

Matthew 27

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon on Matthew 27 explores the betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, highlighting the profound implications for faith and access to God.

Scripture: Matthew 27:3

Topics: "Redemption", "Betrayal", "Sacrifice"

Description

John Nelson Darby expounds on Matthew 27, illustrating the tragic betrayal of Jesus by Judas and the subsequent actions of the Jewish leaders who, despite their guilt, sought to avoid defilement from the blood money. He highlights the innocence of Christ as He stands before Pilate, who ultimately succumbs to the pressure of the crowd, condemning the guiltless while releasing a murderer. The sermon emphasizes the profound significance of Christ's death, the tearing of the temple veil, and the resurrection, which signifies the end of the old covenant and the beginning of a new relationship between God and humanity. Darby concludes with the powerful testimony of the centurion and the devoted women who remained faithful to Jesus amidst the chaos of His crucifixion.

Transcript

After this (chap. 27), the unhappy priests and heads of the people deliver up their Messiah to the Gentiles, as He had told His disciples. Judas, in despair under Satan's power, hangs himself, having cast the reward of his iniquity at the feet of the chief priests and elders. Satan was forced to bear witness, even by a conscience that he had betrayed, to the Lord's innocence. What a scene! Then the priests, who had made no conscience of buying His blood from Judas, scruple to put the money into the treasury of the temple, because it was the price of blood. In the presence of that which was going on, man was obliged to shew himself as he is and the power of Satan over him. Having taken counsel, they buy a burying-ground for strangers. These were profane enough in their eyes for that, provided they themselves were not defiled with such money. Yet it was the time of God's grace to the stranger, and judgment on Israel. Moreover they established thereby a perpetual memorial of their own sin, and of the blood which has been shed. Aceldama is all that remains in this world of the circumstances of this great sacrifice. The world is a field of blood, but it speaks better things than that of Abel.

This prophecy, we know, is in the book of Zechariah. The name "Jeremiah" may have crept into the text when there was nothing more than "by the prophet"; or it might be because Jeremiah stood first in the order prescribed by the Talmudists for the books of prophecy; for which reason, very likely, also, they said,

"Jeremiah, or one of the prophets," as in chapter 16:14. But this is not the place for discussion on the subject.

Their own part in the Jewish scene closes. The Lord stands before Pilate. Here the question is not whether He is the Son of God, but whether He is the King of the Jews. Although He was this, yet it was only in the character of Son of God that He would allow the Jews to receive Him. Had they received Him as the Son of God, He would have been their King. But that might not be: He must accomplish the work of atonement. Having rejected Him as Son of God, the Jews now deny Him as their King. But the Gentiles also become guilty in the person of their head in Palestine, the government of which had been committed to them. The Gentile head should have reigned in righteousness. His representative in Judea acknowledged the malice of Christ's enemies; his conscience, alarmed by his wife's dream, seeks to evade the guilt of condemning Jesus. But the true prince of this world, as regards present exercise of dominion, was Satan. Pilate, washing his hands (futile attempt to exonerate himself), delivers up the guiltless to the will of His enemies, saying, at the same time, that he finds no fault in Him. And he releases to the Jews a man guilty of sedition and murder, instead of the Prince of life. But it was again on His own confession, and that only, that He was condemned, confessing the same thing in the Gentile court as He had done in the Jewish, in each the truth, witnessing a good confession of what concerned the truth as to those before whom He was.

Barabbas, [See Footnote #85] the expression of the spirit of Satan who was a murderer from the beginning, and of rebellion against the authority which Pilate was there to maintain-Barabbas was loved by the Jews; and with him, the wrongful carelessness of the governor, who was powerless against evil, endeavoured to satisfy the will of the people whom he ought to have governed "All the people" make themselves guilty of the blood of Jesus in the solemn word, which remains fulfilled to this day, till sovereign grace, according to God's purpose, takes it off-solemn but terrible word, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." Sad and frightful ignorance which self-will has brought upon a people who rejected the light! Alas! how each one, I again say, takes his own place in the presence of this touchstone-a rejected Saviour. The company of the Gentiles, the soldiers, do that in derision, with the brutality habitual to them as heathen and as executioners, which the Gentiles shall do with joyful worship, when He whom they now mocked shall be truly the King of the Jews in glory. Jesus endures it all. It was the hour of His submission to the full power of evil. patience must have its perfect work, in order that His obedience may be complete on every side. He bore it all without relief, rather than fail in obedience to His Father. What a difference between this and the conduct of the first Adam surrounded with blessings!

