

The Worth of Jesus

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[0:00] We're in Zechariah chapter 11, and we're going to read verses 4 to 17. Their own shepherds do not spare them.

For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land, declares the Lord. I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands. So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one favor and the other union, and I pastured the flock.

In one month, I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them.

And I said, I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die and the perishing perish.

Let those who are left eat one another's flesh. Then I took my staff called favor and broke it.

Revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations.

[1:27] It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the Lord. I told them, if you think it best, give me my pay, but if not, keep it.

So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, throw it to the potter, the handsome price at which they price me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.

Then I broke my second staff called union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

Then the Lord said to me, take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd, for I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost or seek the young or heal the injured or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hooves.

Woe to the worthless shepherd who deserts the flock. May the Lord strike his arm and his right eye. May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded.

The word of the Lord. Come and preach it to us, Jason. I want you to imagine that tomorrow morning you woke up and on Fox News or CNN or it would be on all the channels.

[2:58] They've found rock hard, solid, absolutely positively true evidence that Jesus is still in the grave.

That the man, Jesus, is still there. And I want you to imagine what you would have lost.

If that were to be true, what will you have lost? It's really another way of asking, what is Jesus worth to you?

Where does he fall in your hearts, in your heart? How valuable is he? How precious? How central to your life is he? Could you go on?

Could you keep going to work? Would nothing really change in your life? Would your pursuits and your goals, would your life change? Or would it just carry on?

[4:05] So what about if you lost Jesus? That's really what we're asking. What about if you lost Jesus?

What would you have lost? Well, if I think about that question, I think my answer is I would have lost the most important thing in my whole life. I can imagine losing my wife.

And I can imagine losing my children. And I can imagine situations like that. And if those things were to happen, they would be terrible. But I think the most important thing would still be there.

The most important thing still would be there. But if I lost Jesus, then what would I be living for? So what is Jesus worth to you?

If you lost him, what would you lose? Everything? Nothing? Zechariah has talked a lot about Jesus so far in this prophecy, in this book.

[5:11] In chapter 1, we saw him. He's the angel of the Lord, and he prays for God's people. In chapter 3, he was the branch, and he's going to remove sin from the land in a single day.

In chapter 6, he was the priest who sits on the throne, who joins the priesthood and the king, the kingship, all together in one. And he's going to build the temple of the Lord. Who's going to build the temple of the Lord? The high priest of God, the king, God's appointed king. In chapter 9, he's the king, righteous and having salvation.

And gentle and riding on a donkey, coming to his people to deliver them, coming to his people to save them. But in chapter 11, the whole tone changes, because this too is another picture of Jesus. It's another picture of the Messiah, but it's not a picture of him being the king, being the priest, accomplishing something. No, this is a picture of how his people respond to him, what people do with him, his rejection.

[6:21] So, in this passage, we see Israel getting the one they've always wanted, the one they were looking forward to, the one they were hoping for. They finally get him, they finally get him, and they reject him.

He was there, and they didn't want him, and they had a chance to put a price on him. To answer the question that I just asked you, how valuable is he?

How precious is he? What does he worth to you? And they said, 30 pieces of silver. Now, 30 pieces of silver might sound like a lot to us, because we don't really deal in silver.

It might seem like no big deal. 30 pieces of silver was the price that you paid for a slave if he was accidentally gored. Not even killed, just injured.

People in the ancient Near East, in Zechariah's world, actually used this phrase, 30 pieces of silver, or 30 pieces of, 30 shekels as an idiom, as an expression for hardly anything, for a paltry sum, for next to nothing.

[7:34] I could give you some examples, but just some were one man's armor. He said it was 50 shekels, but he wore it like it was 30, like it was nothing.

It was light as air for him. It wasn't worth, it wasn't that big. So if I pulled up a completely junky chariot back in Zechariah's day, and it's all rusty, and it has no wheels, and it's all beat up, and I ask you, what will you give me for this chariot?

And you say, I don't know, 30 pieces of silver? The idea is like, nothing? Oh, next to nothing? And that's what they valued Zechariah at in the end, and that's what they valued Jesus at in the end.

That's what Judas got for betraying Jesus. And that's why I started with that question, what is Jesus worth to you? Paul said, Christ, he's your life.

He's my soul. He's the engine that makes me go. No, he's everything for me. If I lose him, I'm just an empty husk of a person. And so you can have all the world, just give me Jesus.

[8:49] Or is Jesus really down there on the scale? Maybe he's so far down there you've never even thought about how valuable he is. You never considered him. You'll get to him someday, but not today.

