

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 9 April 2017

No. T0984

Speaker: Mr. Paul Callicott

Easter Series 2017: Matthew 26:47-27:66

Good morning to all who are listening today.

I attribute my opening anecdote to my nephew as his sense of humour alone provided me with it. At one of our Easter services, my nephew was asked what Easter was all about. He promptly answered "Chocolate"! After the speaker had then gone through the Easter story and what it means for us, he was asked again. Again he answered "Chocolate"! Naturally this was given with an air of humour. However, such a statement is not too far from a lot of people's thoughts about Easter.

In this country at Easter we spend time with family and friends, eat chocolate and have time off work. All of these things are very nice. However, if we were to consider the passage that we will be looking at this morning, Matthew 26:47-27:66, which is so integral to the Easter story, we would see that our standard response to this time of year is not in keeping with the terrible actions of many of those involved in the story. If these events had taken place today and had involved a normal person in the street, there would be open condemnation. There would be protests; discontent would flow until justice was believed to have been done. Yet today how content we are to enjoy the 'nice' time we have over Easter without really appreciating the enormity of most of the Easter story.

Our broadcast this morning is the second of three which make up the Easter Series and covers Matthew 26:46-27:66. It provides a narrative of the events leading up to the Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus and finishes with His burial. There are many verses to cover in our time this morning; ninety five to be exact! Our passage moves swiftly through the numerous events that made up this extraordinary time, which covers roughly twenty four hours. It seems to me that the people directly involved keep themselves incredibly busy.

In order to get through everything, I have decided to cover the narrative briefly in order to get an overview of the passage. I will then look at some of the individual characters who can be seen in the passage in a little more detail. I will then give a few thoughts regarding the Lord Jesus in this passage. I will finally conclude with a few thoughts for us to take away that will hopefully stir up each of our hearts in response to the great sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

So, let us press on by a swift run through the narrative events to get a picture of the events of this passage:

- We initially are told of the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. An armed mob, led by Judas, turns up to the place where Jesus had been praying. He identifies Jesus with a kiss. Peter tries to intervene by cutting off the ear of one of the mob but Jesus acts to stop any further violence by healing the man's ear. The disciples all flee and Jesus is taken away for His first trial. This all occurs in Matthew 26:47-57.
- Matthew 26:57-68 goes on to give us the account of the first trial that Jesus underwent. This was the more religious trial which was supposed to be conducted according to the Jewish Law. However, even the location, timing and attendance was not done in the proper way. We see that false witnesses are sought but they cannot agree and this proves to be useless in bringing a charge against the Lord. He is then directly asked to declare if He is the Son of God. When He answers this, He is then deemed by the High Priest to have condemned Himself and the whole gathered company condemns Him to death. Those present then take part in what can only be described as cheap shots by striking and spitting at Jesus.
- We then move to a different scene away from the trial. Here we see Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus. He denies him three times and then, finally hearing the cock crowing, he remembers the words of Jesus, predicting Peter's denial. This leaves Peter weeping in the realisation of the gravity of his actions. This is covered by Matthew 26:69-75.
- Matthew 27:1-2 describes the move to hand Jesus over to Pontius Pilate. The narrative then moves on to describe the last actions of Judas. He is filled with remorse and seeks to return the money which had led him to betray Jesus. This is rejected by the chief priests and Judas, finding no help for his predicament, hangs himself. The last part of this section looks at the twisted morality of the Chief priests who, not wanting to deal

with blood money which they happily gave away, buy a field to try and clear themselves of the guilt. There is another reference to the scriptures being fulfilled here. Matthew 27:3-10 cover this section.

