

Matthew 26:69 - 27:10

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. What a wonderful group you are. You know, it occurred to me when we were praising and worshipping.! We are so, so, so blessed to have Joe.

! Because for me, the passage is an emotional passage.

For those of you who don't come every week, or haven't been before even, in the case of Katie, we've been going through Matthew's Gospel. And we have arrived at Matthew chapter 26.

There are so many things. In fact, if I did a full introduction to what we've done so far, we'd be here for an hour just with that. So, Matthew's Gospel is a Gospel written by a Jew to Jews.

And as we've been going through the various bits of the book, we realise the context is entirely Jewish. And if you have questions about that, see me later.

[1 : 12] But that's the way we've approached it. Now, this morning, we're going to go from chapter 26, verse 69, right the way through to chapter 27, verse 10.

And you will know if you've been before that that's a big chunk for me to do on a Sunday. But there is madness in my method or something.

And that is, by doing both of those bits together, you get a wonderful contrast between the denial of Peter when he denies Christ, and the sin of Judas Iscariot.

And we get to look at why the outcome of those two things is so different. Effectively, you've got two sinners who've committed heinous sins, and yet one gets to right chunks of the Bible and the other one goes to hell.

And so the contrast is, I think, I think it's instructive for us, both for our own lives and for the ones with whom we deal when they come to our church, when we don't know the status of their salvation.

[2 : 22] So thus far, we finished last session. Jesus is in the hands of the religious Jews, the priests, the elders, and as well as Caiaphas, the high priest, who, if you recall, is historically a puppet of Annas, his father-in-law, who in turn is a puppet of Rome.

And we discussed this prophecy, didn't we, in Genesis 49, verse 10, that the scepter, the scepter being the ruler's staff or the staff of authority, would not depart from Judah until Shiloh or Messiah comes.

And they should have realized that this was fulfilled in their time because they had lost self-determination. They were no longer able to choose their own priests.

And so the priests were now appointed by Rome. And it was no longer an inheritable status, but it was a Roman decision as to who occupied.

So it was a pagan decision as to who would occupy the role of high priest. But they'd also lost their own ability to administer their own penalties for lawbreakers. So they were not allowed to administer the death penalty.

[3 : 35] They had to do that. They had to have Rome's permission to do that. And it's really strange that at this very time, having had all the authority removed from them, they were seeking to exercise authority over Jesus, who's the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the one who had all authority in heaven and on earth, and could have acted decisively to put an end to everything they were doing.

And he chose not to because he loved us. So he was blindfolded and beaten by sinful men, the ones he came to save, having been betrayed by a man indwelled by Satan, who he still referred to as friend.

What strikes me as I read through these things is the unbelievable compassion of the Lord. Imagine to be in that position where you can call 12 legions of angels to deliver you from this hour, and you're still calling the one who wants to kill you a friend.

In Isaiah 52 verse 14, we can read that he was so badly beaten, he was unrecognizable. And the process of beating him had only just started, and it went on for many hours.

And so in that process, back in verse 58, we read that Peter followed him into the courtyard to observe. And that sets the stage for what we're about to read.

[5 : 06] So, verse 69. Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and the servant girl came to him and said, You too were with Jesus, the Galilean.

But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you're talking about. When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant girl saw him and said to him, and said to those who were there, This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.

And again, he denied it with an oath. I do not know the man. A little later, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, Surely, you too are one of them, for even the way you talk gives you away.

Then he began to curse and swear, I do not know the man. And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word, which Jesus has said, Before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

And he went out and wept bitterly. Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him to Pilate, the governor.

[6 : 16] Then when Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that he had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.

But they said, What is that to us? See to that yourself. And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed. And he went away and hanged himself.

The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury since it is the price of blood. And they conferred together. And with the money, they bought the potter's field as a burial place for strangers.

For this reason, that field has been called the field of blood to this day. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah, the prophet was fulfilled. And they took the 30 pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel.

And they gave them for the potter's field as the Lord directed me. So much to get through. And so I won't hang about.

