

Matthew 23-01-29b

Let's return to our examination of Matthew chapter 26, where two times here the Lord Jesus emphasizes in this time of greatest trial that scripture is being fulfilled, and this is not unique to the Lord Jesus. You remember that Paul tells Timothy that the scriptures are so important. In chapter four, we saw this on Wednesday night, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom.

Second Timothy chapter four here, preach the word, Be ready in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. But according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables.

I would substitute the word narratives, stories, but you, verse five, be watchful in all things, endure afflictions. He doesn't say resist afflictions, escape afflictions, endure afflictions, do the work of a good news teller, fulfill your ministry. He has reminded Timothy earlier in that same letter, second Timothy chapter one, verse 13, hold fast to the pattern of sound words, which you have heard from me in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus.

Faith and love, hold fast that good thing, which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. How do you fulfill these exhortations? How do you keep in step with the word of God through the spirit? Chapter two of second Timothy, you, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. There is none of us that doesn't need strength through the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

We are all taxed. We are all challenged. We are all in need of divine enablement and divine sustaining power through the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. This is the fellowship and the communion and the passing along from generation to generation of scriptural truth. You therefore, verse three, second Timothy two, three, you therefore must endure hardship as a part of accessing the power that comes through the grace that is in Christ Jesus as a result of having these things that you have heard and learned and are passing on to others.

You therefore, verse three, must endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Connection with our sword discussion in the first session. There is nothing wrong with being a good soldier.

There is nothing wrong with taking up the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

Swords are not evil. Swords are not bad.

Military service is not evil. It's not bad. Or scripture wouldn't use it over and over again as a metaphor.

Endure hardship as a good soldier endures hardship. Why? There is a greater cause. There is a greater good.

There is a need for self-sacrifice in view of a higher purpose. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of life. Why? You don't get distracted.

You don't get deflected. This again is straight out of our lesson from Wednesday night. How do you walk the narrow road through the straight gate without deflection, without substitution, without distraction? No one engaged in warfare.

Nobody who recognizes that they are fighting in a good cause lets himself get drawn away, distracted and entangled by human and worldly affairs. Why? So that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. Paul is using a metaphor here to Timothy that our calling is like an enlistment and we are fighting a battle.

But what does Paul also say about that battle? What is it we wrestle against and what is it we do not wrestle against? We do not fight against, wrestle against, conflict with flesh and blood. Our warfare is with the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age. Right? That's where the conflict is.

That's where we need the armor of God. That's where we need the sword of the Spirit. That's where we need the helmet of salvation.

And our feet that are going to walk that narrow road and head for that straight gate need to be shod with the preparation of the word of God, the gospel of peace. There is peace. I love that old gospel song.

In fact, I had the chance to ask my favorite gospel singer of all time, live and in person, if he would sing this song for me personally. And he did. I went to a concert where it was just Jake Hess and the Happy Goodman family and they were taking requests.

Just any song you can think of, we know it and we'll sing it. And I went up and I asked Jake if he would sing Peace in the Valley. It's the first song I ever heard him sing off the first album of The Statesman that I ever heard when I was just a kid.

Matthew and I would sit in the back room and play these records that my dad had. We had a record called Peace, O Lord by The Statesman and Jake and The Statesman sang, and it's a solo by Jake Hess, Peace in the Valley. There will be peace in the future.

This is our hope. This is our motivation. And when your feet are shod with the preparation of the good news of peace, we are preparing ourselves for the kingdom that

is characterized by peace.

Why is it peaceful? Because it is a place where righteousness is at home and those who are qualified because they possess righteousness by faith can dwell there. And we learn how to be kingdom citizens now. It is the preparation.

So interesting, he doesn't say your feet shod with the gospel of peace, it's the preparation of the gospel of peace. Jesus said in this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world and when he implements that victory in the millennial kingdom and beyond, we will be prepared because we have that hope, that good news of the gospel of peace.

Endure hardship. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself so that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. If anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

You have to have knowledge of the parameters. All scripture is profitable. All scripture is inspired.

The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any sword. The word of God will prepare us far more than any self-defense training, any arsenal of weapons, any pile of ammunition. The word of God, this is what we need.

This is what is sustaining Jesus at the present time in Matthew chapter 26, verses 54 and 56. This is what Jesus has that the disciples do not have. This is why Jesus is taken into custody and all the disciples forsake him and flee.

