

Week 44

October 29 - November 4

Matthew 26:1-5; 26:14-27:56; Mark 14:1-2; 14:10-15:41; Luke 22:1-23:49; John 13:1-19:37

We don't have to read this week's passages to realize the strong opposition to God present in the world today. The hatred for and rejection of Jesus Christ and the Gospel is evident in so many places. This week's readings concern the last hours of Jesus' life on earth. One of the aspects that stand out and what we will focus on has to do with the opposition to Christ, and not solely directed to Christ but also His disciples.

October 29th

Matthew 26:1-5,14-30; Mark 14:1-2,10-26; Luke 22:1-30; John 13:18-30.

"Betrayal"

"All our experience with history should teach us, when we look back, how badly human wisdom is betrayed when it relies on itself." –Martin Luther

That's an interesting quote as you reflect on today's passage. God is betrayed when we rely solely on our human wisdom. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were guilty of this, which, in essence, became a double betrayal. The first betrayal was against the life of Jesus Christ. We learn that the, "Leading priests and teachers of religious law were still looking for an opportunity to capture Jesus secretly and put Him to death." The tool they found to accomplish their purpose was a greedy Judas, a follower of Christ. A truly betrayal can only come from one close to you.

The second betrayal came in the form of rejecting God. As the religious leaders planned and schemed, they also grew more self-reliant and independent from God. Through experience the Apostle Paul gave wise counsel, "we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead." (2 Cor. 1:9)

October 30th

Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-38; John 13:31-15:17. "Ground Up"

Today's passage in Luke 22 fascinates me. Satan wanted to grind up Peter and the other disciples "like wheat." Satan wanted them destroyed. Jesus comforts Peter by telling him that his faith would falter but he would not be destroyed. In fact, his faith would later be recharged and he would "strengthen and build up his brothers." Peter thought he was ready right then to take on the world and its prince of darkness, but unfortunately, Jesus cautioned that he was not ready and would even deny Christ. Jesus then informs the disciples that things would become more dangerous and difficult than it had been up to that point. They wouldn't go out with the Gospel as unhindered as they had been before. Moreover, they would be considered "rebels" and "transgressors." They were to face danger and hatred just for following Jesus. But one thing to remember is that the sifting God allowed the men to endure strengthened their faith and truly emboldened them in every difficult situation they faced in the future.

October 31st

John 15:18-17:26. "Hated"

"A Christian may esteem it as one evidence of his piety that he is hated by wicked men. Often most decided evidence is given that a man is the friend of God by the opposition excited against him by the [worldly]." --Albert Barnes, late 1800's Bible scholar.

It settles a little uneasy to hear that someone hates you. A little confrontation is bad enough, but hatred... and then to hear why... because "Jesus chose us" and because it hates Him. And then to take it a step further, Jesus told His disciples that they would be persecuted and killed by those who "think they are doing God a service."

Did all this daunting news scare off the disciples? Did hatred and persecution deter Jesus from the work He set out to do? No, and I'm eternally grateful that it did not keep Him from His task. Personally, we need this exhortation to press on despite persecution and hatred. Instead of discouraging us, prayerfully persecution will do just the opposite.

November 1st

Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-24. "Betrayed with a Kiss"

We need to be reminded of the character of Judas: By his own choice he betrayed God's Son into the hands of soldiers (Lk. 22:48), he was a thief (John 12:6), Jesus knew that Judas' life of evil would not change (John 6:70), Judas' betrayal of Jesus was part of God's sovereign plan (Ps. 41:9; Zech. 11:12-13; Matt. 20:18; 26:20-25; Acts 1:16,20), and in the end he committed suicide instead of seeking forgiveness.

In those days a kiss was a welcome and sign of respect and affection. Judas' intent was not hidden. In fact, Jesus reprimands him for using such a signal. This sign of friendship and affection was employed with a base and wicked purpose. Yet here is some food for thought; have you ever been guilty of your external gesture not matching your internal intent or feeling? There is nothing worse than feigned love. Don't be guilty of pretending to love God or pretending to love anyone else. As with Judas, your true intent will not be hidden from God.

November 2nd

Matthew 26:57-27:10; Mark 14:53-15:1; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:25-27. "Undeserved"

The scenes displaying the hours of Jesus' trials and beatings leading up to the crucifixion in "The Passion of the Christ" movie tore at my heart. I wept, feeling that it just wasn't fair. He shouldn't have had to go through what He did. The religious leaders who hated Jesus so strongly found people to lie about Him, but they couldn't even agree with one another. Instead of throwing it out of court it just escalated into a greater fiasco. People spit on Him and blindfolded Him and beat Him in the face. Our next two day's readings will expound on more of His suffering as it led up to His crucifixion.

The opposition could not have been stronger, and no one could have been less deserving. The fact that He did not deserve what He went through is the very foundation of the Gospel message. Faultless Jesus went to the cross for our faults. He didn't deserve it and He could have avoided it, but He did it for us who needed to make atonement so crucially.

November 3rd

Matthew 27:11-31; Mark 15:2-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-19:16. "Responses to the Gospel"

There are two ways people deal with Jesus and the Gospel, and in this passage there are two statements that stand out describing both. One has to do with Pilate thinking he can just wash his hands of his responsibilities, and the second has to do with the Jews and their children being willing to take the responsibility for Christ's death (Matt. 27:24-25).

Pilate felt that a ceremonial hand-washing and verbal statement declaring his innocence would relieve him from any responsibility. However, as magistrate he was bound to free an innocent man, but he was swayed by the crowd and still led Jesus to His execution. Pilate's response is similar to those who believe the message of Christ dying for our sins is for someone else while they themselves believe they are not guilty.

The Jews called down vengeance even to their children, and it came. In less than 40 years, millions perished as their city was overthrown. Even to this day they live scattered and persecuted. Their response to Jesus and the Gospel was alike those who maintain they will take my chances.

November 4th

Matthew 27:32-56; Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23:26-49; John 19:17-37. "At the Cross"

"[God] cancelled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross. In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ" (Col. 2:14,15).

This week's devotional theme has concentrated on the opposition to Jesus Christ. He did nothing wrong, but was hated by more people. The height of opposition was apparent at the cross. Yet at the cross He paid our debts, but still instead of gratitude He received rejection. However, as the verse above reminds us, Jesus was victorious none the less. He accomplished what He set out to do. He conquered death as He promised. He sits now at the right hand of the Father still interceding for us. His work on the cross was permanent, once for all. He interceded for us then and still intercedes. God, through Jesus Christ, reveals His love for us on a regular basis (Rom. 5:8).

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

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Bible Discussion Guide:

Describe the levels of opposition to Christ. Does the difference in intensity change the outcome?

Philosophically some believe their objections to God cannot be answered yet we have numerous testimonies from those whose objections were answered. Do you know of a testimony like that?

Does Jesus give up on those who oppose Him? (see Oct. 31)

How did Peter's denial of Christ strengthen him later?

Can knowing you will be hated by the world help in any way?

Describe the meaning of 1 Peter 2:21.

What are ways you could be guilty of betrayal?

How undeserving are you of God's love? How often do you meditate on your gift from God? How grateful are you for Christ's sacrifice?

How does a lack of gratitude for God's gift reveal itself? (specifically in the life of a believer)

Personal application: Write down as many words as you can that come to mind when you hear the phrase "cross of Christ."