

The Old Story

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we've come again tonight to hear the old, old story. Some of you may be familiar with the popular novel and movie *The Life of Pi*,! *The Adventures of a Hindu Boy Named Pi*.

And in it he tells about hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ for the very first time. I wonder if you can remember the very first time you heard the gospel.

And after hearing the whole thing, Pi asked for another story, one that he might find more satisfying. Surely this religion has more than one story in its bag.

Religions have lots of stories, he said. But Pi learned that Christianity has but one story. And to it, Christians just keep coming back again and again, over and over.

It is story enough for them. The one story of the cross. And I wonder if that's not what you and I have found. That no matter how long it's been since we heard the old, old story, there's still a sweetness that we find in it.

[1 : 1 0] Such that we can cry with the hymn writer, tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story. Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

And we love to tell the story. To those who have never heard it. And even to those who know it best, seems hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.

And when in scenes of glory we sing the new, new song, it will be the old, old story that I have loved so long. The one story throughout the countless ages is Christ in him crucified.

Worthy is the lamb that was slain. Here is story enough for us. Down from his glory, never-ending story, our God and Savior came.

And Jesus was his name. Well, our Bible is our great storybook, isn't it? And again and again and over and over again, the Bible sets forth that true story.

[2 : 1 4] That true story. In so many wonderful ways, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And this story is so central to Christianity that no one becomes a Christian without hearing and believing this story.

And no Christian ever grows in the Christian life without thinking upon the story. And so central is it to the Christian life and our life together that our God has instituted a weekly story hour when we might gather to hear again the old, old story.

And Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, instituted this sacrament that we come together, this ceremony that we come together tonight to keep. It's as if it were the Lord's Supper, as if it were a picture storybook.

Because we not only get to hear the story tonight, we actually get to see, by way of symbols, his body and his blood given for us. So may the story and the supper converge tonight and lead us to greater love and wonder at our Savior's love for us.

We want to open to Matthew 27. Matthew 27. And I want to read the first 26 verses.

[3 : 3 9] Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.

They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor. When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the 30 silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.

I have sinned, he said, for I have betrayed innocent blood. What is that to us? They replied. That's your responsibility. So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.

Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, It is against the law to put this into the treasury since it is blood money.

So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the field of blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.

[4 : 50] They took the 30 silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field as the Lord commanded me. Meanwhile, Jesus stood before the governor and the governor asked him, Are you the king of the Jews?

Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?

But Jesus made no reply, even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor. Now it was the governor's custom at the feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.

At that time, they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, Which one do you want me to release to you? Barabbas or Jesus, who is called Christ?

For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message, Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.

[6 : 04] But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. Which of the two do you want me to release to you?

Asked the governor. Barabbas, they answered. What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ? Pilate asked. They all answered, Crucify him.

Why? What crime has he committed? Asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, Crucify him. When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

I am innocent of this man's blood, he said. It is your responsibility. All the people answered, Let his blood be on us and on our children. Then he released Barabbas to them.

But he had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. So some very distinguished men in flowing robes are bent over, picking up something off of the temple floor.

[7 : 15] Who are they? And what are they doing? Well, they're the chief priests and the elders of Israel. The shepherds of God's people. The ones charged with leading the nation to God.

They were called to call the people and to be an example to the people, to walk in God's ways and to worship him alone.

The ones privileged to minister in the holy place and were therefore especially charged to be holy. That's who they are. The chief priests and elders of Israel.

And what are they doing? Well, they're picking up coins, aren't they? As you look closely, they're silver coins. And if you count them, there's 30 of them.

The very money they had paid Judas, one of the 12, for betraying Jesus and turning him over to them at a time when there was no crowd around, lest they should riot.

[8 : 17] What is this money doing back in the temple? Well, there's a certain irony to it all, isn't there? That this money had been given to God in the first place to serve his purposes, should have been prostituted to such a wicked end that those same 30 silver coins now found themselves back in the temple of God where they belonged as God's money.

How ironic. What had happened? Well, as we read that when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned to die, he was seized with remorse.

