

Matthew 23-05-14a

Good morning on this Mother's Day morning. Welcome to Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 14th of May 2023.

We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 27. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we will resume. Father, we thank you for another opportunity to spend this time together, being united by the bond of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ, nourished up from the words of truth that are contained in Scripture, and seeking to be thoroughly equipped for every good work to develop our love for one another, for those around us, and most of all motivated by our love for you.

We pray that as we examine this portion of your Word together that the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, comfort us, encourage us, and strengthen us, and prepare us for obedience and for function and for usefulness in reflecting your glory and representing the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We, as I said, are looking at the 27th chapter of Matthew and everything related to this momentous event of the crucifixion is contained within this relatively short chapter and most importantly we're 30 verses in before we reach the crucifixion. So what is the nature of this account? In verse 29, they twisted a crown of thorns, they spit on him, they strike him, they mock him, and then they lead him away to be crucified. And in verse 32, you have Simon of Cyrene who is compelled to bear the cross.

This, as I mentioned previously, was usually the cross piece. The upright poles were often permanently ensconced on the hill just to save time. They wouldn't want to dig a hole and insert a vertical pole and try to steady it and make it solid enough to bear the weight of a human being.

So there were usually a number of these vertical pieces already installed and it is the cross piece, the horizontal piece, to which they would affix the person to be executed and then raise this cross piece up and affix it to the vertical. And so it is this heavy beam, this horizontal beam, that Simon would have carried, that Jesus would have been nailed to. And then as they hoist this beam into place, perhaps it was slotted, as you might expect, and affixed.

And then this guard is set. They offer him the sour wine mingled with gall. There is a separate sour wine offered with myrrh.

And one of these would have hastened his death, the other would have extended it, and he refuses them both. Then in verse 35, so understated, so simply put, they crucified him and divided his garments, casting lots that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophet. 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. Two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads, this is what we noticed last time, saying, you who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself.

If you are the son of God, come down from the cross. The first suggestion that Jesus end this proceeding prematurely with power that he possesses, just as in the first temptation, if you are the son of God, turn these stones into bread. If you are the son of God, cast yourself down from the temple.

Likewise, the chief priests also mocking with the scribes and elders said, he saved others, himself he cannot save. If he is the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. And you get the idea that this would have been Satan's great joy to see Jesus refuse to endure this unjust execution, refuse to drink the cup that the father had given him.

And this seems to be Satan's somewhat frantic attempts to stop this from happening because he recognizes that this is going to be the strategic victory. And so he is planting this suggestion in the human mind of the Lord Jesus and trying to supply reasons, justify yourself, vindicate yourself, show yourself to be who you are and who you claim to be. And the way to do this is to come down from the cross, to depart from the plan and purpose of God, to violate your identity by seeking to demonstrate your identity.

And this is so often the temptation for us to try to justify ourselves, vindicate ourselves, explain ourselves in the eyes of others and in the very act of doing so, we compromise who we really are in Christ. The Lord Jesus does not succumb to this temptation, just as he did not succumb to the temptation in the wilderness after 40 days of no food in great physical extremis. Here he is in great physical extremis, but he does not succumb.

He does not become subjective. He doesn't let these blasphemous suggestions enter into his mind and change his focus on the plan and purpose of God. For the joy that was set before him, he endures the cross, despising the shame.

And that is why he achieved the victory and is now seated at the right hand of the father. If he is the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. Of course, this is not true.

People who do not want to believe, there is no amount of evidence that will convince them. If raising Lazarus from the dead did not convince them, remember Jesus speaking in Luke 16 in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, send Lazarus to my brethren, so that they will not come to this terrible outcome. And Abraham tells the rich man, they have Moses and the prophets.

Let them hear them. If they will not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they

believe someone who is raised from the dead. And the evidence in scripture is sufficient.

You remember the road to Emmaus where Jesus opens the scriptures to the two men and shows them all of the things concerning himself in Moses and the prophets. That is sufficient witness. These people have rejected it.

If Jesus did come down from the cross, they would not believe it. And it puts you in mind of Richard Dawkins being asked, what would it take to convince you that there is a God? And he said, well, I used to think that there could be a sufficient demonstration of God's presence or God's power. But now I think even if I were to see such a thing, I would suspect myself of hallucination or deception, being fooled or being tricked in some way.

And he ultimately admitted that there is nothing that would get me to believe in God. And this should comfort us and guide us in our interaction with those who are faithless, whether they are believers or unbelievers. It isn't as though if we just said the right thing or modeled the right behavior or discipled someone adequately, that we could snatch them out of the fire and go into the highways and byways and compel them to come in.

