

“Have You Heard?” Malcus and Jesus in the Garden
Luke 22

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“Have you heard?” Those three words have been repeated by countless people who have witnessed or experienced something they want to make sure others know about. Have you heard about the sales on Amazon? Have you heard who won the game? Have you heard about this new restaurant? We ask this question all the time. As we approach Easter, which is only a few weeks away, we ask the question, “Have you heard about the most important event in the history of the world: the death and resurrection of Jesus?” This is one of those stories that doesn’t simply change the way you think, like the people we just heard from; it’s a story that, once you hear it, can change every aspect of your life.

This year, instead of focusing on the story from the perspective of the disciples, which is usually the case, we want to imagine the story being told by a different person in the scene, to imagine the story being told from the perspective of someone who was on the other side of the table—not someone who was rooting for Jesus, but someone who was there, when it happened, rooting against Jesus, even playing an active role in the events that led up to his death. We want to imagine this person who was opposed to Jesus going back home, talking to their family and friends and saying something like, “I just witnessed the most incredible thing I’ve seen in my entire life. Have you heard?”

Today we tell the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane from the perspective of a man named Malcus. Malcus was not a man of great standing. He had no wealth or notoriety to his name. In fact, he was a common servant. His one claim to fame was that he wasn’t the servant of any ordinary family; he was a servant for the family of the high priest, one of the most powerful people in the land. He worked for the man who represented God, the man who spoke on behalf of God, the man who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people and helped their sins to be taken away, the man who went into the inner room of the temple once a year and interceded on behalf of the nation. That’s the person he served. Most people considered being a servant a lowly task, an unenviable position, but for Malcus, serving Caiaphas was the greatest honor of his life. He would go anywhere for this man, do anything for this man. After all, he was the high priest, the leader of God’s people.

If you want to catch this as a story, some of you might even want to close your eyes and try to imagine it unfolding...

One of my strongest memories from my time serving Caiaphas was the first time the high priest heard a report about this man named Jesus, this teacher and supposed miracle worker from Nazareth, a small town in the middle of nowhere. Supposedly Jesus was in a house one day and a lot of people gathered to hear him teach, which was no big deal. But then a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus and his friends asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus said the most outlandish thing. He said, and I know this is hard to believe—but I have it on good authority that he really did say it—he looked at him and said, “Your sins are forgiven.” What? Who in the world does this guy think he is? He can’t forgive sins. Only God can do that. And the only way God has decided to forgive sins is by your coming to the temple, bringing a sacrifice, and having my master, the high priest, offer that sacrifice so that you can be made right with God. That’s the only way it’s ever been done. But the craziest thing is that when he told this paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven,” he actually walked. I don’t know how to explain all of that, but I do know that as soon as word got to the high priest, he was furious, and said, “This mad man is leading people astray and pulling them away from the temple. If he doesn’t stop, we’re going to have to take matters into our own hands.”

And the thing is, Jesus didn’t stop. It got worse and worse. There was a time in a town called Bethany, a two mile walk from Jerusalem, that a local guy named Lazarus, who everyone loved, got sick and died. He was such an integral part of the community that the entire town was there for his funeral. As the

funeral was wrapping up, here comes Jesus. How inconsiderate: he waited until the guy was dead for four days to arrive to pay his respects. He shows up, sees all these people weeping and wailing, and he himself even cried. Leaders aren't supposed to do that. After he cried, he said the most ridiculous thing: "Have someone roll the stone away from the cave where he is buried." How ridiculous is that. You have to honor that man's grave. Besides, he's been dead for four days. It's going to smell so bad. Why in the world would you subject his family to that pain? But Jesus insisted. Roll the stone away. After they did, Jesus said, "Lazarus, come out." Everyone was thinking exactly what I'm thinking, "Who does this guy think he is?" First, the guy is dead, he can't hear you. And far more importantly, nobody comes back from the grave. Only God can give new life. Then the most remarkable, awe-inspiring, and almost unbelievable thing ever happened. Lazarus came out of the tomb. He came back from the dead. They literally had to go and take off all the linens he was wrapped in. He was walking and talking. Everyone saw it. I have no idea how he did it. No clue what kind of power he had, but I do know this: everyone who was there, everyone who saw it, started placing their faith in Jesus, saying that he was the Messiah. That Jesus, not my boss, is the real leader of God's people. That he is the one who can lead us to eternal life. When word finally got to Caiaphas about what was going on, and all these people who were being led astray, he said, "It's time to draw a line in the sand. Our entire nation is at stake. We've got no other option than to kill him." People were a little shocked at first—a holy man, talking about taking someone's life. But then they listened to his logic. Caiaphas reasoned with them, "It's better for one person to die than for our entire nation to perish." Everyone slowly began to nod. They decided, as long as they were at it, they should probably kill Lazarus, too, because so many people started following Jesus after meeting him.