- Matthew 27:11-25 brings before us the dealings of Pilate and we will find that events move rapidly on. This is effectively the Roman trial which would have been down to the whim of the Governor, utilising the Roman law. He first questions Jesus to ascertain if the claims are just. There is a sense where Pilate began to see that this was not a clear case and, in fact, the Jewish leaders were envious and allowing that to drive their aims. He then hopes to arrange the release of Jesus by giving them a choice between Barabbas and Jesus. We have a single verse which brings in the wife of Pilate who has had a dream about Jesus and she advises her husband to have nothing to do with this righteous man. However, Pilate is committed to his actions and he offers Barabbas. The Chief priests and elders have been busy again and stir up the crowds against Jesus. Pilate can no longer get out of his decision and, despite his pleadings and his 'washing his hands' of the situation, is forced to release Barabbas and condemn Jesus to be crucified.
- We then have a long section, Matthew 27:26-56. Pilate hands Jesus over to be scourged and crucified. The soldiers take Him, strip Him of His clothing and put on Him a scarlet cloak and a crown of thorns. They mock Him, spit at Him and beat Him. He is then led away for crucifixion, carrying His cross. A man called Simon is mentioned who is made to help the Lord carry His cross. At Golgotha, He is given vinegar mixed with gall, which the Lord does not drink. He is crucified and then lots are cast for His clothes. He has a plaque put above His head which reads, "*THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF JEWS*" (Matthew 27:37) and He is placed between two robbers, one on the right and one on the left. Many around, including the robbers, mock Him and challenge Him to save Himself. Darkness then fills the whole land between the sixth and ninth hour, which is about 12 noon to 3pm in our time. Jesus then says those famous words, "*My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken me?*" (Matthew 23:46) before being offered more vinegar to drink and undergoing further mocking. This section finishes with some incredible events which only get a small mention here. Jesus cries out and gives up His life. The veil of the temple is ripped in two, earthquakes occur, rocks are split and the dead are raised. A centurion comments on these events realising the greatness of the person he has just crucified. We also get a mention of the women who had followed and kept near to him during this time.
- The last part of the narrative is Matthew 27:57-66. We are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea who had been a disciple of Jesus. He goes to Pilate to ask for the body. Having gained permission, he takes Jesus from the cross, wraps Him in linen and lays Him in a new tomb. Some of the women witness the rolling of the stone of the tomb. Our chapter then finishes with a dialogue between the Chief priests, the Pharisees and Pilate. They ask Pilate to ensure that the tomb was not opened by anyone. Pilate gives them permission to seal the tomb and the closing words tell us that the stone of the tomb was sealed and a watch set over it by Roman soldiers.

So there we have it; a mass of events surrounding the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we just consider for a moment these events, we really see a grave injustice. It is clear that there was no real charge that was brought. It is a sickening effort by people to remove a righteous Man. If this is coupled with the fact that the Lord Jesus went about doing good and helping people, it makes the whole process even worse. The Lord called people to account and was never a respecter of persons (see Acts 10:34) but His whole life was one of grace and love. Yet this is not what the people wanted. They preferred a murderer and rebel to someone full of grace and truth. As I suggested at the beginning of this talk, a consideration of these things should perhaps cause us to reflect on the terrible fact of the death of the Lord Jesus. During our normal Easter activities, hopefully we will be more conscious of the gravity of the story that surrounds it.

I would now like to consider some of the characters from the narrative. The Lord also has some words in this section which are, in the vast majority of cases, particularly aimed at the groups and characters. The quantity of words from the Lord is considerably less than would be expected, but they are none the less important and informative for us today.

Judas

Our first character is Judas, who occurs twice in the narrative. He betrays Jesus by identifying Him to the mob. We are told about him a second time when he sees that the whole episode is an injustice. Having failed to absolve himself of his fee and part in the events, he hangs himself in guilt. I have often wondered at Judas and the action that he took. It doesn't make much sense to me as he simply identifies a man whom everyone had seen daily. He doesn't offer any testimony against Jesus or go along with the actions of the others once his task is complete. Considering what he lost, he wasn't really influential in the process. There is also the question of the seriousness of what he did. Judas is synonymous with the worst of betrayals in today's language, but is it really as bad as it seems? Yes, he betrayed the Lord, but is his as bad as Peter's denial? Perhaps, but you could argue either way. The real error here was that Judas showed that he really didn't understand the Lord in terms of His character, message or work. Even at the point of betrayal the Lord's words started with "Friend". I can almost imagine that The Lord Jesus must surely have been

