

The Week from Hell

By Bob Vincent

Bible Text: Mark 11:1-11; Luke 24:13-21

Preached on: Sunday, April 9, 2006

Grace Presbyterian Church

4900 Jackson Street

Alexandria, LA 71303-2509

Website: <http://www.rbvincent.com>

Online Sermons: <http://rbvincent.sermonaudio.com>

If you'd turn with me in your Bibles to Mark chapter 11 starting at verse one – page 1572.

“As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ‘Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’” They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, ‘What are you doing, untying that colt?’ They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’ Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.”

And now if you'd turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 24 starting at verse 13 – page 1642.

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’ They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?’ ‘What things?’ he asked. ‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be

sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”

May we pray?

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we come to you this day asking in the name and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ that you would open to us the Word of God by the anointing and infilling of your Holy Spirit. Lord, we are empty here and we need to be filled; filled not with grief, not with doubt and unbelief, not with ourselves and a focus upon the things of the past or the things of the present or even the things of the immediate future. But, Lord, we need to be filled with Jesus and with the Word of God so that, Lord, our minds would be transformed so that as we go from this place we go different as different people than as we came in.

Lord, if you speak the word your servant will be healed and there isn't a person here today that doesn't need a healing touch from you. Lord, touch us by your grace. Lord, so combine the ministry of the Holy Spirit with the ministry of the Holy Scriptures that, Lord, your Word may come to us with such life changing power that we really are transformed; that if there's anybody here today who has never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, today is the day to be brought from death to life, from the darkness to the light, from bondage to freedom, from guilt and condemnation to cleansing and freedom in Jesus Christ.

Lord, hear our prayer for Jesus' sake. And we also lift up before you our sister Barbara Allen's brother Dee Drell, our federal judge, Lord, as he has had a heart attack. We pray that you would be with him, that you would heal his body, that you would restore him to health.

Lord, you tell us in the Word of God to pray for kings and all those who are in authority over us that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness. And since Dee is a professing Christian we pray all the more boldly that you would raise him up and put him back into that position of authority you've placed him over us.

Lord, in Jesus' name bless each one here according to our various needs that you alone know and meet those needs uniquely through your Word and Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I'd like to direct your attention to the gospel of Mark, chapter 11. The title of the message is *The Week from Hell*.

Have you ever had a week when you said, “Well, that was a week from Hell?”

That's not cussing to say that, by the way, the week from Hell, because as we'll see today there are weeks from Hell.

In what sense?

Well, there really is a Hell and there really is a Heaven. And as we speak sometimes of Heaven and we mean by Heaven, God, so we may speak of Hell and refer to the work of Satan and all of his host. For there really is a devil, there really is a Satan, and he is a supernatural and powerful being and he opposes us and opposes all that is of God.

So we may have a week from Heaven and we may have a week from Hell. And I pray by the end of this message today that we may look at the week that is described beginning in Mark 11 as a week that is both from Heaven and from Hell. For there is no week from Hell that is not also a week from Heaven; as we know that Satan opposes the things of God and does everything that he can, using all of the forces of Hell combined to bring about destruction and misery because he is a thief and a robber. He is a liar and the father of lies.

So we know that there's nothing that happens in this life that Scripture tells us is not part of God's kind purpose for us. "Because we know," says Saint Paul in Romans 8:28, "that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

So we might entitle this sermon with a question mark at the end: *A Week from Hell?* And answer, *sic et non* as the Latin philosophers would say, "Yes and no." It was a week from Hell. It was a week from Heaven.

Take yourself back in time some 1976 years ago 'til April the 9th in the year 30 AD. For that, at least as far as I'm able to tell, is when that week came to an end. It was on April the 9th in the year 30 AD that Christ rose from the dead at the end of a week from Hell and the beginning of God's new day, of God's new week.

But think with me, today, if you will, of the days that preceded April 9th in the year of our Lord 30 AD. Think with me of the events of a week from Hell.

Weeks from Hell can begin looking very good. Mark chapter 11 describes Christ's triumphal entry. And as we look at this triumphal entry we begin to think: "This is a wonderful week. It's going to be a glorious week. Everything's coming up roses. Everything is grand." Christ leaves Bethany. He descends the Mount of Olives and as he descends the crowds are gathered there. They had heard the stories about Jesus. Many of them have heard him personally teach and preach. Many of them had seen the miracles that he did. Some saw the miracle of the dead Lazarus being raised just in the days before this in John chapter 11. A man had been dead for four days and Jesus says, "Roll the stone away." And he cries out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he comes forth. People have seen that. And there are all kinds of phony miracles that people have performed from time immemorial that aren't real. But raising the dead is one of those things that is irrefutable evidence that there is something other than the natural at work. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

So people are anxious to hear the rabbi, to see him. I'm sure there were many sick who wanted to be healed and they gather. And as he comes they begin to shout in prophetic fulfillment of Scripture: "Hosanna! Oh, save us! Hosanna in the highest!"

