

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Matthew 26:1-46**

**Sermon: Palm Sunday 2020**

When a couple is engaged to be married, countless decisions must be made. Among them are the day and the time of the wedding. First, there's the day. What day works best for family and friends? What season of the year will make for the picture-perfect wedding? When is the church available? And then there's the hour. When should the wedding begin? Enough time needs to be allotted for pictures and for guests to go to the reception but not too much time. Once day and time are set, wedding websites actually count down the days, hours, and minutes until the happy occasion.

On this Palm Sunday, we discover that our God is also concerned about time, in particular, not only the day but also the hour of his Son's death, and rightly so. The hour of Christ's death is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. When Adam and Eve sinned, God promised a time when the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. This prophecy was the first of hundreds more to follow through the centuries.

The prophets declare who this Promised One will be: the Messiah, the Son of God, the all-powerful King whose kingdom will never end, the faithful servant of the Lord, and yes God himself. The prophets describe what the Coming One will do. Although Lord of all, he is the servant of all. He will proclaim the Gospel, heal the sick, and give sight to the blind. The prophets declare that the king of all comes to save not in power with horse and chariot, but in humility riding on a donkey. He will be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. He will be despised and rejected, mocked, beaten, spit upon. His hands and feet will be pierced and his clothing divided by casting lots. He will be stricken, smitten, and afflicted as God lays our iniquity and the iniquity of the entire world upon him. He gives his life as the perfect offering for our sin so that by his wounds we are healed.

However, it wasn't only the prophets who foretold the hour of Christ's death. The festivals, the sacrifices, and the temple itself all find their culmination in Christ's death. The coming of our Savior is the Year of Jubilee, his death the Day of Atonement.

He dies at the feast of Passover, for he is our Paschal Lamb. All the blood shed at the temple altar points to the shedding of his blood on the altar of the cross. He is the eternal temple, destroyed only to be rebuilt in three days.

Thus, not only the Old Testament but the entirety of our Lord's earthly ministry anticipates the hour of his death. Before his first miracle, the changing of water into wine, he announces that his hour has not yet come. There would be times when the religious leaders desire to arrest Jesus and put him to death, but it does not happen because his hour has not yet come. Finally, the chief priests and elders do conspire to put Jesus to death; they plan to do so after the Passover feast. But that isn't the divinely appointed hour either, for the Lamb of God is not to be sacrificed after the feast but during Passover. So after earnestly praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that, if it was his Father's will, he be saved from this hour, Jesus then declares to his disciples: "See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matthew 26:45). Now it is God's time, the hour.

The entire Old Testament, all of human history, centers on the hour, the ninth hour on Good Friday, three in the afternoon, when Jesus died. His death was preceded by three hours of eerie and unexplainable darkness, a sign of God's judgment and wrath over sin. Then at the ninth hour, the hour when the lamb was slaughtered at the temple, when all that was prophesied was fulfilled, Jesus yielded up his spirit. No one took his life from him, but he gave up his life of his own accord, at that time, at that hour.

The death of Jesus at the ninth hour on Good Friday fulfills prophecy and is the climax of our Lord's earthly ministry. This event was the culmination of history. But, not only is the hour of Christ's death the center and focus of the scriptures and all history, but the hour of Christ's death is the hour of our salvation.

At that hour, the Lamb of God shed his blood and offered his life as the sacrifice for our sin. Our perfect Passover lamb has been sacrificed. All our iniquities were placed on him. Good Friday is our day of atonement as Christ offered himself as our substitute.

The mob at Jesus' trial shouted, "***His blood be on us and on our children!***" (Matthew 27:25). They spoke in derision. We speak in faith, "His blood be on us and on our children," for the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. The blood of the Lamb is the means by which our sin-stained clothes are washed and made white. His blood is not only on us but in us, as during this hour we would be receiving his body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, if it weren't for COVID-19.

The hour of Christ's death is the hour of our salvation. When Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, top to bottom. The hour of his death not only reveals that he is the perfect Lamb but also our Great High Priest, who has offered the atoning sacrifice for our sin. With that all-availing sacrifice, there is no curtain of separation. The way to the Father has been opened for us through the flesh of Jesus. Our sin no longer separates us from your Creator. Instead, we have access to the Most Holy Place, the heavenly temple, where we will dwell in the presence of God for all eternity.

The hour of Christ's death is the hour of our salvation. When Jesus died, there was an earthquake, and in that hour, the bodies of many believers were raised from the dead. As the centurion witnessed these events unfold, he confessed, ***“Truly this was the Son of God”*** (Matthew 27:54). This will not be the only earthquake with the subsequent opening of tombs. On the third day, at an early hour, there will be yet another earthquake, and the angel of the Lord will roll back the stone from the tomb where Jesus was placed. The saints that were raised from the dead on Good Friday point ahead to Christ's resurrection and to our resurrection on the Last Day.

As Jesus declares, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. . . . Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out”*** (John 5:25, 28–29, emphasis added).

The believers raised from the dead on Good Friday reveal the purpose of our Lord's death: to save those who were condemned to die eternally.

Since he died and rose again, an hour is coming when our bodies will be raised from death and we will enter with him into the life that never ends.

The hour of Christ's death is no coincidence. The very hour, the very moment of his death was planned from eternity. This is good news for each of us because the hour of Christ's death is the hour of your salvation.

The hour we commemorate Jesus' death is at hand. He enters Jerusalem on the donkey's colt, his eyes fixed on the cross. In the coming days, we walk the way of sorrows with him to the very hour of his death, confident that the moment he yields up his spirit is the hour of our salvation.

Amen