I do not want it on my record that as a follower of the Lord Jesus, the pressure hit. I got scared for my own well-being and so I leave the side of the Lord Jesus and run away. In their defense, the Holy Spirit has not yet been given because Christ is not yet glorified.

And this is another summary demonstration, replete throughout the Old Testament scriptures and the Gospels, that when the Holy Spirit was not yet given, even though the Spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. Peter's spirit is willing to stay with the Lord Jesus and to die with him, but the fear overcomes his spirit. After Pentecost, Peter is going to be the boldest of the disciples.

He is going to preach. This will never happen to him after this night. When Peter sees the risen Lord, there's no stopping him.

So, continuing now in Matthew 26, verse 57, those who had laid hold of Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. This is an interesting course of events because there is a dual system of government in place in first century Judea, as you know. There is the authority of the Romans, which has been in place for many decades, amounting really to centuries.

And this is the civil authority implemented by the Romans with their military, with their governors and their prelates and so on. And then there is the Jewish government below that, which is a religious government. This religious government does not have the power of capital punishment.

They can regulate religious life and inflict religious penalties. They cannot adjudicate civil cases and they cannot implement civil penalties. So, Jesus is arrested and sent to the religious authorities.

Jesus could easily have said, you do not have the right to arrest me with swords and clubs, but he assents to this because he knows that the people themselves are the ones who are going to deliver him up to death. And it is necessary for them to incur this guilt and to put this blood on their own hands. They do not whisper in the ear of Pilate and make it an all Roman show.

They begin this themselves. They start this ultimate crucifixion themselves on the eve of their holiest Sabbaths, their highest Sabbaths, the defining memorial of their escape from evil government, killing male babies, killing sons, and that it is wrong to kill a Hebrew boy. This is what Passover is associated with.

What is the final plague? You've got three by three, and then the final defining plague is what? Death of the firstborn. It is associated with Passover. And here is God's only begotten son.

This is a son of Israel, a son of David. Nobody seriously disputed Jesus' claim as a descendant on both sides of his family from David. But these who claim to be keepers of the law, religious authorities, scribes, elders, Pharisees, specialists in scripture, are about to kill a male son in Israel on the eve of Passover where God delivered Israel from just such a scourge.

Let him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled. Once again, it would be impossible to have such an assembly on Passover night. All of the elders of Israel, this is basically the Sanhedrin in full regalia and in full force.

These scribes and the elders, not a few, not one or two, not in a back room cigar smoke filled little meeting. This is the full assembly of the scribes, chief priests, Pharisees are assembled. Peter followed him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard, and he went in and sat with the servants to see the end, to see the outcome.

This is end in the sense of outcome. Will Jesus release himself and walk through their midst as Peter saw him do at the synagogue in Nazareth? Will he say, I am, and they will all fall back and he'll stride out of the assembly to continue his ministry? What should Peter know at this point? What did Jesus just say in the course of the arrest? Thus it must

happen to fulfill the scriptures. What has Jesus told them over and over again? We've reviewed the references in Matthew, Jesus warning the disciples that he will be delivered into the hands of men.

He will suffer and die and rise the third day. Peter shouldn't be waiting to see the end. He should know the end.

What could he be doing right now? Can he do any good in the courtyard at all? He is going to wind up doing bad in the courtyard. Why? He didn't listen to what Jesus said. He didn't absorb and digest and ask himself the question, how should I then live? Who is the leader of the disciples at this point? Aside from the Lord Jesus himself, who is the leader of the group? It's Peter.

On this rock, I will build this church. This is why the Catholics think Peter is the first Pope. As one of the three leading disciples in the group, what should Peter be doing at this point? All of the disciples have fled.

What can he do? Round them up, speak the truth to them in love, remind them that, did you just hear what the Lord said in the garden? He is fulfilling Old Testament scripture here. He told us they would strike the shepherd, and that we would be scattered. Well, we are separated from the shepherd, but we can still stick together.

He said he would rise the third day. Let's get ready for that. Let's pour over the Old Testament scriptures and figure out what it is that is going to happen after his death, after his resurrection.

What's going to happen then? What do the Old Testament scriptures say? Let's sustain our faith in the Father and our love for one another, and not be divided and in isolation be defeated. That doesn't happen. So he follows at a distance.

Point of application. Which is better, to follow Jesus at a distance or to follow directly behind him? The closer we can stay to the Lord Jesus, the better. Following at a distance.

