



THE PASSION and GOD'S LOVE

"God's passionate love for his people ... is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice ... so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love."

—Pope Benedict XVI²

² Benedict XVI, encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)*, 10.

SESSION ONE

THE PRAYER OF THE AGONY

Jesus in Gethsemane

A. Establish the Context

Our biblical walk through Christ's passion begins on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus came with his disciples to pray. Jesus had passed over this same mountain earlier this week when he entered Jerusalem riding a donkey. He had come here to pray at other times during his time in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. After celebrating his Last Supper, in which he gave us the gift of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist, he came back to this Mount of Olives once more to pray.

This time, things are very different. The Gospels immediately make it clear that Jesus' visit to Gethsemane on this night is no ordinary prayer time. Jesus is "greatly distressed," his soul is "very sorrowful even to death," and he falls to the ground on his face in prayer. We have never seen Jesus pray like this before (see Mark 14:33-35). As he prays in agony, his sweat becomes like drops of blood, and an angel comes to strengthen him (see Luke 22:43-44). Knowing all that was about to befall him at the moment as his final battle with the devil is about to begin, Jesus prays, "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

B. Read the Story

This session focuses on the following verses that tell of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane: **Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; and Luke 22:39-46**. You do not need to read these verses now, as you will be reading these accounts as part of your preparation for Session Two.

C. Take a Deeper Look

1. What inspires you most about Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39)?
2. What do you think it means to do the Father's will and not your own? How does this prayer inspire you to do God's will more in your life?

D. Application

Reflect

In Gethsemane, Jesus surrenders perfectly to the Father's will when he prays, "Not as I will but as you will" (Matthew 26:39). What are some of the things that keep you from entrusting more of your life to the Father's plan for you? Is it fear? Not wanting to give up control? Not being convinced God is trustworthy? Not wanting to surrender your plans to his plans? Is there an area of your life for which you could seek his will more or entrust more to his hands?

Commit

In the Bible, God says, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). How might this verse give you confidence to seek and do the Father's will for your life, especially in that area? What can you do practically to live more like Jesus in that area and say, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39)?

Pray

Pray the following prayer from St. Ignatius of Loyola. It's a prayer of surrender, entrusting one's entire life to God:

"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding, and my entire will,
all that I have and possess.
Thou hast given all to me.
To Thee, O Lord, I return it.
All is thine; dispose of it wholly according to thy will.
Give me Thy love and Thy grace,
for this is sufficient for me."³

For more background on this session, see "Introduction" and chapters one through four in Edward Sri's book *No Greater Love: A Biblical Walk Through Christ's Passion*.

³ St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951), 192.

TALK NOTES

The Prayer of the Agony: Jesus in Gethsemane

- I. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”
(John 15:13)
- II. Holy Week
 - A. Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey
 - B. The Cleansing of the Temple
 - C. The Last Supper
 - D. The Passion
- III. The Mount of Olives
 - A. David and Jesus both crossed the Kidron Valley and prayed here
(see 2 Samuel 15:13-31; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1)
 - B. David and Jesus were both betrayed by close friends, Ahithophel and Judas
 - C. Both Ahithophel and Judas hanged themselves
 - D. It is prophesied that the Lord would stand on the Mount of Olives
(see Zechariah 14:4)
- IV. The Great Battle
 - A. The devil is the unseen dark force behind Jesus’ passion
 - 1. After his temptation in the desert, the devil departed from Jesus
“until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13)
 - 2. Jesus confronts the powers of darkness by
 - a. raising people from the dead
 - b. liberating people from their sins
 - c. expelling demons
 - 3. Satan enters Judas, who betrays Jesus to the chief priests (see Luke 22:3-6)
 - 4. Jesus tells his disciples that Satan demands to have them and sift them
like wheat (see Luke 22:31)
 - 5. Jesus says to his captors, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness”
(Luke 22:53)

TALK NOTES

V. Sorrowful unto Death

- A. Jesus was “greatly distressed” (Mark 14:33, recalling Psalm 55:4)
- B. “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:34, recalling Sirach 37:2)
- C. “It is not a grief to the death when a companion and friend turns to enmity” (Sirach 37:2)
- D. “He fell on the ground and prayed” (Mark 14:35)

