

## **Matthew 23-04-30b**

We're ready now to resume our study. We're looking at the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, and we spent some time in the first session looking at the uniqueness of the dedication expressed by John the Baptist and by the Lord Jesus. And it's interesting to me on this front, and this is a bit of a personal understanding.

You could call it a speculation perhaps, because I think that the dedication that the Lord Jesus had to his father's plan and purpose, our father's plan and purpose, was a kind of dedication that is echoed in the Nazarite vow, but actually exceeds it. And it was personal, it was individual. It didn't need to be expressed in a ritual form.

I think Jesus was able to eat and drink as he did. If his dedication was greater than John the Baptist, then why were his outward signs of dedication not greater? Why was he not a formal Nazarite with uncut hair, never touching the fruit of the vine, never coming near a dead body as Jesus did on several occasions? You could perhaps explain that away and say, well, but if he raised him back to life, then the energy flowed in that direction and he could not be corrupted by death. But the instruction in number six is pretty clear, do not touch a corpse.

And Jesus could have done in every case as he did with Lazarus and simply speak them back to life. But he grabs the little girl by the hand. He touches the stretcher as the young man is being carried out of town to be buried.

And time and again, it is clear that from a formal point of view, Jesus was not under a Nazarite vow. I think his vow to God, his dedication to God, exceeded it and went beyond the ritual. The reason I think this is important to note, and it was brought to my mind as we're looking at the issue of the sour wine and why did Jesus not drink it one time and drink it another? And I think our best understanding of that was what we discussed last week in terms of each of the preceding times that it was offered to him at the beginning of the crucifixion process, it was drugged.

One drug, hemlock or gall, would have killed him too soon. The myrrh, which was a painkiller and a dulling agent would have made it last too long. Jesus was in possession of his faculties and he decided when he would dismiss his spirit.

And it was not until his work was complete. And in the same way, we should have an understanding of what God's work is for us. If one of the oldest sayings I can remember hearing from a pastor of days gone by was, if you are still alive, God still has a plan for your life.

God takes us home when his plan for us is complete, not a second sooner and not a second later. Departing too soon, departing too late, taking extraordinary measures to extend life Ordinary measures to extend life are fine, but each of us has to determine

before God, what is too much? And many times people will file a DNR, a do not resuscitate order or place their fate if they're unable to respond and make decisions to give a medical proxy to someone who can speak for them and ensure that extraordinary medical measures, which the scientific world can provide, this is a choice. And we do it as unto the Lord.

And my choice may not be your choice. Your choice may not be someone else's choice. What we do, we do as unto the Lord.

And it goes back to the theme of our first session this morning, which is whatever your understanding is, are you diligent and faithful to carry it out as unto the Lord? Paul says, some people observe signs and seasons and days and years. Others observe every day alike. Some people won't eat meat offered to idols.

Others will. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. I cannot stress too much how important it is.

Rather than looking around, trying to find doctrinal orthodoxy and did you get this one exactly right? And what is your position on that? And let me read your church statement of faith and see whether or not you think the rapture is timed this way or that way. Or what do you think about this particular issue or that particular issue? I think sadly and egregiously misses the mark. Our calling is that of a steward.

It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful. Whatever it is we've been given stewardship of, our life, our circumstance, the people around us, our job opportunities, our responsibilities, whether it's in relationships or in friendships or some role or function in society, that we be found faithful. And faithfulness to that calling often means that the crowd is gonna play a dancing tune and we don't dance.

The crowd is gonna call for mourning and we're not sad. Jesus was so accused and we now represent him on this earth as his body. And we shouldn't be shocked and surprised as though some strange ordeal faces us.

And we're told this in the New Testament. Don't be surprised as though something has slipped through the defenses and the wall of fire that God places around us. Whatever we face, whether it's physical, whether it is emotional, whether it is social, whether it is spiritual, whether it is economic, relational, whatever it may be, it is calibrated.

