

Matthew 23-02-19a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 19th of February, 2023.

We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We will be concluding chapter 26 and moving into chapter 27 this morning. It is a powerful scene.

It is the events surrounding the most significant event in all of human history, and we are privileged to have an insight and to have four accounts of these details at which we can look. We will concentrate, of course, on Matthew, but supplement with the information that is provided in the other two synoptic Gospels and John. Let's ask God's blessing on our study, on our time of fellowship and worship in music, and we'll begin.

Father, how grateful we are for another opportunity to be blessed by the presence of your Holy Spirit and the gifts that He energizes and operates in our midst. We thank you for the Lord Jesus through whom we have that presence and power and opportunity and gifting, and through whom all of the benefits of our salvation have come. In accordance with your plan and purpose from the ages in eternity past to the ages in the eternal future, you have foreseen us, you have loved us, you have provided for us and woven us into the fabric of the grand design for all of human history.

We pray that as we look at this most significant of all nights in history and in the life of the Lord Jesus, that the Holy Spirit will illuminate the details and the truths that they transmit, that we will be encouraged and strengthened and enhance our appreciation for the Lord Jesus, for His dedication, His example, and His reliance upon your Word and your Spirit to accomplish all of your purpose in His life, even as we can do the same for our own. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're in Matthew chapter 26, and we have come to the point where the three Jewish trials are concluded. We saw that the focus of these trials was to find something with which the authorities could condemn the Lord Jesus to death. Saying that if somebody tears down the temple you can rebuild it in three days is flimsy at best.

That was the only testimony they could get more than one guy to repeat with any consistency. That, of course, was insufficient, and we saw that in verse 61. This one said, I'm able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.

First of all, it's a twisted misquotation, and secondly, it's not a death penalty offense to overestimate your building abilities. The frustrated Caiaphas presses Jesus for something more damning in terms of a pretext upon which they can convict Him. Now, this Caiaphas is known to us from a previous occasion.

Keep your finger here in Matthew 26 and turn to John chapter 10. And then go another

page to John chapter 11. After the raising of Lazarus from the dead, it's real easy to remember.

Shortest verse in the English Bible, John 11, 35, Jesus wept. After this, in verse 45, many of the Jews who had come to Mary and had seen the things Jesus did believed in Him. There is a fresh surge of interest and belief upon hearing the account of the raising of Lazarus.

Some of them went away to the Pharisees in verse 46 and told them the things Jesus did. The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, what shall we do? For this man works many signs. What's the right answer to that question? What shall we do? This man works many signs.

What did Nicodemus say in John chapter 3? No one could do the things you do unless he were from God, right? God has not only sent His Son, He's not only sent the Messiah, He has not only sent a prophet announcing the coming of that Messiah. They have not only received preaching and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, but the authenticating signs, such as those which accompanied the deliverance from Egypt, are on offer here. They are observed.

They are seen. They are witnessed. Do they have any trouble finding enough witnesses to confirm that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead? Did they have any difficulty finding two or three witnesses who could agree that a man that had been in the tomb for four days was raised? No difficulty here.

No need to suborn perjury and false testimony. There are abundant witnesses to dozens of Jesus miracles. These same individuals have interviewed the blind man, formerly blind man, of John chapter 9, have they not? And his parents and received testimony from two or three witnesses that he was born blind and they looked at him and observed that he has full competency in the visual department.

So, what kind of testimony have they gotten in abundance? And what should they do when they receive further testimony of these signs? Legally speaking, morally speaking, spiritually speaking, what should they be doing? And these are the leadership. These are the ones to whom all Israel looks for religious and spiritual guidance. But the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered to counsel and said, what shall we do? This man works many signs.

If we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation. Now, if everyone did believe in him and the kingdom is granted, is God going to allow his king and that kingdom to be destroyed by the Romans and the nation be done away with? You can't offer this perspective and harbor this belief that the population believing in Jesus will destroy the nation unless you yourself can't and don't believe in Jesus as the Messiah and that God's power is not

behind him.