VI. The Garden of Gethsemane

- A. John’s Gospel mentions there was a garden there (see John 18:1)
- B. *Gethsemane* (Aramaic): oil press
- C. The rock structure in the Church of All Nations is venerated as the site where Jesus came to pray

VII. The Angel and the Blood

- A. An angel came to strengthen Jesus (see Luke 22:43)
 - 1. An angel protected the three youths in the fiery furnace (see Daniel 3:26)
 - 2. An angel rescues the apostles from prison (see Acts 5:19; 12:6-11)
 - 3. An angel ministers to Jesus after his temptation in the desert (see Matthew 4:11)
- B. Jesus was in agony and his sweat became like drops of blood (see Luke 22:44)

VIII. Why Peter, James, and John?

- A. The same apostles Jesus brought to witness his Transfiguration (see Luke 9:28-36)
- B. The Transfiguration prepared the apostles for Christ’s passion (see CCC 555)

IX. The Prayer of the Agony (see Matthew 26:39)

- A. Jesus is fully human and fully divine
- B. Jesus surrenders his human will to his Father’s will and embraces his cross

X. “Watch and Pray” (Mark 14:38)

- A. To watch means to be vigilant
- B. Be on guard against the devil (see 1 Peter 5:8)
 - 1. Call on the name of Jesus
 - 2. Make the Sign of the Cross
 - 3. Call upon your guardian angel
 - 4. Watch and pray with Jesus in Adoration, especially on Holy Thursday



Judas Betrays Jesus With a Kiss (Fresco in the Collegiata of San Gimignano, Italy)

SESSION TWO

“ARE YOU THE CHRIST?”

(Mark 14:61)

Jesus' Arrest and Trial Before the Sanhedrin

A. Establish the Context

In the opening session, we saw the intensity of what Jesus faces when he begins his passion in the garden of Gethsemane. The Gospels make this clear with several details about what Jesus endured in this time of prayer. Knowing all that was about to befall him, Jesus is “greatly distressed” and his soul is “very sorrowful even to death” (Mark 14:34). He kneels and falls to the ground prostrate in prayer (see Luke 22:41). In his agony, his sweat becomes like drops of blood and an angel appears to strengthen him (see Luke 22:43-44). At the center of his agony is his prayer, “Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). We saw how the prayer reflects both his humanity—which would be repulsed by his betrayal, scourging, and crucifixion (“*let this chalice pass*”)—and his divinity: “*not as I will, but as you will*” (Matthew 26:39, emphasis added). Nevertheless, Christ’s *human will* remains perfectly united to his *Father’s will*. Jesus feels the full weight of what he is about to endure, but he still chooses to embrace the suffering for the sake of our salvation. And yet, he knows his disciples’ wills are not as committed. They are about to be tested in the garden, too, so he warns them to be vigilant: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Mark 14:38).

Now we turn our attention to what happens next. Soldiers, police, captains, chief priests, and elders of the people come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. They are led there by Judas, who has betrayed his Master. They come with torches, lanterns, swords, and clubs. And they come in large numbers. We

DID JUDAS REPENT?

Though sometimes translated as “repented,” the actual Greek word Matthew uses to describe what was going on in Judas’ heart is *metamelomai* (see Matthew 27:3). The word means having a change of feeling or a change with one’s concern, which can be accompanied by sadness. It could be translated as “having changed with remorse.” The idea is that Judas deeply *regretted* his actions.

Despite the seriousness of Judas’ sin, it would not have kept him from reconciliation with Jesus if he simply had turned to God—if he *repented* and trusted in God’s mercy. Instead, Judas merely *regretted* what he did. He focused on himself and his horrific crime.

will see how Jesus is not taken by surprise. Nor is he taken by force against his will. The Gospels highlight how he is actually the one in charge during his arrest, and he freely allows the crowd to hand him over to the chief priests.

Imagine being at Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin. There is confusion and disarray. False testimonies are sought, and they are not consistent. The high priest stands up and presses Jesus to speak, but Jesus remains silent before his accusers. Only when the high priest puts Jesus under oath does he finally speak. He says something that makes the high priest tear his robes and the Sanhedrin charge him with blasphemy. They condemn him to death, slap his face, spit at him, blindfold him, and strike him saying, “Prophesy! Who is it that struck you?” (Luke 22:64). What did Jesus say that was so upsetting? All he did was refer to himself as “the

Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). We will unpack the meaning of this statement, which is the turning point of the trial.

