

Matthew 23-02-05b

We're ready now to continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew, looking at the six trials of the Lord Jesus on this night and morning before his crucifixion. And in Matthew, we saw the beginning in verse 57 that the arresting party leads him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. Peter followed him at a distance to the high priest's courtyard.

So Peter follows, and this is a helpful detail in a bit of a strange way, because our account in Matthew talks about the chief priests, the council seeking false testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they find none. And it is unclear at this point when it says the high priest arose and said to him, do you answer nothing? And we assume this to be Caiaphas because he is mentioned up in verse 57. But we have some additional details from John and in order to sort of track the sequence of events and the six trials and their result, we need to look at the parallel accounts in John and the other gospels as well.

Now, why are we doing this? It is of interest for multiple reasons. One is we are given multiple gospel accounts for a reason. Not only do the individual records bear witness and testimony thematically inside the gospel of which they are a part, but together they give us a more than stereo version of what went on.

And the reason that is important is not just so that we know exactly what happened or what was said, who said it, when, where, and how, and what the bare record of circumstance is, but we're always looking for the answer to the question, so what, in terms of not to belittle or diminish the importance of this most momentous of all nights in human history, but to find the meaning and purpose of our understanding of it. Once we understand what happened, we hear what is said and what is not said, we see the treatment and some of the motivation behind it, how should we then live? What do I bring out of the examination of these events, this circumstance, this record of what happened to the Lord Jesus on this night, when we finish, when we walk away and resume normal activities, are we changed? Are we given fresh resources, fresh insight, fresh perspective to live our lives more closely aligned to God's will and purpose for us? If we don't arrive at that point, it's just academic. You might as well tease apart the plots and subplots in some movie, if it doesn't make a difference, if it isn't something the Holy Spirit can use to guide us, to convict us and to enable and empower us, it has missed its mark in our soul.

So this is what we're watching for. We're doing this on Wednesday night, the parable of the crafty harlot and the seduction that she perpetrates on this naive and empty hearted young man. What is the antidote for any such seduction perpetrated by the world on any one of us? If we don't turn the corner into that, if it doesn't become meaningful to me and meaningful to you, we're not really availing ourselves of the power of God and the

grace of God that put these scriptures before us.

This is its purpose. We should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. There is a limited distance to which I can carry this material and put it before us to look at.

The rest of that journey, carrying that pack, the second mile is what each of us has to do for ourselves. So if you are waiting for me to spoon feed everything that should happen in each of our individual souls from looking at this account, remember that we are all individually priests before God through our high priest, the Lord Jesus. And having been given this spiritual food and this record of events, it is incumbent on each one of us to come before God, the Father, appreciating the Lord Jesus, seeking a better understanding of how he did what he did, why he did it, and how we should then live.

This has to be our individual ambition. We can certainly seek it as a group. I can certainly encourage it and provide exhortation as the guy presenting the material.

But just remember, we've got to pick this up and carry it across the finish line, each of us, ourselves. So my encouragement is be watching for the practical outworking. What does this mean to me? I ought to be a different person.

If I can't look at the night of the Lord's trial and conviction and the day of his crucifixion and be changed for the better by it, there's something wrong with me. If this doesn't do it, what part of scripture is going to transform me and renew me and shape me more closely into a fruitful and productive part of the body of Christ? If this doesn't do it, what will? So that's what we're watching for. That's why we are going through this.

It's not academic. It is essential to our spiritual life. The death of the Lord Jesus provides life for us.

His death is our life. That's what we're watching for. Well, let's pick up with the arresting party, scattering the disciples, striking the shepherd, and they are taking him to the courtyard where the high priest operates.

This is the place where both Annas and Caiaphas are ensconced. But for reasons that we can deduce, they are not in the same chamber. Each of them has his own office.

Each of them has his own courtroom, if you will. And they are not talking to each other. This would provide an unhealthy sort of contrast and competition.

So when some case is to be adjudicated, some issue is going to be discussed or decided, it is either taken to Annas, who is the de facto high priest, or it is taken to Caiaphas, who is officially and nominally the high priest. So the less important stuff is probably, I'm guessing here, handled by Caiaphas. He does the stuff that Annas is tired of doing.

