

## Embracing All of God's Plan Matthew 17:22-23

### Introduction

**What Is the Will of God for My Life?:** In Kevin DeYoung's 2009 book, *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will* (with the catchy alternate title, *How to Make a Decision Without Dreams, Visions, Fleeces, Impressions, Open Doors, Random Bible Verses, Casting Lots, Liver Shivers, Writing in the Sky, etc.*) he makes the basic but profound observation that we "spend too *much* time trying to [discover]<sup>1</sup> God's [unspoken] will and too *little* time striving to obey the plain commands of Scripture" (DeYoung).

- Let's put this in the realm of physical fitness. How many want a *new* diet, the discovery of a new "miracle" drug, etc.? Yet, the things we know about nutrition, caloric intake, healthy and unhealthy foods, moderation, and exercise go ignored.
  - One of two things generally happens: (1) A supposed miracle drug comes out only to discover it is harmful rather than helpful (e.g., diet drug disaster Fen-Phen; who would have thought that giving people amphetamines would be a problem? Damaged heart valves).<sup>2</sup> (2) The best case scenario is a drug that works or is safe but then you're dependent on it forever (e.g., new drug that delivers but long-term safety is unknown and weight is immediately gained back upon stopping).<sup>3</sup> Thank God for medical interventions that prolong and protect our health but *what is our fascination with seeking an unknown solution without obeying what is known?*
- We always want to hope there is an easier way!

**How often are we like this in our faith?** We want God to give us the next million-dollar business idea or bless us with the winning lottery ticket but we refuse to be faithful with the talents, money, and opportunities in front of us?

- We promise God we'll honor him with that job promotion, new relationship, additional income but we can't commit to love our neighbors, gather with the saints, devote ourselves to prayer and the Word, or share our faith?
- We want all sorts of opportunities and blessings from God but we won't obey him with what he's already said and called us to.
- What if he calls you to something or commands you to do something that you don't like? What if his plan is different than your preference?
- Will you trust God's plan and obey his path or do you only want him to underwrite your existing desires?
- What happens when God reveals his will and you don't want it?

**True Discipleship:** True discipleship, is trusting and obeying Jesus. We focus so much on "knowing" Jesus that we often act like knowledge about Jesus is the same as trusting his character. Knowledge of Jesus is not meant for Bible Trivia but to propel your feet to walk his

---

<sup>1</sup> Divine (v): discover (something) by guesswork or intuition.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/heart-disease/news/20081105/lasting-heart-damage-from-fen-phen>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2021-02-10/injected-drug-delivers-up-to-20-weight-loss-in-trial>

footsteps. You and I might be like the first disciples, we know something is unique about Jesus, we have witnessed his miraculous power, and been compelled by his powerful teaching but our idea of what a Messiah is conflicts with his. Their idea of how a Savior is meant to save, conflicts with theirs.

What does it look like to joyfully and obediently trust *all* of God's plan?

<sup>22</sup> As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, <sup>23</sup> and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. The Predetermined Plan of God (vv. 22-23a)

**Gather to Teach:** <sup>22</sup> As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, We've had some disciples up the mountain with Jesus, others are working with the crowds below. Now they've all *gathered* back together and Jesus has something to tell them.

**Passion Predictions:** Three times in Matthew Jesus formally announces the plan for his crucifixion and resurrection (16:21; **17:22-23**; 20:17-19).

- (1) "From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Matt 16:21)
  - This is the scene where Peter is described as a rock of the church and goes from confessing Jesus is the Christ to being called Satan because he can't imagine the Messiah suffering and dying. He had only envisioned a warrior-king and not a suffering servant.
- (2) Matt 17:22-23 (our text tonight)
- (3) "And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day'" (20:17-19).
  - Immediately after this prediction, the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee<sup>5</sup>, asks Jesus to place her sons at his right and left hand in his coming kingdom. She thinks she is securing them a coveted position of power and prestige. But Jesus *chastises* her because she doesn't know what she's asking. Discipleship will lead to sharing in the suffering of Christ.

**He's Not Hiding:** He's not hiding the plan from them. He's discussing with them. He's telling them "this is what is going to happen." What is keeping them from understanding his plan? There's no information missing? He's not being ambiguous? Why are they surprised? The

---

<sup>4</sup> <sup>22</sup> Συστρεφομένων δὲ αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Μέλλει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου παραδίδοσθαι εἰς χεῖρας ἀνθρώπων, <sup>23</sup> καὶ ἀποκτενοῦσιν αὐτόν, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐγερθήσεται. καὶ ἐλυπήθησαν σφόδρα.

<sup>5</sup> You have to say "Zebedee" with your best Adam Sandler scat voice (e.g., "Zebedee-doo-da").

problem seems to be their willingness to accept and submit to what he says. They can't believe that things will go differently than their plan, that Jesus would bring about his kingdom in some way other than what they imagine. "Sin blinds us, including to our own blindness."