[7 : 27] What you'll find is I'm going to go through what happened with Peter. And then I'm going to go through it again in contrast to Judas. And you may well find that I'm not as thorough with Judas purely for the sake of time.

But if you think I've left stuff out and you want me to cover it, then do come back to me. You mustn't forget that back in verse 35 of this chapter, Peter is recorded as saying that he wouldn't deny his association with Jesus, even unto death.

And the Lord had said, before the rooster crows, you will deny him three times. Peter was adamant that this wasn't true. So in verse 69, as we started reading this, we've got him sitting in the courtyard.

And this servant girl comes up and says, you too were with Jesus of the Galilean. And we must also remember in the last chapter that, or sorry, in the last passage that we read, that all those present had the same attitude of heart.

They were all showing bravado. They were all saying, we won't desert you. We won't deny you. We'll even die with you. And in the final analysis, they all left him.

[8 : 35] And Peter was probably singled out for this scripture and to establish this principle because he was the spokesman. So, but none of them present were innocent of what Peter did.

So he wasn't alone in this attitude of heart. All of them shone bravado, but it was only theoretical. All of them had abandoned him when it became a reality. So he denied that he was a follower of Jesus to the slave girl.

Then he's challenged a second time, this time more publicly. And this time he denied it with an oath. And in our Western society, we tend to think of that lightly as if it's, you know, we, he might have cursed and sworn or something like that.

I don't know him. But in the Greek, it's clear that this means he was swearing an oath. I swear I do not know him.

Or perhaps even I swear to God, I do not know him. Or I swear on my mother's life, I do not know him. Something of that nature. He was swearing an oath to confirm that he was denying all knowledge.

[9 : 48] So it's one stage deeper than something that was just offhand. This is a very visceral thing where he was not just denying it, but so vehemently he was prepared to swear an oath to it.

Then he's challenged a third time by the same group. The bystanders plus servant girls. One of the challenges we read in one of the other gospels was a female relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had chopped off.

So she wasn't going to forget Peter in a hurry. So he's on very, very, he's on very, very dodgy ground trying to deny in front of this crowd. And yet he knows, I suspect, that his life is in jeopardy if he owns up.

And so what he does this time is it is the most vehement denial you can get because he introduces a curse or an imprecation.

Which is such a vehement denial that you will say something like, may God strike me dead if this is not true.

[11 : 00] Or it could be even worse because the language isn't quite clear. And there are some scholars who suggest that what he was actually doing was pronouncing a curse on the Lord.

You know, pronouncing him as being accursed. I'm so far from this man, I consider him to be a curse. To add emphasis to his denial. So he got deeper and deeper and deeper into this.

And he was just denying any attachment whatsoever to the Lord. And then the rooster crowed. So when we are in sin, we've blown it through weakness and cowardice.

And certainly with Peter, this moment brought him abject sorrow. It says he wept bitterly.

If you look at the Greek, it describes a situation of racking sobs, violent sobs.

[12 : 02] When he realizes what he's done. It goes beyond just regret. It overtook his heart. What he'd done just became like a tsunami in his heart.

That what have I done? What have I done? And he knew because he pronounced a curse. He'd not only done it, but he couldn't take it back.

And so he's at the mercy of God's forgiveness for what he's done. Just turn with me to Psalm 51 a moment. One of the things we need to understand, and this is going to be difficult because I'm not even sure I fully understand it myself, is the difference between remorse and repentance.

And this is the contrast we're going to look at in a moment between Peter's responses and Judas's responses. He says, you may know me well enough to know I sometimes struggle to recall names.

But in Psalm 51, which comes at a time when David is facing up to sin, extreme sin. And he says, be gracious to me, O God, according to your loving kindness, according to the greatness of your compassion, blot out my transgression.

[13:25] Now, this is the kind of heart of a repentant man. I will tell you that part of my own testimony is that I came to the Lord after being caught stealing. And prior to being saved, I was a thief.

And I was really sorry that I got caught. There was nothing in me that said, I'm never going to steal again.

