

Menlo Park Presbyterian Church
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Series: Unbroken
Matthew 26:26-28

January 29, 2012

“Broken – The Final Lesson”
John Ortberg

[Video]

John Ortberg: Remember, in the ancient world, the thinkers said a conqueror was one who maintained his tranquility in the face of an impersonal world that's always going to be broken. That was a conqueror. They could hold on to serenity in the middle of their hardship lists. Paul says, "*No...*" Paul says, "*...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us...*" when we were sinners.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's why hope doesn't disappoint. That's the lesson from the raft.

What if we could say to Louis, when he comes next week, "Hey, Louis Zamperini, more than 60 years after you got out of that prisoner-of-war camp, you have sparked a massive campaign of reconciliation around here. People are going to each other, Louis, because you forgave enemies who spat on you and beat you and cursed you and starved you. Because you did that, we have had an outbreak of redemptive, courageous love, and the truth is getting spoken, and stuff is getting confessed, and junk is getting dealt with, and we have all surrendered to Jesus around here, and sought reconciliation in broken relationships." Wouldn't that be something?

Louis Zamperini: When people come to the end of their rope and there's nowhere else to turn, they turn to God. Of course, that's what's happened on the life raft and prison camp. You make promises to God. I remember the thousands of promises I made on the raft and in prison camp. God kept his promise. I came home alive. I didn't keep my promise. That really shamed me, and I got on my knees and made my confession of faith. I couldn't believe what was happening to me there. I knew as I was on my knees, I knew I was through getting drunk. I knew I had forgiven all my guards, including The Bird. It was just unbelievable. That was a genuine miracle.

[End of video]

I was just thinking, watching that, *How good a God must God be to think up Louis Zamperini?* I think we ought to have him back here really soon. Don't you think? I was also thinking, watching that, *I think from now on, when I preach, I want a soundtrack of inspirational music playing behind me.* It's just a little flat right now when there's no music going on.

I would add to what Rick said. Way to go everybody. It's a remarkable weekend, and it really feels like we're learning more about our redemptive potential as a church.

This weekend has been phenomenal. Going into communion together. We had several hundred folks from different churches here for a children's conference yesterday. It was really cool. Training going on for student ministries. We're actually doing a message next week called, *Put Me in the Game* about the adventure of what happens when you dream about it. What if everybody in our church said, "You know, my story won't look like Louis', but I want to be as connected with God and as used by God as that man." What might happen around here? That's going to be very cool next weekend.

I also want to let you know (some of you already know about this), we're praying and studying about denominational issues, and last week a number of our elders and staff were at a meeting in Orlando, Florida. There were actually over 2,000 pastors and church leaders from our denomination at this gathering, trying to discern what God might be up to. If you would like more information on that, you can go to our website and get more details.

I want to start today by telling you one last Louis Zamperini story. Do you want to hear one more story? Louis' favorite stars, when he was a little kid... He loves Laurel and Hardy. Does anybody remember Laurel and Hardy? Those little comic guys? He always loved them. He hasn't been to a movie for decades, but he owns every Laurel and Hardy movie there is. He has always loved Laurel and Hardy for some reason.

When he gets back from World War II, he gets invited to a golf club in L.A. where a lot of Hollywood stars hang out. He's at the bar (I think he said with Bob Hope). Somebody comes up to him and says Oliver Hardy was in the locker room and wanted to meet him. Louis goes back to the locker room. This is his hero, Oliver Hardy, who's taking a shower, buck naked, soaking wet. He sees Louis, jumps out of the shower, goes over and gives him a big hug. He's naked as a jaybird, getting Louis drenched. He stands back and says to him, "Louis, I prayed for you every day while you were missing in the war." Who would have guessed Oliver Hardy prays every day for years for Louis Zamperini?

I love that story so much I made Louis tell it twice. I did not ask Louis for an autograph or anything like that when he was here, because we were asking so much of him and I didn't want to put any more burdens on him, but I came into my office the next day after last weekend, and there was a copy of *Unbroken* sitting on my chair at my desk, and it was signed, "To John: Be Hardy. Louis Zamperini." I love this so much.

I was thinking about what we're going to talk about this weekend, because it's really moving, and I was just moved to make this offer. If anybody is here today and you're kind of discouraged, you have been kind of broken, you're feeling a little beat up by life, or you just would like a little tangible hope, if you'd like to have a copy of *Unbroken* personally signed by Louis, come see me after the service, and I will tell you what it feels like to have one. What? Did you think I was going to give this one away? Are you kidding me? Insane!