These are scriptures in James and from the Lord Jesus that are often cited as justification for our efforts in trying to land the fish and bring someone into the kingdom or back to faithfulness. We do not have this power. We can be agents guided by the Holy Spirit.

We can speak the truth. Remember where the power is. How does the power of God come into the life of a believer? And how does the power of God come into life in general? It is the Word of God and the Spirit of God.

The Spirit is the intelligence, the guidance, the one who knows when and how to apply the truth. He leads us into all truth and He will encourage us and lead us and guide us in speaking the truth to each other in love, speaking the truth of the saving gospel of Christ to those who are seeking and are in a position to accept it and to place their faith in the Lord Jesus. The power is not in us.

We can assume like Moses, I am of slow speech and of a slow tongue. I am not capable of convincing Pharaoh to let the people go. We in our human strength are not able to argue, model or in any other way convince someone to the gospel.

The Lord Jesus is crucified here between two thieves. One of them repents, changes his mind, stops blaspheming, stops mocking and accepts the Lord Jesus as his savior and receives the assurance of his salvation from the Lord Jesus on the cross. What did Jesus do to convert this man? Absolutely nothing.

He is on the cross. He hasn't said anything. He doesn't argue.

He doesn't cite scripture. This man comes under conviction from what he already knows about the Lord Jesus. How do I know that the man knows something about the Lord

Jesus? Remember me when you enter into your kingdom.

Remember from the outset, from John the Baptist and the earliest preaching of the Lord Jesus, repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That seed that was planted bears fruit at this point. The man on his own changes his mind.

That word of truth that he has manifestly heard in the past becomes something in which he places his faith. Remember me when you enter into your kingdom. And Jesus says, and something that we will take a look at, that today you will be with me in paradise.

But in our passage, this temptation come down from the cross. Every human soul is valuable in the sight of God. God has created it.

God has invested each of us with free will. If Jesus had come down from the cross, would the thief have repented? It's an interesting question. We know that these mockers would not because there's no amount of evidence that will convince them.

Where would our salvation be? If he had placed his faith in Jesus as a dying thief, then would Jesus turn around and take him down from the cross as well? I mean, the consequences of the Lord Jesus not completing the assigned work are difficult to even comprehend or contemplate. We take it for granted that the Lord Jesus is faithful, but it's not so easy to take for granted that we will be faithful when it is our time to fulfill God's purpose, to not be diverted, to not be tempted, to not be mocked and jeered into saying what we shouldn't say, doing what we shouldn't do, focusing on our purpose and letting God decide when and how vindication will come. The Lord Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and these who mocked and jeered are going to see that.

They didn't see it on the day of the crucifixion, but they are going to see it. Jesus said, you will see the Son of Man seated on the right hand of the majesty on high, and you're also going to see yourselves denied access to the kingdom. You will see many others whom you despise entering and you yourselves cast out.

Jesus has the patience and the faith to let God decide the timing of justification and vindication, but you can imagine there is no greater test of any human being at any time than this point where two different times from two different groups with two different justifications will come down from the cross, exit the plan and purpose of God for your life for our benefit, to satisfy our demands. Even the robbers, verse 44, who were crucified with him reviled him with the same thing. So three different groups.

How many temptations are there in the wilderness? Three. How many groups are here testing the Lord Jesus and telling him to come down from the cross at their demand and at their behest? You have the passers-by, you have the chief priests and the scribes and elders, and you have the thieves. Three different points of attack and Jesus successfully resists them all.

Now, verse 45, from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, there was darkness over all the land. I think of all of the things that one might select to look at and concentrate on. I'm going to pick one that I haven't seen anybody pay much attention to, and that is this phrase, darkness over all the land.

In Greek, this is from the word pas, P-A-S. We get the word pan from this. Pan-American airlines used to fly all over America.

Pas or pan means all. Pandemic, the epidemic is everywhere. So this is all.

Then it is tein-gein, which is the accusative form of geis or gay, G-E or G-E-S, teis-geis, gay. G-E is the word that means earth, world, land, depending on context. So the question here, and this has been addressed by some, from the sixth hour, this is noon until the ninth hour, which is 3 p.m. with the count starting at 6 a.m. Sixth hour to the ninth hour, 12 noon to 3 p.m., there was darkness over all, is this all the earth or all the land? All the earth or all the land? If it is over all the earth, if there was a preternatural darkness over the entire earth, and some translations translate it this way, you would expect to find maybe historical notices that there was some strange darkness.

You think back to the darkness over the land of Egypt, and this has been explained in physical terms as volcanic eruption that put clouds of ash into the air and obscured the sun for several days, and trying to find naturalistic explanations. There are quite a number of surviving records from the Roman Empire and various corners of the Roman Empire during this period, and there is no record of a mysterious darkness lasting three hours elsewhere, and this use of the word gay indicates that this is the land of Israel. It is the land of Israel.