Every one must be the servant of sin, or of the tyranny of wickedness, at this solemn hour, in which all is put to the proof. They compel one Simon (known afterwards, it appears, among the disciples) to bear the cross of Jesus; and the Lord is led away to the place of His crucifixion. There He refuses that which might have stupefied Him. He will not shun the cup He had to drink, nor deprive Himself of His faculties in order to be insensible to that which it was the will of God He should suffer. The prophecies of the Psalms are fulfilled in His Person, by means of those who little thought what they were doing. At the same time, the Jews succeeded in becoming to the last degree contemptible. Their King was hung. They must bear the shame in spite of themselves. Whose fault was it? But, hardened and senseless, they share with a malefactor the miserable satisfaction of insulting the Son of God, their King, the Messiah, to their own ruin, and quote, so blinding is unbelief, from their own scriptures, as the expression of their own mind, that which in them is put into the mouth of the unbelieving enemies of Jehovah. Jesus felt it all; but the anguish of His trial, where after all He was a calm and faithful witness, the abyss of His sufferings, contained

something far more terrible than all this malice or abandonment of man. The floods doubtless lifted up their voices. [See Footnote #86] One after another the waves of wickedness dashed against Him; but the depths beneath that awaited Him, who could fathom? His heart, His soul-the vessel of a divine love-could alone go deeper than the bottom of that abyss which sin had opened for man, to bring up those who lay there, after He had endured its pains in His own soul. A heart that had been ever faithful was forsaken of God. Where sin had brought man, love brought the Lord, but with a nature and an apprehension in which there was no distance, no separation, so that it should be felt in all its fulness. No one but He who was in that place could fathom or feel it.

It is too a wonderful spectacle to see the one righteous man in the world declare at the end of His life He was forsaken of God. But thus it was He glorified Him as none else could have done it, and where none but He could have done it-made sin, in the presence of God as such, with no veil to hide, no mercy to cover or bear it with.

The fathers, full of faith, had in their distress experienced the faithfulness of God, who answered the expectation of their hearts. But Jesus (as to the condition of His soul at that moment) cried in vain. "A worm and no man" before the eyes of men, He had to bear the forsaking of the God in whom He trusted.

Their thoughts far from His, they that surround Him did not even understand His words, but they accomplished the prophecies by their ignorance. Jesus, bearing testimony by the loudness of His voice that it was not the weight of death that oppressed Him, gives up the ghost.

The efficacy of His death is presented to us in this Gospel in a double aspect. First, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. God, who had been always hidden behind the veil, discovered Himself completely by means of the death of Jesus. The entrance into the holy place is made manifest-a new and living way which God has consecrated for us through the veil. The entire Jewish system, the relations of man with God under its sway, its priesthood, all fell with the rending of the veil. Every one found himself in the presence of God without a veil between. The priests were to be always in His presence. But, by this same act, the sin, which would have made it impossible for us to stand there, was for the believer entirely put away from before God. The holy God, and the believer, cleansed from his sins, are brought together by the death of Christ. What love was that which accomplished this!

Secondly, besides this, such was the efficacy of His death, that when His resurrection had burst the bonds that held them, many of the dead appeared in the city-witnesses of His power who, having suffered death, had risen above it, and overcome it, and destroyed its power, or taken it into His own hands. Blessing was now in resurrection.

The presence therefore of God without a veil, and sinners without sin before Him, prove the efficacy of Christ's sufferings.

The resurrection of the dead, over whom the king of terrors had no more right, displayed the efficacy of the death of Christ for sinners, and the power of His resurrection. Judaism is over for those that have faith, and the power of death also. The veil is rent. The grave gives up its prey; He is Lord of the dead and of the living. [See Footnote #87]

There is yet another especial testimony to the mighty power of His death, to the import of that word, "If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." The centurion who was on guard at the crucifixion of the Lord, seeing the earthquake and those things that were done, trembling, confesses the glory of His

Person; and, stranger as he is to Israel, renders the first testimony of faith among Gentiles: "Truly this was the Son of God."

But the narrative goes on. Some poor women-to whom devotedness often gives, on God's part, more courage than to men in their more responsible and busy position-were standing near the cross, beholding what was done to Him they loved. [See Footnote #88]

But they were not the only ones who filled the place of the terrified disciples. Others-and this often happens-whom the world had held back, when once the depth of their affection is stirred by the question of His sufferings whom they really loved, when the moment is so painful that others are terrified, then (emboldened by the rejection of Christ) they feel that the time is arrived for decision and become fearless confessors of the Lord. Hitherto associated with those that have crucified Him, they must now either accept that act, or declare themselves. Through grace they do the latter.

God had prepared all beforehand. His Son was to have His tomb with the rich. Joseph comes boldly to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. He wraps the body, which Pilate grants him, in a clean linen cloth, and lays it in his own sepulchre, which had never served to hide the corruption of man. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary [See Footnote #89]-for they were known-sat near the sepulchre, bound by all that remained to their faith of Him whom they had loved and followed with adoration during His life.

But unbelief has no faith in itself, and, fearing lest that which it denies be true, it mistrusts everything. The chief priests request Pilate to guard the sepulchre, in order to frustrate any attempt the disciples might make to found the doctrine of the resurrection on the absence of the body of Jesus from the tomb in which it had been laid. Pilate bids them secure the sepulchre themselves; so that all they did was to make themselves involuntary witnesses to the fact, and assure us of the accomplishment of the thing they dreaded. Thus Israel was guilty of this effort of futile resistance to the testimony which Jesus had rendered to His own resurrection. They were a testimony against themselves to its truth. The precautions which Pilate would not perhaps have taken they carried to the extreme, so that all mistake as to the fact of His resurrection was impossible.

