

Matthew 23-01-08a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are here in this first Sunday after the new year to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up in chapter 26, verse 31. Matthew 26, 31.

We'll take a moment to go before the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time and our attention to receiving the ministry of God's Holy Spirit and participating in the great fellowship around God's Word that is our heritage as believers in the Lord Jesus. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege, what a blessing it is to gather and spend this time together with other believers who share an enthusiasm for your plan and purpose as it is revealed through the Lord Jesus in the pages of Scripture. We thank you for this time.

We pray that you will bless each one. Let us be blessed by the gifts that you've distributed in our midst, that we can be encouraged and strengthened and motivated to redeem the time because the days are evil and to make the most of what you have placed before us by way of challenge, by way of opportunity, by way of potential so that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We can express and manifest the fruit of the Spirit and most of all have that faith and hope and love that is the unique possession of those who belong to Jesus Christ in this age.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Matthew chapter 26.

We have spent quite a bit of time, almost probably as much time as Jesus and the disciples themselves spent in the upper room and I hope we have a better appreciation for the nature of those symbols that Jesus used to communicate the covenant in his blood, the participation in his body, something that he had introduced many, many months earlier. When you think about John chapter 6 and chapter 7, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood and many could not absorb that teaching and fell away at that time. And Jesus asked his disciples, are you going to leave also? And Peter said, Lord, where would we go? You have the words of life.

And it's one of the reasons Peter became the great apostle that he eventually became, but not without some episodes along the way, one of which we're going to be looking at this morning. So picking up in chapter 26, verse 31, then what does then refer to? This is one of those classic words you have to look at. It's in the epistles.

When you see, therefore you have to say, what is the, therefore, therefore, and look up above. And this is critically important to something we're going to note this morning. When it says, then Jesus is going to speak some words here after something has taken place.

What is our preceding verse in verse 30? When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Our location has shifted. The location is no longer the upper room,

right? They sung a hymn.

They left the upper room, traveled the streets of Jerusalem, exited the Eastern gate, went down the Kidron Valley and have ascended and are currently walking in the dark to the Mount of Olives. I say again, they are walking in the dark to the Mount of Olives. They have not arrived yet.

Look at verse 36. Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane. This is the wine press or the oil press area on the Mount of Olives.

So between verse 30 and verse 36, they are walking out of the city, up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. This is very, very important. Then as they are walking, Jesus said to them, all of you will be made to stumble because of me this night.

If this were being dramatized for viewing by the public, you could imagine them going along and one of the disciples catching his sandal on a root or a rock and stumbling and going down on one knee and his brother or his companion helping him back to his feet and Jesus noting this would say, all of you are going to stumble this night because of me. Just as you can imagine when Jesus says, look at the lilies and there might be some in view or consider the mustard seed smallest and yet look at what it produces. And I could easily imagine that Jesus says these words because one or two of the disciples have tripped in the dark on this journey.

All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. This is a quote from Zechariah chapter 13, verse seven. Not long ago, we were in the book of Zechariah and we saw this in its context.

We're going to revisit that briefly. But after I have been raised, verse 32, I will go before you to Galilee after I have been raised. Raised from what? There's no word in the preceding immediate context where Jesus has said he is about to die.

He's going to be crucified. He has told them many times, but they're still not absorbing it. And he says, after I have been raised, I will go before you into Galilee.

This is designed for those who are listening to bring that back to their memory. After I have been raised, natural question is have been raised. He doesn't say after I raise up, after I raise myself up, after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.

And for those who are listening and for those who are thinking, this is going to be a warning. He has just shared the cup with them and said, this is the covenant in my blood. After I have been raised.

But if we don't pay attention, if we don't stop and reflect and think about what we hear from God through his word and through his spirit, we can be as unprepared as the

disciples. And these words are designed to help them be prepared, to stabilize them, to encourage them, to strengthen them. But it's like healthy food that you look at and you buy and you bring home and you put it on the shelf, but then you never prepare it and you never consume it.

It's like an exercise book or an exercise machine. Have you seen as many exercise machines as I have out on the curb? People buy them, they sit, they never get used, they're taking up space, they get dusty and they go to the curb. I have seen treadmills, bicycles, rowing machines, weight benches, belly busters, thigh masters, you name it.

You get them with the best of intention, but if you do not use them, they can't help. It requires intentional, purposeful planning and execution. I say again, intentional, purposeful planning and execution.

