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Bread of Life

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## **Matthew 26:46 - 27:26**

### **The Gospel of Christ, Our Only Hope**

What is the main point, the main purpose, for preaching? What should my main goal be for every sermon? What should your goal be in hearing a good sermon? We see lots of examples of public speaking all the time: we see stand-up comedians, whose purpose is entertainment, the goal is to make us laugh; we see lectures and Ted talks, where the goal is to give new information in a creative and original way; we see political speeches where the goal is to sell you on the ideas and personality of the speaker. But a sermon is a very different animal altogether, isn't it? The purpose isn't to entertain, or to merely inform and give new information; the goal isn't to be as creative, original, or exciting as possible; the goal isn't to sell the ideas or opinions of people, not even the speaker.

No, the purpose of a sermon is to hear the Word of God clearly and accurately taught, explained, and applied to our lives. The goal is to accurately teach a portion of the Bible so that we can say, "This is what God says, this is why we need to hear it, and this is how it applies to you and me." That's why you and I show up for the sermon every week - not to hear what some guy has to say, not to be entertained, not to hear something new, creative, and exciting - but ultimately, to hear what God says. That's my goal for every sermon - to hold up the Word of God and accurately, clearly explain: "this is what this part of God's Word means, and here is why it is important for us."

So that's my goal today: to hold up for us the main point of what *Matt. 26:46 - 27:26* says. But I'll confess: I've felt tempted to deviate from that plan this week. Not because I don't know what this text means; nor because I'm ashamed of it, or disagree with it - by no means! But because the main point of this text - and therefore, this sermon - is pretty much the same as the main point of the sermon from last week; and, I believe, it will be pretty much the same for next week. So I'm tempted to come up with some new, exciting, creative content for us, rather than preach basically the exact same thing three weeks in a row.

But I can't do that, for 2 primary reasons. First, because I deeply believe that what you and I need is not to hear the thoughts and opinions of man - no matter how new, creative,

exciting, entertaining, or inspiring they may be! We need to hear the Word of God. We need to hear what GOd's Word says - what this text says, what it means. And the main point of this passage - very similar to last week's, and virtually will be the same next week - is this: that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, willingly suffered and died in order to fulfill God's plan of salvation for His people - for us, for anyone who repents and believes in the sacrificial death of Christ and the power of His resurrection to forgive us from our sins, declare us righteous, and raise us to eternal life! That's what this text shows us: that Jesus willingly suffered, in order to fulfill the scriptures, accomplish GOd's plan of redemption, and die as a sacrifice on the cross, in our place, bearing the penalty for our sins; that He did so not in weakness or defeat, but in order to defeat sin, Satan, and death by rising again as the glorious, victorious Son of God, savior, and King; and that the only right way for us to respond to the problem of our sin and the message of what Jesus has done is to turn from everything else and trust in CHrist alone for salvation. In other words - the main point of this passage is the good news of the gospel!

So not only was it the main point of the passage last week - and next week as well - but this is the same gospel I make it a point to proclaim in *every sermon!* So again, you might see the temptation to want to change the topic, and say something more creative, something less familiar. But the second reason I'm not going to do that is because *the gospel is most important thing I could say to you today.* This gospel message is the single most important thing that you and I need to hear and believe this morning - and every day of our lives. We can never let the gospel become *too familiar* for us, so that we tune it out, that we quit listening, because we think, "Oh, I already know *that.*" But we never graduate from the gospel. Whether this is the thousandth time you've heard it, or the very first, this *good news* of who Jesus is and what He has done to save us is the *most important, most relevant, most life-changing message* that I, or anyone else, could talk about today. We could learn about many good and important things - about marriage; how to raise kids in a godly way; how to figure out whether or not we should quit our job, or take this new one, or how to navigate our relationships. But more important than any of that is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ - the news that it is possible for hopeless like you and me to be saved from our sins and have eternal life! And that this is not by any amount of good works you and I could do, but purely by the grace of God - and that He has accomplished everything necessary, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, to save *anyone* who repents and trusts in Him!