And that Jesus has healing power, but he doesn't have ruling power. He doesn't have defensive power. He can't be the leader of a nation that holds its own against its foes by God's grace and with God's power and by God's design.

So over and over again, these individuals manifest their hardness of heart, their callousness. And the thing that is scary, these are biblically knowledgeable believers. These are not unbelievers.

They are not headed for the lake of fire. They will be raised at the second coming. We know this from what Jesus said and we'll review it this morning.

We saw it last time. These are the people of God, but they have got about the same level of belief as those who left Egypt under the blood of the Passover lamb and went into the desert to partake of manna and water from the rock. They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them.

And yet they did not enter the land of promise. These individuals are going to be raised because they are believers in God. They believe that God is and that he rewards those who diligently seek him.

But their form of seeking, what they choose to believe, their twisting and contorting of scripture to their own benefit and for their own profit is their undoing. But it is scary because we are believers and we are made out of the very same clay and we can twist scripture. I like to think that not us individually within this group, but we have to suspect ourselves.

We have to check ourselves that nobody wakes up in the morning twirling the end of their villainous mustache and saying, I'm going to perpetrate evil today. I'm going to twist the scriptures and be a rank hypocrite and search the scriptures because in them I think I have eternal life and yet they testify of the Lord Jesus and I come out with either no Jesus or the wrong Jesus. Jesus said, you search the scriptures because you think that that's your source of life.

Well, that is true, but the result of your search is this. And it is a sober warning. It is a caution.

As soon as we think that we stand, we need to take heed lest we fall. Jesus' most advanced pupil in the disciple group is going to fail miserably, has already failed miserably on this night and is going to bring it to a very graphic conclusion in just a few minutes here. But in John 10, when they said, if we let him alone like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

The sky will fall, the world will end. Where is their faith in God? Where is their scriptural

perspective on why they are under Roman oppression to begin with? If you remember the closing chapters of our Kings and Prophets study with the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah and the exhortations to rebuild the temple and the sluggardly, distracted nature, they were more interested in their own homes and their own economy and their own well-being, physical security, the dismal failures in the days of Nehemiah. And it has continued all the way down to the present day here in John 10.

Not stopping to think, what is the plan and purpose of God here? Do you think these men were prayerful? Did they go to God with an honest, seeking heart? Lord, can this be your chosen Messiah? Give me wisdom, give me insight, give me understanding. There is no humility, there is no seeking note here at all. They've already made up their minds.

All things continue as they have from the beginning. Nothing is going to change, nothing is going to be different. And we're happy with the status quo.

We don't want the status quo to change. And this idea that the Romans are going to take away their place and their nation if everyone believes in Jesus, well, if they believe in Jesus, what is the result? What are the people going to do if they believe in Jesus? Oh my goodness, they might start living by the Beatitudes and the exhortations in the Sermon on the Mount. They might start doing unto others as they would have others do unto them.

They might carry a pack an extra mile. They might love their enemies and do good to those who hate them. They might follow the example of the Samaritan and be neighbor to one another.

They might worship God in spirit and in truth. They might love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. What exactly are the Romans going to object to if everyone believes in Jesus? This is a fantasy expectation.

Has Jesus been telling people to sell their cloaks and buy swords publicly? Has he told them, get ready to throw off the Roman yoke, get ready to mount an insurrection? Has he said anything of the sort? Why would the Romans take away the nation? What they're really concerned about is the first item, will take away our place. Are they talking about the place that the religious leadership itself occupies or is it the place of the people? It's hard to know, but they paint this potential as a threat and as a fatal expectation if everyone believes in him. On what basis? What has Jesus ever said that has ever concerned the Romans? Even when they take Jesus to Pilate, Pilate can't find enough to charge him with.

He says three different times, I find no fault with this man. So people believing in him, this is such an empty, twisted falsehood. It reminds me of people that make a lot of other predictions about what's going to happen if we don't follow course X or believe in scientific proposition Y. It's ridiculous.