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, people have said, well, maybe it was an eclipse, and you know how an eclipse, there is a narrow strip where the shadow of the moon will pass across the earth, and well, this must have been an eclipse. We could look for an eclipse during this time that would have put a shadow in the Middle East centered on Israel and explain it this way. The problem with that is that this is Passover, and you have a full moon at this time, and if you think about a full moon, it is illuminated so that the moon cannot be in front of the sun.

When the sun is behind the moon, so to speak, then we see the shadow in the sky, and the moon can be very dim because it's a new moon, and then you start to have the little fingernail, and you have the progressing to a quarter moon, and a half moon, and a gibbous moon, and then a full moon. Well, at Passover, there is a full moon because this is halfway through the month. Remember, the month begins with a new moon, and Passover is 14 Nisan.

It is squarely in the middle of the month. This is when the moon is full, and then it begins to wane and become a new moon at the end of the month and beginning of the next

month, and the priests would watch to see when is it a new moon. That's the declaration of a new month.

Well, on 14 Nisan or anything close to it, you have a full moon. You can't have a full moon that passes in front of the sun. It's just physics.

So it was not an eclipse. This is a supernatural darkness in the same way that the first Yeshua in Scripture is one of the most famous events associated with Joshua, the son of none. Son, stand thou still and moon in the valley of Eijalon, and the sun did not hasten to go down for about a full day.

The first Yeshua is associated with supernatural light. It is the deliverance of Israel under threat of destruction as they enter the land. Son, stand thou still.

Here, it is the opposite. This, where Joshua is the high point of conquest, of deliverance, of vindication and justification, the exit from Egypt, surviving the 40 years in the wilderness until the generation that was faithless passes away, and the new generation comes in. Only Caleb and Joshua from the first generation, because they are men of faith, enter the land.

And associated with Joshua is this sun that does not hasten to go down for a whole extra day to vindicate and demonstrate God's deliverance of His people. That was an apex, a high point. This is a nadir.

This is a low point. And at the point that He comes to His own and His own receive Him not, and rather than believing in Him, they crucify Him, this darkness occurs. Not one hour, not two hours, but three hours.

And these three hours foreshadow and anticipate the three days where Jesus said, according to the sign of Jonah, where Jonah was in the darkness of the deep for three days and three nights, even so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. And so from the sixth hour to the ninth hour, there is this darkness. And there's a lot that you could say about this, but the Lord Jesus is in the darkness.

He doesn't use the cover of darkness where He is no longer being observed to come down from the cross, to exit the proceedings, to call 10,000 angels. There is darkness. It is representative of that to which the Father has left Him.

This is something that He endures with the resources that God has provided to Him, which are detailed in Psalm 22. This is the word of God, the promise of God. You will not let your Holy One see corruption over so many things that are circulating in the mind and the heart and the soul of the Lord Jesus.

During this time of darkness, He is on His own. There is not comfort from looking at

those who are looking at Him at the foot of the cross. This is supernatural darkness, and it is only what the Lord Jesus has in His soul, which is the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

You cannot accomplish the plan of God in the energy of the flesh, and Jesus did not do this in the strength of His own humanity. It is the power that God provides to us, the Spirit and the Word. At about the ninth hour, verse 46, Jesus cried out with a loud voice saying, Notice the timing of this cry from the cross.

It is not at the third hour. It is not at the sixth hour, when they are affixing Him to the cross and raising Him up like the serpent in the wilderness. This is as the darkness is beginning to lift.

At about the ninth hour, and the notation of the time is significant. It is not at the beginning of the darkness. It is as the darkness is beginning to lift.

At about the ninth hour, and I don't think the translation into English here, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me catches the meaning. Certainly not when you look at the Hebrew that Jesus is quoting, the Hebrew of the passage he is quoting from Psalm 22. And this reminds me, it just seems like to me that Satan tries to get in and do whatever he can to obscure the meaning of things and lead people to misunderstand.

Just like when John the Baptist sends to Jesus from prison and says, are you he that should come or do we look for another? And people have said, this is John the Baptist doubting. And it's okay to doubt. And you should feel free to question and have doubts.

And John the Baptist had doubts. And here you get the idea, well, the Lord Jesus had doubts. Why have you forsaken me? I don't understand what's going on.

And to attribute doubt and lack of understanding to the Lord Jesus is I think very unfair and inaccurate. The Lord Jesus never doubted the plan and purpose of the father. He never failed to understand why he had come into the world.