And it looks like Jesus is truly coming into his own. This long expected Messiah of Israel, this one had been foretold from the days of the Garden of Eden and prophecy becoming increasingly explicit as God unfolds his revelation to his people. It looks as if now, truly, the Messiah is coming.

As Cleopas said, "And we had thought that it would be who would deliver Israel."

And so the crowd is electric. Little children are crying out. People are waving palm branches. "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the kingdom of our Father David coming in the name of the Lord," for Scripture had foretold that David would have a successor who would far exceed what David ever did. "Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the Lord."

What a wonderful beginning the week from Hell had; full of promise, full of optimism, full of joy. And yet Palm Sunday is such a deceptive day, is it not? Palm Sunday is a warning that when things appear to be going well – watch out. For evil is to come.

Things are not as they appear to be when it looks as if everyone is for us; when it looks as if everything is going our way...wait a moment. Palm Sunday reminds us of the uncertainty of life; that as we stand poised on the brink of a new week; things may not at all turn out the way that they began. And relentlessly as day passes in that week from Hell – what we call Holy Week – things get worse.

On that first day of the week, Sunday, Christ rides triumphantly into Jerusalem and there's no real crisis. He goes into the temple, but he leaves because it's late evening. He goes back to Bethany and he spends the night.

And the next day he goes back to Jerusalem. It's on a Monday; so much happens that day; and then Tuesday and so much happens on that day. Christ, over those two days, antagonized the delicate political balance of the country.

For Israel, in the year 30 AD was even more precariously balanced politically than Israel is today with various outsiders calling the shots. Now, no nation is really a free nation, is it? Other nations affect it profoundly. Even when a nation is in a position of great leadership its position isn't secure. And here is Israel. Its balance, politically, is very, very tentative. There are these various parties, religious parties, within the country.

There are the Sadducees. The Sadducees only took the first five books of Moses as the Word of God. They took them very seriously. They memorized the Scripture. They studied the Scripture. They believed the Bible was true. But they limited the Scriptures to the first five books. They didn't believe in angels. They didn't believe in demons.

They didn't believe in predestination. They didn't believe in life after death. They were sad-you-see. And that's not an original with me.

And then there are the Pharisees. The Pharisees took the entire body of the Hebrew Scriptures, 24 books. They correspond exactly to our 39 books of our Old Testament for, in many cases, the Hebrew Bible combines certain books: 1 and 2 Chronicles are the last book in the Hebrew book and they are one book. They are exactly the same as our 1 and 2 Chronicles. So every single word that's found in your English Old Testament is found in Hebrew in the Hebrew Bible. It's just the order of the books and their combination is different.

The Pharisees believed the Old Testament; what we call the Scriptures. They believed every word of it. They believed what it taught. It taught angels. It taught demons. It taught predestination. They believed all those things. It taught life after death and it taught the resurrection of the body. They were the Pharisees.

And if you think about the belief system of Jesus, Jesus was, in many ways, a Pharisee, as certainly Paul was a Pharisee. But the spirit of the Pharisees was not the same as that of Jesus or of Paul.

The Pharisees were the majority. They appealed to the common man. The Sadducees were the elite. They were the money class and they were the ones who had made peace with Rome. The Sadducees were the ones who controlled the high priesthood. Annas and Caiaphas were Sadducees. But the Sanhedrin was divided into two parties – the Sadducees and the Pharisees. But over the whole thing loomed the shadow of Rome; Rome's representative in the person of the Roman governor – Pontius Pilate – cast a shadow even over the temple as the fortress of Antionia was right there next to the temple in those days.

And into this political maelstrom walks the prophet Jesus of Nazareth and he is upsetting things. He is a man who does not favor the status quo. There were all kinds of schemes that were set out, schemes that provided money. And remember that money and religion always go hand in hand because the easiest way to con someone out of a dollar is through religion. It's quick and painless usually. People are naïve and they want to believe all kinds of nonsense. And there's always a preacher there to convince them of it. Religion has always been a means of personal profit for unscrupulous people.

And, of course, the sad thing about unscrupulous people is that they don't realize they are being unscrupulous when they are. The Sadducees, who controlled the high priesthood, had a key to the revenue of the temple. And so, you know how it works today: your US Senator, you don't bring home enough pork you get voted out of office; you go back and are hired as a consultant. It works that way. There's always someone to pay the consultant's fee. And that's the way it worked. The friends of those who controlled the temple had certain positions where they could really rake in the cash.

