

Matthew 23-03-05a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege to be with you on this beautiful day. We are continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew.

We are going to be looking at some background and some details in connection with the Roman trials of the Lord Jesus to include some timing that is explanatory. We're going to see what the Jewish perspective has to say about the arrest and trial and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. And all of that together, I hope will conspire to give us a thoughtful point of application for how the sway of emotions, how the pull of the crowd, how envy and the desire for acceptance drives us to strange and unhappy extremes.

And seeing it in this episode as in no other, we can certainly then look at ourselves and try to identify and by God's grace, eradicate these things to the extent that they might influence us. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our study, and we'll begin. Father, it is such an honor and a privilege to be allowed into your throne room to represent ourselves in your presence by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, our high priest, who has made a new and living way never before possible for human beings to directly address ourselves in your presence as we now do.

We thank you for the work of the Lord Jesus. We thank you for the significance of his blood in both the positive and the negative sense. And we pray that as we look at these truths this morning, that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, help us to not only understand the facts and gain knowledge, but from it to draw wisdom and in the hands of the Holy Spirit to have power, renewal, washing and cleansing in our souls and achieving the result of being thoroughly equipped for every good work, being useful for service and function in your plan both now and in times to come.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read our passage.

We're in Matthew chapter 27, and we have seen the three Jewish trials that were two in the darkness and one in the morning to try to confer false legitimacy on this sham trial. They get it done in daylight, but they do not put a day's space between the two trials. They do not follow any of the normal procedures involved with a capital trial or a death penalty.

It's all crammed into a trial. They never do find two or three witnesses to confirm. They construe the simple quotation of Daniel from the Lord Jesus as blasphemy and by sort of acclamation decide that he is worthy of death.

And it is in no way legitimate. It is in no way in keeping with either the law of Moses or the later traditions that were implemented to achieve justice. It is a complete railroad job before there ever were railroads.

That took place in the night and in the early morning hours. He is then sent to Pilate and we pick up in Matthew chapter 27, verse 11. Now Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, saying, Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus said to him, You are the one saying it.

It is neither an affirmation nor a denial. It is simply a notation to the effect, I'm not the one making this issue. I didn't bring it up.

I'm not pushing the claim. You are the one making an issue out of this where I have not done so. While he was being accused by the chief priests and the elders, he answered nothing.

Pilate said to him, Do you not hear how many things they testify against you? But he answered him not one word so that the governor marveled greatly. Now at the feast, the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. And at that time, they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

The Nestle-Allen UBS text adds Jesus Barsabbas, Jesus Barsabbas. Yeshua was a relatively common name, as you find Shimon was a common name and so on. And it is hard to confirm whether this really was Barabbas's name or not.

If so, it is just another point of connection. There is sufficient connection already to see the Bar meaning son of and Abba meaning father, this man's name means son of the father. And for him to be exchanged as an evil convicted criminal for the true son of the father is enough in itself to give us a point of reflection that our choice can have a superficial legitimacy.

And yet on the face of it, you look and say, really, you're preferring a convicted criminal over what everyone understood in their heart of hearts to be an innocent man being convicted on trumped up charges. So Barabbas, therefore, verse 17, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, whom do you want me to release to you, Barabbas or Jesus, who is called Christ? When you look at the parallels, he evidently also adds King of the Jews when he makes this statement, Jesus, Messiah, King of the Jews. There have been many famous paintings made of this moment.

They are the. In various forms and ways depicting this dramatic moment, they are in a category called which is Latin for behold, the man. For he knew that they had handed him over because of envy.

Pilate knew that in the course of listening to these rabbis and priests accused Jesus, it became apparent and evident to him that their motivation was spite, jealousy, envy, that it was emotional and irrational, not logical and fact-based or a genuine need to remove someone who was breaking the law in a way that was a danger to the public or the government or anyone else. It was only a danger to their standing. So this is very

significant.

He knew that they had handed him over because of envy. Last week, we saw that there was fear behind this for fear of the Jews over and over again. They dare not arrest Jesus earlier for fear of the Jews.

They have to do it by night when there is not a danger of a mob. But it's an odd thing. It's dangerous to trust the instincts of a mob because previous instances where Jesus was in Jerusalem and great crowds were following him, they were afraid of the people.

Here, they are going to incite the people in the exact opposite direction. We've seen just the previous Sunday, the tragic entry. These same people are celebrating, throwing palm branches and clothing and hailing Jesus as King of the Jews.

