

Seeing Clearly

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is from Matthew chapter 26. Starting in verse 57, we read, Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest. And going inside, he sat with the guards to see the end. Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus, that they might put him to death.

But they found none, though many false witnesses had come forward. At last, two came forward and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.

And the high priest stood up and said, Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you? But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God.

Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

[1 : 11] Then the high priest tore his robes and said, He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment? They answered, He deserves death.

Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, Prophecy to us, you Christ. Who is it that struck you? Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard.

And a servant girl came up to him and said, You were also with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you mean. And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.

And again he denied it with an oath, I do not know the man. After a little while, the bystanders came up and said to Peter, Certainly you two are one of them, for your accent betrays you.

Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know the man. And immediately the rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

[2 : 21] And he went out and wept bitterly. This is the word of God. Thanks, Ha. Let's keep that passage open.

I'm going to look at it closely. But first, why don't we pray and ask God to speak to us. Our Father, thank you for your grace.

You are up in heaven. We are down here on earth. And yet you condescend to speak to us in your word, by your spirit. Please help us to see you, see Jesus, see your glory, and to realize more what it means for our lives.

Please speak to each one of us personally. Help us in our weakness to know you more. In Jesus' name. Amen. Great. Thank you. Great. Well, I don't know what kind of TV shows you like.

I don't know if you ever watched things like Britain's Got Talent or The X Factor. Those kind of shows, they were very popular in the past. Now, in some sense, of course, people are looking for talent, and they have these kind of sometimes amazing people, right?

[3 : 26] They look like just an ordinary person, and they can sing wonderfully, and everyone is surprised. But then again, they also have these other parts of the show, which are so cringy, where they just get someone who has absolutely no talent, but think they are really wonderful.

And so they get them to perform, and everyone cringes, and all the judges, they hit the buzzer, and they get just so humiliated. And I don't know what we're supposed to do.

We're supposed to be laughing at these persons who just are such failures, and we all laugh at them. I don't know what you think. I think it's a rather weird thing, right, in some way. It certainly won't be helping those people. I guess they would go home and be ashamed. And, well, we just laugh at them. At the same time, that's often what the world is like, right? Often we just need to perform.

And if we admit that actually we're not good at something, that we're a failure, what happens? Well, people will judge you. You will feel ashamed. And that's why often in the world we put our best feet forward.

[4 : 29] And if we do something wrong, well, it wasn't my fault. This is why making excuses, defending ourselves. Because, of course, we don't want to admit that actually we're a failure.

Of course, some places, they go the other way, right? Maybe Hong Kong local schools, that's where you get condemned for not doing everything right. Other schools, they are much more affirming. And every child gets an award.

And everyone gets a prize. And we're just so positive. Because you don't want to hurt anyone's self-esteem, right? When we give feedback, you never say, well, this was good and that was bad. You always say, well, this was good. And this could be even better next time. Which is maybe sometimes just a lie, right? Because it was awful. Or what do you say?

I'm not a sinner. I'm morally challenged or something, right? No, this is you from me. But, again, does that help people? What do people think who've been told their whole life that actually they're great?

[5 : 34] Well, either they become very snowflakey, who always need affirmation. Or maybe they become very insecure, right? Children find it very hard sometimes to try new things because they've always been told how great they are.

They've always got a prize. And now they feel that they can't do this. And they don't want to admit it. And so they're insecure, right? Now, affirming or judging, both of them actually don't help people. Now, if we want to grow in the Christian life, if we want to live as Christians, if we want to, what do we need? Well, in this passage, we see a third way. We see the way of Jesus. And that is something that completely changes our lives.

That's what we're going to look at. We're looking at Matthew's gospel, one of the biographies of Jesus. Jesus, of course, he lived 2,000 years ago, but we're worshiping him still today.

Why is he so amazing? Well, you read that here in these gospels. And we've been going very slowly these past few weeks, going through the last 24 hours of Jesus' life.

[6 : 34] Because that's when we can really so closely see who he is and why he came and why we need him. And that's where we're going to go today. And as we see this passage in two parts, well, what do we see?

Well, we notice two big things, right? First of all, well, we notice Jesus' faithfulness. As we journey to the cross, Jesus' faithfulness.

I mean, we saw that already beginning last week, right? He was in the garden on God's mission. And then he got arrested, betrayed by one of his closest friends, arrested, and he let himself be taken.

And now he's on trial before the high priest, before the religious leaders. Quite a huge crowd, right? Verse 57, then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

Verse 59, now the chief priests and the whole council were there, right? All the officials, all the leaders conspiring against Jesus. Against this one lonely rabbi standing there, right?