That's what you and I need to hear and truly believe today. So let's walk through this text and see what it tells us about the gospel of Christ.

And first, we see that...

### **I. Jesus Suffered and Died to Accomplish God's Plan of Salvation for Us (26:47-56)**

Last week, we saw that Matthew was making it painstakingly clear for us that the suffering and death of Jesus is no accident, no moment of weakness or failure; it is not a divine mistake, or an example of His enemies getting the better of him. It's not even fair to say this it's some cosmic chess match, where the cross was some clever ploy of the enemy and blow to God, but that bounced back and outsmarted them with the resurrection to finish the final blow. No, Matthew has gone out of his way, in the previous weeks and all throughout our text today, to make it very clear that *this is God's plan of redemption being accomplished in Christ*. The cross of Christ was always Plan A. Jesus willingly went to His suffering and death in order to obey the Father's Will, fulfill the Old Testament scriptures, and accomplish God's plan of salvation for His people. The sacrificial death of Christ to atone for our sins *is the only way for anyone to be saved*.

We're reminded of that throughout this passage, where we see Jesus' betrayal at the hands of Judas, his arrest and corrupt trial, Peter's denial of Jesus, Judas' tragic ending of his life, and Pilate's recognition of Jesus's innocence before handing him over to be crucified. But it is in this first section, where Matthew records the betrayal and arrest of Jesus that this is most clearly seen, in chapter 26, verses 47-56. Jesus is still in the Garden of Gethsemane; he's just finished praying that prayer; and then rose from prayer, saying, "see, my betrayer is at hand." And sure enough, just like Jesus predicted would happen, Judas comes to betray him, leading a "great crowd with sword and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people" (v.47). Now, these weren't the days of cameras and cell phones, where you could look up any celebrity's picture on the internet or even see their face in the newspaper. So even though Jesus was well-known, many people, even religious leaders, might not have known exactly what he looked like, especially in the dark of night; so Judas came in and showed the guards who to arrest by walking up to Jesus and saying, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and giving Him a kiss (vv.48-49). And I'll also note: this is not some inappropriate or romantic kiss, but merely a common way of greeting close friends or family members in that culture (much like it is in many European or Hispanic cultures today, to give a kiss on the cheek).

Jesus quietly complies and allows himself to be arrested; but Peter, who boldly proclaimed just a few verses earlier (vv.33-35) that he would stick with Jesus to the end, now boldly tries to defend Jesus with a sword. He attacks a soldier - most likely going for the head to try and kill him - and in a near-miss, ends up taking off the guy's ear. But Jesus doesn't fight back, nor does he thank or support Peter's bravery; instead, he *rebukes him*, saying, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Basically, saying, if you live by the sword and try to solve your problems with violence, then sooner or later, that violence will catch up to you, the sword will find you, too.

After all, Jesus doesn't need Peter to defend him. IN fact, he goes on to say, in v.53, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" This is not-so-subtle flex, isn't it? He's saying, "Look, I'm not powerless here; if I wanted to defend myself with force and get myself out of being arrested and killed, I could do it - and not with the sword of man, but the power of God! I have tens of thousands of angels at my disposal!" That's what Jesus is saying here. He could have stopped those soldiers in their tracks. But he didn't. As he says in the next verse (v.54), "But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" He willingly allowed himself to be arrested and betrayed, in order to go to his trial, suffering, and even death on the cross. As he says again, in v.56, "But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

In other words, Jesus willingly allowed himself to be arrested, to suffer, and even die on the cross because He knew that it was necessary in order to *fulfill the Old Testament* scriptures, detailing how God would bring redemption to His people - how a savior would come to save us from our sins, spiritual death, and the wrath of God we deserve. One of the clearest examples of this is *Isa. 53*:

"He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. . . . Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out

of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities” (vv. 4-7, 10-11).

