

Matthew 20-03-22a

Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. I am amused to see the rest of the world finally catching up to us and our innovative and forward-looking mode of worship. And it's be interesting to see if, you know, Christians break the internet this morning since everybody, even out here in our small sparsely populated neck of the woods, is either Facebook living or live streaming or in some other way digitally presenting themselves.

Few of them as finely dressed as myself, I might add. I've noticed that the casual trend has really gone viral now with people not having to go down to the building. The polo shirt industry, I think, and t-shirt industry should be booming.

But we're going to continue this morning our investigations in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up in chapter 9. You can be turning there and digging back in your memory. There's been a lot of information flow this past week and we may have to paddle our way back to what we remember from last Sunday, what we were looking at in Matthew chapter 9. So, as we prepare to spend time basking at the oasis of God's Word and the comfort and encouragement of God's grace, God's Holy Spirit, the fellowship of God's people, let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our time of fellowship this morning and we'll get started. Father, we are so grateful to be firmly secure in your hands, to be centered in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for the spiritual gifts that you've distributed amongst us and the experience that you have given us in sharing those, appreciating them, and being blessed and being a blessing through them over these many years. We thank you for each member of our church near and far and the prayers and the mutual encouragement that we enjoy. We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word this morning that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, help us to understand it, to see its pertinence and its applicability.

There are always stresses in life that come and go. There are permanent ones, there are more transient ones, but the constant in our lives is your presence, your purpose, your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for that and we pray that we can be found worthy to reflect his glory both in this age and in the age to come and we ask these things in his name.

Amen. You'll remember that we are seeing something of strange times in the days of the Lord Jesus and people have been trying to figure out how they should respond. And in any age, at any time, any dispensation, any of God's people looking at innovative circumstances, whether they are the worldly incursion of invading forces such as the Assyrians or the Babylonians, whether living in captivity under the Persians, coming out

from under it in the days of the Greeks and being overcome and subjugated by the Romans.

You think about the history that we reviewed in the Kings and Prophets series and that intertestamental period coming down to the time of the Lord Jesus and then the appearance of John the Baptist raising eyebrows, making an old message new again and bringing it to the fore, bringing it to the hearts of the fathers and the sons with the idea of them turning to each other and recognizing that God was about to make an innovation of his own into their history. And so it's always fruitful to remember the things that are constants, the things that serve as an anchor of our soul in times when winds are blowing, waves are rising, the boat is filling, and sometimes you wonder, well, is the Lord still sleeping in the stern? So just as a quick nod to past days, we used to do this every Sunday morning, but turn back with me. We're going to look at a Psalm very quickly, really do no more than read it.

We've talked about it in the past. You remember it. Most of you have the first part of it committed to memory, but this is Psalm 91.

Psalm 91, a very straight and useful arrow in the quiver of our divine resources. You remember that the Psalms are divided into five books, and the fourth of those five books begins at Psalm 90 and begins with, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

Again, I'm in Psalm 90. You turn man to destruction and say, return, O children of men, for a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is passed and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood, they are like a sleep.

In the morning they are like grass which grows up. In the morning it flourishes and grows up. In the evening it is cut down and withers.

That's Psalm 90. That's the beginning of this fourth section of the Psalms, and the Jews in Jesus' day were very well aware of how their hymnal was organized. But turn to the next one, Psalm 91, and your human mind and human soul should be able to chime along with this.

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress, my God. In him I will trust.

Surely he shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you shall take refuge. His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the

pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look and see the reward of the wicked.

Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent. You shall trample underfoot because he has set his love upon me." This is quoting God now. This is the promise that fuels all of those observations.

Notice the quote mark at the beginning of verse 14. God is speaking because he has set his love upon me. Therefore I will deliver him.

Notice the conditional promise. What is deliverance based on? Who receives it? Who qualifies for it? Because he has set his love upon me, God says, I will deliver him. I will set him on high because he has known my name.

