

Two Trials

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Date: 15 March 2020

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[0 : 00] Hello, it's really nice to see you. I'm surprised to see you, actually, to be honest. I think we might be the only show in town today.

So I don't know how that happened, but I'm actually glad to be here. My name is Aaron. I look after this service. And if you're a visitor, so we have four different services.

Four different services we cycle through over a month. So we do evening prayer twice, we do communion, and we do a service called Compline, which I absolutely love, and it seems very appropriate to me that the final service before we take a break is the Compline service, because we get to pray these wonderful prayers, prayers like this, right at the end, that Bree will lead.

Like this one, right at the end. And to be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world may repose upon thy eternal changelessness.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Isn't that wonderful to be able to pray that tonight? I certainly think this whole COVID-19 business has...

[1 : 21] The difficult gift that it has given us is to expose the fragility of humanity, you know, institutions. And fortunately for us, it's not all we've got going in our lives, is it?

And this passage is going to talk directly to that, I think. So, let's get into it. Oh, it says here. Good evening, everybody. So, good evening.

I was just making that stuff up. Here we go. Now here's the official sermon. Good evening. So, we're in Matthew 26. That's what we're up to. We're working our way through Matthew. And in our passage tonight, there are two trials in our passage.

There's two trials. There's the trial of Jesus before the religious elite, called the Sanhedrin. And there's the trial of Peter before the servant girl. I call them trials because they're both people that are being accused of something.

Now, the passage tells these two stories one after the other. So, Jesus before the courts and then Peter story next. Okay.

[2 : 32] But I want you to see in verse 58. Okay. How do I do this if you're not looking at Bibles? Okay. So, there's three sections. There's the arrest. Then there's the trial of Jesus.

And then Peter before the servants. Okay. Arrest, trial of Jesus. And then Peter. At the beginning of the arrest, at the beginning of, sorry, at the beginning of the middle section, when it's talking just about Jesus in the Sanhedrin, it introduces Peter really quickly.

And it says, Peter's hanging out in the courtyard. And then it goes straight back to Jesus. Why is that? Matthew is a very careful writer. He's doing that because he wants us to know that these two trials are happening at the same time.

Okay. So, these are two scenes happening in parallel. Jesus is being interrogated. And at the same time, Peter is being interrogated as well. So, it's not that the Jesus before the Sanhedrin is the really big thing and it's really terrible.

And then these Peters seen as a kind of this minor thing, which is just like a side note. No, no, no. These two stories happen at the same time and they explain each other.

[3 : 46] This is really important. These two stories explain each other. And the most succinct summary I can give you of them, of those two trials, is this.

Is this. We will fail. There you go. There's your positive message for you. We will fail. Christ will not. Okay, that's it.

We could go home now because basically that's the whole sermon. But I wrote down a whole lot of other stuff. So, I'm just going to read it. So, let me say that again. We will fail.

Christ will not fail. And this is very important for us in our discipleship because we actually need to come to the point in ourselves where we recognize that we are morally and spiritually undependable.

We need to come to that point before we can actually really follow Christ, that we're actually undependable people. We need to come to that point before we can see the beauty of the gospel and before we can fully understand why Jesus went through this complete sham of a trial here.

[5 : 03] So, let's get into it. Before we deal with the two trials, though, we have the arrest scene. So, let's talk about that just for a couple of minutes. So, that's the very first thing.

Verses 47 to 56. The arrest. And it all happens at night time. Judas comes with what are basically like the temple police. And did you see how it describes Judas as... It says this.

It says, Judas, comma, one of the twelve, comma, and then carries on, which is quite interesting. Like, that hardly needs to be said, right? Like, we know who Judas was. So, why put it...

Why add the line, one of the twelve? Why that detail? It's to remind us that Judas was there at the feeding of the 5,000, and he was there at the raising of Lazarus, and he was there at the Sermon on the Mount.

Judas was one of the twelve. He was one of the group with Jesus. It's there, that detail, to say that it sort of heightens the sense of betrayal.

[5 : 59] This is not some crazy, random person trying to make a buck. This is one of the disciples who betrayed Jesus. Okay, what happens next? So, Judas gives the signal, a kiss, and Jesus says, Do what you came to do.

And it's at those words, then Jesus says, Do what you came to do. It's at those words that everything happens. Everything happens, okay? Jesus' words trigger what happens next.

They grab him in time, and they take him away. So the key point here that Matthew wants us to see is this. Jesus is not arrested until he speaks.

Until he says, Do it. Until he gives the word. Matthew is trying to make us realize that Christ is in complete control. He's in complete control of the situation. And then we have this fairly ineffectual show of force by Peter.

