

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Commission: A Study of Matthew 21–28

STUDY FOURTEEN

Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56

Every time I walk the sacred path with Christ to the scene of His passion at Gethsemane, I take in the wonder in silence. There is no way I can even imagine the depth of His anguish.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IN the upper room, oil lamps threw flickering shadows against the walls as Jesus and His disciples ate the Passover meal. Satan was there, crouching in the darkness, watching and waiting. Jesus dipped a piece of bread into the bowl and offered it to Judas as a final appeal to stop before it was too late. Judas accepted the morsel but rejected the Savior's grace, and Satan pounced. According to John's account,

“When Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus told him, “Hurry and do what you're going to do.” . . . So Judas left at once, going out into the night.” (John 13:27, 30)

Once outside, Judas scurried down the steps and into the street, slipping through the shadows to the chief priest's house. When the door creaked open, Judas ducked inside and a thick curtain of evil descended upon the city. It would be the darkest night the world had ever known, for all the powers of darkness were converging to try to snuff out the Light of the World.

Back in the upper room, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, delivered His Upper Room Discourse (John 14–17), and finished the Passover meal with His disciples. “Then they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30).

From this point on, Jesus would not preach any more sermons nor teach His disciples any more lessons. His betrayer had set in motion gears that would not be stopped. Jesus stepped resolutely into the night to face His final hours and the suffering for which He was born.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

Matthew 26:31–56



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The time of Christ's suffering between the Last Supper and the grave is known as *the passion*. To prepare your heart to walk with our Savior along this sacred, sorrowful path, let the following lines prompt your own prayer to the Lord:

Father, with head bowed I follow Your Son into His garden of grief where He will agonize on my behalf and willingly offer Himself for me. Break my heart with His sufferings so I may know Him more intimately and love Him more deeply, in His name I pray, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus' movements after leaving the upper room were not random or unpredictable—just the opposite. According to Luke's account, Jesus went "as was His custom to the Mount of Olives" and went to "the place," implying that He went to a specific garden that He had gone to many times before (Luke 22:39–40 NASB). His disciples, including Judas, "knew this place" and would have easily anticipated where He was going (John 18:1–2). *Jesus wanted to be found.*

As you read [Matthew 26:31–56](#), note the precision of Jesus' words and deliberateness of His actions. Jesus was in complete charge of His circumstances. He knew what to say, what would happen, and when it would happen.



Observation: Denial, Distress, Deception, Desertion

In the observation phase, we look closely at the sequence of events. Nothing in Scripture is out of order or without significance. Read carefully and slowly each phrase in the verses as you answer the following questions.¹



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Predicting the Disciples' Reaction—Matthew 26:31–35

Jesus had already told the disciples, “One of you will betray me” (Matthew 26:21). What did Jesus now tell Peter and the disciples (*Matthew 26:31–35*)? What was Jesus' tone as He spoke? How did Peter and the other disciples react?

Jesus quoted *Zechariah 13:7*, which is about the Lord's purifying judgment of His people. How does the Lord's promise in *13:9* also apply to the disciples, perhaps encouraging them when they reflected on it later?

The disciples never did get the resurrection until the morning of the resurrection. They were so distraught over Jesus leaving them, they missed some of the things He said.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Praying Alone in the Garden—Matthew 26:36–46

When Jesus arrived at the garden of Gethsemane, His emotional tone intensified. He said, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). *Gethsemane* means “oil press,” which is a fitting metaphor for the crushing pressure Jesus was about to experience.



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In the interpretation phase, we'll explore the reasons for Jesus' agony. For now, write down what you observe in *Matthew 26:36–46*. Note the contrasts you see between Jesus and His bleary-eyed disciples.

Jesus pleaded in the most intimate terms, “My Father!” (26:39)—in Mark's account, “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). What did He ask His Father to do for Him? What did Jesus want more than His own desires?

The agony raging in Jesus' soul reached its apex at Gethsemane where His humanity recoiled over the horrors of the cross. After a struggle, Jesus arrived on the other side fully surrendered to the Father's will, at peace, and *invincible*. Jesus was now ready for what came next.

Responding to the Betrayal and Arrest—Matthew 26:47–56

Without warning, a mob of torch-bearing soldiers burst into the garden with Judas at their head and poison in his kiss. What responses from Jesus in *Matthew 26:47–56* express His resolute submission to the Father and selfless love even for His enemies?



