

Matthew 23-02-26a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 26th of February, 2023. We continue our study in the gospel of Matthew.

We're in chapter 27 in the midst of Jesus trials in the hours preceding the crucifixion itself. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and ask for concentration and focus and the active presence and ministry of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to enjoy and appreciate the function of all of the gifts that he has distributed amongst us. And then we'll begin.

Father, we thank you for this time of fellowship and encouragement and looking at the truth of your word and appreciating the Lord Jesus Christ at this most momentous of times in all of history. We pray that your Holy Spirit will enable us to grasp the things that are meaningful and pertinent for us in terms of representing the Lord Jesus as his body on this earth in his absence, that we can grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior, that we can be renewed in our minds and understand your will for us, that we can shine as lights in the midst of our generation and be a source of truth and hope to those who are seeking. Most of all, we pray that we can be prepared for service and function in this life and in the ages to come.

We ask it all in Jesus' name, amen. Let's read a bit of our passage and move forward from there. We have seen the three trials before the Jews.

Jesus is taken to Caiaphas and to Annas. And there are those two trials in the night. We're now going to see the third trial here in chapter 27.

When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. That single verse, verse one of chapter 27, summarizes quite a bit more activity.

Jesus' third trial in the daylight before the Sanhedrin. We have more detail on this given in Luke. And so if you turn to Luke chapter 22, verse 66, we have quite a bit more information about this one verse summary.

Luke 22, 66 says, as soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led him into their council, saying, if you are the Christ, tell us. But he said to them, if I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask, you will by no means answer.

If your Bible says any more than that, you can safely line it out. There are some later textual additions there. But all Jesus said was, if I tell you, you will by no means believe.

And if I ask you, also is not there. If I ask you, you will by no means answer, period. It's a beautiful two-line distick, as we like to say when studying the Psalms.

It's a two-line statement. If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I ask, you will by no means answer.

Notice the beautiful symmetry there. They will not listen to Jesus' answer. And if he asks, they will not answer him.

What Jesus is effectively saying in a beautiful few words here is, there is no communication possible in either direction. When I speak, you will not believe what I say. If I question you, you will not answer.

We've seen previous instances and episodes where they durst not ask him questions anymore when they would engage in dialogue. Jesus basically says, we're past the point of talking here. I know it, and you know it.

There is no dialogue possible. This is significant when it comes to application for us. There are times when it is fruitful to listen, and there are other times when it isn't.

There are times when it can be fruitful and you can make progress in speaking. There are other times where it is going to do absolutely no good. There is a time to speak, and there is a time to remain silent.

There are so many threes on this night. We have seen three sets of three denials by Peter. Jesus prays in the garden three times with Peter, James, and John in the background.

There are three great silences here mentioned where when Jesus stands before the high priest, he answers nothing. It doesn't mean that in the entire night he never spoke, but there are long periods where they question him, they ask him, they prod him, they accuse him, they mock him, and he is silent. And three times we see Jesus answering not a word.

He knew when to speak and when it was completely pointless to do so. So he points out that truth here. If I tell you, you will by no means believe.

And if I ask, you will by no means answer. There's no point in talking to you. He's already been through the two previous trials.

This is in the morning. So he repeats what he said in the night trial. The one statement that he made before Caiaphas, he repeats before the assembled Sanhedrin.

Hereafter, the son of man will sit on the right hand of the power of God. Remember he said, you will see the son of man during the night trial. Then they all said in verse 70, are you then the son of God? He said to them, and this is a poor translation.

It's a poor understanding. It's repeated and reflected in a lot of commentaries. You rightly say that I am.

This is not an affirmation. This is a non-committal response. It's kind of like, you know, that is a question for another time.

Jesus has already said, if I tell you, you will by no means believe. And that indicates that he's not going to tell them anything. He's not going to make a claim.

He's not going to answer yes or no to their question. When they press him and say, are you then the son of God? He said to them, you are the ones bringing this up. You're the ones speaking these words.

I haven't come here pushing a claim. I haven't made a claim. I'm not interested in affirming or denying a claim.

You are the ones who keep making this an issue. Now, here's my question. Is it the issue? Is the identity of Jesus as the son of God the foremost issue? It is certainly an issue.

But this is the issue that the Sanhedrin and the high priest have repeatedly made. We're going to see Pilate making an issue out of whether or not he is a king or the king. What is the actual issue with respect to the people of Israel, especially the religious leadership in Israel and Jesus? They have narrowed it down to a single question.

We want you to affirm publicly that you claim to be the son of God. If he were to say, yes, I am the son of God. Let me read you what will become John chapter one.

