

Surrender and Scorn - the way of the cross confronted

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- [0 : 00] either of surrender or scorn. One of the things we've already seen very clearly in Matthew's presentation of the Passion story is that he's no mere historian, recording just facts.
- He is recording history and facts, of course, but he's also a theologian, he's a teacher. And so, of course, is Jesus. And so all through Matthew's Gospel, we've seen Jesus himself teaching his followers what his life and his mission and his actions, what it's all about, what it means.
- And since from the very beginning of the Gospel, it's been clear that it's a story that is heading to its climax in the death of Jesus, it shouldn't surprise us at all that in the Passion narratives, above all, we would be given a clear explanation as well as accurate narration of the events.
- And that's exactly what we've discovered. We mustn't be taken in by those who want to reject what they call certain theories of the atonement of the cross of Christ.
- That just won't do. We've seen already. It's not just certain theories. It's clear and certain biblical truth. It's truth conveyed by Jesus to his disciples and passed on directly to us by Matthew.
- [1 : 28] His death is a Passover for sins. It delivers. His death is a clear substitution for sins. He drinks the cup of wrath that we might drink the cup of forgiveness.
- Matthew presents us with a clear theology of the cross. That's what his passion story is all about. And we mustn't forget that. But, and this is important too, all biblical theology is also practical theology.
- Matthew is not just a theologian. He's a pastor. He's writing for the whole church. He's writing for the people of God and for their strengthening, for their equipping.
- And that's what Jesus' concern has been all the way through his ministry. He's been teaching his disciples that their life, that their ministry is going to be all bound up in his life and his ministry.
- And so their life and ministry will inevitably reflect the path of Jesus in his own ministry in the world. He's teaching them that unless they understand the way of Jesus, they'll never understand the way of discipleship.
- [2 : 38] And right from the very beginning, Jesus has been very clear about the stark contrast between his way and the natural way of the present world. It's a clash head-on between the way of the cross and the way of this world.
- And Jesus' way is the way of the cross. It's the way of death. It's the way of loss. It's the way of rejection by this world. And that way is also going to be the way of discipleship.
- There's no other way. What did he say in chapter 16? Whoever would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever will save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. And in these last hours of Jesus' earthly ministry, he's very concerned with his disciples and their future ministry.

He's looking to the future. He's looking to the time after his resurrection. But he's determined that his followers will understand what that era of kingdom witness will be all about.

[3 : 50] What it will be like for them. That's what Jesus focuses in these last hours before he goes to the cross. Look at verse 32 of chapter 26. He's pointing to their future task.

After I'm raised up, I'll go ahead of you to Galilee, he says. You see, that's where their mission's going to begin. Remember verse 13. He talked about the gospel being preached in the whole world and Mary, her story being remembered after his death.

Think back a little to chapter 24 when Jesus is teaching about his final coming in glory. Chapter 24, verse 14. He said, The gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world.

And then, and only then, the end will come. Remember how he described that gospel mission? Chapter 24. They will deliver you up to tribulation.

Deliver you up. Interestingly, it's the same word used 15 times in the Passion narratives. The word betray, deliver. They'll do that to you, he says. They'll put you to death.

[4 : 58] You will be hated by all nations for my sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another, he said. And the Lord himself and his gospel.

Think back to chapter 10. Jesus' great teaching on mission. It was exactly the same. It's enough for a disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master, he said.

If they call the master of the house Beelzebul, the devil, how much more those of his household? You see what Jesus is saying again and again and again throughout his gospel?

He's saying that the cross isn't just an idea. It's not just a theology. It's not just something to be thought about, to be pondered.

As if it was out there. As if it was detached from the experience of his followers. Not at all. Now the cross is a way of life that confronts every human being.

[5 : 59] That's what Jesus is saying. It's an experience either that you enter into or that you reject. And the way of the cross is the way to the new world that Jesus has been talking about.

And it's the only way. The cross is the narrow gate that you enter into to find life. And as such, you see, it's the way of the cross that confronts the world in the message of Jesus.

