

Two on Trial (Matthew 26:47-75)

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[0 : 00] Matthew 26, verse 47 to 75. While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them.

The one I kiss is the man. Arrest him. Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, Greetings, Rabbi, and kissed him. Jesus replied, Do what you came for, friend.

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus, and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out, and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Put your sword back in its place, Jesus said to him, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

[1 : 08] But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? In that hour, Jesus said to the crowd, Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?

Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me. But this has taken place, that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled. Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest.

He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus, so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two came forward and declared, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.

[2 : 15] Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you? But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, I charge you under oath by the living God. Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God. You have said so, Jesus replied.

But I say to you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, He has spoken blasphemy.

Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? He is worthy of death, they answered.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, Prophecy to us, Messiah, who hit you? Now Jesus was sitting out in the courtyard and a servant girl came to him.

[3 : 20] You also were with Jesus of Galilee, she said. But he denied it before them all. I don't know what you're talking about, he said. Then he went out to the gateway where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, This fellow was with the Jesus of Nazareth.

He denied it again with an oath. I don't know the man. After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, Surely you are one of them.

Your accent gives you away. Then he began to call down curses and he swore to them, I don't know the man. Immediately a rooster crowed.

Then Jesus remembered the word Jesus, Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken. Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. And he went outside and went bitterly.

Thank you, Eden. Good afternoon, everyone.

[4 : 26] Make sure you keep that passage that we've just heard open. We're here to encounter God. And no better place, right, than as we are journeying with Jesus to the cross.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, speak to us, whatever trials come in our lives. Remind us that even when we have deserted or denied or ignored the Messiah, that you have vindicated him. You have declared that he is exactly who he says it is. And he is worthy of our trust. Even as we see him led to the cross for our sins.

Speak to us. We pray. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Let me tell you about the time that I had to go to court. Yes.

It was at the Manico District Court. It wasn't for a crime I committed, so don't worry. But I did have to represent myself at a tribunal, a disputes tribunal.

[5 : 34] So, Cheryl and I were driving through a car park one time, and then someone else pulled out and then dinged our car. We got out. We talked about it.

There was a bit of a disagreement of who was at fault. And, I mean, it went to trial. And at the time, the verdict, I don't know why, but it really mattered to me. I didn't want that, you know, to pay the excess or to have the shame of a blemished insurance record.

But in light of what we've just seen, this trial, it seems so minor, doesn't it? Here in Matthew's Gospel, we have an actual trial that is life or death, doesn't it?

Where the verdict really matters, not just for Jesus, but for all of us. So, let us consider the scene that we just heard.

All right. So, we're going to briefly look at it in four parts. So, in our first passage, in the first section, kind of just sets the scene from verses 47 through to 56.

[6 : 43] All right. And here, we see the scene is set for the trial. We're here in the early hours of Good Friday. That's when we are. And as we heard last week, a lot of preparation has led up to this moment, right?

Everyone, different people, all preparing for the events about to take place on the cross. But Matthew's goal in this part of the story, it seems, is to remind us that everything is happening according to God's plan.

Even as Jesus is arrested in this scene, I wonder if you noticed twice, all right, verse 54, verse 56, Jesus explicitly points out that all this is happening so that the Scriptures will be fulfilled, right? Verse 54, how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? Verse 56, this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.

And Jesus knows this is all according to plan. It's why he doesn't need to fight back against this mob out to arrest him. He doesn't need to resist Judas, his betrayer.

[7 : 58] He accepts the kiss. Do what you came for, friend. Remember last week, he's already wrestled with his father in prayer. He's already accepted that it is God's will that must be done.

He's willing to go to the cross as planned. And so that's how the scene is set. It's an arrest, yes, but it's planned, all according to plan.

And then what do we see next? Well, we see Jesus on trial. Well, actually, there's actually several trials that happen on Good Friday when it comes to Jesus, right?

And we'll hear more about it next week in chapter 27 as well. There's a trial before the Roman governor, Pilate. We'll see that next week. That's a formal one. There's possibly even another Jewish trial.

Matthew 27, verse 1 or 2 could be another group, another gathering, another decision to be made. Our focus today in our scene is this kind of midnight last-minute trial that we see from verse 57, right?

[9 : 02] But notice that actually, while Jesus is on trial, it's not just him who faces the court of human opinion. Did you notice how Matthew puts two scenes together?

There's Jesus on trial, and then there's Peter on trial as well, right? Peter watching for the courtyard. He's questioned as well.