He cuts a guy's ear off. He was probably aiming for his head, and there's things to say about that, but we're going to move on. And Jesus' response is great to Peter. Verse 53, Do you think I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send more than 12 legions of angels?

[7 : 08] So this is what he says to Peter. He says, Peter, don't you think I could stop this if I wanted to? Like 12 legions.

They would have understood what that was. 12 legions is like 72,000 beings. It's 72,000 angels. When the Romans just took out Jerusalem, invaded Jerusalem, and just took it out, destroyed the temple, they only needed five legions.

Peter says, Peter. Jesus says, Peter, Peter, Peter. You've completely misread the situation. I'm in control here. I'm being arrested because I choose to be arrested.

I'm being arrested because I refuse to prevent it. He's in control. Jesus goes on to say that this was because Scripture will be fulfilled.

So Jesus is just going along with what the Lord has said to do. And if this is helpful, if you need a visual image, you know the Death Star trench run at the end of Star Wars A New Hope?

[8 : 20] You know what this is? Okay. So the trench is like the will of God. And just stay with me. This is fantastic. I spent a lot of time on this.

All right. So you stay in there. This is what Jesus is doing. Jesus is holding himself to the narrow, this narrow trench, this narrow channel of God's will.

In great humility, moment by moment, choosing God's will over probably the humanity of Jesus, which says escape, avoid pain, et cetera, et cetera.

No matter how hard it is, no matter how difficult it is, no matter how unjust it is, I'm going to stay in the narrow channel of God's will. Now, again, there's lots more to say here, but we've got to move on because I want to get to these trials.

So the scene ends, this first scene ends, the first scene ends with, it says, all the disciples flee. Get out of there. Okay. The trial of Jesus. So we're at the house of Caiaphas.

[9 : 24] He's there with a crew of folks, and they are the who's who of Jerusalem. It's the most, it's the cleverest people. It's all the major donors. It's the finest people in the city, and they want Jesus gone, and they're in his house, and it's a trial-ish.

I say ish because it's lots of irregularities. For example, they're having a trial in the middle of the night. There's no cross-examination of the witnesses. I read a lot of stuff on this, how sketchy the trial was.

It's all very dodgy. Verse 59. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they wanted to put him to death. So there's no interest in justice, which is why they had it at night, and they didn't allow cross-examinations, right?

They just want Jesus dead, and they're trying to find people to tell lies about Jesus so they can kill him, and their problem is this. They can't find liars who agree with each other.

So they've got people coming and saying things, but they don't agree with each other. So that's problematic. At some point, one guy says, Jesus said he would destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days, which is kind of a garbled version of something that Jesus did say, and they're thinking maybe we can get him on terrorism charges maybe, but Jesus does not respond.

[10:45] Again, he just allows this thing just to keep rolling. The religious elite are very frustrated. Eventually, Caiaphas just throws this crazy question at Jesus, this crazy question in verse 63, and the question has the sense of this.

He says, you're not saying that you are the Christ. This is kind of like, so I've been learning about American football, Hail Mary pass. You've got nothing, you don't know what you're doing, you just throw the ball as long as you can and hope somebody's going to catch it.

This feels like a bit of a, it's really inappropriate actually as I think about it. But like, I'm trying to learn North America. So, it's like, I'm just going to throw this thing out there and just see what happens with this question.

So, Caiaphas throws, you're not saying you're actually the Christ, right? The temple thing is bad, but you're not actually saying you're the son of God. See, the high priest is thinking no one on the planet is going to say yes to that question.

But Jesus says, yes, what you have said. And then he adds this line. He says, from now on you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

[12:09] There's a lot in there and it goes back to Daniel. But I'm going to move on and just give you this at 40,000 feet, okay? What Jesus is saying there is, you guys think you're in charge, you are not.

And then he basically says, I'm not going down here because of some tricky, you know, shammy sort of trial.

And, I mean, if you think about it, Jesus actually gives them the evidence to get himself killed, right? He actually gives them what they need to get himself killed.

He incriminates himself because this is God's plan. God's plan was for this to happen. And then he says to them, I'm incriminating myself and basically you'll see me at the right hand of power, meaning one day this ridiculous trial we're having will be reversed.

And one day you will be standing in front of me. That's the sense of the interaction there. And this is music to the ears of Caiaphas because he doesn't believe a word of it.

[13:24] He doesn't believe a word of this. But now they have Jesus for a case of blasphemy. And they tear their robes to show how, you know, agog they are, which is a great word.

We are agog, you know. And, and then it's just awful. And then it's quite hard to read. They beat and they spit and they mock Jesus.

Now again, why is Jesus going through all of this? It's the will of God and because people are precious to him. We are very precious to Jesus. People like us who are morally and spiritually completely undependable.

