

OUR SAVIOR

Matthew 20:17-19

17 And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, **18** “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, **19** and will deliver Him over to the Gentiles to mock and flog and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.” (**Matthew 20:17–19, 2022 LSB**)

This is the third time Matthew speaks of Jesus predicting His suffering; the first was in Matthew 16:21. In that verse, Matthew writes,

21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. (**Matthew 16:21, 2022 LSB**)

In Matthew 17:22-23 we read,

22 And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; **23** and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved. (**Matthew 17:22–23, 2022 LSB**)

Matthew 20:17-19 clearly contains much more detail.

In Matthew 16 and 17, the events of Jesus’ suffering were still off in the future, but now the time has come. We’ve moved from “began to show” and “is going to be” to “we are going now.”

Let’s take a closer look at these verses.

A PRIVATE CONVERSATION

17 And as Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, (**Matthew 20:17, 2022 LSB**)

The first thing I notice is that Jesus made it a private conversation. In a few weeks' time, the Holy Spirit would come at Pentecost, and the age of Gospel preaching would begin. From that point on, everything Jesus described would be openly revealed. But for the time being, it was a private matter between Himself and His men.

It was important that all the disciples be with Jesus for the journey; He still had work to do with them. In fact, much of the coming week or two would be devoted to teaching them and preparing them for what was to come.

Where this differs from many other passages is that Jesus didn't take His men off somewhere quiet; they were on the road heading south with many others from Galilee and the east. It was the most direct route from eastern Galilee and was busy during feasts. Jesus created some space with His disciples as they walked since what He had to say was for their ears only.

THE LORD'S SUFFERING

The heart of Jesus' words, of course, is His own suffering.

Jesus would be betrayed. Salvation is through the death of Jesus on the cross, but God works through means. Jesus didn't suddenly appear crucified; a series of steps and human interactions led to His crucifixion. That series of steps began with betrayal. Many translations read "delivered," which is fine. Remember, though, that it doesn't mean "delivered" in the

sense of a package being delivered to your house but “delivered” in the sense of someone being turned over to authorities. Someone with very close access to Him would take action against Him and betray Him to the Jewish leaders.

Jesus would be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes. Before this, Jesus had no contact with the chief priests, just the scribes and Pharisees. In perfect agreement with His sacrifice for sin, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was taken to the chief priest to be sacrificed for the sins of His people.

Jesus would be condemned to death by the religious leaders. Israel’s rejection of the Messiah would be made abundantly clear. We need to keep in mind that Israel was never known for her faithfulness to God or His prophets. From the moment they left their chains in Egypt before they had even crossed the Red Sea, they were complaining about Moses and accusing Yahweh of abandoning them. But here’s the thing: the Old Testament sacrifices were shadows and pictures of what Jesus would do. How would His death for sinners be accomplished? Who would put Him to death as God had ordained if everyone loved and believed in Him? Israel’s very unfaithfulness was a key component to the salvation of the elect. In fact, Paul makes the point in Romans 11 that the Jews were cut off for the sake of the Gentiles, but that God is able and willing to graft them in again, not through the restoration of the Old Covenant, but by the power of the New Covenant.

Jesus would be handed over to the Gentiles, the Romans. “Handed over” is the same word as “betrayed” or “delivered” in Matthew 20:18. Speaking practically, the Jews could not legally execute anyone. The times they did – such as the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 – were illegal according to Roman law. Only the Romans could legally execute someone. But speaking biblically and theologically, the Gentiles had to participate in Jesus’ death. In the Old Testament, a person bringing a sin offering would lay his or her hand on the head of the animal as a sort of ordination: I ordain this animal to die in my place. The involvement of the Jews and Gentiles in Jesus’ death meant that all mankind, figuratively speaking, ordained

Jesus to die in their place.

Jesus would be mocked and flogged. According to Roman law, flogging was legally required before crucifixion. Being crucified was such a cruel and brutal way to die that even the worst criminals were first savagely beaten to weaken them and hasten their death on the cross. The worse the flogging, the quicker the death. Mockery usually occurred following the flogging while the victim was given a few minutes to recover and the crosspiece prepared.

Jesus would be crucified. Crucifixion was not uniquely Roman, but they used it frequently, mostly with non-Roman citizens. Women, Roman senators, and Roman soldiers were never crucified (although soldiers who deserted could be crucified). Crucifixion is not only a brutal death – perhaps the worst possible way to die – it is also a very public and humiliating death. There was no single method of crucifixion; some were crucified with their arms outstretched to the side, others with their arms straight above. Some were nailed through the chest, abdomen, or other places. Some were crucified upside down. Our word “excruciating” comes from the verb “excruciate,” which means to torture someone on a cross or rack. It was such a horrific way to die that the Roman orator Cicero, who died 40 years before Jesus was born, said that “the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body but from his mind, his eyes, his ears.” No wonder preaching Christ crucified was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles (First Corinthians 1:23).

VICTORY

And on the third day, Jesus would be raised. It's important to remember that Jesus almost never spoke of His death without also speaking of His resurrection. He did not simply come to die for sinners; He also came to live for them. In a sense, sin and death would be given every opportunity to destroy Him. Satan himself came and tempted Him. While demons were terrified of Him, their hatred is obvious. Human enemies, from the religious and

political leaders of Israel to the common people, grew vicious in their desire to see Him silenced. When the moment came, they vented their hatred and violence upon Him in the most shocking and demeaning way they could. But death could not hold Him, and the grave could not keep Him.