[7 : 39] And Jesus shines because, as you've heard, this trial is just a sham. Now, the religious leaders, if you've read through Matthew, they really hate Jesus because he keeps on drawing all these followers and he keeps on showing their, pointing out their hypocrisy.

So they want to get rid of him. And so this trial, it's completely biased, right? I'm sure you've heard that. Verse 59, now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death.

The outcome is predetermined. They want to condemn him to death. And so let's get some false witnesses. Let's get some people to lie and get this done. Why all the charade?

I mean, if they want to get rid of him, why not just kill him? But no, no, it needs to appear legal, right? They want to give the impression that it's all proper and legal, but it's not, right?

Apparently, there's like 14 different rules of a fair trial that the Jews had and all 14 get broken or something like that. So it's at night.

[8 : 41] It's in a private residence, kind of behind closed doors, no defense for the accused. It's just a sham. And even then, they can't make it work, right?

They can't get two liars to tell the same lie. And in the midst of that, Jesus is just standing there. And he's standing there and he is silent. And he knows what they want.

He knows what they will do. He knows what's going to happen. And yet, he just stands and he's quiet. I mean, partly because these guys just don't deserve an answer. But also, he just lets it happen, right?

He goes along with it. He is faithful. I mean, it reminds us of Isaiah 53, right? Here is Jesus on his mission. Like a lamb, he was led to the slaughter.

Like a sheep that before its shearers is silent. So he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away. Here is Jesus, yeah, going along with this.

[9 : 40] Because after all, yeah, that's what he came to do. And while the high priest, he's getting frustrated. He can't get him condemned. So getting nowhere, he puts Jesus on the spot. Verse 63.

But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the son of God. Tell us. Are you the Christ?

Are you God's chosen king? And this is the moment, right? Here is Jesus' moment in which he could just get out of it and say, no, I'm not. And it's all over. And he won't have to go through the cross.

But no, he doesn't, right? He doesn't save his skin. Jesus said to him, you've said so. You're right. Absolutely. Though you don't really know who I am.

I mean, you say it. But actually, I'm more than that. Because he goes on. And it doesn't make them very happy, right? But from now on, you will see the son of man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

[10 : 40] You think I'm just some pretender. You think I'm just some human king, some political leader. Actually, from now on, you're going to see the son of man seated. And the religious leaders know exactly what he's talking about, right?

They know the Old Testament. They know what he's claiming. The son of man from Daniel. You know, behold, with the clouds of heaven, there was one like a son of man. And he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him.

And he was given glory and authority and a kingdom that all nations to serve him. He's going to be the king of the whole world. Or seated at the right hand. Right? Psalm 110.

The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Right? Seated at God's right hand. I'm far more than that.

I'm going to be the judge of the world. And actually, you're going to make that happen. You're going to reject me. You're going to kill me. But from then, well, I'm going to be at God's right hand. And I'm going to come back and judge you.

[11 : 38] That's what he's saying. And that's who he is. Although, it's not going to make anyone happy, right? He's not going to make any friends with that. Just by admitting that.

And yeah, you've heard it, right? The high priest, he tears his robes. You've heard his blasphemy. He deserves death. And they all condemn him. And they start spitting on him and slapping him and striking him.

Such, yeah. Such a sad injustice, right? But I hope you're in awe of Jesus. Last week in the garden, if there's any other way, let it be so.

Let his cup prosper me. But there was no other way. And so he goes along. He submits to this sham trial. He speaks the truth. He declares who he is, even if it leads to his death, leads to his condemnation.

I mean, he's the son of man. He could judge them and destroy them there and then. And yet he doesn't. He is faithful to his mission. He's obedient. And it's so beautiful.

[12 : 37] And such a contrast to, well, the next story, right? Because then we get to Peter. If you don't know who Peter is, Peter is Jesus' closest disciple, his best friend.

And in a way, he's a great guy, right? Because he is still there. All the other disciples, they fled away. But Peter, he wanted to follow Jesus. And he's still there, right? He's still there.

He's now in the courtyard. Verse 69. Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, right? He's still there. But what happened? Well, a servant girl came up to him and said, you also were with Jesus the Galilean.

What now? What will Peter do? Well, Peter goes the other way, right? He tries to save his skin. But he denied it before them all, saying, I do not know what you mean.