Which brings us very nicely to the trial of Peter, which is verses 69 to 75. So juxtaposed to Jesus facing down the most powerful Jewish court in the land.

We have Peter being interrogated by probably like a, you know, 12 year old servant, girl. And the, the passage wants us to, to note this contrast.

[14:35] But you'll see there's no judgment in the passage. Matthew doesn't write and here's stupid old, crazy old, cowardly old Peter. Here he is embarrassing himself again.

Can you believe this guy? It doesn't say that. It just, yet, it's so brutal, isn't it? Just in the retelling, just in the plain retelling of it.

It's very brutal. Okay, so let's get into it. So, so there would have been a house where they're doing the trial and there would have been a big courtyard and Peter's sort of lurking around this, this

courtyard of the high priest, seeing what's going on.

I guess you can give him some credit for following, but the passage notes, and again, Matthew is a careful writer, the passage notes, he follows Jesus from a distance, from a distance, and of course, we can't follow Jesus from a distance, can we?

We cannot be just spectators of Jesus from a place of comfort and safety, although it's quite tempting to do that. Keeping Jesus at a distance like that just does not work, but right now, for Peter, he just wants to fit in, he wants to be inconspicuous, and see how the whole Jesus thing pans out, which, if we follow this strategy in our own lives, it's just a slow slide, isn't it?

[15:59] I think, Christians, and I see this sometimes with people, they start with vigor and then they become, they start to follow Jesus at a distance and then they become a spectator, not a follower, start to change their ideas until you're quite cozy, enjoying the warm consensus of culture.

Now, back to the passage. Peter's lurking about and I think he's a bit taken off, taken back by this girl who just comes up to him, a servant girl, who was no threat to him and says, you were with Jesus, weren't you?

And he sort of stammers out this response that doesn't make any sense, he doesn't deny, he just sort of says, I don't know what you're talking about. Like, he just doesn't know what to say, I don't know what you're talking about, you know?

So he moves, he physically moves somewhere else and then another servant girl says the same thing but this time it's an out and out denial. But you'll notice he can't bring himself to say Jesus' name, he says, I don't know that man.

And again, he's approached by some bystanders and then there's this sort of escalation of betraying. People say, your accent, you sound like you're from Galilee where Jesus was from and Peter curses and it could be that he's cursing Jesus here, I wasn't quite sure about that but he curses, I don't know him, it is a spectacular denial and the rooster crows and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

[17:29] And here is what's very interesting. That is the last mention of Peter in Matthew's gospel. We don't hear of him again.

Now we know from other gospels he's restored to Christ but it's interesting to me that Matthew leaves him in this state, a broken man and that's how Matthew wants it.

Again, he's a very careful writer. So why does Matthew include this event with such detail? Actually another question is this, why does Peter tell each other what happened?

Like, because who knows what happened there, right? Peter knows what happened and obviously he told the witnesses and it was recorded because there's lots of details. He could have kept his private failure a failure private.

He could have kept his private failure private. Why was he so open about his cowardice? And why are the gospels actually full of the disciples failing at these critical moments?

[18:33] They admit that Christ couldn't trust them to stay awake whilst he prays. They admit that they couldn't do the right thing all the time, even small things.

Folks, here's here's our take on this. In order for Peter to become the great leader of the church which he was and a mere two weeks later he's preaching up a storm and, you know, like just charging for Jesus like just a couple of weeks later.

In order for Peter to be the great leader in the church that he becomes, he needs this moment. He needs this moment because it's in that moment all his bluster and spiritual pride dies.

All that posturing, all that I would never betray you, Christ. Maybe all these other folks, but I would never do that. I'm Peter. I'm the rock. All that posturing dies at that moment when the rooster crows. And we all need this moment. We all need this moment to be followers of Christ. Christ can't trust his disciples to stay awake whilst he prays in the gardens.

[19:49] Christ can't trust us to pray daily. He can't trust us to do the right things all the time, even small things. He doesn't trust us to do that. But we can trust him and we can trust what he has done.

Remember the big picture again, okay? Peter's trial happens at the same time as Jesus' trial. And they tell us Christ was faithful to his mission.

He did not walk away from what God had done, what God had asked him to do. Peter failed. Christ is faithful, we are not. That is the big message.

As I said at the start, these parallel stories, they explain each other. We must see ourselves in Peter and we must see Christ's unswerving commitment to save us.

And we must anchor our lives to that, not to our ability to pray every day or always do the right thing. So I'll say this again as simply as possible, then we'll finish.

[21 : 01] Christianity is for failures. It is for people who know they can't save themselves. It is for people who see how deep and wide and high God's graces and who recognise what Jesus went through to save us.

This is the gospel. Amen.