For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross and despised the very idea that it was shameful. He gloried in His cross. At the last supper, He said to His disciples, “This is MY body, this is MY blood, which is for YOU.” That was the cross for Jesus: the greatest act of love of all time. So He despised the shame of the cross, and when He rose from the dead, He rose with the signs of the wounds intact. He said to all His disciples, “See My hands and My feet . . . touch Me.” He urged Thomas “put your hand into My side.” (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:27).

TRANSITION: But there’s more to Jesus’ words than this. He calls Himself “Son of Man,” which is a very meaningful title.

THE SON OF MAN

We see the words “son of” frequently in the Bible; Isaac was the *son of* Abraham; Joseph was the *son of* Jacob. That use simply tells us the relationship between father and son.

But when “son of” is used as a formal title, it indicates representation or character, whether good or bad. Judas is called the “son of perdition” [or destruction] (John 17:12). That is, he is representative of every person who rejects Christ, regardless of whether they know little or much about Him. The magician Elymas, who tried to prevent Sergius Paulus from believing, was called the “son of the devil” since he behaved exactly like the devil does when the Gospel is preached (Acts 13:10).

Jesus is the Son of God, which tells us that He is the full and perfect representation of all

that God is. It's equivalent to "Word" in John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God by nature.

And Jesus is the Son of Man, which tells us that He is the full and perfect representative of all that mankind was created to be and should have been but failed to be. He was faithful. He was obedient. His character was flawless. He was tempted by the devil himself but never sinned even once. He was truly perfect as His Father in heaven is perfect.

Why does it matter that Jesus is the Son of Man who will be crucified and resurrected? Because human sin requires a human death. Every sinner owes God their death. That's the price of their sin. That's also why the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin. Only a human death can satisfy the justice of God regarding human sin.

The sacrifice of a bull or lamb was like an "IOU" to God, a promise that one day full payment for sin would be made. More importantly, God's gift of the sacrificial system to Israel was HIS "IOU" to sinners. He promised that one day He would provide a sacrifice for man's sin, just as He provided a sacrifice when Abraham went to offer up Isaac.

That sacrifice could not be an animal. It had to be a human being and not just a human being, but a man. It was a man, Adam, who sinned and plunged the entire human race into death and judgment. It would have to be another Man, a Second Adam, who would give His life to pay the sin-debt owed to God, rescue sinners from death and judgment, and, if you will, plunge them into eternal life and righteousness.

In the fullness of time, Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. As the Son of Man, Jesus suffered the death each believer would have unquestionably suffered as God's final judgment was carried out. Every act Jesus carried out was voluntary; He willingly, gladly, and even worshipfully lived, taught, and worked according to the will of the Father.

He surrendered Himself to arrest in the garden. He surrendered Himself to the show trials of the Jews and Romans. He surrendered Himself to the mockery and abuse of the Roman soldiers. He surrendered Himself to carry His own cross up to Calvary. He surrendered Himself to the anguish of crucifixion. He surrendered Himself to the judgment of God against sinners – “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” When all was accomplished – “It is finished!” – He surrendered up His own spirit to death.

In fact, He had to surrender Himself willingly because no created power could have overcome Him. Even death was powerless over Him. He could have remained on the cross, suffering agony, until this very day. Instead, He yielded up His spirit. And on the third day, He took up His life again. The grave had no more power over Him than a bit of dust floating in the air.

I don't need to tell you that we can't do that. Storms can kill us. Demons can harass us. Enemies can confound us. Both Satan and death prowl around like roaring lions, and we are powerless against them.

So, did Jesus cheat? Far from it. In fact, Jesus suffered more by surrendering Himself than we would. How is that? Physical death can take any of us at any time; our suffering would be limited. Physical agony brings its own form of numbness. But Jesus was never overcome by anything. Being fully God as well as fully Man, He endured the fullness of God's wrath against sin. Because He was without sin, it was never necessary or inevitable for Him to die. He ate of the tree of life by His faithful obedience but suffered the consequences of the tree of death.

And He did all of this as the Son of Man, the perfect, sinless, perfect representation of all that mankind was created to be.

BRINGING IT HOME

As we bring this home, I simply want to remind you that the Son of Man died for the sins of man. His death was a perfect sacrifice. He did it to save His people, and He saves them perfectly and completely.

I came across a quote from Presbyterian Pastor Christopher Love, dated 1657, transcribed by leading pastors in London. In a sermon titled “Dejected Soul’s Cure Tending to Support Poor Drooping Sinners, With Rules, Comforts, and Cautions in Several Cases.” There’s a sermon title for you!

Love said,

“Are your sins great? The mercies of God are greater. Do your sins deserve great punishments, even eternal death? The death of Jesus Christ and the merit of Christ are of infinite value to merit life, even eternal life. Are your sins the sins of a man? O, but the satisfactions of Jesus Christ are the satisfactions of God. Do your sins merit the frowns of God? O, but Christ’s death merit and purchase the favor of God. In a word, Christ’s person exceeds your person. So His obedience infinitely exceeds your disobedience. Though there is great guilt in sin, there is greater mercy and merits in Christ, for as by Adam there came sin and death, so by Jesus Christ there came righteousness and life. There is not so much guilt in sin as there is merit in Christ. There is not so much guilt in sin to condemn as there is merit in Christ to save. Though there are more tears for you to shed over your sin, there is no more blood for Jesus to shed for your forgiveness. Therefore, do not be excessively cast down by your sin.”