



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
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March 22, 2009

Theme: The Cross: An Exercise In the Sovereignty of God

Text: Matthew 26:1-5

In our study of Matthew, we have now come to what commentators often refer to as the "passion narrative." In other words, we have come to that part of the Gospel that tells the story of Jesus suffering, death, and resurrection. The story of the events which led up to Jesus' death and resurrection is the longest uninterrupted section of the Gospel. This is true of all four Gospels. This has led some commentators to refer this Gospel as a "...a passion story with a long introduction." We can say that everything else has been a powerful introduction to an even more powerful conclusion. Without the cross the Gospel is not Good News; instead, it is the record of the highest standard of morality that has ever been taught. But the cross stands at the center of the story of Jesus. Apart from the cross Jesus is just one more spiritual guru among many. It is through the cross that the God of heaven has provided a way for the people of earth to have their sins forgiven and so to have a relationship with a holy God.

In the King James Version of the Bible, this section begins with these words, "And it came to pass..." This adds a little more drama than we find in the NIV. Jesus has just finished a long piece of instruction about how believers can be prepared for his return to the earth. Matthew has it that as soon as Jesus had completed that instruction, he told his disciples that the Passover was two days away and that the Son of Man would be handed over to be crucified. This tells us from the beginning that even when it came to his death, Jesus was in command. This is Jesus' fourth prediction of his death in this Gospel. By connecting his death so directly with the Passover, Jesus is making a statement. The statement is that He will be the new Passover lamb.

The Passover was a yearly celebration in which the Jewish people remembered their salvation from slavery in Egypt. It was celebrated in the first month of the Jewish calendar—after dark on the fifteenth day of Nisan. When God delivered the Hebrews from Egypt, he sent ten plagues upon the land of Egypt. The tenth plague would be the death of every firstborn child in Egypt. God commanded the Hebrews to slaughter a flawless, one-year old lamb. They were to take some of the blood of the Lamb and put a spot on each side of their doorposts, and one overhead. God promised the Hebrews that if they would do this, their firstborn children would be spared. The Jewish people were then to celebrate that Passover each year to remember that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. But now Jesus blood would be shed for the forgiveness of sins.

A very important phrase in verse two says that, "...the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." In that small phrase the sovereignty of God—that is, his nature as being all-powerful over all the events in the universe is revealed. That small phrase also expresses



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sacrificial language. Just as Jewish families handed over their Passover lambs to the priest to be sacrificed, so Jesus would be handed over to the chief priests to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. The word which is translated, "will be handed over," is the very same word that is used to describe Judas' act of betraying Jesus to the authorities. This word appears fourteen times in two chapters. Judas hands Jesus over to the Jewish authorities. The Jewish authorities hand Jesus over to Pontius Pilate to be sentenced to death. Pontius Pilate hands Jesus over to his soldiers to be crucified. But through these human acts of handing Jesus over to be sacrificed, God hands Jesus over to death—and Jesus Himself hands Himself over to death.

From a human standpoint, Jesus trial, sentencing, and execution was a travesty of justice. The only sinless man who ever lived was crucified. But through those incredibly evil human actions God sovereignly worked out something that was indescribably good—the forgiveness of sins. Scripture says that Judas handed Jesus over to the authorities. But Scripture also says that God handed Jesus over to the cross. Peter preaches this in his first sermon on the Day of Pentecost: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge..." Scripture also says that Jesus handed Himself over to be crucified. In one expression of his personal life of faith Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and who handed himself over for me." The crucifixion of Jesus is not a matter of tragedy or defeat; it is instead the predetermined will of God the Father, and the intentional choice of Jesus the obedient Son.

Jesus' prediction of his own death is also directly connected to the evil plans of the Jewish leaders to kill Him. Even as Jesus announces that He must die, the Jewish authorities are planning how they can arrest Jesus and have him put to death in some sly and secretive way. It was their responsibility to govern the spirituality of the Jewish people. But if they truly believed that Jesus was a false prophet, they should have fearlessly arrested Him as He taught daily in the temple. Their actions are an example of religious politics at its worst. The church has to be governed, so we have to have politics in the church. Someone must lead and govern the church. The question is this: Do we govern wisely and selflessly; or, do we govern selfishly and foolishly? We must also recognize that the church belongs to Jesus Christ and not to us. These things are necessary for healthy church politics.

The final and striking thing that I want to point out once again is that God is in control of all things. The plan of the Jewish leaders was that Jesus would not be killed during the Passover. But God had other plans. A 3:00 PM on the day of Passover, the High Priest would sacrifice one Passover Lamb for the whole nations of Israel. Matthew tells us that not only did God plan that Jesus would die on the day of the Passover, he died at 3:00 PM—exactly when the High Priest was sacrificing the lamb for the Nation of Israel. Just



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as God worked out His perfect plan through Jesus Christ, we can believe that He will work out His perfect plan for our lives, because we are the brothers and sisters of Jesus.