He shall call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life, I will satisfy him and show him my salvation. A couple of quick points here. When you think about the pertinence and the application of this particular section of scripture, we don't consider this to be a guarantee of physical preservation.

When it says in verse 9, because you have made the Lord my refuge, the most high, your dwelling place. And of course, that my refuge goes all the way back to verse 2. It's the same phrase. I'm talking about my refuge.

When you make my refuge, your refuge. When you abide in that secret place the way I do, what does it say? No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. Plague come near your dwelling.

Now, does this mean that nobody gets sick? Nobody's going to check out in a normal human fashion? What does it mean? What is your dwelling? This is your place of comfort, safety, and security. Our habitation right now is in this earthly tent. And if your earthly tent is subject to the vagaries of circumstance or in the will of God, it's time to leave that tent.

What's your dwelling? We have a tabernacle not made with hands eternal in the heavens. The Lord Jesus went to prepare a place for us and is going to come again and receive us to himself so that where he is, we may be also. So it's like the Lord says in John 11, I am the resurrection and the life, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

What's the condition? The one who believes in me, the one who is trusting, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And the one who lives and believes in me will never die. You say, well, wait.

So all the people that believed in Jesus are still sneaking around over there in the Middle East. It's the transition from this life to the next or any hardships in this life become so insignificant. You know, we have this phrase, don't mention it.

Not worth mentioning. It's not worth mentioning because you have made the Lord my refuge, the most high, your dwelling place. You remember that the Lord is your dwelling place.

When your dwelling place is the Lord, no plague comes near your dwelling place. Not saying that, you know, your physical walls that some incursion of circumstance might not take place, but no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling. Why? Plague and the presence of the Lord God are incompatible.

This is why the death angel couldn't get into the houses marked with blood on the doorposts. Secret place of the most high is where we dwell. What's your dwelling? So in these days of concern, I was joshing.

It's fun to go around and tune pianos in churches because you're always visiting with people. Every stripe and denomination you can imagine. I've been everywhere from Utopia Baptist Church to Faith Temple Jesus Name and every stripe and color in between.

I was in the Methodist Church. I've been in a lot of different ones lately and everybody you visit with is such a joy. A very elderly man came to let me into the Utopia Church and, you know, social distancing and I thought, well, I can make sure I have something in each hand.

Don't wake somebody if you feel awkward. And the guy whose name was Don, old as my mom, came up, stuck out his hand, shook my hand heartily, let me in, said, yeah, you know, we're a small church, we're meeting. Because what's the nature of the prevailing fear right now? Not to say precautions aren't great, not to say that these aren't practical steps, but to be motivated by a recognition of what is practical and what is an effective deterrent is a lot different than being motivated by fear.

Fear of what? Are people afraid, have a fear of getting sick? What is the underlying instinct here in the unbelieving world? It's fear of death. I think you can preach your own sermon on that subject. That's the last thing we have to worry about so long as we know where we dwell.

So that's a little quick reminder of Psalm 51. God says, he shall call upon me in verse 15. I will answer him.

I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honor him. It's not just survival, it's promotion, it's advancement, it's moving upward and onward.

With long life, I will satisfy him and show him my deliverance. Not just deliver, but demonstrate, explain. When you see that somebody has made a thing, you know, see people that make wonderful quilts, you see people that make a dish or a dessert or a piece of clothing or some other craft.

You see it and you appreciate it. You say, wow, that is great. What's your next question? How did you do that? Where did you get these materials? What was the process by which you brought this all together? It's not just seeing the finished thing.

Part of the fun is finding out how it was done and what steps it took and what innovative, creative processes went into it. When God says, I will show him my deliverance, this is the joy that we get to look at the process, to appreciate the character of God that goes into it and the creativity and the innovation and the overcoming of difficulties that God accomplishes. If a helicopter suddenly comes and evacuates you from the top of your roof in a flood, you'd kind of like to know, you know, who are you guys? Where did you come from? How did you find me? And find out the process of that deliverance.

Years later, people will come back and thank and appreciate someone who went to extraordinary lengths to help them in a time of distress. And this is what we do with the Lord God. And how much more do we appreciate him when he shows us his deliverance and the means by which he does it.

So Psalm 91, great thought. In these times. And my last observation from Psalm 91 is practical common sense.

Remember what is transitory and remember what is lasting. As most of you know, I go annually to one or two conferences, set up a booth, thousands of people and so on. Pretty good chance that's not going to be happening this year.

But that announcement has not yet been made. But in checking to see what the status of that is, I ran across an article and the, I don't know, national federation of trade show people or whatever it is that organize and run these things and track them. It was talking about what a devastating blow it is going to be because everything is being canceled.

Any kind of big get-togethers being canceled. And they said, well, you know, what's this going to do? The trade shows and conferences and these big venues where they are held and all the people who set up and tear down. And if you've ever witnessed that, I know some of you have been in this kind of thing, Ken used to go with pots and things and I've been to several different kinds, both in IT, in ministry and in radio related stuff.

And I mean, it's a huge enterprise. It's multi billion dollars. Well, that's taking a big hole below the waterline right now.

And so they were talking to them and they said, oh yeah, it's going to cost, I don't know, X number of billion dollars this year to the industry. But the guy said, they said, well, you know, what are your concerns? And he said, he said, this is a transitory phase right now. We expect to be right back where we were in 2021.

And this guy's not got any spiritual dynamics in play in the interview or the conversation, but he's just saying, you know, we're, we're taking a little bit longer view here. Sure. This is a, there's a spike in the graph, but this situation is not going to continue indefinitely.

And we expect that, you know, by the time the dust settles, we'll be doing all of this stuff next year. So rather than being tossed about by every wind, it's kind of like climate change. Uh, I was amusing myself by going back to Al Gore's predictions back in, uh, 2006 ish.

Now he had 12 predictions of what was going to happen with climate change. And one was that within 10 years, we were basically all going to fry. And I noticed that, uh, it's been, uh, four years ago now since 2016.

And mysteriously the seas didn't boil away. Uh, we, we haven't fried and, uh, all of these harem scarum, uh, predictions of global warming and people really got in a panic when we, it was followed by a warm summer and, uh, some, you know, wadis dried up and so on. And people said, see global warming, global warming.

It's, it's wonderful to be anchored, uh, in eternity to know that our citizenship is in heaven and to be able to have a perspective that allows us to step back and realize that there is a context that is much larger than, than what blows across whatever rectangular screen you happen to be looking at. So having said that back to Matthew chapter nine, we'll continue, uh, refreshing ourselves in some of that eternal perspective. We saw last time, this is really interesting.

When Jesus goes and, uh, Zacchaeus climbs the tree, we compared that to Matthew, the tax collector being called. Uh, Jesus saw the man named Matthew in Matthew nine, nine, sitting at the tax office. He said to him, follow me.

So he arose and followed him. It happened as Jesus sat at the table in the house, Matthew's house, tax collectors and centers came and sat down with him and his disciples. So what is the scene? Just picture this in your mind.

If you were going to stage this for a little movie or something, how would you decorate the set? Matthew's well off enough to host a big crowd in his house. Jesus is sitting there. There's a lot of other people of all descriptions in the house.

They have come because Jesus is the guest of honor. Can you imagine somebody that didn't like Jesus saying, well, hate that Jesus, but free food. I'm going to go anyway.

They, they have come because Matthew has said, Jesus is at my house, much as Zacchaeus does. So the Pharisees saw it. And what is their response? Who do they go to, to ask their questions? The Pharisees see it, but of course, Jesus is in the house.

There's disciples coming and going probably, you know, stepping outside. And so they say to his disciples in verse 11, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and centers? Why is he doing what he's doing? This does not comport with our expectations of someone who represents God. God wouldn't put up with these ne'er do wells.

Why is Jesus eating with tax collectors and centers? Well, he says those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, these people are looking for dynamic in their life. They are looking for change. They are looking for growth.

They are looking for improvement. They recognize that they have a need and Jesus can fill it. And they are ready for what we used to represent in physics with the fourth letter.

What's the fourth letter in the Greek alphabet? Alpha, beta, gamma, delta. Delta is what's used for change. They are ready for change, right? If you're happy with the status quo, you don't need to investigate.

You don't need to look. You don't need to listen. There is a lot of information out about knitting and knit one, purl two and crochet and macrame and dealing with different kinds of thread.

I have seen and heard nothing on that subject since I was writing with my grandmother in a car back in the 1970s. Why? How come I haven't learned any knitting and macrame? I have zero interest in that. I'm not knitting.

I'm not purling. I'm not counting loops. I'm not sliding stuff on and off one of those needles.

No need, no interest. Why would I go and visit a booth at a trade show for knitting? Why would I seek out my grandmother or somebody else that knows how to do that? Because I have an interest. I want to grow.

I want to learn. I want to become involved in that thing, right? A lot of people are going to be doing home interested activities in the coming days. So why are these people present? They have an interest and it's not just curiosity.

Jesus, this is not a healing venue that attracts people in the outdoors. It's a banquet. What do you do at a banquet? What is the constant picture in scripture at a banquet? What do people do? Fellowship.

It's a time to talk. Jesus says in Revelation 3.20, I'm standing at the door knocking. The one who hears that sound and opens the door, I will come in and visit with him, share a

meal, and he with me.

It's fellowship. It's contact and exchange and shared enthusiasm for things, right? That's what it is. It's pictured that way in the coming kingdom, sitting down and somebody knocking at the door wanting to come in.

I don't know you. It's people I know, people I can fellowship with that are going to sit down at the table coming from the north, east, south, and west, sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, sitting down, sitting down to a meal. So these people recognize those who are sick means they have a need and they're ready for change.

They're ready for something more than what the Pharisees are offering. Something more than the staid ritualistic religion is providing them. They're looking for a dynamic relationship with God in the positive sense of that word, right? And they're finding it with the Lord Jesus.

Well, we pick up this morning in verse 14. Then the disciples of John came to him, came to Jesus saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast? Jesus said to them, can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, but the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them and then they will fast. No man puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment for the patch pulls away from the garment and the tear is made worse.

Nor do they put new wine into old wine skins or else the wine skins break. The wine is spilled and the wine skins are ruined, but they put new wine into new wine skins and both are preserved. We've been talking about and enjoying the multi view effect that we get for many of these scenes from the other gospels.

And we will be checking that. But in, in all of them, these scenes are connected. It's not necessarily chronological.

I won't regale you with, with all that could be said about the actual chronology here, but in all of the gospels, what we've just seen with Matthew, the tax collector and what is now before us with the disciples of John are juxtaposed. That one comes right after the other. And that context, as you would suspect is important.

What is Jesus doing as, as we leave Matthew's house, as we leave looking at it, what's going on? It's a feast. It's a big banquet table laden with wonderful stuff. The question that comes hard on the heels of that is we're fasting.

It seems apparent from the noise behind you that you're not right. I don't think if I walk into Matthew's house, I'm going to see everybody, you know, in sackcloth and ashes, uh, casting holy glances toward the ceiling sounds to me like you all are having a big party. We're, we're not eating anything.

Second thing you'll notice from the context is we had a question up above at Matthew's house. And we have a question here to whom is the question addressed? Who did the Pharisees ask his disciples? Who did John's disciples ask Jesus himself? And you think, well, okay, Dr. Master of the obvious. Why, why is that important? You remember when Jesus says, I have not come to call the well, they don't have a need of a physician.

It's those who are sick. Who is it that is talking with Jesus? Who is approaching him and talking to him? Where did the first group of Jesus disciples come from? They came from the group of John's audience, right? They were down listening to John. So there is an interest.

There is, uh, uh, a, a positive pursuit and people are coming to Jesus and wanting to converse and to hear and to benefit from his presence. The Pharisees are not in that group. And so they'll just find the nearest disciple at this point.