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What statements did Jesus repeat in Matthew 26:54, 56? What role do you see the Scriptures playing in Jesus' mind-set?

Jesus had worked out His fears through prayer before the crisis struck. The sleepy disciples, however, were completely unprepared. How did their natural fight-or-flight instincts take over their reactions?

Like rats in a sinking ship, the disciples fled. They deserted Jesus. Every one of them. Even John the beloved. Even the chest-pounding, arrogant Peter ran. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Cup of Wrath

Jesus' obedience to the Father and trust in His care flowed like precious oils from Gethsemane's presses. But His surrender did not come without a fight. His humanity was on full display as He "fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:39 NASB).²



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To what does “this cup” refer? *Isaiah 51:17–20*; *Jeremiah 25:15*; and *Revelation 14:9–10* give insight into the answer.

Jesus qualified His request with “if it is possible” (Matthew 26:39). If *what* was possible? Jesus asked His Father if the world could be redeemed without Him having to suffer sin’s wrath. Surely, Jesus knew He must drink the cup to redeem the world, but, in His humanity, He longed for another way.

What do the longings of Jesus tell you about His human nature and ability to understand “our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15)?

How can we model Jesus’ prayer?

Jesus willingly accepted the cup, and He took it for you and me. The fight was over. The struggle over drinking the cup was done. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Help from an Angel

What poignant details did Luke add in his account of Jesus' distress in Gethsemane in *Luke 22:39–45*?

This scene forms a bookend with an earlier incident involving angels at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. What similarities do you see between Gethsemane and the wilderness, according to *Matthew 4:8–11*?

Whether actual drops of blood poured out of His skin or His sweat poured like drops of blood, Jesus was in severe distress. Peace came in the end when He chose submission to the Father's will and became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8 NASB).



Application: Gethsemane Then and Now

The battle of Calvary was won in the trenches of Gethsemane. But Jesus' victory did not come easily or neatly. So extreme was His travail that He needed an angel's shoulder to lean on. So messy was His labor that His sweat flowed blood-like from His pores, matting His hair and soaking His clothes. Yet, in His submission, He found the Father's peace to carry Him through the suffering to come.

No human can truly comprehend what it was like for sinless Jesus to gaze into sin's cursed cup and to recoil at the fury of God's wrath. But we do experience similar battles of the will. We struggle to release our wants and to accept God's way and to echo Jesus' words to the Father, "Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42).



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Are you experiencing a Gethsemane-like battle? If so, what “cup” are you asking the Lord to take away, if possible?

How long have you struggled with the Lord over this issue? What is the main fear that haunts you? Can you express that fear to the Father?

Ask the Lord to help you voice His prayer of surrender, “If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Matthew 26:39). What would you like to say to your Abba Father in this moment?



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In our soul's garden of grief, we tremble and sweat and cry out to the Lord. Then, somewhere in the midst of our agony, the Lord touches us. The battle over, we leave in peace. Whatever your situation, remember Jesus entered the garden before you, and He's willing to lead you through.



A FINAL PRAYER

Dear Father, in the days ahead, bring to mind the scene of Jesus struggling in prayer and then releasing His will to You. Take me back to Gethsemane where Jesus' soul was pressed into sweet obedience. Help me always remember His agony, which is matched in intensity only by His love. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Learn more about Pastor Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* method on the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](http://insight.org)" at insight.org.
2. Matthew used the imperfect tense, indicating that Jesus continually "fell on His face" in prayer. This description of Jesus in great distress contradicts the image we often see in paintings of Jesus in Gethsemane kneeling serenely with His face toward heaven.

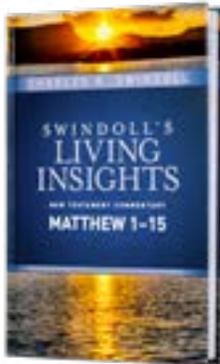


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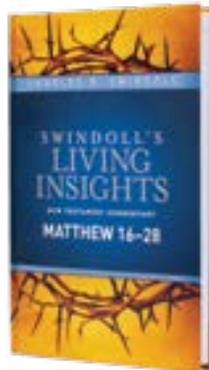
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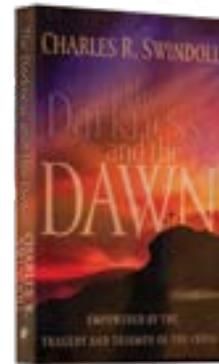
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2021 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