Finally, both Peter and Judas are unfaithful to Jesus on this night, and both recognize their sin. But why is one eventually reconciled to Christ and the other ends in despair and death? What is the difference between the way Peter and Judas respond to their sin, and what lessons can we take away for our own lives?

B. Read the Story

Read the following verses that tell of Jesus’ arrest and hearing before the Jewish Sanhedrin: **Matthew 26:36-75; Mark 14:32-72; Luke 22:39-71; John 18:1-27.**

**For more background on this session, see chapter six in Edward Sri’s book
No Greater Love: A Biblical Walk Through Christ’s Passion.**

C. Take a Deeper Look

1. Read **Mark 14:42** and **John 18:1-6**.
 - a. Does Jesus seem to be taken by surprise by Judas and those coming to arrest him? Who seems to be in charge in this scene of his arrest?
 - b. Read **John 10:14-15, 17-18**. What might this tell us about the role Jesus will play when he is arrested and eventually crucified?
2. When the crowd comes to the garden looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responds, "I am he" (John 18:5), and they "drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6). Consider how this scene reveals a glimpse of Jesus' divine power.
 - a. Read **Exodus 3:14**. How is the expression "I AM" used in this passage with Moses at the burning bush? And what might this tell us about Jesus' similar expression in Gethsemane, "I am he"?
 - b. Read **Psalm 35:4** and **Psalm 56:9 (56:10 in NAB)**. What might these verses tell us about the crowd turning back when they came to arrest Jesus?
 - c. Read **Revelation 1:12-17**. Why does St. John fall to the ground? What might that tell us about the crowd falling down when they come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane?

3. A new Isaac:

- a. Read **Genesis 22:1-18**. In what ways does this scene prefigure Jesus' last week of his life when he enters Jerusalem?

	What happens to Abraham and Isaac in these verses from Genesis 22?	How might Abraham and Isaac prefigure what happens to Jesus in his last week in Jerusalem?
Read Genesis 22:2 and John 3:16		
Read Genesis 22:3 and Matthew 21:1-9		
Read Genesis 22:6 and John 19:17		
Read Genesis 22:9 and John 19:18; Acts 5:30		

- b. Notice how Matthew's account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane recalls what happened to Isaac on Mount Moriah:

	Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22)	Jesus on Mount of Olives (Matthew 26)
Read Genesis 22:5 and Matthew 26:36	What does Abraham say to his men?	What does Jesus say to his disciples?
Read Genesis 22:6 and Matthew 26:47	What does Abraham take for the sacrifice?	What do the men coming to arrest Jesus bring with them?
Read Genesis 22:10 and Matthew 26:51	What does Abraham do with his hand?	What does one of the disciples do with his hand?
Read Genesis 22:12 and Matthew 26:50	What does the angel tell Abraham not to do with the boy?	What does the crowd do with Jesus?

4. Matthew 26:62 notes that the high priest “stood up.”

a. Read the following verses. What do they tell us about those who have “risen” or “stood up” against the righteous?

i. **Psalm 27:12**

ii. **Psalm 35:11**

iii. **Psalm 86:14**

b. What might this background tell us about the high priest who “stood up” during Christ’s trial, pressing him to answer?

5. Read **Matthew 26:63** and **Isaiah 53:7**. What does this prophecy from Isaiah tell us about Jesus' silence before Caiaphas?

6. Caiaphas says to Jesus, "I adjure you, by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ" (Matthew 26:63). Read **1 Kings 22:14-16** about a conversation between the king and the prophet Micaiah.
 - a. When the king uses the language "I adjure you" in this passage, what is he wanting from Micaiah?

 - b. When Micaiah uses the expression, "As the LORD lives," what is he emphasizing?

 - c. And how might this shed light on why Jesus finally answers the high priest?

7. Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). This is an allusion to the famous “son of man” prophecy in Daniel. Read **Daniel 7:13-14**.

a. What do you think Jesus is saying about himself by referring to this prophecy?

b. Why do you think the chief priests were so upset by his allusion to the son of man in Daniel 7?