He's been the high priest for 18 odd years in the past. And this is maybe 10 years after

that. So the busy work and the paperwork and the routine uninteresting stuff gets handled by the faceplate, the figurehead.

The more interesting, decisive, and influential stuff goes to the spider at the center of the web, who is Annas. Well, in Matthew's account, it just talks about Caiaphas, the high priest. And then in verse 59, even though this is officially the residence or the courtroom of Caiaphas, it doesn't say that Caiaphas conducts all of the intermediate formalities.

The chief priests and the council are seeking false testimony. They're trying to put this case together so that they can bring it before the high priest as sort of the final judge. Well, when you turn over to John chapter 18, you find in verse 12, the detachment and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

And they led him away to Annas first. He is the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. They take him to Annas first.

He is the father-in-law of the actual high priest. It's interesting to me that out of all of the miracles that Jesus did in releasing people from bondage to disease, certainly stories of driving out demons and stilling storms and feeding multitudes with a few loaves and fishes had reached the ears of the leadership. How effective is it? If you just think with everything that we know, how effective is it gonna be to tie up Jesus? The Philistines tying up Samson is comical.

When Delilah wakes him up, whatever they tie him up with, he pulls pins out of walls with his hair. He breaks strong ropes as though they are burnt cinders. It's ridiculous to try to tie up Samson.

This is the Lord of glory. This is the son of the creator God and they bind him. They tie Jesus up.

And this is the beginning of any number of indignities and injustices and really ridiculously foolish perpetrations of human ideas of strength and power that they're gonna perpetrate against the son of God. This is really the first. The arresting party comes.

They don't beat Jesus with clubs. They don't stab the disciples with swords. The first thing they do by way of the puny exercise of human power is they tie Jesus up.

Like his power is if he stretches out his hand and that's somehow he's not going to be the Lord of glory. He's not going to invoke divine power because he's tied up. Well, if I only didn't have these ropes on my wrists, 12 legions of angels would appear.

It's the contrast between who Jesus is and who these people are and what they think constitutes power and control ought to be a lesson for us. Human authorities may try to exercise control and regulation and ridiculous exercises of power against us. Jesus, as

absolutely insanely stupid as these individuals are, submits, allows himself to be bound, allows himself to be led away to this sham trial.

And these mock judges and these false witnesses, Jesus offers no resistance, why? Is this a model that we should always be passive and pacifist, never resist force at all? How do we know when to appeal to the exercise of power? When to defend ourselves with a sword? When to resist the exercise of wrongful and evil power? The scriptures guide us and it is a study unto itself that on this occasion, in this circumstance and for God's specific purpose in this case, it is necessary that Jesus allow himself to be taken into the hands of men and submit to the humiliation and the indignities and the criminal misbehavior and distortion and perversion and corruption of God's law in its exercise. It is necessary for Jesus to endure suffering so that the magnitude and the ugliness and the awfulness and the inevitable outcome of sin can be made manifest. This is the reason we suffer.

God could easily in the exercise of divine power, make it so that believers never suffer, never endure hardship, never endure persecution. Why does God allow it? The contrast between the will of God and the will of man, between what is good and what is evil, between what is righteous and what is sinful is drawn out in that conflict. It is necessary.

You say, well, I'm happy to learn that lesson on the big stage, but why do I individually and personally have to endure suffering and affliction and hardship? And it doesn't always seem to be tied to sin. It's just, it can be disease. It can be a circumstance.

It can be outrageous fortune. It seems to have no purpose in this life. Why is it happening to me? Individual suffering teaches individual lessons.

Those who are close to us observe it. And if they are believers under the influence of the word of God and the spirit of God can also be given experience that is essential to understanding and essential to future usefulness and function. Inexplicably, we suffer.

Inexplicably, we have hardship. Inexplicably, in many cases, explicitly, provision will dry up. And we have to give it a measured amount of thought, but we've still got to live.

We've got to function. We've got to operate. And it drives us to God in prayer.

