

Matthew 26:47-75

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Date: 15 March 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want to add my welcome to David's from this morning and just say how good it is to be here together, to pray together, to hear God's Word together, to sing together as well. It puts all the things that we are going through into perspective, and it reminds us that God is our great hope and that He is in control of all that happens. Even this tumultuous week that we have had, there have been major announcements, it seems like every hour, of organizations that are affected by this virus, this coronavirus, COVID-19. COVID-19 was not a word that anybody knew about two months ago, but here we are. It's an everyday word now, and we are catching up and trying to figure out how to respond to what is happening in our world and in our country. It is a historic and global crisis that really disrupts things in a way that can't easily be compared to anything in recent memory. I was talking to somebody today who said, you know, I was born after World War II, and I've never experienced anything like this, thanks be to God. Here we are. There is a lot of uncertainty, and fear can really creep in. It surrounds us every day right now, and we need wisdom as Christians as to how we can bless the world in this time. How can we shine as lights, as we were just praying, in a dark time. How do we do social distancing, which is also a new word, and at the same time really care for each other, reach out to people around us. This requires wisdom, wisdom, and that is that Jesus rules this time. He is sovereign over everything. God is not surprised by this pandemic. It's all within his very powerful rule, and he has plans and purposes for each of us for each of us and for the world. He seeks our good in all of it. This is what he promises to us. He seeks our good in all that happens, and we can rest in this all-important truth as we serve him in this world. And I think that this passage from Matthew that I guess you can't really turn to, unless you have a cell phone or something, but this passage is so relevant. It has amazing timing because it's all about Jesus' complete authority over a chaotic and dark night, a night of great evil evil and chaos and chaos and chaos and fear. You know, the worst night of Jesus' life, the worst night in the world, really. And yet through every aspect of that night, Jesus is in command in this passage, even when it appears that everyone is against him and that he, Jesus, is powerless. He is actually in charge. And Matthew makes sure we see that in the events of this night. So I want to just talk about three vivid scenes that make up our passage. And the first scene is Jesus' arrest and his betrayal.

And in it, we see Jesus' complete authority over a very chaotic scene. And then the second scene is an incredibly unjust trial. And Jesus takes charge of that trial. He uses it for his good and perfect will. And then finally, in the last scene, it's a very personal scene where Peter denies Jesus.

And we see in this Jesus' gracious and compassionate rule, even over this terrible night in Peter's life as well. And through all these verses, what God does as we meditate on them is he gives a deeper confidence in Jesus and his all-powerful, loving rule over our lives and also everything that is happening in the world around us. And I want you to notice in these scenes as we go along is that there is one person besides Jesus who is prominent in all of these three scenes. That person is Peter. And I think that God made this happen because Peter's account of what happened that night and Peter's confession is what Jesus will build his church on. Peter needed to see these things. He needed to go through them because that eyewitness account is what our faith is based on. So let's look at these scenes. The first scene is the arrest in Gethsemane in verses 47 through 56. Peter is very active in this scene because, as you remember, Jesus and his ten disciples have just heard Jesus say, let's rise. We're going to get going now.

My betrayer is at hand. And sure enough, Judas comes bursting in on the scene here with a group of thugs and mercenaries. And they have swords and clubs. They're sent by the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem. And of course, Judas immediately goes up to Jesus and he kissed him. He was not into social distancing here. He comes and does this terrible thing so that the crowd will come up to Jesus and seize him. Well, what happens next is that Matthew doesn't name this person, but he says someone who is with Jesus draws his sword. Now, who do you think that might be? Who is the person that's first to speak, first to act, the one who very rashly will do whatever is on his mind? Yes, the gospel of John tells us for sure it was Peter. He could not stand to see Jesus arrested. And he takes things into his own hands. I know what needs to be done here and to be successful. And he slashes out at the closest person, misses his head and cuts off his ear. And that scene turns into a bloody, chaotic mess.

But I want you to notice that Jesus takes complete control throughout that confusion. In fact, that scene starts by Jesus giving Judas permission. He says, do what you have come to do, friend.

[7:17] And then when Peter injures that servant, Jesus says, put away your sword, Peter. You need to stop it right now. And he teaches that group who are listening, do you think that I cannot appeal to my father and he will at once send me more than 12 legions of angels? If you're counting that 72,000 angels.

And it is not literal. It is a symbol of a vast number, maybe more than that. But Jesus is saying to Peter and to his disciples, God's power is at hand here. And all of this is happening according to my plan, Peter, that you have read in God's word. I am the one to fulfill what God's purposes are here.