Every single one of us is a sinner. We have all sinned against God and turned away from Him; we’ve all disobeyed and rebelled; we all deserve God’s just judgment and wrath against us - and that day of final judgment is coming; the Lord will pour out His wrath and judgment against evil on *all who are outside of Christ*. But anyone who repents and believes - who turns to Christ in faith - will be saved! Not because we’re good enough - you’re not, I’m not, and none of us ever will be. But because we believe that Jesus *already paid the penalty for our sins so that we don’t have to! That Jesus willingly bore our sins on Himself as He went like a “lamb to the slaughter” to be a sacrifice in our place, dying the death we deserve and paying the penalty we should have paid!* That’s what Jesus is saying here - that’s why he’s allowing himself to be betrayed and arrested, to even suffer and die - because He’s doing it in order to be “crushed for our transgressions” in order that, through His death, we might live!

But this text - and the good news of the gospel - isn’t just about Jesus’s death, but also about what comes after it. So secondly, we see that...

## **II. Jesus’s Death and Resurrection Reveal Who He Truly Is: God’s Glorious Son, Messiah, and King (26:57-68)**

After Jesus was arrested, they took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, and all the elders and scribes; this was the gathering of the “Sanhedrin,” the highest religious court of the Jewish people. This was a trial, to accuse and prosecute Jesus for blasphemy - but it was not an attempt at true justice; it was corrupt, a sham. You see, they knew that Jesus wasn’t a criminal in any sense, so they intentionally sought false testimony against him. Verses 59-60 tell us, “They were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward.” So, how does this work? They’re intentionally seeking false testimony; they have false witness come forward, who are willing to lie and bring false charges; and yet, it says they “found none.”

Well, what it probably means is that many people were coming and bringing false charges against Jesus, reports of him being unlawful and the like, but no two witnesses agreed on anything, perhaps even contradicting one another. That's one of the problems of people coming forward as witnesses and lying - the lies don't add up with each other. But they still need at least two witness to validate the pronouncement of the trial. But finally, Matthew tells us in verses 60-61, "At last two came forward" and corroborated each other's stories, saying, "This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'"

Now, that's not an accurate report of what Jesus said, and he was talking about his body, not the temple itself (actually predicting his own death and resurrection). Regardless, Caiaphas seizes on the opportunity, saying to Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" (v. 62). But Jesus, even as Isaiah predicted, remained silent, like a lamb going to the slaughter. So Caiaphas charged him under oath to answer him, saying, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (v. 63).

And Jesus answers, "You have said so" (v. 64). Now, we might prefer a more straight-forward, "Yes, I am." What exactly does, "You have said so" even mean? Well, one of my previous pastors (Lee Tankersley) gave an explanation of this scene that I found very helpful, and I think you will, too: he pointed out, very helpfully, that this exact phrase was said by Jesus to someone else just a few verses earlier. In the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus had said that one of them would betray him, and we read in verse 25 that "Judas, who would betray him, answered, 'Is it I, Rabbit?' [And Jesus] said to him, 'You have said so.'" And what's interesting about this is that Judas had already made the deal to betray Jesus. He knew it was him. So, why would Jesus answer him, "You have said so" instead of just, "Yes, it is"? Well, perhaps the reason is because Jesus wants to answer in a pointed, stinging kind of way. That is, instead of Jesus saying, "Yes," Jesus says, "You have said so," because Judas was asking a question he knew the answer to, trying perhaps to act as if he was innocent, and Jesus was saying, "It's you and you know it's you."

I think Lee Tankersley is right; I think that's pretty much exactly what Jesus is saying to Caiaphas here. Caiaphas cannot act as an innocent bystander here. He has been given sufficient proof to know that Jesus is, indeed, the Christ, the Messiah - God's promised King and Savior.

