

Matthew 23-05-21a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 21st of May, 2023. We're in the Gospel of Matthew, picking up toward the end of chapter 27.

This is a study this morning like none other I have ever done or you have ever heard. I haven't found it anywhere, and you should always approach with caution when nobody else has undertaken this. So I warn you ahead of time we'll cover this ground and we'll see what you think.

I found it fascinating and very interesting. I learned a lot that I'd never put together and did not know. And it just is another demonstration to me of the inexhaustible riches of God's Word, at least from my perspective.

So we will dive in, but let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our study. Thank Him for the answers to our prayers and the ongoing intercessory ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful that we are granted the privilege of approaching Your throne to represent ourselves in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, because He is our great High Priest.

He has been highly exalted and given the name that is above every name. And we are in Him righteous. We are in Him elect.

In Him we have so many privileges and benefits. And not to be taken for granted, not to be underappreciated, not to be ignored or unexplored. And we're grateful that one of those privileges is the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, to guide us, to illuminate our path with the lamp of Your Word.

We pray this morning as we look at this most crucial moment in the onward progress of Your plan that the Holy Spirit will help us understand it, see its pertinence and its application in our own lives, and that as a result, we will be drawn closer to You through the Lord Jesus. We will be more sensitive to the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit. We will be guided more fully and directly by Your Word.

And we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work, both now and in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have seen this most victorious and yet most tragic moment, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, the darkness in verse 45 of Matthew 27 from the sixth until the ninth hour. And then Jesus cries with a loud voice, quoting Psalm 22.1, My God, my God, to what have you left me? Some of those who stood there when they heard that 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.

Once again, we have an indirect witness to the elevation of these instruments of crucifixion because his lips could not be reached by someone simply extending their arm with this sponge. It had to be put on a stick and raised to a height. The rest said, Let him alone.

Let us see if Elijah will come to save him. So Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. Then behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

We looked at this last time, the significance of the direction of the tear. And then this earthquake, the first of two local earthquakes that take place on this weekend. This one where the rocks are split, the graves are open, the bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep are exposed.

They are brought up from below the surface. They are brought out from the tombs, remembering that some of these are rock-cut tombs. And there is a preview of coming attractions, as they used to say at the theater, where a tomb is opened and someone's body emerges.

And it is going to be resuscitated a couple of days later. And we've talked about the remarkable site that pertained all weekend long. While Jesus is in the tomb, he is still on the cross at the point that this earthquake occurs.

The tombs are open and these bodies are exposed to view. But it is the Sabbath. People are preparing to celebrate Passover.

They can't touch a dead body and be defiled and prevented from observing Passover. The religious types wouldn't even enter Pilate's quarters, his office, for fear of being defiled and unable to eat the Passover. So no one can touch these bodies.

So once Jesus is taken down from the cross and remembering that the people who prepared the body of the Lord ignored the defilement, they would be disqualified and unable to eat Passover because they handled the body of the Lord and prepared it. And under ritual Jewish law, they would be unclean and require ritual cleansing before they could again participate in sacrifices, offerings, and feast observances. What do you think? Do you think touching the dead body of the Lord Jesus defiled anyone? I think these ladies understood that.

And I think they weren't concerned. There was a higher priority than the details of the law at this point. And having seen Jesus and known him and supported him and cared for him for the years of his ministry, I doubt there were any of them that felt that God would count them unclean for honoring the body of the Lord Jesus, preparing it for his burial, and placing it in the tomb.

I suspect there had to have been some young men involved in this as well, to physically

transport the body, to arrange it in the tomb, and so on. But more about that shortly. But think about that Friday after Passover had been observed the previous evening, and everyone is observing the high Sabbath, and they can do no work on that day.

They certainly can't rebury bodies. And so, all day long, anyone who travels outside and looks down toward the Kidron and looks at that vast cemetery on the eastern slope of Zion, you can see it today. And it existed in that day.

And the sepulchers and tombs and graves that were open, and these bodies are laying there in expectation. People wanted to be buried in Jerusalem as an expectation. They knew Daniel 12, 1 and 2, those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, and so on.