You couldn't bring and put a coin into the temple of God that was a form of idolatry, could you? You couldn't have a coin stamped with the head of a Roman Emperor like Tiberius. The Romans believed their emperors were gods. That was a graven image of a foreign god. That was, indeed, an idol itself. Can you cast a gold idol as an offering to God or a silver idol to God?

And so all the money had to be exchanged and those who were friends of the ruling party did their work. The money is exchanged. You bring your pagan, Roman coin and you get a kosher coin that you can now offer. And everybody gets his cut.

Or animals; you're coming to bring an animal to sacrifice. And, in many cases, it's a long way from home if you live up north beyond the place of the Samaritans, if you live in the Galilee. So it's better just to buy your animals there. And, again, those who provide the animals, they're getting a cut. And everybody's getting his cut. And, as in Baton Rouge with the brown bags under the table, as in Washington, DC where there are leather cases at restaurants; everybody is getting his cut and it's being passed up the line.

And so when Jesus comes into the temple that day during the week from Hell, Holy Week, we understand why people were so angry with Jesus. He went in there and he acted in the eyes of people like a mad man. Didn't he know what he was up against? Didn't he know that he was up against the high priestly family itself; Annas and Caiaphas; that they were the ones behind it and they were getting a cut? When he overturns the tables of the money changers, when he overturns the cages of the doves, when he drives out the animals that were there to be bought and he said, "It is written: My house shall be called a house of prayer and you have made it a den of thieves!" Didn't he know? Didn't he know what he was stirring up?

He was raising Hell. He was stirring up the rage of demons who drove men in their greed to get more money, more money. He angered people. He angered them terribly.

I want you to look at the events in the week from Hell from a natural perspective. Do you understand why Jesus was killed, why Jesus was crucified? He became a threat to the status quo, this delicate political balance. He's upsetting it and he's offending the powerful people because remember this: Government is always run by the wealthy who bribe behind the scenes and control. It is that way. From time to time there are exceptions, but by and large it's the way that it is. The way the world works is an illusion. And he has upset the real power brokers. He's made them angry. He's challenged their authority and he's hit them where it really hurts, which is in their pocketbook.

And so things lead on from that point. Jesus is in a number of discourses as he goes back and forth Monday night and Tuesday night. And Tuesday is a day when he is full of teaching. He's teaching in the temple. And he climaxes in Matthew 23 where he describes not only the Sadducees but the Pharisees. You see, the Pharisees, in many ways, could cheer Jesus on as he talked about the Sadducees because the Sadducees were, I say again, of the money class. And the Sadducees had parked their conscience at the

door of Roman power in order to achieve their positions of authority and leadership within the land.

But as Jesus gives this scathing diatribe against both Sadducee and Pharisee, people are smarting. Those who had been loyal to Jesus now are having second thoughts. He's crazy, this man, to go along like this. He's offending people. He's making them angry. His very supporters are turning on him now because of the vitriolic, vituperative vehemence with which he speaks as he castigates people with their hypocrisy.

It's an amazing thing, isn't it?

Jesus.

How did Jesus get crucified? It's all explainable in a natural view of the world. Jesus is crucified because he offended powerful people and because he embarrassed even his friends and closest followers; because he assaulted people verbally with his words as he challenged every man to repent of his sins. As he said of the most righteous among the people, "You're not worthy. You must repent of your sins and come to God in brokenness."

So we looked at the events, the events that lead us to that point. There are these two strands of prophecy in the Old Testament about the Messiah. On the one hand, the Old Testament clearly teaches that the Messiah, the Son of David, would rule and reign over all the nations. And he would bring in peace. He would conquer all of God's enemies. That strand of prophecy is there.

But there is this other strand woven within the fabric of Old Testament prophecy. It is the fabric of a suffering servant, of one who would be despised and rejected of people, of one who would be put aside, of a stone that the builders would reject, of one who would be finally rejected to the point of torture where people would actually pluck out the whiskers of his beard and pluck out much of his hair, where he would be so marred and beaten and brutalized that he would be virtually unrecognizable, that people would look and see this Messiah and wonder: "Can he be human or is he just a big bloody clump of meat?" All that's foretold as well.

These two strands of prophecy in the Old Testament: a triumphal king, victorious, wearing the crown, driving out our enemies, delivering us – pray God it's true – from these accursed Roman tyrants; and the suffering servant, the Lamb of God, the one who is silent before his accusers, who doesn't open his mouth, who is beaten and finally whose hands and feet are pierced. These two strands....