They're not questioning Jesus directly. They're going to learn that that can end up being kind of embarrassing anyway. So they're asking the disciples, but there's, there's already this suggestion of distance, not enough interest to go to the source.

Do you, can you think of, of a ruler who does come directly to Jesus? We wouldn't have John 3 16 without it. Nicodemus came directly to Jesus by night in John chapter three and the whole explanation of what it is to be born again in the ministry of the Holy spirit and John 3 16 and 17 and 18. That's from the conversation with a man who was willing to come to Jesus to ask his questions and men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and eventually, uh, Saul of Tarsus encountering the Lord Jesus directly, uh, get the answer to their questions and the object of their, uh, search.

And so you have to give credit to the disciples of John because the disciples of John don't go to the disciples of Jesus. You know, my people will talk to your people, let's do lunch or something like that. I mean, these, the disciples of John go straight to the Lord Jesus, not disciple to disciple.

It's not a, an exchange by proxy, but they come to Jesus saying, why do we in the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast. Now there is an implicit sense of accusation in the question that the Pharisees ask the disciples, why does your master consort with these rabble and centers? The disciples of John, you don't get the sense that they're accusatory. Although there is an implied contrast, you all are feasting.

We're fasting. Why is that? And if you look at the, at the situation of Pharisees on one side, the Lord Jesus on the other, which side are the disciples of John currently on? Disciples of John didn't join the banquet at Matthews. They easily could have.

They are not with John. By the way, you remember clear back in chapter four, when Jesus heard that John had been in prison, he went to Galilee. John's been in prison for five

chapters.

So these disciples of John are not hanging around the Jordan, waiting for John there. They're in the community. They didn't join the feast.

They find Jesus at some later point and say, why do we and the Pharisees fast? Your disciples do not. And notice there's a, there's an element of respect here. They don't say you and your disciples do not.

But they pose the question in terms that suggest, is this good followership for someone who is serving God, someone who is seeking God, someone who is a person of faith and obedience. The Pharisees picture themselves as serving God, pleasing God, obeying God, following the law to the smallest jot and tittle. We are subscribing to John and his message and his example.

What is John's example? Living in the wilderness, simplest of clothing, simplest of food. It's been called an ascetic lifestyle. That's A-S-C-E-T-I-C, ascetic, self-denial, minimalist, simple.

Use your time to focus on more important things, not pursuing the pleasures and garnishments of the world. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that. So the question, why do we fast? We and the Pharisees fast.

You can decide whether or not often should be there. It doesn't really change the question. They do fast often, but your disciples do not fast.

And so the question is really a matter of which of these is or isn't related to righteousness. Which of these is or isn't related to a proper view of spiritual things and the priority of those in your life. Pharisees make a big deal out of it.

Disciples of John make a big deal out of it. So that brings us then to the red ink section where Jesus is going to answer this question. And we'll have a lot to say about cloth and wineskins.

It's not an unfamiliar topic. But the setting is important. The question is important.

And in a day when people say, well, there are lifestyle choices that should reflect one's relationship to God. Fair question. Yes.

So righteous people are not feasting in this presentation. The sinners are, and your disciples are. Your disciples, the Pharisees say, and you are eating with publicans and sinners.

So we are not doing what the sinners do. Your disciples without mentioning you are doing what the sinners do, what the tax collectors do. Pharisees pointed that out.

We and the Pharisees fast. So you see, you see the setup here for this, what Jesus is about to say in that context is really important in understanding the answer. There's some very straightforward conclusions you can draw from wineskins and new and old cloth and perfectly valid.

Something doesn't have to be obscure or hidden to be true and valuable. And there's some very overt truth that can be taken from a quick reading of what Jesus says. But when you're sensitive to the setup, who is asking what the background of this question is? And are we really supposed to be consorting with sinners and doing what they do? Uh, or should we be distinctive and separate by our practice in this particular way? That's implicit in the question.

So we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see how that background illuminates Jesus reply and what the reply means to us. And, uh, we'll do that in about a quarter of an hour.