

Matthew 23-04-02a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 2nd of April, 2023, and we are in Matthew chapter 27. It is apropos on this Palm Sunday that we are where we are in our study.

The events of the preceding week, where we are at the point of the crucifixion are upcoming in terms of their anniversary. And my encouragement is, if you would like a wonderful experience that will deepen appreciation for the events that we commemorate, get a copy of the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah and trace Edersheim's description of each of these days. If you use that as your morning devotional, you will be richly blessed, culminating in Resurrection Sunday, a week from today.

I was tempted to do that here, but I know that you all have access to it and it's even available, I think, for free online. But that is a great way to start the day, thinking about the way the Lord Jesus spent his final week. Even as we spend our final days here on this earth, hoping to sprint to the tape, finish strong and be prepared for service and function in God's future plans and purposes.

But we're going to be picking up today in the middle of Matthew chapter 27. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, what a wonderful privilege it is to be included in your royal family, to be in Christ and therefore to share his sonship, his choosing, his election, his priesthood, his inheritance, his future role in reflecting your glory and his present activity in sustaining his body and interceding on our behalf, enrolling the Holy Spirit for our comfort, our encouragement, our guidance into the truth.

We're so grateful and so privileged. And as we look this morning at these momentous events surrounding the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, we pray that we can come to appreciate it in a way that will be meaningful and helpful to us in fulfilling our role, representing the Lord Jesus on this earth, growing in grace and knowledge, being thoroughly equipped for every good work. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Let's pick up in verse 24. We have seen the three Jewish trials. We have seen the three Roman trials.

And at the conclusion of that in verse 24 of Matthew 27, when Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that tumult was rising, he took water, washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this person. You see to it. And if you see the *to it* in italics there, he is basically asking for acknowledgement from the crowd that it's not his doing, and yet it is his doing.

This is what happens when you adopt your own version of the truth. He has just had a

discussion with the Lord Jesus about what is truth. And yet he immediately forgives himself.

This is a common theme in modern psychology is you have to love yourself, you have to forgive yourself. And this is utter nonsense. My judicial authority for forgiving myself is nil and doesn't enter into anything.

It's not a matter of me forgiving myself, giving myself a pass or deciding that I'm not as guilty as I am. It's ridiculous. It's subjective, it is erroneous, and it distracts and fills the place that should be occupied by God.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me, right? So if God alone can forgive sins, isn't this a point that was made earlier when Jesus told the young man, your sins are forgiven you. And so that you may know that the son of man has power on earth to forgive sins. I say to you, arise, take up your bed and walk.

And this is the charge of blasphemy that was raised to get Jesus crucified is he's making himself equal with God. He forgives sins. Only God can forgive sins.

It's a right point, but they drew a wrong conclusion. And this is the danger of taking what we learn from scripture and then misapplying it or drawing bad conclusions from it. How can you have one Bible and over 500 denominations, each of which has different understandings of what it means? It's because when we have the truth, we then misuse it.

So truth is the issue. Pilate says, what is truth? He goes out and confronts the crowd. They're creating a ruckus, a tumult.

And so when he saw that he could not prevail, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands. He is forgiving himself. He is cleansing himself.

And this is the devil's own lie. We are not in a position, we do not have the authority, nor is there any purpose, goal or accomplishment in quote unquote, forgiving ourselves. It is to God where we look for forgiveness and cleansing.

It is a supernatural activity because sin is against God, against thee and thee only have I sinned. It is God's forgiveness we need. When we have God's forgiveness, we need no other forgiveness in terms of our first requirement to love the Lord our God.

What is the second great commandment? Love your neighbor as yourself, do unto others as you would have others do unto you. And we forgive each other, notably mentioned in the Lord's prayer, forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. So the two outward directions, the two objective directions for forgiveness and for absolution are external, not internal.

And Pilate is just as guilty after he washes his hands as he is before he washes his hands. He has had the testimony of Jesus Christ himself. He has had the testimony of his wife who almost mystically contacts him and says, don't have anything to do with this sham trial.

Don't have anything to do with the execution of this just man. I've been greatly troubled today and I have a strong sense of foreboding. This was an additional factor.

How unusual, how often do you think Pilate's wife would send messengers and say, whatever it is you're doing today, stop and don't do that. And yet on this day it occurs, but he bows to pressure. The reason he is proceeding with the crucifixion is pressure from the mob, pressure from the majority, pressure from the group outside.