8. The Sanhedrin blindfold Jesus and slap him, saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ. Who is it that struck you?” (Matthew 26:67-68; see also Mark 14:65). They are mocking him for claiming to be a prophet.

a. Read the following verses. What does Jesus predict in these passages, and how accurate were his predictions?

i. **John 13:21-26**

ii. **Matthew 26:31**

iii. **Luke 22:34**

- b. Who is the true prophet on this night of Christ's passion?
 - c. Read **Isiah 50:6-7**. In light of the background of this prophecy, how might the members of the Sanhedrin unwittingly play a part in fulfilling prophecy even as they mock Jesus for being a prophet?
9. After Peter denies Jesus three times, the cock crows and "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61).
- a. What kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter at this moment?
 - b. Read **Mark 10:21**. How did Jesus look at the rich young man when he walked away from discipleship? How might that shed light on Christ's look at Peter?

- c. How would you feel if you were Peter and Jesus looked at you at this moment?

- 10. Read **Matthew 27:3-4**. Though some translations say Judas “repented,” the actual word Matthew uses to describe Judas at this moment means to have remorse or to regret. How do you think Judas’ regret is different from full repentance?

Not for Duplication

D. Application

Reflect

Peter wept bitterly when he realized his sin, and he eventually was reconciled with Jesus. Judas merely felt badly about his actions. Perhaps he was mad at himself, afraid of the consequences, afraid of what others would think of him, discouraged by his weakness, tempted to think he could never change, and tempted to despair thinking he could never be forgiven. Whatever the case, he was more focused on himself than he was on his relationship with Jesus. How do you respond when you sin, when you hurt someone like your spouse or a friend, or when you hurt your relationship with God? In what ways might you be tempted to focus only on yourself in those moments?

Commit

What can you do to be less like Judas when you recognize your faults, weaknesses, and sins? How can you keep your focus on God and the people you may have hurt through what you have done and what you have failed to do? Write down one thing you can do to keep your focus on God and others when you make a mistake, a weakness comes out, or you commit a sin. Then pray to God each day this week for him to help you to do that.

Pray

Read **Psalm 51**, a classic psalm of repentance. It describes King David’s heartfelt sorrow for having sinned against God. Choose one line from this psalm that speaks most to you and prayerfully speak those words to God in a way that applies to your life right now.

**For more background on this session, see chapters five through nine in Edward Sri’s book
*No Greater Love: A Biblical Walk Through Christ’s Passion.***

TALK NOTES

“Are You the Christ?” (Mark 14:61): Jesus’ Arrest and Trial Before the Sanhedrin

- I. Jesus gives himself over voluntarily; he is in control
 - A. “Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand” (Mark 14:42)
 - B. Jesus knew what was going to happen (see John 18:4)
 - C. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (see John 10:14-15)
 - D. “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18)
 - E. By saying “I am he” (John 18:5-6), Jesus is asserting that he is divine
- II. Jesus is betrayed by Judas
 - A. “Friend, why are you here?” (Matthew 26:50)
 - B. “Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48)
- III. The disciples left Jesus (see Mark 14:50)
 - A. Recalls Peter and Andrew leaving their nets to follow Jesus (see Mark 1:18)
 - B. Recalls James and John “leaving” their father to follow Jesus (see Mark 1:20)
 - C. A young man leaves his clothes behind and runs away naked (see Mark 14:51-52)
 - D. Implies they have turned away from their discipleship
- IV. Jesus before the Sanhedrin
 - A. *Gallicantu* (Latin): cock crow
 - B. *Sanhedrin* (Greek): council
 - C. Sought false testimony against Jesus to condemn him to death (see Matthew 26:59)
 - D. “And the high priest stood up ...” (Matthew 26:62; see Psalm 27:12; 35:11; 86:14; Wisdom 2:12-20)
 - E. “Have you no answer to make?” (Matthew 26:62)
 - F. Jesus remains silent (see Matthew 26:63; Isaiah 53:7)
 - G. Jesus is put under oath and now must speak (see Matthew 26:63)
 - H. “You have said so ...” (Matthew 26:64)
 - I. Jesus is the Christ, but not in the way that Caiaphas thinks

V. The Son of Man Prophecy (see Matthew 26:64; Daniel 7)

- A. Four beasts represent four Gentile nations
- B. Coming on the clouds symbolizes God's presence
- C. Jesus is claiming to be the divine Son of Man
- D. The chief priests have become the chief beasts

