

Brian Banks was a High School Football player in his final year. He had been scouted by major universities and dreamed about a possible professional football career. But near the end of the year, a female student accused him of assaulting her. He was arrested and charged. Brian claimed he was innocent of the charges. His defense lawyer advised that a trial would cost lots of money and a conviction could lead to decades in prison. So he was advised to take a plea bargain.

He pleaded “no contest” to the charge and was sentenced to five years. In prison he was called a dangerous offender. Upon his release he had to register as a sex offender and had to wear a monitoring device. All the while, he continued to proclaim his innocence.

He started a new Facebook account. Soon, he was contacted by the female student who accused him. She agreed to meet with him and a private investigator. Brian took a secret recording device along. During their conversation, she admitted to making the whole thing up so that she and her family could sue the school. They had been awarded 1.5 million dollars in an out of court settlement.

Brian took the recording and contacted an organization called *The Innocence Project*. They took up his case. 10 years after his initial arrest, Brian Banks was completely exonerated of the crimes of which he was accused. Banks then pursued professional football and was able to earn a spot on the Atlanta Falcons football team. There is talk of making a movie of his life.

Now Brian Banks’s story is not unusual. Many innocent people confess to crimes they don’t commit or enter into a plea bargain because they have been advised to do so. They are presented with plea bargain as the lesser of two evils and see no other way out. So in a sense, they go along with the injustice in the hopes that they will suffer less in the long run. Yet they still proclaim their innocence. Some work to clear their name after their prison time is done.

Today, we are going to look at a similar scenario. We will see Jesus, an innocent man arrested and tried. But this man’s behavior and words reveal a different motivation than the desire to clear his name. He behaves in ways that seem to worsen his standing before his accusers. Why would he do that? That’s what we’re going to explore as we walk through His arrest and trial. As we go through this, we will discover that His motivation is connected to us. It was for us that he went through with it. Once we look at this, we will think about some ways we can respond.

Matthew 26:47-75 (ESV)

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.

⁵⁷ Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸ And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" ⁶² And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your judgment?" They answered, "He deserves death." ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸ saying, "Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?"

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean."⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man."⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

We left off last week with Jesus waking up Peter, James and John because his betrayer had arrived. He is still speaking when Judas, one of the twelve Matthew reminds us, approaches with a great crowd. They are armed with swords and clubs. They have prepared for possible trouble because they know Jesus has disciples who might resist his arrest. They come from the chief priests and elders. This is the same crowd that gathered back in verse 3 with the High Priest to plot together to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him.

Matthew tells us Judas had arranged with the mob that he would identify Jesus with a kiss. Remember, this is pre-social media, pre-photograph days. Few of those in the mob might be able to conclusively identify Jesus. On top of

that, it was dark. They were in a grove of trees where any moonlight could be easily obscured. So instead of Judas shouting “there he is” which might give an opportunity for escape, he would go right up to Jesus. Presumably, some of those armed with swords or clubs would be right beside Judas so they could quickly seize Jesus.

Judas immediately comes up to Jesus and says, “Greetings, Rabbi!” Notice Judas again does not call Jesus Lord. ‘Greetings, Rabbi’ would normally be considered a greeting of peace to a well-respected rabbi. Yet Judas transforms it into an act of treachery. Then he kisses Jesus.

Jesus responds to Judas. Here we come to the first instance of Jesus going along with His arrest and trial. **He instructs Judas to “do what you came to do.”** He does not argue with Judas or run. He simply instructs Judas to do what he came for – betray him. He also calls Judas “Friend.” When I first saw that, I thought Jesus showed great mercy and compassion to Judas even in this difficult moment. But the word Matthew uses for “friend” was not for a good, reliable friend. It described someone who appeared to be a friend. Jesus used this term two other times in His parables. In Matthew 20:13, the generous landowner says to the disgruntled worker “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?” Then in Matthew 22:12, the king says to the man who entered the wedding banquet without wedding clothes, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” In both cases the one addressed “friend” has taken advantage of a privilege of relationship.