Honestly, I didn't think it could get worse. I didn't think tensions could get any higher, but then Jesus decided to come to Jerusalem, to the capital, to walk onto our home turf, and to do it during the most important week of the entire year, Passover. He didn't come to town in a low-key, normal way. He came into town riding on a donkey, like King Solomon did to show that he was the rightful king of Israel. This guy was really trying to tell everyone that he is the king. All the people were taking the bait hook, line, and sinker. The crowds by the thousands were lining the streets, putting their cloaks on the floor, waving palm branches, shouting, "Praise God, blessed is the king of Israel." Everyone was losing their minds! And then Jesus comes into the temple, shuts down our marketplace, says we are exploiting the poor by marking up the price for their sacrifices, as if we don't deserve a good life for all the work we do. Then he starts debating all of our scholars, using his clever words and his mind games, to make all of our leaders look dumb. It got to the point where all the people were ready to follow him and abandon this entire religious system that has been in place for thousands of years. It's like he had a spell over the people.

I knew Caiaphas wasn't going to take this lying down. He was going to do whatever it took to bring an end to this ridiculous so-called Messiah. He just had to figure out how. How do you arrest and kill a guy the entire nation adores? How can you get to him? Then the most unexpected gift came knocking on the door. Literally, this guy named Judas, one of Jesus' closest disciples, came knocking on our door. He said Jesus wasn't the Messiah he thought he was. Jesus wasn't leading a revolution the way he wanted him to. He wanted out, and for the right price, he could arrange the perfect situation for Jesus to be arrested under the cover of darkness, with no one around to stop it. Negotiations ensued. They settled on thirty pieces of silver, which is less than I thought it was going to take, and then they started making the plan. This is when I started listening really closely because I wanted in on the action.

Judas said that there was an olive garden right outside the city gates called Gethsemane. I had passed it a thousand times. You can literally see it from the window of my house. Judas said that Jesus often went there in the evening with his disciples. He would wait to see the next time Jesus went in that direction, then he would peel off, come let us know, and lead us right to him. It couldn't be more perfect. Sure enough, on Thursday night, right after dinner, as the sky grew dark, here comes Judas, ready to betray his master by helping mine. Caiaphas assembled the palace guard as well as an entire cohort of Roman soldiers, more than 300 of them. We were not going to miss our chance. Of course, I wasn't going to miss

out on all the action, so I joined the mob as well. We were out to get justice. We were out to protect our nation. We were out to unmask this messianic imposter.

It didn't take long to get there; the olive garden was only ten minutes away. We approached as quietly as we could, not wanting them to know we were there. We stayed behind a wall and watched what was happening. Seven or eight of his followers were in a circle and had fallen asleep. There was another group of his followers, three of them to be exact, who were in another group. They were asleep, too. I was thinking this was going to be a cake walk. Only eleven men, and ten of them were napping—you gotta be kidding me! But Jesus, when I saw him in the moonlight, had an expression on his face unlike any I had ever seen in my life. Somehow there was blood dripping down his brow, and there was a sorrow and pain on his countenance that are impossible to describe. Yet despite the sorrow and pain there was a confidence and resoluteness about him as well. All of a sudden, we heard crying, something about a cup being taken from him. He fell down for no reason, got back up and said, "Not my will, but yours be done." We were all wondering who in the world this was guy talking to. All of his friends were asleep.

At that moment Judas said, "It's time. I'll make sure everyone knows which one Jesus is by giving him a kiss." We followed fifty to sixty yards behind him, and sure enough, Judas walked right up to Jesus and kissed him. Judas' approaching must have stirred the other disciples, because all of a sudden they were awake and alert. We decided this was the moment, so we rushed them all at once! That's when my zeal got the best of me. I was out in front, rushing toward Jesus, and one of those stupid disciples pulled out a sword and swung at my head. I did the best I could to duck, but he got me. I fell to the ground and blacked out for who knows how long. When I came to, I felt blood gushing out all over my face. I reached up and felt this huge gash from the back of my head all the way to my chin. I looked down and saw my ear lying on the ground. My future flashed before my eyes. Would I recover from this? If I did, would I ever be able to hear again? Fear and terror swept over me. As I came to my senses I watched as Jesus motioned for his men to stand down. Then he looked at me. I assumed there would be betrayal, hatred, and rage in his eyes. But instead, there was compassion, mercy, and love. It was like he knew everything about me—my past, my present, my future. He came to me, bent down, and picked up my ear. As he did, the blood from his brow dropped down and mixed with mine. He took his hand, touched my face, and suddenly the ringing stopped. My gash was gone, the wound was healed, my ear was back where it belonged, I could hear again. All my blood had disappeared. I couldn't make any sense of it. How in the world did that happen? How did he do that? Why did he do that?