Even though nominally he has authority over them, he is the procurator, he's the governor, but he allows the intent of the mob to sway his judgment. Now he is trying to forgive his own sin and justify his own action in caving to that pressure and it is ineffective. So, and it is untrue, it is engaging in a falsehood.

Keep your place here and turn to John chapter 14. We looked at the importance of the truth last Sunday and Jesus declaring to Pilate that this is the reason he was born and this is the reason he came into the world to bear witness to the truth. The preceding evening in John 14, that same issue arose.

We have memorized these first six verses and recite them to ourselves, but I ran across an article recently that I thought made a very good point. This is from a man who is a missionary in Cambodia and is translating scripture and teaching scripture to and for the Cambodian people in their language. And as he was working through John chapter 14, he made this observation, which is a great observation and I wanna share it with you.

You remember the first four verses, where I go, you know, and the way you know is how it concludes. And in verse five, Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going and how can we know the way? And what the missionary pointed out as he was translating this verse is, if you go by the King James or the new King James, Jesus answers by saying, I am the way, the truth and the life. And there is a missing word in 14.

And in verse 16, six other translations, such as the NIV and new American standard and others that are a bit more literal, don't leave this and out. What it should read. And I would encourage you to put a little up caret after the first comma, after way, I am the way and the truth and the life.

You think, well, doesn't the comma serve in elements in a series, and here's the point that was made, and I think it's very good, because our focus here, what are we talking about? The truth. What is truth, Pilate asks, when Jesus says, I've come to bear witness

to the truth. Jesus told his disciples in this verse on the preceding evening that he is the truth, and he bears witness to the truth.

What is the point here? Context. Context. Context.

Jesus is not giving a list of his attributes. Thomas didn't say, Lord, who are you really? And Jesus says, well, I'm the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life. This is in reply to the question, Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way? The stress, the emphasis in this reply is on the very first word. Think about this. Lord, we do not know where you're going.

How can we know the way? Jesus answered and said, I am the way. Not, I am the way. I am the way.

The stress, the emphasis is on the Lord Jesus himself. Thomas is saying, if we don't know where you're going, how can we know the way? Jesus says, I am the way. That answers the question.

I am the way. Now Jesus provides additional information. It's the example that the missionary gave that I thought was a good one.

Suppose a child comes home from a track meet, and his mother says, well, what did you win today? And the child says, I won the 100 meter and the 1,000 meter and the half marathon. The ands supplement with going above and beyond the answer to the original question. What did you win? I won the 100 meter.

Or who won the races today? I won the 100 meter and the 1,000 meter and the half marathon. That's the sense because this is the response to a question. Why is this important? Why do we care? First of all, if we think about John 14, 6, we think, well, the way, the truth, and the life.

Way, truth, life. But if we put the emphasis where it belongs, Jesus says, I am the way. We often are looking for a way to cope, a way to succeed, a way to be fruitful and approved as workmen in God's plan, in God's economy.

What is the way to that destination, to approval, to life with God now and in the future? Jesus says, I am the way. What does that mean? Jesus has given us an example of how to travel the narrow road, how to enter through the straight gate. Looking at him isn't an end in itself.

We don't just want to be Christ-like. He is not the objective. He is the way.

I am the way to the destination he described in the first verses. Don't be troubled. You believe in God and you believe in me.

Both of those are in the same tense. He's not saying, since you believe in God, you should believe in me. He's saying, don't let your heart be troubled.

You believe in God and you believe in me. That's another very important and. You believe in God and you believe in me.

In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places, I go to prepare a place for you. I am going... He's already told him where he's going. Why does he not answer Thomas' question? Lord, we don't know where you're going.

How can we know the way? Jesus has just spent two verses describing where he is going. I am going to the Father's house. I'm going to even tell you what I'm going to do when I get there.

I'm going to prepare a place for you. And having gone, I will come back and take you with me. So that where I am in the Father's house, where there are dwelling places, you may be and dwell also.

Thomas is not listening. Lord, we do not know where you are going. He just told him where he's going.

This is the thing that scares me is to be looking at Scripture and not even grasp what it is saying as I'm looking at it, as I'm listening to it. He spent two solid verses. I'm going to the Father's domain.