Jesus has told them over and over and over, he is going to be delivered into the hands of men around this upper room meal. He said, the hand of my betrayer is in the dish with me. Is it I? Is it I? We're going to see what their minds were really on when Jesus is trying to get this information across and trying to get them prepared as we move forward.

After I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter answered and said to him, even if all are made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble. Jesus said to him, assuredly I say to you that this night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

Peter said to him, even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you. And so said all the disciples. So Jesus says, all of you will be made to stumble because of me this night.

Peter says, I will never stumble. And so said all the disciples. Jesus says, man says.

Well, there is a great fruit to be picked and enjoyed here by looking at the word stumble. All of you will be made to stumble. You will recognize this word.

We have encountered it previously in Matthew. It is the word scandalizo. Scandalizo.

This originally meant to set a trap or a snare. And when you trap a small animal or a bird in this way, you trap its leg. It comes down and knocks a crooked stick and a basket falls and traps it.

But its normal course of life is interrupted by someone who sets this snare or this trap. So it came to in a figurative sense to cause to stumble, to take offense, to be interrupted in your normal thoughts and your habitual way of doing. This has tripped up your mind.

It is an issue that arrests your progress and your normal way of doing. Scandalizo. Now, we first saw this in Matthew chapter five, verse 29.

As soon as I say Matthew five, what do you think? Sermon on the mount, teaching on the

hill, I like to call it. Teaching on the hill. Who are the recipients for most of that teaching? The disciples.

Jesus went up on the hill, his disciples came and he taught them. How does Matthew five begin? You have the Beatitudes, then you have the descriptions and the, you have heard it said, but I say, where Jesus calls out not to contradict what is said in the law of Moses, but to call out the distortion and perversion of God's word and to correct it, to point out the spirit of the law and not the twisting and corruption of the letter of the law that was prevalent in his day. So in Matthew chapter five, verse 28, Jesus in the course, you're not even out of chapter five yet, having completed the Beatitudes says, you have heard it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery.

I say to you, whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

If your right eye, it says causes you to sin. It's not sin. It is stumble.

It is scandalize. If your right eye trips you up, throws you off the right path. In the King James, I think it says offends.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, trips you up, pluck it out and cast it from you. Notice Jesus says, if there is something that is arresting your progress, interrupting your advance, interfering with your proper spiritual walk, separate from it. No matter how close it is, no matter valuable it seems, if it is stopping your progress, if it is diverting you away from the path, separate it from you.

This sounds rather violent, pluck it out and cast it from you. But things that cause us to stumble, block our advance, trip us up, have to be purposefully uprooted and cast away. Separate, get it, get the cause out and away.

More profitable for you that you lose something like this than for the fruit of your entire life, your body, your body of work as it were, to go up in flames. Better to suffer a loss here and preserve what is good than to have the leaven of that thing remaining, eventually leavening the whole lump and you've got nothing to show. The word in Matthew 5.29 is scandalize, makes you stumble, trips you up, diverts you off your normal path.

Same thing in verse 30, if your right hand scandalizes you, why does Jesus give this principle twice, two different ways? The eye is an input device, right? The hand is an output device. If something you read, something you watch, something you have near at hand that provides input, this could be a personal relationship, this could be a personal electronic device. Remember when they used to call things a PDA, personal digital

assistant, which got wrapped into the phone that now does everything but darn your socks.

And if you can't darn your socks, you can just order a new pair on your phone. But input, this can be anything that enters our soul through the eye gate, the ear gate. If some form of input is causing us to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you.

If your right hand scandalizes you, if you are engaging in an activity or a pursuit, something by way of output is pulling you off the path, cut it off, cast it from you for all the same reasons. Skandalize. Turn a few pages forward in Matthew to chapter 11.

We find this in Matthew 11, 6. In chapter 11, it came to pass when Jesus finished commanding his 12 disciples. And this is when he is telling them to go through the cities of Israel. He sends them out.

All of chapter 10 is devoted to sending the 12 out. Don't go in the way of the Gentiles, et cetera. He who receives you receives me.

In verse 40, whoever gives one of these little ones a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward. Then in chapter 11, it came to pass when Jesus finished commanding his 12 disciples, he departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. By the way, that's all 12 disciples.

Judas is going to be an issue here on the night we are examining so closely, but Jesus instructed and commissioned 12, not 11. He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. When John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to him, the Lord Jesus, are you the coming one or do we look for another? We've covered this many times.

