

Matthew 23-02-26b

We're ready now to resume our study in Matthew chapter 27, and it is such a sober occasion. There is a great deal of sorrow at the ill treatment that the Lord Jesus suffers at the hands of a misguided and self-righteous group, and the last thing we want to do is in any way be self-righteous or misguided, and in many cases the need to feel righteous and the need to blind ourselves to truth is a consequence of fear. Fear is our enemy.

This, I think, is the reason that the story of Peter is so prominently interwoven with these trials, because at a moment where faith and courage are needed, and you can't get any better than the Lord Jesus praying for you that your faith will not fail, but the enemy of our faith is fear. And it is, again, important that we examine ourselves not only to see if we are in the faith, but to take a hard look at ourselves and ask the question, what is it I really fear? What am I reluctant to even think about or consider regarding myself? How I act? What my priorities and my goals are? What is it I'm kind of scared to look into in myself? That's probably the most useful place to look to pray, to ask God for grace, wisdom, and insight, and to pray that Psalm 51 prayer. There is no more useful expansion of the principle of 1 John 1-9 to confess our sins and to receive the faithful and loving forgiveness of God as a result of that confession and repentance.

The expansion of that truth is nowhere more fully revealed than in Psalm 51. It just doesn't get any more clear. It is a prayer that we can regularly pray, and we need the objective truth.

We need a truth that comes from outside ourselves, and when that truth comes, we have to avoid distorting it, minimizing it, reinterpreting it in our own favor, using it in a way that confirms our biases, our bigotry, our insensitivity, our comfort zone. I remember long ago listening to exegetical teaching pastors who would say, if you don't feel your toes getting stepped on once in a while, you need to examine whether or not you're really getting the truth, because the truth of God will confront us. It will give us some painful truth from time to time.

If we find ourselves totally in accord, and everybody is happy here and there, and it's just joy and a song all the time, we're not getting a proper dose of the truth. It is a sword that cuts asunder and exposes what is in the very marrow of our bones, what is at the center of our thought life, and it needs exposing, and it needs cleansing. It needs the washing of water by the Word, but if we are hard-packed soil and the seed of the Word doesn't sink in, it's never going to bear the proper fruit.

We want to be not just a fruitful field, not just 30-fold, not just 60-fold. We're aiming for 100-fold, right? If we're going to be a field, let's be the best possible field, and the only way to do that is to let the hard plow of the Word of God furrow deep, turn up the rocks so that they can be removed, and that seed can have deep roots, abiding roots, and the

stalk and the leaf and the ear will come up, and it is well worth the effort of implanting the seed because of the fruit that it bears. If we're going to do it, let's do it right, let's do it well, let's be overcomers and enjoy those wonderful promises and motivations of the overcomer blessings.

Well, we do not want to be those to whom Jesus speaks as He does in verse 67, If I tell you, you will by no means believe. You think, well, how is that possible for a believer to hear the undiluted truth directly from the lips of God Himself and not believe it? How can you be a believer and not be a believer? Well, here's how, and it is a very rewarding investigation to figure out why. How could someone reach this state? It's not enough to point the finger.

I was musing last night and this morning about the question down through history, Who is responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus? That question has been answered in many ways. I asked the OpenAI chatbot that question last night and got a really good answer. But it's a fruitful question to ask.

It has been answered wrongly down through the years. It has been the basis for anti-Semitism. And in the Christian church, well, the Jews crucified the Lord.

They're bad guys. But rather than looking for somebody else to look at and to point a finger at, it is useful to look at ourselves and say, Is there any way, is there any extent to which I partake of that same kind of blindness, that same kind of fear, that same kind of failure, so that Jesus at the judgment seat of Christ will say to me, I gave up trying to tell you because you wouldn't believe. And when I asked you questions, you wouldn't answer.

Scripture questions us. The Holy Spirit questions us. Convicts us.

And the question is, will we turn? Will we have the humility to accept God's cleansing grace, his restorative grace, his strengthening power, his renewing of our minds and hearts, so that we can indeed reflect the life and words and works of the Lord Jesus day by day in our love for others and our love for God. Having said that, we move on. Once again, we've already covered this from the first time Jesus said it in verse 69.