We're coming today, to what's called the Lord's Table, to learn, together, about, *What's the price that has been paid so human beings can have the hope of an unbroken life, of an unbroken eternity with God, of one day being unbroken?* I love the word *unbroken*. I love the story of Louis, how nothing could break him from when he was a little kid. Double pneumonia couldn't. Getting in trouble with the cops couldn't.

Olympic competition couldn't. Nazi soldiers, when he stole a flag, couldn't. World War couldn't. Getting shot down out of the sky in a plane crash in the Pacific Ocean, sharks, starvation, doldrums, and a typhoon couldn't.

Being a POW in unbelievable degradation and humiliation and brutal conditions, beatings, slave labor, torture, the sadism of The Bird. None of that stuff could break this man. Through all of these things he was unbroken. Then he got liberated. Then he went home. Then he broke, because inside you there is a brokenness you can never fix. Only God can. There is a brokenness in you, and me, too. The Lord's Supper is an indispensable part of that healing. I want to explain why as we get ready to come to the Table together today.

Sometimes people will describe the story, the narrative, of the Bible in a giant picture, kind of like in an arc in the shape of the letter U. At the beginning of the Bible, in book of Genesis, is this story of great beauty. Everything is perfection. There's no sin. Human beings live in perfect harmony with each other and in communion with God and in harmony with nature. Then we're headed also toward great beauty. Revelation says the destiny of this earth is, one day, God's going to heal it. Then sorrow and suffering will be no more. Can you imagine that? God will wipe away every tear from every eye. The dwelling of God will be with his people. Creation will be redeemed.

It starts in wonder. It ends in wonder, but in the middle, where you and I live, things are not so good. At the absolute bottom, there are three events. They all took place in just a couple of days. They were the hinge of cosmic history. The three events are a *crucifixion*, a *resurrection*, and a *meal* that was called the Lord's Supper. We're going to learn today, before we receive it, what Jesus says was going on in the crucifixion and in the resurrection (what's at stake, what it means for you and for me).

Now in order to do that, we have to back way up for a moment, because Jesus is going to refer to a very important part of Israel's worship, a really critical part of Israel's history. It was something that was really different. Their life, their culture was very different than the way things work in our day. Did anybody ever read through the Old Testament and notice it was a really bad time to be an animal back then? There were bad things going on if you're a sheep or a goat or an ox or something like that.

Actually, in the ancient world, all ancient peoples practiced animal sacrifice. That was not unique to Israel. They all kind of knew our world is broken. It's not working right. There's this really interesting, very deep, kind of mysterious sense that something needs to be sacrificed to set things right. Generally, in the ancient world, other folks were quite superstitious about it, and the idea was that sacrificing an animal was a way to get the attention of the gods. Zeus, or Marduk, or Isis, or whoever your gods were, might be placated by that. In fact, in the ancient Mesopotamian world, the most common myth in ancient Israel's day was that the gods created human beings to feed them.

Animal sacrifice was very common (it still is in parts of the world), but Israel took this practice and put it in a very different framework, in an ethical framework, in a spiritual framework. They believed there is one God and he created everything there is. He's all-powerful, and he's good, this God. He is good beyond our ability to imagine. He is brightness. He is just. He is holy. He is righteous. He's very different from us. Not just more powerful, but better.

The reason the world is broken is because of sin, not because God wasn't powerful enough to make it right. He made human beings free because he loves freedom. He loves persons, but we chose sin, and that's messed everything up, and sin needs to be atoned for. It needs to be set right. There's a penalty

attached to it, in a just universe, that has to be paid because God is a good, just God, and he doesn't want sin to stand.

Sacrifice, see, became, in Israel alone, a highly dramatic, highly visible way to express the seriousness of the problem of sin before a holy God. It was not just trying to get Zeus' attention or something. Human beings are morally, spiritually broken. They were reminded of that, and the drama, the stakes of it, in a sacrifice. There were a lot of different kinds of sacrifices (for guilt, sin offerings, peace offerings and so), but sacrifices generally had four common characteristics. It's going to be very important, as we get ready to come to the Table. This'll break you.