It attaches us to God in faith. It reminds us of our reliance upon scripture and upon the presence, power, guidance, and counsel of the Holy Spirit. Remembering that God does not test us above what we are able.

He is the God of all comfort. He comforts us in affliction. He doesn't remove our affliction.

He comforts us in it. He instructs us in it. He gives us something beneficial through it so that we are qualified to inherit after we have suffered a while.

And the inexplicable, non-understandable rage against the unfairness of it all that we are tempted to indulge has to be overcome by faith, by self-control, by the other parts of the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus is a greatest of all examples in this circumstance. So back to our passage here in John chapter 18.

John so visibly was a witness to these and we see it because in verses 12 through 14, he tells us about Jesus being bound and led before Annas. Those who are outside only know that they're in the courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. Matthew's gospel reflects this.

John is inside because he's got friends and he knows that Jesus is first taken to Annas, the actual power involved in the high priesthood. But then John cuts to Peter who is outside and John knows he's out there. Simon Peter followed Jesus, so did another disciple.

That's John. That disciple was known to the high priest, went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. Peter stood at the door outside.

The other disciple who was known to the high priest went out and spoke to her who kept the door and brought Peter in. John lets Peter in. The servant girl who kept the door said to Peter, "'You're not also one of this man's disciples, are you?' And he said, "'I am not.'" Notice that she uses the word also.

Why does she say also? John is known to the high priest. John is known to the girl at the gate. The girl at the gate knows that John is one of the disciples and no alarm has been raised.

No arresting parties have been called forth. John is known as a disciple of Jesus. Inside and even at the gate of the high priest's courtyard, why does Peter deny it at this point? John doesn't seem to be in any trouble.

Peter's imagination evidently is that, well, because John is familiar and I am not, they're gonna treat me differently than they do John. If Peter would stop and think, would John knowingly let Peter into an area where he's gonna be arrested and beaten and potentially executed? John knows something that Peter does not. John lets Peter in.

John is functioning at a much higher level at this point than Peter. In retrospect and aside from Jesus' prophecy that Peter would deny him, knowing what he knew after the fact, could John have prevented Peter's denial by not bringing him into a situation he was not spiritually strong enough to handle? I would suggest sometimes we learn, we grow, we have experience, we have insight into the scriptures and we want others to come in where we are. To see what perhaps only we have the spiritual strength to see, and this is not self-congratulatory, it is just a fact.

John is able to come in and be a witness of things that God wants him to write down later. Not so Peter. I wonder if John would later in those dark days following the

crucifixion and Peter's bitter weeping and remonstrance with himself at having denied the Lord Jesus and fulfilled the cock crow prophecy, if John thought to himself, you know, I wonder if I should not have brought Peter into a place he wasn't equipped to handle.

My suggestion is that we think carefully about trying to decide for others what they should or should not experience in places that we are able to go and able to understand and able to digest without failure and without fear. I think sometimes we learn something that is really exciting and motivating and encouraging and just a fresh corner we turn in the cathedral of God's word and we have enthusiasm, we're excited and we want to bring someone else in to see the unfolding of God's plan and purpose in a positive way. And we actually have the opposite effect.

Instead of strengthening and encouraging and making them a part of something that is a part of the complexity and the beauty of God's plan, it can actually cause them to stumble. And my suggestion is that we think carefully and be measured in what we drag our fellow believer into. John could justify this any number of ways.

Didn't the Lord Jesus bring Peter to the upper room? Didn't the Lord Jesus bring Peter and my brother James to the Mount of Transfiguration? Were we not the ones invited to come further into the garden? Shouldn't Peter be here? Yet it could be of God that the servant girl stops Peter at the gate and he can't get in because he's not known as a disciple. If he just stayed outside and didn't try to enter into a place that he wasn't able to negotiate in his current state, he would have been fine. But he tries to enter into a place where he's not ready to go.

And as a result, he denies being a follower of Jesus. And sometimes our ambition to do something more than we should, be something more than we are, enter into something that we're not yet ready to experience is a cause of stumbling and failure, which then results in all kinds of internal angst, sorrow, self-remonstrance. God is going to work this together for good because this experience is going to make Peter stronger as you see in the book of Acts.