Such was the case with Judas as he now betrayed Jesus for his own personal gain. Yet Jesus does not resist this. He allows himself to be seized.

But then things got really exciting. One of the disciples brought his own sword. We know it was Peter from other Gospels. He takes his sword and decides it’s time to act. So in the face of this mob armed with swords and clubs, Peter takes a swing at the high priest’s servant. Matthew tells us he “cuts off the ear” of the servant. Now this was not because Peter wanted to send a message – “stay away from Jesus or I’ll do worse with my sword.” Peter was a fisherman. He likely had little training with a sword. He was probably swinging for the servant’s neck or body. But the servant ducked just enough for Peter to lop off his ear. The other gospels reveal the servant’s name and that Jesus healed him. But before doing that, we come our second piece of evidence that Jesus went along with this arrest.

He stops Peter from using the sword to deliver him. (52) “Put your sword back in its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” Jesus stops the attempted rescue. In doing so, he maybe emphasizes that true

disciples of Jesus do not seek to advance or impose God's will on others through threats or violence. He lives out the principle of non-resistance here. He goes against the world's way of asserting or imposing one's will on another through human power and violence. He then warns that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. This statement is used by many from the pacifist tradition to emphasize their approach against violence and war. Whatever application Jesus may have intended, He is at the very least stops His disciples from using any violent means to advance the kingdom.

But then Jesus reveals another way He goes along with the unjust arrest. **He refuses to call in thousands of angelic reinforcements. (53)** Jesus had access to His Father's angel army. But Jesus says to Peter "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" 6000 soldiers made up a Roman Legion, Jesus could have appealed for more than 70000 angels to come to His aid. Yet, He refuses. One commentator notes, "In Matthew's world angels will assist at the end of time. But in the present time, dependence on them for deliverance without God's permission would yield to one of Satan's temptations. Remember back in Matthew 4 when Satan suggested Jesus throw Himself off the highest point of the temple and angels would catch Him?" Jesus refused them. Jesus refuses to call them here.

So misread the situation. Jesus was no helpless victim. He did not need human intervention to deliver Him. He allows this arrest by choice and will not call for deliverance from it.

The final verses of this scene reveal one more way Jesus goes along with this plan. **He allows Himself to be arrested despite the suspicious nature of the arrest. (54,55)** Jesus confronts His arrestors with its questionable nature. "You have come out as if I'm a robber with swords and clubs to capture me." Now when we think of robber, we think of a thief. But the word translated robber was often used for a rebel or revolutionary. It is the same word used to describe Barabbas, the one who will be released instead of Jesus in a few hours. It also describes the two crucified on either side of Jesus. So all of these were those suspected of high treason. Normally, rebels or revolutionaries would not go around delivering their message in public places.

Yet Jesus taught every day in the temple in plain sight. He was in their territory. If they really had solid charges against him, they could easily have arrested him there. Yet here they are at night with swords and clubs away from the crowds. Jesus calls them out for this. Yet, He doesn't resist arrest. He confronts the injustice but allows it to move

forward because “the Scriptures of the prophets must be fulfilled.” When the disciples see this they all flee. They’ve tried to intervene the way they know how. But when they see Jesus refuse to resist, they give up and run away. Thus, Jesus’ prophecy that they will all desert Him is fulfilled.

So despite His innocence, Jesus commands Judas to go ahead, stops Peter from trying to rescue Him, refuses to call in angel reinforcements and allows the arrest despite its suspicious nature. The scene then moves to Caiaphas, the High Priest’s house.

Though it’s the middle of the night, the council has gathered. Things seem to have been pre-planned. According to verse 59, the chief priests and whole council sought something. An honest council or court would seek the truth. But they sought false testimony about Jesus into order to put him to death. So they don’t seek justice. They aren’t going to give a fair hearing. They want to find a way to legitimize their end goal – Jesus’ death. So different people bring testimonies. They hope they can find one that sticks. Finally, two witnesses come forward and claim Jesus said he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Matthew doesn’t have a record of this saying. In John’s Gospel, very early in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus says “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” He referred to Himself as the temple. He would rise after three days in the grave. But he didn’t say “*I will destroy* the temple in Jerusalem.” This would be a serious charge after all. The temple was the spiritual center of Judaism.