And so with his disciples, as they anticipate on the beginning of the week from Hell, that Palm Sunday, they anticipate the inauguration of the kingdom of God. They expect that the Romans will now, this week, be driven out. But it begins to dawn on some of them. It isn't going to be that way at all. He's not going to seize the opportunity and take power

and drive out the corrupt priests and drive out the corrupt rulers. He's not going to purify the sons of Levi the way that we thought he would do it.

And they become bitterly disappointed and one of his inner disciples, one of the most trusted – for the one you give the money to is generally the most trustworthy – Judas, the keeper of the purse is angry with Jesus.

Now, you know, there was something in the news this week of a piece of writing that was done several hundred years after the time of Christ – written in Coptic, that is, the language of Egypt at that time – saying that Jesus conspired with Judas for Judas to betray him.

Well, dear ones, let's put it in perspective. If I were to write a piece describing some events in the life of George Washington, you're looking at the same basic time difference between that writing and the life of Washington as you are – even greater distance – between that piece of Coptic writing about Judas, that someone's figment of imagination.

What was Judas' motivation? Judas' motivation is not unlike yours and mine. We want a life with a crown without a cross. We want victory without pain. We want the victory to be declared without a battle. And when Judas realizes that Jesus is not who he thought he was, that Jesus is not going to drive the Romans out with force of arms, that instead of riding in on four white chargers pulling his chariot of power, he's coming in riding on the foal of an ass, Judas begins to be disturbed.

Perhaps he wants to provoke Jesus, to force him, to force his hand. But Judas cuts a deal and 30 pieces of silver in that day was a huge sum of money to a poor man. And he cuts a deal.

And you can see as you look at everything leading up to the death of Jesus, from the natural perspective it's all fully understandable. This charismatic and gifted rabbi from the Galilee, this one who had performed miracles in the eyes of so many people, who disappoints so many by being too radical for them, who embarrasses them, and for others, he deeply offends them because he drives the money changers from the temple and overthrows the cages where the doves are kept; Judas, who betrays him for money. All these people: the Sanhedrin, by and large honest men, men who studied the Scriptures. But Jesus had said some things that were just outrageous. Jesus laid claim to divinity and that was blasphemy. He said he was the Son of God.

And what Jesus meant by that was not that we're all children of God, of our heavenly Father. They understood him quite well. It's why, on several occasions, some of those people took up stones to stone him for blasphemy because he's claiming, actually, to be God.

And, finally, there is that statement that he had made: "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up." And though he spoke of his body, everybody understood him to be speaking of the actual temple of God, the second temple.

You can understand it. You can understand Pontius Pilate, the politician, can't you? How did Pilate get into that position of leadership? He got there by being smart, by being a pragmatist, by understanding certain things, by realizing that you can push for things, but you don't push too far, by taking the pulse of a crowd.

Pilate wants to set Jesus free. He realizes that Jesus has offended the ruling party of the Sadducees. And he realizes, as a Roman, as he evaluates Roman law, he realizes that Jesus is not a real threat to Rome. He questions him. He's frightened. His wife says, "I had a weird dream about this man. Don't do this." All these things going on.

We can understand them in the natural realm. But Pilate realizes that he's going to have a riot. And if there's one thing that a governor doesn't want, it's a riot. He doesn't want that on his watch. He doesn't want this trouble. And so, finally, Pilate in this great hypocritical show, calls for a bowl of water and he washes his hands of the matter; not only figuratively, but literally, in front of the crowd. "You see to it," he says. And he gives them a Roman guard.

And Jesus is crucified. And he's crucified according to Roman law, not Jewish law because it wasn't the Jews; it was the Romans, who concocted this incredibly painful torture of crucifixion where a man is hung up for days on end as he slowly bleeds to death and as the life force ebbs out of him.

You can understand it all. It all makes sense in the natural world. And yet, as with the book of Job, there is another dimension to this, which, if we do not take into consideration, we miss the whole thing. There are supernatural forces at work that we cannot see with our eyes or hear with our ears. And the people who are in this drama on the stage of history in our time and space, planet earth, 1976 years ago, they are utterly unaware, too.

Turn with me, if you will, in your Bibles to several of these events. First, in Luke chapter 22... This is day four of the week from Hell – Luke chapter 22. It's our Tuesday night. It's their Wednesday because the Jewish day begins at sundown. Luke 22 – page 1636 – verse one: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve." Satan entered him.