The woman with the issue of blood followed him at a distance, but it wasn't until she got right behind him and touched the hem of his garment that the power of God entered her life. Personal contact. This is what it means to be salt.

This is what it means to be light. When you think about Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, talking about being salt and light, light isn't even visible until it contacts something. There's light in the room where I'm sitting.

There's light in the room where you're sitting. It's passing invisibly through the air. You don't know there's light until you see it contact something and reflect or refract.

Salt doesn't do any good in the shaker. It has to be applied. It has to be in contact with

something to flavor, to season, to preserve, to do what salt does.

Contact. Following at a distance isn't good enough. Following at a distance is going to get you next to the fire saying, I don't know the man.

If Peter had been standing right next to the Lord Jesus, would he look at him and say, I don't know this man? I seriously doubt it. Contact with the Lord Jesus, being in the presence of the Lord Jesus is the opportunity to work in his strength. When we find ourselves weakening, when we find ourselves and our strength is sapped and our endurance is flagging, where does strength come from? To put it another way, how does the power of God come into the life of a believer? It is the word of God and the spirit of God.

And this is the word of God contacting me, working within me, a seed that's life springs forth and sinks roots and puts out shoots and a stalk and an ear and grain, 30 fold, 60 fold, 100 fold. The seed doesn't work until it is in contact with the soil. The spirit doesn't work in abstractions.

He is within us. He works in us to will and to do God's good pleasure. So when we find our strength flagging, it is often because we are trying to use our own strength and it runs out very quickly.

To be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might is to focus on the word of God, as the Lord Jesus does here, and the spirit of God. Peter followed at a distance. He's in the courtyard.

He went in and sat with the servants. So he is with the servants of the hypocrites. He's with the servants of the Pharisees.

He's with the servants of the scribes who have been attacking Jesus, his teaching, his identity, his work, his disciples from the outset. So Peter, who is he in contact with? Who should he be sitting with? There's 10 other guys he could be with right now for fellowship, for encouragement, for speaking the truth to one another in love. Who is Peter sitting with? He's setting himself up to fail.

He's sitting with the servants of the people who have arrested Jesus with swords and clubs. With whom do we cultivate fellowship? With whom do we maintain contact and converse and elaborate and maintain social contact and discourse and conversation? If you sit with the servants of the high priest, overt religionists though they may be, declarers of Christian identity though they may be, whose servants are they? By their fruits you will know them. Who is steeped in scripture? Who knows the word of God? Go back to the very beginning.

When the angels go to the shepherds by night, there is born to you this day in the city of David a savior. This will be a sign. You will find him and they know right where to go

because they know the word of God.

They know where to look for the lamb, knowing the scriptures, making an effort to spend time in fellowship and concourse and discourse and conversation with believers who share an enthusiasm for the scriptures, the word of God, the law, the prophets, the writings, the gospels, the epistles, the revelation. We draw strength from God through his word and his spirit and that strength is magnified and enhanced in fellowship. Whose servants are you sitting with? You could just make a little refrigerator magnet and stick it up, hang it on a card on the rear view mirror.

Whose servants am I sitting with today? Peter is setting himself up for failure because he's warming himself up by the fire of the enemy. The chief priests, all the council, elders is not really in the best text, the chief priests and the council, what is the council? This is the Sanhedrin. This is the religious government of Israel in full force all out on this night, sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.

Do not let your good be spoken of as evil. You cannot implicate Jesus in any true way for his actions or his words. Jesus never violated the civil law, never antagonized, never conflicted.

There is a huge movement today. If you listen, if you put your ear in the wind of contemporary Christianity, the books that are being published, the videos that are being published, the talking heads and the faces and the voices in visible contemporary Christianity today, there is an enormous movement away from scripture and into social justice, into implementing the peace of the kingdom, wanting to get to the destination without taking the journey. It is all the same as at the very beginning when Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and said, all this can be yours.

You can implement your word and your will. You can solve crime. You can solve poverty.

You can solve world conflict. I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. You can be a peacemaker.

You can broker treaties and peace agreements and restore stolen land and feed the impoverished and clothe the naked and release the wrongly imprisoned. I will give you all of the kingdoms of the world. If you will ignore the scriptures and ignore every word that comes from the mouth of God that requires something to come first, before there is the peaceable kingdom, before there is justice and righteousness reigning and ruling, before there is the settling of disputes and the righting of wrongs that you can have by controlling all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus knows something has to come first.