When he says, “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God,” he already knows the answer, he’s simply unwilling to profess what he knows to be true. He wants Jesus to give the true answer so that He can reject and deny it.

So after Jesus says, “It’s true that I’m the Messiah, and you know it’s true,” He then says in the next verse, “But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (v. 64). That is, Jesus is saying, “You know it’s true; you know who I am; you can deny it now and try to reject the truth, but the truth will be made plain and clear, and you will no longer be able to deny it.”

When Jesus answers this way, He’s making a clear, explicit claim to be the Messiah. He explicitly declares here that He is the “Son of Man” in Daniel 7, who will receive the kingdom of God, being seated at His right hand and coming in power and glory.. He is claiming to be God’s Messiah - the promised Savior - God’s King who will reign over the whole world and judge all people. That’s why Caiaphas responded so forcefully, so that he “tore his clothes,” accused Jesus of “uttering blasphemy,” and declared, “He deserves death” (vv. 65-66).

Do you catch the powerful irony at play in this scene? Let’s not miss what Jesus is saying here. At this moment, in this trial scene, Jesus now stands to be judged, he is given a death sentence, and He will indeed be executed; but that’s not how the story ends - the tables will be turned in a powerful way. Yes, Jesus will die, as we’ll see next week in the end of chapter 27. He will be judged, beaten, mocked, even crucified.

But then, on the third day, Jesus *will be raised from the dead!* And one day, we know, Jesus is going to return, coming on the clouds, with power and glory, at the right hand of the Father, bringing His reign and Kingdom to bear on all the earth! That’s what Jesus is saying here: “one day, you’ll see me alive, reigning in power and glory.” One day, Caiaphas will see that when he accused Jesus of blaspheming, he was *dead wrong* - in fact, he was the one committing blasphemy against Jesus, because Jesus is God Himself! One day, every single enemy of GOD, every single person who has ever sinned and rebelled against God, every single human being ever to live, will see Jesus seated at the right hand of Power, coming on the clouds of heaven. And on that day, everyone will stand before the Lord Christ, and *He* will not be judged by

Caiaphas, the priests, the Romans, or any of us - but just the opposite will be the case; we will stand before Jesus, God's Son, the True King over all, as *He pronounces judgment on each of us!*

So this is a word of *warning* to each of us. But it is also a *word of hope* - because this same King and judge of all also came to suffer and die as a *savior* for *anyone who repents and trusts in Him*. And this leads us to our final point...

### **III. The Necessity for Each individual to repent and believe in Christ Alone (26:69 - 27:26)**

This point is made throughout the rest of this passage (26:69 - 27:26), where we are given three different portraits of three men - Peter, Judas, and Pontius Pilate - who see who Jesus is, but do not respond to him rightly.

#### **A. Peter's Denial (26:69-75)**

First, we see that Peter denied Jesus three times, just like Jesus predicted he would. Peter has long been the spokesmen of the Twelve disciples; one of Jesus's most faithful and loyal followers, who believed that Jesus is the Messiah, Savior, and King - even the Son of God! Just a few verses earlier, we saw Peter boldly declare his willingness to die with Jesus - he even fought to defend him with the sword! Yet Peter faces a trial of His own that parallels and contrasts greatly with Jesus's. Jesus willingly gives himself up as a sacrifice, in obedience to the Father's will, to accomplish the plan of salvation. But Peter, on the other hand, caves in the face of fear; he denies following Jesus *three times*, in verses 69-75, even while Jesus is on trial, before he finally fled and abandoned Jesus like the rest of the disciples.

Now, the point of this story being included is not for us to poke fun and pass judgment on Peter. After all, He is indeed a bold figure of faith, and would go on as one of the most prominent leaders of the early church, enduring much persecution on account of Christ! Peter indeed goes on to repent and believe!

