

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

The Suffering Jesus

(from the gospel of Matthew)

Introduction: A long look at our suffering Savior...

From start to finish, the most prominent theme of the New Testament is the Person and work of Jesus. It really is all about Jesus.

And in the New Testament, we get a couple of different perspectives on this Jesus.

In one view of Jesus, we see Him high and exalted.

He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3) and He bears the Name that is above every Name, the Name at which every knee will bow. (Philippians 2:9-10)

We see Him returning to earth as the KING of kings and the LORD of lords to set up His millennial reign. (Revelation 19)

That is one glorious and true view of Jesus. The Old Testament prophets sometimes show us the Messiah in this light. We even see hints of this Jesus in the gospels.

But when we open our Bibles, we get another view of Jesus that is every bit as true and accurate a view as the exalted view. We also find this view in the Old Testament prophecies and in the Gospels, just like we find the view of the exalted Jesus.

¹ Matthew records many times when Jesus made sure that His disciples understood that following Him would involve suffering. He spoke about it early and often, including a reference to persecution in the opening lines of His Sermon on the Mount. (See Matthew 5:10-12; 5:43-48) Then, not long before His death on the

This second view is of the suffering Jesus, and it is on the second view of Jesus that we are focusing today.

Today's message is actually Part 1 of a two-part mini-series on suffering. Next Sunday, we'll focus mostly on the suffering that often comes to believers who live for God.

We'll observe the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. Our focus will be on the life of the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, a man who suffered greatly and only because of his faithfulness to God.

Today, though, the suffering Jesus is our theme, and we are restricting ourselves to looking at His suffering through the lens provided us by Matthew.¹

Mark and Luke and John have their own unique perspectives. They each record incidents and details to Jesus' suffering that Matthew doesn't. We're not looking at them today.

Nor are we exploring any of the Old Testament prophecies about the suffering of the Messiah nor at any of the references to Jesus' sufferings in the book of Acts, the letters, or the book of Revelation.

We're just going to listen to and learn from Matthew.

Today, at the end, we are taking the Lord's Supper. And it is common on a first Sunday of the month, when we take the bread and cup of communion, that we pay attention to Jesus' suffering in His death on the cross.

That was certainly the apex of His suffering. But, as I have spent time in Matthew's Gospel over the past couple of weeks, I have been struck by how deeply He drank of the cup of suffering, even apart from the cross, all through His life.

cross, Jesus told the apostles James and John that while He couldn't assure them of seats next to His throne in the kingdom, they would certainly "*drink the cup*" (of suffering and persecution) that He would drink. (Matthew 20:23)

So, the next few minutes will be an extended, thoughtful reflection on the many sufferings Jesus endured for us as He lived in obedience to His Father's will.

Over the three years of His ministry, our Lord very often suffered from being opposed and rejected.²

Jesus - the Leader - Opposed and Rejected

Opposed by THE enemy (4:1-11)

For instance, before His ministry even started, Jesus was famously challenged by the enemy of our souls - the devil.

Satan approached Jesus, alone, out in the Judean wilderness after the Lord had been fasting for forty days and nights.

Jesus stood firm against three temptations to sin against God. A temptation to eat food, to power and authority, and to rule. Jesus never wavered. He refused it all, entrusting Himself to His Father.

That first fight against the devil set the stage for what would mark the rest of His life because Jesus suffered a lifelong series of attacks from all quarters.

Opposed by Gentiles (8:28-34)

Matthew recorded one of my favorite stories about Jesus. It involves His casting multiple demons out of two men in the Gentile region of the Gadarenes.

The demons made these men very violent, but they were no match for Jesus. He was going to cast them out, and they knew it.

² 12:1-7 - When the Pharisees scolded Him for allowing His disciples to eat heads of grain on the sabbath, He rebuked them for forgetting about the time David ate consecrated food and yet was guiltless; 12:9-14 - He rebuked His opponents for having no compassion on a man with a withered hand; 15:1-9 - He rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for following their traditions while breaking God's law to "honor" needy parents; 16:1-4 - He rebuked the Sadducees for demanding signs

Knowing it, they asked that He send them into a nearby herd of swine, which He did, the herd of swine immediately rushing headlong off of a cliff into the Sea of Galilee where they drowned.