VI. Peter's denial

- A. Peter distances himself physically and spiritually from Christ (see Matthew 26:69-75)
- B. "I do not know what you mean" (Matthew 26:70)
- C. "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:72, 74)
- D. The cock crows (see Matthew 26:33-35)
- E. "The Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61)
- F. Peter "went out and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62)
- G. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:16)
 - 1. *Agape* (Greek): perfect sacrificial love
 - 2. *Philea* (Greek): imperfect human love

VII. Judas

- A. Judas throws the thirty pieces of silver into the Temple (Matthew 27:5)
- B. Judas did not so much "repent" as he "regretted" what he did (see Matthew 27:3)
- C. Peter repents; he is not focused just on himself
- D. Judas stays focused on himself and his actions
- E. Judas "went [out] and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5; see Luke 22:62)

NO
GREATER
LOVE



SESSION ONE – RESPONSES

THE PRAYER OF THE AGONY

Jesus in Gethsemane

A. Establish the Context

Facilitators: If you like, have someone read aloud the “Establish the Context” section.

B. Read the Story

Facilitators: Explain to the participants that the listed verses are their readings for the following session. No prior reading is needed for this session. Begin your small-group discussion with a brief prayer.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Facilitators: Have the participants respond to these questions and invite them to share their responses with the group

1. *What inspires you most about Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39)?*

Answers will vary: Some may be moved by Jesus' humanity in this prayer—that he felt repulsed by, as any human would, the thought of the pain and suffering he was about to endure. Others might comment on how grateful they are that Jesus still said "yes" and embraced his passion and death for us. Others might be inspired by Jesus' will being perfectly united with the Father's even though it will cause him much pain.

2. *What do you think it means to do the Father's will and not your own? How does this prayer inspire you to do God's will more in your life?*

God's plan is always better than anything we can come up with on our own. We may have certain desires, goals, hopes, and expectations in life, but God invites us to place everything in his hands, trusting that his plan leads to what is best for us. Consider the following verse from Scripture about how the Father has a plan for each of our lives: "For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD. Plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). The Father's will—his plan for our lives—is for our happiness. It is for our "welfare" and to give us "a future and a hope" in life. Jesus models for us perfect trust and surrender to the Father's plan.

D. Application

Facilitators: If time allows, invite group members to share their responses from this session's application questions.

After sharing your responses in the small group, watch Edward Sri's video presentation on Session One – The Prayer of the Agony: Jesus in Gethsemane.



Judas Betrays Jesus With a Kiss (Fresco in the Collegiata of San Gimignano, Italy)

SESSION TWO – RESPONSES

“ARE YOU THE CHRIST?”

(Mark 14:61)

Jesus’ Arrest and Trial Before the Sanhedrin

Facilitators: Read these responses to the questions ahead of time to help you prepare to lead the small-group discussion.

Participants: Reinforce what you have learned by reviewing these responses after your small-group discussion and before you continue to the next session.

A. Establish the Context

Facilitators: Take a moment to establish the context and what was learned in the previous session.

B. Read the Story

Facilitators: Ask someone to summarize the readings for this session. Begin your small-group discussion with a brief prayer.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Facilitators: If there is time, have someone read each passage aloud before it is discussed.

1. Read *Mark 14:42* and *John 18:1-6*.

- a.** *Does Jesus seem to be taken by surprise by Judas and those coming to arrest him? Who seems to be in charge in this scene of his arrest?*

Jesus is not caught by surprise. He knows all that is about to happen. At the end of his prayer in Gethsemane, he says to his disciples, “Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand” (Mark 14:42). When the arrest party arrives, Jesus knew all that was to befall him (see John 18:4). He takes the initiative and goes forward to meet them (see John 18:4). He asks, “Whom do you seek?” (John 18:4). This does not look like someone trying to flee. When he identifies himself, the soldiers and temple guards all draw back a few steps and fall to the ground (see John 18:6). A glimpse of Jesus’ full power is revealed. As the soldiers and officers seem in a daze, Jesus has to take charge of the situation. He is the one who moves along the process of his arrest, asking a second time, “Whom do you seek?” (John 18:7). He once again identifies himself, clearly not trying to hide or veil his identity. And he commands the arrest party to let his disciples go (see John 18:8). Notice how Jesus is the one in charge. He is the one taking the initiative. He is the one doing all the questioning.

- b.** *Read *John 10:14-15, 17-18*. What might this tell us about the role Jesus will play when he is arrested and eventually crucified?*

In John 10:14-15, Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. In John 10:17-18, he said, “I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” Here in Gethsemane during Christ’s arrest—and throughout his passion—others will take Jesus away, beat him, scourge him, and crucify him. But we must see that Jesus is the one freely choosing to be arrested and handed over to the chief priests, just as he is the one who will allow the Roman soldiers to scourge him, mock him, and crucify him. No one takes his life from him. He is the one in control of the events unfolding before him.

2. *When the crowd comes to the garden looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus responds, “I am he” (John 18:5), and they “drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:4-6). Consider how this scene reveals a glimpse of Jesus’ divine power.*
- a. *Read **Exodus 3:14**. How is the expression “I AM” used in this passage with Moses at the burning bush? And what might this tell us about Jesus’ similar expression in Gethsemane, “I am he”?*

God reveals his divine name to Moses at the burning bush: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). When Jesus says, “I am he” (*ego eimi* in Greek), the expression could simply mean he is identifying himself as the one the soldiers and police are seeking. But in John’s Gospel, the expression carries much more weight. The words can also recall the divine name revealed to Moses. That is how it is used in John 8:58, where Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I am” and the Jewish leaders want to stone him to death for associating himself with the divine name. Finally, upon hearing Jesus say, “I am he,” the soldiers and police in Gethsemane draw back and fall to the ground, further showing the supernatural power of these words.

- b. *Read **Psalms 35:4** and **Psalms 56:9**. What might these verses tell us about the crowd turning back when they came to arrest Jesus?*

Both psalms feature a righteous man who is being persecuted by his enemies. In Psalm 35, the psalmist prays that those who seek his life will be “turned back” and confounded. In Psalm 56, the man prays that his enemies be “turned back.” That John’s Gospel uses the same word to describe the soldiers and police “withdrawing” shows that they are in the role of the wicked enemies of these psalmists, the ones persecuting the righteous man, who is Jesus. The enemies of Christ are turned back and confounded just as described in the psalms.

- c. *Read **Revelation 1:12-17**. Why does St. John fall to the ground? What might that tell us about the crowd falling down when they come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane?*

In the book of Revelation, St. John sees Jesus, the Son of Man, in glory. Several apocalyptic images describe his glory and power; for example, he appears with eyes like a flame of fire holding seven stars and his face shining like the sun. Seeing this, St. John falls on his feet as though dead in fear and awe and worship before the divine Son of Man. The fact that the crowd in Gethsemane falls to the ground in a similar way indicates that, at least for a moment, they are overpowered by some experience of Christ’s glory like St. John was in the book of Revelation.

3. A new Isaac:

- a. Read **Genesis 22:1-18**. In what ways does this scene prefigure Jesus' last week of his life when he enters Jerusalem?

	What happens to Abraham and Isaac in these verses from Genesis 22?	How might Abraham and Isaac prefigure what happens to Jesus in his last week in Jerusalem?
Genesis 22:2 and John 3:16	God asks Abraham to take his “only begotten son” (Genesis 22:2), whom he loves, to offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain in Moriah. (It is interesting that a burnt offering is an offering for sin and Moriah later becomes known as Jerusalem.)	God offers Jesus, his “only-begotten son” (John 3:16), as a sacrifice on a mountain in Jerusalem. (Like the sacrifice of Isaac, Jesus’ sacrifice is an offering for sin. And he’s sacrificed on the same Mount Moriah, which becomes known as Jerusalem.)
Genesis 22:3 and Matthew 21:1-9	Abraham and Isaac travel to Moriah on a donkey.	Jesus will enter Jerusalem on a donkey (see Matthew 21:1-9).
Genesis 22:6 and John 19:17	Abraham laid the wood for the sacrifice on Isaac, who carried it up the mountain.	Jesus will carry the wood of the Cross to Calvary.
Genesis 22:9 and John 19:18 ; Acts 5:30	Isaac was bound and laid on the wood for the sacrifice.	Jesus was nailed to the Cross, the wood for his sacrifice