We're never tested above what we're able to bear. There is always some feature, some provision from God that enables us sometimes to be delivered out, sometimes to be delivered through, sometimes to remain in a situation indefinitely. We entrust ourselves to the hands of a faithful creator.

This is what the Lord Jesus did from birth to death. The very last thing he is going to say is emblematic of his entire life. Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit.

That is a choice. It's not an inevitability. From beginning to end, our choice is on the line.

Our priorities, our goals, our values are on the line. And if we do not examine them, the unexamined life is fatal. But if we're going to examine, we need the tools and we need the standards.

How are you going to assay gold or any other kind of valuable material if you don't have some sort of standard? I like to think it's fun to make bullets. I love making bullets. And some of you have been very generous in providing some of the materials to do that.

And so if you're melting lead, you need bullets that are soft, if that's what the weapon was designed for, but not too soft. Too soft and you leave lead behind and leading in a barrel is a very egregiously bad thing. But if they're too hard, they will shatter or fragment.

Being too hard, they can damage the barrel of a rifle that was made for soft lead bullets. They're not made for copper jackets. They're not made for other things.

So how do you compose lead? And then how do you test the lead to see how hard it is? Is it too soft or too hard? And there are expensive little gizmos. We used some of them at the Naval Academy for testing hardness. This was a part of naval engineering.

What are you gonna make the frame of your ship out of? Recently watched again, the Titanic movie by James Cameron in 3D. And if you've had any training in engineering of ships and watertight compartments and structure and skin and rivets and so on, that is a fascinating case study in what happens to materials such as the skin of the ship where water temperature was not taken into account. They have examined the hull and discovered that rivets that were used were not the proper alloy.

And the plating of the ship gave way when it struck the iceberg in ways that it should not have. Famously, the watertight compartments didn't go all the way up and seal. And with the ship going down by the bow, the water began spilling over the top of those.

But to have a standard by which to measure the hardness of a material, the durability, how far will it stretch before it breaks? I well remember the machine where you would clamp these little billets of metal that had a very precisely graven slot or groove, a little V-shaped indentation in this billet. And then you had a gripping machine that would grab it at the top and the bottom and measure in a very precise calibration how much force was being applied until at that groove it separated. I think about that when piano strings break because a little pit of corrosion is just like that little groove.

And here I am tightening a string, and all of a sudden that string separates because there's a flaw in the outside integrity of that string, and it quickly splits all the way through, just like scribing glass. We need a standard. The standard is the word of God.

How do I know if my dispensationalism is correct? Does it need revision? Does it need modification? The very simple measure that Jesus gave, by their fruits ye shall know them. I am not nearly as concerned in my converse with many, many believers across a month. I talk to people three or four days a week, out and about, every different denomination and some cults that you can imagine, every different kind of lifestyle.

I've got customers that are gay. I've got customers that are completely atheistic. I've got Jewish customers.

There's Mormons, there's Jehovah's Witnesses. There's just every different stripe you could think of. But the measure is what is your faith doing in your life? If your covenant theology or your dispensational theology, if you're charismatic, if you're straight-laced, if you're just an old, hard-shelled, dogmatic person, how does it work itself out in life? This is what the judgment will be.

Not the judgment of the world. Are you dancing as we pipe the tune? Are you mourning when we tell you it's time to grieve? You should feel sorry for this. You should feel sorry for this group.

Here's a country that got attacked. You should feel sorry for them. Nothing we do is too much for these people because you should feel sorry for them.

And you should be angry and be ready to dance on the graves of the other side. And you should think this and you should reject that. You should approve this and you should proscribe that.

You should practice this and you should refrain from that. We'll tell you the tune. Dedication, as John the Baptist had and as the Lord Jesus had, transcends rules and gets to the heart of the matter, which is where is our dedication? I think it is interesting that we respect the principle in this church of baptism without feeling the need to practice literal, physical water baptism.