First, an animal would be *taken*. Take the animal out of the flock or herd, and bring it to the altar. This taking, this selection of a sacrificial animal, was critical because that animal had to be without flaw, without blemish. It had to be perfect. Moses said, **"...you must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be accepted on your behalf. Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf."** This is really important. The flawlessness of the sacrifice was kind of an expression of the flawlessness of God. The value of a flawless animal was kind of an expression or a picture of the cost of the forgiveness of sin.

So an animal would be taken, and then it would be *blessed*. An animal would be taken, and then it would be blessed. You would bless, you would pray over, place hands on the animal that was going to be sacrificed. Moses says, **"You are to lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering."** This is really interesting. There's this moment where you take that animal, you place your hands on its head, and over time this prayer became a prayer of confession, like knowledge, *Before a holy God, I'm broken*. It's almost like, in that prayer, my sin is getting transferred to or represented by or expressed somehow through this sacrificed animal.

See, Israel understood this is not a superstitious act. It wasn't magic. It wasn't mechanical. It was to involve a repentant heart. This is what God is interested in. David says, in Psalm 51, **"The sacrifices of God..."** It's not like the gods around Israel, where it's just kind of a superstitious way to get the god's attention, or to get the god to give you what you want.

What God is really interested in is a broken spirit. Notice the language. There is a thread of brokenness all through the Bible. **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."** It's like they were seeing (like Louis would see one day), the real problem, the real brokenness, is not (as I want to think) out there in the world. It's in me. It's in you. In the moment of sacrifice, part of the seriousness of it is I have to come to grips with me.

The London Times asked, about a century ago, a number of authors to write on the question...*What's wrong with the world?* It's a fascinating question. A bunch of famous authors wrote about it. A wonderful Christian writer named G. K. Chesterton wrote the shortest article. This was actually in *The London Times*, from him. "What's wrong with the world? Dear Sirs, I am. G. K. Chesterton."

I was thinking this could give us a little liturgy. We're not a really liturgical church, but this would be kind of cool. I could just say, "What's wrong with the world?" to drive this point home, and you all respond, "I am." Then we'll all be able to remember this. Let's try that. What's wrong with the world? I am. You are indeed.

People would remember this when they came to sacrifice. The sacrifice was taken (flawless, perfect). It was blessed. There was prayer; there's confession. Then, it was *broken*. It's killed. The killing of the animal was the breaking of the thread of life. This is symbolic expression. Sin is death. It just brings death. Again, they were a different culture. Hebrew people were very pictorial and very vivid, and this would be unforgettable for them.

In Exodus 24, Moses took the blood from young bulls. There were a lot of them, so there was a lot of blood. He divided the blood in half. Half of it got sprinkled, thrown over the altar, symbolically on God, and the other half put in bowls. The text says he "...*sprinkled it on the people...*" Literally, it says he *splashed* it on the people. That's kind of weird. Can you imagine bringing friends to church and having some animal blood literally splashed on you?

Why would they do something like that? Well, they lived in a really different culture, and they didn't have nearly the same kind of preoccupation with hygiene we have. They didn't buy meat at a grocery store all wrapped in cellophane really carefully. For some of you who didn't know, meat does not actually come to the earth in that form. They lived in a bloody world. They were surrounded by violence. Blood was a matter of life and death. They saw it. They lived with it. They smelled it. They touched it. They were spattered by it every day.

Moses took the blood, splashed it on the people, "...*and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant...'*" Now because blood was about life and death, that was about the most serious thing they knew. Again, this just goes deep into people. It's kind of a weird thing.

When I was a kid, growing up, we used to talk about blood brothers. If you had somebody you wanted to be a blood brother with, you would prick your thumb, and they would do the same to theirs, so there could be a little tiny bit of mingling of blood. It was a way of saying, "This is my solemn vow." The act of sacrifice told everybody who saw it that sin and the forgiveness of sin are not casual. They are somehow a matter of life and death. Nobody who thoughtfully came to God in worship during sacrifice could believe sin was a superficial, unimportant casual deal. Every sacrifice proclaimed there is something about sin that is ultimately lethal. There is something about forgiveness that is unspeakably costly.

The sacrifice is taken, it's blessed, it's broken, and then it's *given*. Often, especially when there was a peace offering, you would end by the priest and all the people having a meal. The meat from the sacrifice, after it had been cooked, after it had been burnt, would be spread. In the ancient world, generally this is what happened. Usually, animal sacrifices were also kind of a form of almost restaurants back in that day. It was eating, for people.