And I am allowing this to happen. And then he reprimands the crowd. He turns to all those thugs and those mercenaries and he teaches the same kind of thing to them. He says, have you come against me as a robber, as though I was a robber with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day, I sat at the temple and I was preaching and teaching. You didn't seize me. But he tells them again, all of this has taken place that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. You see, Jesus' authority is on full display here in a very chaotic situation. From a human point of view, there's this power imbalance where Jesus and his disciples have no chance. Jesus will certainly be arrested. They are outnumbered completely. But Jesus is teaching them about a much bigger reality that surrounds them. God's power is all around them. So if God wanted to, that group seizing Jesus would cease to exist and instantly be destroyed. Not only that, Jesus is telling them that there is a far greater plan that surrounds all of their schemes and all of their violent actions here. It is God's plan to save all people at their deepest needs and only Jesus can fulfill it. That is the bigger plan. And that is the plan that surrounds us today in our own individual plans and in the pandemic that we all face. What we are experiencing right now and this virus is actually not apart from God's plan, but it is incorporated into it. God uses what we are experiencing today for the sake of people coming to that saving understanding of Jesus. And God is ministering to people through us, through the church, in this time of virus. We don't know how long it will take for God to bring an end to it, but he will. But in that time we know that God will use it to draw people to himself and he will use us. He will continue to change us into his image as we serve him. As we hear his voice in the Bible and obey it, you will grow in your love for Jesus and you will be his ministers in a hurting world. In fact, he will use everything that happens to you, even the hard and anxiety-causing issues, for his good purpose as part of his plan to save you and save others for himself. That's how great his authority is. That's what's on display in this scene. Now I want you to notice something odd.

You don't have your Bibles in front of us, but right after Jesus teaches us, the verse says, Jesus' disciples all flee. They run away from Jesus. And there's a warning here for us.

They could not at that moment, these disciples, accept that what Jesus said was true. It looked like complete failure to them. How could this be part of God's plan? This is a hopeless situation.

[11 : 46] The things you must do is to flee. But I think that Jesus is teaching us in that little verse that in those dark times, do not flee from Jesus. Persevere. Seek Jesus in the time of fear and failure and pain and disappointment. Jesus said, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.

Persevere. Persevere. Seek him in this time. Now we turn to the second scene. And this scene is a remarkable one. Again, Jesus is in charge, even as he is under arrest. What happens here is that Jesus is taken to a palace. And it's Caiaphas' house, it's called. It's a palace where it's sort of like a supreme court of sorts, where the Sanhedrin meets. And that's about 71 people. There is a chief priest.

There are elders who are wealthy influencers in the community, landowners. And there's religious leaders. And they are brought together very quickly because Jesus has come sooner than they thought.

And their purpose in this, I don't know if it's called a trial, because it's really just a kangaroo court. It's a sham. And the whole purpose of it is that Jesus must be convicted at all costs.

Because then they can pass him on to the Romans who can make the death sentence. So there they are gathered together. And Peter follows that whole group. And he goes right into the courtyard. He is able to witness all the things that are happening there that night in that trial.

[13 : 33] And it's an amazing trial. It's many, many false witnesses being gathered up and brought in one at a time. And they very quickly testify against Jesus. And Jesus remains silent through it all.

Those witnesses are discredited. Nothing works. And finally, the high priest gets exasperated. And in verse 63, he says, I adjure you in the name of the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Tell us. And then Jesus speaks for the first time. And his words are the high point of this gospel. Because what he says is all important for us today. He says, You have said so, but I tell you from now on you will see the Son of Man seated with great power, at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Now what those words mean is that Jesus is revealing himself more than anywhere in this gospel. He is saying that he is far more than a political human Messiah that he's being asked about.

He is the one who has God's glory, God's authority. He is king over all, and his kingdom will be forever. Well, this is a shock to the chief priest. They have not heard this before. They had not considered that as the possibility. And he says, it's blasphemy. He is saying things only God himself can say.

And the whole tribunal agreed right at that moment. He deserves death. Send him to Pilate. Now, I don't know if you see this, but do you see Jesus' lordship here? Do you see how he is in charge?

[15 : 31] What he does in this completely unjust courtyard, courtroom, is to reveal his glory in the darkest of times.

He reveals in that terrible place that he is God the king, and he will suffer. He will be one who gives his life as a ransom for many, as a payment for sin that will give life to many, many people.

He is telling them and us a glorious, the glorious gospel and good news. And amazingly, because he reveals this, his mission of dying on a cross is going to move ahead very, very quickly, because this is what he determined to do.

God revealing himself in this dark, dark time. And do you know that in our own darkness and uncertainty, with this pandemic that we are dealing with, God is revealing himself, often very clearly.

Many people are beginning to see that they are mortal, that there must be something more. Where is our help coming from? And there are many opportunities for the clear light of Jesus and his gospel to come forth in a very uncertain time.