We respect the principle and deeply regard the truths of the Lord's table, the bread and the cup, but they are a daily observance in our heart and in our soul that doesn't require a physical expression. I believe that Jesus was a Nazarite that exceeded and transcended the very simple prescriptions of Numbers chapter six. I think John the Baptist did the same thing.

John, as the last of the great Old Testament prophets, took the literal observance to the limit. Baptism, separation, very restrictive diet, not cutting his hair, not having any physical relationships with women and not touching any dead bodies and so on. Jesus put that in a spiritual context and in every area transcended it.

Where there was death, he converted it to life. Where there was corruption, leprosy, disease, he would touch and heal. And this was what the Nazarite vow was supposed to

teach and supposed to represent.

These rituals, whether it is baptism, whether it is not cutting the hair, whether it is refraining from touching that which is dead, which as you recall, was also required for priests, the sons of Aaron. Coming in contact with something dead was a real problem for them. But these were all shadows, teaching pictures to bring us to Christ.

And his dedication transcends and fulfills at an entirely exponentially new level those pictures, those shadows. And I find it particularly compelling that the sign on the cross at which we are looking in Matthew chapter 27, do you remember what is written on the cross? It is mentioned in all four gospels. So is it important? Is the sign on the cross important? What exactly did the sign say? This is your trivia quiz question.

What were the exact words on the sign on the cross? All four gospels talk about this sign that Pilate had written that was carried through the streets along with the cross and then posted above his head. What did it say? Matthew 27, 37, our passage set up over his head his accusation written. This by the way precludes all of the theories about the cross.

We're gonna talk about the cross in a minute. What was the shape of the cross? Many times people have said, well, it was a T. Can't be a T because the inscription is over his head. You got to have that piece of the post up above his head onto which you can tack the sign.

Matthew says over his head his accusation was posted. Matthew says, this is Jesus, the King of the Jews. This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Mark chapter 15, verse 26, the superscription of his accusation was written over the King of the Jews. The King of the Jews. That's the portion Mark records.

Luke 23, 38, a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew. This is the King of the Jews. John, an eyewitness who stood at the foot of the cross for quite some time in chapter 19, verses 19 and 20 says this, and Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross.

And the writing was Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. I seriously doubt that John would add something to what was on the sign.

I think the other gospel writers could give the essence or portions. This is along the lines of other gospel accounts we've seen where, was there one garrisoned demoniac or two? Was there one blind man crying outside of Jericho or two? Well, if there are two, you can get away with talking about only one of them. And if there is a sign over the head of the Lord Jesus, you can give some or all of the words.

You can't really add to the words something that isn't there. So the full text of the sign,

according to John, was Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Matthew drops the of Nazareth, Mark and Luke drop his name and simply record the King of the Jews portion.

What is common to all four, therefore the most important and central idea? The King of the Jews. By the way, when it says in Luke and John that it was recorded in three languages and Greek and Latin are two of the three and then the third is listed as Hebrew without going into a lot of detail, this is the language of the Hebrews and it was Aramaic. Aramaic was the language spoken by Jews in this day.

There are people who want to quibble and say, no, when it says Hebraisti, that means Hebrew and they used Syriacos for the Syriac or the Aramaic. It's the language of the Hebrews. And in Hebrew, doesn't mean Hebrew, it means Aramaic.

It is, it's like saying, well, it was written in American and French and German. American is English, but you don't have to call it English. You can say American.

It's similar. Why am I belaboring this? I am especially attracted to the full text of the sign written in three languages, but especially the Aramaic. There has been speculation.

You can write this in Aramaic where Yeshua begins with a Y and then you can say Yeshua the Nazarene, which would be Ha-Nazaros and that would start with an H. If you're following me here, we've got a Y and an H. And then if they said, and, that would be a wow. And then Udion, Udion or the latter part of that, Yehudi would have an H. So it'd be Y-H-W-H. And the first letters of these four words would spell out the Tetragrammaton.

