

Watch with Creation at the Cross

Master of the Universe Betrayed

- ⚡ **Word-powered good beginning**
- ☠ **Sin-powered fear since the Fall**
- ✝ **Mercy triumphs over judgment.**
- ⚡ **Word-powered justice on our side**

In the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, dearly redeemed children of God:

Would you agree that most Americans can't seem to make promises anymore? Look at how long it's been since our society on the wide screen left behind marriage promises and mostly shows them as broken or a burden. We seem to be finding more ways to let people out of their contracts whether in mortgage or labor. Some citizens even complain if a politician keeps his promises – as if that's not to be expected. But as we turn back to God's promises again this evening and contrast His faithfulness with our sinfulness, I can't help remembering what newsman Paul Harvey said sometime in his distinguished career: "In times like these we should always remember there have always been times like these."

Look at this contrast, how willing God is to promise absolutely the very best, then keep every promise no matter the cost to Him. Tonight as we *Watch with Creation at the Cross*, we marvel at the **Master of the Universe Betrayed**. Christ stands in wonder as the true God who brought about the...

⚡ **Word-powered good beginning**

All was chaos in the building materials God created until He organized everything. On Day 2, God went to work with His powerful Word and said, "***Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.***" We don't have time to fully discuss that "***expanse***" or "***firmament***" (KJV) which God created to separate water above from water below. The Hebrew word is רָקִיעַ – RAKIA. God called the רָקִיעַ, שָׁמַיִם, or *heavens*, but the NIV is too limiting when it says only, "sky." Later we hear that God's birds literally "flew against the face of the רָקִיעַ." The Holy Spirit describes it as a *curtain* or a *canopy*, a *tent* (Isaiah 40:22). From below the רָקִיעַ looks as "***hard as a mirror of cast bronze.***" (Job 37:18)

One old commentator: "It reaches as high as the place where the stars are fixed, for that is called the *firmament of heaven* (v. 14, 15), and as low as the place where the birds fly, for that also is called the *firmament of heaven* (v. 20)... The height of the heavens should remind us of God's supremacy and the infinite distance...between us and him; the brightness of the heavens and their purity should remind us of his glory, and majesty, and perfect holiness; the vastness of the heavens, their encompassing of the earth, and the influence they have upon it, should remind us of his immensity and universal providence."¹

Most of all we want to remember this evening that all of what is out there above the ground to the depths of outer space came about when God spoke His almighty Word. And that Word from His mouth, the extension of God's power, is none other than Jesus Himself. "***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.***" (John 1:1-3 NIV)

¹ Henry, Matthew. (1996, c1991). *Commentary on the whole Bible – unabridged*. (Ge 1:6). Peabody: Hendrickson.

☠ Sin-powered fear since the Fall

God's awesome power throughout the **Universe** was bright and clear to ancient believers like King David. A thousand years before Christ was born of the virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit inspired David to write in Psalm 19:1 – *“The heavens (שמים) declare the glory of God; the skies (רקיע) proclaim the work of his hands.”* In Hebrew parallelism we see why David was so brave when he was running for his life from King Saul. David knew from experience the **Sin-powered fear** that came into God's perfect world ever **since the Fall** into sin. David was a target of King Saul's hunting expeditions for one simple reason. Saul feared David would try to steal his kingdom due to his popularity after defeating Goliath.

But do you know some of the inspiring stories of David, as the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ, passing up one opportunity after another to kill Saul? David was living in the true and holy, faith-fear of the LORD. David knew he was anointed as Saul's successor, but as long as Saul was alive, Saul remained the LORD's anointed and therefore David's superior – even if it meant running for his life.

This just won't happen in our movies. When you see two rivals meet in the restroom, blood ends up on the floor and one doesn't get out alive. David had his chance with his men back in a cave when Saul came in to use the restroom. David's men whispered a definite death sentence. But the young king-to-be absolutely refused and spared Saul's life instead. David waited until God Himself took out Saul.

If only David had continued to live in the true fear God. His adultery with Bathsheba and vain attempt to cover it up by murdering her husband Uriah the Hittite along with his fellow faithful soldiers – all point to the way David betrayed the **Master of the Universe**. Several of the Penitential Psalms in this Lenten series liturgy came out of the agony of David's guilt as he looked back on his sin and felt sick in body and soul. When you and I finally realize the depth of our own depravity, the shameful way we have disappointed our God and hurt our closest loved ones, we realize what **fear** has done in our lives ever **since the Fall**. We do not **fear** God above all things. We fear people and our own sense of failure, often because our promises seem to have a price too high. Lord, be gracious and help us see how your...