Well, that's putting a value on him too. TV, video games, work, cars, family, down, down, down.

After everything in your whole life, you put Jesus. It's valuing him too. And so the question is, what does he worth to you? Are you receiving him gladly, or are you rejecting him?

That's what Zechariah shows us. It's the 30 pieces of silver to you. Now, before we look at this passage directly, I think it will help to look at it in its historical context.

Because up to this point, Zechariah, the book, has been humming right along. We've been seeing a lot of things. It's going quite nicely. Zechariah was probably born in Babylon.

[9:51] And when a chance came for him to go back to his homeland, to build the temple, he went back. And Zechariah would have seen Haggai, the prophet, start to prophesy.

And that probably stirred up Zechariah's heart. The people's hearts warmed. And a couple of months later, Zechariah, God called Zechariah to the ministry. You remember, he had that one night of long visions.

And he must have woke up in the morning and started telling God's people what he had seen. And we know that the whole community, their hearts lifted.

They started to work on the temple with all of their heart. Ezra talks about, under the preaching of Zechariah and Haggai, the people built the temple. They were moving forward.

Zechariah preached. People heard and they listened. They believed it. It was good.

[10:47] It was refreshing. There was revival going on in the nation of Israel. Israel. But something happened. And it seems like years have passed.

And do you remember what Judges chapter 2 said? There arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord.

And that seems to be what happened here. In the beginning, people loved him. They heard him. They were so excited for God's word through him.

But that's not how it ended. It started with excitement and it ended very badly. Sounds a lot like Jesus and his ministry. Jesus in Matthew 23 says, you killed Zechariah, son of Barakai.

That's who we're talking about. You killed him, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. So Zechariah preached and the parents built the temple.

[11:53] Zechariah preached and the children killed him in the temple. And there's a heart-chilling lesson even there.

That one generation's faithfulness, one generation's grace does not ensure, does not guarantee the next generation. And so are we doing everything we can to make God's grace precious?

Are we doing everything we can to impress, in the words of Deuteronomy 6, impress these things upon your children? Or is grace already becoming ho-hum?

Because already by the second generation, after the exile, after God brought them back and their mouths were full of laughter from what God had done, the second generation, the temple's built and their hearts are cold.

Grace was ho-hum. And doesn't it grieve you? Doesn't it scare you to see that happen? And so doesn't it make you want to say, I will preach?

[13:05] Or I will pray? I will teach? I will do whatever it takes to impress these things on the next generation. That the next generation, that our children, might not have this happen to them, where their parents build the temple and then their children kill the prophet.

Well, how did it happen? How did such a fall happen? Well, it's a story that's old as time.

It's a story that has happened many times in church history and the history of dealing with God and his people. And the answer is, simply put, it was money.

It was the world and the things that money can buy in the world. And the leadership, instead of leading them to godliness, used religion as a tool to become rich, to make money.

And it is the oldest shtick in the whole book, isn't it? The Pharisees loved money. Jesus pointed it out. The Sadducees were the upper class in Jesus' day.

[14:16] They ran the temple, and I'm sure they were doing quite well for it. L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, was quoted a few times in the 40s when he was just a science fiction writer.

Before he had even founded his religion, he said, you don't get rich writing science fiction. If you want to get rich, you start a religion.

So that's what he did. You see the religion of the leaders in verse 5. Look at verse 5. Praise the Lord, I am rich.

Religion, money, it's all there together. Praise the Lord, I'm rich. That's it, religion and money. And the relationship was just too close in Zechariah's latter years.

Verse 5. Praise the Lord, I'm rich. Not praise the Lord, I'm forgiven. Not praise the Lord, here's the temple. Not praise the Lord, I'm a friend of God.

[15:13] Praise the Lord, God loves me. It's praise the Lord, I am rich. You see even a hint of it in verse 13. After they paid Zechariah his 30 pieces of silver, what they valued him at, what does he do?

He says, I took the 30 pieces of silver and I threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter. Now people often wonder, why is there a potter in the temple?

That wasn't normal. Why is there a potter in the temple? Or is he just in the temple precincts? Like around the temple? No, it says he threw it into the house of the Lord.

Did there just happen to be a potter walking by? And Zechariah threw the money at his feet. That's not it either. The word potter wasn't, it didn't refer to just a simple potter.

It didn't refer to just some guy who was making clay pots for household use. He was a government official, and this will make sense.

[16:15] He was a government official at the pay of the Persians, on the pay of the Persians, and he was probably in charge of a whole group of people that dealt with the finances of the government.