And it's an interesting idea. I doubt it. I think if that were something we should conclude, it would be given.

We are given the Aramaic, Talitha Kumi and other examples. And if that were important, it would have been set down in writing that way. But what I'm more interested in is Jesus of Nazareth, which only John records.

And the vowels in both Hebrew and Aramaic for Nazarias or Nazaria, Nazoria, sometimes it's an Omicron, sometimes it's an Omega, but in the original, in Hebrew and Aramaic, that name, that town name is N-Z-R. And N-Z-R are the same consonants as Nazir, Nazirite. And it is actually more of a stretch to understand the notation in Matthew that when Mary and Joseph moved to Nazareth, this was to fulfill this description, the Old Testament, he shall be called a Nazarene, which you can't find anywhere in scriptures.

They say, well, this is Netzer, the root shoot from the stump of Jesse, but that is N-T-S-R, Netzer. And it still works because Hebrew is so fond. Those who use Hebrew and wrote scripture were so fond.

And I think God is fond of wordplay. And so Netzer being the root shoot. And if you have Jesus, the branch, and here he is on the tree, that is a meaningful, here is the branch,

but cursed is anyone who is hung on a tree.

And in the later New Testament, as you recall, he bore our sins in his own body on the tree. And the cross is called a tree. And Netzer is a branch.

Nazar in Hebrew means to consecrate, to dedicate. That's the concept of Nazir. It also means to be watchful.

If you are consecrated and dedicated, then you are very careful and watchful to observe. How many times was Israel told, be careful to observe all that I have commanded you. God says, after delivering the law, be careful to observe all that I have commanded you, to be observant, to be watchful, to be dedicated to something specific.

And when you're watchful and dedicated and invested in something specific, you're off the beaten track. This is not mainstream. This is something specific and unique in many cases.

And this word group is all related. And the branch, the offshoot, is connected to the main thing, but it is a branch. Remember Paul in Romans talking about the domestic olive tree representing Israel, but branches were broken out because of unfaithfulness, unwatchfulness, not representing the tree as a branch and being dead.

These branches were broken off because of faithlessness. It says unbelief, but it's faithlessness. This is not a tree of salvation.

This is a tree of production. And it's doubly interesting to me, given the Nazarite vow and abstaining from grapes, that Jesus, just before the crucifixion in the prior week, doesn't go to a grapevine looking for grapes. He goes to a fig tree looking for figs.

But back to our word group, Nazar, here on the cross, you have Yeshua, Nazari, Nazarias, Nazarioi, some version. Nazareth is spelled three different ways in scripture. And Nazarene or Nazarite, or in the sense of coming from Nazareth, is spelled two or three different ways.

The essence of it is N-Z-R. And it forces you to look back at the roots. And it is Yeshua, the dedicated, Yeshua, the watchful, Yeshua, the branch, Yeshua, the fully invested, all in, King of the Jews.

King in Hebrew, you may remember, is Melech. And Udayon or Yehudi would be closer in Hebrew as the word for Judah. And those who are Judahites, they came to be known as Jews because all that was left of ancient Israel was Judah.

But this sign over the cross, as John stood there contemplating it, he thought it was important to include the word that Pilate had written, Jesus of Nazareth. It was designed to be a pejorative. Remember, Nathaniel, can any good thing come from Nazareth? It

was ill thought of because it was Galilee of the Gentiles.

They were kind of a mixed group. They weren't thought to be pure. They're north of Samaria.

They're further distant from Jerusalem, even than the Samaritans. How good can things be up in that region? And Nazareth being one of the principal cities, Nazareth off to the northwest, Capernaum right on the Sea of Galilee, but Galilee of the Gentiles. Can any good thing come from up there? And so Jesus of Nazareth, is it a pejorative or is it a compliment? Jesus, the dedicated, the branch, the watchful, the careful to observe all things.