- What are we surprised by? God has told us everything we need to know. There are things he hasn't told us but nothing we *need to know* is missing. Why are we surprised when the things he's told us happen?
  - The world will hate us. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn 15:18-19).
    - Why do we think we can earn acceptance in the world? Why do we try to cozy up and get the approval of the world? Why are we surprised that the world rejects our Biblical principles?
  - The path of discipleship is narrow. "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many" (Matt 7:13).
    - Why are we surprised that people reject the gospel? We should be more surprised when they accept the call to follow Jesus!
  - The love of money is dangerous. "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity" (Ecc 5:10). "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim 6:10).
    - Why do we think we can love money with no danger? Why do we think money will solve our problems rather than create it? Money is not evil but the love of it will tempt you away from God (and you and I aren't exceptions to that rule). What do you **daydream** about it?
  - Persecution is a promise. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).
    - Why are we surprised when suffering and ostracization comes? "*Will be*" is a promise.

### Three Components of His Plan:

(1) **Betrayal** "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men,

**Son of Man:** This is a common phrase in Matthew's gospel but is often misunderstood. A lot of people hear "Son of Man" and think this is just a reference to Jesus' humanity (cf. "Word become flesh," Jn 1:14). And the term is occasionally used in the OT to mean "human being" (e.g., מִן־בְּנֵי־אָדָם Ps 8:4). In fact, Ezekiel (the prophet) is called a "son of man" to emphasize that he is a mere mortal. **But** by the time of the first century (2TJ) this phrase is understood almost the complete opposite because of the prominence of the prophecy of Daniel 7: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory

and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14). People understood that the "son of Man" of Daniel 7 is a person with transcendent qualities, a royal person who God gives eternal dominion to. He is enthroned beside God. All earthly rulers are stripped of their power and it is given to God's king.

- Religious leaders of Jesus' day understood this to be the messiah. The "Son of Man" is God's agent of his kingdom.
- Most people still hadn't put all the pieces of the OT mosaic together to see the larger picture (though it is all there). They missed that the messiah would suffer to save (rather than merely conquer with military power). They missed that God himself would become flesh (e.g., God became king).
- But, they knew that "Son of Man" was not the opposite of Son of God. Son of Man is not the "human" side of Jesus and Son of God the "divine." Rather, Son of Man is the royal designation of the Messiah.

**Ironic Reversal:** So when Jesus describes that "the Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men" there is a play on words (ἀνθρώπου / ἀνθρώπων). It is painfully ironic for the Son of Man to be under the power of mere men. The Son of Man has the eternal power of God, yet he is given over to the finite and limited power of human beings.

- Notice how Jesus is "passive" in this description (e.g., handed over, killed, be raised).
- For the Son of Man to be killed means he must surrender himself to the power of others. He had to choose to die: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (Jn 10:17-18).
- Jesus has the power to run away. Jesus has the power to destroy them. Jesus has the power to resist... but he doesn't. He *chose* to die for us (e.g., *Man on Fire*, Denzel Washington, "a life for a life," turning himself in and not hiding).

**Betrayal:** Jesus was "given" (παράδωμι) into the hands of men (can be translated entrust, delivered, handed over, arrested, betrayed). It is the word translated as "betrayal" when referencing Judas.

- Descriptions of the physical pain of the crucifixion was like the youth group's theological version of scared straight. But compared to the physical pain we often forget that the emotional and spiritual toll is even greater (e.g., think about your worst moment of guilt, shame, or anguish and multiply it by every feeling and every person who has ever lived).
- Psychologists have demonstrated that "betrayal from a close relationship hurts more than a distant public figure. Betrayal is a moment of broken trust. Those relationships upon which we ground ourselves and orient ourselves to the world are lost. Our foundation feels unstable." Betrayal usually involves someone choosing their own self-interest above your well-being (which is the opposite of the gospel). \*The gospel says, "I'll sacrifice my interests for the interest of others."
- Jesus was betrayed for you! **The great exchange:** he was betrayed, abandoned, accused, and punished *for us*, so that we could have forgiveness, righteousness, and

new life *in him*. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).

**Enemies:** Jesus had many prominent enemies (e.g., Jewish leaders) **but it’s the failure of a close friend that makes this a “betrayal.”**

- Judas realizes that Jesus is going to be crucified — **he gets it, but he doesn’t like it**. He wants to be on the winning team. This was not the mission that he signed up for (e.g., poverty, crucifixion, etc.). “Judas concluded that it was in his own best interest to abandon Jesus before it was too late.”
- He battled this messianic misunderstanding we’ve seen: he saw Jesus as a conqueror of Rome and a successful leader of a movement (a successful leader means lots of people and lots of donations). He was all in for the power and financial benefits. Judas was cool with a popular leader but he couldn’t handle a dying Messiah. He wanted a conquering warrior, a political hero, and an enriching leader but he didn’t want a suffering savior.
- Judas believed Jesus was the Messiah, he just missed what the Bible says the Messiah is. So when Jesus didn’t live up to *his* expectation of the Messiah, he was out. In the end, he only followed Jesus as long as Jesus fit into *his* paradigm. (e.g. Quest for the Historical Jesus, “Jesus looks like a 19th century liberal German”).