Now, he is being arrested and charged with a capital offense of blasphemy for alleging that he is the Son of God, the Messiah and the King of the Jews. This is their charge. He made himself king.

He's made himself equal with God and so on. So a point to remember here is just because there is a great flow of public opinion in one direction or another, this is in no way a reliable indicator of truth or rightness. Is it true? Is it just? Is it right? Is it moral? Is it ethical? There is a great acceptance of a lot of immoral behavior today and even embrace and encouragement by large segments of the population.

It doesn't make it right. It doesn't make the basis on which they do it true. And we have to be so careful.

You can see the fickleness of the mob before, during and after these events. They handed him over because of envy. Pilate knew this.

While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him saying, have nothing to do with that just man. For I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him. This is only recorded in Matthew.

It is a difficult circumstance to parse because our information is somewhat scarce. She says, have nothing to do with that just man. It literally says nothing between that just man and you, nothing between you.

For I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him. This is in the relatively early morning hours. You would put this at about 7 a.m. with the sham Sanhedrin trial having happened maybe an hour earlier around 6 a.m. because Jesus is going to be on the cross at 9 a.m. And she says a dream today.

She doesn't say a dream last night. She says, I have suffered many things in a dream. Is this a dream from God? Is it a coincidence? Why is it in our scripture? It's recorded here

in Matthew, not by Mark, Luke, or John.

What is the significance of this? All scripture is God-breathed. So what is the significance of Pilate's wife's dream? That's something we'll come back to here when we finish reading. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

This is another point to which we will return shortly. The governor answered and said to them, which of the two do you want me to release to you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate said to them, what then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? Again, we have the title, the Christ.

Jesus who is called Christ in verse 17. Jesus who is called Christ in verse 22. They all said to him, notice they is in italics.

All said to him, it is a unanimous fists in the air, thronging crowds below the balcony as it's depicted in these paintings. All said to him, let him be crucified. The governor said, why, what evil has he done? But they cried out all the more saying, let him be crucified.

Notice they don't answer the question. They demand execution. It is at this point clearly beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond evidence, beyond fact, beyond truth, beyond morality, beyond even basic ethics to stir up a crowd and achieve a desired goal without reference to any objective standard of truth or right.

Let him be crucified. Verse 24, when Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather a tumult was rising. He took water, washed hands before the multitude saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person.

Just a couple of verses earlier, just a couple of verses earlier, we saw the word just from the message sent by Pilate's wife, have nothing. There is nothing between you and this just man. Pilate uses the very same term here.

I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see, see to it. This, by the way, is the very same term that was used when Judas attempted to return the 30 pieces of silver and the priests in the courtyard said, what is that to us? You see to it, it's on you.

Same thing here. I am innocent. It's on you.

That's the colloquial translation. It's on you. Very same words that were said to Judas are now said to the crowd.

You find that back in verse four, 27, four, you can put that beside 24. Once again, verse 25, all the people answered and said his blood be on us and on our children. Then he released Barabbas to them.

And when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. This is significant in a

number of ways. We are appalled at the injustice of it.

The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus is an emotional scene for anyone who looks at it closely, who considers its implications, considering that Jesus saw it coming. The prayer in the garden, if it be thy will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

It is such a sober occasion. We sometimes are so aware and sensitive to those great truths that some of the finer details and the applications that we draw from them are not so easily grasped. And there's a couple of those we want to look at this morning.

One of them I noted earlier in verse 18, he knew that they had handed him over because of envy. When he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent a message and talks about this dream. Think about the warnings that Jesus has given previously about this day and this time.

Jesus warned the religious leadership that if they did not repent from the time of John the Baptist, repent, the kingdom is in hand, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. What should we then do? And John explained it. Jesus explained it.

Jesus warned the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the scribes and the elders and the chief priests of their religious blindness, their hypocrisy, and they had an opportunity to turn. Jesus warned them specifically. It's sometimes hard for the gentle Jesus crowd.

The Sermon on the Mount doesn't have much by way of severe warning and charging with the kinds of things that the woes to the Pharisees draw out. And so people say, well, I like the blessed are the meek and blessed are the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. I like that part.

I don't like it when he's charging people with hypocrisy and telling them they're going to be cast out of the kingdom. And that seems so harsh. And I don't want to dwell on that.

There was a reason for it. Jesus warned the religious leadership time and time again. Jesus warned Herod.

Remember when he says, tell that fox, Herod, he better be careful. Jesus warned his disciples. Jesus warned Judas.