So what he would do was, it wasn't just here in Jerusalem, but all throughout the Persian Empire, in all the different temples, it didn't matter, it wasn't just at this temple, but every big temple, there was

someone like him, a potter, an assayer, someone who took in silver and gold, and what he would do, with that tax money, he would melt down the silver, melt down the gold, and put them in clay pots, and store them as part of the treasury.

So that's how the Persian government dealt with taxes, and so here's this potter, and all the money of Judas coming through his hands, going to Persia, and of course, in these situations, the Persians expected the people to make money off of this process.

It was okay, as long as they got their cut, you can make what you wanted off of it. And so right at the heart of the city, right at the heart of Judah, right at the heart of their religion, in the temple, is a man who's in cahoots with the Persian government, who's doing this for money.

You have this terrible mixture of money and religion, Wall Street and church, and when that happens, God's people always suffer. There's always deep, deep trouble.

[18:01] So at the height of the medieval world, the Roman Catholic Church was rich. The Pope was probably the richest single person in the whole continent of Europe. They had money coming in from everywhere.

Every nation sent money to the Pope, and according to one story, one time the Pope, Innocence II, was going on, was taking Thomas Aquinas on a tour of the Vatican, and he's showing him all the gold and all the valuables and all the wonderful things that he has, and Innocent II turned and said to Thomas, you see Peter, meaning himself and the church, you see Peter no longer has to say silver and gold have I none.

And Thomas said in reply, perhaps that's why he no longer says rise up and walk. A few things dry up the soul, kill true religion, and ruin a man for eternity like the love of money.

And at the center of Israel in Zechariah's later years were shepherds, religious shepherds, political shepherds who loved money, and their whole religion could be boiled down to praise the Lord, I am rich.

And when he started preaching against them, they killed him. Does that sound familiar? And that's what you see in this passage.

[19:32] What happens to Zechariah is a picture of what's going to happen to Jesus. It's a picture of what happened to Jesus. So Jesus is the key to this passage. He's not right at the front.

Instead, he's pictured in Zechariah. He's shadowed. He's foreshadowed in Zechariah. He's sort of wearing Zechariah's clothes. And so what happens to Zechariah happens to him.

And we're going to look at it in just four parts. And the first part is these people, what we see here is these people really need a shepherd. They really need a good shepherd.

Verse 4, he says, what does he call this whole flock, this whole nation? They're a flock marked for slaughter. So instead of a flock that's marked to go out and eat grass and enjoy themselves and live on the pasture, these sheep are marked for slaughter.

The shepherds have marked them. The Lord himself has marked them because of their sin. They're marked for slaughter. And the shepherds are selling them to the highest bidders.

[20:38] They're sellers and they're buyers. And the shepherds, instead of taking care of their sheep, are just selling them off to the highest bidders. So you have government and you have people who are buying and selling the people.

And we would say, government and people and businesses and cahoots to make a lot of money? That could never be. Well, that's what's going on here. The leaders are selling out the people to whoever will pay the highest price.

And the strange thing is the people are okay with it. They're either blind to it or most of them are in on it. So it doesn't matter. They're okay with it.

They're fine with it. They don't care that right at the heart of their nation, right at the heart of the people, right at the place where they're worshiping, they should be worshiping God.

Instead, its money is in its place. There is a God in this temple. His name is Mammon. And so what if some of the people are suffering?

[21:42] He talks about them, the oppressed. So what? Government, religion, society, everyone's overlooking them. They are in on the take. They are getting the short end of the stick.

But it's not me. So what do I care? And that's how low things are. That's how bad things are. And so God says to Zechariah, shepherd them, pasture them, feed them, teach them, help them.

But verse 6 seems to say, in the end, it's not going to matter. You're going to do this, Zechariah. But they're not going to respond in the way that you want them to.

Destruction is going to happen, and God says, I'm not going to rescue them. So Zechariah is this one last messenger, their last chance. That's how bad it is. They need a shepherd.

They need a good shepherd who will tell them the truth, who won't tell them what they want to hear, but will tell them the truth, who will love them. And they need a good shepherd who will stand up to the wicked shepherds, to stand up for the oppressed.

[22 : 53] And so that's the second point. They need a good shepherd, and God sends them a good shepherd. Remember Jesus' words, God has been sending the prophets again and again.

Now at long last, he sends his son. Here was another prophet, a good shepherd. Verse 4, pastured the flock marked for slaughter. Verse 7, so I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock.

That's who Zechariah's heart was with, the oppressed, the poor, the people that weren't up high, not the rich. And so I took two staves, and I called one favor, and the other union, and I pastured the flock.