But people are forced to view these. Anytime you attend a funeral, anytime you hear of the death of someone that you know, or it strikes closer to home, and it's in your circle of acquaintances, your friends, your family, our thoughts inevitably focus on mortality, on the significance of life. What does it mean to have an accomplished life? What is the residual fruit of a life? Do you have, as we've seen in Proverbs, a name that is used as a blessing and the memory of it is a comfort and encouragement to others? Do you disappear soon to be forgotten? Is there any residue left of your birth, life, and death? And for two solid days, all of those in Jerusalem had to look out across these koi materion, these cemetery areas, and see these exposed bodies and be forced to think about life and death and the possibility of resurrection.

If you are a child of God in the Old Testament age, if you are Israel and you are heir to the promises, what is the expectation from resurrection? What comes after the resurrection? The kingdom. What did John the Baptist preach? The kingdom of God. What did Jesus go time and again? You see this repeatedly in our gospel.

You see it in chapter four. You see it in chapter nine. You see it over and over again.

Jesus went about to the towns and villages preaching the kingdom of God. The very last thing the apostle Paul does when he is in Rome and he is in his own rented home for two years, the last recorded conversation that he has is with Jews living in Rome whom he invited to come and visit him. And it tells you twice in Acts chapter 26, the latter part of the chapter, that when these Jews came, he spoke to them of the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, specifically to these Jewish visitors. And the very last verse of Acts, the very last thing Luke wrote is that Paul, as long as he was in Rome, continued to preach the kingdom of God. And when he is preaching the kingdom of God, who is he talking to? The Jews.

And that because Jesus has come and gone in his suffering servant role, his next appearance is going to be the conquering king. And these Jews need to get on board

with understanding the testimony of their old Testament scriptures to Christ and to receive him and recognize their contextual understanding of the Messiah. He is the son of God.

He is the king of Israel. And both of those pertain to the kingdom of God. And by the way, as a side note, it is important to understand people want to go to the last verse of Acts and say, well, Paul, the apostle was preaching the kingdom of God.

Therefore we should preach the kingdom of God. We should be kingdom people and be occupied with the kingdom and talk about King Jesus and do kingly things. Look at the context.

Observe your three rules of Bible interpretation. And when you read the last half of Acts 26, this is Paul talking to Jews and encouraging them to place their faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of Old Testament scripture, on the basis of the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God, the message that Jesus preached to Israel. I am sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

What do I preach to them? The kingdom of God. Over and over and over again. Failing to observe the context, you get into a world of trouble.

Paul, the apostle, never preaches the kingdom of God to Gentiles. Not once. Search the epistles.

The only time he preached, Paul, the only time he preached the kingdom of God is in Rome to the Jews who came to see him. Anyway, they have to think about this. When you see these dead bodies scattered across the cemetery fields of Jerusalem for two solid days, what do you think? Is there a God in heaven? How can God's power over nature resulting in this earthquake and exposing these bodies? Where is God? What is going on? What kind of a sign is this? What sort of happening is this? And then early in the morning of the third day, Jesus is raised and as soon as he is up and about, these people get up off the ground where they've been laying for two days and start knocking on doors.

If you want to talk about door-to-door evangelism, this is my favorite example. Grandma, you died two years ago. Uncle Zeb, what are you doing here? I'm here to tell you about the kingdom of God.

God has breathed fresh life into me so that I can testify that the power of sin, which is death, has been broken. This is the good news of the kingdom. Israel is going to be raised to experience the kingdom if they qualify.

Are you qualified to enter the kingdom or will you only see it? All of these issues, they've got two solid days to think about it. I wonder how many actually did think about it and draw any kind of valid conclusion. What an amazing scene.

If I ever become a painter in my old age, I've got leisure. I want to paint a Jerusalem scene. I don't want the golden temple and how it must have looked.

I want all of these dead bodies laying all over the ground and people going no more than a Sabbath day journey, looking at them and scratching their heads and talking to one another and stroking their beards and saying, what can this mean? Well, keep asking that question and push for an answer and you're not far from the kingdom. What a scene. I hope there's videotape or whatever passes for a visual record that we can watch in the future.

The centurion and those who were with him, guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened. They feared greatly saying, truly, this was the son of God. What a fascinating testimony this is.

Truly, this was the son of God. When's the last time a similar situation took place? And when I say similar situation, there's a combination of two things here. This is your pop quiz question number one this morning.

Can you think of another time where someone saw a highly unusual action in nature and then said, truly, this is the son of God. These are Gentiles. These are Roman centurion and soldiers.

The crucifixion team sees the earthquake and the things that had happened. They have heard the conversation between Jesus and the thieves, both thieves reviling him. It's interesting.

I did a word study. I don't have time to do it this morning. It was just for my own amusement.

But the word reviling, it reminds me of there's some flatware that comes from overseas called Oneida. Well, there's a Greek word, Oneidas, or something along those lines. It just starts with Oneida.

And it means to rebuke. Jesus rebukes the towns and villages in which he preached that did not respond. Remember that? If the works that had been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes and so on.

But the word that the gospel uses to characterize Jesus' disappointment and unhappiness with those towns and villages in which he preached who did not respond is this Oneida Greek word. It is the same word that describes the thieves on the cross prior to the one changing his mind and repenting. But it isn't so much mocking or deriding or making fun of or disparaging.

It is a rebuke. It means to rebuke, to find fault with somebody for failing to do what they should have done. And so you get the idea that this rebuke consists, from the thieves,

consists primarily in, well, we've heard you did all of these wonderful works.

Why don't you do one now? It isn't mockery so much as desperate appeal to any remaining power that Jesus might have. If what they say about you is true, how about pouring a little of that power out right now? And the difference is they are invoking, they are thinking about Jesus' prior demonstrations of power over nature, power over disease, power over demons, power over afflictions, and saying, well, we're in an affliction. Why don't you use that power now? That's their, that's the word translated revile.

Same word that describes Jesus' attitude toward those who he came to his own and his own received him not. He rebuked them. But one of the thieves in thinking about that decides, you know, maybe there is a reason that this Jesus is not using that power at this moment.

Maybe there is a better and higher purpose than what I understand. So in thinking about this power that Jesus has used in the past, he says, maybe I don't know as much as I should about when and where and how he's going to use this power, but in thinking and rehearsing these past deeds, I think he must be. And that was the reason Jesus did those miracles, was to demonstrate that he was from God.

And the one thief decides, I think he is from God. So what does he do? He stops rebuking and he says, Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom. And Jesus says, this day you will be with me in paradise.

The centurion and those with him heard this conversation. They saw the supernatural darkness for three hours. They've crucified a lot of people.

One would guess they've never seen a crucifixion like this, never seen a public response like this. At most previous criminals, there might be some victims, families of victims or whatever that might be out there shaking their fists. You're finally getting what you deserve.

You rascal, shame on you. You murder, you thief, you criminal. But there are vast throngs that have passed by and have stopped and are mocking and throwing accusations and all kinds of blasphemous disparagements at the Lord Jesus.

They've never seen anything like this. He is such a polarizing figure. There are the faithful women standing at the foot of the cross and the religious leadership can't find enough bad things to say.

Can't challenge him enough to come down from the cross and prove himself to their satisfaction. That's what these men saw. The centurion and those with him guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and the things that had happened.

Jesus' power to divide, Jesus' power to polarize. But then here is this darkness and now

the earthquake. The answer to my earlier question, if you can think of another time, turn to, well, you don't need to turn to it.

I'll just remind you. Remember the storm on the Sea of Galilee and Jesus walking on the water. That's in Matthew chapter 14.

Peter says, Lord, if it's you, bid me come to you, et cetera. And Jesus stretches out his hand, catches him when he's sinking. Oh, you of little faith.

Why did you doubt? They got in the boat, the wind ceased. Supernatural storm, supernatural ceasing. And this is your verse, Matthew 14, 33.

Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped him saying, truly, you are the son of God. Truly, you are the son of God. What convinced them? This radical action in nature.

Truly, you are the son of God. They saw him walk on the water, saw him still the storm, saw him rescue Peter. You are the son of God.

