

**March 20, 2016 - 11:00 a.m.**

**Pastor Jonathan Falwell**

## **One Week to Live: The End of the Beginning**

### **Scripture: Matthew 26 and 27**

Summary: In part four in a series on the final week of Christ's life, Pastor Jonathan looks at the events of Matthew 26 and 27, and their eternal impact.

Today I want you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 26. We, over the last couple of weeks, have been walking through this series, *One Week to Live*, as you know, where we have been talking about focusing on what it means to be an observer of those last few days before Christ died on the cross, of those days that began on that Palm Sunday—we looked at it a few weeks ago—when Jesus arrived in the city, and you know what took place.

The crowds lined the streets. They took off their coats and threw them to the ground. They took palm branches and threw them in the way before Jesus came in. And they cried out with loud voices, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" It was a celebration. It was an amazing moment. You can imagine what the city must have felt like. It was electric at that time when Jesus showed up.

Then after Jesus arrived in the city, the first thing that He did was go up to the temple to cleanse the temple, to get the house in order—His house—for what God was going to do.

We talked when Jesus then gathered His disciples together on the night before He was crucified, when He brought them together and they had that last supper, that moment when they sat down and Jesus shared some incredible truths with them and talked to them about how they must remember what was about to take place, to use the events that would take place in the hours following, that supper, that they would use those moments and those conversations to always reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus was about to make. We together came to the Lord's table that Sunday. The passage in 1 Corinthians 11 tells us that until Christ returns, we do this so that we can remember what He gave.

Last Sunday, after the dinner, Charles took us into the garden. You know what took place in the garden when Jesus gathered a few of His disciples together and they knelt to pray. And they prayed a fervent prayer about God doing something, and Jesus groaned in His spirit and cried out to God, talking about God's will that would be done.

Now today we're going to go one step further. Today we are going to move from that moment and go right up to the moment that Jesus yielded His spirit and died.

But rather than a normal sermon because, to be honest with you, when you talk about the cross, about Golgotha and about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the story has been told so many times. It's been told in this room; in Sunday school classes and through books and television programs. Over and over and over again it's been told. And to be quite honest with you, it's difficult to figure out exactly how to say something that would be new, that would be something that would be powerful to bring about that message. It's difficult to figure out exactly how to present that in a different way.

This week I read a quote by Charles Spurgeon that honestly turned the direction of my entire sermon this morning. Spurgeon said this many, many years ago. He said this: "It is better to preach five words of God's Word than 5 million words of God's wisdom."

And so today, rather than trying to bring up illustrations that would make a point or funny stories that help to accentuate the truths that we find in God's Word, I'm going to simply present to you God's Word. And rather than preach so much, today we're going to read. We'll read what God, in His inspiration, breathed out to the writer who wrote this passage in Matthew. He breathed into Matthew's heart and mind as he sat down to he write these words; truths that can change our lives.

So today let's begin reading this passage in Matthew 26. Again, setting the stage of where they are; they're gathered in that Garden of Gethsemane. They've been praying together in those moments where Jesus was crying out to God. And you remember those words, "God, let this cup pass from me, but whatever your will is, God, that is what is to be done. God, your will, not mine, be done," Jesus said.

And then in the quiet of those moments and the silence and the darkness that was so overwhelming, something began to change. What was silence just a moment ago now they began to hear something. They began to hear some footsteps and seeing the trees rustling in the garden. They started hearing the rustling of a lot of feet. What was once just a few moments ago darkness, they began to see illumination. There flickering lights as those carrying torches came into the garden.

And what was then just a few people gathered together, huddled together in prayer, now there was a mass of people that arrived.

Let's begin reading from what took place. Matthew 26, verse 47:

*And while He [Jesus] was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer [Judas] had given them a sign, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him." Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, "Friend, why have you come?"*

*Then they [the guards] came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"*

*In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.*

What took place in the darkness of that moment, in the quiet and silence of that quickly became chaos, was not only inevitable, it was imperative. Jesus was there in the garden and all of a sudden He was surrounded by that multitude, surrounded by the guards, and then Judas betrayed Him and the guards came and grabbed hold of Him. The passage said that they put their hands on Jesus. So they didn't come and say, "Jesus, excuse me. Would you come with us?" No. They grabbed Him. They were manhandling Jesus.

Peter did what many of us would do. He pulled out his sword and began to try to defend Jesus. If any of us had been there that night, we probably would have tried to defend Jesus. I know that if I were in a place with my children, and someone came and tried to take someone that I loved so much, I would defend them tooth and nail. I would do whatever it took to protect my kids. That's what Peter was doing.