Look at verse 49, and one of them Caiaphas, this is our Caiaphas from chapter 26, being high priest that year, said to them, you know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for you. It's not us, you can cross it out, it's you. It's expedient for you.

This is Caiaphas in his all-knowing Wizard of Oz voice before somebody peeks behind the curtain. Nor do you consider that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people. It's expedient that we take this Jesus and we demonstrate to the Romans how compliant and subordinate and obedient we are.

We'll take this guy and we'll sacrifice him to the Romans to prove that we have no desire to insurrect, to rebel, to have a king of our own and overthrow their rule and throw off their yoke. We'll have this man die for the people. It's for the people.

It's for the common good. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one. So we'll make a sacrificial lamb, quote unquote, out of this man and we will pacify the Romans and assure them that we have no national ambitions.

It's expedient. One man should die for the people and we will engineer it. We will be the good guys in this picture.

We're protecting the people. Of course, they're protecting the status quo and their power over the people, their wealth, their accumulation, their pride of place. This he did not say, verse 51, on his own, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

He did not say this on his own. It is interesting that sometimes God will communicate divine truth or a divine prophecy through someone despite the fact that they are not a legitimate priest, a legitimate prophet, a legitimate source. Sometimes truth comes in unexpected ways.

In the Old Testament, you think of Balaam. Balaam is no saint. He's not in Israel.

He doesn't have any of the accouterments of an Old Testament prophet, and yet God uses him to prophesy blessing and to prophesy the coming of the Messiah, the star that arises out of Jacob and smites the brow of Moab. That's a Balaam prophecy. And yet Balaam is ultimately going to die because he's a rascal, and he has to be confronted by the angel of the Lord.

He's evidently the only available person to do what God wants done, and so Balaam's exhortation to curse Israel is turned into a threefold blessing of Israel, but not until after Balaam beats his donkey and so on. So not on his own, being high priest that year, God is using every available means to communicate to the people of Israel. Even the illegitimate, discredited, self-interested high priest that year, because he is high priest and because his words will be quoted in Israel and repeated to the people, God puts these words in his heart and in his mouth that Jesus would die for the nation.

Anybody who hears that, those in the room, the members of the Sanhedrin, ought to be thinking back to Isaiah and the prophecy that he is going to be bruised for our iniquities and wounded for our transgressions. By his stripes we are healed. If Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy, even in this sense, it gives one pause for thought.

Well, if this Jesus is a part of God's plan, maybe we ought to think a bit more carefully. Not for that nation only, John says in verse 52, but also that he would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Gather together in one.

This is a clear indication that the Gospel of John was written last, well into the church age, where Peter's vision had already been given and interpreted and was known, and that the Gentiles had been included into the new group of God's people, gathered into one. The one there is the post-Pentecost church. It doesn't say gathered into Israel.

The nation of Israel and all nations are gathered into one. There is neither Jew nor Greek, and so on. But this is that Caiaphas, and he has already had this murderous thought weeks earlier at the resurrection of Lazarus.

And you remember, they not only want to kill Jesus, they want to kill Lazarus as well, as you find further down in verse 57, both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command that if anyone knew where he was, they should report it, that they might seize him. This is the reason in verse 54, Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, went to the country near the wilderness, a city called Ephraim, there remained with his disciples. It's no accident that the city is named by John.

You remember, Ephraim takes its name from one of Joseph's two sons. And remember the crossing of Jacob's hands, the expected firstborn, the elder ends up serving the younger, just as Jacob and Esau themselves were switched because of faith. And Jesus going to Ephraim because the Jews are actively trying to kill him, ought to have been another clue to those who were watching and thinking of all of the cities in Israel, Jesus could have gone anywhere, but he goes to a city nowhere else mentioned in his ministry or in his travels, Ephraim.