And he told his disciples over and over again, that he would be delivered into the hands of men, would be crucified and would rise again the third day. And he doesn't begin to question or doubt that at this point, he has survived the three hours of darkness. He has survived the mocking and the taunts and the scorn and the bitter, reprehensible, blasphemous comments of people surrounding the cross.

He has survived all of that. You wonder how many of those people were left after the three hours of darkness when they're fumbling around trying to, they're no longer interested in what's going on at Golgotha. They're wondering about other things.

And as the darkness lifts, it isn't the people surrounding him. It isn't anything other than, to what have you left me? What more is there to do? And as the darkness lifts, Jesus has

his answer. God restores the light.

At about the ninth hour, Jesus says, to what have you left me? What is God's answer? Does God refuse to answer, fail to answer? At about the ninth hour, Jesus launches this question to his father and the father restores the light. Some of those who stood there, when they heard said, this man is calling for Elijah. Immediately, one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed and offered it to him to drink.

They could not have done this unless the light had begun to return. At best, they would have had to light torches, but it doesn't say that they did so. When they hear the Lord Jesus calling out and they hear Eloi, it sounds like Elia.

And so they say, he's calling for Elijah. The other gospels say, let's watch and see if Elijah answers. If Elijah answers, which is a very odd expectation, but immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a reed and offered it to him to drink.

And from the other gospels, we know that Jesus got just enough of this to be able to speak clearly and loudly. As you can see, the rest said, let him alone. Let us see if Elijah will come to save him.

Jesus cried out again with a loud voice. Matthew does not record what he said, but we know from the other gospels, he said, Tetelestai or the equivalent in Aramaic. It is finished.

And I suspect that he took this drink of undrugged sour wine so that he could be heard clearly. He cried out again with a loud voice, father into your hands, I commit my spirit and yielded up his spirit. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' words to his disciples going back to Matthew 17, 23.

He will be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him. And the third day he will be raised up.

This made the disciples sorrowful. But remember John 10, 18, no one takes my life from me. I lay it down of myself.

I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up again. This command I have received from my father. Jesus knew that he had the power to lay his life down and he knew from the father that he would take it up again.

So it is in fulfillment of the scriptures. Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit at that point in verse 51. And Matthew says, then behold, look, then the veil of the temple was torn into from top to bottom.

It's been noted many times that it didn't split from the bottom to the top, but the top to

the bottom indicating that it is God who initiates this rent. The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, the earth quaked and the rocks were split. This is the first of two earthquakes.

Earthquakes are so significant at Mount Sinai. There is an earthquake at the deliverance by the Lord Jesus of his spirit into the father's hand. There is an earthquake and the graves are opened.

The rocks are split and the bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep are brought up. The bodies are exposed. Nobody can do anything about these bodies for the same reason they can't attend to the body of the Lord Jesus when it is in Joseph's tomb, because as the dusk approaches, that is the high Sabbath and there isn't sufficient time.

And nobody wants to touch the dead bodies and defile themselves and be unable to eat the Passover just as they didn't want to even enter into the courts of Pilate to be defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So at 3 p.m. when this earthquake happens, there are dead bodies brought up out of the tombs that are laying out there exposed and nobody can touch them. They have to lay there.

And so they lay there for the rest of the afternoon. They lay there all night. The next day is the high Sabbath of the Passover proper.

Nobody can do any work. The day after that is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Saturday and a regular Sabbath. They can't do anything that day.

Nobody can attend to these bodies until Sunday at the earliest. The problem is before they can go out there and do anything with them, they get up off the ground and start walking around visiting people. I would love to have been in Jerusalem on that Sunday for multiple reasons, first and foremost, to see the resurrected Lord Jesus.

But it's not just him. There are resuscitated people walking around knocking on doors. If you think they were surprised when Rhoda said, Peter's at the door, and they said, no, it's just his messenger.

Imagine when, you know, grandpa that died six months ago is knocking at the door. After his resurrection, this means on Sunday, it is as though Jesus can't be raised by himself. When he's raised, everybody's raised.

And when he comes back at the rapture, the dead in Christ are going to rise first. When Jesus appears, the dead in him cannot stay dead. And Old Testament saints were resuscitated and appeared unto many.

You want to talk about vindication of who he is? Let the scribes and Pharisees and priests explain how this happened. Their bodies are exposed. Everybody knows they're dead.

You can't say, well, maybe they weren't really dead. They just went in hiding. They've been laying out there.

Anybody can go a day's journey on the Sabbath. They can look, but they can't touch. And then Sunday morning, these people start walking around and talking, visiting people.

What a day. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll, we'll resume this so fascinating story that manifests the power of God in the Lord Jesus Christ for new life.