**How many of us are happy to follow Jesus until we find that where he is taking us is not where we want to go?** In some sense, all the disciples are fair-weather followers before the resurrection (e.g. Peter betrays, they fall asleep in the garden). So, when Jesus tells them someone will betray him, they all start to look around and say, “Lord is it I?” They may not have sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver, but none of them will go all the way with Jesus. They have a price whereby they will betray Jesus. Judas may do it spectacularly, but they all will do it eventually.

**A Price:** Judas’ price was 30 pieces of silver (approximately a month’s wages). It’s not nothing but it shouldn’t be enough to betray Jesus. Here’s a question: **What’s your price?** What do you value more than Jesus? At what point does his call exceed your comfort? Anything but... (e.g., money, sexual freedom, career, family, tradition, etc.)? True discipleship means acknowledging your “price” and submitting it to Jesus, saying he is “priceless.”

(2) **Death** <sup>23</sup> and they will kill him, Sin demands death. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). God promised death in the garden as the result of sin and we see that all things die physically and, because of sin, spiritually. So, all of us are on the hook for sin. We all are corrupted by sin and, as this text reminds, also walk freely into our sin.

- Not only is the price of their sin death but the choice of their sin is to kill the Son of God.
- (1) In one sense, nothing kills Jesus (he chooses to lay his life down); (2) in another sense our sins demand the cross to pay them.

**The Price He Paid:** That price is unfathomable. It was the price of our sin that we can’t pay; and cost him his own life (“salvation is free but not cheap”). Your value is astronomical because

Jesus was willing to pay his life to redeem you (e.g., lovely because we are loved; valuable because we are valued; not *vice versa*).

(3) **Resurrection** and he will be raised on the third day.” “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

- “The gospel (the good news) of Christ’s reign is as far and wide as creation, it is as far-reaching as his invitation to feast at the King’s table. But the *core*, the center, the weight of the gospel, that creates its gravity and holds the story together is the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Missing All the Good News:** As central as the cross is (e.g., “preach Christ crucified”), as indispensable the crucifixion must remain, the gospel doesn’t end at the cross.

- “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:7).
- “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21).

The resurrection reminds us that Jesus isn’t *just* the payment for sin but *also* the conqueror of death. He is not only the suffering servant but the victorious King. Our debt has been paid and death has been defeated.

- “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:8-11).

The resurrection reminds us that we serve a living God and have been given *life*. The cross reminds us our sins are dead; the resurrection reminds us we are alive.

## 2. The Short-Sighted Focus of the Disciples (23b)

**Disciples Response:** And they were greatly distressed. This description of the plan of Jesus is similar to the previous one found in chapter 16 with two notable additions: the description of betrayal and the description of the disciples’ reaction. Why are they distressed? What is causing their sorrow?

- (1) There is a certain level of godly grief that should accompany meditating on the death of Jesus.
- (2) But Hebrews tells us that Jesus endured the cross for the “joy set before him.” How can the cross and joy go together?
  - The good news of the gospel demands a joyful response. Jesus describes the salvation of the lost as creating joy (e.g., Lk 15). Jesus promises to give joy to those who believe in him (Jn 15:11, 16:22).
- Sorrow is appropriate but, by itself, is incomplete because it fails to see that the cross leads to the resurrection.

**Death-Focused:** They are focused on the “death” set before him, rather than the “joy” of the resurrection. They can’t get past the crucifixion to rejoice in the resurrection (e.g., saying the quiet part loud and the loud part quiet; shouting the death and whispering the resurrection).

- “The rejection, suffering, and death so dominated their thinking that they could not see beyond it” (France). They seem confident he can predict his death but not his resurrection.
- Is your faith robust enough to embrace the call to suffer and rejoice in the promise of eternal life?

**All of Christ’s Plan:** If we are going to follow Christ we must embrace the joy and the pain, the victory and the suffering, the cross and the resurrection.

### **Conclusion:**

We must joyfully and obediently obey and follow *all* of Jesus’ plan. When we baptize, our custom is to ask two things: faith (do you believe) and obedience (will you go where he calls you to go and do whatever he calls you to do?). Basically, we’re asking if you’ll put your “yes” on the table.

- “Why should we exempt ourselves from the condition which Christ, *our leader*, had to submit, especially since he submitted to it *for our sake* to show us an example of patience *in himself*? [Paul] reminds us that God has destined all his children to be conformed to Christ. That means that even in harsh and difficult situations, often thought of as adverse and evil, we can have great comfort. Christ passed through all sorts of evils into heavenly glory. In the same way, by sharing Christ’s sufferings we are led through various tribulations to the same glory. When we come to know the sharing of his sufferings, we grasp at the same time the power of his resurrection. When we become like him in his death, we are made ready to share his glorious resurrection. Be comforted, the more we are afflicted with adversities, the more our fellowship with Christ is confirmed! By communion with him the very sufferings themselves become blessings and spur us toward holiness” (Calvin, *adapted*).
- Will you trust *all* of God’s plan (even the sorrowful, difficult, and uncomfortable parts)?
- God promises his plan for you is *for your good*. The cross leads to the resurrection.