

That the Scriptures Might Be Fulfilled

Scripture: Matthew 26:47-56

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Jesus, Fulfillment, Prophecy

Introduction

When the lights go out and darkness seems to be winning, and evil appears to have the upper hand, what will sustain your faith in God? When everything appears to be going wrong, what will keep you from doubting God's goodness or his power? When you are totally alone—abandoned by those you thought you could trust—and everyone has failed you, what will keep you standing for the Lord?



This is where Jesus finds himself—alone, in the dark, abandoned by his disciples, betrayed by a friend, and surrounded by a crowd of enemies! Yet, he is still standing. Why? How? What is keeping him going? Upon what foundation does Jesus maintain his faith in his Father?

That the Scriptures Might be Fulfilled

When you seek the meaning of a passage of Scripture, look for repeated words and phrases. There is one repeated phrase in our passage this morning that points us to the primary meaning.

Matthew 26:54 (ESV) "But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

Matthew 26:56 (ESV) "But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

On this dark night, the foundation under the feet of Jesus that sustained his faith in his Father is the fact that he was fulfilling God's plan previously revealed through his prophets. The spiritual strength of Jesus to persevere through the pain of this night was founded in his unshakable conviction that "all this was taking place to fulfill" a sovereign plan previously revealed in the Scriptures.

In this portion of Scripture, there are six examples of the Scriptures being fulfilled in Jesus on this dark night;

1. that he would suffer at the hands of a both Jews and Gentiles,
2. that is being betrayed by a friend,
3. that he would be rejected and unjustly arrested,
4. that the timing of his arrest would fall during Passover,
5. that he would be treated as a criminal, and
6. that he would be abandoned as his closest friends are scattered.

1) That He Would Suffer by Jews and Gentiles

The first aspect of fulfillment is that he would *suffer at the hands of both the Jews and Gentiles*. The Jews had no authority to execute the death penalty and since they were seeking to kill¹ Jesus, they would need permission from the Roman authorities over them. Thus, both the leaders of the Jews and kingdom of the Gentiles would necessarily need to collaborate in order to kill Jesus.

Matthew 26:47 (ESV) 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.

Jewish Authorities Present Among Arresting Crowd

The crowd of those who came against Jesus this night were sent "*from the chief priests and the elders of the people*," that is, "*the elders of the people*" of the Jews. This crowd is lead by "*the servant of high priest*" (v.51) and it is the temple levitical guard who were know to carry *clubs*.² These represent the religious leaders of the Jews. Thus, the Jewish religious leaders have conspired to kill him.

Jesus Predicted Jewish Rejection

Jesus had predicted this part of the plan even before he began his final journey to Jerusalem, while he was still in Caesarea Philippi, weeks before this night.

¹ Matthew 26:4; cf. 12:14; John 11:53.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 982, footnote 32.

Matthew 16:21 (ESV) From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

So Jesus knew that he would be rejected and opposed by the leaders of his own people.

Jesus Predicted Gentile Rejection

Then, a bit further along the way to Jerusalem he added to this prediction that the leaders of the *Gentiles would also be included* in this conspiracy against him.

Matthew 20:18-19 (ESV) ¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death ¹⁹ and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."

Jesus knew all that his own leaders could do was "*condemn him to death*," but then in order to actually carry out the sentence of death, he would have to be handed over to the Gentiles.

Gentiles Authorities Present Among Arresting Crowd

Matthew also notes that there were those in this crowd who were carrying "*swords*" (v.47). This hints at the presence of Roman soldiers³ within this band, a fact that is confirmed by John (Jn 18:3, 12). Thus, there is an evil collaboration between the leaders of both the Jews and the Gentiles have come together to execute him.

Ancient Foretelling of Jew/Gentile Conspiracy

This evil collaboration was spoken of about 1,000 years earlier through the prophet David in the book of the Psalms.

Psalms 2:1-2 (ESV) ¹ Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed,

The Gentiles are represented by "the nations" and "the kings of the earth," while the Jews are seen in "the peoples plot" and "the rulers taking counsel."

Apostolic Affirmation of this Interpretation

³ See also D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 546.

This interpretation is affirmed by the apostle Peter when he spoke before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 4:25-28 (ESV) ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Everything unfolding on this dark night in the Garden of Gethsemane is unfolding according to the divine plan that God had predetermined should take place and which he had announced beforehand through the writings of his prophets. The Scriptures were being fulfilled through the evil collaboration of Jewish and Gentile rulers.

2) That He Would Be Betrayed by a Friend

The second aspect of fulfillment of Scripture this night is that Messiah would be *betrayed by a close friend*.

Matthew 26:48-50 (ESV) 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.

The betrayer, whom Jesus calls “*friend*,” is **Judas**. Judas—who only ever refers to Jesus as “*rabbi*”—was “*one of the twelve*” (Mt 26:47). These twelve were Jesus’ closest friends. Just a few hours before, during the Last Supper, Jesus had foretold that Judas would betray him.

Matthew 26:20-21, 24-25 (ESV) ²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man goes *as it is written* of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

You will notice that Jesus said his betrayal will happen to him because “*it is written of him*.” He means “written” in the Scriptures. Even the betrayal of Messiah has been written beforehand in

the Scriptures, which reveals to us that his betrayal on this night was fulfilling part of God's plan. Jesus specifically tells us this in what John records of Jesus saying during the Last Supper.

John 13:18-19 (ESV) But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

Jesus warned in advance of his betrayal to demonstrate that he understood it to be part of the fulfillment of Scripture and to foster faith in his disciples. The Scripture to be fulfilled, which he quoted, was written by David about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus.

Psalms 41:9 (ESV) Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

The fact that Jesus was betrayed by a friend on this dark night is another piece of the fulfillment of God's divine plan.

3) That He Would Be Rejected and Unjustly Arrested

The third aspect of fulfillment in this passage is the fact that Jesus would be *rejected and then unjustly arrested*.

Matthew 26:51-54 (ESV) 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?"

Peter knows that there is no legitimate reason for Jesus to be rejected and arrested. Thus he draws his sword and tries to take the head off the guy leading this crowd, who happens to be the personal "*servant of the high priest*." Peter missed his neck and took off his ear. Jesus stops Peter and tells him to put back his sword into its sheath. Jesus then heals the man's ear (Lk 22:51).

Jesus also explains that though what was happening to him was unjust, it was also planned and he was going along with this plan. He was not going along with this because he was powerless to prevent it. For if he so desired, he could call for 72,000 angels.⁴ Jesus was going along with this injustice because it was part of God's divine plan (to effect redemption and salvation). Peter got the point later and eventually boldly declared before the Jews on the day of Pentecost,

⁴ A single Roman legion contained 6,000 soldiers.

Acts 2:22-23 (ESV) ²² “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

The arrest of Jesus on the surface did not make any sense. God had worked mighty and wonderful miracles through Jesus and yet the leaders of the people rejected him. This *rejection was part of the plan*. Jesus himself noted this while he was teaching the people just a few days before his arrest.

Matthew 21:42 (ESV)

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

The quote that Jesus is referencing is found in Psalms 118:22, which again, was written about 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. Peter reminded the Sanhedrin of this fact with great boldness (Acts 4:11).

Here again we see that the arrest of Jesus this night took place, not because Jesus was powerless to prevent it, but rather because it was planned by the Father, a plan that he had revealed in advance through the holy Scriptures, which were written under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

4) In the Timing of His Arrest

The fourth aspect of fulfillment in this passage is seen in the *timing of his arrest*. The plain fact is that Jesus allowed himself to be taken at this hour. He surrendered because this hour was finally the fulfillment of the primary purpose for which the Father sent him.

Matthew 26:55 (ESV) 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.

Why does Matthew write, “*at that hour?*” He is certainly not referring to a particular hour on the clock, for if he was, then he would have told us exactly which one? He means much more than a specific chronological hour, but rather he is pointing us to *divine purpose*. “*That hour*” refers to the hour of fulfillment. Remember what day it is. It is Passover and the beginning of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened bread. Recall that this was *not* when the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest Jesus.

Matthew 26:3-5 (ESV) ³ Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, ⁴ and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. ⁵ But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people."

The religious authorities were seeking to *avoid* arresting Jesus during the feast. They wanted to wait until *after* the feast was over. However, Jesus intended to be arrested and crucified *during* the feast. In fact, on the very day of Passover. Just before the Passover meal began, Jesus said to his disciples,

Matthew 26:18 (ESV) He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, The Teacher says, *My time is at hand*. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples."

Jesus knew that his "*hour*" had come and so he has been actively controlling the timing of his arrest. Jesus' enemies sought to wait until *after* the feast, but Jesus has determined that he is to be arrested on the first day of the feast.

Jesus is in ultimate control of the timing of his arrest. Evidently when Jesus revealed to Judas during the Passover supper that he knew about his plot to betray him, that forced Judas' hand and so he chose to act sooner rather than later. Many times before the Jewish leaders had sought to arrest Jesus, but they had been prevented because "his hour had not yet come."⁵ However, now—on this dark night—the time of fulfillment had come and so Jesus allows himself to be arrested. This was not easy to endure, but it was the plan and purpose of God the Father. That night Jesus prayed saying,

John 12:27 (ESV) "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

The timing of the arrest of Jesus was not the choice or design of Jesus' enemies. Rather, it was in accordance with the divine plan and purpose of God and he did it to fulfill all that he had previously revealed through Scripture.

5) That Messiah Would be Treated as a Criminal

The fifth aspect of fulfillment has to do with the fact that Jesus, though sinless and completely innocent, was *treated and convicted as a criminal*.

Matthew 26:55-56 (ESV) 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

⁵ Matthew 21:46; John 7:30, 44; 10:39.

temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

Jesus asks his captors why they have come to him at night and with swords and clubs. Every day he sat and taught openly in the temple and no one arrested him. If he truly was a criminal, then he certainly would not have been allowed to teach daily in the temple. If he truly was a robber, then certainly he would have been arrested days ago. Jesus was not a criminal hiding in the dark. Robbers do not teach daily in the open for all to see and hear. Jesus was not hard to find, so why had they come to him at night like he was a criminal? Because it was the fulfillment of God’s plan. We find this fact spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, who lived about 700 years before the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah 53:12 (ESV) ...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah is writing about the Messiah who was to come. He would be one who would be “*numbered with the transgressors.*” He who was to “*bear the sin of many,*” was to be one who would be considered a criminal. During their Passover meal, Jesus said,

Luke 22:37 (ESV) “For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.”

On this dark night, though Jesus was anything but a criminal, yet he was being treated like a criminal in fulfillment of Scripture. We will soon discover that he will be crucified along with criminals as well. This unjust and sinful treatment of Jesus as a criminal is a fulfillment of God’s plan which he prophetically revealed through the sacred writings of his prophets, one of them being Isaiah.

6) The Scattering of the Disciples

The sixth and final aspect of fulfillment is the actual *scattering of the eleven disciples*. The final sentence of this paragraph says,

Matthew 26:56 (ESV) Then all the disciples left him and fled.

Jesus had predicted this during the Last Supper.

John 16:32-33 (ESV) ³² “Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus warns his disciples plainly that he knows that they each will fail him that night and be scattered away from him. He knows that a lonely night is about to befall him. Jesus knows that his disciples will be scattered from him because he knows his Bible. This scattering is foretold by the prophet Zechariah, who tells us that God said,

Zechariah 13:7 (ESV) "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,"
declares the LORD of hosts.
"Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered;

Both the striking of the Shepherd and the scattering of the sheep were predicted by the prophet Zechariah, who began his ministry in 520 B.C. Thus, the fact that the disciples would be scattered from Messiah was predicted about 500 years before the birth of Jesus and then it actually happened on this night, when *"all the disciples left him and fled."* Even this detail was a fulfillment of what God had revealed to his prophets and had been recorded in his Scriptures.

Conclusion

So what are we to do with all this? Why all this talk about fulfillment?

To identify the Messiah. The primary purpose of prophecy is reveal when God is truly at work. Only God has the power to predict and then execute that prediction in exact accordance with the details of the prediction. God revealed so many details about Messiah hundreds of years before his arrival so that there would be certainty about his identity when he actually did arrive. No one fulfilled the details of prophecy like Jesus. And today we saw the miracle that even the enemies of Jesus unknowingly fulfilled messianic prophecies. Truly Jesus is God's Messiah and the Savior of all who put faith in him. No one else in the entire history of humanity fulfilled all the messianic prophecies as did Jesus of Nazareth.

To give us peace. Jesus knows that *"in this world we will have tribulation."*⁶ Thus, he fulfills God's plan of redemption and salvation to give us peace. He walked through dark nights and seasons of sorrow so that we too could have peace in him when we too have to walk through the same dark and sorrowful seasons. The world might appear to be falling apart, but God's sovereign plan is not being thwarted.⁷ His plan will ultimately bring salvation to all who repent and turn to him in faith and submission. We may not fully understand his plan, but we can have peace in Jesus if we cling to him in faith through dark and sorrowful days.

To keep you believing in God. Jesus kept his faith in the Father because he knew he was following God's good plan. Jesus was able to walk through the darkest hour of his life because

⁶ John 16:33.

⁷ Job 42:2.

he knew that his Father's plan would bring great good to God's people. We too must believe that it is better to follow God's plan than our own plan. Don't stop believing in Jesus just because life is hard, the days are dark, or your enemies seem to have the upper hand. Keep believing in Jesus. Keep clinging to him in faith. Keep trusting in him. Keep enduring and you will see the greater good that God intends to reveal through Jesus.

Jesus came to fulfill Scripture. Take heart, he did this and has overcome the world!

Discussion Questions

The purpose of these questions is to provide a means of engaging with the text and starting discussion.

1. What is the main point of this portion of Scripture? What information from this passage supports your answer?
2. Why did Judas betray Jesus with a kiss?
3. Why did Jesus call Judas "friend" (v.50)? What is the significance of his use of this word?
4. Why did Peter attack the servant of the high priest?
5. What do you think of the fact that Peter had a sword strapped to his side that night?
6. Jesus said that "all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (v.56). What specifically that happened on this night fulfilled Scripture?
7. What do you find most encouraging from this text?
8. What do you find most challenging about this portion of Scripture?