Now was he just called off guard? Well, he gets another chance. So a little bit later, he went out to the entrance. Another girl saw him and she said to the bystanders, this man was with Jesus of Nazareth.

[13:40] And again, he denied it with an oath. I do not know the man. No, right? Denies it. And then a third time, three times he denies Jesus.

Three times he gets a chance to say the truth and he fails. He denies it. It should have been no surprise, of course, right? Because then the rooster crows. And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.

He knew what Jesus said. He remembered. And he sees it's exactly true. And so he went out and broke down and wept bitterly. But what is so interesting, right?

I mean, of course, here's the great hero. He's now broken. But I hope you see some similarities here, right? What's interesting is the way that this is written. I mean, we've seen Peter a lot already. But even into the start of today's passage, right? Because verse 57, Jesus had, and those who had seized Jesus, led him to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

[14:44] And Peter was following him at a distance. So we get kind of Peter already introduced earlier. We get Jesus and then Peter and then Jesus and then Peter. It's kind of they are happening at the same time, right?

In a movie sometimes where you see kind of two scenes happening exactly side by side. And that's not just the only similarity, right? In a way, they're both on trial, right?

Both are asked, who are you? Is this who you are? It's a trial. And both of them on their oath, right? The high priest, Jesus, I put you under oath. Say who you are.

And here's Peter. And he puts himself under oath. No, I swear I do not know the man. So basically, it's two parallel trials. One with Jesus, one with Peter.

Except, of course, that's what's the same, but it's so different, right? Peter, he fails. Jesus is faithful, but Peter, he fails. He denies Jesus. And what a failure, right?

[15:42] Here is Jesus, and he stands before, I don't know, 30, 40 people, all the religious leaders, all the elite, the chief priests and the elders. And he's standing there.

And who does Jesus stand him for? Well, a servant girl came up to him. In Greek, one servant girl, right? Maybe 13-year-old girl. And that is his trial.

And he fails. I don't know what you are like. I find that I'm being more or less bold with different people, right? I used to work in an office, and I had one co-worker, and he scared me.

He was like this tall, right? You know, you think I'm tall? Well, he was this tall. And he spent half his life in a gym. He had these huge muscles. And he never smiled. And every sentence he said had an F word in it.

He was just intimidating. So I never said anything to him. And then the administrator of the team was this little woman. She was this, I had no problem being bold and talking about Jesus to her, right?

[16:45] Well, here is Peter, the experienced fisherman. And then this 13-year-old girl. Hey, aren't you with Jesus? And he denies it, right? Such a failure and such an explicit contrast with Jesus, right?

And this is such basic discipleship, just saying that you belong to Jesus, right? Baptism, what do you say? You belong to Jesus. And he fails. He, yeah, so deeply.

But what should we do with that? What should we do with Peter's deep failure? I mean, I guess it's easy to do an X factor, right? And to laugh at Peter. What a failure. You know, I wouldn't have done that.

I mean, it is humiliating, right, for Peter. I mean, if you're here, and I don't know what you think of the Bible and the New Testament, I think it's quite extraordinary that it actually says this about Peter.

I mean, Peter was, he was the great leader of the church at that time, right? He was almost like, you know, some churches call him the Pope, right? Like the chief leader.

[17 : 46] And then it has, in the holy book, it says how awfully he failed. You never say that, right? Some people, they think, you know, the New Testament was just made up by the disciples. Why would they make this up?

Any religion that's made up, it's kind of, it's always, it exalts how great the leaders are, right? If you take a tour to North Korea, I mean, what are you going to hear? Or you're going to hear how Kim Jong-un, I guess when he was in kindergarten, he fought off an American invasion on his own, right?

And when he was 12, he got his fourth PhD from Kim Il-sung University, right? How great he is, not how he failed. And yet here is Peter, the great leader, and we read how he failed.

So maybe, you know, these books are reliable. If they're willing to say this about Peter, maybe this is really eyewitness accounts, and you should read it. But that's not the point here.

It's not about the authenticity. They didn't include Peter because he was so great. Now, Peter, I mean, he's just a chief disciple, right? The 12 followers, they were disciples, and we as Christians are disciples.

[18 : 53] And so when we see Peter in the other disciples, they're just our role models, right? You read this book, you want to know what it's like to be a disciple? Look at these guys. Look at Peter.

Peter, he's the number one disciple. He's our number one role model. And so we see Peter, and now you think, well, okay, so this is what it's like to be a disciple. And what is that then like?

Well, you're a failure. Not just Peter's failure. Actually, we should see here our failure. How we, you know, contrasted with Jesus, well, how we fail.