There are many places to dwell there. I'm going to prepare a place for you. This means that there is work to be done in preparing it for our accommodation, our occupation.

He doesn't just say, I'm going to go look at it and come back and tell you what it looks like. I go to prepare. This tells us a lot about the Father's domain.

Work is done there. Progress is made there. There are unfinished works that can be finished there.

Jesus says, I am going to the Father's house, the Father's region, the Father's dimension, the Father's space, and I am going to work. I am going to prepare something that is not currently ready. I will go.

I will do that work. That work will come to fruition and accomplishment, and then I will come back and receive you to myself so that where I am, you may be also. Because Jesus is going to occupy and dwell in that heavenly, fatherly domain, and he is going to bring you, quote unquote, with him.

Thomas says, Lord, we do not know where you are going. Which is just cringeworthy. And how can we know the way? And you could imagine just a slight note of impatience.

I am the way. I am going. I am coming back to take you to myself so that where I am, you may be also.

There's kind of a W movement here. I am here with you now. I am going to the Father's domain.

I am going to prepare a place. I will come back and receive you to myself so that where I am, you may be also. And then we are going to come back and have the millennial kingdom on earth.

So, I am not sure what that would be. An N? Maybe it's an M. So you are down. You go up.

Jesus comes back, receives you to myself so that where I am, you may be also, and then we will come and work in the kingdom of the Son. Ultimately, there will be another leg where we go back and dwell in the kingdom of the Father. But Jesus says, I am the way.

You are with me. So, no worries. I am the way.

Then he adds, if that's not enough, I am the truth. And I am the life. Three I am's there.

I am the way. But the emphasis is on the person of Jesus Christ. And that should be where our emphasis is.

When we are looking for forgiveness and cleansing and restoration, we look to the Lord Jesus and his work as the way to the Father. It isn't that Jesus forgives our sins. He has power on earth to forgive sins in the same way that he grants power to his disciples to bind and loose.

What you bind on earth has been bound in heaven. What you loose on earth has been loosed in heaven because you are going to be a representative of the throne room and God the Father who sits on the throne. You will be his emissary.

You will be his operative. You will bring into being his policies, his forgiveness, or his conviction and judgment. But the truth, I am the way.

I am the truth. And I am the life. So interesting for Jesus to say, I am the life.

And within 18 hours, he's going to be physically executed and will be dead. I am the life. And to unpack that is the endeavor of our lives.

To understand how dying to self is living to God. And that the more we die to sin, die to self, die to our old nature, the more we enter into life. And the Lord Jesus Christ has shown us the way.

He has revealed to us the truth. He has come and borne witness to that truth. So as we

come back now to Pilate, who is doing the exact opposite.

He is looking for approval from the crowd. They ask for Barabbas and he assents. They ask for Jesus to be executed and he assents.

They threaten a tumult if he doesn't exceed to their wishes. And so he bends and he bows, but he's going to absolve himself and forgive himself and cleanse himself by washing his hands. Do we want to be Pontius Pilate? Or do we want to be a disciple of Christ? To grant ourselves absolution is not of the truth.

Only God can forgive sins. That's one thing the Jews got right. They just drew the wrong conclusion.

This man is a blasphemer instead of this man must be God and speaking for God. All the people answered and said, his blood be on us and on our children. We have taken a look at the horrific nature of this.

I am sure shallow and ill considered shout. People will say and do things in the heat of the moment, in hubris and with adrenaline, with other people shouting and shaking their fists that they would never do in a room with two or three people. And this is the effect of the mob.

The mob mentality changes Pilate's mind, changes the minds of people that are in the mob. So he releases Barabbas. When he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around him. This is the Roman contingent of security guards and the garrison troops that are provided to enforce discipline, to engage in arrests, to keep people in line with intimidation, with an ongoing presence. This is like an occupied city where tanks are rolling up and down and you see uniformed soldiers on corners with weapons in the modern day.

The purpose of these individuals was to communicate, often in a nonverbal way, that you are conquered and you are occupied and you need to render obeisance to Rome. So the whole garrison gathered around him. There's a mob in the streets.

Now there's a mob in the praetorium. It's a discipline mob, but it is a large group nevertheless. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and a reed in his right hand and they bowed the knee before him and mocked him saying, Hail King of the Jews.