These things must come, but woe to him by whom they come. There were ample opportunities. Everyone had a chance.

And Pilate understands that this is wrong, and he tries to wash his hands of it. The warning from his wife does not dissuade him. It doesn't give him sufficient motivation.

It doesn't convince or persuade him to change the course of events. It would be an interesting come to pass if he had, if he was spooked enough by his wife's dream to

wonder enough to stop, but he doesn't. Despite the warning, Pharaoh in Egypt, in the days of Moses and Aaron, warning Pharaoh, those warnings are not enough to dissuade him.

He has a temporary change of heart, but then he goes back and refuses and so on. So what is the purpose of these warnings? Assuming that this dream came from God, we've seen God communicate with dreams to all kinds of people. Joseph being warned in a dream goes to Egypt.

Any number of occasions you can find where God speaks through dreams on the assumption that this dream is given to Pilate's wife from God, what is its purpose? If you are given a warning and you do not heed it, it establishes accountability and responsibility, doesn't it? You could say, well, I just really didn't know. I had no, I just didn't realize what would happen. Well, if you have a warning such as woe to him by who these things come and you do it anyway, where is your appeal? Where is your defense? Where is your mitigating or extenuating circumstance? You were warned and you did it anyway.

So the responsibility is established. It isn't as though Pilate is unaware. He also knows that these charges are illegitimate when he ascribes it to envy.

He knew that these charges were being brought by the religious leadership because of envy. So A, he knows this is not legitimate, even by the law of the Jews. And B, his wife says, this man is just, I have been suffering many things from a dream I had about him.

And I'm telling you, get out of this situation. Distance yourself. Have nothing to do with this.

The second thing, and by way of application, we should look and pay attention if we find warning from scripture, if we find warning in observation, if we see what happens in the lives of others when they are swayed by envy, when they are swayed, which we have seen. Last week, we saw the role of fear. The Jewish leadership time and again is called out for a motivation of fear.

They durst not arrest Jesus during the feast because they feared the people. They feared the consequences. They fear losing their position.

They fear a change in the status quo. They fear the idea that their way of life might change if the people follow Jesus and no longer follow them. They fear the illegitimacy of their sham righteousness and their hypocrisy is exposed.

They fear exposure. Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Jesus is the light of the world.

And the more Jesus talks, the more they suffer by comparison. And people begin to

question and people begin to defect and people begin to realize the perpetration that is taking place from these leaders. So there is fear.

There is envy. And he cannot, in his own mind, see justification for killing Jesus. He can't.

He doesn't see it. So now you come to where is the courage of your conviction? If you believe a thing, how willing are you to act on your belief? If you perceive a truth, how willing are you to live by that truth, to decide by that truth, to stand by that truth, and to take whatever consequences arise having done so? I want to read you something that I find very interesting. The Jewish Virtual Library, which is an online repository of viewpoint by, about, and for people of the Jewish religion, Jewish persuasion.

They have an article on Jesus, crucifixion, Pontius Pilate, and the New Testament. I'm going to cover most of this in the next nine or ten minutes, because listen with your head and with your heart to this perspective on the events that we are studying in Matthew. The New Testament depiction of Jesus suggests that he was largely a law-abiding and highly nationalistic Jew, and a man with strong ethical concerns.

Like many of Judaism's great rabbis, he saw love of neighbor as religion's central demand. Though many Christians are under the impression that he opposed Judaism's emphasis on law, he actually criticized anyone who advocated dropping it. "'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the law, the Torah, or the prophets,' he declared to his early disciples.

I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the law until its purpose is achieved." The law's purpose, of course, is the universal recognition of God, a goal which neither Christianity nor Judaism believes was realized in Jesus' time or since. Jesus concluded his message with a severe warning. Therefore, the man who infringes even the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 5, 17-19. On at least one specific legal issue, Jesus identified with the stricter rather than the more lenient rabbis. The prevailing school of Hillel taught that divorce was permitted for any reason, while the school of Shammai only permitted it in cases of sexual misconduct.

This is Mishnah Gittin 9.10. The position later attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, Matthew 5, 31-32. The subsequent Catholic ban on all divorce seems to represent an even stricter legal standard than the one Jesus established. A perennially interesting, though probably unanswerable, question is how Jesus regarded Himself.

Did He see Himself as the Messiah? Probably. Although one must remember that in the first centuries of the Common Era, the word Messiah had a different meaning than it has today. Contemporary believers usually think of the Messiah as a holy spiritual figure.