✝ Mercy triumphs over judgment.

They were in the city of David a thousand years later when Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples in the upper room that first Maundy Thursday. Before Jesus washed His disciples feet, John reports that Jesus was very aware as the **Master of the Universe**: *“Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.”* That's why He could mercifully humble Himself to wash His disciples' feet even though they were still arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus also *“knew who was going to betray him”* (John 13:3,11 NIV), and so He kept trying to reach Judas while there still was time.

But Judas went out into the night and then went after Jesus like a SWAT team commander storming a grocery store to arrest a child for shop lifting. Why would anyone think he needed a whole *“detachment”* (NIV) of soldiers to arrest a Jewish rabbi? It seems they were all on foot, but the Greek word could actually include cavalry too! You've heard of heroes who stay cool under fire. You probably admire people as I do who have such calm, collected control of their emotions no matter what troubles are staring them in the face. But how could Jesus who had just been sweating great drops of blood in prayer – while His disciples all slept! – still go out and meet *“Judas [who was] guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.”* Fight gives way to flight so badly outnumbered!

But Jesus is the **Master of the Universe**. He is about to demonstrate what it means for us and all God-betraying sinners that **Mercy triumphs over judgment**. Jesus knew who He was, why He came and clearly where He was headed to the cross on His way to victory for us all.

“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” If we’re like Peter and the rest, we’re ready to run or use that sword hanging at your side. But Jesus would have none of that physical force either. How could the soldiers miss Jesus’ miracle reattaching the servant’s ear? How could they miss His **Mercy** commanding Peter to put away His sword? How could they miss the power of this universal **Master** when they answered, *“Jesus of Nazareth,”* and He literally responded, *“I AM”* (εγω ειμι)?

We can’t quite get across in English what happened next. An unseen force in the power of Jesus’ words drove them backwards. They did not drop where they stood when they first heard, *“I AM,”* but driven into the background, they fell to the ground. And somehow they missed the fact that all their heavy weapons along with the full authority of church and state, held no power against the **Master of the Universe**. Not once, but twice Jesus asked, *“Who is it you want?”* Not twice but three times, He identified Himself as the great, *“I AM.”* (John 18:5,6,8) Do you suppose that the eternal God with infinite power over the **Universe** could have banished that mob to a distant planet to freeze or fry in instant agony? Yes, but instead the **Master of the Universe** allows Himself to be **Betrayed**. His **Mercy triumphs over judgment** to save the souls of all His enemies from eternal torture in hell. His power is awesome and marvelous to behold. But His **Mercy** is even greater to taste in all its sweet, sweet love.

✠ **Word-powered justice on our side**

Just remember that some stubborn morning when you wake up on the wrong side of the bed ready to do battle with everyone at home or at work. You know it’s wrong as I do to take our frustrations out on those we love. Jesus shows us how wrong it is to hate our enemies. He loves His enemies in **Mercy** and uses His **Mercy** to bring us back over to God’s side. What a blessing it is on those brain-fried mornings to step back in prayer from our frustrations and look again at Jesus our **Master of the Universe Betrayed**. This He did for me, and not only for me, but for you and for all, to patiently again and again face off with our rebellion against God’s love and suffer our penalty under the angry justice of God. There was no other way. The Father’s silence to Jesus’ prayers had just spoken that so loudly as our Lord woke up His disciples and stepped into the light of the torches and lanterns. There was no other way than that the innocent Son of God should let His heavenly Father pile all our guilt and shame on the **Master of the Universe** to carry every grievance and every grief to that cursed tree of the cross.

When by the Gospel our souls finally wake up to the faithfulness of God in making and keeping all His promises, then we realize whose side we’re on, thanks to our gracious God. For John finishes this report on the betrayal of our Creator with Jesus’ kind request to the mob on behalf of His unfaithful disciples: *“I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.”* How could He be so unselfish at such a time as this? The Holy Spirit pulls back the cover on God’s **justice** by telling us, *“This happened so that the words he had spoken [in His High Priestly Prayer to His Father] would be fulfilled: ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me.’”*

Brought back by mercy we marvel at God’s **Word-powered justice on our side**. No forces of heaven or hell will ever prevail against us now that God has declared us, “Not guilty!” for Jesus’ sake. **Betrayed** for us and in our place, Jesus remains the **Master of the Universe** whose courageous kindness and all-forgiving mercy powers us to ever increasing worship and obedience of faith.

Watch in wonder. *Watch with Creation at the Cross*. The **Master of the Universe Betrayed** – for you. Amen.