And it forces a choice. Either it's rejection of that narrow and hard way and it's an embrace of the wide and the easy way that leads to destruction, the way of the world. Or it's an embrace of the narrow way, the cross.

The way that alone leads to life. And Jesus has been clear all the way through, hasn't he? It's not lip service to him in his kingdom that counts. It's not Lord, Lord that cuts any ice on the day of judgment.

It's doing the will of my Father in heaven, following in the way that he calls. And the reality is, it's when the rubber hits the road in real life situations, when we're forced to show our true colours, when we're forced to put our money where our mouth is, if you like, it's then that our hearts are really exposed, isn't it?

[7 : 20] Have we really begun to follow Jesus in his way? Or are we still actually seeking the treasures of earth? Have we surrendered to the way of the cross?

Have we submitted with Jesus to the Father's will? Have we said with Jesus, not my will, but thine? Or is the truth, in fact, that however hidden it might be, we actually are showing scorn for the way of the cross and the way of the Saviour?

Well, there comes a time when we are confronted by the cross of Christ and it's all forced out into the open. And that's exactly what we're seeing in this chapter in the passage that we read.

And Matthew wants us to see the great contrast when the cross confronts Jesus and these others. The contrast between Jesus' action and the world's action.

We've already seen the contrasting attitudes to the message of the cross, but now these attitudes become actions. The challenge of the cross comes right up close and personal and we see how different people are responding.

[8 : 31] And it's a total contrast. On the one hand, it's surrender, we see in Jesus. And on the other hand, it's the scorn of the way of the world.

Jesus is the perfect, sinless Son of the Father and yet He surrenders to the Father's will. He embraces the cross serenely and obediently.

But this is the road to glory. In verse 64, He's telling the high priest, the way to the enthronement of the Son of Man is the way of the cross. The way to the fulfilment of all God's promises for the world is through Jesus' path to the cross.

But in total contrast, we see the world's scorn and rejection of the way of the cross. Yet we see that that, in fact, turns out to be the road to ruin.

It's a contrast that runs all the way through this passage. I want to look really at it under these two headings. The scorn of the way of the cross, the way of the world, and then briefly surrender to the way of the cross that we see in Jesus.

[9 : 40] So look at this whole concept of the scorn of the cross. I'm sure if you look at the passage, you can see that, once again, Matthew's flagged up his message by the way he structures his story in these three incidents, the three paragraphs in our Bibles.

He wants us to look at these and read these and ask the question to ourselves that the disciples all asked of themselves at the supper. Is it I, Lord? Could that be me?

You see, he's got three representatives all showing their scorn and rejection of the cross of Jesus and the challenge of the cross. Can you see? First of all, it's Judas in the first paragraph, verses 47 to 56.

And Judas represents the defiance of the worldly man. But then it's Caiaphas in the next bit, beginning at verse 57. And Caiaphas represents the derision of the worldly church.

And then, of course, last of all, it's Peter, who represents the denial of the worldly disciple. And each incident just flags up particular aspects of the scorn of the cross shown by this world to the real Jesus.

[10 : 55] Let's just look first at the story of the arrest of Judas, who represents the defiance of the worldly man. Not just Judas, of course. But he's the lead figure.

It's heavy with irony, isn't it, that we're told in verse 47, he was one of the twelve. It just flags up the sheer ugliness of the incident. He's at one, this one who was one of the twelve.

He's at one with the brutal world, with a spiteful hatred of Jesus Christ. Just clubs and swords, the massed power of violent men arraigned against the Son of God.

And Judas, one of the twelve, is with them. You could hardly have a clearer picture, could you, of sin as rebellion against the rule of God? And Judas embodies that rebellion personally.

He may be one of the twelve, but we already know that he's actually, at heart, a man of the world. What will you give me in this world's currency if I sell Jesus to you?

[12 : 00] That's what he'd said to the high priests. Whatever the specifics of the reasoning in Judas' heart, we can never know. But whatever it was, his ambitions, his worldly ambitions, clearly were not being met.

His heart was set on this world, and ultimately, therefore, it's no surprise that he allies himself with this world. And he betrays Jesus with a kiss.

