

Title: Confession
Text: Matthew 26.57-68
Theme: Confessing the truth when it costs you something
Series: Matthew #121
Prop Stmtnt: Christ confessed the truth about himself knowing that he would pay dearly for it.

Read Text:

Imagine that you are at the beach and you decide to wade out into the ocean. The tide is coming in. You get out to where the water covers your ankles, then your knees. As the waves come in you flex with them and remain in place. Then you get out waist deep. Now you have to fight to hold your position and in some cases you have to jump to stay above some of the larger waves. Still you keep moving out. But now you are in a place where you can't out jump the wave. The wave crashes over you.

The life of a follower of Christ is like that in a way. We don't go with the flow. We stand against it. The tide of this world is always against us. We regularly face challenges and adversities. We learn to flex, hold our ground, steady our feet and move on. Some of the challenges that come are greater, we have to jump, even tread water for a bit to keep from going under. But then comes the big one and we can't out jump this and as it crashes over us, we find ourselves spilling, spinning, getting disoriented and ending up in a place different than where we were. People who survive a crisis like that come through it either softer and kinder, or harder and crustier. What's the difference? The people who are harder and crustier have become bitter because in the crisis their ultimate treasure was stolen. The dream they lived for did not come true and what they banked on did not happen. The people who are softer and kinder became sweeter because they realized that their ultimate treasure was safe and could not be stolen. Oh they were cut, bruised and staggering from the pounding, but there was a sweet relief that in spite of it all, they were still standing. The authenticity of their faith had been revealed. It was tested, tried and found to be real.

The Bible makes it clear that followers of Christ are not at home in this world. We are warned by John not to love this world, nor to love the things that are in the world. This world is passing away. If you put the treasure of your affections in this world, your treasure will not be safe. No, we are pilgrims. We are passing through. We are citizens of another kingdom. We are restless here and often we feel as if we do not belong. The truth is, we do not belong in this world. We suspect that because we never really settle down. Adversity and crisis cause that suspicion to become a convictional reality.

For Abraham, the wave that crashed over him was the call to offer the son of his old age on an altar. Joseph was facing Esau and was at risk of losing everything. Moses had unfinished business back in Egypt and God called him to turn his back on his quiet life in Moab and fulfill his calling. Luther thought he stood alone at the Diet of Worms. All of you have faced the waves that have hit your knees and waist. Some of you are treading and wondering how long you can do this. A few of you have had the waves crash over

you. You would never want to go through that again nor wish that on an adversary. But there is a quiet amazement that you feel. It is not the fist-shaking resolve of an Elton John singing, "I'm still standing." It is the wonder that somehow in your weakness, in your inability to hold yourself together, that God has really brought you through and the promises you made on a Sunday morning as you sang with the people of God are now sung with even deeper conviction since you know the cost. You nod internally, because yes, you really believe and you know that you won't turn back, because you did not turn back. God kept you. God never calls you to endure what he has not already faced. This text is the confession of Christ. This is the confession of Christ as the waves overwhelm him. This is the confession of Christ knowing that upon his confession, he will pay for it. Here is our leader. He sets the mark and calls us to keep the pace.

Our text covers phase one of the trial of Christ. A lot happened in a few hours, so let me set the stage for you. After Jesus was arrested he was taken to the Palace of the High Priest. This palatial mansion was quite likely positioned on the eastern slope of the "upper city" that overlooked the Temple Mount from the west. The distance from the Garden of Gethsemane to the palace of the high priest would have been close to a mile. V.57 speaks of Caiaphas as being the high priest, but other gospel accounts speak of Annas as being the high priest. Caiaphas was actually the high priest this year, but Annas had been the high priest and Annas was his father-in-law. The position of high priest was a powerful and lucrative position and these guys were keeping it all in the family. But, once you served as the high priest, you would be referred to as the high priest even if you weren't serving currently as THE high priest for that year.

After the "trial" at the house of the high priest Christ is sent to Pilate who sends him to Herod who sends him back to Pilate, who then turns him over to be crucified. So, Christ stands on trial before the Sanhedrin, then the governor, then the king and then the governor again. The entire trial is a charade. There are all sorts of procedural laws that are violated, which is another irony. The chief priests, scribes and members of the Sanhedrin, many of whom are Pharisees are charged with keeping and enforcing the law. These scrupulous law-keepers who ram it down the throats of others break the very same law in numerous places. They have no conscience. They don't really believe the law; they use the law as a means to leverage influence and power. They too are blind by their rage and their fear of being exposed. It is a hard reality to embrace, but...