But it's no accident that this is over his head and all four gospels record the sign. The common denominator is the King of the Jews. It is a mockery by the Romans and yet it is absolutely true.

That which is mocked, not just by the Romans, but by the scribes, the Pharisees, the onlooking Jewish people are looking at this title in mockery and yet that which is mocked is true. We think about our own lives. There are people who don't understand our priorities, don't understand our values, don't understand our dedication to endeavoring to please God in our thoughts and our words and our actions.

And yet Paul says, the things that I thought were gain to me, that the world considered attainments and compliments, I consider scubala, I consider loss. Those things are refuse, afal, O-F-F-A-L. And I gladly let go of those things for the sake of Christ, for the cause of Christ.

Let me conclude by reading a little bit about crucifixion proper. This is from your International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. The scripture doesn't describe the details of the process of crucifixion because in the days when these accounts were written, everybody knew it.

Everybody had seen it multiple times. We're at a historical distance and it's good to review. I'm just going to sample a few things.

In Roman times, crucifixion was already the punishment of slaves as early as the Roman Republic. Plautus, the first writer to describe Roman crucifixions, considers slaves to have been crucified from time immemorial. This penalty was soon extended to include foreigners and robbers.

The gospel accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus together with two robbers. For other examples of crucifixion of robbers, you can see Josephus, Petronius, Apuleius, Aesop. It was applied most extensively in the provinces more so than in Rome proper.

The connection between slaves and robbers was natural since it was from the ranks of

runaway slaves that bandit gangs most commonly replenished their numbers. Josephus witnessed many gruesome crucifixions in connection with the siege of Jerusalem, characterized it as, quote, the most wretched of deaths. Throughout his writings, there is a consistent picture of the excessive use of crucifixion for the pacification of seditious provinces.

The procedure. Some form of torture prior to crucifixion was customary among the Carthaginians and in the form of flogging was the normal procedure of the Romans. Whatever else may have been done to the victim prior to crucifixion, there was at least a flogging to the point of making blood flow.

In actuality, this hastened death and thus reduced the extreme agonies that intensified as long as the victim endured on the cross. As the next step in the process, the victim carried his own cross beam, if this form of cross was used, to the place of execution where the upright stake had already been erected. Then on the ground, he was fastened to the beam with arms outspread, usually by ropes, less commonly by nails.

The beam and body were then lifted into place on the upright. A small wooden block called a *sidicula* or a wooden peg positioned midway on the upright supported the body weight at the buttocks. This feature was extremely important in cases of nailing since it prevented the weight from tearing open the wounds.

Once the condemned was thus immobilized, he was left alone, unable to attend to bodily functions, unprotected from inclement weather or flies, and because the place of execution was usually some public street or prominent place, subjected to abusive words and mockery from passersby. Often the body was left to putrefy on the cross and become the prey of carrion birds to complete the utter humiliation. It could be claimed for burial, however.

The extreme dishonor that lack of burial represented, especially in Jewish circles, can hardly be exaggerated. It was not unusual for a tablet identifying the crime to be hung on the condemned as he went to the execution site then attached to his cross for all to see. The first skeletal remains identifiable as those of a person crucified discovered in Jerusalem in 1968 appear to raise as many questions as they answer with regard to the details of the methods of crucifixion.

Ossuary remains from a first century AD tomb unearthed at Givat HaMivdar in Jerusalem surprisingly included the two heel bones of a crucifixion victim still fastened together by a single iron nail. The nail, long and bent over at the point to a length of nearly an inch, also carried fragments of a plaque of acacia or pistachio wood between the nail and the heel bones. On the bent point of the nail, minute pieces of olive wood were detected.

It appears certain from this evidence that the feet in this case were not fastened to the upright post of the cross because the gnarled wood of the olive tree would hardly be

used for a cross upright. The length of the nail suffice for joining two heels but leaves nothing for attaching them to the cross. Assuming the point of the nail could have been driven into the cross upright, a nail of its thickness could hardly have been bent by a knot in the olive wood.