Not repentance, but simply remorse, guilt, regret for the things that he had done to the one who had been nothing but kind to him as long as he had known him and who he knew to be innocent of the charges.

And so his guilty conscience brings him to the temple to return the 30 silver coins, to confess his sin to the priests, saying, I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood.

And this broken man is callously brushed aside by these priests who said, what is that to us? That's your responsibility.

[9 : 45] Why bring it to us? That's your problem, not ours. Why do you involve us? Probably never a greater abandonment of one's calling than these priests.

Why do you involve us? Well, for starters, you are the priests after all, right? You are the ones charged with caring for the spiritual needs of mankind.

You're the ones whose job it is to offer up sacrifices for sin on behalf of sinners to point them to the gospel promises of mercy to be had through God's Messiah who would be bruised for our iniquities and crushed for our transgressions.

And so their role as priests was to say to guilt-ridden sinners, there is mercy with the Lord. Seek him and he will pardon you. For the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart.

The Lord will not despise. These are the very ones set apart to lovingly shepherd souls and direct them to God both for pardon from guilt and power from their temptations to sin.

[11 : 06] Well, that was their responsibility, their business as priests, and that's no doubt why Judas comes to them. But secondly, why do you involve us?

Well, they were complicit in the deed, weren't they? They were involved in the sin. They had plotted and schemed and put those silver coins into Judas' hands with glee that at long last they could eliminate Jesus of Nazareth who had been stealing popularity from them.

As all the people rushed to hear him and thinned their crowds, it was for envy that they had turned him over to Pilate.

And yet they disagreed with Judas, didn't they? They had not viewed Jesus as innocent but as guilty of blasphemy since he claimed to be God and that even though he had exercised the power and authority of God by healing the sick and the diseased, casting out demons, raising people from the dead, forgiving sins, doing what no mere man could do.

They overlooked all the evidence for the fact that he was God and accused him of blasphemy for claiming to be God. Did you betray innocent blood, Judas?

[12 : 34] What is that to us? That's your responsibility. Your problem, not ours. And so they pass the buck to Judas and dismiss him without a word of mercy.

He throws the 30 pieces of silver into the temple, goes out and hangs himself. Now, we need to be clear, Judas is guilty. He's guilty of a serious crime against his Lord for betraying him and then taking his own life and not seeking forgiveness in the only place where it is found.

He's responsible for his own sins and therefore, as Scripture teaches us, he's gone to his place of punishment where every moment he is proving the reality of Jesus' words that it would be better if he had never been born.

But though Judas has only himself to blame, can you imagine the accounting that those priests will have to make in the day of judgment for their care for this sheep that was under their watch care?

What a dereliction of duty as priests and shepherds in Israel. They don't care about Judas at all. Oh, but the money, that's a different thing.

[13 : 50] And here they are, distinguished men in their robes, crawling around the floor, grubbing for silver. They used it to buy a burial place for foreigners.

It's against the law to put the money into the treasury, they said, since it's blood money. What hypocrisy! Since when are they concerned about obeying the law of God?

They broke it at will when they wanted to. Just earlier, chapter 26, verse 59, tells us they were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

It doesn't say they were seeking justice, they were looking for false evidence. They were looking not for evidence, but for false evidence so that they could put him to death.

What about the law that says you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor? And they brought forth many false witnesses with no concern for the ninth commandment whatsoever.

[14 : 58] And then they falsely accused our Lord before Pilate as if he were leading a rebellion against the Roman emperor Caesar. Caesar.

And Governor Pilate examined him and found nothing to their charges. What about the law to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?

Whatever happened to justice in this trial when Pilate asked who he should release to the people, Jesus or Barabbas, these are the very ones who persuaded the crowd to choose Barabbas, who was a known insurrectionist and murderer and to have Jesus crucified.

It was at their cheerleading that the whole crowd shouted, crucify him. And when Pilate asked further in the search for justice, why?

What crime has he committed? None is offered. It's just justice by volume as they shouted all the louder, crucify him.

[16 : 08] Gross injustice. Very strict in obeying the laws when it served their purposes, but willing to trample over the law when it was best for them.