You see, what made sense to Judas made sense because he was not just demonically, but satanically blinded from understanding what he was doing. He acted in accordance with his own nature. He's responsible. And yet he's being manipulated by forces beyond himself. And he doesn't even realize it. In verse three Satan enters Judas.

But there's yet more here as we read on, of course, it's Satan who is in this whole plot in verse four. "And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give

him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.”

It’s Satan in this. It’s Satan in the high priest. It’s Satan in the temple guard. It’s Satan with the advisors to the high priest. It’s Satan in Judas. They think that they’re thinking on their own, just as people today think they’re thinking on their own; thinking that they’re capable, objectively, of analyzing reality. When the sad fact of the matter is: no human being in our world is capable of that. We all are affected by forces beyond our comprehension. We think sometimes what we are being manipulated to think.

Come on, now. You know that’s true, don’t you? Think about television and think about fashion and think about what looks attractive to you. I mean, I think back when I was in high school and people wore Weejun loafers and Madras shirts and khaki pants and khaki colored London Fog raincoats. Everybody dressed that way. And now, even in college, people wear flip-flops and cut-off jeans that look raggedy and that’s how people look and people are happy looking that way. That’s attractive.

How does that happen? It doesn’t happen because everybody just comes up, simultaneously, with, “Hey, I think that looks good.” There are forces beyond us that manipulate us into seeing beauty in certain things at one time and not seeing beauty there now. That’s attractive attire today – flip-flops and cut-off jeans. Whereas, in my time it was wearing your pants cuff high so they could see your Gold Cup socks and make sure they could see that your penny loafers weren’t just penny loafers, but Weejuns. That was back in the early 60s. It’s how people looked.

It’s manipulation and you can see that. It’s a natural manipulation, isn’t it? We understand it from natural means: pictures, movies, other people, peer pressure. We understand intuitively and instinctively how we ought to look. But there’s something supernatural, too, that operates in the world. And we see it in all of this thing with Jesus in this week from Hell.

And then there’s this amazing event described...turn with me to John chapter 13, how the Lord’s Supper, the last Passover, becomes not an occasion of blessing, but an occasion of curse. John 13, verse 26 – page 1674: “Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’” He’s talking about who is going to betray him. “Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to Judas.”

There are supernatural forces at work where we read, further, there are many things going on even among Jesus’ own disciples. Turn with me to Luke chapter 22, supernatural forces at work, Luke chapter 22 – page 1638. Luke 22:31: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Think about it. There’s

something satanic going on here even among Jesus' disciples, even among his boldest disciples. For there is no disciple of Jesus bolder than the apostle Peter.

Peter, brash; Peter, strong and strapping; Peter, quick to speak; Peter, quick to defend Jesus; Peter the one who draws his sword and slashes off the high priest's servant's ear. But there's something sinister at work even in Peter during the week from Hell. Satan has asked permission to sift Peter.

What does that mean?

Well, if you will take the book of Job in the next few days and read through it – if you read through the prologue to the book of Job, you'll understand it. Why did all this stuff happen to Job? Why did his children die? All these natural events that you begin to read about in the book, if you don't understand what was going on in the heavens, you don't understand what's going on on earth. What's going on with Job? It's a contest between the Lord and Satan. Satan wants to move against Job. But he has to get permission from God first to move against Job. And I don't understand why God gives permission to Satan to sift the souls of men at times. But he does. And he sifts the soul of Job as he allows robbers and mercenaries and lightning and a windstorm to come and to take all of Job's property and to take away the life of every single one of Job's children. They're all dead. It's a week of funerals for Job and he doesn't understand. As he looks at life, as he looks at the natural world and he sees these tragedies, he doesn't understand why he had gone from being the wealthiest of men in the entire country – so highly respected and having children, the future, to pass on his wealth to one minute. And then in the next minute messenger after messenger arrives with that dreadful litany of destruction and ending, each time ending, "I alone am escaped to tell you."

It all seems so natural and it all was so natural for there really is a natural world of cause and effect; this inextricable chain, nexus, of cause and effect, it really is true. And yet at the same time, as the prologue of the book of Job tells us, there are supernatural forces behind those natural forces, manipulating lightning and thunder, manipulating the robbers, manipulating the mercenaries. And those forces are orchestrated by the prince of Hell himself, Satan, who stirs up the robbers, who manipulates wind storms and lightning. For Satan can manipulate natural phenomena.

And Job was sifted. And in the very next chapter, Job two, Job begins to be afflicted with disease, with horrible, loathsome, painful disease; disease that was so repulsive to others that they hid from him and only his wife is left there to nag him and tell him, "Curse God and die."