grieved by the fact that this man, who had seen His grace on a daily basis, could give it all up for so little gain. Judas coldly betrayed the Lord Jesus with a greeting of real closeness but he knew nothing of how close he could have been. This lack of understanding is highlighted at our second mention of Judas. He tries to rid himself of the guilt of being involved with these events by going back to the source of them. When this effort is unsuccessful, he finds no hope and takes his own life. How sad that even a little knowledge would have saved this man! We could have been talking of Judas as the greatest story of salvation ever seen. If only he had but known something of the grace of Jesus that he had seen face to face everyday for three years! He did not know that Jesus was here to save and missed the chance to be forgiven despite the fact that it had been right in front of him. Judas to me speaks of so many in this world. Salvation stares them in the face, yet when the challenge comes, they side with this world which still rejects the Saviour and misses the wonderful gift of grace on offer. Let us be aware of those who are close but have not been touched by God's grace. There is no middle ground and only those who know the Lord are truly with Him.

Peter

I will now turn to Peter who again has two specific mentions in this narrative. The first shows a rash Peter looking to demonstrate the power of man. He cuts off the ear of one of the mob. The disciples were outnumbered and Peter demonstrates a level of incompetence with the sword that I cannot to this day work out. How he can swipe and simply cut an ear off is beyond me. But nevertheless he did it and demonstrated the futile efforts of man to change the course of the world. Jesus, in His words to Peter, shows His grace again. It would have been easy to chastise, humiliate and shame him. But the Lord simply corrects the mistake with a miraculous healing. He then acknowledges the efforts of a man desperate to help the situation, and calms the situation down. Peter is then with the rest of the disciples as they all flee from the scene. Our second mention of Peter gives the events as he follows nearby. We see now the complete failure of man to cope with the world in his own strength. Peter denies the Lord three times, exactly as predicted by his Lord beforehand. Peter had tried to demonstrate strength earlier on with the sword against a whole mob but now under pressure from a solitary woman, even a girl, he completely gives in and any strength is gone. We could spend an age looking into the restoration of Peter (see John 21:15-23). His is a story of one who knew the grace of the Lord and was able to benefit from it wonderfully. But that is for another time. Here we are given a stark lesson about the futility of man's strength. Peter shows how feeble it really is. The only power that can overcome the difficulties of this world or stand with a righteous and holy God comes from God Himself through the work of the Lord Jesus.

Caiaphas and Pilate

Let us move on to consider two further characters together, namely Caiaphas and Pilate. Caiaphas was the High Priest of the Jews, Pilate the Roman governor. Both are keen on maintaining their authority. Caiaphas is one who loves his position and will not see it threatened. We witness here a man who will do anything in order to meet his aims. Caiaphas shows a crass level of hypocrisy and an alarming eagerness to do away with the correct rules when it suits him. He is an incredible picture to us of the lengths that will be sought to maintain a level of authority. Christianity requires us to see that our position and authority in this world is all worthless without Christ. We are seeing this more and more today. People want to do whatever they want and anyone who challenges this should be silenced and removed. All I can offer to this is the need to be aware that this is what Christians will face more and more in this world. We cannot escape it, just as the Lord himself faced it.