And this is what contemporary Christian voices and talking heads refuse to acknowledge. There is the problem of sin. Listen to kingdom talk.

Listen to the love hermeneutic people. And what you will not hear is the problem of sin

has to be addressed. Remember our longstanding rule of interpretation, as goes national Israel in the Old Testament, so goes the individual believer in the New? For Israel, before they could have a kingdom and have the Mashiach king, sin in the camp had to be addressed.

The lamb has to be slain before the conquering king can rule. Jesus knows this and that's why he refuses to accept a shortcut to kingdom rule and world rule from Satan. Because Satan's plan, oldest lie, the same omission when he's speaking through the serpent to Eve in the garden, well, this fruit is desirable, it's beautiful to look upon, and it will make you wise.

Look at me, I ate it and I'm a talking sink. Where have you ever seen that before? This is magical fruit and you will arrive at an even better situation. Here is Eve, perfectly formed, directly from the hand of God, perfection in the garden, perfection of provision, perfection of fellowship, perfection of beauty in every sense.

Don't even need clothes, everything is so beautiful, but you can improve on it. You can make it better. Just ignore what God said about the problem of sin.

If there is sin, there's going to be death. If you eat of this tree in that day, you will die because that is a sin and the wages of sin is death. Snake never mentions, oh, do you remember that along with this being the tree of knowledge, it's also a tree of death? He omits that part.

The great swelling movement in modern organized Christianity today is the crown without the cross, the kingdom without the elimination of sin, without washing your robes in the blood of the Lamb and making them white. Elizabeth and I were talking about this yesterday. Isn't it interesting that there is this wonderful feast going on that the king throws for his son and the new bride and they've gone to the highways and byways and brought every different kind of person in and they all have one thing in common.

They have accepted the robe, the wedding garment that the king has offered. Everybody puts it on except one guy. He's all about the beauty of the feast and the wonder of the meal and the entertainment and the light.

You've got the five wise virgins in there lighting the thing. You've got a wonderful, festive, beautiful lack of conflict, lack of poverty, lack of nakedness, lack of disease in the wedding feast hall. All is golden, all is light, all is beautiful, but a guy wanted to come in without putting on the robe.

What happens to him? Friend, how did you come in here without a robe of righteousness? He has no answer. Did you forget that there is a qualification to come in here? You've got to have the robe. It's free.

I will give you one if you accept it, but you evidently came in here thinking you did not need it. You are good as you are. What happens to him? Go back and you remember the result.

Weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, being cut in two and apportioned in inheritance with the hypocrites, darkness which is outside. You cannot have the kingdom without the cross. You cannot have righteousness without resolving sin.

So Jesus committed no sin. No falsehood ever came forth from his lips. He is the truth, capital T. He is the life, capital L. He is the way, capital W. You cannot come to the Father but through him, and the goal is to come to the Father.

The goal in the ultimate sense is to be qualified to dwell in and function in and enjoy the fruits of and contribute to the success of the kingdom of the Father. We come to the Father through Christ, and when we come to Christ, it isn't love that we receive first and foremost. It is cleansing.

It is forgiveness. It is atonement. It is the eradication of our sin.

Has to come first. There is no kingdom without the elimination of sin. Chief priests sought false testimony against Jesus to put him to death.

They are not seeking testimony where they can impeach him, or they can tell the crowds that he is a faker or a fabricator. They're not just going to expel him and send him across the Jordan to dwell in Gerasa or up in Tyre and Sidon. Their goal is not to discredit him or to dismiss him or to expel him.

Their goal is to kill him. This is what happens when antagonism, when anger, when a perceived threat overcomes judgment. What has Jesus done that is worthy of death? Nothing.

Search the law. There is no death penalty offense for which Jesus is even close to being guilty. But they're seeking someone who will lie so that they can kill him.

This is the quote-unquote religious leadership of Israel. We're going to seek out a lie so that we can commit a murder. What has Jesus told these guys just a couple of chapters earlier? Well, did the prophet speak of you that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar? All these things will come upon this generation.

Why? Because this generation is just like its fathers. You who slew the prophets and you admit yourselves that you are sons of those who did so, and you are filling up their wickedness. But they could find none.

They can't even find somebody who will lie. Many false witnesses came forward, but they couldn't get agreement. You've got to get at least two or three witnesses who will repeat the same lie.