In Israel, sometimes there would be a meal, but then it would be a feast, then it would be a joyful remembering, *My sin has been forgiven by a good God. I don't carry that burden around with me anymore*. It was taken, broken, blessed, but then given to sinners who became forgiven. Then, one day, came the most famous meal in the history of the human race. It would be remembered, painted, and studied more often than any other meal in human history. The people who received that meal had no idea it would become so revered.

I mentioned before, it took three events to turn world history around. If there had been a crucifixion, but no resurrection, we'd have no hope. Jesus would be just another dead guy, just another body lying in a tomb. The world is full of them. It would just be one more tragic story. If there was a resurrection but no

crucifixion, there would have been no sacrifice. There would have been no payment for our sin. There would have been no atonement. We would not have known of the suffering love of God.

But if it weren't for the Lord's Supper, the disciples would not have known what this meant. See, it's at the Lord's Supper he explained to them, he very carefully used language and imagery that's going to tie what's about to happen *here* and what's about to happen *here* to what's been going on for centuries *here*, so they could know they're about to experience the last sacrifice that would ever be needed by the sinful human race, and then the triumph of life over death and sin. They, having no idea what's at stake, having no idea the eyes of heaven and the cosmos are all focused on this one tiny little room and this tiny little meal, are gathered around the table.

It is so critical, in all the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, in the gospel of Matthew, and the gospel of Mark, and the gospel of Luke, they give Jesus' instructions all using, all centered around, precisely the same four verbs. There is identical wording in each one of the accounts, because it is so critical. ***"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks [blessed it] and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."*** The bread is taken. The bread is blessed. The bread is broken. The bread is given. And Jesus says this bread, somehow, some way, is his body.

We need to pause here a moment, because I know many of you who have been around churches are kind of wondering... You know there have been many debates across the centuries in the church. What exactly did Jesus mean when he said this odd thing? ***"...this is my body."*** Some of you will know, in the Catholic Church, Catholics believe in communion there actually is a miracle, and the bread is miraculously turned into Jesus' flesh, and the wine is miraculously turned into Jesus' blood. I grew up in the Baptist church. Baptists believe the bread stays bread, but the wine is miraculously turned into grape juice. I thought that was funny. Apparently, I'm the only one who did, but I got a kick out of it so I said it all four times.

People are wondering, *What do we believe?* Presbyterians believe the bread just stays bread, the wine stays wine, but Jesus somehow comes shining through. When we come to the Table, it's not just us. He's here. We're not just remembering. He's the host. He is the one who took all the initiative in the very beginning. He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave, and he's going to do that right now.

Something that happened to the bread was happening to Jesus. He is using the language and the picture of Israel's history of all of the sacrifices that had gone on in Israel, and, of course, in such often odd-looking ways, through the history of the human race. Because we all have this deep, mysterious sense that somehow the world is broken, and somehow, somebody needs to pay a price to set it right. He uses all of this language and all of these pictures so his disciples would be able to understand, here, the glorious, liberating, horrible thing God is doing for you.

Jesus was taken. In the history of the human race, he is the best. He is the best humanity every produced. He was without flaw or blemish. He never thought or said a mean, petty thing. That one was selected, was pulled out of the crowd, to make the sacrifice only he could make. John the Baptist said, when he saw Jesus coming toward him, ***"Look, the Lamb of God..."*** Notice the language. Lambs were sacrificed. ***"...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"***

Jesus was taken; Jesus was blessed. The Father said about him, ***"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased..."*** and yet, when the human race laid its hands on him, it is as if all of our sin, all of our brokenness, and all of our foulness somehow got placed in him. The prophet says, ***"We all, like sheep,***

have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity..."
Feel the weight of that word. "...of us all."

Then, Jesus was broken. There's a strange thing. People connect in brokenness in a way we don't connect over anything else. You know, if I were to ask any of you who have had certain achievements to stand up, you might be kind of connected with each other. If I was to say, "Anybody who graduated from Stanford or Cal, stand up"... I'm not asking for that, but if I were, and you were to stand up, you'd all look at each other and there would be kind of a connection there, although a lot of us would feel kind of left out. If I said, "Anybody who has made a lot of money, stand up."

I didn't share this with any of the other services. I went to a concert a year or two ago. It was a bluegrass concert by Steve Martin. Does anybody know Steve Martin? He writes a lot of his own music. He's like a world-class banjo player. He said many of his songs come from his own personal experience. "Like this next one," he said, "which I call, 'My Masseur is Too Chatty.'" Again, I thought it was a funny title for a song.