[16 : 55] This is God's sovereignty, even over these times of great uncertainty and failure. And I think that we need to stop for just a moment to think about God's sovereignty.

Because you see it all through this passage. We've seen that all the people in this passage have freedom to choose what they do and what they say.

And yes, we need to know that human freedom is limited by sin and by the fall of Adam and Eve. But there is real freedom in humans. It's what makes us human. We wouldn't be human beings.

We would have no responsibility. We would be like robots if we did not have real freedom. So in this passage, notice that Judas is free to betray Jesus or not.

That crowd is free to act rightly or to be boorish and to be violent. The Sanhedrin is free to make a just decision or to do the wrong thing and to send somebody, innocent person, to death.

[18 : 05] The disciples are free to stand with Jesus or to flee when things look really, really bad. And of course, what we've seen this morning is that all the people choose against Jesus.

They make up their minds to do what they determine to do. But what is the result? God's will is done. What he has determined to do is what actually happened.

I love the words of Dick Lucas who taught on this passage. And he said, If God can give the whole world that he has made freedom to decide how they want to live and think and then still fulfill his purpose for all humanity, then he must have power beyond all human wisdom, beyond all human understanding.

That is power. We don't understand how it's done. It is a mystery. But that is how God's rule works. That's a deep encouragement to us.

Because for us, only Jesus can make all the things in this world work together, whether a very terrible evil or a wondrous good in our lives, for ultimate good.

[19 : 20] That's his power. And that's especially true in your personal life as you trust God. Do you remember the words from Romans 8, 28? A very good verse to memorize.

It says, We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose. You see it saying God rules completely in our lives in order to bring this utmost good, what he knows that is best for us, about.

And that's true for us in all our periods of uncertainty and darkness. Whatever your journey is, Jesus rules to the end. Now this brings us back to Peter.

And I want to close with this. Because Peter, who's been listening to this in the courtyard, has heard Jesus' glorious confession here.

He has heard something that is incredible, if it's true. Yet he can't wrap his mind around how Jesus could be the Messiah who rules everything, and yet be sentenced to death.

[20 : 28] But Jesus is silent before he makes that. And Peter must have been thinking, Say something, Jesus. Make it good. Make it happen. It's not successful.

It's not what Peter had in mind. Peter wanted to be successful more than anything else. And he was devastated by the failure that he saw in Jesus. He was angry.

And he was disillusioned. And so what happens is that he is vulnerable. He is weak in his relationship with Jesus. In that courtyard, a servant girl who has no authority over him, who poses no threat, says, Oh, didn't you know Jesus?

And three times we're going to see Peter deny. And he says, first of all, Well, what do you mean by did you know Jesus? Very political answer.

I'm not sure what you meant by that. You'll have to explain that to me. And then another servant girl comes up, and the denial is stronger. He says, I don't know the man. Never met him.

[21 : 32] And then finally, the third denial is much stronger. He angrily swears by God, I do not know the man. And that is final. And then, of course, the rooster crows, and that third denial.

And Peter remembers Jesus' word, that his denial is exactly what Jesus told him would happen. And he weeps bitterly.

It is the worst night in Peter's life. But the marvelous thing here is that we see Jesus' compassionate and gracious rule here.

Even though Peter would remember this as the darkest day of his life for the rest of his life, it is a day that Jesus rules as well. Because if you remember from last week, Jesus had told Peter that earlier that evening that he will rise from the dead, and he will go before him to Galilee and gather his disciples to himself.

And it's there in Galilee where Jesus will personally call Peter to himself. And he's going to ask Peter three times, Do you love me, Peter? Do you love me?

[22 : 45] Do you love me? And what is Peter's answer every time? Yes, Lord, the one who rules me. Yes, Lord, you love me.

Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Yes, Lord, I love you. And the amazing thing is, is that Jesus, in his power, after he said, all authority has been given to me, Jesus says, Jesus entrusts the work of the church to him.

With that authority, he commissions Peter to be his minister in the world, to lead the church, to feed his sheep. That is restoration, beyond any restoration we can imagine.

That is what God's rule does for us. And Jesus' rule for you and me means restoration for us as well. Philippians 1, 6 says, I am sure of this.

This is from Paul, by the way, the one who has restored more than anyone. I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

[23 : 54] You see, Jesus' rule means that he restores all people to himself. He brings about his great good in the lives of those who trust him, even through the very darkest of days.

That is powerful authority, and Peter knew it in his life. And that was the good news that he preached. Jesus calls us to entrust ourselves to his rule.

Today, this is his message to us. And to join Peter every day in saying, Yes, Lord, I love you. Yes, Lord, you know I love you.

Yes, Lord, I love you. Amen.