And one of the characteristics of a lie is it keeps swarming and morphing, and the details change, and you can't get agreement. They couldn't get two or three guys to say, yes, this is what Jesus did. Did he kill anybody? That's a death penalty offense.

He raised several people to life. Well, that's not going to work. What is a death penalty offense in Israel? They couldn't find one.

Finally, they found two false witnesses who came forward. And false isn't really in the best text either. They found two witnesses who would come forward, and they said, this fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.

Now, this has a grain of truth. What is the issue in this testimony? I referenced this recently, pronoun trouble. Did Jesus talk about the temple being destroyed and in three days, he would raise it up? Yes.

What has changed here? Jesus said, if you destroy this temple in three days, I will raise it up. And he was talking about the temple of his body. Destroy this temple in three days, I will raise it up.

If you do so, what are they saying? He said, I will destroy the temple and I will raise it up in three days. Even if he had said this, is this a death penalty offense under the law of Moses? Does the law of Moses address anything related to the temple? No. The temple is 400 years after the law is given to Moses.

Okay. Well, let's say that the temple is the new version of the tabernacle in the same way that Jesus is the new version of the temple. The temple was a version of the tabernacle.

Is there any death penalty offense for attacking, destroying, or saying that you are going to do so to the tabernacle in the law of Moses? No. They finally got two witnesses who are willing to say this, but it is not a death penalty offense. So the high priest arose and said to him, do you answer nothing? In other words, Jesus does not spring to his own defense and say pronoun trouble.

That's not what I said. You know, ask any one of the people who were there, which is a crowd of witnesses who will tell you. I said, if you destroy the temple, I will raise it up.

And it's a metaphor. What is it these men testify against you? But Jesus kept silent. Jesus kept silent.

This is a great thing to reflect on. When do we speak? When do we remain silent? There

is Old Testament scripture that says, like a lamb to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth. Interestingly, Jesus will not answer these guys, except very briefly.

He has a much more extended conversation with Pilate, the Roman governor, than he does here, because there is no point with these people. Well, much more to see here. What is our application? We are on the right track as a Bible church to endeavor, to daily and regularly seek an understanding of the scriptures, both to know it, to draw the wisdom from it that we can put into application.

Knowledge puffs up. The application of wisdom, which is love, builds up, builds us up, builds others up. It implements the power of God.

The Word of God is alive and powerful. The Spirit of God is alive and powerful. We are weak in the flesh.

We are corrupt. We are fallen. Our robes are dirty.

There is no fuller soap that will wash these dirty robes clean. What does it? The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son. It's in 1 John.

It's in the Revelation. Going to the sacrifice, going to this day, this time, this necessary foretold work of the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world so that the peaceable kingdom can come to the world. We are not going to have peace in our lives.

We are not going to have a fruitful, meaningful life without suffering. It is intrinsic and essential to the plan of God. You have need of patience so that after you have suffered a while, you inherit the promises.

Scripture tells us to expect suffering, to prepare for suffering, and to use it as an opportunity to learn how to access and live in the light of the power of God. That's what it's for. Easy life has no need for God.

Smooth sailing has no need for knowing how to batten down the hatches and how to sail rough seas. Our skills are honed. Our understanding is refined.

The dross is removed as we are heated in the refiner's fire. And to wash our robes in the blood of the Lamb is to recognize that the cross comes before the crown. The work of resolving sin comes before the kingdom.

And unless we are willing to take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus through the valley of the shadow, we are not qualified to experience, nor do we have the capacity to appreciate, future blessing and reward and opportunity. Our hardship, our suffering is necessary. And understanding that lets us turn our attention not to its causes and how can we get away from it, but what should we be doing in it and through it.

If Peter had been having this conversation within himself, he wouldn't have been by the high priest's fire with the servants of the high priest. He would have been with fellow believers, speaking the truth in love. What should we do in this interim time between the Lord Jesus dying and the Lord Jesus returning? It was a question for them.

It's a question for us. We'll see more next week. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for granting to us such fulsome access to your word, Old Testament and new, and the presence and power of your Holy Spirit to teach it to us, to guide us in it and through it, and to show its pertinence and application. We pray that we can be true followers of the Lord Jesus, to follow him closely, to take up our cross, go where he went, to arrive where he has arrived, which is at your right hand, in your presence, ready for future service and opportunity. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.