I. **Our world does not want to hear the truth.** (59-63)

This trial is a farce. They did not care about the truth. They had predetermined the outcome and now they were using the system of justice as a means to work injustice.

A. **Our world is built on lies.**

The high priest, chief priests, scribes, elders, and many of the members of the Sanhedrin had already determined what the outcome had to be. Jesus had to die. They had to get rid of him, so now they needed some legal pretense or excuse to make it happen. Even though the Roman government was in charge, Rome tried to give each area a measure of

self-governance as long as they did not cause problems for Rome. However, there were limits. The Jews could not sentence someone to die. Capital punishment was left in the hands of Rome. Now, if they could make a clear case for capital punishment, then they could threaten (in this case) the governor Pilate that if he did not go along with their demands then they would cause a riot and that wouldn't look too good back home in Rome. But, in order to get a sentence for the death penalty they had to get two witnesses who would agree on the crime.

The problem was, no two witnesses had stories that agreed. Now, why is that an issue? After all, they had already made up their mind that he had to die, why didn't they just sentence him? There are two possibilities: 1) There were members of the Sanhedrin that demanded that at least some sort of due process be followed and/or 2) Pilate would ask them about the charges and if they actually met the threshold of capital punishment under Jewish law. Matthew makes it clear that they "*were seeking false testimony.*" They wanted to kill Jesus. But, their plans were being frustrated because even the lies weren't working. According to Deut. 19.16-21, the penalty for lying in a capital trial was execution. So, if these guys were serious about carrying out the law, all of these witnesses would have been executed. But, their plan was to find false testimony and then the leaders would use that as an excuse to promote their own agenda.

B. Our world operates by lie-propping.

Lie-propping is the frenzied and desperate act of propping up falsehoods in order to make them appear to be believable. Lies do not stand on their own. Like false idols, lies keep falling over. They do not work because they are not true. But, no one wants to admit that they are not true. So, our culture pretends that they are true and threatens anyone with rejection or shaming if you don't go along with them. Lie-propping is done more by emotion than reason and seeks to influence the masses to drown out those who are willing to speak truthfully.

Look at this scene. It is pathetic. These men are so afraid of the truth, that they are desperate to find someone whose lies they can prop up in order to advance their own cause. Their own cause is so flimsy and shallow, that it can not stand on its own and if anyone exposes them, then they will resort to desperate tactics to shut them up.

We have watched this happen on a number of issues in our culture, with one of the most prominent ones being the issue of evolution. The theory of evolution is just that, a theory. But our educational system has said over and over and over that evolution is a fact and seeks to drown out anyone who points out that it just a theory. In fact, ironically, you are viewed as an intellectual pygmy, or worse, as a danger to society if you do not believe in evolution. But, over and over the facts do not support the theory.

My son-in-law is in Physical Therapy school. Recently in his anatomy and physiology class they were studying armpits. Armpits are amazing. You may think of them as being hairy, (or not) dirty, stinky or funny noise-making devices, but in reality, your armpits are the home of sweat glands that when functioning properly help to lower the surface

temperature of your body to keep you as comfortable as possible. Your body has its own thermostat and temperature regulating system and your armpits are part of that complicated and fascinating process. So, Stephen is studying this and is pretty amazed at this one aspect of God's handiwork in our bodies. At the end of the lecture, the teacher, amazed himself at it all, said, "Isn't it amazing how evolution produced all of this?" Well, that was about all he could handle and he spoke up and said, "You seriously think that was evolution? That wasn't evolution, that was God who did that."

What do you have to have in order for evolution to "work" or even be remotely plausible? You have to have an infinite amount of time and an infinite amount of possibilities in order for there to be the slightest chance of the most random mutation happening. But the truth is, you can give a monkey a box with 10,000 puzzle pieces in it and that monkey can shake it for 10 billion years and it will never all fall together as a perfectly formed puzzle. Besides, where did the 10,000 puzzle pieces come from, the design of the puzzle and the box? And who is going to find a monkey that will live for 10 billion years and if you did, who is going to feed it? It is amazing that anyone believes that stuff. But they do and ...