There was nothing in me that recognized what I had done as a moral wrong. Just something that if I was ever going to do it again, I'd need to be more careful. Now, that's remorse.

You know, I finished up going to court. I finished up losing my job. My reputation was besmirched. It did me a lot of damage at the time. Although, in the end, it led me to turn to Christ.

So in that respect, I'm grateful for the experience. I was never repentant of it. I was remorseful of it. And it's such a subtle difference.

[14:26] If you look up repentance and remorse in a dictionary, you'll find that one of the synonyms of repentance is remorse. And one of the synonyms of remorse is repentance. So it's very nuanced, this.

There's a fine line. Now, I'm hoping we'll get to where that line is drawn in this particular case. Preview of coming attractions. In Psalm 51, if we just read on, because it's too good to just pick verses out of.

He says, he said, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. What's he saying there?

He's saying, I do not want to be this kind of man. I realize that this kind of man is abhorrent and I want my heart to be washed. For I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me.

In other words, I can't escape this unless you wash it away. Against you, you only have I sinned. Now, you know, you think, well, what about Uriah?

[15:36] And what about Ahithophel, who then went and committed suicide because of a changed relationship with David and all of that? But he says, against you and you only have I sinned.

Now, what this does is it flags up that there is this moral absolute. That if you breach it, you have just gone too far.

And the one you've offended, you may have offended all sorts of human beings, but the one you've offended that counts is the living God. On the wrong side of whom you do not want to be.

Let's just read on a little. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me. So this is kind of saying I was sinful before I was even born.

In fact, before I was even thought of. I mean, you could extrapolate that and say when I was somewhere in the bowels of Adam, I was a sinner. Because God saved us from before the foundation of the world.

[16:42] So in the mind of God, we existed back then. Behold, you desire truth in the innermost being. And in the hidden part, you will make me no wisdom.

Purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean. This is saying, Lord, you purify me and then I'll be clean. This is a fact of salvation. We will never be clean through our own efforts.

Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness. Let the bones which you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquities.

And then for me, this is the key verse that denotes repentance or remorse. And that is creating me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.

[17:42] And I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will be converted to you. And just for the sake of time, I'm going to stop there because the point is made. The repentant heart is the heart that wants to change.

It's not just a change of action. It's a change of heart. I don't want to be like that anymore. I want to be different. Now, Peter, we should look at his journey to this point.

Because people don't get up in the morning intending to commit besetting sins. There is a pathway that leads to it.

And it's usually little by little. Just as we take in the word of God little by little, precept by precept and so on. Sin does the same thing. It draws us.

Little nibble here. Little nibble there. Oh, just the once. Oh, just this time. And can I say this without offending anybody? There isn't one of us that's immune to this. I like to think that I'm completely immune from, for example, having an affair with another woman.

[18:54] But I take precautions. And some of you will already know this from the way I've dealt with you. I take precautions so that I don't get put in the place where I have to respond to the temptation.

I will never visit a woman on her own. I always take my wife with me. Or if she can't come, I'll take someone with me. It protects them and it protects me.

And this is, it's important for us not to do what Peter did. Peter said, I'm not vulnerable to this sin. I'm not. I'm not ever going to deny you. And Jesus said, yeah, you are.

When you hear the rooster crow, you will have denied me three times. No! But when we look at his lifestyle up to this point, Peter's responded, even though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away.

And Peter's arguing, just flip back to Matthew. Well, it's actually forward from the Psalms, isn't it? But back in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 16.

[20:02] Just to remind us of what Peter had said about Jesus. Verse 15.

Jesus asked Peter in verse 15. But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

Now, I think when the Christ, the son of the living God, who I recognize as such, says to me, you're going to deny me.

My proper response would be, oh, am I? Oh, what can I do to not do that? What can I do to protect myself? But Peter's response to the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the divine being, Jesus Christ, was, nah, you're wrong.

And he was arguing with God, and we've just read that he knew it was God. I would never do a thing like that.

[21:10] Tell God he's wrong. And even when he said, this very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times, he still said, no, I won't. And what he also missed is Jesus applied this to Holy Scripture, his situation, implying that his denial, which hasn't yet happened, but it has to happen to fulfill the Scriptures.