Why? The name says there is a change out of the fulfillment and the bestowing of God's blessing to an unexpected source, to a Johnny come lately, to the younger instead of the elder, because of the issue of lack of faith, lack of acceptance, lack of belief. That was Esau's problem. And it is symbolized when Jacob crosses his hands on the sons of Joseph and Joseph being such a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus.

So that's John chapter 10, back to Matthew chapter 26, this trial, quote unquote, where Jesus kept silent in verse 63 of our chapter, the high priest answered and said to him, I put you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God, making claims about how fast you can build a temple, isn't a hanging offense, so to speak. Caiaphas wants something that is a death penalty offense under the law claiming

to be the son of God is not detailed in the law of Moses.

What is Caiaphas after here? He is after a charge of blasphemy. Blasphemy is what he wants. Keep your finger here and turn back to Leviticus chapter 24.

What is the legal precept? What is it in the law that Caiaphas wants to invoke? Leviticus 24, verse 16, verse 15, you shall speak to the children of Israel saying, whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Then 16, whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregations shall certainly stone him.

The streets shall be filled with blood, as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death. Well, the Romans have taken away the legal power for Israel to inflict a capital punishment.

They're not allowed to stone anyone to death. This is illegal under Roman rule when accomplished by the people of Israel. And this would indeed bring the Romans down on them.

They can't gather a crowd and stone Jesus according to the law. So they are broadening the interpretation all kinds of ways. They're saying, well, the stranger can participate in the execution and he needs to be put to death.

So all they've got to do to operate under this provision of the law is convict Jesus of blasphemy. The specific blasphemy here is immediately preceded by whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And this is something of a synonymous distinct, as we like to say when studying the Psalms, a two line or two component statement.

Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin and whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord. Blaspheming the name of the Lord is basically cursing God and cursing God's name. Blasphemy is cursing God, making representations about God that are not true, assigning the source of sin or evil to God himself.

This is blasphemy. Blaspheming the name of the Lord. They're going to broaden this to say claiming to be God's son is somehow cursing God and blaspheming his name.

And yet they themselves will be the first to say we are children of Abraham and we are sons of God. Jesus himself on an earlier day quoted the Psalm that says you are all sons of God. It's in the Old Testament scriptures.

And yet they're inflating this and distorting it, corrupting it and twisting it as a pretext. If you take a text without context, you have a pretext. That's something they teach in hermeneutics class.

Text without context is pretext and that's exactly what they've done. They didn't even read the preceding verse that says this blasphemy that I'm talking about is cursing God,

reviling God, assigning corruption, evil, sin, wrong to God who is light and there is no darkness at all. That is the nature of blasphemy.

But they've broadened this to include anything they wanted to include. So they want to get him on blasphemy. And the blasphemy is that he is the son of God.

You saw how carefully Jesus avoids making this claim in front of the illegal convocation on this night of the Sanhedrin. In the Synoptic Gospels, you cannot find a single clear passage where Jesus ever claims to be the son of God. He refers to himself in the third person as the son of man.

Where does that come from? This would be Daniel 7, verse 13. Son of man is Daniel 7, verse 13, which says, I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. Coming with the clouds of heaven, he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him.

To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7, verse 13, one like the son of man coming with the clouds of heaven, coming to the Ancient of Days.

Son of man. What does Jesus say in verse 64? I put you on oath. Tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God.

Jesus said to him, you're the one saying it. I'm not standing here telling you that. Even though it's true, even though it is true, Jesus remains silent, and even under pressure, doesn't just say, yes, you're right, I am the son of God.

Why? There are truths that we understand that we do not communicate. How many times do you see Jesus heal someone and say, tell no one? Jesus told his own disciples, Peter, James, and John, after the transfiguration, don't even tell the other disciples what you have just seen. Don't say what you know, even though it's true.

Why? Very simple. Do not give what is holy to the dogs. Do not cast your pearls before swine.

All they will do is turn and tear you to pieces. These guys are poised. They are trying to find a pretext to tear Jesus to pieces, and he's going to make it all on them.

