

# Betrayal, Condemnation, Assassination

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[ 0 : 00 ] I want you to look again at the 20th chapter of Matthew, beginning at the 17th verse. Now, it's important that you follow this in the Scriptures, simply because the sequence of it will be lost on you unless you can follow with your own eye.

So Matthew chapter 20 and verse 17 says this. Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. He took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked him for something. And he said to her, What do you want?

And she said, Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom. You all have that Scripture firmly fixed in your mind?

[ 1 : 32 ] Turn, if you will, now to Matthew chapter 17, verse 22. Back to Matthew 17, verse 22.

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day.

And they were greatly distressed. Now turn back to Matthew chapter 16, verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, God forbid, Lord, this shall never happen to you. And he turned and said to Peter, Get behind me, Satan.

Now these three events in the story of Christ heading towards Jerusalem were very unpopular.

[ 3 : 03 ] It is a persistent pushing of the fact that Christ had to go to Jerusalem, that there he would be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, that the chief priests and the scribes would then betray him to the Romans, and that the Romans would crucify him.

And though you recognize that Matthew's gospel was set down some years after this event took place, this is put in the text as though Christ had deliberately told his disciples that this was going to happen.

And you may conclude, if you're a great literary scholar, that this is, of course, knowledge after the fact. But there is the possibility that in fact Christ found these events totally predictable.

And if you look at them, you will see how totally predictable they are. And the best way to look at them is turn back again to Matthew 20 and verse 70, and let me just outline them to you as they appear there.

These are, in a sense, the three events. First, that he would be betrayed or delivered, into the hands of the chief priests.

[ 4 : 35 ] Now, how was that to be done? It was to be a personal betrayal by one of his disciples. Then the chief priests and the scribes were to condemn him to death.

And that was the function of the great religious body to do that. And then they turned him over to the political arm and the political arm scourged, mocked, and crucified him.

Now, if you look at the person of Jesus Christ as he describes himself, he describes himself as the Son of Man in all three cases.

the Son of Man is the picture of what man is meant to be. Who man is meant to be. If in all the annals of history you want to discover what it means to be a man, then you must look at the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, without apology, treated himself as being the example for all of history of what it means to be a man.

[ 5 : 57 ] A man vitally in touch with God, a man vitally in touch with God's world, a man vitally in touch with his fellow men, and knowing them.

So you have the Son of Man. And what happens to him? He suffers personal betrayal at the hands of a disciple, condemnation at the hands of the religious establishment, and crucifixion at the hands of the political establishment.

And that, my friends, is the way the world goes round. That's what happens to us in the course of our earthly lives.

That's what brings the gray hairs to our head, the stoop to our shoulders, the inevitable submission to the hopelessness of human life, is that that process doesn't vary.

That it's an entirely predictable process. That what has to happen to you, and I don't see any way that you can escape it, is that you are going to be personally betrayed, you're going to be religiously condemned, and you are going to be politically crucified.

[ 7 : 25 ] I meet people talking in these terms about business every day. You can read this process on the front page of any newspaper.

If you look at the agony of what's happening in Northern Ireland, there it is. It's just over and over again the process of personal betrayal, religious condemnation, and political assassination.

And so it doesn't seem to me very surprising that Christ says to his disciples over and over again, I am going to Jerusalem, I will be betrayed, condemned, and crucified.

Now look at the reaction just briefly. In the first instance, Peter with magnanimity says, God forbid this should never happen.

A lovely optimism, but quite unrealistic. In the second instance that it happens, it says the disciples were distressed by his persistence.

[ 8 : 37 ] In the third, it gives the lovely story of a woman's total misunderstanding, and she says, when you come in your kingdom, can one of my sons sit on your left hand and one of your sons sit on my right hand?

And that still is the reaction that the Christian church is concerned with the centrality of the trial and death of Jesus Christ.

Why it happened. And why the qualities and conditions under which it happened are not strange to us, but are part of our everyday experience.

Personal betrayal, religious condemnation, and political assassination. So that it is an entirely predictable process, which all of us, in some measure, are involved in.