Hereafter, the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God. Here, he doesn't say, you will see. He just says, after this, the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.

This is simply a factual declaration from the book of Daniel, as we saw. But they choose to take this and twist it and magnify their desire to find an occasion for blasphemy. Is it possible to be found to engage in criminal behavior because you quote the scriptures? In this modern day, could you go on social media somewhere and simply post the content of certain verses of scripture and have your account suspended or be canceled or be

piled on by countless dozens, if not hundreds of people who will tell you how insensitive and backward and wrong you are? It is possible.

What's more pertinent, though, is do we hear scripture and immediately put a spin on it that is in our own favor, that justifies us and condemns others, instead of taking it to heart? There is a feature of the progressive Christianity movement that is very dedicated to and invested in social justice and looking outward to remedy the real and perceived ills of how people are treated based on their ethnicity, their gender proclivities, if you will. And it is taking what it considers to be action and loving interest in trying to fix these problems. And there is a very noticeable lack of self-analysis, of looking for the beam in one's own eye before going out to try to remove moats.

And not to say that oppression and persecution of people for illegitimate reasons is not a large problem, but you can't fix it so long as you have unfixed problems internally, whether you're looking at the church internally or individual believers internally. We can't be a blessing. We can't be salt and light.

We can't be a means by which God addresses those problems and God reaches hearts of those who may be enmeshed in bigotry or insensitivity or hardship or oppression or misuse by the world at large. We cannot benefit people with anything other than the same power that benefits us, that heals us, that restores and renews us, that extracts and eliminates sin and evil in our own lives. Social action and social media posts and finger-pointing and calling out of egregious wrongs doesn't accomplish meaningful good.

The only meaningful good that is ever accomplished is that which reflects the glory of God. And it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit and the light of God's word, and it is on an individual basis. Individual.

This is why Jesus said he didn't say love humanity. He didn't say love society. He didn't say love your city, love your town, love your village, love your state, love your nation.

He said love your neighbor. It's singular. It's individual.

And we have to be transformed individuals before we can be an individual blessing to other individuals. You can't fix a group if you don't fix the individuals in the group. It's really just that simple.

So they all said, are you then the son of God? He said to them, you are the ones saying it. I haven't made this an issue. I'm not running around the country saying, behold me, the son of God.

What was Jesus' message? Change your minds because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He made an issue of his father and his father's promises and the covenant that Israel had with God the father throughout the Old Testament day. He called out lack of fidelity to that covenant, just as the Old Testament prophets did.

He presented the imminent kingdom as the fulfillment of God's promises and said that you're disqualifying yourselves from the kingdom. This kingdom that I keep telling you about, the time is at hand for the fulfillment of these promises, but the kingdom is going to be taken from you and given to those bearing its fruit. The issue was their covenant relationship with God.

And taking one facet of that, which is true, but it becomes a distorted, perverted, corrupted truth that Jesus was in fact the son of God and those with discernment would know that without even having to ask. Nicodemus figured that out in John chapter 3. Nobody could do what you do unless he were from God. They said, what further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth.

That is what happened in Luke chapter 22 verses 66 through 71 that is summarized in our passage of Matthew 27 verse 1. Morning came, the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put him to death. That's what this question and answer session devolves down to. They plotted, they figured out a way to put him to death.

So when they had bound him after this third trial, one before Annas, one before Caiaphas and the nighttime assembly of the Sanhedrin. Now they have this sham formality of, well, now we've done it during daylight and we've condemned him in public and in daylight. So we've satisfied the requirement.

When they had bound him, they led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate, the governor. Now we have the story of Judas seeing that he had been condemned. What they figure is they're going to lead him to Pilate and Pilate has the authority to effect the death penalty.

They have charged, tried and convicted, quote unquote, the Lord Jesus of a death penalty offense, but they do not have the power to carry it out. So they are going to lead Jesus to Pilate and say, we have found this man worthy of death. Now this is not a unique case.

