

We continue walking through the Gospel according to Matthew (782). This week, something Jesus said back in ch. 16 will be graphically illustrated as true: **16:25-26**. We are in the last week of the ministry of Jesus. The week started back in 21:1. It's been a long week. Let's consider 4 shifts in the narrative: Peter afraid, Jesus bound, Judas hung, and Pilate amazed.

**I. Peter Afraid – 69-75** – Now we have the trial of Peter, who had been following from behind. **57-58**. A young servant girl recognizes and him and accuses Peter of being with Jesus. It literally says “one” (*mia*) girl. She is alone. She is no threat whatsoever, yet Peter straight up lies. “I don't know what you are talking about.”

He tries to bail so he moves further out but the Spirit won't leave him alone. He is being haunted by the Holy Ghost. Another servant girl recognizes him. Peter denies Jesus again, but this time with an oath. He says “I don't know the man.” How tragic.

By the way, many skeptics say that Christianity is just a man-made religion. Just made up. But, if you are making up a religion, you don't include this stuff. You don't let your heroes fail so badly. Especially for Roman Catholics. They say Peter is the first pope. If you are making this up, you don't have your Pope deny your Messiah three times! Some have been embarrassed by this. For example, Hilary and Ambrose tried to make Peter look good: “I don't know the man, but the God who is Christ.”<sup>1</sup> No, the Bible makes no bones about the fallenness of its greatest leaders. Sinners. Abraham was also a cowardly liar. David was an adulterer and murderer. Peter denies Christ. The best of men are men at best. The Christian faith is not built on men, but the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to save people who have it all together but sinners who need grace. Amazing grace, that saved a *wretch* like me. Christianity is for wretches.

No, Peter fails and fails bad. Peter is moving further away from Jesus physically and spiritually. First there is verbal evasion then physical evasion. He wants to get away. Friends, if you find yourself neglecting his presence, the easier it will be to fall into sin. Anyone who is deep in persistent sin, quit pursuing his presence a long time ago. The first step of apostasy is a neglect of hearing from God and speaking to God. Nearness to God and delight in disobedience can't live in the same heart.

Not only did Peter sin by lying and denying Jesus, but he takes an oath. His Lord has taught explicitly on oaths: **5:34, 37**.<sup>2</sup> / Then some that were standing there approached Peter and say we know it is you. Your accent betrays you. Galileans had a distinct accent that was noticeable in Jerusalem. It was a different dialect of Aramaic and Judeans often mocked Galileans. Being from Eula, I can resonate.

Peter calls down curses and swears that he doesn't know Jesus. This verb here for curse requires an object. It is a transitive verb.<sup>3</sup> The ESV adds “on himself.” Peter called a curse on himself. But the original doesn't say “on himself.” The direct object must be supplied. Cursing himself doesn't make a lot of sense. The NIV is more accurate here: “then he began to call down curses.” Most commentators come to the shocking conclusion that he is cursing Jesus in an effort to dissociate himself from Jesus.

Immediately after this third denial, the rooster crows. And the sound pierces not only Peter's ear but his soul. And he remembers what his Lord said. **26:31-34**. Jesus is a true prophet (contra 68). There is a crescendo here in this story, on a couple levels. With the number of accusers and with Peter's responses, and Peter's location. First

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<sup>1</sup> FDB, 697.

<sup>2</sup> One of “them.” He is embarrassed of his association with Jesus and the church. Anti-church is anti-Christ FDB, 698.

<sup>3</sup> *Katathematizō* = *anathema* in Mark. RTF 1034.

a girl alone, then a girl to a group, then a group to Peter. Peter first denies, then swears, then curses. Then Peter recedes from the fireside to the door to the outside.<sup>4</sup>

Luke the Physician adds a detail that Matthew doesn't include. Luke 22:60-62: "But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly." I imagine Peter never forgot that look for the rest of his life. / I was able to see where all this took place while in Israel a few weeks ago. **9 Pics.**

Notice what verse 75 says: he remembers Jesus' word. Some of you have children who are not walking with Jesus. Let this be an encouragement to you. The words of Jesus have been pounded in and the Spirit is able to recall them in a time of trial or even sin, like we see here in Peter.

Peter had strong resolve until the heat of the moment. He talked a big game! 1 Cor 10:12: "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." We should pray, God strengthen my faith, my hope, my love, so that when the moment comes, I'll stand strong. Father, keep us. What is it that caused Peter to sin so tragically? He feared man more than he feared God. Or better, he feared little girls more than he feared God. He had a divided heart. People and the approval and welcome of people is Peter's real god in this moment. Safety is his Idol. He is not obeying Jesus who commanded his followers to love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and mind.

Peter doesn't show up in this gospel again, but 28:16 mentions the 11 disciples. And Peter will have another chance. Not that he deserves it. He denied his Lord not once, not twice, but three times. **10:33**. He made an oath, and cursed his Lord. He doesn't deserve grace, but receives grace. As Calvin said this story "teaches those who stand to take care and cation; it encourages the fallen to trust in pardon."<sup>5</sup>

As we know, Peter goes on to become one of the greatest leaders in the early church. He needed to be humbled. An unbroken Peter would have been an unbearable Peter.<sup>6</sup> If you were here last week, we considered Pentecost together, Acts 2. Peter preached to the Jewish leadership boldly. He goes from being scared of a solitary little girl to risking his life by preaching to the multitudes. And 3K get saved. What happened? Two events: Resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit. He saw the empty tomb and was filled with the empowering presence of God. And he would go on to write Holy Scripture and say, "even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Do not be afraid of people, but in your heart honor Christ as Lord and always be ready to give an answer to anyone for the hope you have." God can use failures; in fact he only uses failures.