But at this moment, I think it's a fair question to ask because it is John who lets Peter into the courtyard and Peter is going to perpetrate a threefold spectacular failure to acknowledge his relationship with the Lord as a result. It would not have happened had he stayed outside. The servants and officers who had made the fire, verse 18 of John 18, stood there for it was cold and they warmed themselves and Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

There have been some things read into that. Why are you standing with the servants of the enemy? And it is for physical comfort. You want to be near the Lord, but you basically want to warm yourself.

If John had let him in, why didn't he stay with John? But then you were back in verse 19.

The high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. This is the high priest Annas.

This is the actual power in the office. Annas asked Jesus about his disciples and his doctrine. Interesting question.

He didn't ask him directly, are you a blasphemer? He said, what exactly is it you teach? Why is it that these men follow you? What are you having them do? Ask him about his teaching, his doctrine, his beliefs and ask him about his disciples. Jesus' answer is not direct. Well, let me name you my 12 disciples.

One of whom by the way is a rascal and he's the reason I'm here. Let me tell you what I have taught across these past three years. What does Jesus say? I spoke openly to the world.

I always taught in synagogues and in the temple where the public gathers, the Jews meet. There's some question about whether it's all the Jews meet at the synagogue and at the temple or where they always meet. Is it an adjective or an adverb? Doesn't really matter.

And in secret, I have said nothing. I am not subversive. I am not plotting an overthrow.

Anything you wanna know about my views, my quote unquote politics, what I have taught and what I have said, listen to the public witness of those who heard me. I haven't said anything in secret that I haven't said in public. It is all open and above board.

Why do you ask me? This is a great question. How often do you see Jesus answering a question with a question? Why are you asking me? You have heard testimony from people. If you wanted to know what I teach, why didn't you come listen? You're relying on secondhand testimony.

Now you're asking me. You've had ample opportunities across years to hear firsthand for yourself what I teach and what my followers believe and do. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard what I said to them.

They know what I said. I've got a public record of teaching. Consult the public record.

In those days, the public record was verbal. There weren't historians and newspaper reporters writing things down and submitting columns and such. People would listen and people could repeat what they heard.

What Jesus knows is that Annas is well aware of what Jesus has taught and spoken in the synagogues and at the temple and wasn't able to do it and wasn't able to find any occasion of fault or criminal behavior or a pretext for arrest on anything that Jesus said in public. Jesus never made any claims publicly that were an arrestable offense. And that's

one of the reasons that they never seized him before.

I've taught in your streets and at your temples, he says in Matthew, at your temple. Why didn't you seize me then? Because nothing I have said is contrary to the law of Moses. Nothing I have said is in any way worthy of arrest, conviction, much less a death sentence.

When he had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand saying, do you answer the high priest like that? Like what? Look at Jesus' words. What has he said that is even a strikeable offense? This is a little symbolic distillation of everything that's going on. Jesus says something true and harmless and they want to smack him for it.

Smack him, smack him down. At this point, they want to kill him for doing nothing more than speaking truth. Did he insult the high priest? Did he bring up the record of corruption that was well-known for Annas and for Caiaphas? Did he talk about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the legalism of the scribes? Did he talk about all of the religious crimes that were being perpetrated, tithing spices and abusing widows and refusing to honor parents and all the rest of it? All Jesus says is my teaching and what my disciples say and do is open in the public record, consult that.

Why are you asking me now? Are you looking for me to say or do something at this point that I haven't already said and done? Are you looking for a fresh grounds because you can find none in the public record? And of course, this is very frustrating and annoying to Annas because yes, that's exactly what he's doing. He is asking, hoping Jesus will trip himself in his speech. How many times in the past have they tried this without success? Now they've arrested him and they're hoping that his emotion and his sense of outrage and indignation will get the better of him because that's what Annas would do in his place.

That's what a Pharisee or a scribe would do, unjustly arrested, falsely accused, mishandled and mistreated against the law, which doesn't allow anybody to be arrested, much less tried in the night. And what is he hoping for? That Jesus' emotions will overcome his judgment, that his self-control will fail and that he will say or do something for which he can then be legitimately charged. But it doesn't happen.