In the beginning, I was with God and nothing was made without my participation and so on. They asked the question and he refuses to answer it. Why? Because it isn't the issue, whether or not Jesus is in fact the son of God.

What is the real issue here? The purpose of his arrest, his detention all night long, his, this mock trial. They are not interested in truly ascertaining whether or not he is the son of God. They have already concluded long ago that he is not.

Months ago, perhaps years ago. Their issue is we want to substantiate a charge of blasphemy. We want you to say something with which we can kill you, over which we can execute you.

We'll take anything. But the only hope they have, because Jesus has committed no crimes, quite the contrary. The only thing they can do is try to nail him for blasphemy.

Jesus knows that that's what they are trying to do. And even though he knows that this is the cup that the father has placed before him and that he needs to drink it, he doesn't have to participate. These things must come, but woe to him.

And we might paraphrase and say, woe to them by whom they come. Jesus simply stands there and lets these people invent the pretext, the false, unjust, cowardly, unbelieving pretext to execute him. And he is not going to play into that.

He's not going to even give them an excuse. Now, as wonderful as it is to observe the beauty of the Lord Jesus, his integrity, his character, his self-control, his dignity in the midst of this tragic set of indignities that are being perpetrated on him, we always want to look for application. We certainly appreciate the Lord Jesus, and we are thankful to him for enduring this on our behalf.

So unjust, so hypocritical. It is the worst you can imagine of human behavior. But we are not on trial for our lives.

We are not being, at this moment, unjustly accused for the purpose of being executed. So what would be the interpretation and application of this point in Jesus' trials? He is face-to-face with people who claim to be believers, and yet refuse to recognize the incarnate word of God. They are priests.

They are Pharisees and Sadducees. There is not a person in this room who does not believe in the God of Israel and claim to be a defender, proponent, and student of the scriptures. And yet they are capable of this egregious, unconscionable behavior directed against the Lord of glory himself.

This should, at a minimum, be sobering to us. Scary to us to believe oneself to be on God's side, to have a relationship with God, to have an understanding of the scriptures, and have the magnetic needle of your conscience so deflected that you think you are right, and you think you are just, and you think you are doing God a favor and representing God and his holiness and his righteousness when you are, in fact, doing something that could not be more opposite. I would suggest that this can happen in small ways as well as large.

This is the most memorable example of it in all of history. You seldom find people pointing out that all of this behavior, from the betrayal, the arrest, and the future indignities that are gonna be inflicted on the Lord Jesus when he is delivered into the hands of the Romans, fully and intentionally by these men, they are believers. People don't want to consider, much less accept, the notion that Judas is a believer, that he's gonna be in the resurrection of Old Testament saints.

People just say, that's just not possible. And that's our problem. When we look at ourselves and we say, well, I'm not capable of that kind of injustice.

I could never be so wrong while thinking I am right. Something would tell me, my conscience would warn me. I would have an innate sense that I was doing something wrong.

And we're going to see an example here in the second half of the six trials that ought to be even further emphasis and a telling example of this principle. We can be so wrong and be unconscious of it if we just rely on ourselves. If we rely on our rightness sensor, I feel right, so I must be right.

I don't feel wrong. I don't think I'm wrong. I can't think of why I would be wrong.

I can think of any number of reasons why I'm right. We have talked many times in the past about the difference between objectivity and subjectivity. You know the definition, the quick definition of being subjective.

You have a relative standard. You are judging things because you have your eyes on yourself or you have your eyes on other people or you have your eyes on circumstances. And we can make judgments.

We can draw conclusions. We can adduce evidence. And anything that doesn't fit our preconception, our confirmation bias kicks in.

And we say, well, that's not legitimate. That can't be true. Let me think about something else.

I'm going to ignore that reality and substitute my own. I like this view better. I like this construction better.

I'm going to weight the arguments in my favor because then the conclusion turns out in my favor. And it's all subjective. There is no more pertinent and essential truth for us than the gift that God has given us through Christ of his word and his spirit, both of which are external to us.

God's word in its truth is outside of me. So what happens to the word of truth? Well, I will interpret it. I will filter it.

I will be selective in my observation of it, my use of it. I will cherry pick. I will proof text.

I will take some parts and emphasize them. I will take other parts and minimize them. And as I pointed out before, I really like my technological illustrations that have recently come to hand where you look at your phone, you take a picture of yourself or someone else, and then they have these little fun filters, kids like to play with them, where they take your picture and they make your eyes very large and your mouth very small or your ears very big.

