

Matthew 23-04-09a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a privilege to be with you on this Resurrection Sunday morning. We're going to be continuing our study beginning in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 27 and looking at the information provided in the parallel synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John.

And I am sure that it will warm everyone's hearts to reflect on in particular this year the women who are present and are mentioned repeatedly on this occasion. It isn't always noticed. We're so focused on the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, his sufferings, his words, his three-day stay in the heart of the earth, and of course the resurrection early on Sunday morning, which we celebrate this Sunday morning.

But it is helpful, instructive, and I think fruitful for application to see why Scripture mentions women more so than it does men and in particular the disciples during the course of these events. So we're going to be looking at that a little bit this morning. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin.

Father, we are so grateful. The bright hope that lives and flames within us is based on the event that we celebrate on this day, your resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And because he lives, we live.

Because he is seated at your right hand, we have confidence and the expectation that you will soon send him to gather us to himself and present us in your presence. In anticipation of that day and that time, we labor and endeavor to learn and to grow and to become thoroughly equipped for every good work so that we will be useful for service and function, both now and in the ages to come. And we pray that as we look at this great momentous portion of your plan and purpose as it is revealed in the Scriptures, that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, encourage us, strengthen us, guide us, enlighten us, and motivate us for the days, the hours that remain to us in this life, that we can be useful and good stewards of what you have placed in our care.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. The place we left off last week was with Jesus on what has come to be called the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, which is the path from the Praetorium to Golgotha.

In Matthew chapter 27, we see that as Jesus is proceeding in verse 32, they found a man of Cyrene, Shimon by name, which is the Hellenized version, the Greekified version of the name Simeon. And as you reflect back on the meaning of names in Scripture, this is from the Hebrew verb shamah, which means to hear, to listen. You can go back to the naming story for Simeon when the birth of Jacob's sons is detailed and see the etymology and the origin of this, God has heard.

And you have to think that if the man's name was asked and ascertained during the

exchange where the cross is placed on Simeon's shoulders and he is bearing it either with the Lord Jesus or instead of the Lord Jesus to the place of execution, that the significance would not be lost on the Lord Jesus, that God still hears his, I am sure, silent prayers all along the course of these events. And in particular, on this road, where the ultimate sacrifice is about to be made, the perfect Passover is about to be celebrated. So there are no accidents.

We are given this name for a reason. I think it's also pertinent to think about the unexpectedness and the not quite irony, but when you think of the way God uses people who would not be anticipated by the religious leadership, Jesus' disciples, so many of them are Galileans, and the common expectation is can any good thing come out of Galilee? And yet, so many of Jesus' disciples come from that region. His support comes from that region.

His family is from that region. You think about Simeon, who from his name, I think, is from a Jewish family that had relocated to the area of Cyrene in Egypt decades before. And he is sort of unexpectedly encountered, accosted, and pressed into service.

But he's not a Judea Jew. He's not from Israel. He's from another land.

And ultimately, the final and twelfth apostle, Saul of Tarsus, another Jew, another Hebrew of the Hebrews, but not from around here, not from Jerusalem. He has to travel to Israel and to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of Gamaliel and receive his Pharisaic training. But you could imagine that he would always labor under the implication and the suspicion and the innuendo that, well, he's not quite as good as the other Jews in the school because he was born elsewhere.

And there would always be this lingering sense of trying to prove oneself. You could imagine this might have been part of his motivation in persecuting the early Christians is to demonstrate that he is, in fact, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, despite being born outside the borders of the country. But we're going to continue to see this.

You would expect that maybe the core of Jesus' disciples would be present at the cross to provide some sort of moral support and be visibly in prayer for him. But they are absent with one exception, and it is instead the ladies who are mentioned. So we begin, and we saw this last time in Luke 23, that as Jesus is proceeding toward Golgotha and the women of Jerusalem are coming behind weeping and mourning, that he speaks to them and says, you daughters of Jerusalem, don't be weeping for me.