The demoniacs were delivered from their torment. Glorious good news, right?

Well, the herdsmen who had been watching over their pigs by day, ran to a nearby city to report what had happened.

And we read this - ***[34] And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they pleaded with Him to leave their region.***

No worship. No praise for delivering two human wrecks from their misery. No curiosity about who this Man might be. Simple rejection by these people, who just happened to be Gentiles.

But, of course, Jesus was rejected by His own people, too.

Opposed by His Fellow Jews

By His family and friends in Nazareth (13:53-58)

At about the mid-way point of His three years long ministry, He visited the village where He had grown up, Nazareth.

His family and close relatives and friends were all there. One sabbath day, He spoke in the Nazareth synagogue.

They had heard about His miraculous powers and were "astonished" at His teaching. It was a great sermon.

from heaven; 19:3-9 - He rebuked the Pharisees for looking for excuses to get a divorce; 21:12-13 - He took the fight to the ruling Jews by cleansing the temple; 22:15-22 - He rebuked the Pharisees for not giving to God the things that belonged to God - themselves!; 22:23-33 - He rebuked the Sadducees for understanding neither the Scriptures nor the power of God about what the afterlife was like and how that impacted marriage; 23:1-36 - He rebuked religious rulers for hypocrisy.

But rather than believe in Him or be impressed with Him or beg to hear more from Him, Matthew tells us that **[57]...they took offense at Him.**

“Who does Jesus think He is? He’s just Joseph’s kid. No big deal. Nothing to see here.”

The rejection in His hometown was just one piece of the suffering of rejection and opposition that came from other Jews.

It came repeatedly from the Jewish leaders who moved quickly from *interested in Jesus to enemies of Jesus.*

By chief priests and scribes

Matthew tells us that the opposition and rejection from the *“chief priests and scribes”* came mostly at the end of Jesus’ life.

Jesus had been confirming by His many miracles God’s presence and power in His life for three solid years. But these *“chief priests and scribes”* were offended when Jesus accepted the praise He was getting from the adoring crowds when He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.³

And they spent the final week of Jesus’ life challenging His claims to authority⁴ - and plotting His death.⁵

By Sadducees

He was also opposed and rejected by another group of religious leaders called Sadducees, a group who denied the afterlife and the existence of angels.

His most famous interaction with the Sadducees came when they tried to trip Jesus up with a made-up story.

The story was about a man who died childless leaving behind a wife.

Then, according to the Mosaic Law,⁶ the wife was passed on to the second brother who would raise up children to his death brother, who also died, as did brothers three, four, five, six, and seven.

The Sadducees’ “gotcha” question to Jesus was, *“Whose wife will she be in this supposed ‘after-life’ You speak of, since she was married to all seven brothers?”*

Obviously, they were out to get Jesus. They opposed Him and rejected Him and were trying their best to humiliate Him before His followers there in Jerusalem.

The end of this story is especially rich because Jesus shows us that He didn’t just roll over.

He gave better than He got, with this stinging rebuke, **[22:29]...“You are mistaken, since you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God.”⁷**

He was repeatedly opposed by the “chief priests and scribes” and by the Sadducees. But Jesus’ most famous opposition came from the most popular and influential group of religious leaders in His day, the Pharisees.

By Pharisees

They accused Him of casting out demons by satanic power. (9:32-34)

That was a major accusation, but they also got really picky.

³ 21:14-17.

⁴ 21:23-27.

⁵ 26:3-5.

⁶ Deuteronomy 25:5.

⁷ He said this: **[30] “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. [31] But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: [32] ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”** (See more opposition of the Sadducees at 16:1-11.)