Sometimes they will add things to the picture. They'll put on a hat or they'll make you look like a kitty cat or whatever. There are all of these fun filters, but it starts with an accurate picture of a person's face.

But by minimizing some parts and maximizing others, it is distorted and unreal and no

longer reflects reality, even though every pixel in that image started out as a true and accurate and proportional picture, just by distorting, just by emphasis and de-emphasis, it turns into something virtually unrecognizable. This is what happens with scripture when we take it into our own hands and we start asking it our questions for our purposes. Tell us plainly, are you the son of God? The reason I want to know this is not so that I can believe in you, it's so that I can kill you.

Hence Jesus' response. It's a useful exercise. It's a useful thought experiment, if you will, to take those words in red ink and imagine that they are being addressed to me personally.

Are there areas where Jesus could say to me, if I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I question, you won't answer. Jesus does speak to us through the scriptures and the second witness of the Holy Spirit.

And there are times when as believers, we just refuse to accept that truth. It can't be me, it's not my fault. There's something wrong with somebody else.

There, I will shift this blame somewhere. The Sanhedrin certainly doesn't consider itself to be blameworthy in arresting an innocent man. Judas initially has no trouble betraying innocent blood.

It's only when he sees the consequence and the outcome that he is remorseful. But initially he has no difficulty doing it. He's one of the 12 disciples.

He's been Jesus' constant companion for over three years. Has seen virtually every miracle the Lord has done, except those that were limited to the Peter, James, and John set. Judas participated in the feeding of the 5,000.

He participated in the feeding of the 4,000. He was in the boat when Jesus walked on the water, et cetera, et cetera. And yet Judas finds out a way to think he is in the right and think that it is a good idea to disclose Jesus' location and allow him to be arrested on this night.

If that doesn't scare us, I don't know what will. And this reply to the greatest scholars of the age, the current leading lights of Jewish faith in Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover, for Jesus to tell them, you will by no means believe what I say. And if I ask you a question, you won't answer.

Why? Because it's not just any old question. Jesus isn't gonna ask them their name or their address or their date of birth or their genealogy or their position on resurrection, as Paul will do later on, he'll raise the issue and get the Pharisees and Sadducees fighting with each other over whether or not there's a resurrection. Why would they not answer when Jesus asks a question? Because it will strike to the very heart of the real issue, which is, although they believe in God, they do not believe the witness of scripture.

Jesus told them months and months ago, you search the scriptures, these same people, you search the scriptures because you think that in them, you have life. And it is those very scriptures that bear witness of me. If you believed my father, you would believe me.

If you knew my father, you would know me. The real issue is the staggering cataclysmic blindness in evidence here, as they look at the incarnate God and are endeavoring by any means fair or foul to kill him. How can your heart get in such a state? This is my question.

How can the heart of a believer, thinking that they are well-schooled and knowledgeable in the scriptures, can cite chapter and verse for any number of things, tell you how far you can walk on a Sabbath day and how many times you can brush the mud off of your cloak and whether or not it's okay to let a trapped animal out of a hole in the ground on the Sabbath, to not understand that Jesus healing on the Sabbath is a wonderful thing and not a violation of the law. And at this point, to be looking at the Lord of glory and trying by any means, they know their witnesses are false. They know how criminally wrong meeting in the middle of the night is to condemn Jesus to death.

This is why they're meeting now in the morning because they don't want it to get out that he was condemned at night. So they're having a reenactment, if you will, of the night's trial. Reminds me of when Douglas MacArthur came ashore in the Philippines and said, I have returned, but they didn't get a good camera angle.

There was sun flare or something. So they had to have him go back out in the water and wait ashore a second time so that it would look good for the press. They could release a better film.

So he comes ashore. I have returned. Oh, sorry, we didn't turn the camera on.

Can you go back out and do it again? That's the level of tragic artificiality and hypocrisy that is a part of this trial. And you and I are capable of the very same thing. Don't think we're not.

Let any man who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. It is the point at which we don't believe we are capable of doing wrong like these men. We are incapable.

Look, there's 70 of us here. We've got the high priest in charge. It's impossible for our entire group to be wrong.

And this ragged Galilean with his band of 12 followers to be right. That's just not possible. He hasn't sat at the feet of the rabbis.

He doesn't know what we know. He doesn't do what we do. He's not looked up to.

He's not a part of the structure. He can't be right. We're right.

And we're in a group that says, we're right. I can look to my right and my left and see people who are nodding their heads in agreement with me that you're a blasphemer. You're a rabble rouser.

You're gonna get us in trouble with the Romans. Everything that's wrong is your fault, not ours. Shifting the blame to Jesus for the response that people have to the pure and accurate teaching of Old Testament truth, which is a great deal of what Jesus spoke and taught.