I stood there in shock, dazed and confused, motionless. All the disciples ran away. Jesus, with a sense of peace, confidence, and resolve, stood there and allowed the guards to tie his arms and lead him back into the city, where we all knew what would happen to him. As everyone else fled the garden, I found myself frozen, unable to move. I stayed there all by myself, replaying in my mind again and again every detail of what happened, and what it all meant. Could it be? Could he really be the Messiah? Could he really be the one we've all been waiting for? All I know for sure is this: his mercy changed my life, and I'll never hear the same way again.

That's the story that Malcus would tell his friends and his family for years to come, and he began the conversation every single time with the same three words: "Have you heard?"

What do you do with a story like Malcus', a story recorded from different angles in all four chapters of the Bible? Well, I think there are three unavoidable messages to take away from it.

Jesus trusted his Father in the most difficult situation to show us how to trust him in every situation. When Jesus was in the garden, he cried out to his Father and was completely honest about his desire in that moment: "If it is possible, take this cup from me." He knew what the next 24 hours had in

store: he would be abandoned by his friends, arrested by a band of criminals, accused by false witnesses, paraded in front of corrupt officials, mocked, spat upon, and publicly humiliated, all as a part of a sham procedure leading to his being condemned to death. He would be stripped of his clothes, flogged, and beaten to within an inch of his life, paraded through the city streets in mockery, then spend his final tortuous hours on a cross, with his mom and a few of his closest friends watching in horror. In his full humanity, he pleaded with God his Father to find another way to save the world. Yet he said with love and trust, “Not my will, but yours be done.” In other words, even when facing the greatest pain and injustice in the history of the world, I will trust you. Maybe those words of trust resonate deep in your heart at this moment, because you, too, are facing a challenge that seems like more than you can bear. Maybe that challenge is marked by physical pain, isolation, injustice, confusion, silence. All of us will inevitably face Gethsemane moments in our own lives. In those moments we have to decide if we are going to try to force our way through life with a white knuckle grip as long as we can, insisting on being in control, insisting on being justified, or if we are going to learn to relinquish control, trust our Father, and submit our immediate desire for deliverance and justice to our greatest desire to honor God in all things. Jesus trusting his Father in the garden, in the most difficult situation in life, shows us how we can trust our Father in whatever situation we are facing right now, no matter how hard.

Here’s a second message: **Jesus’ body was broken so we could be healed.** The Bible says that Jesus was in so much agony in the Garden that he sweat drops of blood. It seems extreme, almost like hyperbole or exaggeration. But there is an actual medical condition called hematidrosis that describes this exact event. In moments of extreme stress or agony, the capillaries in the forehead actually burst and cause blood to flow from your forehead. That blood, I believe, was a foreshadowing of the blood that would be shed when a crown of thorns would be placed on his head and nails would be driven into his hands and feet, and a spear would be driven into his side. Jesus submitted his body to unspeakable pain and physical brokenness, and he did it so that we could be healed. Isaiah 53:5 is a prophesy about Jesus written 700 years before he walked the earth. It says, “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” This is what Christian theology refers to as substitutionary atonement. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved because of our sin; he took it fully and completely upon himself, so that we could be made whole—meaning our sins could be forgiven and we could receive eternal life. In the garden, he began to experience that physical, spiritual brokenness, and it was all so we could be healed.

Here’s the final message: **Jesus was taken captive so we could be set free.** The Bible says that the soldiers seized him and then bound him. Jesus exercised unbelievable restraint. He was the one who just healed a man’s ear and who days before raised a man from the dead, not to mention of course that he is the one who spoke the universe into existence. Surely he had the power to prevent his arrest, but he went willingly. In Matthew 26 Jesus said that he had twelve legions of angels, which means 72,000 angels at his command. He could have summoned them and walked free. But he allowed himself to be taken captive so that you and I could be set free instead. The reality is that every one of us has been seized and bound by the power of sin. We aren’t just people who have sinned. We are sinners. Sin has so pervaded our hearts and corrupted our nature that we are bound to it, unable to break free. Behind our humility is the motivation of pride. Behind our generosity is a motivation of greed. Behind our kindness is the motivation of selfishness. We put on a good face for others, but there’s a darkness in our hearts, an inward curvature of our souls that has bound. Jesus paid the price to break sins’ oppressive power over us. 1 Peter tells us that he bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. Jesus was bound and led into the heart of darkness, so that he could lead us into the light.