You need to weep for yourselves because bad times are coming. And if this is what happens in the greenwood, what will happen in the dry? When there is the potential for life and nurture, and this is the result, you have people crying out for a crucifixion and his blood be on us and on our children. What's going to happen when that opportunity is gone? Jesus said when his disciples were criticized for eating and drinking and not fasting

as John's disciples did, he said why would the friends of the bridegroom fast when the bridegroom is with them? When the bridegroom leaves, then they will fast.

Then they will have hardship. And the greenwood and drywood is an allusion to the presence and very soon to come to pass absence of the Lord himself. But these women, when Jesus speaks to them in Luke 23, you have this prophecy and both the people saying, let his blood be on us and on our children and Jesus' prophetic words to these weeping and mourning women.

I want to read you something from Josephus in the wars of the Jews. This is the second volume in the 14th chapter. And there were no governors, no procurators in this region lasted very long.

Pilate has one of the last long reigns, if you will. And he is quickly succeeded by these who rule for a year or two years and then are replaced. And there's an infarction or there's some sort of suspicion of disloyalty or that there's just a real round robin of governors.

But you remember that by the time of the closing chapters of Acts, you have Felix and Festus, actually Festus is first. And then Festus is superseded by Felix and Bernice is in that mix. And she ends up being married to several important people because she is a Herodian queen.

She is Jewish and is influential. She is the wife of two different kings. And she becomes sort of the Cleopatra of her day in a way.

But Festus comes after Felix. I keep getting those two mixed up because they were in kind of rapid succession. But Felix was the procurator and then Festus followed him.

And there were increasing disturbances in the country. But one of the reasons this pertains is the difference between Matthew 27 and its parallels and Acts chapter seven with Stephen and why Jesus is crucified at the hands of the Romans, because the Jews, despite their intense motivation, are afraid to do anything that the Romans will not allow. That pressure seems to be lifted just by the time of Stephen, just a few years later.

And that's why they stone him. And it is because of the turbulence and the instability of the Roman governorship. In fact, it appears that there wasn't even a sitting governor.

There was sort of an overseer. The word that is used to describe him by Josephus is that he was just an overseer. He was kind of a temporary administrator until they could get a new guy out from Rome.

And this emboldened the Jews. And this is one of the things that sparked more and more rebellious activity. And so when they finally did get a governor, then there's a man who comes in Gessius Florus, F-L-O-R-U-S.

And he decided that what he wanted was to put down this rebellious, increasingly fractious population with an overt war of oppression with Roman troops. So, and you will recognize this idea and this principle, even in our modern day, Florus decided that he would provoke the Jews and keep on provoking them until they did something for which he could send to Rome for additional Roman troops and absolutely crush the Jewish population. He hated them.

He persecuted them at every turn. And his desire was, this isn't going to get fixed with just these garrison troops. We need to come in and crush these people.

Well, he couldn't give enough reason for that to Rome. And so he started provoking them. And he was also greedy.

And you can read this. I wish I had time to read the whole thing in Josephus. I just want to get to his final acts of provocation.

So during the month of E-R, on the occasion, the Jews that dwelt at Caesarea had a synagogue near the place whose owner was a Caesarean Greek. The Jews had endeavored frequently to purchase possession of the place and had offered many times its value for its price. The owner overlooked their offers and raised other buildings upon the land to affront them and made working shops and left but a narrow passage.

And it was very troublesome for them to go along to their synagogue. It almost cut off the right-of-way to get to their synagogue. And so the warmer part of Jewish youth went hastily to the workmen and forbade them to build there.

So young Jews are interfering with the workmen building these buildings that are in affront and they're putting in shops. This would be like having pot shops and brothels on the driveway to your church. Floors would not permit them to use force.

So great men of the Jews with John the publican being in the utmost distress of what to do persuaded Floors by paying him eight talents, which is a lot of money to hinder the work. He then being intent upon nothing but getting the money promised he would do all that they desired of him. Then went away from Caesarea and left the sedition to take its full course as if he had sold a license to the Jews to fight it out.

So he's hoping this is going to result in a big conflagration. On the next day, seventh day of the week, the Jews were crowding a pace to their synagogue. Certain men of Caesarea of a seditious temper got an earthen vessel, set it with the bottom upward at the entrance of their synagogue and sacrificed birds.