Scholars tell us that a true disciple, a true follower, would never have done that to a rabbi uninvited. One scholar says, it was a studied insult, a public act of defiance and open repudiation of Jesus' authority.

Of course, that's the very essence of sin, isn't it? Open defiance of the rule of God. It may be hidden in the beginning, but ultimately, in the end, it becomes open and public.

It's sin at its most ugly. He had been one of the twelve. Yeah, that's often the way, isn't it? You know that. So do I. Sometimes the most bitter opponents of the gospel are those who at one time had been within the orbit of the household of faith.

[13 : 14] But the truth was, you see, that Judas at heart was a man of the world. And the powerful appetites of this world had consumed him. And when the way of the cross was made plain, when it stood in his path, when it made a real claim on him, a real demand on him, well, he met it with scorn.

And he was exposed as a man of this world. Remember Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount? Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. And where your heart is, friends, your ambition will carry you, even if it means defiance of the Son of God.

That's a real warning, isn't it? Jesus says again and again that the cares of this world are powerful, that they're captivating.

They're so powerful they can lure people on a quest of just irrational madness. What does it profit a man if he gains to the whole world, says Jesus, and yet loses his life?

[14 : 28] And yet many do just that. Some who have been one time followers of Jesus and they do it in open defiance of the way of Jesus.

His cross, his way becomes an offense when it really confronts, when it really challenges our personal life. But can you see the sheer folly of that rebellion?

It's madness to think that you can rebel against the Son of God, the King of Glory. Don't you realize you're deluded if you think you can rebel against him that way?

That's surely the point of verse 53. Jesus says, I can call twelve legions of angels, twelve times twelve thousand angels, and all you've got is clubs and swords.

Do you really think you can overcome me like that? Just like Psalm 2, isn't it? The United Nations of the World railing against the Lord and his Anointed.

[15 : 27] Let us burst their bonds, they say. But the one who sits in heaven laughs. You're mad. It's a real warning to a rebellious world.

You may scorn the cross of Christ, but you'll never triumph in the end. Don't be fooled by that. Whoever saves his life says Jesus will lose it, ultimately.

And that's what matters. We need to read on into the next chapter to see where Judas' defiance took him. It's a real warning, but of course it's also a real encouragement, isn't it?

The world's defiance can't ever stop the kingdom of Christ by violence and opposition. Jesus says in verse 55, they couldn't stop his teaching day after day in the temple, nor could they stop his mission.

Even in their defiance, they were only serving God's purpose. Verse 46, all of this had to happen that the scriptures would be fulfilled. The world may unite in its rebellion against Jesus and his gospel and his kingdom, but ultimately they can only do what God's plan and purpose has predestined to take place.

[16 : 36] That's exactly what the apostles said in Acts chapter 4. And that's just as true today. It's been true ever since. Christ's gospel is spreading all throughout the world.

His ministry can't be silenced. His work can't be silenced. The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church right from the very beginning. As disciples walking the way of the cross with the word of the cross on their lips, the world's power is powerless against it.

The way of the cross and the word of the cross is our weapon. Not swords and clubs. Jesus says, put your sword away. That's not the way of my power.

Our weapon is the sword of the spirit, the word of God, the word of the gospel, of the cross, the word of foolishness and weakness. But the open defiance of the worldly man, that's one way that people of this world show scorn to the cross of Christ.

Christ. But we see another way just as clearly in the second section in Caiaphas. Caiaphas represents the derision of the worldly church. If Judas' rebellion at last was open, here we see in fact the same scorn for the cross of Christ but dressed up and hidden in the respectable garb of ecclesiastical religion.

[18 : 01] What comes across here surely, isn't it, is the dishonesty, the sheer deception of institutionalized religion.

It utterly rejects the real Jesus and yet it claims to worship the true God. Caiaphas is the representative of the church of God on earth and yet the scorn of Jesus that they show is just so dishonest, it's so contemptible.

They'll have Jesus if he'll submit to them, if he'll carry out of their religious prejudices and paraphernalia but certainly not if they must submit to him.