I have no further doubt. In my mind, you remember that there is a time and place for this acknowledgement. When Jesus asks the disciples, we saw it a few chapters ago in Matthew, who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am? Some say you are Elijah here on the hill of Golgotha.

People say he's calling for Elijah. And it reminds you of that earlier scene. He's on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah.

Some people think you are Elijah returned. Who do you say that I am? You are the Christ. What's the rest of it? The son of the living God.

What is Jesus' response? Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father. And then he instructs his disciples not to broadcast that. Don't spread that.

Is it true? Is it a wonderful thing revealed by the father? And Jesus says, don't tell anyone. Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John, witnesses. Is it true? Did they see Moses and Elijah? Did they hear the voice of the father? This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased.

Hear ye him. What does Jesus tell the three? Don't tell anyone until after I'm gone. That story did not come out until after the resurrection.

Think about Luke chapter four, verse 40. When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him. He laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

Demons also came out of many crying out and saying identical words to what Simon

Peter said. It is identical. Letter for letter, word for word.

These demons came out of many crying out and saying, you are the Christ, the son of God. The only missing word is living. You are the Christ, the son of God.

And he rebuking them, this is your Oneida word. Jesus rebukes the demons, did not allow them to speak. In your new King James, it says, and I don't know if I fixed this well, we did Luke so long ago, I can barely remember that we did it.

But a better translation, if you've got your Bible open to Luke 4.41, demons also came out of many crying out and saying, you are the Christ, the son of God. These are the demons saying a true thing. Is he the Christ? Is he the son of God? Jesus tells Peter, my father has revealed this to you.

He rebuking them, did not allow them to speak. And your new King James says, did not allow them to speak, comma, for they knew that he was the Christ. You should take out the comma and cross out the word for, and write the word that.

Hati, following a verb of speaking, gives you the content of what is spoken. Did not allow them to speak that they knew he was the son of God. Didn't allow them to say what they knew.

Jesus told his disciples not to say what they knew. He told people that he healed, don't tell anyone what I have done. He told the demons, don't speak what you know.

He did not allow them to say that they knew he was the Christ. That's how that should read. If your new King James is like mine, you may even have a text note to that effect.

I just now noticed a number there, did not allow them to say that they knew. That is the translation. You are the Christ, the son of God.

So, exercise of supernatural authority by Jesus, demonstrating that he is the one from God, he is the Messiah, he is the son of God, that is testimony enough. You can know from observing nature. Think about Romans chapter one, what may be known of God is manifest in creation.

His eternal power and deity. God's power manifest in nature is sufficient testimony to know that God is God and to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It doesn't have to be said.

People in the boat, I've seen you walk on the water, I've seen you still the storm, I've seen you pull a man out of the water sinking. Truly, you are the Son of God. That's what the centurion and his soldiers recognize at the foot of the cross.

And I would love to enter into the hidden councils of God because there are people who see this kind of manifest power all the time and do not draw that conclusion, refuse to

acknowledge that truth. When they know Him as God, they do not glorify Him as God, neither are they thankful. Empty imagination, foolish heart, darkened.

Remember in Acts, after there is the preaching of the gospel, and it says, and as many as were appointed unto eternal life believed. And the word appointed there means to be set in place. It's used of disposing troops, of putting people in the right place at the right time for the right purpose.

It doesn't mean they were elect, as many as were elect. It doesn't say elect. It says they were put in place with a view toward eternal life.

I would love to have an angel who was present on the scene in the councils of God, if you will, in the past, arranging so that this particular centurion and these particular soldiers who have already gambled to see which part of Jesus' clothing they will get. The centurion and the soldiers are receptive. They are some of the first Gentile converts to Christianity.

They recognized Jesus before Pentecost. This man is the son of God. Not just any soldiers would have done that.

Not just any centurion. You think about the centurion whose servant or son Jesus healed earlier on. I say to one, come, and he comes.

To another, go, and he goes. You don't have to come under my roof. We don't have to make an issue out of Jew-Gentile defilement, any of the rest of it.

Just say the word because I know you have authority. I understand authority. These soldiers not only understood authority, but they recognized that the kind of authority represented by the Lord Jesus, even as He is being crucified, there is an authority at work.