**II. Jesus Bound – 27:1-2** – All the Jewish leaders took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. What a tragic sentence. Another allusion to Ps 2: "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'" In Ps 2, this is about the pagan nations joining together against the Lord and his Christ. Now, sadly, the Jewish leadership has become the pagan nations (Acts 4:23-28).

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<sup>4</sup> FDB, 696.

<sup>5</sup> FDB, 693.

<sup>6</sup> FDB, 700.

Sadly, the Jewish leadership hands their Messiah over to the pagans, to Roman leadership. Jesus prophesied that all this would happen: **20:18-19**. Israel hands Jesus over to Rome and in AD 70, the Lord would hand Israel over to the Romans. They bind him to make him look like a political criminal. He was bound that we might be freed, numbered with the transgressors.

Pilate was prefect of Judea AD 26-36. Did you know that up until very recently, many scholars questioned the existence of Pontius Pilate? They would say the only evidence we have is in the Bible, and a small smattering of references that just rely on the Bible. Until 1961. Just 60 years ago. This is what is amazing about archaeology. Some Italian archaeologists were in Caesarea Maritime excavating an ancient Roman theater when they found a large piece of limestone with the inscription on it "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea" from the 1<sup>st</sup> C. It was a dedication stone, showing that Pilate indeed was a historical figure. I was able to see the stone in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem **PIC**. The inscription constitutes the earliest surviving, and only contemporary, record of Pilate. The Bible is true.

**III. Judas Hung** – (27:3-10)<sup>7</sup> – **3-5** Judas realizes what he has done and is filled with remorse and tries to return the blood money. Blood is emphasized in this section: **4, 6, 8**. The blood bears with it responsibility. Like Lady MacBeth, blood-guilt drives him to despair. Maybe he remembers the curse of Deut 27:25: "'Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen'." / In the original, there is an allusion to Ahithophel in 2 Sam 17:23 turns against Absalom. He went and hanged himself.<sup>8</sup> Like Ahithophel, Judas has joined the ranks of the traitors.

Judas doesn't go to God, he doesn't go to Jesus, he goes to the Jewish leadership. This isn't genuine repentance. The word used in v. 3 for changing his mind or feeling remorse is a different word for repentance than the NT normally uses. This is not true repentance or he would not have committed suicide, which breaks the 6<sup>th</sup> command and is a trusting in one's own work. That is not to say that anyone who kills himself is not saved, but it is to say that taking one's life is never God's will. He is the one who gives life and takes it away.

The chief priests and elders don't care. They have what they need from Judas. Judas tries to confess and they say "what does that have to do with us?" In short, everything! They have the authority here. These are not pastors. Israel had become sheep without a shepherd. They tell him, "You deal with it."

Judas has lost all hope. He throws the money in the temple and goes and hangs himself. Money is an idol that destroys its worshippers. It never satisfies and ultimately only takes. The blood money ends up in the temple, where it belongs. The Jewish leadership has become blood-stained. **23:34-35, 27:24-5**.

**6-10** – The chief priests realize that the Law forbids the use of blood money towards the temple. Let's just pause and note the irony. These leaders are worried about keeping an aspect of the Law after they have just counseled together to murder an innocent man. **59**. They are good with lying and murder but not defiling the temple.

These pastors know the minutia of the Law. **23:23-24**. They miss the big picture by majoring on the minors. They are scrupulously religious, but ultimately anti-Christ. There is a way to know biblical details and miss the heart of God. As Watson put it, "The devil baits his hook with religion."

They decide to buy a field to bury the many foreigners that died away from home during their Passover pilgrimage. The Field of Blood was in the Valley of Hinnom, just South of Jerusalem – site of human sacrifice to

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus is treated as a slave Exod 21:32

<sup>8</sup> RTF 1041

Molech (2 Kin 23:10, Jer 7:31, 19:4-7). And again, as we have seen so much in Matt, this was to fulfill Scripture. It is another composite quotation of Jeremiah and Zechariah.<sup>9</sup> Even in the midst of trials, God is directing history toward his purposes.

So. Peter and Judas betray their Lord. As one commentator puts it, “The reader is invited to choose between two models of how the man of God behaves under pressure, the one who escapes death but with his spiritual reputation in tatters and the one who will be killed only to live again in triumph; so the reader is reminded that ‘anyone who finds their life will lose it, and anyone who loses their life will find it’ (10:39; 16:25).”<sup>10</sup>

Again, we see the importance of repentance, the message John the Baptist and Jesus began their ministries with. Repent for the K of heaven is here. Change your mind. Drop your agenda. Turn from sin to Christ. Peter’s repentance was genuine, Judas’ wasn’t. They both “went out” but to different ends. Compare **27:5, 26:75**. 2 Cor 7:10: “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

**IV. Pilate Amazed – 11-14** – The Jewish leadership had declared him guilty but the Roman government must actually implement the verdict. Pilate asks Jesus if he is the King of the Jews, which is ironic because in fact Pilate held political authority over Judea. That is the same as asking if he is the Christ, the Messiah. But that title hasn’t been used since Matt 2 when the pagan magi ask, “where is he who has been born king of the Jews.” This title is only used by Gentiles or in mockery (29, 37, 42).

Jesus answers Pilate in the affirmative but qualifies it (cf 26:64). I am King but not the kind you think. But Jesus refuses to answer the chief priests and the elders. And Pilate is frustrated. Don’t you hear these accusations!? Jesus remains silent. Just like **26:62-63a**. This too, is in fulfillment of Scripture. **Isa 53:3-5, 7**. Why is all this happening? Why is an innocent man being bound for execution. For our sins. G. ABC. / **16:25-26**

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<sup>9</sup> See RTF 1045. Whenever the NT authors combine quotations, they invite us to consider the passages together. Jer 18-19, 32:6-15.

<sup>10</sup> RTF, 1017.