It is not lawful to use this money in the treasury. And so what do we see? We see that when Judas comes and confesses, I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood, the Jewish religious leaders pass the buck.

Why bring it to us? That's not our problem. That's yours. And then Matthew shifts and he shows us the Roman governmental leader.

We've seen the religious leaders. Now we come to the civil leaders. And here it's Pilate. And we find him passing the buck as well, don't we? For when Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.

I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility. Do you hear the echo from verse 4? What is that to us?

[17 : 24] That's your responsibility, the priest said. And now Pilate, this is your responsibility. He does what the chief priests and elders did. And so we see another dereliction of duty for Governor Pilate.

Civil rulers, kings and governors, were called the shepherds of the people, just as the priests were to be the shepherds of the flock. And to shepherd souls. So it is that civil governors and rulers were called to shepherd the people.

Remember that passage in Psalm 78 about David, how that the Lord took him from tending the sheep and brought him to be the shepherd of his people, Jacob, of his inheritance, Israel.

A shepherd of the people. That was the role of civil leaders. And so these civil shepherds had been given authority by God to maintain justice in the land. To protect the citizens against aggressive injustice.

To punish the wrongdoer. To reward the one who does well. So when Pilate's frustrated that Jesus isn't answering his questions, he threatens Jesus saying, do you refuse to speak to me?

[18 : 36] Don't you realize I have authority to free you or to crucify you? And Jesus says, you would have no authority over me if it was not given to you from above. But it had been given to him.

Authority from God to rule and to decide in such matters as were being tried that day. God had given him authority that he might use it to maintain justice and to see that Jesus got a fair shake in the trial.

But Pilate was wanting to please the people. He was wanting to quell the rising uproar and so even though he could find no fault with Jesus, he abuses his authority. He has Jesus flogged and then he turns him over to be crucified as if he were one of the worst criminals.

But not before trying to wash his hands of the matter. We still have that saying, don't we? Where did it come from? Right out of Matthew chapter 27.

Right out of this scene where our Lord is the one on trial and the civil ruler is abandoning his post and his duty and he is bringing blood upon his own hands but seeking with water.

[19 : 49] He takes water and washed his hands in front of the crowd saying, I'm innocent of this man's blood. This is your responsibility. What folly to think a little bit of water could somehow get the blood of Jesus off of his hands.

Eligieri Dante was a 14th century poet from Italy and he wrote Dante's Inferno in which he takes us on a guided tour through hell.

Now, it's got mixture of the Bible but it's mostly his imagination. And in the lower regions of hell he finds Pilate forever washing his hands.

feverishly trying to get the blood off but unable to do so. Nothing but the blood of Jesus can cleanse from sin. And that's the picture that Dante paints of this man who tried to wash his hands of our Savior's blood.

So, what do we see in Matthew 27? We see the world's leaders both religious leaders and civil leaders abandoning their post, being buck passers, self-servers, so consumed with themselves that they don't care for others or for justice or for mercy.

[21 : 14] And this becomes the dark backdrop on which the old, old story is told. And now, the good shepherd stands out against such dark pages in contrast with these hirelings, the good shepherd appears, our great high priest, our glorious king, and we find him so refreshingly different from these other so-called shepherds who were no shepherds at all but were hirelings who cared nothing for the sheep.

And our good shepherd is not self-absorbed, is not seeking his own interest, indifferent to the needs of others, but voluntarily lays down his life for us.

The shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander. So there we were living in our sins, content to be without Jesus, going our own way, and then this kind shepherd priest found us and he sent his Holy Spirit to wake us up to reality that we are guilty of a horrendous sin, content to live without Jesus.

And we felt our guilt and we felt our deservingness of everlasting punishment and we came and confessed our sin and cried out for mercy. I've sinned.

I've cared nothing for you. Have mercy upon me. There we were and our high priest did not say, your sin?

[22 : 51] What is that to me? That's your responsibility. Now to be sure, it was our responsibility. It was our sin. It was our problem and not his.