They recognized that Jesus is fulfilling His mission under the authority of the Father. They not only recognized Him as the Son, but they recognized that there is a God, and Jesus is His Son. This is the Son of God.

People have tried to explain this away, well, He's the Son of a God. Sorry, no. They have heard everything that has transpired.

They have been in Israel long enough to have heard about Jesus. When they find out that they've been assigned to this particular detail, well, what's this guy done anyway? Oh, let me tell you. Let me tell you his history.

Let me tell you what I've heard in the marketplace and in the streets. I've seen people who claim that they were healed. I've seen people who were blind from birth, lame.

They knew all about who Jesus was, and at this moment, when they see the earthquake,

when they see the earthquake and these other things that have happened, they believe truly this was the Son of God, the Son of God, God singular, the God of Israel, God the Father, and this is His Son. And what a rebuke to the Pharisees, the scribes, the chief priests, the elders, the members of the Sanhedrin who disbelieved, who put Jesus on that cross. Here are Gentile soldiers who can see the witness in nature, see the witness to God in Jesus Christ Himself, how He comports Himself, His discipline, His thoughts while He is on the cross, and in the mouth of two or three witnesses, that thing is established and they believe.

Jesus has a wonderful converting and saving ministry where one thief and five soldiers get saved right at the cross. Of those standing around that aren't believers, the only one He loses is the unrepentant thief. Soldiers believe, the other thief believes.

They've got more faith in Jesus' disciples, most of whom have fled. Only John seems to be there. But it is a reminder that we have to respect what God respects.

And that is the decision that each individual makes in light of the testimony that they have witnessed. God is manifest in nature. God is present in the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, of sin and righteousness and judgment.

No greater hour of judgment than the one that these soldiers and this repentant thief see. And they grasp it, they get it. And looking at the Lord Jesus, they believe.

Jesus didn't argue them into it, didn't talk them into it, didn't preach them into it. It is His example of faithfulness and obedience. And it is the witness to God in nature.

And they recognize only God could do this. And the juxtaposition of the power of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, it truly makes a cross. You have nature as the horizontal and you have God in the vertical.

And when they see that witness, they believe. That is sufficient. And when we pray for those in our periphery who are faithless or truly unbelievers, we can ask God to re-emphasize the witness in nature.

We can ask God to re-emphasize the witness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to make the issue clear. You can't ask God to save someone against their will, but we can appeal to Him to make the issues of sin. Many times that's the stumbling block.

There's no sense of need because there's no acknowledgement of sin. Ask God to make the presence and power of sin manifest and unavoidable and irrefutable in the heart and mind of someone who is far from God. Make the issue of sin abundantly clear and the necessity for righteousness and the inevitability of judgment, the fact of God's existence and presence and power and authority in nature, and the need to confront that question and resolve that issue.

And at that point, it is between God and the individual. But I would hate to get to glory and say, well, I just kind of left that all to chance, fate. I didn't care enough about the person to pray for them.

I thought I couldn't pray for them because I know God can't contravene their God-given free will. But there are a lot of things I can pray. I can pray that they will have an experience like these soldiers at the foot of the cross.

They can have an experience like the disciples in the boat and be faced with the irrefutable evidence of God's authority and presence in nature and the identity of the Lord Jesus Christ, who truly is the Son of God. We can pray that all day long. For those that we love, for those who we observe, those that we discern are not in a healthy and growing relationship with God.

Can't ask God to change their mind, but you can certainly ask God to put irrefutable evidence before them so that if they still are unrepentant, it's on them. They are without excuse, Romans 1. Well, my fun, that's a bit of a sobering subject and yet a great opportunity for prayer and to express our love toward those who have not entered into the wonderful grace and blessing that we enjoy in Christ, but we can pray for them, pray constantly, pray fervently, ask, seek, and knock on their behalf and that we will be the example of Christ with our dedication to God's purpose, our self-control, our character, and that in the same way that these soldiers saw Jesus' personal behavior on the cross, when people look at us, they will see something of that same level of dedication, love for God, love for one another, sacrificial to self, beneficial toward others. Well, we'll come back to what I think is a really fun and beautiful study after our break.