Jesus answered and said, go and tell John the things which you hear and see. The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them. This is the answer to John's question.

I know you are the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Are you also the coming one, the conquering king? Are you both? Blessed is he who is not scandalized because of me. Blessed is the one who doesn't trip because of me.

What is Jesus saying on this night as he is walking out to the Mount of Olives with his disciples? All of you will be scandalized because of me. Jesus tells John's disciples to report back to him. Blessed is the one who is not caused to trip because of me.

So it would seem that from an early day, the issue of the Lord Jesus is an opportunity to either grow and advance or to be tripped up and caused to go in a faulty direction. And this is for believers. Old Testament saints encountered the words and the works of the Lord Jesus and had to make a decision.

John in prison has to receive words from the Lord Jesus, which are the words of God, and not stumble at them. Why would Jesus give this particular saying to John's disciples to take back to the imprisoned Baptist? You can imagine that John preaching daily for weeks and weeks and weeks that the Lamb of God is coming to take away the sins of the world. Repent for the kingdom is at hand and the kingdom is going to be inaugurated by the coming of this Redeemer for him to then be in prison, not in the kingdom, to be facing execution, not peace and blessing, to have the reality of the cold, dank walls of the dungeon closing in on him after this faithful ministry for so long.

The Lord Jesus comes on the scene and John said, he must increase, I must decrease, but to decrease to the point of imprisonment and death is a challenge. And John is a human being like any other. He's not made of stone.

And he sends to Jesus this question, are you the coming one? Because if you're the coming one, the coming one brings the kingdom. And this could be understood as a veiled question. Where's the kingdom? I know you are the suffering servant, but if you're the coming one, where is the kingdom? I'm in prison.

Jesus says to answer your question, am I the coming one? Tell John what you have seen in terms of these miraculous manifestations of the power of God on behalf of the oppressed, the blind, the crippled, the lepers. And blessed is he, and I think this is a personal word for John, blessed is he who does not stumble because of me, who doesn't lose heart in the face of death. What's going to happen on this night in Matthew 26, 31, all of you will be made to stumble because of me.

They are going to face what John is facing back in chapter 11, the imminent presence and power of darkness to inflict suffering and death. Blessed is he who does not stumble because of me. What's Jesus going to say in the revelation? Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.

When mortality begins to be a real and potent presence, when suffering and death loom large in our lives, this is a great potential for stumbling. Blessed is he who does not stumble, Jesus says to a man in prison about to be beheaded. All of you are going to stumble, says Jesus to his disciples who are going to see the arresting party armed with clubs and swords, haul Jesus off before the authorities.

All of you will be caused to stumble. Turn another page from Matthew 11 to Matthew 13, when Jesus is delivering the parables and he gives the parable of the soils, the parable of the seeds, the parable of the sower, it's called, but it's really the parable of the soils. Verse 18, therefore hear the parable of the sower.

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. He does not understand it.

Now how can this be? Is this just a hopeless situation? Anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it. Our study in Proverbs over and over has emphasized the importance of getting wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding. Where does understanding come from? If we hear the word and we don't understand it, what's the solution? If someone hears the word and does not understand it, the wicked one is going to come and snatch that word away, unless what? If we hear a word and we don't understand it, the old gospel song says, where could I go but to the Lord? Ask, seek, knock.

He who asks, gets an answer. He who seeks, finds. He who knocks on the door is going to find that door open.

We should not expect that the first time we hear a thing, we're going to understand it. Sometimes the words can be difficult. We ask, we seek, we knock.

And if we don't, if it's trivial, if it's casual, if we don't bother to try to understand, to go to the source of understanding, that word is not going to last long. It's going to be snatched away and replaced with something else. This is he who received seed by the wayside, Matthew 13, 20.

But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately received it with joy. Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. It doesn't establish deep roots.

He receives it with joy. I love this. This is great.

But he endures only for a while. When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he scandalizes. He is scandalized.

He is tripped. He stumbles. He is snared.

He is caused to twist an ankle, leave the path, no longer making forward progress. Receives the seed, hears the word with joy, has no root. So this tells us something of the process of faith.

I once did a study because there was a pastor that talked about, well, where are the different places you can have negative volition? You can choose badly. God consciousness, at the point that you become aware, this is Romans chapter one, what may be known of God is manifest, but when they knew him as God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, became empty in their imagination, foolish heart is darkened. At the point that the issue of God is presented, I want no part of that.