This provoked the Jews to an incurable degree because their laws were affronted and the place was polluted. Whereupon the sober and moderate part of the Jews thought it proper to have recourse to their governors again while the seditious part and such as were in the fervor of youth were vehemently inflamed to fight. The seditious Gentiles of

Caesarea stood ready for the same purpose.

They had by agreement sent this guy to set up this sacrifice thing and provoke the Jews. So in the upshot, the Jews, although they took the matter very ill, restrained their passion, but Florus acted as if he had been hired and blew up the war into a flame with prodigious clamors called upon Caesar by name, besought him to free them from the tyranny of Florus. The Jews did.

Some of the seditious cried out upon Florus and cast great reproach on him and so on. Here's the upshot. At this time, Florus took up his quarters at the palace.

On the next day, he had a tribunal set before it, sat upon it when the high priests and men of power and those of great eminence in the city came before the tribunal. Florus commanded them to deliver up all those who had reproached him. You've got to read a couple of preceding sections because they really pointed out what a rascal he was.

And they tried to explain that the reason the Jews had gotten out of hand is that some of the young men had gotten too inflamed and don't punish everybody because of the actions of a few insurrectionists, as it were. And he ought to provide for the peace of the nation and preserve the city for the Romans and rather for the sake of a great number of innocent people to forgive a few that were guilty than for the sake of a few of the wicked to put so large and good a body of men into disorder. Florus was more provoked at this and called out aloud to the soldiers to plunder that which is called the upper marketplace in Jerusalem and to slay such as they met with.

So the soldiers, taking this exhortation of their commander in a sense agreeable to their desire of gain, did not only plunder the place they were sent to, but forcing themselves into every house they slew its inhabitants. So the citizens fled along the narrow lanes, and the soldiers slew those that they caught. No method of plunder was omitted.

They also caught many of the quiet people and brought them before Florus, whom he first chastised with stripes, then crucified." Scourged and crucified. Accordingly, the whole number of those that were destroyed that day with their wives and children, for they did not spare even the infants themselves, was about 3,600. Flayed, scourged, murdered in the streets, and crucified.

This is maybe 20 years or so after. This is in the middle of the generation that follows the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus. What made this calamity the heavier was this new method of Roman barbarity.

For Florus ventured then to what no one had done before, that is to have men of the equestrian order whipped and nailed to the cross before his tribunal. These were Jews who had Roman citizenship. The equestrian order were Romanized Jews.

Remember the protection that Paul's Roman citizenship grants him that he can't be

beaten without a trial and he can't be mistreated like ordinary Jews because he is a citizen. Even when he is finally executed, he gets the Roman citizen death of beheading and not crucifixion like Peter, according to tradition. But Florus now disregards even the safety to which many of these Jews would resort in terms of their Roman citizenship, the equestrian order.

He had them whipped and nailed to the cross before his tribunal. Although they were by birth Jews, yet they were of Roman dignity notwithstanding. This just continues and it just gets worse and worse.

You can read Josephus to see that when these people called out, let his blood be on us and on our children within 40 years, within living memory, they're going to get their wish. And it is a principle of the word of God that people who do not respond to God's call and as in the last half of Romans chapter one, choose something else. God will turn them over to it.

And if you want a godless life and a godless future, that is what God will grant. You get what you ask for. If you ask for life, God grants life.

If you ask for separation from God, which is inevitable, ultimate and eternal death, that's what you get. If you say, let his blood be on us in this mocking and pejorative sense, that's what's going to happen. Well, this brings us then in Matthew chapter 27, verse 33, when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is place of a skull, they gave him sour wine mingled with gall.

There's a very interesting set of words in Aramaic and Greek here because depending on which gospel you read, is it sour wine or is it vinegar? Is it gall or is it myrrh? And all of those answers are yes for various reasons. There's no contradiction there. There's an Aramaic word that with the change, if you mash two letters together like in an early copy and you misread it, it changes from gall to myrrh.