They objected when He allowed His disciples to pluck heads of grain and eat on the Sabbath day (they said that was “work” even though it wasn’t) (12:1-7) and they rebuked Him for not washing His hands before eating. (Really?) (15:1-19)

And numerous times they tried to trip Him up and to catch Him in a wrong saying and to make Him look bad.⁸

The one incident that stands out to me as particularly telling was the time He visited a synagogue and found there a man who had a problem with one of his hands. My Bible says his hand was “**withered.**”

I have wondered over this past week what that hand looked like (Did it look ghastly?) What did it feel like? (Did it hurt all the time? Was it numb?)

I wondered how a withered hand would limit what a man could do, how he could support a family, what job he could hold in a world before tech?

Jesus saw the man. The Pharisees did, too.

But it was the Sabbath day. The Pharisees and all the Jews of Jesus’ day had a tradition that said that even healing “work” was not allowed on the Sabbath day.

They wondered, “*What will Jesus do?*” They watched Him.

Jesus never once violated God’s commands. But when human tradition got in the way of love, He tossed human tradition aside.

[12 :13] Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other.

Well, praise God! what a cause for celebration. Can’t we just imagine the whole synagogue congregation erupting in praise to God and seeking to know more about this Jesus?

And maybe some of them there that day did exactly that. Not the Pharisees.

[12:14] But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

For the act of helping a man become whole by a miraculous healing, the Pharisees plotted against Jesus to “**destroy Him.**”

These rejections and oppositions from the leaders of His own nation were significant sufferings and would have been disheartening to Jesus.

Even more disheartening, though, would have been the opposition and rejection He got from His own disciples, especially as these occurred shortly before His death.

Picture this.

Opposed by His Own Disciples

On the last week of Jesus’ life, He and His disciples were invited to the home of a man who suffered from leprosy. His name was Simon.

During the meal, ***[26:7] a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very expensive perfume, and she poured it on His head as He was reclining at the table.***

It was an incredible, over-the-top expression of love and faith, and Jesus commended her for what she did.

⁸ They tested Him about marriage and divorce (19:3-9) and about paying taxes or not to Caesar. (22:15-22) He, for His part, questioned them about why David, in Psalm 110, called his descendant, “**Lord**” indicating that David’s descendant was

greater than David himself. Jesus, being David’s descendant was clearly referring to Himself - and the Pharisees would have understood that. See Matthew 22:41-45.

He said to those around the table, **[13] “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her.”**

Matthew tells us that **“the disciples”** - of which he was one, so he included himself in this response - **[8] “were indignant when they saw this, and said, ‘Why this waste?’”**

This woman⁹ saw the worth of Jesus and she lavished value on Him. The men who had been following Him for three years did not.

Their indignation at her act of worship was a slap in Jesus’ face. ...and right after this, the Apostle Judas agreed with the chief priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver - and he carried out that plan.¹⁰ ...and not long after that, the Apostle Peter, having been warned to not do this, denied three times that he even knew Jesus while Jesus was on trial for His life before the Jewish Sanhedrin.¹¹

Suffering of all sorts was the routine experience of Jesus throughout His three years of ministry. We’ve just seen some of it and the disciples saw what we’ve seen and more. They knew.

And Jesus made sure that they knew that worse opposition and fuller rejection was coming His way.

My recent look at Matthew’s Gospel has surprised me by noting how many times Jesus told His disciples about His soon-to-come death.

Jesus Forewarned His Disciples of His Soon-to-Come Sufferings

#1 - In Caesarea Philippi (16:13-23)

A little more than half-way through Jesus’ ministry, Peter gave an answer to Jesus’ question, **“Who do you yourselves say that I am?”** with this: **[16:16] “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

⁹ Many believe, as I do, that Matthew was recounting the same event John did in His gospel when Mary, Lazarus’ sister, anointed Jesus in Bethany. (John 12:1-8)

¹⁰ 26:14-16.

¹¹ 26:47-56.

Immediately after that Great Confession,” **[21]...Jesus began to point out to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised up on the third day.**¹²

#2 - After the Transfiguration (17:1-12)

Shortly after this, when Jesus took the apostles, Peter, James, and John, to the top of a high mountain, **[17:2] He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and his garments became as white as light.**

Moses and Elijah came from heaven to be with Jesus and to talk with Him. It was a glorious scene.