So Jesus is not only telling Peter he's wrong, but he's telling Peter, you will need to fulfill the Scriptures, and therefore it has to happen.

Oh, even if I have to die with you, I won't deny you. We sometimes just don't get our own propensity to sin. We don't think we're vulnerable, and we are.

Now, if you think back to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked them all to pray, and they didn't, they fell asleep. And he said to them, pray lest you fall into temptation.

Right, now take the mental attitude we've just seen and apply it back to the Garden of Gethsemane. What do I need to pray for? I'm not vulnerable to sin. But the Scripture tells us, in fact, Jesus said in that same piece of Scripture, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

[22:38] In my spirit, I don't want to sin, but my flesh is weak. Paul says it in Romans. The very thing I want to do, I don't do, and the thing I don't want to do, I finish up doing.

My spirit's willing to do the right thing. My flesh sometimes has too much say in the matter, which is why I need to pray. There's nothing, I don't believe Peter would have wished to deny Jesus, and I'm sure he was completely sincere when he said, I will never, ever deny you.

And then we see this escalation of what happened when he denied Jesus the first time, and then vehemently the second time, and then really vehemently the third time, and effectively put himself under a curse by doing so.

So, at best, he was invoking a curse against himself. At worst, he may have been invoking one against the Lord. So what was he doing here?

He was denying that he was a believer. Tantamount to one of us saying under pressure, no, I'm not a Christian. He was denying that he was a believer.

[23:56] Now, I'm glad that God dealt graciously with him, because there are lots of people who, under certain circumstances, will deny they are believers, even though in their heart of hearts they are believers.

And we read from several scriptures that God looks upon the heart. So these people are not lost to salvation. But this is serious stuff.

Peter is saying, I don't believe in the Lord anymore. Then the rooster crowed. And we've just read. We know that Peter was a believer because of what he said in Matthew 16.

I know you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And when Peter repented, he finished up. I know this is further forward in time.

But he finished up writing two books of the New Testament. He also finished up providing all the information for Mark's gospel, because most scholars would agree that Mark was actually Peter's ghostwriter or amanuensis.

[24:56] So Mark's gospel, many say that that was actually Peter's gospel. But Mark wrote it. So he was restored above and beyond the place where he was when he sinned.

And I praise God that he's taken me to a place beyond where I was when I sinned. And it's done the same with everybody in this room, I hope. So then we come to the contrast with Judas.

And we've just read. And again, I'm going to deal with this. I'm not going to go into minute detail here. I need to go back to chapter 27.

And particularly verse 3. Now, Judas has obviously witnessed the treatment that Jesus has been having. And we need to fill in some background in our minds.

One is that Judas was treated equally with the other apostles. So he was with them all the time. And they couldn't tell that he was the betrayer.

[26 : 04] He looked like a Christian. And sometimes we meet people in church who say all the right things and outwardly do all the right things. And their heart is elsewhere.

So you've got Judas who then suffers remorse. In verse 3 of chapter 27.

He felt remorse and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. Saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. But they said, what is that to us? See to that yourself.

Just a little piece of hypocrisy. They paid the blood money to Judas. But they said, it's not acceptable for us to have it back. Because it's blood money.

We'll leave that there. That speaks for itself. It's a piece of abundant hypocrisy. But there's something very symbolic about this. When we consider Judas' fate.

[27 : 02] Because effectively, it was too late for him to reverse his decision. I want to reverse my decision. Have your money back. No.

It's too late. You can't reverse this decision. Another biblical example, which those of us who meet on a Thursday night will be coming across very shortly. Or will be coming across the progression of it.

But Esau, who sold his birthright, he wept tears. It says in Hebrews 12, verse 17. It says he wept tears, but could not find repentance.

So you've got remorse and repentance in that passage too. Right? Oh, what have I done? I've got no birthright. Oh, I've injured myself. How stupid. I really regret doing it.