And so that's why I've called this sermon, Two on Trial. And the key question for both trials is this. What do these trials prove?

So I want you to think about it. What do these trials prove? All right? I hope you can answer that question in the next couple of minutes. So let's first look at the first trial, the drama in the courtroom. From verse 57 in your Bibles, we see Jesus.

He's just been arrested. He's brought to the high priest's house for this last-minute trial. I'll give you a bit of context. And if you were living in first-century Jerusalem, you were living in a place where the Roman Empire was ruling over, officially.

[10:11] But they gave the Jewish people some freedom to decide lots of things for themselves. They could make some of their own laws. They could have all these religious leaders tell people what to do and what not to do.

But one thing they didn't allow them to do is to be able to decide for themselves to kill someone, capital punishment.

So what they want to do with Jesus, they actually have no power to do themselves. All right? The best they can do, these scribes and these elders, they can call for someone to be executed.

But they can't actually do it themselves. They must let the Romans handle it. It seems like events have moved quickly, right? After Judas turned Jesus in, kind of betrayed him, these religious leaders, they decide to seize the opportunity to move quickly.

They're thinking, wow, there's no time for due process, no time for a fair trial. Let's just arrest him. Let's charge him with something that will stick. Let's try and convince the Romans to punish him by death.

[11:19] But there's a bit of a race against time, right? It's Friday. The Passover is coming. For the Romans to execute him before the Sabbath, the day of rest, where no one could do any work, including executing, they had to do it all before the Friday evening.

Hence, this late night mob coming to grab Jesus. Hence, this very hastily assembled quorum of people, the Sanhedrin. Hence, it must have been in the middle of the night.

Imagine coming here for a 3 a.m. special members meeting. I don't know who would show up, but here they are. They're desperate. They're committed to seeing through this arrest and the consequences, right?

And the intent's already clear, right? Look at verse 59. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

Matthew is already clear. They were seeking false testimony. They had already predetermined the outcome, hadn't they? And yet, there's a big problem.

[12:31] They've got nothing to charge Jesus with officially. When it comes to Jewish law, you needed two men to agree to a testimony, right? For it to be like, okay, that's actually true.

And they couldn't even get that. Did you see that? Verse 60. Many false witnesses came forward, but they couldn't even get them to agree. If this happened today, right, the case would surely have been thrown out by now.

But here, Caiaphas, the high priest, is controlling the affairs. They're pressing on. Finally, two people come forward, and these men, they declare, right?

This fellow said, verse 61, I'm able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days. Now, these two must have recalled this moment, right?

And we see it recorded in John's Gospel, chapter 2, verse 19. There was a moment when Jesus cleared out all the merchants and the money changers. And when people challenged him, he declared, I can destroy this temple and rebuild it in three days.

[13:35] Of course, the temple he spoke about was his own body. But the nuance is lost. People just heard that and then passed it on and passed it on. And accused of this, Jesus, before these leaders, is made to look like a bit of a rebel, like a political terrorist.

It's a serious charge, right? Trying to destroy, you know, the place where God met with his people. Still not punishable by death, though, it seems.

So what happens next? Then the high priest, verse 62, stood up. He demands a response from the defendant. But notice again, look at the detail. But Jesus remained silent.

That's not a throwaway line. I mean, think about Matthew's Gospel. We've journeyed through it for several years now, right? According to Matthew, Jesus does not stop talking, does he?

Right? He has a lot to teach, a lot to share, a lot to disciple you with. And yet at this moment, he is silent. The contrast is clear.

[14:45] Because in his silence, Jesus is fulfilling. He is embodying the suffering servant prophesied in Isaiah chapter 53.

Some of you may know this verse, right? Isaiah 53, verse 7, we read, Matthew, as he writes the Gospel, is trying to convince and persuade us that Jesus fits the bill.

He is this Lamb of God, as prophesied, silent before his accusers. The silence here, though, isn't helpful. Because here's a whole bunch of people that can't get what they want. Time's running out. They need a verdict for this trial. And everything they've come up with has not worked so far. And so the chief priest kind of pulls out his trump card. He raises the stakes. He asks under oath, verse 63, I charge you, I charge you, under oath by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.

[16:01] And this is the turning point in our passage. Here in front of all these religious leaders, right, knowing that it would lead to his death, Jesus acknowledges his divine authority openly.

What does he say? You have said so. And I say to all of you, from now on, you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.