In the Gospels, it says they had twisted a crown of thorns. And it's very interesting. I'm indebted to Adam Clark, writing back over 200 years ago, for this observation about the crown of thorns.

Because the word here, translated thorns, is acanthus. Acanthus. And this is a plant, there's about 30 different varieties of this, but it is not the four inch long thorn vine that you see so often depicted in art.

This is a spiky plant. It does have, but it's more in the nettle or short prickly variety. In fact, the acanthus, its leaves are very pretty.

If you pull up a picture of this in Wikipedia or some botany website, you will see that it has somewhat curved and shapely leaves and flower petals. And these were the inspiration for the capitals in Greek and Roman architecture. When you see the top where you have the capitals that sit on top of the column and you see these curving leaf-like structures that curl down, and there are just hundreds and hundreds of examples, many of these are modeled on the acanthus.

It's kind of a beautiful flower and it is purple. Its flower petals are purple. They put on a purple robe and they weave this crown, and not to diminish or in any way mitigate what the Lord Jesus went through, sometimes in a perverse way it gets romanticized and pushed beyond what it is.

These views of the Lord Jesus with this awful looking, ever since I was a boy I wondered, when it says they twisted this, how could you do this with these four-inch thorns? How could you do that without getting hurt yourself? How do you twist a crown of four-inch thorns? And there are some depictions of Jesus where they shoved it on his head and then they're smacking the crown with a stick. That is all legendary. It is imaginary.

And the acanthus is not that kind of plant. It is not comfortable. It has nettle-type prickles on it, but not these gigantic thorns.

And the purpose of it wasn't to torture him. They had wonderful means of doing that with the flogging, the scourging. You've heard about the cat-of-nine-tails with these lead weights and pieces of broken glass embedded in leather thongs.

And to inflict damage and pain on someone, that's how they did it. This was something at hand in the spring. The acanthus is in bloom all over Israel.

And there are a couple of different varieties of it. One is acanthus molli, I believe, M-O-L-L-I, that is prevalent there. And it has long stalks with these leaves and flowers on it.

And you can quickly take one with just a moderate amount. You could wrap a little rag around your hands or something and you could easily put that into a circle and stick it on his head. And it is a crown of flowers, which as soon as they are picked are going to quickly wilt and die, but they're purple.

They match the robe. Then they put a reed in his hand, which is a mock scepter. And then they engage in this mock worship.

But the point of it is to make fun of him and to mock him, not at this point to inflict further pain. He has already been scourged, and he is standing there bleeding profusely from the scourging. And now this is psychological.

This is the cruelty of human nature. And it is put here not so that we have a garish scene in our mind of blood coming from the Lord Jesus' head. I am sure he was bloody all over at this point.

But it is to remind us of the cooperation between the Jews with their mob call for his execution and their flippant disregard for the consequences. We know he's guilty. If you think his blood's going to go somewhere, let it be on us and on our children, because this will make us righteous.

It's so ironic. They believe that this man is a blasphemer. They've been led to believe that by not considering what the religious leaders are saying, not stopping and reflecting.

And those who are making these calls think, well, I've been told he's a blasphemer. I don't actually know of any examples. I can't quote anything, but the leaders told me he's a blasphemer, so he is.

You see this going on today in our press. We are told that someone is bad or someone is good, and without investigation, without thought, without facts, without testimony, it's just assumed to be true. In these days, it's good enough to just get the accusation.

There are people who are indicted because regardless of how the indictment comes out, they've been indicted, and so they're besmirched no matter what. There have been people in the past 10 years who were accused by the government, and it took them years to vindicate themselves. Ultimately, they were vindicated.

They were not guilty. The whole thing was made up, but their life is ruined. And forever, they are the person who got indicted for a thing, and the fact that it was unfair and untrue gets lost in the sweep of history.

But the Jews believe he's a blasphemer. Therefore, executing a blasphemer is a good thing. So yeah, put his blood on us.

We believe in capital punishment. We believe that criminals worthy of death should die, and we support it 100%. Yeah, put his blood on us and our children, because it will vindicate us as righteous people.

This is scary. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, that cleanses us from sin. Here you have the blood of Jesus Christ being claimed by people who think that the application of His blood to them and their children is a sign of righteousness.

What a twisted truth. This is what Satan does. He's been doing it since the garden.