In one month, I got rid of the three shepherds. And so God calls Zechariah to lead the people, and Zechariah leads the people, and he has two staves, favor and union, and they're symbols to say, if you follow me, if you listen to me, if you hear me, then this is what you're going to have.

There's going to be favor, protection from the nations. You're going to have union. That's brotherhood. There'll be peace and unity here. And Zechariah got rid of the three shepherds.

[24 : 05] We don't know who they are, but they must have been the ringleaders of this whole operation. The leaders taking advantage of the people, selling them out. And again, you see the similarities between Zechariah and Jesus.

The people in Jesus' day had bad leaders. Leaders who loved money. They needed a shepherd. Remember, Jesus looked out at the crowds, and he saw them oppressed, beaten, like sheep without a shepherd, and his heart goes out to them and compassion on them.

God had sent prophets and teachers before to shepherd his people, but now he sends his own son as the good shepherd. Jesus says, I am the good shepherd, and I'll lay down my life for the sheep. That's how much I love them. Just like Zechariah, Jesus cared for the people. Just like Zechariah, he stood up to the greedy religious leaders.

The greedy political leaders. While everything was coming down to this last moment, Israel's chance to listen to God, to follow him, to not be destroyed, but what happened?

[25 : 27] They need a good shepherd. God sends them a good shepherd, and now in the third place, they detest the good shepherd. Doesn't that tell you something about your own heart?

How long did we detest the good shepherd? For say, the flock detested me. They despised me. They abhorred me.

And you say, why? Why detest the one who loves you? Why detest the one who's willing to give himself? Who's not thinking just what's good for me, but what's good for these people?

The one who's not trying to make a buck off of you. Why detest him? Why hate the one who tells you the truth? Because it's Jeremiah 5 all over again. The prophets prophesy lies.

The priests rule by their own authority. And my people love it this way. They love it. And what can we say except people don't like what's good for them?

[26 : 35] Between broccoli and Twinkies, we'll choose Twinkies. Twinkies. Between exercise and TV, we'll choose TV. Between spending time with our family and looking at our phone, we'll look at our phone.

The world makes a lot more sense when you realize people like what's bad for them. That's what sin does. They detested him.

And he breaks his staff called favor, saying, you've rejected me. God is saying, now I'm ending my protection of you. God had protected them from 586 B.C.

when Jerusalem fell all the way to 70 A.D. God had given them relative peace. But with the rejection of the Messiah, the staff favor was broken. As it were, the guards stood down.

You want this nation? You can have it. You want these people? Here you go. Come and get him. And then it came time to pay him. And we already looked at this.

[27 : 34] What did they pay him? If you think it best, give me my pay. But if not, keep it. And they pay him 30 pieces of silver. That's an insult. Slave wages.

Slave money. Here's what we think you use, Zechariah. Here's what we think of what you were trying to do. Here's what we think of you and your God. Here's what we think of your word.

And so the Lord in disgust says, throw it to the potter. Throw it to the potter. The handsome, the magnificent price at which they price me. It's sarcasm. So Zechariah throws it into the temple. He throws it right into the place where all this rottenness is belching out of. You want money? Here you go. You can have it. I'm done with you.

Let the dying die. Let the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh. I'm not being your shepherd anymore.

[28 : 39] Now we know where all this was fulfilled. Judas loved money. And it all started when Mary poured out some very expensive perfume on his feet.

And Judas, ever calculating, ever thinking, says that's worth 300 denarii. And all he saw was money wasted.

All he saw was money he couldn't get his hands on. And Mark tells us that after that, after seeing that, and Jesus' response to him, after that, he went to the chief priest to betray him.

Because it must have like, either was slowly dawning on him and it clicked, or finally Judas had had enough. Jesus wasn't going to play Judas' game.

Jesus wasn't going to be the kind of Messiah that Judas was looking for. Judas wasn't going to get what he wanted out of Jesus. And so he says, off to the shepherds he goes.

[29 : 43] And the leader says, here's 30 pieces of silver. And Judas takes it. And you've got to wonder, could Judas have gotten more? He probably could have. They wanted him bad. But Judas will do it for less.

It didn't matter at this point. He put Jesus' life at 30 pieces of silver. The perfume, 300. Jesus, 30.

So Jesus to Judas is nothing. Jesus to the shepherds, nothing. Jesus to most of the people, most of Jerusalem, crucify him. We don't want this man to rule over us.

We don't have any other king except for Caesar. They wanted Caesar. So they got Caesar.