It is likely then the heels were joined between an acacia and an olive wood plaque with the nail deliberately bent over the bottom of the plaque to hold them securely. Depending on how one reconstructs the exact conjecture of the heel bones, the victim's legs would have been either adjacent or open. The strong likelihood that the feet could not have been affixed to the cross favors the open position for this case." What they're basically saying, and you can go on to read that, is it is possible that it is very commonly represented that Jesus' feet were crossed and a single nail was placed through them.

But there are drawings from the first and second century of people being crucified and their feet were nailed to the side of the upright and the nail driven through the heel bones, such as they found. There could have actually been the sign with this man's crime, not over his head, but at his feet. And they drove the nail through one of his feet and through this sign and then into the cross proper.

And they couldn't get the nail out of the heel bone when they buried this guy, and it is still there. You can see pictures of it if you look. But the gruesomeness of this death can hardly be overestimated.

But Jesus understood timing. He understood the pattern of description that is found in Psalm 22 and also in the Passover lamb procedures. And as Christ, our Passover, sacrificed for us at the time that the sacrificial lambs were being slaughtered for cooking, and then you got to cook them before the sun goes down because you can't do that work on a high Sabbath.

So the lambs were slaughtered between the evenings at 3 p.m. This is in addition to the morning and evening lambs that were always sacrificed at the temple. This is a special sacrifice at 3 p.m. Jesus knew to the moment when his work would be complete because he knew the significance of the Passover. He knew the significance of the blood.

This is what he emphasized to his disciples on the preceding evening. And he didn't want either hemlock or myrrh in his system to in any way interfere with the perfection of his work. God created the darkness from noon to 3 p.m. And as that darkness was lifting, Jesus knew his work was finished.

He said it is finished and he dismissed his spirit. He decided the moment of his own death. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice.

He was not helpless. And I don't believe he was alone. We are seeing in Proverbs where it says that God does not forsake the righteous.

And there was never one more righteous than the Lord Jesus. And in fulfilling the plan of God, as Bob Thiem so strikingly pointed out in a pastor's conference I went to years ago, human strength doesn't accomplish the plan of God. The plan of God is accomplished in divine strength.

And in the same way that he did everything else, Jesus offered this sacrifice under the guidance and with the power of the Holy Spirit to sustain and to enable his humanity to accomplish the perfect will of God. And I think, my God, my God, to what have you left me is a better understanding of Eli, Eli Lama Sabachthani. Looking from his vantage point at this mocking derisive crowd, the only ones who could be excused were the soldiers who did not know what they were doing.

But the others, because you say we see, your sin remains. And even Jesus from the cross cannot forgive those who will not see. There's none so blind as he who will not see.

We need to be humble enough and receptive enough to see. And in our dedication to God to be correctable, to be rebukeable, to be instructable, to receive the teaching of the word of God with its purpose of supernaturally renewing us and cleansing us by that renewing. The washing of water, the regenerative power of God's word, it has to be let in.

You can study it for a lifetime. You can be a Pharisee, you can be a lawyer, you can be a scribe and miss it. It isn't the exposure to the word that does it, it is its penetration, its depth of sowing into the soil.

If it sits on the surface, it is only gonna be plucked away from beginning to end. And I'll close with the happy note that our Christmas study, studying the tower and where they raised the Passover lambs and the sacrificial lambs, and that that's where Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes and that's where he was laid. That's where the shepherds found him.

They knew where to look. He was the dedicated lamb and fulfilled that to the letter on the cross. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you so much for the privilege of entering into the hallowed sanctuaries of your word to see the revealed truth and the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ in its fullness. We pray that as we reflect on his example, that we can take up our cross and follow him in dedication, follow him in looking to you for guidance and for the purpose and plan for our lives. And in so doing, we can represent him on this earth both now and in the ages to come.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.