Since they won't submit their worldly hearts to him, they must silence him. They must get rid of him. It's a striking example, isn't it, of sin as sheer perversity.

They simply refuse to believe the plain evidence of the words of Jesus and the works of Jesus, of his unique authority right in front of them. They will not have it though they can see it.

[19 : 11] They're willingly blind because they do not want to submit to the authority of Jesus. Just think back to everything they'd seen and heard. Do you remember in chapter 21 in the triumphal entry?

When they saw the wonderful things Jesus did and the children even praising him, instead of falling down and worshipping, they were indignant. When they heard his teaching with authority, instead of bowing and listening and submitting, they said, where did you get this authority?

It didn't come from us. They couldn't stand the fact that Jesus exerted heaven's power and heaven's authority in his word and works and they were not in control.

And so little has changed. That's the attitude in so much of the worldly church today. That's why you get, for example, bishops in the Church of England persecuting churches that are planting gospel churches and seeking to silence them and stop them and revoke licenses and so on.

They can't stand that their power, their institution is being rendered obsolete by the power of God at work and the authority of the gospel at work by itself. That's why in all the older denominations, including our own one, there's a perverse refusal to recognize that where there is life and growth in the Church of Jesus Christ, it's because there is belief and submission to Jesus and his word and his authority.

- [20 : 42] Because that's such a threat to the worldly idols. Ecclesiastical structures, hierarchy, power. They're determined to preserve, to cherish these things, to worship them.
- And if the real Jesus turns out not to fit into their worldly establishment, well, they must silence the real Jesus. Just look at the perversity and the prejudice at work here in verse 59.
- They're seeking out false witnesses. They're grasping at the vaguest sounding things. Verse 61 there, a total distortion of Jesus' words that you read in John chapter 2 about the temple.
- But you see, their real God is their institution. It's their temple. And they will not see their institution threatened even by the Son of God. And that's what enrages them.
- They will not have Christ's authority. In theory, of course, they buy down to Christ's authority. But they're exposed when they're actually faced with the reality of what that means for them.
- [21 : 52] God in heaven and far away, that's fine. But God in the flesh, right in front of them and invading their lives and calling them to obedience and submission, well, it's a very different thing.
- You see, in verse 64, Jesus is saying, yes, I am who you say I am. And this is what it means. I am your Lord. I am your judge.
- You will see me seated on the throne in heaven. You must bow the knee to my absolute authority. You must accept me as I am. And you must accept my way, the way of the cross, the way of submission.
- You must turn your back on the worldly church with its veneer of godliness. You must submit to the gospel of the cross, to the authority of my words. That's what he's saying to them.
- But they say, no, we won't have that. We can't have that. And so we must silence that kind of Jesus, spit on him, slap him, and scorn him. And it's just the same today.
- [23 : 05] Our denomination provides plenty of examples of that. Scorn for the authority of Jesus and his word. Perversity and unsheer prejudice of those who do cherish the word of God.
- rejection of Christ's way of self-denial and of cross-bearing. No, no cross to bear. No, no, Jesus affirms you just as you are.
- There's no need to turn away from the world's ways. You can be one of us. No cross. How old have there been, you see, had any thought of Jesus on the throne of judgment as verse 64 depicts?
- Can't have that, but boy, touch the institution. Dare to rock the boat. Touch precious idols like the parish system or the financial set up of the church.
- Something like that and all hell breaks loose. It's sheer self-deception. It's willing blindness to the reality that Christ's kingdom is not of this world and that if institutions of religion and church structures, if they don't point people to the reality that matters, to the Son of Man seated on the throne of glory coming to judge the earth, well, they're worthless and empty.
- [24 : 24] They become enemies of the gospel. Just idolatrous worldly things. They scorn the cross of Christ. You see, preservation of any worldly institutional church demands silencing Jesus, destroying the true Jesus.
- Jesus. Because the challenge of the cross is anathema to the world. That's a real world word for us today. Because you see, our church is so desperately in the West trying to preserve its influence in society and in the world.
- And that's why it's so tempted all the time to silence Jesus and his authority. That's what's behind the whole issue of the furore surrounding gay marriage and so on.