C. Our world is desperate to suppress the truth.

Finally two men came forward and they at least agreed. The problem is, what they agreed upon was wrong. But the leaders didn't care. The two witnesses claimed that Jesus said, "*I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.*" Actually what Jesus said was in response to challenge. He was challenged by some Jews who said, "What sign do you show us for doing these things." Jesus had just cleared out some of the corrupt business practices that were taking place on the temple grounds and they were challenging Christ by asking him what right he had to do that. Jesus responded by saying, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." One, Jesus did not say "I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days." He said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Two, Jesus was talking about his own body, which they did not understand. But, these witnesses claimed that this is what Jesus said, so they charged him with it. The charge was not even accurate, but this trial was not about truth.

II. Our world pretends that it wants to hear the truth. (62)

For example, raising awareness about breast cancer and raising funds to research ways to fight it are both good and popular. But, did you know that having an abortion can raise a woman's risk of breast cancer between 30 and 44 percent? Joel Brind is a professor of biology and endocrinology at Baruch College in Manhattan. This graduate of Yale has done extensive research on this topic and was initially drawn to it because of reports that were coming out that said that pregnancies decreased a woman's chances of having breast cancer. He discovered that not only did the pregnancy have to go full term, but if the pregnancy was aborted that there was an increased risk to the woman for breast cancer. So, he began to speak up because breast cancer is a serious and ongoing threat to the health of women and this was something that was not being talked about and he

thought that this was important to get out into the public conversation. But people like the National Cancer Institute, the American Cancer Society, the World Health Organization, etc. all deny the abortion –breast cancer link. Why? Why do these organizations that say they care about women’s health, refuse to deal with this? They wouldn’t touch it. Joel was ignored, but he hasn’t given up. Most people are only willing to deal with the “truths” that support their preconceived opinions. Do people want to know how to prevent breast cancer? Not if it has to do with the abortion issue.

That is exactly what is going on here. Caiaphas is pretending that he is holding a fair trial when everyone knows that the verdict has already been determined and only information that fits the verdict will be considered. Caiaphas now challenges Jesus to answer the accusation. His standing up, his challenge of “Have you no answer to make?” is all bluster. He is pretending that he has found the smoking gun and that this evidence will seal the deal. Now he is going to stick it to Jesus. So mustering his most intimidating pose and voice he demands that Jesus give him a response. People who pretend that they want to hear the truth are actually blind to it. Jesus is silent. The silence of Jesus is not only a demonstration of his meekness and a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (chapter 53), but it is actually a kindness of Jesus to Caiaphas. Every bit of truth that Caiaphas has heard about Jesus has been rejected. Every time Caiaphas rejects more truth about Jesus he only adds more condemnation and judgment upon himself. The more light that you reject, the harder your heart becomes. To answer Caiaphas would be giving this fool more fuel to burn himself with. Caiaphas is not in charge, Jesus is.

III. Jesus always tells the truth (64)

Caiaphas is in over his head. And in his anger at the gracious refusal of Jesus to answer him he places Christ under oath by the divine name. When Caiaphas said, “I adjure you (or charge you) by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” he was forcing him to answer by using the name of God. He was placing him under oath. So, Jesus did. And Jesus told him the truth, in fact the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Jesus accepted Caiaphas terms. Yes, he is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God. And then Jesus said, in essence, but let me tell you more. Things are about to change. I am putting you on notice so that you have no excuse. You are going to see evidence of my power. Yes, I am the Messiah and Son of God and you will see it with your own eyes. I will be seated at the right hand of Power and will be coming in the clouds of heaven. I am God. I am King and I am your Judge. Now, either Jesus is lying, which this would not be a good time to be telling a lie like that, or he is delusional, or this is who he really is.

The statement is powerful. To say that he will be seen on the right hand of Power is saying that he will be going back to a position of incredible honor and authority. But, he is not going to stay there. He is going to return on the clouds of heaven. The language is all about authority because that is the setting. Who is in charge here? And Jesus just answered the question. Caiaphas, you are in deep weeds. You have taken on the Lion from the tribe of Judah and this lion roars. Right now he is going to lie down, but do not be deceived. This Lion roars. Verse 64 is the focal point of this entire scene. This is the

confession of Jesus Christ. This is his statement of belief and revelation of his own identity. He is deity. He is God. He is God, the Son, and God, the man. His rightful place is at the right hand of the Father and as such all authority is given to him. Already he reigns, not yet has his kingdom come in its fullness.