- b. Notice how Matthew’s account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane recalls what happened to Isaac on Mount Moriah:

	Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22)	Jesus on Mount of Olives (Matthew 26)
Read Genesis 22:5 and Matthew 26:36	What does Abraham say to his men? “Stay here ... I and the lad will go yonder and worship.”	What does Jesus say to his disciples? “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.”
Read Genesis 22:6 and Matthew 26:47	What does Abraham take for the sacrifice? “knife (<i>machaira</i>) and wood (<i>zula</i>)”	What do the men coming to arrest Jesus bring with them? “swords (<i>machariōn</i>) and clubs (<i>zulōn</i>)” (Note to leader: the words in Greek for “swords” and “clubs” are the same words used in Genesis 22 for “knife” and “wood”)
Read Genesis 22:10 and Matthew 26:51	What does Abraham do with his hand? Abraham “put forth his hand, and took the knife.”	What does one of the disciples do with his hand? He “stretched out his hand and drew his sword.”
Read Genesis 22:12 and Matthew 26:50	What does the angel tell Abraham not to do with the boy? “Do not lay your hand on the boy”	What does the crowd do with Jesus? The crowd “laid hands” on Christ.

4. *Matthew 26:62 notes that the high priest “stood up.”*

a. *Read the following verses. What do they tell us about those who have “risen” or “stood up” against the righteous?*

i. ***Psalm 27:12***

“False witnesses have risen against me.”

ii. ***Psalm 35:11***

“Malicious witnesses rise up.”

iii. ***Psalm 86:14***

“Insolent men have risen up against me ... ruthless men seek my life.”

b. *What might this background tell us about the high priest who “stood up” during Christ’s trial, pressing him to answer?*

The high priest stands up against Christ, like the wicked in the Old Testament who stood up against God’s faithful ones. The chief priests sought false witnesses, just as the wicked do in Psalm 27:12 and Psalm 35:11. They rise up and seek Christ’s life as the wicked in Psalm 86:14 do.

5. *Read **Matthew 26:63** and **Isaiah 53:7**. What does this prophecy from Isaiah tell us about Jesus’ silence before Caiaphas?*

Isaiah 53 is known as the “Suffering Servant” song. It is a prophecy about God’s faithful servant who will bear our griefs and carry our sorrows and be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:4-5). He “makes himself an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10). “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter ... so he opened not his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus remains silent up to this point in his trial, not answering the false charges against him, fulfilling this prophecy of Isaiah. This means Jesus is the suffering servant, the lamb led to the slaughter, the one who is wounded for our transgressions and makes himself an offering for sin—just as Isaiah had foretold.

6. *Caiaphas says to Jesus, “I adjure you, by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ” (Matthew 26:63). Read **1 Kings 22:14-16** about a conversation between the king and the prophet Micaiah.*

a. *When the king uses the language “I adjure you” in this passage, what is he wanting from Micaiah?*

The king uses the expression “I adjure you” in the context of commanding Micaiah to speak nothing but the truth: “I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD” (1 Kings 22:16).

- b. *When Micaiah uses the expression, “As the LORD lives,” what is he emphasizing?*

Micaiah is emphasizing that he is telling the truth—that he is communicating to the king what God has spoken to him. “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak” (1 Kings 22:14).

- c. *And how might this shed light on why Jesus finally answers the high priest?*

The high priest is pressuring Jesus to answer. He uses this strong, technical language from the Jewish biblical tradition to command someone to speak and to speak the truth. This language “as the LORD lives” and “I adjure you” is formal courtroom language, putting someone under oath. Jesus is being put under oath and is being commanded by the high priest with the strongest possible language to speak. Put under this oath, Jesus will finally speak.

7. *Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). This is an allusion to the famous “son of man” prophecy in Daniel. Read **Daniel 7:13-14**.*

- a. *What do you think Jesus is saying about himself by referring to this prophecy?*

Jesus is claiming to be the son of man of Daniel 7—the one who comes on the clouds of heaven and is given an everlasting dominion over all nations.

- b. *Why do you think the chief priests were so upset by his allusion to the son of man in Daniel 7?*

Jesus describes himself in ways that put himself on par with God. He describes himself as being “seated at the right hand of Power”—an image of him sitting on a throne at the right hand of God.