On the way down the mountain, Jesus commanded the three apostles to tell no one about what they had just seen **[17:9] “until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.”**

#3 - While They were in Galilee (17:22-23)

When they all soon got back on Galilean soil, **[17:22]...Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be handed over to men; [23] and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.”**¹³

#4 - Before Entering Jerusalem (20:17-19)

While He and His disciples were on their way to Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus **[20:17]...took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the road He said to them, [18] “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, [19] and they will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and flog and crucify, and on the third day He will be raised up.”**

¹² Tragically, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him for His prophecy, to which Jesus responded, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** to Peter.

¹³ Yes, Matthew tells us that the disciples were **“deeply grieved.”** But they were still **“deeply stunned”** when His predictions came true.

#5 - After a “Firstness” Argument (20:20-28)

Still not yet in Jerusalem, the mother of the apostles James and John asked Jesus if her two sons could sit next to Jesus in His coming kingdom.

The other ten were indignant at the request, no doubt wanting the best seats for themselves. What a mess Jesus had on His hands!

He huddled them all up and told them that “firstness” in His kingdom came by way of servanthood.

And He held Himself up as the example to follow, **[20:28] “...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”** - a crystal-clear reference to His death.

#6 - Two Days Before Passover (26:1-2)

During His final week, Jesus again said, **[26:2] “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion.”**

#7 - At the Anointing in Bethany (26:6-13)

At the dinner scene where the woman anointed Jesus at Simon’s home, Jesus announced that she did what she did, unknowingly preparing His body **“for burial.”** (26:12)

#8 - At the Last Supper (26:26-29)

And during the Last Supper, on the night before Jesus died, He clearly looked forward to His own death when He identified the bread with, **“this is My body”** and the cup with, **“this is My blood of the covenant.”** (26:26-27)¹⁴

I count eight times (and I may have missed some) when Jesus explicitly or implicitly let His disciples know of his coming death.

And yet, what they heard from Jesus was contradicted by their expectations.

They, like most of the Jews of their day, expected the arrival of a conquering king, the appearance of royalty.

What Jesus said about arrest, betrayal, scourging, crucifixion, and burial didn’t match those expectations.

So, they experienced a massive cognitive dissonance to the point where they heard - and yet didn’t hear what He was saying, at all.

Prelude to a life of suffering...

Any of us might also be surprised to find Jesus’ life so filled with sufferings.

After all, we know Jesus as the One who is now seated at the right hand of God, the One who has the Name that is above all names, and as the One who will one day be recognized as the KING of kings and the LORD of lords.

But we wouldn’t be surprised if we remembered the earliest days of His life, when magi from the east came to worship Him after they saw the star announcing His birth.

Matthew tells us that in Jerusalem, King Herod the Great wasn’t at all thrilled with the news that the Persian wise men brought.

So, Herod hatched a wicked plan.

He told the magi to return to him after visiting this Child **[2:2] “who was born King of the Jews”** so that he, too, could worship Him.

¹⁴ When, during the same Passover meal, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him, He added the details of **“striking the shepherd”** and **“after I have been raised”** - both of which point to His death.

Herod's plan was to learn from the magi where the Child was living (now roughly two years old) and go there and kill Him.

But the plan failed because the magi went back home by a different route, by-passing Jerusalem and the trip to tell Herod where the Child was.

And Jesus was kept safe because God's angel told Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to protect them from Herod's madness.

But Herod was so enraged by the magi's trick that he sent soldiers to Bethlehem who killed all the boys in that area two years old and under in an attempt to kill Jesus.

Jesus' suffering the pain of rejection and opposition and the desire for His death had been in place since His birth.

It finally happened at Passover.

Jesus' Final Sufferings

The Suffering of Anticipation (26:36-46)

Jesus went with His disciples (all except Judas) to the Garden of Gethsemane, just outside Jerusalem.

He then took Peter, James, and John to a secluded place in the Garden. He told them to stay alert and to **"keep watch with Me"** while He Himself stepped away to pray.