We want to be friends with the world and not lose the world. But the problem is you can't court the world and carry the cross. You have to choose because the way of the world is opposite to the way of the cross.

And Jesus is saying to the institutional church here, don't forget what's coming. The day of judgment when I will come on my throne judge all the peoples of this earth.

[25 : 40] And those who have passed summary judgment on Jesus and his words now to preserve their worldly ecclesiastical empire, they will see him in the judgment seat and be judged by him.

And they'll discover on that day that you can't court the world now and wear the crown then. The third example is Peter.

It's the denial of the worldly disciple. And all the emphasis here is on the pitiful shame of disloyalty, isn't it? Such a picture of sin as falling short of the mark.

You see the total contrast that we're given by Matthew between Jesus' interrogation inside and Peter's outside? Jesus is under arrest, he's intimidated by a huge crowd, he's subject to official interrogation, to violence, to scorn, to spitting.

Yet he stands dignified, supreme, majestic. And Peter's outside, away from the crowd, no violence, safe. And his interrogation is by little servant girls.

[26 : 56] And yet poor Peter's completely undone. Three times, I don't know him. And very probably, as I said in the reading, he even curses Jesus himself.

The very thing that Christians were later told that they must do if they were to survive and not be martyred. Three times, he says, I don't know him.

And in a very real sense, of course, that's the truth, isn't it? He didn't know Jesus, the real Jesus. He didn't know him so as to share his power and the witness of the real Jesus, the power of life that comes through death to this world.

Because to truly know Jesus like that means to know his cross, to have embraced his cross, to have surrendered to the way of Jesus. That's what Paul says in Philippians 3, isn't it?

I want to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. The power of real witness, you see, the power that bears testimony to Jesus, comes in embracing the cross with Jesus.

[28 : 07] There's no other way. And like Peter, so many of us want to fit in both camps. Peter hadn't yet grasped the truth of what Jesus had really said in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, no one can serve two masters, either you'll hate one and love the other or be devoted to one and despise the other.

He hadn't yet grasped that truth. You can't love the cross of Jesus and love the world. And often it's true that in our naivety we think we can serve Jesus and still be in with the world, still enjoy everything that the world offers.

We think that we can have it all without any pain, we can have Jesus and discipleship, but then we can also have my ambition and my indulgence, my acceptance by this world and its people and its institutions and its prizes.

But you see, the cross cuts through all of that. Because to embrace the cross immediately means that the world will see you for who you really are.

The world will recognize your accent because you've been with Jesus. The world will be on to you and you will have to choose. You have to choose to carry the cross and face up to the shame with Jesus or to curse Christ and be ashamed of him like Peter was.

[29 : 38] And ultimately you see it's one or the other. There's only two choices. Whatever the detail, the same issue is at the heart. Either it's scorn for the way of the cross and therefore rejection of the real Jesus.

Or it's surrender to the way of the cross and it's rejection by the world along with the real Jesus. That's the choice. Well we've seen the scorn and its different manifestations but as we close let's just look instead at the way of true surrender.

The surrender of Jesus to the way of the cross. The serene submission that Jesus shows to the way that's marked out for him is in total contrast isn't it to all of those around about him who are so attached to this world.

It's no accident that this follows directly on from the goings on in the garden of Gethsemane because it's the place where attitudes become actions. The whole world flees from the challenge of the cross but Jesus embraces it calmly and serenely and he does so because he has already been crucified in his spirit.

He faces the cross as one who's already surrendered to the cross. In the garden he's submitted to his father's will. He's submitted to the scriptures and now therefore he's able to submit to his enemies to walk the way.

[31 : 07] He's already crucified if you like to this world. He's died to its power, to its ways. He's turned his back on all worldly ways of power, the swords and so on.

He's not helpless. All of heaven's power is at his fingertips, legions of angels. But he will not put the power of heaven to work as earthly power.

Rather Jesus works heavenly power on earth in the way that the world scorns. His power lies in trusting in God's promised words, the scriptures.