This evidently happened frequently where there were criminal trials and someone who was found guilty of murder and other extremely serious crimes could be convicted by the Jewish court, taken to the Romans, in this case, Pilate. And that sentence would be ratified and carried out pretty much without question. They say, well, we found he murdered these people.

He committed this heinous crime. It's treason, it's this, it's that. Seldom, if ever, did they convict someone of blasphemy and try to use that and try to convince the Romans that religious blasphemy was something punishable by death and it would be in the interest of the Romans to do so.

It's always in the interest of civil government to discourage murder and other capital

crimes. But saying something normally isn't a crime. You can say, well, maybe somebody's not in their right mind.

Maybe they're just delusional, they're deluded. They can say what they like. We used to have the old nursery school truism, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

And you can choose to not take words seriously and just blow them off. Consider the source. Not worth fighting over.

You can say what you like. If it's not true, then you'll be ignored in time. Words have come to have a very great power in the information age, really beginning with the printing press and with the dissemination of books and newspapers and the swaying of large groups of people with public opinion, sort of out-of-court jury trials.

People are tried in the court of public opinion. And so you can see the potential power in this case. So they led him away and delivered him to Pontius Pilate, the governor.

Judas, seeing that he had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. So Jesus has departed. Judas, if you just had the verse that said, when Jesus was arrested, all the disciples fled and were scattered.

You strike the shepherd, the sheep are scattered. Yet you find at least three disciples remained in the vicinity. One is John, who is inside and hears the details of the nighttime sadhedron trial.

One is Peter, who is in the courtyard. And upon his third most profuse curse-ridden denial that he knows the Lord, Jesus looks at him out the window. He is in the vicinity and Judas has remained in the area to see the outcome.

And this is what leads me to side with those who think that perhaps Judas thought he was doing the Lord a favor by forcing the confrontation. And having seen Jesus miraculously deal with opposition in the past, that he wouldn't let himself be mistreated, wouldn't let himself be incarcerated, wouldn't let himself be led away and executed. And when he sees that Jesus does not resist, does not escape, does not overpower his accusers and his jailers, if you will, he suddenly comes to the conviction that his betrayal was an extremely poor idea.

He was remorseful when he saw that Jesus had been condemned. It would appear that he didn't think Jesus would allow himself to be condemned. He has seen Jesus refute the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the priests and the elders time and time again.

And they are confounded and they cannot arrest him for anything. They can't lead him away on anything. They can't convince the people that he is wrong and they are right.

But on this occasion, by the betrayal and the arrest and the forced Sanhedrin trial, which is a first, and Jesus basically answers nothing. He doesn't argue. He doesn't outwit.

He doesn't do anything other than quote Daniel, basically. And he refuses to go along with this blasphemy charge. So they have to basically just force it completely wrongfully.

And when he sees that he is being led away to Pilate, Judas figures, well, this is a horrific outcome. I don't understand how he could have not thought that if he had any notion that Jesus would be led away to be crucified, that he wouldn't have betrayed him in the first place. This seems to be an unforeseen consequence.

And when he sees it, now he is full of guilt, sorrow and remorse. So what does he do? Well, he looks at the 30 pieces of silver and that is manifest evidence of his action, his betrayal, his complicity. And he is sort of with the Sanhedrin in this completely unjustified condemnation and death sentence.

So he doesn't want the money anymore. What could you possibly do with it? So it says he took it back to the chief priests and elders. If you check the other gospels, and I won't go there for the sake of time, it says that he cast them into the sanctuary.

And this is not the temple courtyard where the vessels are located, where the lady put her two mites or where show-offs and self-righteous people held up great bags of money and dropped them into the treasury. That would have been hieron, which is the word for temple. This is the naos, N-A-O-S, which is the sanctuary itself.

He went up in and threw them either into or in the direction of the holy place itself. He tried to throw them in and if they were in a pouch, then he threw them a pretty fair outfield throw-to-home plate to get it to the steps of or into the holy place. That's what the naos is.

It is as though Judas is throwing this money into the presence of God himself. Of course, he can't do that, and this is the environment of the priests. And this is why it doesn't say that the Pharisees or the Sanhedrin picked up this money.