Then it meant a military leader who would free the Jews from foreign, i.e., Roman, rule, bring them back from the four corners of the earth, and usher in an age of universal peace. A century after Jesus, many Jews accepted the military general Bar Kokhba as the Messiah, although even his greatest supporter, Rabbi Akiva, made no claims regarding his spiritual greatness. Indeed, it was precisely because of the military association with the word Messiah that the occupying Roman authorities must have seen Jesus as dangerous and decided to crucify Him.

Let me read that again, compared to what we just read in Matthew. It was precisely because of the military association with the word Messiah that the occupying Roman authorities must have seen Jesus as dangerous and decided to crucify Him. What does Scripture say was the reason Pilate, the Roman authority who made the decision and executed the sentence, what is his motivation? Does it say, as he calls Jesus Messiah twice, that he's afraid that he might be leading a military insurrection of any kind? It's the furthest thing from the historical record, which is Matthew.

People like to say, well, that's not history, that's the Bible. The Bible is the extant, nearly contemporaneous, eyewitness account. It is history.

And this is what history says. Do you see the deflection of responsibility to the Romans by even modern day Jews? Who are resisting the notion that it was the Jews. By the way, just as an aside, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, four Gospels.

Let's work backward. Who is the audience for the Gospel of John? It was written last, well into the first generation of the church, first and second generation of the church. It's written greatly retrospectively.

And John knows that there is an abundance of Gentiles as well as Jews in the early church. John's purpose, it helps to work backward to see if you really remember it. What is the theme? How do we summarize the emphasis of the Gospel of John? It presents Jesus as son of God.

John 1, first few verses, he's the son of God. Luke, is Luke a Jew or a Gentile? He's a Gentile. To whom does he aim his Gospel? Gentiles.

He is himself a Gentile. He has interviewed people after Pentecost, the former treatise. Have I written O Theophilus? Read the opening part of Acts.

Read the opening of Luke itself. What is the emphasis for the Gospel of Luke? It'll help you if you remember John. John presents him as, say it out loud.

John presents Jesus as son of God. Luke presents Jesus as son of man, son of man, son of God. Mark, probably the first Gospel, notes on Peter's preaching by Mark, John Mark.

Short, youthous, immediately this, immediately that. It's an action Gospel, just like Peter

himself. What is the emphasis? What is the theme of the Gospel of Mark? Suffering servant, suffering servant.

Right? Shows Jesus with his compassion. Jesus absorbing disease and wrong. He's the suffering servant.

So now that we've worked our way back, Gospel of Matthew. Who is it written to? Which Gospel has the most allusions to the Old Testament that it might be fulfilled? It was written by the prophet. Who's it written to? Who's Matthew talking to? The Jews.

These people who wrote this article. That's who he's writing to. What is his emphasis? What does he present Jesus as? The King of the Jews.

The conquering King. Conquering King, suffering servant, son of man, son of God. There is a beautiful symmetry in the four Gospels that God inspired to put into our New Testament.

A fourfold perspective. And that's what it takes to even begin to appreciate the Lord Jesus. To even touch the hem of the garment, it takes four Gospels by four different authors from four different perspectives to even begin.

And John, as the last writer, says, I've written these things so that you may believe. But I couldn't find enough paper and enough ink to record everything that Jesus said and did. I can only write these.

And you remember, there are the seven signs around which that Gospel is organized. But listen and be warned about the ease with which we can shift blame, consciously or unconsciously, to someone else for what falls on us. Pilate says, this is envy.

This is wrong. I find no fault with this man. My wife says he's a just man.

I say he's a just man. I've presented him to you twice as the Christ. I'm going to put a sign on the cross that says, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

It couldn't be any more direct. It couldn't be any more clear. All said, let him be crucified.

Let me give you an alternative. How about Barabbas? Release Barabbas. Let him be crucified.

And when you get to verse 25, when Pilate says, I am innocent, this is what we're going to talk about when we come back from the break. Just be thinking about this. Verse 24, I am innocent of the blood of this just person.

What is the significance of the blood of Christ? If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship each with the other and the blood of Jesus Christ, his son cleanses us from all sin. Book of Revelation, those who wear the white robes, which they have

washed in the blood of the lamb. So think about this poignant claim.

I am innocent of the blood of this just person. All the people answered and said, his blood be on us and on our children. His blood be on us.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? The blood of Jesus Christ on us. Is it a good thing or a bad thing? That's a point to ponder as we go to our break.