And they're virtually identical words and the two letters that could easily be misread, kind of like misreading resh and dalet in Hebrew in the Aramaic script. It's the same thing here. And it is a very cheap wine mixed with myrrh.

And myrrh was a palliative. It was a mild painkiller when imbibed. And so when Jesus tastes it, he will not drink it.

He doesn't want his senses dulled. He doesn't want to be in any way spared from what is to come. He's probably got blood in his eyes.

He's having difficulty seeing or knowing what's going on. But as soon as he tastes it and realizes what it is, then he won't drink it. So then they crucified him and divided his garments, casting lots.

And you remember that the quotation here that follows that it might be fulfilled is not in the original of Matthew. This is taken from John 19 where it is original. And then sitting down, they kept watch over him there.

The four parts of his garments are his sandals, his outer garment, his cloak, if you will, the sash that ties these things together. But his inner garment is the one that is woven without seam. And so after dividing the other four parts between them, he's probably got his prayer shawl sort of thing that you see Jewish men depicted in this day, cover their head when they need to.

But this inner garment, they cast lots separately. Each of them picks what they want out of the four initial things. And then the fifth, they cast lots for him.

Sitting down, they kept watch over him there. They put up over his head the accusation written against him. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

This is written in three languages. And if you had time to follow my suggestion and read Edersheim, he describes in detail the lettering that would have been on this sign. And it's within a couple of letters of each other in terms of length.

This would have been a fairly lengthy sign. It's 22 to 25 letters to put this inscription across. It's not the little square that says I-N-R-I like you see on a Catholic cross.

That's abbreviated for convenience, I think. But this had a full 22 to 25 letter inscription in Latin, in Greek, and in Aramaic. And these were commonly understood languages in the day.

And this sign wasn't created at Golgotha. It was created at the Praetorian before he left. And nobody thinks about it, but this was done for anyone who was crucified.

They didn't just want somebody up there and people scratching their heads as they walked by saying, well, I wonder what he did. They would put the thief, murderer, seditionist, whatever it might be. And so the other two men crucified with Christ also had these signs.

And if you wanted an accurate depiction of the crucifixion, all three crosses should have that sign. That sign was carried in the procession, through the crowds to the place of execution. And it is possible that Jesus was carrying his sign while Simon was carrying the cross.

It is also likely that the procession was greeted with a lot of continued mocking and jeering. And if you've ever seen depictions of hangings in the Old West, and it was a family event, people came to see somebody hung and brought their little kids. And this is the kind of mentality that flourished in Rome with the gladiators and the feeding victims to the lions and so on.

There's such a cruel streak and a weird part of the corruption of human nature that is entertained and captivated and mesmerized by this kind of a spectacle. And so these streets are lined as these three individuals pass through. And so you arrive at the foot of the cross.

And I want to resort to Edersheim here, because I think he does a very effective job of describing and explaining what all four gospels contribute to this. The narrative leaves the impression that with the beloved disciple John, there are four women standing close to the cross. The mother of Jesus, Mary, the mother of Jesus, we know she's there, the sister of his mother, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Now, if you think about this, by comparing the accounts and the named women at the cross, there are other women present, and it's possible that different gospel authors mentioned different ones in this group of women. But Edersheim assumes that the named women at the foot of the cross are all the same ladies referred to in slightly different ways in the gospels. A comparison of what is related by Matthew here in verse 55, many women who followed Jesus from Galilee ministering to him were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, or Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

These are three of the four women. We also know that in Mark 15, 40, and 41, you have women looking on from afar, among whom are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less, and of Joseph, and Salome. So this tells us by inference that the mother of the sons of Zebedee is Salome.

Salome is Mary, Jesus' mother's sister. And this is how we infer that James and John, or John and Jacob, you know, James is actually Yakobu in Greek, and it is Jacob, not James, but John and Jacob, the sons of Zebedee are Jesus' first cousins. It is also widely understood in the early church that Clopas was Mary's husband, Joseph's brother, which makes James the less and Joseph also Jesus' first cousins, in the sense of Joseph being his adoptive father, if you will, and that a substantial portion of Jesus' disciple core was family.