Now, my favorite folk singer, and he doesn't get a lot of support from me, but any support I can give, I give to him, and his name is Bruce Coburn.

[ 9 : 54 ] And Bruce Coburn wrote a little song about saying that he was tired of being under the horse's hooves all the time.

He became a Christian, and it's hard for a folk singer to be a Christian. And he just got tired of being under the horse's hooves, and he thought to get out from under them.

And in his little song, he tells about his efforts, and he concludes that you are either part of the horse's hooves, or you are under them.

There is no other way. Now, this is, this is true of life. There is no other place to be. And it's particularly true of the Christian church.

The thing that we can't do, despite our idealism, is we can't escape from the fact that we are going to suffer and continue to suffer from personal betrayal.

[ 10 : 57 ] It's part of the tragedy of human existence. The second thing that you've got to recognize is that religion, that is in any sense man-made, cannot tolerate the truth.

Religion is a fragile structure, and if anybody brings the truth into it, it's liable to collapse. And the religious authorities in Jerusalem knew that.

And they knew that if Christ persisted in his teaching, that their whole religious structure would collapse, and they thought their religious structure was so important that rather than risk its collapse, they condemned Jesus Christ to death.

Even though he said, I haven't come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Even though he proved a wise teacher, they recognized that Christ represented the truth in such a way that if he was allowed to go on with what he was saying and teaching, their structure would collapse.

So the very people that should have said, this is the man that we've been waiting for, said, crucify him. And religious people like us still do that.

[ 12 : 26 ] is there a place for the hard truth of Jesus Christ in our midst? Or are we basically threatened by it?

You see, the disciples said, God forbid. Then they were distressed, and then they were seeking places in his kingdom, but afraid to come to grips with the terrible truth that Jesus Christ revealed. And so they condemned him. And then the Roman soldiers, as the Gentiles, were brought in to mock him and to scourge him and to crucify him.

And you see, all of them became personally involved with him. The Roman soldiers couldn't simply crucify him. They had to adorn him in a robe and a crown and put a reed in his hand and sing, Hail, King of the Jews, as they struck him in the face.

They became involved with this man in the strangest way. And so this process of personal betrayal, religious condemnation, and political execution went on.

[ 13 : 45 ] and that's the kind of world we live in. And it's inescapable. It's a reality, the hardcore of which none of you escape from week to week in the course of your ordinary lives.

the facts of religions that turn the truth inside out, of political expediency that demands assassination of one kind or another, and of personal betrayal between people who don't want to do it but find themselves compelled to.

And most of us are involved as the horses or the who's in one or other of those operations. But I want for your comfort and encouragement to tell you how the story ends.

And it ends with these words. And he will be raised on the third day. And that's where our Christian life and faith and vitality and hope comes from.

That after we have done our worst in terms of personal betrayal, religious distortion of the truth and political assassination, there is the reality that God does not say to us, all right, destroy yourselves, but he raises Jesus Christ from the dead.

[ 15 : 23 ] And so that our responsibility is to go back to the area of personal relationships in the knowledge that Jesus is risen from the dead and to go back to our vested religious institutions and to build them around the reality that on the third day Jesus rose from the dead and to go back to our political structures, whatever they may be, with their bent towards having to do what in their hearts they hate to do, with their bent to being compelled almost to destroy when they know it's not their function to, and to say Jesus is risen from the dead.

now this may look to you like a weak and powerless position, but it is in fact the most powerful position, and it's based on the reality that the end of history and the end of our life is not found in the despair of the disciples when they saw the inevitability of what happened because of personal betrayal, religious distortion, and political assassination, that they went and told their world that Jesus is risen from the dead.

And because of that we have a fundamental kind of good news which we must relate to and a fundamental message that we must communicate and that we must become part of.

That we live our lives in the midst of that process, in the knowledge that Jesus is risen from the dead. And that's the life we share.

And we come back to the political hassles of our time, to the religious distortions, and to the personal betrayals which are going on all the time with the knowledge that Jesus Christ is risen.

[ 17 : 33 ] and all the difference in human life starts from that reality which we are called upon to personally appropriate.

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