When he finally speaks, Jesus makes that claim. He says, He is God himself, judge. These words that Jesus speaks of, this is him ascribing to us of all the promises of the Exalted One.

Have a listen to Daniel chapter 7, verse 13, 14. Daniel has a vision and it says, He looked and there before him was one like a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven, approaching the Ancient of Days, led to his presence.

And the Son of Man was given authority, glory, sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. That's who Jesus has just claimed himself to be.

[17:21] Or remember Psalm 110. The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. These are awesome, powerful images.

And Jesus, by what he said to Caiaphas here, is saying, This is me. I am the Son of God. I am this divine King.

And actually, he goes further, doesn't he, right? Verse 64, it says, From now on, or in the future, you will see this.

Jesus is saying, Today, what's happening today, is a turning point in history. Today, what's happening today at the cross, is the fulfillment of all of God's people's hopes and dreams.

Today, I've just declared, I am the chosen one. And I have the authority to judge even you. Can you imagine the high priest being confronted with that by someone in front of him?

[18:29] No wonder he's furious. How dare this small town, homespun rabbi claim to be God's judge even over him. He's worthy of death, they cry.

And it's hard to watch, isn't it? Verse 67, Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists, slapping him, saying, Prophecy to us, Christ, who hits you?

This court of justice, this trial, has taken a really dark and hurtful turn. And there's an irony here, isn't there? The men are taunting Jesus, right?

They're kind of mocking him. We'll think more about his mocking next time as well in future. They're like, Who hit you? And yet, Jesus has just shown that everything that's happened is exactly as planned.

Right? Jesus is in control of every situation, every blow he's receiving. I mean, remember last week? Jesus said, He'll be handed over to be crucified during the Passover.

[19:37] And then remember the Jewish leaders, they gathered together, they said, No, don't do it during the Passover. It's not going to be very good for us. Whose plan comes true? It's Jesus, isn't it?

Remember, Jesus predicted last week, his disciples, they're going to scatter into the night like sheep scattered without a shepherd. And then all the disciples said, No, that's not going to happen. Right? Our plan is that we're never going to disown you. Whose prediction comes true? It's Jesus, right? Even the spitting and mocking of the Lord, actually, Isaiah 50 verse 6, predicts of the suffering servant, I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.

What does Jesus on trial prove to us? It proves, firstly, he's in control. Even at the moment of his impending death, he's in control.

He's not guilty of all these false accusations that people tried to put on him. But he is guilty, one thing, of being the Messiah, of being the Son of God, of being all of God's promises come true in him.

[20:51] And because of that, he is not afraid. He's not ashamed to go to the cross so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, so that our sins might be forgiven, so that we can have an eternal life with God.

And I think as we continue watching the Son of Man walk this lonely road, as we watch him carry out his Father's will, as we watch him prepare to give his life for sinners like you and me, the question, the easy question to ask is, will we humble ourselves before him?

Or will we mock and ridicule and turn against him like these leaders? All of us have the same choice, don't we? As Caiaphas, as these other religious people.

Either Jesus is a fraud and we should destroy him, or he's the Christ and we should bow the knee before him. There are only two ways to live when it comes to being faced with divine kingship.

So the drama in the courtroom, what does it prove? Can I suggest it proves Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the Christ and God will vindicate him.

[22 : 15] That's not the only drama that occurs in our passage, is it? Right? Because we need to pay attention also to the drama that goes on in the courtyard. As I said before, there's two trials in our passage and from verse 69 onwards we see Peter interrogated three times as it were.

And each time denying his Savior. And we've explored what Jesus on trial proved. Now, here's the question. What does Jesus on trial prove to us? What does it reveal about us as we follow his footsteps?

this? It's fair of thought for Peter. Actually, his account starts slightly earlier because as those who arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas, verse 58 tells us, but Peter followed him at a distance, right? This is after all the disciples deserted him and fled. And when we switch back in verse 69 back to the trial, we're watching.

Sorry. As we switch into the trial scene, you know, all these things, the only reason we would have known about it is because Peter was close enough, right, to hear and see what happened.

[23 : 28] And he's seeing it, right, verse 69 tells us, from out in the courtyard. Out in the courtyard. And maybe, at this point, Peter's feeling pretty good.

After all, Jesus did say, right, you'll all fall away. And Peter, he boldly declared, verse 33, I never will. And here he is, determined to see the outcome.

But then a young girl comes forward, sees a familiar face. Hey, you were with Jesus of Galilee, weren't you? And then our hero wilts, no, no, I don't know what you're talking about.