He's not going to supply them with a pretext. What he does say is perfectly legitimate and perfectly true. It is a quotation of Old Testament scripture.

It is in the third person. He is saying nothing directly about himself, and yet he is, in the same way that he spoke in parables, which were opaque to those who are outside because of their lack of faith, and their inability to understand, inability to believe, is

itself a conviction. So in this trial, they are trying to charge Jesus and convict him on the basis of being God's people and following God's law.

Jesus, with a single statement, turns the tables, and based on their reaction to what he says, they are tried, they are convicted, they are found guilty, and their sentence is in view. So when Jesus says, you're the one bringing this up, that's what you said means. It's a figure speech.

Jesus uses it two other times, as we saw last week, and you're the one saying it, not me. That's what it means. Nevertheless, I will say to you, I'm not going to repeat what you said.

I'm not going to confirm or deny what you said. You've said a thing. That's kind of on you.

Here's what I will say. Hereafter, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven. A perfectly legitimate reference to Daniel chapter 7, verse 13.

They will not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but they will believe that he is associating himself with a messianic prophecy by quoting it in this hour and in this context. And this is going to be the basis. The high priest tore his clothes.

When it says he tore his clothes, you go to the parallel accounts, and Mark says he tore one garment. Matthew says he tore one garment. To tear their clothes, they only have to grab the collar and tear it one hand's breadth.

They're not really ruining their clothes. Somebody can stitch it back up. That's one point.

The second point is this is not the garment of the high priest that he wears on the three high feast occasions and wears the breastplate over it. He is not wearing the breastplate. He's not wearing the holy garments.

In these days, those were kept under lock and key by the Romans, who only let them be worn by the high priest on the three assembly feasts. The high priest could wear them formally on those days. The rest of the time, the Romans locked him up.

They didn't want to take a chance that the high priest would convene something with formal high priestly authority that might foment rebellion. So he is just wearing, I'm sure they were fine robes, but they're not the robe of the high priest per se. And so he tears about a hand's breadth and says, what more do we need to hear? He has spoken blasphemy.

Now, they weren't allowed to say this. There is a procedure in the Sanhedrin that was followed in capital cases where the charge was put. Everybody, all 70 of the members

had to vote before the charge could be confirmed.

But Caiaphas, this is like the judge jumping up from the bench in a jury trial and without waiting for the jurors to retire and consider the evidence and come back with their verdict, the judge just jumps up and says, well, you've heard he's on the stand. You heard what he said. He's guilty.

That's the level of heinous miscarriage that is going on here. The judge has jumped up and said, you heard what he said, folks, he's guilty. What more do we need when they are supposed to vote? They don't even get the chance here.

So look now, you have heard his blasphemy. What do you think? They answered and said, he's deserving of death. Well, this is only the beginning of sorrows on this night.

What do we draw by way of application? Just remember, these men are scholars of God's word. They can quote much more of the word of God than you and I can. They search it all the time.

They know it backwards and forwards. They are citing scripture and making their decision based on their understanding of scripture as it pertains to support for what they themselves want to do. Instead of looking to God, instead of seeking out the truth of God, the plan and purpose of God, and coming to grips with the presence of the Son of God in their midst, these believers, knowledgeable in the word, have twisted it and distorted it to their own destruction.

We are equally able to do this. Don't think just because the Holy Spirit is present in our hearts and souls that we can't do this same thing. We can and we do in ways large and small.

I like to think that the large ways are outside our individual lives and outside our group, and that we're seeing it happen in the world at large. But anytime we get so busy pointing our finger at others that we don't see the three pointing back at us, anytime we like to read Romans chapter one and we don't want to read Romans chapter two, we need to go back and take a fresh account of where we stand. Let anyone who thinks he is standing take heed lest he fall.

So that's our lesson for the first session. We'll pause and take our break. When we come back, we are going to pick up, and it is more interesting than you can imagine here, when we pick up in verse 67 after the break.