

*26:74 Then he began...-* The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

*To curse-* Not with expletives, but a declaration of himself as anathema to God and Messiah if he was on the side of Jesus. The Greek *kata-anathematizo* means just that; to declare oneself anathema, to exclude oneself from the body of God’s people.

*To swear-* Peter was in total disobedience to the Lord’s teaching: “Swear not at all” (5:34,36 s.w.). See on 26:72 *With an oath*.

*I know not-* See on :70 *I know not*.

*26:75 Peter remembered-* The letters of Peter urge his readers to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before” (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to “remember” [s.w. “mindful”] the words which their Lord had “spoken before” (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter

‘remembering’ [s.w. “be mindful”] all too late, the words which his Lord had “spoken before” to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not ‘remembered’ the words his Lord had “spoken before” to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to ‘remember’ or ‘be mindful’ [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

Mk. 14:72 adds that Peter “thought thereon”, using the Greek word usually translated ‘to lay hands upon’. We can hear the Lord’s word but not really engage with it. This in fact is likely the status of so much of God’s word which we have read, heard and stashed away in our memory cells. We heard it, we are reminded of it as Peter was by the first cock crow after the first denial episode, but we fail to lay hands on it, to bring it to mind [‘remember’ it], to engage with it until it is paramount in our consciousness.

*Before the cock crows*- The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord’s warning was that “Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times”. Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials- see on :71 *Another maid*. If the first ‘denial’ involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord’s word as recorded by Mark “Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times”. Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word “twice” and “second time”. Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that “Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times”. But it could equally be translated ‘You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock’. This would make a total of six denials. I believe I established beyond doubt in commenting on :71 *Another maid* that there were multiple denials by Peter. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

**First denial:**

A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).

**Second denial:**

A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).

**Third denial:**

A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).

**First crow.**

Mark 14:68 (King James Version).

**Fourth denial:**

Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).

**Fifth denial:**

Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).

**Sixth denial:**

Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).

**Second crow.**

Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

*Three times-* Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encourage them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

*And he went out and wept bitterly-* There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn. 15:6). When we read that Peter "went out" from the Lord's presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included 'Before God!'. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise "went out" into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord's earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must've wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter's sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

## Notes

(1) Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995 ed.)*, p. 53.