Then we watch him. He stands up, he moves out to the gateway, right, further and further away from what's happening. He's no longer watching Jesus now. And then another girl, it says, accuses him of knowing Jesus.

This time, there's a bit more of a crowd. And Peter says, I swear, I don't know the man. And then after some time, it's the servants standing around Peter.

[24 : 33] And they accuse him. They say, you know, in a sense, you're not from here, are you? That Kiwi accent, it betrays you, Peter. Peter. And then it comes from Peter, cursing from his lips.

Something sinister even about what Peter has just done. Verse 74, calling down curses, swearing to them, I don't know the man.

And I think actually in the original text, Matthew leaves it ambiguous. We're not told who he curses, but he certainly denies Jesus, doesn't he? And then the rooster crows, and Peter's trial is over.

The gavel comes down. He's found guilty. It's ironic, isn't it? In one trial, Jesus stands firm in front of the most powerful leaders in the country.

And on the other side, just outside, Peter crumbles before a servant girl or two. on the other side, Jesus willingly receives the shame, the mocking.

[25 : 42] He knows it's all God's plan and he will continue to the cross. Just outside, Peter, he denies his master to avoid the shame of being associated with him on the first go.

Why does Peter deny Jesus? Jesus, why might you and I do the same? I think we do get scared of what other people think of us, don't we?

We get worried about having a bad reputation. We might even see things happen in the news and we say, we don't want to be like those people. We want to aspire, don't we, to be the reasonable, friendly person in the workplace or at school and so our flag stays very hidden and if we're honest, that's because deep down our heaven or what makes us most happy might be just the praise of others.

Maybe our hell, what we fear most, is to be mocked and rejected, pushed aside. How many of us find, finds it, you know, how many of us find it easy this month, right, to say, I'm a Christian, it's Pride Month and the rainbow community are very proud of, you know, who they are and their beliefs but it's hard, isn't it?

We certainly don't want to be tarred as extremists. I mean, I even remember how hard it was to talk about my faith the day that our country legalized same-sex marriage.

[27 : 24] By God's grace, I believe the gospel is good news for anyone who repents of their sin, anyone who clings to the Lord Jesus. He gives us our true identity, no matter our sexuality.

But wow, that's hard to say to a neighbor, right, who's gay. For me, I get scared it'll be my last conversation with some of the people in my life I love who identify as LGBT.

It's hard, isn't it? We don't like being thought of as bigots or idiots or backwards thinking, and so we keep silent when we should speak up about Jesus or when we should just be confident about who we are in Christ.

I even remember another time we were having dinner with an old friend, used to teach us music and singing, and then his wife came out and then she kind of just, you know, as we were just chatting and small talk, she said, you know, what are we here on earth for anyways?

We just work, work, work, and then we die. Isn't that it? You know, and you just stand there and you're like, wow, isn't that a golden option to like, talk about, you know, Jesus, my faith, share the gospel?

[28 : 38] And then we just stood there and we just like, oh, and then the moment passed and that was it. Wow. We want the benefits of following Jesus, so many of us.

And so often we don't want the shame associated with following him, right? It affects everything about our lives, it affects whether we're willing to invite someone to church or to sit down with coffee, for a coffee with them and ask them about what they believe.

We love eternal life. It sounds so good, right, to be home in heaven with Jesus. And yet, so often we struggle with suffering for Christ here and now.

like Peter, our actions, they don't match what we say we will do for Jesus. And no one's righteous, not even one.

We've all denied Jesus in some way. If we have eyes to see, Peter's trial proves something, doesn't it? That all of us can be tempted to deny Jesus, just to vindicate ourselves.

[29 : 44] seen two trials, heard two verdicts, Jesus guilty of being the Christ, but not ashamed to go to the cross, and Peter guilty for denying the Christ, and like him we're tempted to do the same.

How could we respond? What should we do from here? It's the same thing that we do when we are face to face with the good news of Christ.

So I want to suggest that actually our passage shows this to us, shows us repentance and faith, right? So two responses when you are reeling from the fact that you've just denied Jesus, or you've just done something that doesn't match up with what you say you are.

Two responses. First is that we would weep in repentance. Have a look at verse 74 again.

Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken.

Before the rooster crows, you'll deny me, disown me three times. And he went outside and wept bitterly. I think Peter's tears here are his first steps towards restoration.