Indeed, it was our greatest problem. It was such a problem that it would have landed us in hell forever and ever. A problem that was entirely our own responsibility.

But this great high priest is the friend of sinners. So unlike those chief priests that Judas met in his day and in love, our great high priest made our problems his problems.

He made our problem his business. He made our sins his sins and he took all the responsibility for all of them.

He stepped between God's wrath and us and said, put their sins on me, Father, and punish me instead of them. And so God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.

[23 : 57] The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. And then Jesus bore our sins in his body to the tree, to the place of judgment.

And there he was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities and the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds. We were healed. And I ask you this evening as we contemplate that old story again, does that love not captivate your hearts?

That he had our sins credited to him, put on his bill, and he paid it in full. How different is our high priest priest than the chief priest that Judas met?

This is just the kind of high priest we need, Hebrews 7 says, one who is holy, blameless, and pure, separate from sinners, exalted above the heavens, who unlike other high priests, does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.

No, he sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Just notice two contrasts between the chief priest that Judas met and our great high priest, Jesus Christ.

[25 : 24] Those chief priests that Judas went to should have been able to deal gently and compassionately with one who had gone astray, broken Judas, as he came confessing his sin.

Why? Because they too were sinners, and needed to offer sacrifices, first for their own sins, and then for the sins of the people. So they never heard a confession of sin, of somebody coming and saying, like Judas, I have sinned, and I've betrayed innocent blood, without having first made an offering for their own sin.

The picture that comes to my mind is that these priests had garments somewhere that were splattered with blood, the blood of the sacrifices first offered for their own sins, earlier, perhaps, that morning.

But that had become such a ritual, such a mindless thing, that they were not broken for their sins, and seeking mercy from God, but were hardened, so that when Judas arrives, it's not gentleness and compassion from one sinner, who happens to be a priest, to another, but harshness, brushing him off.

What is that to us? You deal with it. I say that they should have been able to be gentle and compassionate because of their sins, but our high priest had no sins, and therefore needed no sacrifice for his own, and yet he's ever so gentle, isn't he?

[27 : 07] never so compassionate when we come and confess our sins and seek mercy. And then think of the difference between our great high priest and what he did.

He did what no other priest had ever done in Israel, indeed, what no other priest had ever even imagined doing. Other priests had offered sacrifices for sins.

That was their job. God, but Jesus became the sacrifice for sin. He was both offerer and offering when he offered himself as a sacrifice for sins.

Can you see his love in that? That when an offering was needed of such merit and value as to take away our sins, he offered himself.

He himself became the offering. What love is this for sinners that made our sins his own responsibility and was cursed that we might never be?

[28 : 10] Oh, how we should love him in return. And though he died for us, he rose again and now lives for us with the power of an indestructible life, this priest of ours.

And because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood, never to be replaced, and therefore he is able to save completely. To the uttermost, all that come unto God through him, because he always lives to make intercession for us.

And he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And that means, brothers and sisters, whenever we sin, our great high priest is not waiting to pounce and condemn us, is he?

He's waiting to be gracious to us. When you come confessing your sins to him, he doesn't put you off saying, what is this to me? It's your responsibility. But rather, he says, you've come to the right place.

For my throne is a throne of grace. It's for this very thing. I'm glad you found me. I'm glad you've come. Oh, you should have come sooner, but I'm glad you're here now. Because he was made like us in every way, tempted in every way, just like we are.

[29 : 20] He's therefore able to sympathize with us in our weakness. He's felt the power of temptation. When he sees you falling under it, he feels for you. He's able to sympathize with you in your weakness, and he does.

He's not like Israel's chief priest, sending you away without a word of mercy. He rather comes promising mercy to forgive you and grace to help you in your time of need.

Praise God. Our high priest is not derelict as to his duties. He's ever ready to help us, not brushing us off, but inviting us.

So let us come boldly before the throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. I understand that before the creation of the world, it was decreed that Judas should betray our Lord.

But from the human side, if only Judas had come to this high priest instead of those chief priests, what a different reception he would have received.

[30 : 33] Let us make constant use of our great high priests. advance