And his three friends come from a distance and they see him with this loathsome disease as he, in his misery, takes broken pieces of pottery to scrape his skin to get some relief. They are astounded.

And all that happened to Job in spite of his being a man of faith and being the most godly man on the face of the earth at that time. Satan is sifting the soul of Job.

And he desires to sift the soul of Peter as well. Peter who loved Christ; Peter who is loyal to Christ; Peter who is self assured and confident that, “If everybody forsakes you, Lord, I won’t. I won’t forsake you. I’ll follow you anywhere, Lord.”

And supernatural forces begin to sift him and he realizes that he is impotent against these forces. And finally, the brave Peter, like a cowardly cur, as he gathers in the courtyard of the high priest and the servant girl says, “I know you. You’re one of his followers.” He denies. As he’s confronted again, he denies again. And finally he swears and cusses and says, “I swear to God, it’s not true!”

And at that point it’s early morning and the rooster crows the second time. And who is Peter? Peter is a natural man who acted in accordance with his own nature. For us, you and me, no matter how much we may think that we can be brave and confident, there’s a breaking point and there’s a natural breaking point for Peter. But there’s also the supernatural work there. Satan is sifting him.

And then there are the Bible scholars. And we’re often amazed, aren’t we? How could it be...turn with me, if you would, to Acts chapter 13, verse 27 – page 1715: “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.”

Isn’t that an amazing thing? And you say, “Any honest person reading the Torah תורה; reading the Nabiim נביאים – the prophets; the Kethubim כתובים – the writings – any honest person reading that would clearly see that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the prophesied Messiah of Israel and that everything before, leading up to it, and everything afterwards confirms it, right down to the fact that Jesus, the prophet says that, ‘This generation will not pass “till all these things have been fulfilled.”’ And then exactly 40 years after he uttered those words – and a few months – on the ninth day of Av – the second temple is destroyed, never to be built again. And the sacrificial system comes to a screeching halt and the high priests no longer have a job as the Romans destroy the city and the temple; on the very same day of the month that the first temple had been destroyed in 586 BC.”

Only blindness or dishonesty keeps a person from seeing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. And that’s the amazing thing that Paul is saying here in Pisidian Antioch, in the synagogue. Verse 27: “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.”

It’s like a Greek tragedy. It’s like Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* having killed his own father. He’s walking to the city and he meets and marries the widow of the king, Jocasta, only to discover at the end that she is his own mother – a Greek tragedy and we, the audience, are privy to what’s going on with the protagonist. And Oedipus is not. He murders his own father in fulfillment of prophecy and marries his own mother; tragic Oedipus.

And here it is, these Bible scholars who knew their Bibles in and out, who had memorized great portions of Scripture. They looked and they don't see what's before their eyes that Jesus is, indeed, who he is. He is the Messiah of Israel.

And why is that? Two other passages of Scripture: 2 Corinthians chapter four, starting at verse three – page 1797: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” Here we are; verse four: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” The god of this world is Satan and he blinds people's eyes. There are people here today whose eyes are blinded. You cannot see. You think you see. You think you understand, but that is your real tragedy, for you are as tragic a figure as Oedipus Rex marching surely to this dreadful fate and you don't see it; marching down to the gates of Hell, not to conquer, but to pass through into the abode of the damned.

Now, why can't you see? Because Satan himself is still active on our planet, blinding people's minds, keeping them from understanding, distracting with this, distracting with that. Some will say, “Well, it's now five to twelve. It's time when any decent church would let out.” But we're not a decent church. Nor am I a decent preacher. For I tell you this: There is coming a day when at least one here will have mocked this Word and will, like Oedipus, have gone to your fate, an eternal and damned fate, the fate of the damned, in what is called by Jesus the lake of fire.

Oh, Christian, pray. For it is only as Christians pray that the Spirit of God removes the blinders. Turn with me, if you will, back a chapter to 2 Corinthians chapter three. It's only as Christians pray that the Holy Spirit removes the blinders. And this is what we read in 2 Corinthians chapter three, starting at verse 13 – page 1797: “We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

Our prayer should be that as people come into every church that preaches the gospel the Spirit would be poured out in such a way that it may be said of all of us gathered together – at verse 18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

So what I want you to understand is: if you look at the week from Hell, it really is a week from Hell, isn't it. It's not just natural things that happen in the life of Jesus. It isn't just that he naturally offends people with his outspoken message, with his message of conviction, with his piercing the heart and pulling back the mask of hypocrisy on every man. There are supernatural forces at work and it looks like Satan wins, doesn't it? As we see this week move on from Palm Sunday to Monday to Tuesday to very few events on Wednesday, to Thursday as they prepare the Passover, to Judas taking part of the very

sacrament of God, the Passover. And as he receives the bread of the Passover dipped in the sop, that Satan enters into him in a new and fresh way and he goes out determined blindly to betray Christ. For Satan never allows you to have your eyes open until it's too late. And then he allows Judas to see what he's done. And Judas is remorseful, not with godly sorrow, but with a sorrow of the world which leads to death as Judas kills himself.