And this also explains why these ladies are at the cross. So here's a challenge question for you. With Salome, what are the names of the other three ladies that are named? Mary, Mary, and Mary.

Three Marys. Mary, the mother of the Lord, Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Of all of the three, the pattern of three that we have been seeing throughout this account, then I think, why are there three Marys? And Scripture is at pains to name them and make sure we know that they are there.

Three Marys. What is the origin of the name Mary? You don't really see it plainly in the Old Testament. What would your guess be as to where it comes from? Who can you think

of that's got a name that's close? You have two choices.

I'll give you one hint from the book of Ruth. Don't call me Naomi. Call me what? Marah, which is the root of this name Mary.

But it occurs before that quite spectacularly in the book of Exodus, first mentioned around chapter 15. And interestingly, not mentioned in the story of the bulrushes. We don't get Moses' sister's name in the interaction with the princess and taking him back to his mother to be nursed.

But later on, Miriam is named as Moses' sister. And her name is sourced in this word, the root meaning of which is bitter. Why would you name a girl bitterness in that day? Well, what kind of a day was it? What are the first chapters of Exodus detail? The hard bondage, the suffering, the persecution, the death, the injunction against male children, and so on.

And so the notion that it is bitter, a bitter time first comes with Miriam. So with that in mind, let's think about the origin of the name Salome. We've seen Shimon, which is to hear.

And you hope that the ladies are hearing and listening when Jesus speaks this prophecy of what is about to happen. They should be weeping for themselves. But you've got the three Marys at the foot of the cross, specifically mentioned along with the other ladies.

And then the fourth, who Mark tells us is Salome. If you just look at the consonants of that name, you can figure out its root in Hebrew. What are the consonants? S-L-M, put a little H after the S. Shalom.

There are any number of names in scripture, including Solomon, but it is Salem. I've been acquainted with a lady in the modern day named Salem. But Shalomay, and the Salome that dances and John's head comes off, that her name, she's a semi-Jewish princess, Shalom.

So if you use the translations now, name the three Marys and then the fourth lady in order, what do you get? Bitter, bitter, bitter, peace. There is bitterness in the earliest days of human history after being driven from the garden. There is bitterness in the days of the patriarchs.

There's bitterness in the days of Israel. And then in Yerushalem, the city of peace, you have the culmination here at the foot of the cross. There is bitterness, bitterness, bitterness, but ultimately there is peace.

You can think about four great eras of human history in the pre-flood era, the post-flood era, the Israel era, and our time, and then the era of peace in the millennial kingdom. I don't know that it's necessarily suggesting that, but there has been a great deal of

bitterness all through human existence until the Lord Jesus came. And through him, peace comes.

There is peace between God and men. There is peace between Jew and Greek. There is reconciliation.

The wall of division has been broken down. The mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus, has brought peace. And there is a sort of a metaphorical reminder and condensation of the threefold work of the Lord Jesus Christ in redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation, which solves three different bitter effects of our sin and our separation from God that are solved by that wonderful threefold work of Christ.

And the bitterness of separation is resolved by reconciliation. The bitterness of the debt that we owe is solved by redemption. And the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in that threefold aspect results in peace, peace with God through Christ, and therefore peace with one another.

But these ladies are mentioned by name. It is no accident. And the words that the Lord Jesus is going to speak in regard to his mother, to John, make a little bit more sense when you understand that Jesus' brothers are not yet believers.

And so to whom is he going to entrust the care of his mother, his cousin is standing right there. And for multiple reasons. Because John is standing there as a disciple who is unafraid to be associated with Jesus at his crucifixion.

Women could kind of fly under the radar and not expect to be arrested or viewed as a threat. And so the women who crowd at the cross and stand by the cross are far more numerous than men. Because men could be implicated and suspected and arrested and there was great fear.

The only man mentioned that isn't a Roman and a part of the crucifixion party is John. And it is significant for multiple reasons. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll continue our look at the events that precede the event that we celebrate on this wonderful Resurrection Sunday.