Again we can learn from Him in our response to it. He doesn't say anything by choice to Caiaphas. His only words come when directly asked. No defence is attempted and no rash outburst or action is made. He simply lets it happen knowing that it will be dealt with in a time to come. Pilate is a man who shows the weakness of man in that he had some idea about what was right but doesn't want to lose face. Rather than allow justice to be exercised properly, he tries to engineer his way out of the problem. However, such efforts are shown to be futile. Pilate speaks to me of someone who is only really concerned with pleasing people. He wanted to please the Jews because he didn't want them to complain to Caesar. How many people in the world are like this in response to the Christian message? They see the value of it and agree with the 'good works' that it brings about. But so many people don't want to take on the more difficult aspects which require obedience and commitment to a rejected Saviour. Pilate's tale is a very sad one. He stood face to face with the Son of God, recognised something of wonder in Him yet couldn't allow his own position and pride to be cast aside and ended up acquiescing in the death of an innocent Man.

The Crowds

I will now take a minute to deal with the crowds. There are three groups that can be identified in our narrative:

- The mob that accompanies Judas;
- The crowd that is stirred up by the elders and the Chief Priests; and finally
- The soldiers who take Jesus to the cross.

All three sets of people seem to be stirred up to act in appalling ways. There is not one redeeming feature among them. There is a sense where they blindly go along with anything suggested to them, taking full advantage of the situation and not one question is raised with regard to their conduct. It is a real warning to us here of the power and influence of a crowd. Let us always be wary of being influenced by the majority. We can see here that the crowd was out of control. I am sure that if many of them had reflected on their actions, they would not feel so happy with themselves. But at the time there was no dissenting voice as the mob rule took effect on those around.

Final Characters

I have a final set of characters which I don't intend to say too much about. They are all different people from varying backgrounds and standings in society. This set consists of Simon of Cyrenia, the Roman centurion, the women who stood near the cross and Joseph of Aramathea. They all have one thing in common in that they saw that this was no ordinary event. They were changed by the things that they witnessed and did not simply dismiss them. And well they might, as the events that surround the actual death of the Lord are nothing short of remarkable. Darkness, earthquakes and people raised from the dead! These people saw these events and they were affected by them. Their lives were changed. They saw that this was not just another Man but, as the centurion stated, He was truly the Son of God. These were not naive people. They had known the evils of this world and were not simply feeling sorry for a good Man. They saw that He was different and took notice. It is sad to think that of all those who would have seen and felt the events surrounding the Lord's death, only these few in our passage saw something notable in it.

The Lord on the Cross

I can now move on to consider the Lord on the Cross. What was done by the Lord Jesus on the cross is the most influential and greatest work that has ever been accomplished! We have to see beyond the fact that someone died to really begin to see the work that was undertaken. The only words that Jesus spoke while on the cross that are recorded here in Matthew are those incredible words "*Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?*" (Matthew 27:46), which is helpfully translated in the text as "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" Here we are given a glimpse into the intense suffering that Jesus went through. It seems to indicate that, during those hours of darkness, the Lord had undergone a different level of suffering which was hidden from the world. At that moment, He took the punishment for all our wrongdoing upon Himself. Only He was able to do this and take that place. He was blameless yet He bore the penalty of our sin. We can never know what He endured for our sake on the cross but His words speak of a terrible suffering. So much so that He could say that He was forsaken. The narrative then goes on to say that He cried out with a loud voice and gave up His spirit. Here we see another remarkable feature of this event. In this saying, we see that the Lord gave up His own life. This shows His willingness to go through this. Yes, He was crucified, but it was His own action that meant He ended His life. This is a remarkable thing in itself, and I haven't got time to go into too much detail, but a key thing to note here is that He was prepared to do this work.

This leads us to the wonderful truth of this salvation; who was it for? Jesus had no need to do this. It was done for all those who would believe on Him, for me and for you. The Son of God gave up His life, so that we would never have to say that God had forsaken us. What a Saviour we have!

I will end my talk here. I hope it has been useful and helpful. There is so much in this section of the Bible. Much more detail could be given throughout the passage. I have not really begun to do any justice to it. These are simply a few thoughts on an incredible part of this world's history. I trust that it helps us to reflect on all that the Lord went through for us during this event.

Finally, I pray that each person listening has truly realised that this was the Son of God, who loved us and gave His life that we might live.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.