If I had everybody who has their own masseuse stand up, there'd be a certain kind of connection around that, but imagine I were to say, "Anybody in this room who is struggling with cancer, stand up," or, "Anybody in this room who is an alcoholic, just one drink away from devastation, stand up." See, AA learned a long time ago what Jesus knew centuries ago. Human beings bond around brokenness in a way we don't around anything else. If I were to say, "Any parent who ever lost a child, stand up." It's the strange thing about suffering.

"This is my body, broken for you." Jesus, every form of brokenness (our bodies, our relationships, rejection, vocational failure), he knows it. He suffers it. The ultimate one is spiritual brokenness. "God made him who knew no sin, become sin for us." This is humanity at its worst. This is God at his best. He wants the human race to know an unbroken life for humanity comes at the cost of a broken God. I don't even understand how that can be.

Jesus is taken, Jesus is blessed, Jesus is broken on a cross, and then Jesus is given. The most famous verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."* He gave him. Jesus lives to be given. To be taken, to be blessed, to be broken on a cross, and then to be given. We come to the Table, and Jesus is our host. Jesus says, once again, *"This is my body..."* taken, blessed, broken, and given.

He says, "Here's this cup," and again, he's going back to language that goes back so far, all those disciples know it from when they were little boys. He takes the cup. He wants to explain *here*, so when they get *here* and when they get *there*, and you and I gather *here*, we will know, we will understand. *"Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"*

They do not know it yet, but he is going to die, and he wants them to understand. He uses the words of Moses they all know. They all remember from way back at Sinai when they got splattered by blood, when they got splashed in it. This is the blood of the covenant. This is the blood of the covenant. This is the blood of the covenant, only this time, this one says, not, "This is *the* blood." He says, *"This is my blood..."*

Some of you have seen the story about the Italian cruise ship that recently got capsized, and a number of people died in it. There's this horrifying transcript where the captain wants to survive, and so apparently he gets out of the boat into a life raft, and he won't go back. The Coast Guard is telling him, "You have to get back on that ship. Whoever is on there has to be saved. We have to know how many people have died, and who's dying." He won't do it.

That is not our Captain. Jesus says, "I know everybody's going down. I know everyone who is at risk. I will be the one who saves. I will die so they can live." This is the sacrificial love that lives in the heart of God. ***"This is my blood of the covenant..."*** and in some way deeper than words can describe, we are covered by that blood. We are cleansed by that blood. So how can we ever be casual before this Table?

Nancy, my wife, when we lived... We lived back in Chicago, a lot of you know, for almost 10 years. She's a California native. She loves California. She used to dream of moving back to California when we lived in Chicago, especially about this time of year. She would tell our youngest kid sometimes, when he was going to graduate (because she figured, *At least, by then, I'll be able to move*)... She would say to him, "When you're walking across that stage at graduation, if you look out at the crowd, you will see a camera flash and a hand waving goodbye. That will be me leaving to fly to go to California."

When we moved here (this is a true story), the plane was landing on the tarmac at SFO. I actually asked Nancy on the plane, "Nancy, suppose God were to call us to Boston. What would you do?" Her immediate response was, "That would be easy. I would sin, say, "No," claim forgiveness, stay in California, and live in grace." Now she was joking when she said that...I think.

I know she was, but sometimes we get a little cavalier about grace. You know, we kind of think of it as, *Well, you know, there's already so many sins on the ledger. What's one more going to do? or, That's God's job to forgive. That's his business. That's what he's supposed to do.* Then we come to the Table. Then we remember, and we hear the one who was without sin.

You know, this is called the Lord's Supper, a very ironic title when you think about it, because in his day, the *lord* was the guy in charge. If there was a supper, the lord was the one who was seated first. The lord was the one who was served first. The lord was the one who was served best. Not this Lord. He's the host. He's the one who served, and what he offers is himself. His broken, bruised, and bleeding self. His broken body. His broken heart. Taken, blessed, broken, and given for you.

Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, we remember in the stillness of this moment, we don't want to come to this Table absentmindedly. We think now of Jesus, the best Man who ever lived, being sacrificed somehow for our forgiveness, and we confess to you, God, in this moment, freely, all of our brokenness, all of our regret, everything we were supposed to be but are not, and all of our guilt. We thank you for what Jesus did for us. We thank you for this Table. Would you bless these moments, God, for everybody in this room? In Jesus' name.