He simply updated and fleshed out what these men should have been teaching all along. So by way of application, when you think about the Lord Jesus standing in front of Annas and Caiaphas and the assembled Sanhedrin, and we say, that is just terrible. That hypocritical, criminal behavior is, I would never do that.

Think about Peter, though all forsake you, I will never forsake you. Though any would deny you, I will never deny you. I will go to the death with you.

And what is it that trips up Peter? Fear. In his case, it is fear of arrest, fear of incarceration, fear of losing his freedom, the access he has to his wife and family. We know he's married.

We know he has a mother-in-law. He has a fishing business. He's got a lot to lose in his own mind.

And a servant girl asking him questions, remarking on his Galilean accent, is enough to cause him to curse and swear that he has no knowledge of Jesus whatsoever, as we saw last time. What kind of fear? We're not generally subject to fear of losing everything we have, losing our lives, being incarcerated, as was the case with Peter. But fear takes many forms, has many causes.

It can be subtle. It can be in the area of relationships. It can be in the area of our own walk through life, whether it is with family, with school, with work, with finances, with political changes in our environment, with the culture, with world events.

Is World War III on the horizon? Is the Antichrist about to be exposed? Are we gonna be here? And our understanding of the pre-tribulation rapture is wrong. We can fear embarrassment. We can fear the, I would say one of the more common fears that we have is to be ill thought of by others, to feel like we're underestimated or underappreciated or misunderstood.

And it is fear. And just because it's not fear of arrest, incarceration, or execution, as was Peter's case, it is simply emblematic. It is parabolic, if you will.

It is a parable of what fear can do to our good sense, to our knowledge of the scriptures. If it can trip up Peter, who had daily Bible class with the Lord Jesus for so these many

months, what can it do to us? God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of what? Power. Notice how fear and power are opposites.

When we are in the grip of fear, we have lost our power. We've given away our strength. Fear drives us.

Fear moves us. Fear motivates us instead of the power of God. Power, love.

Love is outward-looking. Love is sacrificial to self. Love doesn't worry about the consequences to me.

What is the effect on you, on others? When the spirit of fear is banished, we have power. We have love, outward-looking love, love for neighbor, love for enemy, love for God, love for the brethren, love for one another, and a sound mind. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and a sound mind.

This is primarily self-control. We can overcome the impulse and the instinct and the motivation of fear. These individuals who are putting on this sham trial what is at the root of their unbelief? What is at the root of their misconstruction of who Jesus is? Why is it they will not believe? I would submit to you, it is fear.

Fear of loss. They are accustomed to and enjoy the status quo. They like their in-club.

They like their associations. They like their wealth. They like their status.

They like their influence. They like to believe that they are the righteous and outside are the dogs and the sinners and the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Oh Lord, I thank you that I am not like other men.

It's a comfortable view of self and of those that one has chosen to associate with. It's comfortable. I fear letting go of that.

I fear questioning it. I fear the consequences if I were to acknowledge and begin to recognize that this is self-righteousness, that it is hypocrisy, that it is unfair and unkind, that it is grinding the poor and the lowly underfoot in direct contravention of the Old Testament scriptures that I claim to know and teach. I'm afraid of that.

I don't want to consider it. I will push it away. You have to applaud Nicodemus.

He did come to Jesus by night, but he came. And he questioned. He was willing to entertain the idea, Joseph of Arimathea.

And there were others who were willing to overcome that fear in their search for truth. We have to ask God for the grace and the insight, the illumination to call out what it is we are afraid of. What we fear.

The spirit of fear paralyzes us. It prevents us from seeing and therefore of applying the truth. A good exercise, as I say, is to come to these words of the Lord Jesus.

If I tell you, you will by no means accept it. You won't take it as true. You won't believe it.

Can we ask God to show us where we have fear that is slowing us down or blinding us to the truth? Are there areas where the Lord can speak to us and we will by no means believe? There's plenty of other things in the Bible that I like, but I don't like that one. This is a great question. If we have the humility to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and to follow the Lord Jesus, we will have the humility to pray David's prayer.

Try me, search me, O Lord, and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. Show me my hidden faults, my secret faults.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Purging with hyssop can be painful.

Engaging with the things that we don't wanna talk about and we don't wanna consider about ourselves can be painful, but it is necessary if we're going to avoid the paralyzing, blinding effects of fear. Well, let's pause here and take a break. When we come back, we're going to look at the second half of the trials of this night and early morning hour in the life of the Lord Jesus.