There are supernatural forces at work. And within that second paradigm for understanding reality, we're in a world that is at war. And it's been at war for thousands of years between our Lord Christ and between Satan. And human beings are manipulated. It looks, at times, as we look at the world, that everything is being governed by conspiracies. And I'm not disputing that men don't get together and conspire to work out their plans. But I'm telling you that beyond the natural machinations of people who plan and manipulate to affect the lives of others, there is something satanic and demonic in the world. And in that satanic and demonic thing, there are terrible tragedies. There's death. There's tragedy.

And I'm telling you that when you begin to look at the world through the perspective of the second paradigm, that there is war between Christ and Satan, the thing that's revealed in the prologue in the book of Job between the Lord and Satan; this is what you understand: Satan wins. Again and again and again he wins. And never did Satan appear to win more than in the week from Hell, for the events lead on Maundy Thursday to the Supper, which is actually the Jewish Friday. And Jesus, going into the garden and praying and beseeching God because he knows the Hellish torment he's about to go through: "Father, if it be possible, take this cup from me."

And the arrest in the middle of the night and the midnight trial – back and forth – and finally being taken around dawn to the Roman governor and finally being convicted and turned over to be crucified. And he marches that Good Friday, carrying his cross 'til he faints along the way. And then he's nailed there. And it's nine o'clock in the morning. And for three hours Jesus hangs there as he's mocked and he's ridiculed and all his friends have turned tail and gone away and it's only the women who have enough courage to stay there at the foot of the cross: Mary Magdalene and Mary his mother and her sister. And he is jeered.

And around noon terrible things begin to happen. There is great darkness that covers the earth for three hours and he dies. He dies. And the tragedy comes to an end and the week from Hell now closes in, in death, cold death. And he's taken down from the cross and he's carted not so far away to the tomb of a member of the Sanhedrin – Joseph of Arimathaea, a wealthy man who had had a tomb cut for himself, but no one had every laid in.

And Jesus is placed there and a guard is dispatched, a Roman guard to make sure that nobody steals his body. And they stand watch. And the week from Hell comes to the next day, the Sabbath. And the Sabbath from the week of Hell is the darkest and it's the most depressing.

For all the hopes of all those people are now dashed. “Where is our Messiah? He is dead. A Roman lance has pierced his side and the hope of Israel is led away. And they’ve taken him and they’ve put him in a stone tomb and sealed it with a Roman guard. We had hoped,” said Cleopas on the Road to Emmaus, “that it was he. We had hoped. We lost our hope. It’s all over now.”

Sometimes in that second paradigm, it looks like Satan wins. And if ever it looked as if Satan won it was that day when the darkness came at noon and lasted three hours. There was a great earthquake and the earthquake shook so that the veil of the temple ripped from top to bottom.

But there’s a third paradigm. And I will be brief. Just as in the book of Job all of the things there are described in Job 42, if you’ll turn there with me quickly we will be done. Just as in Job there is this third paradigm for understanding reality - page 842. All that happened to Job could be explained naturally. All that happened to Job could be explained by this bizarre war between Christ and Satan. And yet there is a third answer. Job 42:11: “All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.” It was all the trouble the Lord had brought on him.

We have to understand something. In the middle of our suffering and disappointment, when things don’t turn out the way that we expect them, when we’re in the middle of a week from Hell, when we look back over a week – as one might have done on that sabbath day 30 AD to see that Satan won, and Jesus is dead, and Jesus is buried, and hope is gone, Hell has won – is to remember the truth that is laid out in Job 42. Absolutely everything that happened to Job happened according to the eternal, immutable decree of a sovereign God who is at the same time a God who loves Job. They comforted and consoled Job over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him.

And as we look at the life of Jesus we see something of the same thing there. Turn with me, if you will, to the last two passages we look at, both in Acts: Acts chapter two, starting at verse 22. We read these words. It’s Peter’s Pentecost sermon – page 1693: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” Ah, here it is. Verse 23: “This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

What happened to Jesus was part of God’s predestined plan, his immutable decree set out in eternity to save sinners from Hell. It’s all part of the unfolding of a plan. We look at it from one perspective, the natural perspective, and we see and we understand in real time and real space what happened in the year 30 AD, this radical, but kind preacher, this charismatic and dynamic preacher who was just too out spoken, too sincere and is put to death because he tipped the delicate political scales. We understand it naturally.