I will suppress that truth in unrighteousness. So this is a bad choice, a wrong choice at the point that the issue of the existence of God comes up. A second point is at gospel hearing.

There, let's say you believe there's a God, but when the issue of redemption and judgment on sin, sin, righteousness, and judgment, Jesus says, that's because of me. The Holy Spirit will come and convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And you can believe there is a God, but you reject his son, the Lord Jesus.

And that's a second point at which people stumble. Then if you accept Christ, there is the issue of what do you do with the word of God? Can you grow? And this was all sort of lumped together. But if you look at what Jesus says in the parable of the sower and the seeds and the soil, there are multiple places where we can fail to be faithful.

One is, you hear it, doesn't make sense, blow it off, the ravens are going to come carry it away. If it falls on soil that is not very receptive, some of it's going to hit stones, some of it's going to hit the dirt between the stones. So I'm going to pick and choose what I like.

And the parts I like, those are going to get into the soil and they're going to sprout. There's other seed that hits stones, I don't like that part. This is going on today in progressive Christianity, in reconstruction Christianity.

There's parts that I like, but there's other parts I don't. I will tell you on the authority of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, these people will not last in persecution, in hardship, in difficult times because they are picking and choosing seed that they allow to get into their soil and spring up and they receive it with joy. It's all about, I don't want to feel bad, I want to feel good.

But other very necessary seeds, doctrines and principles and promises and realities in the plan and purpose of God revealed in the Old Testament, revealed in judgment on believers who are faithless and so on. Well, that seed hit a rock and it's not going to go in and that's not going to be a living presence in my life. What does Jesus say about that? He has no root in himself in 1321, endures only for a while.

When tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he is scandalized. He stumbles. How is it Jesus can say, all of you will be made to stumble this night because of me? What's the problem? There are parts of Jesus' teaching that they have absorbed.

They love the idea of the kingdom. They have argued on this very night as we will see, who is going to be the greatest? Who is the greatest? In the very recent past, the mother of James and John, the wife of Zebedee, has come with James and John and said, grant that my two sons can sit on your right hand and on your left in the kingdom. The kingdom, they love that.

Just as today, there is a lot of enthusiasm about kingdom work, kingdom people, kingdom thinking, kingdom teaching. That's all great. Other truths have not penetrated.

They hit a rock in the soil. And what has been absorbed doesn't have deep roots. The soil

is not amenable to depth, to appreciating the full counsel of God.

Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, it is selective. Only some of it penetrates and it doesn't go very deep. And you will find that the theological thinking in a lot of these modern movements over the last 50, 60 years have been very shallow and they do not hold up under pressure.

They stumble. That's the problem with the disciples. Some of the truths, we like it, we think about it, we talk about it, we anticipate it.

Other truths, the son of man must be delivered into the hands of men, he is going to suffer, he is going to die, and he will rise again the third day, did not penetrate. The same Jesus that said, these seeds that hit the stony soil are not going to last under pressure, is telling his disciples this night, you are not going to last under pressure because you are stony soil. Sobering thought.

We have to be interested when we hear the word and if we don't understand it, keep getting after it, keep wrestling with it, keep going to God and asking, do you seriously believe that if you go with a genuine heart and ask God, I don't understand this part of your word, I don't see how this fits, I can't make sense of it, please give me understanding, may your Holy Spirit be my teacher, illuminate my heart and give me not only understanding but the wisdom for application, that it can renew me, that it can strengthen me, that it can guide me, that I can understand your good and acceptable and perfect will. I want to offer myself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, I've got to understand your word. Do you seriously think God is going to hear that prayer and say, nope, not going to do it, I'm going to leave you in the dark, you're on your own, no divine power, no divine help, my spirit is not, I mean it's absurd.

God will always answer that prayer. If you want to pray a prayer and be 100% certain that God is going to say yes, pray for wisdom, pray for understanding. God will never answer that prayer with a negative.

These disciples are not praying. Who is the only person recorded as praying on this night? Jesus in Gethsemane. There's no recorded prayer by any of the disciples on this night.

They sang a hymn, they didn't pray. Jesus goes to pray, Jesus says, watch with me, we'll see what happens in that score. So, get wisdom with all you're getting, get understanding.

If we have God's power in our souls, our foot will never slip, we will never stumble. Stumbling has serious consequences, but as we're going to see, even when we stumble, God will work it together for good if we return, if we come back to the source of strength. It's not fatal if we have stumbled in the past.

God can work it together for good. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue the path through the Kedron Valley and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives.