

## Matthew 26H

- We return to Jesus' trial before the Jewish authorities, with Jesus in the home of Caiaphas, the second high priest He's stood before that night
  - The religious leaders have long sought to discredit Jesus by trapping Him in violation of some rule of the Mishnah
    - Once found in violation of the rabbinical code book, they assumed the people would lose interest in Jesus' ministry
    - But Jesus did something they hadn't expected...He declared the Mishnah to be invalid and not binding on Him
    - And the people loved it when Jesus thumbed His nose at the pompous and hypocritical Pharisees
  - So then these leaders turned to seeking a way to charge Jesus either with blasphemy or insurrection, both of which carried the death penalty
    - Blasphemy was punishable by death under Jewish law, while insurrection carried the death penalty under Roman Law
    - And now finally, the Jewish authorities led by the high priest believe they've caught Jesus in blasphemy
  - Last week we studied how two so-called witnesses claimed that Jesus said He could tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days
    - Though tearing down a Roman building would have violated Roman law, that wasn't a credible charge
    - So the high priest is looking for more, something that incurs the death penalty under Jewish law
    - And the easiest way to trap Jesus in a capital crime is under the charge of blasphemy
  - So back in v.64 the high priest placed Jesus under oath and compelled Jesus to answer whether He was the Son of God
    - The high priest expected Jesus to say something that would give him reason to charge Jesus and Jesus complied
    - Jesus affirmed that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel

- And Jesus said in a day to come, these men would see Him sitting at the right hand of the Power, meaning God the Father
- Now moving forward, notice the high priest's response to Jesus' testimony

Matt. 26:65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; Matt. 26:66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!"

- In response to Jesus' words, the high priest tore his robes, which is a traditional Eastern way (and very Jewish way) of showing distress
  - And when the high priest tore his clothes, it sent shock waves through the people of Israel
  - So naturally, it was highly prejudicial for a high priest presiding in a court case to tear his robes at hearing the accused's testimony
  - Imagine how a jury would react today if a judge suddenly shouted "this is absurd" during the defendant's testimony?
  - Based on the judge's reaction, the jury would be influenced into thinking that the accused was lying
- For that very reason, Jewish law prohibited a high priest from tearing his robes during a court proceeding
  - The only exception to that rule was in the case of blasphemy during trial
  - If blasphemy was spoken in trial, then the high priest was permitted to tear his clothes
- And that's the excuse the high priest cites now as he tears his clothes... in v.66 he says that Jesus has spoken blasphemy
  - He was probably referring to both Jesus' statement that He was the Messiah and His promise to be seated at God's right hand
  - But looking at both those statements closely, Jesus never commits blasphemy according to Jewish law
- Blasphemy is speaking in a way that dishonors or diminishes the name or character of God
  - In fact, just mentioning the name of God could be cause for a charge of blasphemy under certain circumstances

- But in this case, nothing Jesus says dishonored the name or character of God
  - In the first case, Jesus didn't diminish God's name or character by claiming to be the One through Whom God keeps His promises
  - And that's especially true when you truly are the Messiah!
- And in the second case, Jesus said He would be seated next to God, which is also true and not a diminishment of God in any way
    - In fact, Jesus never even used the name of God
    - Notice in v.64 Jesus said He would sit at the right hand "of power" which is clearly a reference to God and it glorifies God as well
    - But God's name is not "power," so Jesus has very clearly avoided any type of blasphemy
  - Nevertheless, this is close enough for the high priest and closest thing he will get that night to proof of a crime
    - So with that he charges Jesus with blasphemy and asks the jury, why have further need for witnesses?
    - He makes the statement as if to say we don't even need our many witnesses to convict Jesus
    - But in reality, the so-called witnesses hadn't been any help, and in fact he had no witnesses to verify the charge of blasphemy
- The high priest just wants to end the trial and move to the penalty phase, so he calls for a vote from the counsel members present
    - Demanding such a quick verdict was yet another violation of Jewish court law, and the offenses just keep adding up
      - In fact, there were so many violations of Jewish law that this trial was the greatest miscarriage of justice in all history
      - This is the only time in history when a sinless human being stood trial, and of course the only just outcome was exoneration
      - God Himself was on trial, and God's people found Him guilty of blaspheming God...how does something so ridiculous happen?
    - He was convicted in the only way possible: everyone else involved has to engage in endless corruption and sin while calling it justice

- Which makes this trial a perfect illustration of how sin and depravity distort our view of self and God
- The Bible describes that state of every human being's heart this way:

Psa. 53:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God,"

They are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice;  
There is no one who does good.

Psa. 53:2 God has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men

To see if there is anyone who understands,  
Who seeks after God.

Psa. 53:3 Every one of them has turned aside; together they have become corrupt;  
There is no one who does good, not even one.

Eccl. 9:3 This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead.

- The heart of man is so desperately wicked that Solomon describes it as a an "insanity" of the heart
  - In our natural state, we are literally incapable of knowing or loving God and that condition lasts throughout our lives
  - That's why the Bible says there are none who seek after God, and none who do good, meaning none who know and obey God
  - It's not even a matter of choice... we have a spiritual birth defect that prevents us from doing otherwise
- We are programmed from birth to sin and to disobey and to hate God yet all the while calling it "good"
  - It's spiritual insanity and there is no cure apart from an act of God to change us from within
  - Only if we are born again by the Spirit of God do we gain the ability to know, love, honor and obey God truly
- But unless and until that time arrives for a person, he or she will see all that God does as evil and all that he or she does as good

- Unbelievers see themselves self-righteously and they treat God as an enemy and you see that clearly here in this trial
- That's why these men, who are supposedly priests of God and experts in the Law, can condemn God Himself through a kangaroo court of injustice
  - They scheme and lie to find fault with an obviously innocent man, and the more Jesus acts righteously, the more their insanity increases
    - So that by the end, they are acting irrationally in trying to find cause against Jesus
    - Jesus Himself explains this phenomenon in John 3

John 3:19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

John 3:20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

- Jesus is the Light that came into the world, and Light is a metaphor for truth, righteousness and the love of God
  - The world He entered was filled with darkness, which stands for sin, evil and hatred toward God
  - Light came in as if a spotlight, piercing through the darkness, but Jesus said men loved the darkness more than light
  - In fact, everyone who does evil hates light, because light exposes the sinful deeds done in darkness
- This statement is both literally and figuratively true...literally, evil people prefer to practice their evil deeds under cover of darkness
  - That's why we install security lights on homes and businesses
  - The light chases away the criminal who prefers darkness
- But it's also true figuratively speaking, because the light of God's word declares what is right and true, and it exposes what is sinful and false
  - So when God brings the light of His word into that darkness, evil people will hate the exposure
  - They will seek to put out that light, just as these evil leaders in Israel were seeking to put out Jesus' light

- The truth of His words exposed the evil in their hearts and they could not stand for it
  - But notice they didn't view the situation in that way...they weren't acknowledging what was really happening
    - None of the leaders said, "Boy, we really hate the way this righteous man makes us feel convicted for being so evil"
    - No, they were suffering spiritual insanity, which led them to explain away their conviction
  - Earlier, the high priest Caiaphas said this about Jesus

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.

John 11:48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

John 11:49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,

John 11:50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."

- The high priest himself acknowledged Jesus was performing many signs...why didn't that cause him to step back?
  - Why didn't he consider what those signs meant and then respond in accepting Jesus' claims?
- The answer again is spiritual insanity...he acts in a crazy way fighting against the obvious truth because he's programmed by sin to do so
  - He loved darkness and therefore he could not enter the light...not without God's help
  - And God was obviously not inclined to help Caiaphas
- That's what you're studying here...the Light of the World rejected by the darkness because they did not want their evil deeds exposed
  - The only way any human being overcomes their spiritual insanity is if God brings them the cure...a new heart
  - When a person is born again, they receive a new spirit that no longer fears the Light because it agrees with the Law of God

- And in that agreement, it no longer fears judgment or death, and so Light is no longer a threat
- Moreover, darkness no longer appeals because the believer has nothing in common with darkness any longer
- So the high priest demands an immediate guilty verdict without deliberation, and the rest of the counsel members in attendance agree
  - They all state that Jesus deserves death, which results in more violations of Jewish law
    - Under Jewish law the sentence could not be pronounced on the same day as the trial verdict
    - A span of at least three days must separate the two, but these men aren't interested in justice...just revenge
    - And a Sanhedrin trial could not end with a unanimous verdict, because 70 Jewish men could not be expected to agree
    - At least one man must vote not guilty if a person was to be convicted
  - So as the Jewish trial ends, it doesn't settle the issue because the Jews do not possess the power to carry out the verdict
    - Rome reserved the "right of the sword" only for the procurator of Judea, the Roman official who governed this province for Rome
    - The procurator was Pilate (Pilatos), a politician appointed by the Roman Senate and responsible for keeping the peace
  - The Jewish leaders will need to bring their case before Pilate in the hope of convincing him that Jesus needed to die
    - And if Pilate agreed, then he would do the Jewish leaders' dirty work by condemning Jesus and putting Him to death
    - As I mentioned last week, this hand-off was intended by God to ensure both Jews and Gentiles played a role in Jesus' death
    - Neither group can claim they had no blood on their hands, so that truly everyone was responsible for Jesus dying
    - And God can say His Son died for the sins of the world

- Now Jesus will be handed over, but before they transfer custody to the Romans, the leaders want one last chance to abuse the man they have hated for so long

**Matt. 26:67** Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists; and others slapped Him,

**Matt. 26:68** and said, "Prophesy to us, You Christ; who is the one who hit You?"

- Now the physical torture of Jesus begins while He is in the custody of the Jews at Caiaphas' home
  - So again, both Jew and Gentile abused our Lord physically
  - And in light of all that Jesus eventually suffers, these assaults may not seem like much
- But the offenses listed here represent some of the worst possible ways one Jew could treat another
  - First, they spit in Jesus' face, and spitting was a particularly humiliating way for one Jew to show contempt to another
  - In fact, even today it's customary for orthodox Jews to spit on the ground merely at the mention of Jesus' name
  - Which shows you how badly they saw the act of spitting
- Secondly, they slapped Jesus with an open palm across the face, and again that may not seem like much
  - A slap was among the greatest rebukes for a Jew, and it was preferred since there would be little evidence of the abuse
  - But imagine the hardest slap you've ever seen, and that's how a Jew conducted this form of abuse
  - The point was to inflict as much pain as possible without leaving a mark...and the stinging blow would take your breath away
- Finally, they blindfolded Jesus and beat his body with their fists while mocking Him by saying tell us who hit you
  - You blindfold someone to prevent them from knowing where the blow was coming from, so the person couldn't anticipate it
  - When you see a blow coming, you can move to protect yourself or at least steel yourself to absorb the blow

- But being blindfolded, Jesus couldn't know what was coming
- But as it turns out, Jesus wasn't doing anything to protect Himself anyway
  - Isaiah tells us exactly how Jesus faced this moment

Is. 50:5 The Lord GOD has opened My ear;

And I was not disobedient  
Nor did I turn back.

Is. 50:6 I gave My back to those who strike Me,

And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;  
I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.

Is. 50:7 For the Lord GOD helps Me,

Therefore, I am not disgraced;  
Therefore, I have set My face like flint,  
And I know that I will not be ashamed.

- Isaiah says explicitly that the Messiah did not become disobedient by turning back
  - In v.6 it says He did not cover His face to the spitting or slapping
  - He set His face like flint, a very hard rock, meaning He did absolutely nothing to soften or avoid the blows
  - And we learn that Jesus endured another painful insult not recorded in Matthew...they plucked out Jesus' beard
  - If you've ever pulled out a hair, then you know how much that can sting, but Jesus stood by while they ripped out handfuls
- Was Jesus showing He was too tough for them? Not at all, and in fact Isaiah acknowledges it was humiliating
  - And throughout the New Testament we find references to Jesus' suffering during these early moments of His passion
  - So Jesus felt the pain just as you would, but unlike you Jesus was determined to obey the Father by not resisting in any way
- In other words, Jesus accepted His torture as according to the will of the Father, and therefore He didn't resist it for to do so would be to disobey

- This shows you how determined Jesus was to remain a sinless substitute for our sake that He would not even protect His body
  - And that made His suffering all the worse
- The writer of Hebrews tells us this:

**Heb. 12:2** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- Notice the writer says Jesus “endured” the cross and Jesus “despised” the shame
  - Jesus despised everything He experienced, meaning He could barely stand to bear it
  - And yet, Jesus went through with it as a matter of obedience and for the opportunity to achieve something eternally important
  - And of course the writer of Hebrews reminds us to carry the same attitude as we face various trials and suffering
  - Remain obedient to God though you despise your circumstances because you know eternal things are on the line
- And the worst of Jesus’ pain and humiliation were still yet to come... things just go from bad to worse for Jesus
  - The whole experience lasted about 12 hours from start to finish, but it must have seemed like an eternity to Jesus
  - And as we come to understand just how hard this experience was for Him, it begs a question:
    - Why did the Father want Jesus to suffer so much?
- I’ve asked the question this way before: we know Jesus had to die for our sins, but why did the Father require Jesus to suffer first?
  - Why couldn’t Jesus just die in His sleep, or perhaps Jesus could have been executed an easier way like beheading or stoning?
  - I think it’s safe to say that virtually ANY other method of execution would have been better than the one Jesus endured

- The point is that Jesus' sufferings *on the way to the cross* were just as important to God's plan of redemption as the death itself
  - So why did the Father require Jesus to experience such a cruel, slow and painful death in our place?
  - What purposes did His suffering serve in the plan of redemption?
- We'll answer this question in two parts during the course of our study of the crucifixion, one now and one later
  - Answer 1 comes from Peter

**1Pet. 2:21** For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

**1Pet. 2:22** WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

**1Pet. 2:23** and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

**1Pet. 2:24** and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

- Peter says that not only did Jesus die to save us, but Jesus also suffered for us to set an example for how to receive suffering
  - The Father in Heaven determined that Jesus needed to suffer in the course of His death so Jesus accepted it obediently
  - Resisting the suffering would mean disobeying God, and if Jesus had disobeyed then His suffering would have been for nothing
- And that's the example we're supposed to learn here
  - Sometimes God brings suffering into our lives for good purposes, but if we resist the suffering, we lose the benefit
  - And that's often the hardest part of enduring a trial, because when we feel unfairly treated, we naturally defend ourselves
- But Peter tells us that is not the way we should respond, but instead we should follow Jesus' example
  - And Jesus above all people had reason to defend Himself
  - Quoting from Isaiah 53, Peter says Jesus was completely innocent and had done absolutely nothing wrong

- Nevertheless, Jesus didn't fight back or defend Himself when attacked by unholy and evil men
- Jesus didn't even utter a word in His own defense
- Jesus did nothing to stop or lessen the suffering that the Father planned to bring against Him because He knew it was God-ordained
  - And His attitude was to be an example for us to follow
  - Living righteously isn't just a matter of living justly...it's also a matter of how we respond when we are treated unjustly
- And the godly response to injustice is to endure it patiently knowing God is in control and has allowed it for some good purpose
  - Listen to what Peter also says

**1Pet. 2:19** For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

**1Pet. 2:20** For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

- When we suffer unrighteously, as Jesus did, we are walking in His footsteps in a sense
- We are being asked by God to endure suffering, to endure harsh treatment with patience, just as Jesus did
- And we may say to ourselves, but I did nothing wrong so I have the right to fight back and make accusations and defend myself
  - But the Bible says it's not about your rights...it's about your obedience to God
  - And if you do what is right (i.e., don't sin), and if you suffer anyway at the hands of unkind or evil people, then endure it
  - That will find favor with God, because you are following in Jesus' footsteps
  - And if God the Father could turn Jesus' suffering into so much good, then He can certainly do the same with your patience

- So the first reason Jesus suffered on the way to His death was to set an example of how we respond to persecution and suffering, which all believers will know
  - And it's particularly ironic that Peter should teach us this important biblical truth at this point in the story
    - Because it was also Peter who showed us how *not* to respond to suffering and persecution

Matt. 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."

Matt. 26:70 But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

Matt. 26:71 When he had gone out to the gateway, another servant-girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

Matt. 26:72 And again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man."

Matt. 26:73 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."

Matt. 26:74 Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed.

Matt. 26:75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

- Earlier we looked at Peter's denials of Jesus when we studied Jesus foretelling they would happen during the Last Supper
  - So today we will simply look at how Peter's three denials take place
    - They happen over a very brief period of time, almost one right after another while Peter is in and around the courtyard
    - First, in v.69 Peter is recognized by one of the high priest's servant girls
    - Remember, Peter was in this courtyard because John knew the high priest's family and was able to gain Peter entrance
  - Being so close is what allowed Peter to be recognized, and I wonder if Peter was staying so close precisely so he could disprove Jesus' words
    - Jesus said Peter would abandon Him, so maybe Peter stayed close to show Jesus He was wrong

- So how ironic is it that Peter's pride gave opportunity for the three denials to take place?
  - That's a reminder that once God's word has gone forth, it will not return without having accomplished what He sent it out to do
  - It's also a reminder that our pride goes before our fall
- So the servant-girl casually remarks to Peter that he too was with Jesus the Galilean
    - Peter quickly denies it saying I don't know what you're talking about, and with that he's made his first denial
      - Her comment causes Peter to leave the courtyard, but before he even gets past the gate, another servant girl recognizes him
      - She then announces to the courtyard that Peter had been with Jesus, to which Peter more forcefully says I do not know Him
      - This time Peter says it with an oath, which was a statement made before God
    - Finally, a few moments later some in the courtyard who heard this exchange find Peter and make a third accusation
      - They say surely you were with Jesus, since you have a Galilean accent
      - Apparently, the Galilee was Israel's version of the Deep South and Peter's accent gave him away
      - At that Peter loses it, and he begins cursing and swearing that, "I do not know the man"
    - And with his third denial, Peter's attention is suddenly drawn to a rooster crowing somewhere nearby in the yard
      - And immediately, Peter remembered Jesus' prophecy and so he leaves to weep bitterly over what he had done to Jesus
      - What's so sad about Peter's denials is that he never needed to deny Christ, because there was no indication Peter was at risk
      - Remember, John was there with Peter the whole time and no one threatened John, and John never denied knowing Christ
      - In fact, John is present while Jesus is hanging on the cross

- Obviously, the Lord didn't intend for John or Peter to be persecuted during this time, and that was never something Jesus said would happen
  - The Lord had simply said that His disciples would scatter, but Peter pridefully denied that this prophecy would apply to him
    - And that statement triggered Jesus to declare that Peter would deny Christ personally
    - The Lord was forced to make Peter an example to expose his bravado and show that God's word would be found true
    - If Peter had simply remained quiet in that earlier moment, perhaps he never would have experienced these denials
  - So what do we make of these denials? Remember, in our earlier lesson I explained that Peter's denials were not a repudiation of his faith in Jesus
    - They were exactly what they appear to be: a scared man saying stupid things without thinking in order to save his own skin
    - And if you wonder how Peter could do this, consider that as Peter was speaking, he could see and hear inside the house
  - He saw Jesus being mercilessly beaten, and he heard the slaps and body blows, Jesus gasping for breath and perhaps moaning in pain
    - And Peter knew the counsel declared Jesus would die
    - If you had heard and seen those same things, you might very well have done the same even three times
  - So maybe we aren't so different from Peter after all, and if that's true, then there is hope for all of us...how?
    - Because remember the same Peter who swore and cursed and angrily denied ever knowing Jesus is the man who wrote this

**1Pet. 3:14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed.  
AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,**

**1Pet. 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;**

**1Pet. 3:16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.**

1Pet. 3:17 For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

- We all could do much worse than to be like Peter