It is the chief priests and the elders. The chief priests are the only ones who can go into the court of the priests and into their precincts and pick this money up. And so they take it back to the rest of the Sanhedrin when they see Judas toss it in.

And he says, and evidently he shouts this out loud. I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, that doesn't establish anything between us and you.

It's another one of these awkward sayings that are difficult to interpret in the modern day. But in the same way, when Jesus says, you have said, it meant something in the day that this is your idea. You're the one talking about it.

I didn't bring it up. I'm not saying it here. And it is neither a confirmation or denial of the truth of it.

It's just, you're the one talking about it. Here, if you take out all of the italics, what to us, look, see. What to us, you see or see to it.

They're basically saying, that's your problem. That's your problem, not ours. So he threw down the pieces of silver in the Naos and departed and went and hanged himself.

Now, how soon did this happen before or after the crucifixion? We're on sort of a separate timeline, a narrative timeline here that may surpass the ongoing events. This is typical Jewish storytelling where once you pick a particular line, you go ahead and take it to its completion. Then you can back up and continue the main trunk of the story after having traced that branch.

So he, at some point, went and hanged himself. The chief priest took the silver pieces and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury because they are the price of blood. How blind can you be when you are the one who took this temple money and you paid it to somebody to betray innocent blood.

Now that it's back in your hands, you don't want to touch it. You can't put it into the treasury. It has been contaminated.

Well, did the contamination not happen when you took it out of the treasury to pay a betrayer of innocent blood or not until he accomplished the betrayal that it paid for? You know, the kind of thinking that says walking this many steps is not working on the Sabbath, but walking that many steps is. You could imagine the rabbis deciding at what point is the money tainted? Well, it certainly wasn't tainted when we had it, but as soon as Judas touched it, that tainted it. And now we can't take it back.

Reminds me of what happens if you buy clothing online and you receive it, you tear open the package, and you can look at it and decide this isn't the color I thought it was. My monitor didn't accurately reflect the shade. It doesn't match something else I have.

It doesn't matter if you try it on. It doesn't even matter if you take it out of the wrapping. If you decide to return it for any reason, clothing goes straight to the landfill.

They don't donate it. They don't resell it. They don't launder it.

They don't give it to third parties. If it's clothing, they have to assume that you took it out of the package, put it on, and wore it somewhere, and it was in contact with your body, and it's cheaper for them to sell you or somebody else another article of clothing than it is to in any way recycle, reuse, resell, or donate that clothing. To wash it, to repackage it, what if the person had lice? What if they wore it to a party and sweated in it and then brought it back? What if they spilled something on it? What if any one of

many nefarious things you can think of might have happened in or around or on that garment or in those shoes or whatever else? So any clothing you return, just count on it.

It's going straight to the landfill, and the cost that they lose for that garment is going to be amortized across all other garments and shoes and such that are sold. That's what happens. Amazon, for example, assumes as soon as that leaves their delivery truck, if it comes back to them, it's tainted.

You see my parallel here? It's tainted. I have to assume the worst about that, and we can't take it back. We could be held liable if somebody else gets this and then gets lice or some other skin-borne disease or there's some liquid on there, and they're going to sue us because you didn't launder this sufficiently.

I took it to the lab, and they found germs or saliva or who knows what on it. They don't want to take that chance. So it is golden until it leaves the delivery truck and is left on your porch or is put in your hands.

From that point, if Amazon sees it again, it is touch not the unclean thing and straight to the landfill it goes. Look it up. That's what happens with this money.

So they say, we can't touch this. So they give it to a third party who finds this field for sale. So they consulted together and bought with those 30 pieces of silver the potter's field to bury strangers in.

Therefore, that field has been called the field of blood, Akeldama, to this day. Very interesting side note there, called that to this day. They like to say that the gospel of Matthew was written late, that all of the gospels were written late after the destruction of Jerusalem and so on.

This would be a very weird thing to have in the gospel that the name of this field where the poor are buried and the strangers are buried would have this name that was not conferred on it until the time shortly after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. And for this gospel to say it is still called that to this day, once Jerusalem is destroyed, they've got way bigger problems than where to bury the poor and the strangers. That is no longer an issue.