It's a twisted truth. Somewhere in there, there is a ring of authenticity, and I haven't stopped to consider that I'm taking a truth and misusing it. I'm taking a truth and twisting it.

Did Jesus talk about the temple? Did He say, if you destroy this temple, in three days I will rebuild it? So the temple in three days and rebuilding and destruction are elements, but they get rewoven into something that makes Jesus a priest who destroys his own temple. That doesn't make any sense. He is a life giver who is giving up his life.

There are so many ironies in the accusations, and in the falsehoods with twisted truths, just like this twisted crown. It's a beautiful flower. It's purple, denoting royalty, just spiky enough that you could say, well, crowns in that day didn't have the little points like we think of the Burger King cardboard crown, the one they give kids at their birthday party.

That wasn't how crowns were built in those days. They were garlands, like the Victor's crown, the Stephanos. But this is a Stephanos Akanthoi.

It's a flower crown, perishable, temporary, quickly made, quickly discarded, and was in all likelihood not still on his head at the point that he was crucified because they took away the reed, they took off the robe. They probably slapped him in the head and knocked off this crown that they made. And Jesus is taken to the cross in his own clothing.

We know this because the soldiers who accompany him to the cross then cast lots for his clothes. So after mocking him, they spat on him, took the reed and struck him on the head. They took the reed that they had given him for a scepter.

They took it away from him and slapped him in the head. I suspect this was to knock off the crown and they are deriding and disrespect and shame of the worst sort. And when they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, put his own clothes on him and led him away to be crucified.

So they came out and this is an interesting side note. They found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear his cross. There are copious references to crucifixion in ancient Roman literature.

And one of the quotes is, and it's alluded to in other contexts, that in the same way that someone has to bear the consequences of their bad decisions, a condemned man has to bear his own cross. It was kind of a truism in Latin in ancient Roman day. And it was well known that malefactors had to carry their own cross.

At this point, Jesus is probably so weakened by loss of blood and the beatings that he has taken. And he has had two scourgings at this point. And the cross is large.

We'll see more about that in a moment, but he's not in condition to carry it. And so Simon is pressed into service. We actually know some things about this Simon that are not in this passage.

But think about the trilogy here. There is a Jewish crowd that is guilty and is happy to assume the guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus in hubris and in ignorance. There is a Roman garrison.

The whole garrison is guilty of mocking and deriding Jesus in ignorance and in hubris, we're the Romans, king of the Jews, really? Let's show you how we're going to treat the king of the Jews. And then you have this single individual, Simon of Cyrene. And these points of contact, after the conversation with Annas and Caiaphas, after the conversation with Pilate and Agrippa and Pilate again, things are coming in threes, three Jewish trials, three Roman trials, three Roman interviews.

Then you have these three, two of them are groups and one is an individual. Why Simon of Cyrene? Why is he mentioned? There are a couple of reasons, but here's the point to ponder in terms of our application. How easy is it for us to take truth on a casual basis with a limited amount of thought and press it into our own service? Well, I'm against that because here's a verse.

I'm for that because here's a verse. I am going to be a part of this. I'm going to support that without reflection on the Lord Jesus.

I am the way. I am the truth. If you want righteousness and justice, it is the standard of the Lord Jesus.

This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. People took Old Testament truth. You have heard it said, and all of those things are in the Old Testament and are true, but they were twisted and misused for personal gain and personal ends, personal vindication, personal agendas, personal vendettas.

And Jesus said, I say, you have heard it said, here's what I say. I am the truth and I am showing you the way and the truth that lead to life. If we do not reflect, if we do not slow down and take quality time to invite the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we are going to make this kind of mistake.

We're going to mislead ourselves. We're going to vindicate ourselves. We're going to condemn others unjustly and falsely.

We're going to blame others for things that are our own fault. We are going to be deceiving ourselves. Jeremiah 17, nine.

Our heart is deceitful above all things. There's nothing as tricky. There's nothing that will lie to us as fast as our own heart.

Who can understand it? We have to have something from the outside. We can't judge our own heart. Our compass has got a magnet stuck on the side.

We need the truth that the Lord Jesus came into the world to bear witness to and to be the example of the fullness of deity and bodily form. Look at what is happening to the bodily form of the Lord Jesus at the hands of the Jews, at the hands of the Romans. But you have Simon of Cyrene and he we will look at when we come back from the break.