

Matthew 26:57-68
The Christ Prophecies to the Sanhedrin
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Today is January 1st, the first day in a new year. Today is also the Lord's Day, the first day in the week, the day upon which we assemble weekly for worship. Also, we will today be partaking of the Lord's Supper. All of this fits together nicely because on the first day of the year, we tend to think about the passing of time. On the first day of the year, we tend to think about the ending of the old year and the beginning of the new year. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are also looking at both the past and the future. Jesus said that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are to do this in remembrance of Him. We are to look back in time and remember His broken body and His shed blood. We are to remember the work that Jesus did in order to earn our salvation, the price Jesus paid in order to purchase our redemption. Then we are also to look to the future. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:26:

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we look ahead to the coming day when Jesus will return to earth in His glorified body and will complete the application of His saving work. On that day, He will remove the curse from creation and establish the new heavens and new earth. He will resurrect His people from the dead and give them glorified bodies patterned after His own.

He will deliver His people totally from their sinful inclinations and make them perfect in holiness. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we look to the past and remember Jesus' atoning work. We look to the future and anticipate His bodily return to earth. Finally we look to today, to the present, and rededicate ourselves to His worship and service. The Lord's Supper is, among many things, a covenant renewal ceremony, an occasion for the people of God to rededicate themselves publicly to Jesus' worship and service. When we do this at the beginning of a new year, it is a way to dedicate the coming year to the Lord.

The Lord's Supper points at the past, and we remember Jesus' atoning death. The Lord's Supper points to the future, and we look for Jesus' return at the end of the age. The Lord's Supper points to today, and we dedicate ourselves to Him anew.

In preparing for the Lord's Supper today, we will again be looking at the trial of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the trial which led to His crucifixion as a sacrifice for our sins. In our text for today, Jesus is before Caiaphas the high priest and the Jewish ruling council called the Sanhedrin. Caiaphas had not brought Jesus before himself and the council to try to determine if Jesus was guilty of anything, to try to discover if Jesus had done anything worthy of punishment by a court. Caiaphas had already decided weeks before that Jesus must die. His purpose in bringing Jesus before him for questioning was to find an excuse for Jesus' execution at the hands of the occupying Romans.

Caiaphas brought in a multitude of false witnesses. Jesus was silent as the false witnesses refuted their own testimonies through obvious contradictions. Then two witnesses, probably

members of the Sanhedrin, accused Jesus based on a statement Jesus had made three years earlier at His first cleansing of the temple. At that time, Jesus had said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus was referring to the temple of His body, referring to His own death and resurrection. These two witnesses misquoted and misinterpreted Jesus’ words as a threat to destroy Herod’s temple in Jerusalem. We read in Mark’s Gospel that these two witnesses, even when bearing witness to the same statement of Jesus, could not consistently agree in their allegations. This effort to incriminate Jesus also failed.

Then Caiaphas the high priest tried something entirely different. Instead of bringing accusations, he challenged Jesus to tell him under oath if Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus broke His silence and said yes. When challenged to witness the good confession and to identify Himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, Jesus spoke up. Jesus replied to Caiaphas, “It is as you have said.” This is another way of saying, “Yes, indeed, that is so; I am the Messiah, the Son of God.”

That brings us to the statement of Christ which we will be focussing on today. Jesus continued and said, “Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” We will focus on that one statement this morning under three headings: paradox, prediction and pledge.

First, we will look at the **paradox** which is implied in the word “nevertheless.” The word “nevertheless” is an adverb which

implies some degree of contrast, an adverb which implies the existence of two facts which appear to contradict each other. To say “nevertheless” is to say that something is true in spite of something else which is also true. To say “nevertheless” is to say that two facts are both true even though it seems inconsistent for both to be true. What is the contrast in our text implied by the use of the word “nevertheless”? Jesus said, “I am the Messiah; nevertheless, ...” The contrast is not with Jesus’ claim to being the Messiah. The contrast is with the circumstances in which Jesus made this claim. Here He was, standing before Caiaphas arrested and bound. He was in a state of humiliation. He was here despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. In that context, in those circumstances, He cried out, “Nevertheless.” This is the “nevertheless” of faith. In spite of His lowly condition, He was going to be exalted. In fact, it was because of His lowly position that He was going to be exalted. He was in this lowly position voluntarily as a result of His obedience to God and His desire to please God by doing God’s will. God was therefore going to exalt Jesus in due time.