That is only an issue so long as you have the standing temple, the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin and the chief priests and the rest of them operating and governing in Jerusalem. It tells you that the gospel of Matthew was written previous to 70 AD, probably previous to 60 AD, previous to a lot of other things that began to be problems in Jerusalem. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah, the prophet saying, and they took the 30 pieces of silver, the value of him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced and gave them for the potter's field as the Lord directed me.

You remember that portions of this are actually in Zechariah and other parts of it are in

Jeremiah and it is cited widely as Matthew making a mistake because the actual content of the pieces of silver and the buying of the field, the potter is in one place, the field and the price is another. And so they say, well, it's an error because it's actually Zechariah. Just remember that the scrolls in the library were known by the first book in the scroll.

So if you've got the Minor Prophets scroll, you can call it Jeremiah and you're gonna unroll it and it's gonna be Jeremiah, Lamentations. It can be Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nehemiah, Habakkuk, any one of those could be in there. But it is a reference to Jeremiah as a starting point.

People understood the relationship between Jeremiah and Zechariah and they didn't have to give a scientifically accurate footnote to every part of the quote. They say, you know, go to Jeremiah, that'll remind you of Zechariah and it's just the way they footnoted in those days. We like these very verbose and accurate footnotes.

That's just not how they did it because they were appealing to people's memories and to the reading of scripture that they heard in the synagogues, where in many cases there would be sections from several prophets that were cited and often these two could have been quoted together. So that brings us now to verse 11. Now, Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him saying, are you the King of the Jews? Once again, Matthew is summarizing what we have in much greater detail in the gospel of John.

And that's what we're gonna pick up next week in the beginning of the three trials, Pilate, then Herod Antipas, and then Pilate once again. But the significance as we close this morning of these two sets of trials is that one is an entirely Jewish show. It is Israel, it is the people of Israel, and they convict Jesus on the basis of their law.

They are misusing the scriptures that God gave them to crucify the Son of God himself. The second set of trials before the Romans is an entirely Gentile show. It is the Roman courts by Roman law.

It is instigated by the Jews, but he would have never been tried by the Romans. You think back to the father of Herod Antipas who sent Roman soldiers to try to kill all of the infants two years old and under when he heard that the King of the Jews had been born according to the wise men. That is Herod Antipas' father who did that at Jesus' birth.

That is Roman soldiers actively sent to find Jesus and kill him. That is one of the first things that happens in the life of the Lord, is Roman soldiers are sent at the instigation of the King of the Jews, Herod, to kill the King of the Jews, the Lord Jesus. And that is how the Lord's life is going to close.

At this point, Romans are going to put the Lord Jesus to death. It's one of those beautiful symmetries. It's beautiful and tragic at the same time.

But the consequences of that and the outcome and the pertinence and application for us

will come next time. But as a closing thought, the Lord Jesus is the Savior of the world and the whole world is guilty before God and it is symbolized with the fact that both Jews and Gentiles are equally implicated and equally responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus. You can't blame the Jews.

You can't blame the Romans. They were hand in glove, arm in arm, cooperating and colluding to bring this about. And it is a symbolic manifestation that there is no one that is not guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

You can't claim a special relationship by covenant. Sin is sin. Evil is evil.

Rejection, blindness and fear. We're going to see how many times fear is mentioned. Not just on the Israel side of these trials, but on Pilate's part, on the Roman side.

Fear plays a central role in what happens. Fear is our enemy. Faith is our antidote.

The shield of faith quenches the fiery darts of the wicked one. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the infinite riches of the life, the words, the example of the Lord Jesus.

We pray that as we reflect on this section of his life, his willingness to sacrificially drink the cup on our behalf in accordance with your plan and purpose, that your Holy Spirit will help us see the application in our own lives, how we should then live, how we should examine ourselves and try to identify and eliminate, in your grace and by your power, those things that would cause us to follow the same pattern. We pray that as a result, we can beautifully and accurately reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, which is itself a reflection of your glory. And in so doing, we can shine his lights in the midst of our generation, draw others to you through the Lord Jesus, and be witnesses to him, both now and in the ages to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.