But the High Priest picks up on it. He stands up to address Jesus directly. “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” Now Jesus knew that He didn’t say “I will destroy the temple and in three days raise it up.” He could have clarified any confusion. He could have defended Himself and pointed out that these witnesses were misquoting Him. But Jesus remains silent.

So here’s another way Jesus went along with His unjust arrest and trial. **He remains silent against a false charge. (62-63)** He could have loudly defended Himself. He could have exposed that these two were yet another in their long line of false witnesses. Instead, His silence allows the High Priest to assume that Jesus admits the charge. So the High Priest continues.

“I adjure you,” which means “I charge you” or “I demand the truth.” “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” In a way, this moment is the mountain top where Matthew has been leading us from

the very beginning of the Gospel. This is what Matthew set out to prove from the genealogy of the Jesus, the Son of David to the Palm Sunday ride to the cleansing of the temple to this moment.

If Jesus did not intend to go along with their unjust trial, He could have simply denied this charge. But we see the final way Jesus goes along with it in His answer. “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” **He self-incriminates with the truth yet it condemns Him in the council’s eyes.** Self-incrimination is to say something that makes you look guilty. Jesus does not deny the charge. “You have said so.” It’s almost like He’s answering “Yes, it is as you say.” Here for the first time, Jesus uses His own words to acknowledge He is the Christ or Messiah. But He’s not the Christ of common Jewish expectation who would come and deliver the Jews from the Romans.

Jesus goes way further giving this council exactly what it needs to condemn Him. “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power.” The title “Son of Man” comes from the Old Testament book of Daniel. When he sees a vision where a man comes before Almighty God. Let’s hear Daniel’s account of the vision.

Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The Ancient of Days is God. One like a son of man, like a human, is presented before God. Yet he is more than a human because he is given authority over all and will reign forever. No human can do that. So the Son of Man is somehow divine. Jesus applies this title to Himself. But Jesus goes further. He states “You will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power.” Notice back in Matthew 26:64 - that Power is capitalized. Power was a word the Jews sometimes substituted for the name of God to ensure they didn’t blaspheme by misusing His name. So Jesus says He, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of God. He would “come on the clouds of heaven.” Coming on the cloud always had to do with God. So Jesus lifts the whole idea of Messiahship out of the Jewish earthly expectation into that of heavenly authority. Yes, Jesus says, I am the Son of God but on a much grander scale than the High Priest or any of their scholars could see.

Jesus' answer has the intended effect. The High Priest tears his robe in a sign of grief over the blaspheming of God's name. Then he pronounces his own judgment. "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy." So Jesus saves them from having to bring any more false witnesses. He gives them more than enough.

The High Priest calls for a verdict. They answer "He deserves death" for blasphemers were to be stoned to death. They are right if Jesus is lying. But ironically Jesus is condemned for telling the truth. So they demonstrate their disdain towards Him. They spit in his face indicating a complete rejection of his claims. They slap him and they play a cruel game where they command him to prophesy or reveal who it was that slapped him. Mark's gospel explains that they blindfolded Jesus at this moment.

Yet Jesus goes along with it. He commands Judas to do what He came to do. He stops Peter from rescuing Him. He refuses to call in angel reinforcements and allows Himself to be arrested despite the suspicious nature of it. He remains silent when he could defend Himself yet gives them more than they need to condemn Him for blasphemy. Why would an innocent man go along with all this injustice? Not because His lawyer advised Him that this would be the path of least pain. He's got something much greater in mind. There is something much more important happening than the need for a fair trial. Through this injustice God will bring redemption, forgiveness and salvation. Through these events God will free believers from the power of sin, death and the devil. Through this darkness, God will bring people into light. Through Jesus' endurance of this injustice, you and I are given all the glorious benefits of the Gospel.

