

March 22, 2015 “Keeping Your Eye On The Ball” Matthew 26:47-56

As March moves towards its close, I can't help thinking about the Baseball season. Now I know that some of my friends will say that is just because I am a Toronto Maple Leaf fan, and that what I really long for is a merciful end to a terrible hockey season. But there is something marvelous about baseball. One of the giants of that game said the majest of baseball is in its simplicity. See the ball. Hit the ball. I add, Throw the ball. Catch the Ball. Baseball is about doing a very limited number of things, but doing them well. The best players are consistent. In many cases they are consistent because they are highly disciplined.

On the night on which Jesus was arrested, He demonstrated His commitment to the task for which He was born. He celebrated the Lord's Supper with the disciples in the upper room. Jesus not only told Peter how hard he was going to find the unfolding events of the next 24 hours, He literally confronted Judas, made Judas aware that He knew what was coming and the part that Judas would play in all of those events.

Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. When you are there it is hard to tell where the Mount of Olives ends and Gethsemane begins. Jesus prayed at Gethsemane. He wrestled with the reality of what lay ahead. It is one of the most “human” moments of the Gospel accounts. To put it bluntly, He does not want to suffer, He does not want to die. And yet the second you say that you also have to say He kept His eye on the ball. He submitted Himself to the Father's will.

And it was at Gethsemane that Jesus was arrested. It was

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at Gethsemane that Jesus was betrayed. It was at Gethsemane that one of the disciples, tradition says it was Peter, struck off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, Caiphus. And other Gospel accounts tell us Jesus not only stopped the confrontation from going any further, he healed Malchus ear.

I keep saying over and over again, that the Gospel accounts are in fact not biographies. Not one of the writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, set out to write a definitive “Life of Jesus”. With that said, every one of the Gospel writers had an agenda. Some of them spell that out very

clearly. Luke tells us he wanted to write an orderly account for Theophilus so that he might know the certainty of the things he had been taught...by Luke, by Paul, by Christians, after the resurrection of Jesus. John wants us to believe, tell us so, that he assembled the material he assembled about Jesus to that end. Matthew wants to address a primarily Jewish audience on the single matter that Jesus is the One, the promised Messiah, the Saviour that mankind wants and needs.

What all 4 accounts clearly demonstrate is the crucifixion of Jesus, followed 3 days later by His resurrection are focal matters if we are going to try to understand who Jesus is. And that is the reason that I have chosen to return to Matthew 26, and the portion that tells us about Jesus being arrested. He tells his followers, He tells his arresters to sheath their weapons. He is not interested in being delivered out of this ordeal, nor is He interested in witnessing a blood bath over the right to put Him to death. And yet the words of Jesus in the midst of those tense moments reveal a great deal to us.

“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal 12 legions of angels? But how then would

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the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” I am sure there are some of us that know the line from the Gospel song...”He could have called 10,000 angels.” Vs. 53-54 tell us several things about Jesus understanding of who He is and what is unfolding, and why it is unfolding as it is.

I said last week we need to remember that in all the documentation of antiquity we need to remember there is not one scrap of vellum, or papyrus that refutes the miracles of Jesus. Not one scrap that suggests there is any question that each one of the New Testament miracles did not occur, or should be questioned, in terms of the Gospel details. In fact there is no document, or part of a document that suggests that the resurrection of Jesus did not occur, could be refuted or even explained away. There is this marvelous silence from the opposition which had been so vociferous, and had managed to affect those who held real power at the time.

I mention that again because here in Matthew 26 we have one

of the clearest statements Jesus ever made about His divinity, and His understanding of God as a Triune entity, One and yet Three, Three and yet One. At the heart of the arrest account Matthew tells us Jesus voiced this clear claim that He is the Son of God. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal 12 legions of angels? He is first of all claiming that God, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is His Father. He is claiming Sonship to God. That He is God. That if HE asks for help, it will be given. Jesus is claiming He holds everyone in Gethsemane in the hollow of His hand. If He wishes rescue, the arresters will die. That their clubs and swords will be useless against the power of His angelic army.

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And in the very same instant Jesus is saying something else. Were He to call upon Heaven for deliverance, not only would it be given because of who He is, but that would be counter to the words of the prophets in Scripture. And that that is the one reason He will not do it. It is not a question of His power to prevent the cross, it is rather his submission once again, to the will of the Father in this matter of saving lives, saving souls, saving people from their sins and the reality of mortality. He said in Gethsemane in prayer He would do the Father's will. He says to the theologians who accompany this arresting mob and the Temple Guard, that they are not in charge of what is occurring. Because He is the Son of God and the Messiah, the Christ, He chooses to fulfil the Biblical word. He will suffer, HE will die, and He will rise the 3rd day. And He knows, resurrection does not make crucifixion any easier.

“We consider Him stricken by God. Pierced for our transgressions. Crushed for our iniquities. And by His wounds we are healed.” Here is the real point of this little portion in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus testifies that Isaiah and the other prophets of the Old Testament have got it right. There is only one way the soul of man, the soul of woman, the souls of our young ones can be saved. It is by shed blood of the Messiah. He is the lamb without blemish offered in our place. Suffering and dying to deliver us. Which is another way of saying salvation is not something we earn it is something we are given by the God who loves us more than we can ever imagine.

So it is that in the hour of His betrayal into the hands of those who want to destroy Him, Jesus will not alter the course of events. HE makes it clear He could. He chooses not to, in order that those things written in the Old Testament about the Messiah might

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come to be fulfilled.

I would not expect you to know anything about Louis S. Lapidès. He was a nice Jewish boy from Newark, New Jersey. He holds a bachelors degree in theology from Dallas Baptist University and a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology in Old Testament from Talbot Theological Seminary. Louis Lapidès shares that he was raised in a conservative, Jewish synagogue attending family. Lee Stroebel in his research for "The Case for Christ" asked Pastor Lapidès "Would you say you had negative attitudes towards Christians?" His answer may surprise you..."Yes. In fact the first time the New Testament was presented to me, I sincerely thought it was going to be a handbook on anti-Semitism, how to hate Jews, how to kill Jews, how to massacre them.

After moving to California, he was challenged by the question, "Prophecies?" he replied, "Never heard of them." He was encouraged by a minister to read the Old Testament. Lapidès replied, that he would, but he was not going to touch the New Testament and he had no interest in learning about Jesus. "Pretty soon," Lapidès told Stroebel, "I was reading the Old Testament every day and discovering prophecy after prophecy. He isolated over 4 dozen major predictions. Isaiah told of the virgin birth. Micah named the place...Bethlehem. Genesis and Jeremiah dealt with his ancestry. The Psalms foretold his betrayal, his accusation by false witnesses, the manner of the Messiah's death....crucifixion had not yet been invented by the way.

Finally with trembling hands Louis Lapidès decided he would have to take a shot at reading some of the New Testament. To his surprise it was all about Jewish people. And he began to tell people he suspected Jesus was the Messiah. To make a long story

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short...he became a believer, then he became a pastor. And it all had to do with the Scriptures....Prophecy concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those prophecies in Jesus in the New. Asked why more Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah he gave this

answer... “In my case, I took time to read the Jewish Scriptures. Asked if it was possible those prophecies were fulfilled by accident, Lapidus responded as follows. “Not a chance. Someone did the math on the odds of 8 prophecies being fulfilled. One chance in 100 billion. The odds say it is impossible...yet Jesus...and only Jesus did it.

Jesus said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

Let us pray.....