He also refers to himself as the son of man of Daniel 7, who was coming on the clouds of heaven. In Scripture, the cloud symbolizes God’s holy presence, descending on Mount Sinai, guiding the Israelites through the desert, overshadowing the tabernacle, and filling the Holy of Holies in the Temple. For Jesus to describe himself as coming on the clouds of heaven, he is associating himself with the divine presence and claiming to do something only God can do. This is the main reason the Sanhedrin charge Jesus with blasphemy.

8. *The Sanhedrin blindfold Jesus and slap him, saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ. Who is it that struck you?” (Matthew 26:67-68; see also Mark 14:65). They are mocking him for claiming to be a prophet.*
- a. *Read the following verses. What does Jesus predict in these passages, and how accurate were his predictions?*
- i. **John 13:21-26**
Judas will betray Jesus.
 - ii. **Matthew 26:31**
The disciples will fall away this night.
 - iii. **Luke 22:34**
Peter will deny Jesus three times before the cock crows.

All of Jesus’ predictions take place.

- b. *Who is the true prophet on this night of Christ’s passion?*

Jesus is the true prophet. He accurately predicted Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s three denials, and the disciples falling away and scattering.

- c. *Read Isaiah 50:6-7. In light of the background of this prophecy, how might the members of the Sanhedrin unwittingly play a part in fulfilling prophecy even as they mock Jesus for being a prophet?*

The prophecy in Isaiah foretells how Christ will give his back to smites in his scourging and not hide his face from shame and spitting during his trial before the Sanhedrin. The irony is that while the chief priests spit at Christ, slap his face, and mock him for being a prophet, their violent and mocking acts fulfill what Isaiah foretold. In their actions that mock Jesus as a prophet, they unwittingly reveal him to be the one fulfilling prophecy.

9. *After Peter denies Jesus three times, the cock crows and “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61).*

- a. *What kind of look do you think Jesus gave Peter at this moment?*

Answers will vary. Some might say they envision a stern look. Others might say a look of disappointment or sorrow. Some might say a look of gentleness, mercy, and love.

- b. *Read **Mark 10:21**. How did Jesus look at the rich young man when he walked away from discipleship? How might that shed light on Christ’s look at Peter?*

Jesus looked at the rich young man with love, even though the man was turning down discipleship with Jesus. That is likely what Jesus is doing with Peter: looking at him with love—with compassion and sorrow for how Peter must be feeling. Jesus surely is sorrowful that his chief apostle has failed so miserably, and yet, he still looks at Peter with love. He still loves Peter. This reminds us that no matter what we have done, we are still beloved in Christ’s eyes. He certainly points out our sins and calls us to repent, but that does not take away from how steadfast his love for us remains, even when we have been unfaithful to him.

- c. *How would you feel if you were Peter and Jesus looked at you at this moment?*

Answers will vary.

10. *Read **Matthew 27:3-4**. Though some translations say Judas “repented,” the actual word Matthew uses to describe Judas at this moment means to have remorse or to regret. How do you think Judas’ regret is different from full repentance?*

Judas acknowledges his sin, saying, “I have sinned.” He acknowledges Jesus is innocent and the harm he has done to Jesus: “I have sinned against innocent blood.” He even throws the bribe money back to the chief priests as a way to dissociate himself from anything he gained from his treacherous act. He clearly feels badly about what he did. But the word Matthew’s Gospel uses to describe Judas at this moment means to regret or to have changed with remorse. This is a good first step toward repentance but is not enough. To repent means to turn around or turn away from sin and turn toward God. It’s a fundamental change in direction in one’s life. Judas might regret his sin, but that doesn’t mean he has turned to God and asked forgiveness and recommitted his life to God’s ways. We might regret our actions for many reasons that fall short of repentance: We are afraid of what others will think of us. We are afraid of the consequences. We are upset about what this means for us. We are upset we put ourselves in this situation. We are upset that we are so weak and not as holy as we think we should be. Regret is focused on self. Repentance is focused on God and our relationship with him.

D. Application

Facilitators: If time allows, invite group members to share their responses from this session’s application questions.

After sharing your responses in the small group, watch Edward Sri’s video presentation on Session Two – “Are You the Christ?” (Mark 14:61): Jesus’ Arrest and Trial Before the Sanhedrin.

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