Maybe not in the same way as Peter, but we are failures. And the thing is, we need to see that. I mean, the thing here is that Peter finally sees it. I mean, it's not that Peter has been this hero the whole gospel, right?

He was in a boat and in a storm, and he didn't trust Jesus. And, you know, he tried to walk on water, but he sank. And he didn't trust Jesus to provide bread. And he tried to keep Jesus away from the cross.

[19 : 51] And he fell asleep when he should be praying and all those things. But Peter never saw it himself. He always thought that he was so great and he was so confident.

But now he finally admits it. Finally, he sees who he really is. And he's broken. And he wept bitterly. And Matthew says, you know, you want to follow Jesus?

This is part of it. You need to see your failure. You need to admit that you're broken. You need to admit that you need Jesus. That is what it's like to be a Christian. And a failure that sounds quite neutral.

You know, if I'm going to run a marathon, I'm probably going to fail. But it's not something moral, right? This is moral. Failure is almost sin, right? Basically, Peter, he's a sinner.

And he needs to see that he's a sinner. That he's done wrong. That there's a gap between him and God's holiness. And I know that that's a difficult message, right? Maybe you're here as a visitor.

[20 : 54] And, yeah, this passage, the writer wants to say that we are all failures. Many of us don't look like it, right? We seem successful. I guess it's that seeing, right?

It's that internal thing. You know, maybe you look okay. But if you're honest in your head, are you really the person that you think you should be? That you ought to be?

I guess many of us, deep down we know, right? We're not. And if we're talking about deep down, I guess it's easy to pretend and hide what we're really like. What if everyone could see every thought that's ever in your head and what you think about other people?

My guess is you would lose a lot of respect very soon, right? No. Actually, if we are honest, we fall short. And especially, well, how does this start compared to Jesus?

You know, what is really a life that is good? Really, you know, a life that is good enough for God? Well, Jesus, at the start of his ministry, right?

[21 : 57] He was baptized and the heavens opened and God said, this is my beloved son. With him I'm well pleased. Well, that is what's well pleasing to God.

But you read the gospel and here is Jesus. And what a perfect life, right? 100% love. 100% selflessness.

100% care for the women and children and the outcasts and lepers and sinners. For everyone. Bringing healing, forgiveness, freedom, justice to all who need it.

Total integrity and yet such humility. You know, Jesus is really the most beautiful life. But that is a life that's pleasing to God. And if I see that and I compare that with me, well, God is not well pleased with me, right?

Or with you. And it's not just that that's true. That is, it's objectively true. But yeah, we need to admit that. Accept it. Be convicted of it. That we're failures.

[23 : 02] Being a Christian is admitting your need. You know, these people getting baptized. In a way, that's what they're doing. It's funny, right? They come up here and we applaud them. And we congratulate them on their baptism.

As if it's like a great achievement. They're doing something great. You know, why do people get baptized? Because it's an admission of failure. It's an admission of need.

How much they need Jesus. Right? That's what we've heard over the past few weeks in their testimonies. Right? Muir, how, you know, I was so self-reliant. I tried to do it himself and I couldn't. I was a failure. I need Jesus. Alona, I was trying to be a good person, but I couldn't. I need Jesus. Grace, I tried to find my happiness in all this here and there and I couldn't. I need Jesus.

Right? Being baptized. Yeah. Why do you need water? Because you're dirty. It's an admission of need. And not just at the start of the Christian life. Ongoing. Right?

[23 : 58] There's always a gap. Of course, there's change. You know, we've been reading through Acts in our Bible reading plan. And yeah, Peter has changed. And you know, in Acts, then he's no longer in front of a servant girl.

He's in front of the same council where Jesus stood now. And he boldly proclaims the gospel. Yeah, the Holy Spirit really changed him. Right? But then again, in another chapter, he, well, he excludes Gentiles by his eating habits because he's afraid.

He's still not perfect. Compared to Jesus, none of us are still perfect. Perfect. So, yeah. Jesus, he doesn't affirm us.

Right? This book doesn't say we're doing great. He doesn't give us any award for trying. Now, he says we're failures. But the thing is, we can admit it. In the world, I guess, at work, you'd never admit you're a failure.

Right? You'd never admit what you've done wrong. Because you'd get X-factored. Right? You'd get the buzz. But not here. And why not? Well, because we should see Jesus' faithfulness for our failure.