The answer that Jesus gives employs language from Daniel 7 because Daniel had a vision of God and used these descriptions. Daniel's vision was intense and Jesus is identifying himself with that. But notice this phrase, "from now on" (64). Jesus is telling Caiaphas that he is about to witness a turning point in history, and he did. The resurrection of Christ from the dead absolutely sealed his installment as King of Kings and Lord of lords. It is a done deal. It is not a matter of if, but when. He is the King and we, the members of his kingdom preach the gospel which is the same thing as announcing his reign. Some people get in trouble because they do not speak the truth. Jesus was condemned because he did. He always speaks the truth. He is truth.

Jesus was clear. He publicly and precisely revealed who he was. He warned Caiaphas. But Caiaphas was nothing more than another representative of this world that ever since Adam in the garden says that we will not have God rule over us. We will make our own rules. We will live how we want. We will demand abortion as a civil right regardless of whether or not it is murder. Our right to hedonism and self-centeredness is more important than the life of a child. We will demand the acceptance and promotion of homosexuality as a foundational tenet of our society. And we will demand that the government pay for medications and health-care plans to treat and cure all of the medical complications that result from living in defiance to God's order for his creation. We will redefine marriage; we will wipe out all notions of God from the public conversation and will marginalize and intimidate any who refuse to go along with our demands. We will not have God rule over us.

IV. **Our world may try to destroy you if you speak the truth.** (65-68)

This week, a Texas grand jury indicted pro-life activists David Daleiden and Sandra Merritt on charges of tampering with a government record. David, if you remember was the man who posed as an executive of a biomedical research company and video taped conversations with executives from Planned Parenthood in order to prove that Planned Parenthood was performing abortions in order to harvest and sell baby parts and fetal tissue. So get this. David is indicted because he pretended that he was in the market for purchasing baby parts while Planned Parenthood is protected, continually funded by Congress and championed by our president even though they admit that they harvest baby parts and sell them. Do you see what we are? We feign outrage at a trumped up technicality and ignore the unbelievably inhumane atrocities that are being performed.

Caiaphas is outraged at the statement of Jesus. He is offended. He is shocked. He rips his clothes to pretend that he is in deep mourning over this claim. "He has blasphemed!" This is his moment to attack. He presses for a verdict and it comes quickly. He is guilty and deserves to die. And then we read some of the hardest words in the entire Bible. (v.67-68)

In a few hours he will be flogged, humiliated some more and then crucified. The flogging and the crucifixion will be carried out by the Romans. This is done by his own. "They spit in his face and struck him." Who is they? The high priest, the chief priests, the members of the Sanhedrin. They slapped him. They struck him. They spit in his face. Actually, the language of v.68 suggests that they played a violent version of a child's game with Christ, most likely blindfolding him and then mocking his claim as Messiah as they humiliated and scorned him. By now, those 12 legions of angels would not have to be called, they would be in a cosmic uproar with swords drawn, jaws set they were poised and ready to respond. But permission was never granted. Their King had to face this alone. The world that he made truly hated him. He was a threat to their kingdom because he was the true King.

V. **We are not at home in this world.**

And we feel it. We are defined by a King who was rejected, a leader who was hated, a Savior who was utterly scorned. That has not changed. We naively think that if we were nicer or kinder or more generous that our world would like us. Do you think that you could ever be nicer and kinder and more generous than Jesus? It is hard to really come to grips with because we really want to belong. We really want to find that place where we are free to love and be loved. Where we are accepted and comfortable. I talked with a guy recently who had family, like so many of yours who, years ago, moved up here from the south in order to find work. They did and made good money and had a good life. But, when they retired, they longed to go back home. So, they did. But when they got back they found out that they didn't quite fit in like they thought they would. They had changed and so had the people. Now, they were in no man's land.

That's us. We are in no man's land. Oh, we live in this country and we want to be good citizens and responsible members of our community, but the truth is, we don't belong here, not really. We are citizens of another kingdom. We are part of another people. We pledge allegiance to the ultimate King. We are not at home in this world but we are at home with Christ. Our being at home with Christ means that we are at home with one another. We are a natural band of enemies, supernaturally bound by the gospel.