The Lord's resurrection is briefly related in Matthew. The object is again, after the resurrection, to connect the ministry and service of Jesus-now transferred to His disciples-with the poor of the flock, the remnant of Israel. He again assembled them in Galilee, where He had constantly instructed them, and where the despised among the people dwelt afar from the pride of the Jews. This connected their work with His, in that which especially characterised it with reference to the remnant of Israel.

I shall examine the details of the resurrection elsewhere Here I only consider its bearing in this Gospel. The sabbath ended (Saturday evening with us-chap. 28), the two Marys come to see the sepulchre. At this moment that was all they did. Verses 1, 2 are not consecutive, 2-4 go together. When the earthquake and its attendant circumstances took place, no one was there except the soldiers. At night all was secure. The disciples knew nothing of it in the morning. When the women arrived at dawn, the angel who sat at the door of the sepulchre re-assured them with the tidings of the Lord's resurrection. The angel of the Lord had come down and opened the door of the tomb, which man had closed with every possible precaution. [See Footnote #90] They had in truth only guaranteed by unexceptionable witnesses the truth of the apostles' preaching, by placing the soldiers there. The women, by their visit the evening before, and in the morning when the angel spoke to them, received a full assurance to faith of the fact of His resurrection. All that is presented here is the facts. The women had been there in the evening. The intervention of the

angel certified to the soldiers the true character of His coming forth from the tomb; and the visit of the women in the morning established the fact of His resurrection as an object of faith to themselves. They go and announce it to the disciples, who-so far from having done that which the Jews imputed to them-did not even believe the assertions of the women. Jesus Himself appears to the women who were returning from the sepulchre, having believed the words of the angel.

As I have already said, Jesus connects Himself with His former work among the poor of the flock, afar from the seat of Jewish tradition, and from the temple, and from all that linked the people with God according to the old covenant. He appoints His disciples to meet Him there, and there they find Him and recognise Him; and it is there, in this former scene of the labours of Christ, according to Isaiah 8 and 9, that they receive their commission from Him. Hence we have not the ascension of Christ at all in this Gospel, but all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and accordingly the commission given to His disciples extends to all nations (Gentiles). To them they were to proclaim His rights, and make disciples of them.

It was not however the name of the Lord only, nor in connection with His throne at Jerusalem. Lord of heaven and earth, His disciples were to proclaim Him throughout all nations, founding their doctrine on the confession of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. They were to teach, not the law, but the precepts of Jesus. He would be with them, with the disciples who thus confessed Him, unto the end of the age. It is this which connects all that will be accomplished until Christ sits upon the great white throne with the testimony that He Himself rendered on the earth in the midst of Israel. It is the testimony of the kingdom, and of its Head, once rejected by a people that knew Him not. It links the testimony to the nations with a remnant in Israel owning Jesus as Messiah but now risen from the dead, as He had said, but not to a Christ known as ascended on high. Nor does it present Jesus alone, nor Jehovah, as any longer the subject of testimony, but the revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as the holy name by which the nations were connected with God.

Footnotes for Matthew 27

85: Strange to say, this means son of Abba, as if Satan was mocking them with the name.

86: We find in Matthew, specially collected, the dishonour done to the Lord and the insults offered Him, and with Mark the forsaking of God.

87: The glory of Christ in ascension, and as Lord of all, does not come within the scope of Matthew historically.

88: The part that women take in all this history is very instructive, especially to them. The activity of public service, that which may be called "work," belongs naturally to men (all that appertains to what is generally termed ministry), although women share a very precious activity in private. But there is another side of christian life which is particularly theirs; and that is personal and loving devotedness to Christ. It is a woman, who anointed the Lord while the disciples murmured; women, who were at the cross, when all except John had forsaken Him; women, who came to the sepulchre, and who were sent to announce the truth to the apostles who had gone after all to their own home; women, who ministered to the Lord's need. And indeed this goes farther. Devotedness in service is perhaps the part of man; but the instinct of affection, that which enters more intimately into Christ's position, and is thus more immediately in

connection with His sentiments, in closer communion with the sufferings of His heart-this is the part of woman: assuredly a happy part. The activity of service for Christ puts man a little out of this position, at least if the Christian is not watchful. Everything has however its place. I speak of that which is characteristic; for there are women who have served much, and men who have felt much. Note also here, what I believe I have remarked, that this clinging of heart to Jesus is the position where the communications of true knowledge are received. The first full gospel is announced to the poor woman that was a sinner who washed His feet, the embalming for His death to Mary, our highest position to Mary Magdalene, the communion Peter desired to John who was in His bosom. And here the women have a large share.

89: That is, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and mother of James and Joses, constantly spoken of as "the other Mary." In John 19: 25, Mary the wife of Cleophas has been taken as in apposition with His mother's sister. But this is simply a mistake. It is another person. There were four-three Marys and His mother's sister.

90: But I apprehend the Lord Jesus had left the tomb before the stone was rolled away; that was for mortal eyes.

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