That's our fourth point. That's what you see next. God gives them the shepherd they deserve.

These people need a good shepherd.

[30 : 45] God gives them a good shepherd. they detest the good shepherd. So God gives them the shepherd they deserve. Zechariah's already broken the staff favor.

God's going to invite the nations in. And now he breaks the staff union. And now the community, the brotherhood, the family of God, so to speak, is going to fall apart.

And so then God is going to give them the shepherd that they deserve. They wanted Caesar and so they're going to get Caesar. Verse 15, take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd.

And that's not foolish meaning silly. It's not a silly shepherd. It's an evil shepherd. It's a foolish in the sense of Proverbs foolish.

We're no fear of God. He's selfish. He's self-centered. He's evil. Cruel. Cruel. Verse 16 says, for I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost or seek the young or heal the injured or feed the healthy but will eat the meat of the choice sheep tearing it off their husk.

[31 : 53] Now how did all that come true? Well, 40 years after Israel rejected their Messiah, the nation was in turmoil. One way God punishes a nation is to take his restraining hand of grace and union away from them and they start biting and devouring each other and the nation was in turmoil.

There were riots and there were protests and there were counter-protests. People were getting robbed. There was class warfare going on. The rich against the poor, the poor against the rich. There were radical religious groups that all at odds with each other. At one point, it's like something straight out of a movie. A group of assassins take over the city of Jerusalem and the people grow tired of them and their leader is eventually killed by rival factions.

Do you see? The staff of union is broke and they're all on top of each other fighting against each other. The nation was just tearing itself apart. The heart was cold a long time ago and now the cancer of sin is spreading.

The staff of union has snapped and Rome then decided enough was enough. And with the city in turmoil, they're unable to defend themselves because everyone was basically fighting everyone else.

[33 : 26] And Rome took the temple and burned it to the ground. The temple that Zechariah had preached to build. And then they destroyed the city. They wanted Caesar and Caesar they got.

Thousands, thousands of them dead. So, back to that question. How much is Jesus worth to you? How valuable is Jesus to you? is he worth more than money? A man can gain the whole world and yet if he loses his own soul, he hasn't gained anything.

It's appointed for a man to die once and then the judgment. And money can't save you from the judgment. Money and wealth and all the things that it buys, all the cares, all the experiences, all the luxury, all the security, none of it can save you.

from God's hand. God doesn't care about money in the sense of it doesn't impress him. Look at who he gives it to.

[34 : 39] The only question will be on that day, Jesus, is this one of yours? Do you know this one? Is your name on him?

Then what will he be worth when he owns my worthless name? When he says, this one's mine. But what if you're rejecting him, detesting him? Well, you do have to see that there's a price for that. there's a price now. You want sin?

One way God punishes you is to give you what you want. Sin you'll have. You want Caesar? He'll give you Caesar. You want money? He'll give it to you, but don't miss it. It's just enough rope to hang yourself on.

So is God handing you over to your sin? Well, it's the wrath of God if you're getting your way, if your way is sin. Sin destroys now, and it will destroy you then.

[35 : 47] It will be a millstone around your neck, sinking you down into hell. Now, Zechariah 11 is a very solemn passage.

It's a warning, and God is asking us, what are you doing with my son? How much is he worth to you? How are you treating the good shepherd?

Are you receiving him? Are you accepting him? Or are you detesting him? And if you do detest him, if you ignore him, what are you going to do in the end?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for Jesus. Jesus, you are the good shepherd. And most of us here would say, Lord, there is none like you.

Others can have the world. Others can have money and celebrity and everything else, but give me Jesus. I need Jesus.

[37 : 02] We need Jesus so much. What would we do with our sin? What would we do with those feelings of guilt? What would we do with that helplessness?

What would we do in the hour of death? What would we do in the hour of judgment without him?

But Lord, you have given us the good shepherd. Lord, and he feeds us and he cares for us and he loves us and he laid down his life for us.

And so, we thank you, Jesus, for being that shepherd for us. We do pray for those who don't know you in this room.

Put that question to their hearts, Lord. Lord, what are they doing with Jesus? And make them to answer it. Make them to be honest with themselves. And also for this nation, a nation that in so many ways you have given over to sin.

We've wanted money and you've given it to us. We've wanted Caesar and you've given it to us.

Lord, I pray that you would please pity this poor nation.

[38 : 12] Your arm is not too short. Your ear is not too dull. Your grace is not too small. Do something that we will be pinching ourselves thinking, is this true?

Do something amazing for your own namesake, for the good of those who are lost and dying. Your creations. We pray that you would have mercy on us.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.