[25 : 03] How can Jesus just love us? I mean, how can Jesus love Peter? You know, Jesus knew this. Right? He predicted beforehand, you're going to deny me three times. You're going to betray me.

How could Jesus do that and still love Peter? And later restore him and make him who he was? Well, there is a reason that Jesus and Peter here are so closely tied together.

Why are they in the same kind of trial? Well, because Jesus came to stand in Peter's place. Peter failed his trial. And so Jesus came to stand in the trial for him.

And in so many ways, right? Peter disobeyed. Jesus obeyed in his place. Peter didn't live the life he should. But Jesus came to live the life that we should for us.

And not just for Peter, for all of us. Maybe you've been impatient this week. I know I've been. Well, Jesus was perfectly patient. And he gives that to us. Maybe you failed in the Bible reading plan.

[26 : 07] Jesus knew the scriptures inside out for us. And, you know, that's the gospel. He came to be our substitute. He takes all the things that we've done wrong.

And he paid for them on the cross. And he says, let me give you my perfect life. Come to me. Come to me with your failures. Come to me with your sin. And I will take care of that.

And here is my perfect life. And that is how God sees you. And isn't that wonderful, right? Isn't that, you know, what we need?

Because if everything is taken care of, then we're free, right? Normally we're worried about our failings. We're worried about everything we do wrong. But if it's taken care of, if all the consequences are done, then we're free.

Then we're secure. Then we're safe. Then we can just open up. And actually, that's when we can find help. I mean, if God would just affirm us in our life, affirm us in our failings, there was no need to change, right?

[27 : 09] And we could never become the persons we want to be, the people we would love to be if we're honest. But if we get judged, then we also don't want to open up. But the wonderful thing is

because Jesus shows grace and Jesus has taken care of it, we can be honest to him.

We can come to him with our failure, with our needs, with our disobedience, and find help. Help to change. Help to be reassured.

Help to live as a Christian. Help to follow Jesus. And it's just what we need, right? And that's what we want to do as a church. You know, as a church, we don't want to beat you about you should do this.

We don't think that works. No, Jesus tries to change us by his grace. That's why we want to do this. Why not? We want to be renewed by the gospel. That's the kind of church we want to be. And not just from the front, right?

Isn't that what we should be as a community? Isn't it, you know, if we all know we're failures and we all know how much we need Jesus, the wonderful thing is that we can admit that to each other.

[28 : 13] Because maybe, you know, it's sometimes you come here and, you know, you bring the attitude from work, right? At work you always pretend that everything's good and that you're successful.

And then you come here and, hey, how's your week? And you're tempted to say, oh, it's great. Actually, it's not, right? You've had a difficult week. But if you say that you've struggled and you've sinned, will you get the X factor?

Will you get buzzed out? But, no, if we know we're all sinners, then that won't happen, right? We can admit our struggles. And maybe there's sin. And, you know, okay, there's some sins we all struggle with, right?

We've all struggled to pray as much as we should. But maybe this is a different kind of sin. And you feel, I can't admit that. I hope we're a church where you feel you can do that, where you feel safe. Because, hey, Jesus knows about your sin. And he still died for you and he still loves you. Well, we can do the same. And then you can actually get help. I still feel so sorry when, you know, some married couple come to us.

[29 : 17] And they have marriage problems. And, okay, they want to get a divorce. And then, well, how long have you had problems? Well, 15 years. Why didn't you tell us earlier? And, well, they're just ashamed to admit it, right?

They're trying to pretend that everything's okay. And so they don't get any help. And it doesn't end how we should, right? If we want to grow, if we want to get out of our problems, the first thing we need to do is admit it and talk to each other, right?

And isn't that what we need? If you're a visitor here, you know, I hope that's what you see in Jesus. You know, maybe you know that you're not the person you ought to be. Well, Jesus, he knows that. But he extends his love and grace to you. Please come to him. Ask any of the people getting baptized how wonderful it is. Or any of the other people here who've already done that and who are still every day, you know, coming to Jesus because they need his grace.

And let's tell this to each other, right? If we want to, you know, what do we do with someone? They admit they're a failure. They admit they struggle. Let's point them to this wonderful Jesus, right?

[30 : 26] Can we help each other see his grace and point each other to him where they find the help they need? And what a wonderful gospel, wonderful Savior. Let's pray.

Amen. Lord Jesus, we are so thankful for your grace.

Lord, would we be a church of love and grace that points people to us?

And, Father, as we go on in this Easter time, would you keep driving this home in our hearts, Lord? Please renew us by the gospel. In Jesus' name.

Amen.