But the point is, I think, to remind us that what is true of Peter here is true of *all of us at times*. Peter's story here is a reminder that we all fall; we're all sinners; none of us is strong enough, in our own power and strength, to obey God perfectly, to endure in the face of death. Only Jesus is good enough to stand the trial. Like Peter, we, too, have all sinned; like Peter, we,



too, even as *believers*, have moments of sin and weakness, moments of backsliding into doubt and fear. So the only hope for each of us is to trust not in ourselves, in our own ability to be good enough, in our own strength and power - no, our only hope is to true in the GOd-Man, Jesus Christ, who endured faithfully to the end; who lived perfectly *in our place*.

Our only hope is to trust in Christ alone; to respond to who Jesus is and what He has done in *repentance and faith!*

And so, to underscore this, Matthew then gives us two stories that show us what happens if we *reject Jesus*, and don't respond to the gospel of Christ in repentance and faith.

### **B. Judas's Tragic Death (27:3-14)**

We see a powerful picture of this, first, in the tragic end of the life of Judas. After all, this story breaks up the chronological flow of events in the narrative. The chief priest already sentenced Jesus as deserving death - but they were not in political power, Rome ruled Israel in those days. So the religious court could make some rulings, but they couldn't sentence anyone to death - only the Roman rulers of the area could do that. So chapter 27 opens by Jesus being transferred to Pilate, to be tried in the Roman court.

But right in the middle of this, Matthew interrupts the narrative to tell us what happened to Judas, Jesus's betrayer. In chapter 27:3-14, we're told that Judas becomes aware of how wrong and sinful his actions were in betraying Jesus; he says, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (v.4), and tries to give the blood money back to the priests and elders, having changed his mind. They won't accept the money, in another episode of hypocrisy. But as Judas storms out, aware of his guilt, he doesn't repent; he doesn't confess his sin to the Lord and seek forgiveness and grace by returning to Jesus in faith. Instead, he tries to atone for his own guilt by tragically taking his own life.

### **C. Pilate's Cowardice**

We see something similar in Pilate, the Roman governor who tries Jesus in the very next scene, when the chronological narrative is resumed in verses 11-26. As Pilate weighs the accusations against Jesus and interviews him, he is "amazed" at how Jesus responds (vv.11-14), and is soon convinced of Jesus's innocence ; "For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up" (v.18). Besides this, Pilate's own wife had received a dream from the Lord, showing her that Jesus was innocent and "righteous," and she pleaded with Pilate to spare him (v.19).

But in the end, even though Pilate is amazed and admires Jesus, he doesn't respond in faith either. He responds in fear and cowardice. He gives up his attempts to spare Jesus, and he gives in to the injustice of the angry mob, answering their cries for innocent blood and orders his own soldiers to unjustly execute Jesus. Pilate tries to atone for his own sin here, too, by washing his hands clean of the injustice and pronouncing himself innocent (v.24). But that fools no one except himself.

I think the point of these back-to-back stories is clear: Judas and Pilate know their guilt, they even acknowledge who Jesus is - but this is worldly regret for sin, not godly conviction; it is intellectual belief in God and recognition of Jesus, but not true, saving faith.

We're all guilty sinners deserving of judgment. We can't stand in our own power and strength. And we can't atone for our own sins either. Our only hope is to repent and believe; to stop trusting in our own moral righteousness and good works, and to trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ alone as sufficient to save us from our sins. And if you are, then your sins are truly forgiven because of what Christ has done!

If you're trusting Christ for the thousandth time - praise God! Let us preach this gospel to ourselves and each other every day, and press on in faith!

But maybe the way for you to respond is to truly believe and trust in Christ for the very first time. If so, you can trust in Christ right now - simply rest in His finished work and merciful grace! Then make that public, by being baptized, and join a Bible-believing church, where you can live out repentance and faith by following Christ in all things. If you have any questions about this gospel, becoming a Christian, being baptized, or even joining this church, I would love to speak with you. You can come now, or find me after the service. Let us pray.