But it's interesting to know what Jesus did when Peter began to defend Him. Jesus said, "Put that sword away. Don't do that, Peter! Because if you look back at the Old Testament, you go back to the book of Isaiah, this has to be done."

It was inevitable, but it was also imperative. In verse 54, Jesus said, "How then could the scriptures be fulfilled?" In other words, this must happen. This has to take place. Jesus had come to fulfill the purpose of God's creation. From the very foundation of the Earth, God had a plan for salvation. God had a plan for redemption.

From the moment that God spoke the Earth into existence, He knew that mankind would need a Savior. He knew that in our sinful ways, what we would do and how we would live. He knew that we would need forgiveness. And God knew that the only way for us to find forgiveness was through the sacrifice that Jesus would give, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. He came to fulfill that purpose. Peter attempted to attack, but Jesus knew this must be done.

In Matthew 26 we skip forward a few verses to verse 69. After Jesus had been taken by the guards, after He'd been led away to Caiaphas' house, it says:

*Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are saying." And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, "This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." But again he denied with an oath, "I do not know the Man!" And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, "Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you." Then he began to curse and swear, saying, "I do not know the Man!" Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So he went out and wept bitterly.*

What was taking place at this time was difficult to comprehend. Peter watched as Jesus was taken in the garden. If you rewind back into the first part of Matthew 26 that we read a few weeks ago, you will remember that Jesus said to His disciples, "Tonight all of you will forsake me. All of you." And remember they thought about it. They said, "No, we will not do that. There is no way that is going to happen. We would never do that to you. Jesus, we love you with all of our hearts. We've been following you for three years. We would never forsake you."

Yet, here as we read in the first part of the passage that we read today, it says, "Then all of the disciples forsook Him and fled." Here Peter remembered when Jesus said, as they walked out of the Upper Room that night, "Peter, before this night is over, before the rooster crows, you are going to deny me three times."

Peter said, "If they have to kill me, I will never do it!" And yet here exactly what Jesus said would take place did take place. Peter denied Christ three times. You see, it was difficult to comprehend for Peter, difficult to understand what was going on, because in that moment what he recognized, what he saw as he was there in the courtyard trying to get a glimpse of Jesus, as he followed along the fringes of the guards, as he was trying to peek in to see what they were doing to Christ, as he tried to listen in, overhear what it is that Caiaphas and the others were saying about Jesus as they talked about Jesus' claim that He was the Son of God, that He was blaspheming God because of the things that He had said and done.

And Peter was trying to listen in, and all of a sudden people began to say, "But aren't you one of them? Aren't you one of the followers of Jesus? Didn't you walk with Him? Didn't I see you with Him?" And Peter, over and over again, "No, it was not me. I do not know Him. I do not know that man."

You see, Peter did that night what probably a lot of us would do. He focused far more on his own safety than he focused on the truth. He was more focused on selfishness than he was on selflessness. He was more worried about what was going to happen to him. He was more worried about his status, more worried about his position, more worried about his place than what was taking place just a few feet away as they mocked, beat, hit, and spat on Jesus, the Son of God.

It's difficult for all to comprehend, but let's continue reading now in Matthew 27, skipping forward a few verses. In verse 27, after Jesus had been there in Caiaphas' house and had been taken before Pontius Pilate. After Pilate had released Barabbas and heard the crowd cry, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" in verse 27:

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around Him. And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified.*

*Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross. And when they had come to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull, they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink. Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots." [That goes back to Psalm 22] Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there. And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.*

It is difficult to comprehend what was taking place that day, but also it was overwhelming for all of those gathered in that place to see. Because here the guards took Jesus and didn't treat Him even like a common criminal. They treated Him totally differently. They brought Him into a private place there in the Praetorium, which is where the Roman guards all gathered together, the place where they hung out; kind of like a police station, if you will, in our vernacular.

They brought Him to that place, and they began to mock Him. They made fun of Him. They laughed at Him. They took some thorns from a bush and they made it into a circle, made it into a crown, because of course they were calling Him the King of the Jews. And they took that crown and they stuck it into his forehead. It pierced into His skin. You can imagine the blood that was pouring down His face.

Then they took a reed and put it in His hand. Again, to try to mock Him as if it were a scepter. Then a moment later they took that scepter, that reed, from His hand and they began to hit Him over the head with it. Then they spat on Him. They mocked Him some more. And then they dragged Him out of that place, and again if we visualize ourselves being in that place and being in that moment, you can imagine that they didn't gently lead Jesus away from that place.