Philippians 2:5-11

- 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
- 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
- 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
- 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We are to have the same mind as Jesus, the same attitude. We are to claim this paradox and live in terms of it. We are to live in terms of this “nevertheless.” We are to keep covenant with God. We are to do what is right. We are to obey God and do His will. That may at times put us in a lowly position, a despised position, an embarrassing position, a painful position. We are to follow the example of Jesus and say that word of faith, “nevertheless.” What is important is that we are at peace with God. What is important is that we are doing the will of God. What is important is the God is with us. What is important is that God is for us and not against us. What is important is that God will exalt us in due time. We must believe this, and we must live this out.

First, we see the paradox implied in the word “nevertheless.” Second we see the **prediction** implied in the word “hereafter,” a word which looks to the future. Jesus told Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin that at some point in the future, they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power (the Almighty), and coming on the clouds of heaven. Jesus, here in the midst of His humiliation, spoke as a prophet and predicted His coming exaltation.

Jesus said that there was coming a day when He would be seated at the right hand of God, which is the place of all authority in

heaven and on earth. This would be in fulfillment of the second Psalm. The second Psalm says that the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed. How appropriately this psalm applies to our Lord's trial before this ruling council! The second Psalm goes on to say that the Lord in heaven laughs at these conspirators, and that the Lord has already set His King on God's holy hill in Zion. God has given Him the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession. And God's Anointed will rule with a rod of iron.

Jesus' prediction about His being seated at the right hand of the Almighty is also a reference to the prophecy found in the one hundred tenth Psalm:

- 1 The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."
- 4 The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Jesus would be like Melchizedek, the ancient king of Salem who blessed Abraham and received a tithe from him. Melchizedek was both king and priest. Under the Mosaic covenant, this was not possible because the high priest had to be a descendant of Aaron from the tribe of Levi and the king had to be a descendant of David from the tribe of Judah. The Messiah, however, would be both priest and king according to the order of Melchizedek. Jesus was saying that He would fulfill this Messianic prophecy. He would be seated at the right hand of the Almighty and rule as king while also serving as priest for the people of God.

Jesus' prophetic words also used the language of the Son of Man vision in the seventh chapter of Daniel. In that chapter, four successive pagan world empires are symbolized by four beasts. The first beast, a lion with eagle's wings, represented the Babylonian empire. The second beast, a bear, represented the Medo-Persian empire. The third beast, a leopard with four wings and four heads, represented the Greek empire established by Alexander the Great. The fourth beast, a dreadful beast with no comparison in nature, was the Roman empire. Out of this fourth beast arose a little horn speaking pompous things. I believe this was a reference to the Roman Caesars who did indeed speak pompous things, such as claiming to be the savior of the world. The Romans Caesars were worshipped as gods after they died, and some insisted on being worshiped while still alive and insisted on being called lord and god.

After mentioning the little horn which spoke pompous things, Daniel received a vision of the establishment of a new kingdom that is different. This kingdom is represented not by a wild beast but by a human, by one like the Son of Man.

Daniel 7:11-14

- 11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame.
- 12 "As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.
- 13 "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He

came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.

- 14 Then 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 the one which shall not be destroyed.

Jesus was on earth during the time of the Roman Empire and the rule of the pagan Caesars. In this vision, Daniel said, “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!” Jesus said to the Sanhedrin, “That language refers to Me!”

Jesus was here looking ahead to His resurrection and to His ascension to the right hand of God the Father. After His resurrection, Jesus stated that He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth. When Jesus did later actually ascend bodily into heaven, we read in Acts chapter one that “He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of [the disciples’] sight.”

The language in Daniel about coming with the clouds of heaven refers not to Jesus’ coming down to earth but to Jesus’ coming up to heaven where He received all authority. Yet this same language is also appropriate for Christ’s bodily return to earth. When Jesus ascended to heaven and disappeared in a cloud, two angels were present. The disciples were unable to take their eyes off the heavens where Jesus disappeared, and finally the two angels said to them, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into

heaven.” Jesus’ ascended bodily into heaven on a cloud, and He will one day return bodily to earth on a cloud. Both His ascension into heaven and His return to earth will be a coming on the clouds. When Jesus returns, He will exercise His authority in raising the dead and assembling them before Himself for judgment.

I had said earlier that the word “nevertheless” was a word of faith. So is the word “hereafter.” Jesus lived in the present, enduring suffering and humiliation, patiently waiting for the hereafter, the time of His exaltation. He kept covenant with God the Father in His difficult circumstances, and He left the timing of His coming exaltation up to God the Father.

In this context, I cannot help but think of the premature and illegitimate exaltation which Satan offered to the first Adam in the garden. Satan said, Eat of the forbidden fruit, and you will be exalted from your creaturely state, you will become like God. This pseudo-exaltation which Satan offered to Adam was immoral both in its nature and in its timing.