But Peter didn't know this yet. He's about to experience the lowest point in his life. Yet let's remember that Peter showed the most courage of any disciple to this point. He tried to rescue Jesus by attacking the servant of the High Priest. Once that didn't work, you'd think that he'd run as far away from this armed mob as possible. But verse 58 tells us he followed them as they took Jesus to the High Priest's house. He even gets into the high priest's courtyard while the trial goes on inside. Who knows what he hoped to do at that moment? Yet at least he was there putting his own life in harm's way.

But it all comes crashing down with a simple question from a servant girl. The first servant girl declares "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." "You also?" Who else was at the High Priest's house that was with Jesus? From John's gospel, we discover that John was there and somehow knew the High Priest's family. He was the one who

got Peter into the courtyard. But Peter crumbles before the girl's question. "I don't know what you mean." So it's not an outright denial but he tries to muddy the waters. Then another servant girl approaches him. This time she says to others "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." Peter feels more threatened. So he denies it with an oath. "I swear that I do not know the man." Finally, a group comes up and confronts him. "You are one of them because of your accent." The Galilean accent was often made fun of by urban dwellers in Jerusalem. Peter spoke it as did most of the disciples. So Peter feels he must vehemently deny this charge.

He calls down curses upon himself where the speaker declared that if he was lying, these curses should fall on him. But Peter was lying. Something much worse than a curse was about to fall on him. The rooster crows. He is immediately reminded of Jesus' prophecy and his own brash claim that he would die before denying Jesus. He leaves the courtyard and goes out to weep bitterly.

Commentators point out this is the last time Matthew mentions Peter by name. Yet we know this was not the end for Peter. After the resurrection Jesus appears to him. From the book of Acts, we know that Peter became an emboldened leader in the early church. So Jesus forgives Peter and restores him to service. This gives us one possible response to Jesus' endurance of this unjust arrest and trial.

Turn to Christ for forgiveness and restoration from Peter like denials. Has anyone here never denied Christ? I think most of us can remember times when we acted, spoke or thought in ways that denied that we knew Christ. Yet when we deny Him, it's not the end. He is our forgiving Savior. If you have denied Him recently, confess that to Him and let Him restore you for what He has next for you.

A second response I take from this passage is to ***Trust Christ's timing and wisdom when He says "wait" or "not like this."*** Peter wanted to forge ahead by delivering Jesus from arrest. But Jesus stops him for it is not His will or way to do that. We might want to try to force something using the world's methods or ways. We may want to charge ahead because we can't wait on God any longer. But the Lord says "wait" or "don't do it like that. Trust me and my timing. Eventually you will see my wisdom."

Third, ***Rejoice that Jesus was willing to bear the injustice so that we might be free from sin, death and the devil.*** He came to make all things new; His suffering and death would purchase our forgiveness; it would blot out our guilt; it would initiate the renewal of creation; it would bring in the resurrection age; it would defeat death; it would

defeat the devil; it would ultimately defeat sin; it would be the ultimate triumph over evil; an evil unjust act is transformed by God into the ultimately good act. So if we have nothing else, but we have the Lord, we are very rich.

Lastly, ***Depend on Christ for power to live a God honoring life every day.*** I give Peter credit for his physical courage. But he didn't have the moral courage to stay true to Christ in those moments of denial. Yet tradition tells us that Peter eventually died in Rome on a cross upside down. There came a day when he would not deny Christ and it cost him his life. Why the difference? He lived by the power of Christ. He depended on the Holy Spirit to give Him courage and strength to live as Christ called Him to live. You and I need to do the same. We need to turn to Christ and His power daily so that whether we face a severe public test of our faith or we're simply choosing what to do with our leisure time, we honor Christ with it. We can't overcome our sinful nature by ourselves. We need the Spirit and His power. All this is possible because Jesus went along with the unjust arrest and trial that night which eventually led to His execution. Yet He is now the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power. One day we will see Him coming on the clouds of heaven to claim us as His own. Until then, let us live by His strength, for His glory.