Twice, He broke from His time in prayer to check on those three. Both times He found them sleeping. They couldn't keep watch. (Add their failure to the list of Jesus' sufferings.)

Jesus was praying because He was **"deeply grieved"** by what was about to happen. He knew that He was about to drink the cup of God's wrath by bearing our sins in His body on the cross. (1 Peter 2:24)

He prayed a prayer of faith that having drunk from this **"cup"** (after He died), God would remove the cup from Him. God's wrath would pass from Him.

He prayed by faith that He would be restored to His rightful place at the Father's side.

Jesus suffered tremendously from the anticipation of what was about to happen.

The next suffering was the complete and total rejection that had been hinted at through a lifetime of smaller rejections.

The Suffering of Rejection by the Jewish Leaders (26:57-68)

After Judas betrayed Him in the Garden with a deceitful kiss, soldiers led Jesus away to stand trial before Caiaphas, the high priest and all the other members of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

False witnesses couldn't get their story straight about the crimes they were accusing Jesus of committing, so Caiaphas took things into his own hands and began interrogating Jesus.

At first, Jesus didn't even answer the High Priest. But then he demanded that Jesus answer this: **[62]...*"I place You under oath by the living God, to tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God."***

Knowing full well what the consequences would be for telling the truth, Jesus spoke.

[64] Jesus said to him, *"You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."*

With that, the high priest tore his robes¹⁵ and condemned Jesus to death.

¹⁵ This was in direct violation of the Old Testament command that a priest should never, under any circumstance, tear his robes. The thought was that no one who

had access to the presence of God should ever be so despairing or distraught that he would tear his robes.

Those standing around ***“spit in His face and beat Him with their fists; and other slapped Him.”*** They mocked Him. (26:67-68)

That was the rejection by the rulers of His own people. Then, His own people led Him to Pontius Pilate where the Gentiles would reject Him.

The Suffering of Rejection by the Gentiles (27:15-26)

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and that the Jews had delivered Jesus to him because they were jealous of Jesus.

So, he tried to arrange for Jesus’ release by offering him to the Jews as the one prisoner to be released for them at Passover, as per custom.

But the Jews cried out that they wanted the release of Barabbas, a notorious criminal. It was an ugly scene.

Now I think it is likely that Jesus and Barabbas were both standing in front of the crowd while Pilate sat at his judgment seat.

The crowds were looking at their choices for a released prisoner...and they cried out for the release of Barabbas and for the crucifixion of Jesus.

And yet it was still Pilate’s decision as to which one of them to release. He was the powerful Roman Governor of Judea. He had the authority to release whomever he wanted to release.

And seeing that the Jewish crowds were getting unruly,
[24]...he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this Man’s blood; you yourselves shall see.”
[25] And all the people replied, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” ***[26] Then he released Barabbas for them.***

Jesus was then delivered over to Pilate’s soldiers who unleashed horrible physical abuse on Jesus.

The Suffering of Scourging (27:26-31)

One line describes the first part of the physical torture. Matthew says that Pilate had Him ***“flogged.”*** (v. 26) That is the preliminary beating that would often kill a man before he ever went to the cross. It was designed to so weaken a man that he would die more quickly. It was called *“the half-death.”*

It left the victim covered with wounds from head to foot, his back ripped to shreds with the whip, the ends of which contained pieces of bone and metal.

Jesus survived the flogging and was then taken to a large hall in Pilate’s governor’s mansion (the Praetorium), where He suffered more abuse.

[28] And they stripped Him and put a red cloak on Him.
[29] And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” ***[30] And they spit on Him, and took the reed and beat Him on the head. [31] And after they had mocked Him, they took the cloak off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.***

The Suffering of Crucifixion (27:33-56)

And then our Savior was taken to Golgotha where He was crucified with criminals to His right and left.

He was mocked by those who walked past the gruesome scene, by the chief priests and scribes and elders of the Jews, and even by those who were also being crucified.

At three o’clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out, ***“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”*** Shortly after that, ***[27:50] Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and gave up His spirit.***

He suffered all that He suffered for us. He suffered to serve us by giving His life as a ransom for us.