Satan is always offering people illegitimate and premature exaltations. These temptations are roads to hell camouflaged as shortcuts to heaven. We need to resist and reject all such temptations. We need instead to follow the example of Jesus, the second Adam. We need to keep covenant, obeying God in the present and trusting God to exalt us, to reward us with glorious but appropriate rewards, in due time, which means in God’s time. We endure the suffering and the injustice of this life, trusting that there is coming a day of glory and justice. We follow the example of Jesus, and we live the life of faith, living the present in the light of the future.

We have looked at the paradox implied by the word “nevertheless” and the prediction implied by the word “hereafter.” Our last point is the **pledge**. I am referring to Jesus’ statement that the high priest Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin would themselves see the coming exaltation of Jesus. Of course, this will be fulfilled in a complete and perfect sense at the Second Coming of Christ. All of these men will be resurrected from the grave in the resurrection of condemnation. They will see the exalted, glorified Christ, and they will stand before His judgment seat, and He will then condemn them for their sins.

Yet when Jesus here says, “You will see,” I think there is at least some reference to their seeing something of Christ’s exaltation in this life before they died. They might see and not perceive, see and not acknowledge, see and not recognize, but I believe they would actually see with their own eyes some significant tokens of the power and authority of the exalted Christ.

“Tokens of the power of Christ” is the phrase used by Charles Spurgeon in his exposition of this verse. Spurgeon refers to the empty tomb, the evidence of Jesus’ resurrection which was reported to the Jewish authorities by the soldiers who had guarded the tomb. Then Spurgeon mentions the day of Pentecost and the conversion of 3000 Jews. Then the apostolic miracles, and the conversion of Paul, and the growing church spreading to all the nations of the world. And finally there was the destruction of Jerusalem, an event prophesied by Jesus. Spurgeon comments on this event as a special token of Jesus’ power which occurred before that spiritually adulterous generation passed away. In this comment, Spurgeon refers to a

comet in the sky and a drawn sword over Jerusalem. You may not have heard of these; they are events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem which were recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus. Here is what Spurgeon says:

Yes, say you, but did they see him coming in the clouds of heaven? I answer, yes. Henceforth they saw that also, for they began to have upon their minds forebodings, and dark thoughts. The Jewish nation was in an ill state, the people were getting disquieted, impostors were rising, and the leading men of the nation trembled as to what the Romans would do. At last there came an outbreak, and the imperial power was defied, and then such of them as still survived began to realize the words of Christ. When they saw the comet in the sky, and the drawn sword hanging over Jerusalem, when they saw the city compassed about with armies, when they marked the legions dig the trenches, and throw up the earthworks and surround the devoted city, while all around was fire and famine; when from every tower upon the walls they could see one of their own countrymen nailed to a cross, for the Romans put the Jews to death by crucifixion by hundreds, and even by thousands, - then must they have begun to see the coming of the Son of man. And when, at last, the city was destroyed and a firebrand was hurled even into the holy place, and the Jews were banished and sold for slaves till they would not fetch the price of a pair of shoes, so many were they and so greatly despised, - then they saw the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven to take vengeance on his adversaries.

I agree with Spurgeon that these events were partial fulfillments of Christ's pledge that that adulterous generation which rejected Him would see some manifestation of His exaltation before they passed away.

Before closing, let me point out that this prophecy proclaimed by Jesus before His enemies was a sincere offer of the gospel to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. It was a warning of things to come, and God's warnings are always sincere offers and opportunities for repentance. The high priest responded to this prophesy not in repentance but with the charge of blasphemy. This charge was based on more than Jesus' claiming to be the Messiah. They would not have charged Jesus with blasphemy if Jesus had claimed to be the sort of Messiah they were expecting and wanted, if Jesus had claimed to be a political and military leader who could overthrow Rome and exalt Israel in the world as a nation. But Jesus had claimed to be a different sort of Messiah, a spiritual Messiah with authority and power which belongs only to God. So they charged Jesus with blasphemy, and then mocked Him as a prophet.

67 Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck
Him with the palms of their hands,
68 saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck
You?"

Our response to Christ is different. We look to the past, to Christ's suffering, and we embrace the paradox of cross and crown. The paradox of the cross and crown is to some a stumblingblock, but is to us the wisdom of God and the power of God. We look to the future, and we accept Jesus' prophecy of

coming events. We look for His bodily return, and we look for tokens of His power within history. We look to today, to the present, and we dedicate ourselves to His worship and service.