[31 : 04] Here he steps away from his accusers, and I think he acknowledges his failure. others will respond differently to their guilt and shame, as we will soon see.

But friends, here is a model for us. We need to start by admitting our failure before the law, don't we? To acknowledge the ways that we've been ashamed of Jesus in our speech, our conduct, in our workplaces, maybe ashamed of him in our marriages, or in our parenting, even just in our pursuit of stuff, achievements.

It's not too late to ask, where have I compromised in my walk with Jesus? Consider the evidence in your heart, and then we express how sorry we are.

Repentance, that can be our first response to these trials. And the other response, the other side of the coin, is just as crucial. We don't just weep with Peter.

Let's also gaze at Jesus with him. Let's also gaze at Jesus with him. The Gospel of Luke has a parallel account of this scene, Peter's denial.

[32 : 23] But in Luke's Gospel, he has an important addition. Straight after the rooster crowed, Luke 22, 61 says this, the Lord looked straight at Peter.

And remember where Peter is right now, okay? He's not in the courtyard watching Jesus. Did you notice the movement? He's out at the gateway with the wrong crowd. He's stood far away. From his body position, he's denied the Lord.

God. And it's at this point, a look at Jesus, that Peter snaps back and remember who he belongs to, whose disciple he is.

And he finally remembers the Lord's words to him here, right? It's going back to Jesus, gazing at him again, looking at the one who has loved him before the world began.

That look from his Messiah, friends, when we look at our Savior, we truly gaze, lock eyes again, dwell on him, see him, that is what will shift us from that temptation that caused us to deny him in the first place.

[33 : 35] And in a sense, Matthew doesn't include this detail about Jesus looking at him. He doesn't need to, right? Because what's the point of this whole narrative, this passion narrative, as long and as extended as it is, so we would gaze at Jesus.

We're meant to keep watching, aren't we, church, as he walks to the cross, as every step he takes is a step of love and mercy and grace for us.

We're meant to just keep watching as he is torn and broken for us because of our sins, body and blood, broken, shed for us.

And we dare not look away because any time you and I take our eyes off Jesus, that's when our hearts will be prone to fix on something else that will ruin us.

Is that not true? And friends, this isn't Peter's greatest moment, okay? And that's one reason we know this is true, right? Who would make up something terrible about themselves?

[34 : 40] Like, if I wrote a story about myself, I wouldn't put this kind of detail in. This is true. This is good news because, actually, this is a starting point where Peter changes. In our Bibles, we're privileged to also have letters from Peter, right?

He writes the Christian church, 1 Peter 3, 14 to 15. He says this, same person, right? Same Peter, even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed, Peter says.

Don't fear their threats, don't be frightened. Verse 15, but in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect.

Could this be the same person that just denied Jesus three times? It can, because God is a God of second chances. Jesus is a merciful and forgiving Savior.

He can transform someone like Peter, bold and brash, yet never lives up to his hype on the day it counted. And he can turn him into someone who says, in your hearts, fear Christ the Lord.

[35 : 52] And he's applied that lesson, right? Since his trials. How does he avoid the fear of other people? He says it, revere Christ as Lord, fear the Lord instead, gaze upon his beauty.

as a Scottish hymn writer. You won't know this song because we don't sing hymns so much here, but Ora Rowan, Rowan's his last name, captures this idea beautifully.

This poem is called, Hast thou seen him, heard him, known him? So, but have a listen, because she says this, what can strip the seeming beauty from the idols of the earth?

Not a sense of right or duty, but the sight of matchless worth. It's the look that melted Peter, it's the face that Stephen saw, it's the heart that wept with Mary, that alone can from idols draw.

Jesus has been on trial, but so have we. And our right response is to weep at our own idolatry, but at the same time to turn and gaze again at the precious face of Jesus, our suffering Savior.

[37 : 14] And can I encourage you to continue doing that in your lives, in your days, and do it if you've never done it before for the first time, gazing at the matchless beauty of our Lord Jesus.

And I'm looking forward as we continue to the cross, that we do the same. Let's pray. Lord, help us to turn our eyes upon Jesus.

Lord, help us to look full in his wonderful face. Lord, help us to gradually, as we behold his face to see all the temptations of this earth to grow strangely dim, because his face shines brighter than the sun.

His mercy is far bigger than our problems, and his goodness can counteract and wash over every temptation we have to deny him, to ignore him, to live without him.

Father, help us keep turning our face and our eyes to our Lord Jesus in song. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. to