It doesn't happen. And the evident frustration is manifest when this officer standing by smacks him. Maybe the smacking will get him to say something.

Remember when Paul gets struck and he says, what part of the wall are you invoking when you strike me, you whitewashed wall? And somebody says, do you know you're talking to the priest? And Paul says, I actually did not know that or I would not have spoken such. Jesus answered him, if I've spoken evil, bear witness of the evil. But if well, why do you strike me? Well, we have to stop at this point because they are now going to

take Jesus to Caiaphas in verse 24.

Annas sends him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest. What do we take away from this? We are going to suffer unjustly. It's not my fault.

I don't deserve this. I didn't bring it on myself. It can be circumstance.

It can be treatment by people. It can be failures in our own body. It can be employment related.

It can be education related. It can be from within or without. The enemies can be sitting at your table and strike you with their heel.

They can share your bread. They can smile in your face and stab you in the back. False construction of our actions or our words.

People can misconstrue motives and say that we are doing what they would do in our place wrongfully and hatefully and despicably so. The example of the Lord Jesus is twofold. Resort to the power of the spirit that grants us the divine enablement for self-control.

Love and self-control and everything in between. Self-control. Don't be fooled.

This is part of the seduction of the harlot is to get us looking at ourselves and what would gratify me? What would vindicate me? What would please me in this circumstance? I would love to make a sarcastic remark here and put you in your place, you whitewashed wall. You strike me against the law? What have I said ever? For which you arrest me and charge me and bring me here in the dark of night. What have I said at this point that induces you to strike me? And not letting emotion rule, not letting emotion overcome reason, not letting emotion and feelings.

There's no stronger feeling than that of injustice. We see injustice is perpetrated against others. You see a lot of fuel for the fire in modern politics and modern social justice warriors, rage at perceived injustice, real or perceived.

People let their rage get the better of them and they decide that this justifies all kinds of criminal activity, heinously immoral and unethical and criminal behavior justified by emotion brought about by injustice. Injustice is not an excuse to lose your head, to lose your biblical foundation and to do despot to the spirit of grace, to trample underfoot the son of God and put him to an open shame, which is what we do when we do not follow his example of faith and patience. The scriptures tell us these things will happen.

We have no excuse for failing. Peter's problem is when the Lord Jesus, the walking scriptures told him he was about to fail, he denied it. Remember that? The three previous denials, I will never deny you.

I will go to death with you. The all of these others may leave you. I will never leave you.

I will never deny you. When scripture tells us we're in danger of imminent failure, we need to take the remedy. We need to go to the foot of the cross.

We need to go to the father through the Lord Jesus in the power of the spirit and in the light of the word of God and pray for strength, pray for guidance, pray for wisdom and use those resources that God has provided so that we do not fail. This is why we're here. Anybody can succeed where there's no test.

Anybody can endure where there's no real pain, no real affliction. We endure on behalf of the Lord Jesus, following in his footsteps, carrying our cross behind him. That's the task.

That's why we're here. It is a momentary light affliction. It doesn't seem light sometimes, but compared to the eternal weight of glory that is coming, as the old gospel song says, it will be worth it all when we see Christ.

One look at his dear face, all sorrow will erase. It's a great song. And on that note, we'll close in order of prayer.

Father, thank you for the inestimable and incomparable example of the Lord Jesus showing us how to live the life to which we have been called by your grace in the strength that you provide by every word that has proceeded from your mouth, every word that we have recorded in the scriptures and the presence and power of your spirit, enabling us, comforting us, encouraging us, and shining that light on our paths that enables us to be representatives of the Lord Jesus as his body on this earth. We pray that as we reflect on our own particular path, our own challenges, our own opportunities, that your spirit and your word will illuminate and enlighten our souls, that we can avoid the pitfalls of self-interest, self-gratification, self-preservation, live the life to which we've been called, looking forward to that day when the Lord Jesus returns, takes us to himself and presents us before your throne. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.