His power lies in trusting in God's promised work, the way of the cross. And Jesus has power and authority in this world precisely because he has set his power not in this world but on the kingdom, on the world to come, on the consummation of everything that God has promised through his death and resurrection.

Jesus knows that the way of the cross is the only road to glory for him and for his disciples. It was for the joy set before him that he endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, says Hebrews 12.

[32 : 25] Even in the darkest hours, even when all conscious assurance of that was lost in his cloud of dejection and dereliction, he held on to the trust in the promise of his father, he held on to the word of that gospel truth.

And friends, it's when the way of the cross confronts us, you and me, in real life, and when it forces us to choose between the way of this world and the way of submission to our father in heaven, it's then that we begin to discover for ourselves whether we've really been laying up treasures on earth or treasures in heaven.

then that we discover whether we really have known the true Jesus or in fact a Jesus of our own imagining, a Jesus out of whom the way of the cross has been expunged.

When our past disappoints us in this world's terms, when our ambitions are not served, when the opportunities we'd hoped for haven't come, when the career that we dreamt of, isn't ours, the family that we'd longed for, the health that we'd hoped for, the particular kind of church that we'd idolised.

It's at these times that there are great temptations to act like Judas, to reject, to openly rebel against Jesus, a Jesus who disappoints us in this world, or to react angrily like Caiaphas and the others because Jesus' mission doesn't fit with our own cherished pattern of devotional life or church life or whatever it is.

[34 : 13] Or to just be foolish and naive like Peter, think we can have a foot in both camps, serving Jesus and being friends with the world. That's going to confront us day by day by day.

That's the choice that confronts those of you who are about to start a college or university in a new situation, a new place. The truth is, I suppose, that many of us have and will find ourselves just like Peter here, won't we?

When the rubber hits the road, when the challenge comes, it's too great and we fall and we fail. In fact, that's true every time we sin, isn't it? Every time we let our Saviour down, we're saying, I don't know him.

You know, sometimes it does take tears in our eyes to make us start to see clearly. The right kind of tears don't blur our vision. In fact, they clear it.

They help us to see. Do you remember before Jesus had to rebuke Peter openly? Get behind me, Satan. Your mind isn't on the things of God, but on the things of man.

[35 : 23] You're thinking worldly things. That was chapter 16 when Jesus first spoke to his disciples about the way of the cross. But here in chapter 26, it's in the place of collapse and failure.

But at last, Peter actually learned a lesson about himself. Poor Peter was brought to an end of himself and it was in that place that the remaking of Peter began.

The making of Peter the rock. The Peter who, in later letters, would write to the church, rejoice, he says, to share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

That was the new Peter, born through the tears of failure. Maybe that's a word especially for someone this morning. I guess in many ways it's a word for all of us.

There is mercy. there is restoration even for those who have cursed and denied Jesus. But it does often involve tears because it always involves a surrender to the cross and that is painful.

[36 : 40] Friends, that is the only road to glory. The glory of the kingdom of God. God. And the cross will confront us, every one of us, every day of our lives.

It confronts us today. It calls us to surrender. It calls us to follow our Saviour. It is the way of pain, but it is the way of power.

The way of kingdom power in this world. And it is the road to glory. And it's the only road to glory. Every other road is a road that leads to ruin.

So if this passage says anything to us, it says don't scorn the cross of Jesus. Surrender to the cross. Learn to scorn the praise of men.

And learn to lose with God, for Jesus won the world through shame. and he beckons you his road. Let's pray.

[37 : 56] Gracious Father, as you set the message of your cross before us, so we are touched by the challenge. We are so easily enthralled by the things of this world.

his joys, his rewards, his promises, his pleasures. But you have told us that every one of these reaches its end.

It is possible to have it all and to lose everything that matters. So help us, we pray, to follow in the path of our Savior, to take up our cross and to follow him.

And in doing so, to find the joy that was set before him, that even in the pain, the tears, the suffering, the scorn, we would know his presence with us and his power at work through us.

But that which is foolishness to this world may indeed prove to be the power of God for salvation to all who believe. And that on that day when he comes in glory, we too shall be found rejoicing with great joy.

[39 : 13] For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.