But not that. Oh, my heart is so foul. Please, Lord, do something with his heart. The difference, I would suggest, between remorse and repentance.

[28 : 04] So Judas was favored equally with the others. In Mark, verse 6, when he's sent out, he was sent out with all the others. So presumably, when he prayed for the demon possessed, he saw them delivered.

He saw healings. He saw the Lord at work. We know from John 12, verses 4 to 6, that he was a thief. And the Lord knew he was a thief.

But if we turn to John 6, and I do think this is absolutely key. Verse 64 through to 71.

Now, just before this, Jesus is giving a discourse. And he has said in verse 63, it is the spirit who gives life. The flesh profits nothing.

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. And then he says, but there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were, who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him.

[29 : 11] So despite walking with the Lord, despite seeing the miracles, despite having a hand in the miracles, he wasn't a believer.

Now, that should put us on watch. We know that we're supposed to test everything. I mean, speaking of prophetic words, but test everything.

Don't just believe it. We need to see the fruit of repentance, and we need to see the fruit of faith. He was stealing, and all the people around him were completely taken in.

And Jesus didn't let on that he hadn't been taken in. So he's getting away with, well, literally, when you think that he betrayed Jesus, he's getting away with murder.

So Peter was a believer who fell and repented and was subsequently restored. And this is the case for all believers. In that, if we think back to John 3, 16 to 18, John 3, 18, which is the true gospel message, those who believe are not condemned or will never be condemned.

[30 : 25] And those who do not believe are condemned already. So the principle that was taking place here was that Judas was an unbeliever and went to his grave as an unbeliever.

Never, ever confessed that Christ was Lord. Regretted what he'd done. I mean, it would have been impossible to live in that society after what he had done.

Nobody would have ever trusted him again. The remorse we understand. The repentance. That thing that would have made Judas say, my heart is so foul, creating me a new heart, oh God.

That was absent. So when you get the notes, you will see that the last slide, I've just done a definition of remorse and repentance. And this is as close as I could get to it.

And it's one of those subjects that almost defies proper description with the English language. You kind of wrestle for the right dividing line between the two. And I hope we've struck it.

[31 : 27] But remorse is an emotional reaction characterized by feelings of regret, guilt, sorrow for one's actions. But it focuses on the consequences of the wrongdoing rather than the wrongdoing itself.

So like I was when I was a thief, I felt remorse at being caught rather than remorse because I'd committed a moral wrong. Repentance is something deeper.

It's more profound. It's a complete turning away, a turning around. It's I do not want to be this kind of man.

So it's genuine sorrow for the moral wrong. And that sense of I haven't just haven't just done wrong.

But in a sense, in alignment with David, against you and you only have I sinned, oh Lord. And that sin can include all sorts of people.

[32 : 32] But primarily, my big wrong is that I've sinned against the Lord. And then coming to that realization, and this is why repentance is so important for salvation, because we needed to come.

Everyone in this room that's saved has come to this point where they've had to say, Not only am I awful, not only have I committed a moral wrong, but there is nothing I can do to change myself to put it right.

So Lord, please change me from the inside. And that's what's called being born again. We've recently, in studying Genesis, we've looked at the fact that Jacob, in order to prosper, couldn't do so through natural births of these sheep and lambs.

I won't do a second study on that, but he's in that situation. He had to have supernatural births to go forward with God. Yeah. And we need supernatural births if we're going to go on with God.

Father, thank you so much for this word, which I have found challenging. And I hope in some way we've done it justice this morning.

[33 : 54] But thank you for your grace and your mercy that when you bring us to repentance, I am so grateful that you made that rooster crow at that time. Because that woke Peter up to his true condition.

And I thank you that in every case in this room, we've all been woken up to our true condition before you. And have been able to say, Lord, reach into my heart and make me different.

Heart and body and soul, everything will be new.

But Lord, keep our eyes focused on you and let us not be among those who fell asleep when we should have been praying. Lord, teach us to have victory over our flesh.

And keep taking us forward. And please, Lord, keep us on the straight and narrow when it comes to your scriptures. In Jesus' name. Amen.