If they had been hitting Him over the head, if they had been putting thorns into His skull, if they had been beating Him and mocking Him, you know the way they took Him away. They grabbed Him and they dragged Him. It was painful. These Roman guards were taking an already weakened Jesus—from all the scourging; we read that back in part of Matthew 26 and 27 when Pilate had Him scourged—a weakened Jesus, and they dragged Him across the ground. We know that because they had to get someone else to carry the cross.

And they brought Him up to the place called Golgotha and threw the cross on the ground. They threw Jesus on the ground. And then one of those big Roman guards picked up a really big mallet and he took a big metal spike and he took that spike and he placed it into the wrist of Jesus and he began to hammer away. And that spike tore into His skin; it went through His bones; into the wood behind. The excruciating pain, there is no way for us to even comprehend what Jesus must have felt.

Then they did the other hand. Then they put a nail in the feet and then they lifted the cross and set it in the ground, and there before all of Jerusalem to see, a week that began with people crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" they are now looking at that same man bleeding, suffering, dying. It was difficult to watch.

The people in that place, if you take a moment and with your mind's eye visualize, what would you have been thinking? What would you have done? What would have been running through your thought processes that day as you looked up at that cross and saw Jesus hanging there?

We continue to read in verse 39:

*And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross." Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, "This Man is calling for Elijah!" Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, "Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.*

*Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, [Do Not Miss These Words] "Truly this was the Son of God!"*

It was in that moment that even the guards who had beaten Him, had mocked Him, had put the crown of thorns onto His head, even they realized it is critical to believe that certainly this was the Son of God.

When Jesus died, when He breathed His last, as this passage tells us, immediately that veil that had for so many years separated the people of God from the presence of God was ripped in two. Immediately when Jesus died, the earth quaked, an earthquake unlike anything they'd ever experienced.

Immediately, the tombs of those who had died before, all of a sudden the tombs opened up. A lot of times when we read this passage, we kind of gloss over, we kind of move right over this part of the passage, but when you read it, it's pretty amazing to think that when Jesus died, all of a sudden people who had once been dead had now been raised to new life, and they walked among men.

Can you imagine what Jerusalem must have been thinking now? Can you imagine the fear that must have gripped every single person who had witnessed what had taken place? Imagine yourself, if you were sitting there, if you had watched Jesus die, if you were watching Him yield His spirit, giving His last breath, and now all of a sudden the earth quakes, the sky is dark, the veil of the temple is ripped, dead people are walking, and you are sitting there thinking, "Truly, truly, this man is exactly who He said He was."

My question for you today is this. This was two thousand years ago, and the amazing events that we've talked about, that we've read in God's Word today that took place on that day, to be quite honest with you, we ourselves have seen God do more amazing things than even they saw, so do you believe? Has there come a time in your life where you have recognized that this man who walked among us, this Jesus who said all of the things that He said through the Gospels, this Jesus who had raised the dead, this had healed the sick, and who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through me." Is there a point in your life where you said, as the guards did that day, "Truly, this is the Son of God"?

And my friends, if you haven't, the greatest words that I could give to you today is that the same God who gave His Son Jesus to die for the people two thousand years ago is the same God who gave His Son Jesus to die for you. Jesus died for every person gathered in this room as much as He died for the ones who sat on the hillside that day. Jesus died for the people of the first century as much as He died for the people of 2016. And the forgiveness that Jesus offered in the first century is the same forgiveness that today God freely gives through His Son, Jesus.

The question is just quite simply this: Do you believe? The Bible is clear. The Bible is clear that we're not all working to the same place. The Bible is clear that you can't simply be a good person and get to heaven; that you can't be a church member and get to heaven; that you can't be a Sunday school teacher and get to heaven; that you can't even be a preacher and get to heaven. The Bible is clear that it doesn't matter what you have done and it doesn't matter how good you have been. It doesn't matter how bad you've been. It doesn't matter how great a person you are.

It does not matter. You cannot get to heaven except through one simple way, and that way is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died and that He rose again, and if you believe that, no matter who you are, no matter where you're from, no matter what skin color you have, no matter how bad you've been, no matter how good you've been, no matter what your name is, no matter how much money that you have in the bank, if you believe, you will be saved.

And today if you've never done that, the greatest news that I could give to you, the greatest truth that I could share with you is just simply this: Number one, yes, you are a sinner. Number two, so am I. Number three, Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Number four, He rose again. Number five, if you will believe, God will forgive. God will save. And God will give you the promise of eternal life in a very real place called heaven because of Jesus. And today you can meet that same Jesus who died on that cross.

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