We look at it from the perspective of the supernatural between this war with Christ and Satan and we see that Satan has done his work.

It is, indeed, the week from Hell; plotted and planned in the pits of Hell. And it's carried out and demons come in and stir up the crowd. And Satan himself energizes and captivates Judas. And it all happens according to this demonic plan. And it's evil. And it's depressing. And it's disappointing. And it's bitter. It's a bitter cup to drink as we look at it. For it seems that Satan wins.

And yet we are told here in Acts chapter two that all of this happened – verse 23: “...was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.” Or, as it's expressed over in Acts chapter four, very similarly, the last text – page 1697 – Acts chapter four, verse 26, as they recite in prayer, the apostles do, the second Psalm starting in the end of verse 25: “‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” Verse 28.

They did what your will, your power decided beforehand should happen.

Listen, dear ones. Without the third paradigm, life is an insane joke. With our limited perspective of “three score years and ten or, if by reason of strength, four score,” we can only see so much that's unfair and unjust as we look at time. As we see things unfold, we are bitterly disappointed, not only because of the natural world, but because at sometimes it seems even to us in our day that we are pitted against cosmic forces that are too big for us and that we are but tragic figures in a tragic, bizarre comedy of bathos where the gods mock us in our pain.

But the third paradigm gives us an understanding of the world. The third paradigm encompasses everything, the natural and the supernatural. And in the third paradigm it is the plan of God.

The week from Hell was, in reality, a week from Heaven. The plan that had been carried and plotted out in Hell is, indeed, in the bizarre way things really are, as we get the divine perspective, a week that's planned and plotted in Heaven for our good. That's the amazing thing. It's this tragedy of the week from Hell that is the triumph that we see on Sunday morning, Easter Sunday, April 9th in the year 30 AD. You see, that's life. And we have that hope and we have that confidence because we do believe in predestination. We do believe in a sovereign God. We do believe in a God that has ordained what happens in the world.

It's not simple the way Mohammed saw it where God acts capriciously and does violence to the will of man. Men have free will and act in accordance with their own nature. They choose what they want to do and they act in accordance with their nature. And yet, amazingly, at the same time what men choose freely to do, God is orchestrating.

And the amazing thing of it all is this: Satan, himself, with all of his malice and hatred and all of his power, even Satan himself, acting in accordance with his own malicious, malevolent, malignant nature, even Satan himself is carrying out a divine plan.

That's what we see in the week from Hell. It's really a week from Heaven. It's God's plan unfolding that begins on Palm Sunday and climaxes with Christ still in the tomb on the sabbath day. But early in the morning of the first day of the week, of a new week, we see that in reality the week that was Hell was from Heaven. For God has provided for you and me the forgiveness of our sins. And Christ has conquered death and triumphed over it. And he has given proof to the fact by showing himself visible, alive and allowing himself to be handled by many people, by over 500 on one occasion, eye-witnesses.

So here you are, poised on the beginning of Holy Week, we call it. But it could be called the week from Hell. But, yet, from another perspective it's the week from Heaven.

Won't you give your heart to the Lord Jesus? Won't you come to him with your hurt, with your pain, with your confusion, with your fear? Will you just bow your knees to him and say, "Lord, I accept you as you are. I accept what's going on in my world for me, for my good. I choose to believe that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet. This is my Father's world and I rest me in the thought."

Will you submit to this God?

And if you're here and you're not a Christian, would you come to him? Will you cast yourself on his mercy? Or will you be like those Pharisees of old who believed that they were good men when, in reality, they were no better than the rest of men. And will you, in your own pride, harden your heart then to be left to yourself to go to your doom like Oedipus?

It's not too late. The Greek tragedy can come to an end for you. And you can enter into hope. You can enter into a place where there's no condemnation and where, instead of a destiny of doom you can have the promise of a good tomorrow and an eternity with God in Jesus Christ. Won't you come?

May we pray?

Lord, I've spoken long this day because I believe this is the message that you gave me. And I lack the ability to compress it down and still to be understood. So, take these words of mine, frail and weak though they are, delivered, Lord, by a man who is frail and weak and sinful and incompetent, and use those words to give faith where there is doubt, hope where there's despair, light where there is darkness, life where there's death, joy where there is torment and hope where there is only gloom and cleansing from sin where there is only guilt – for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Transcription by Audioposting: (www.audioposting.com/transcription.php)