

The Journey to the Cross, Part 16

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- [0 : 00] We can turn in our Bibles to Mark chapter 14. The gospel of Mark in chapter 14. We've been singing words of amazing assurance and promise and hope because of Jesus.
- And here in Gethsemane, we find Jesus contemplating the cost for him, for us to enjoy all those blessings that we've been singing about.
- So Mark chapter 14 and from verse 32 to 42. Let's hear the word of God. They went to a place called Gethsemane.
- And Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. He took Peter, James and John along with him. And he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.
- My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He said to them, stay here and keep watch. Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him.
- [1 : 14] Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.
- Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.
- The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Once more, he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy.
- They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, are you still sleeping and resting? Enough. The hour has come.
- Look, the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise. Let us go. Here comes my betrayer.
- [2 : 18] Amen. Now we're going to think about living under the shadow of the cross, what that meant for Jesus and what that means for us.
- But let me begin by talking about a book I read last year, written by a doctor, Dr. Paul Kalanithi. The book's called When Breath Becomes Air.
- It's a neurosurgeon's memoir. A memoir as he battles with, battled with, stage four metastatic lung cancer.
- With the doctor's knowledge of everything that was coming, Kalanithi reflected. And reflected in large part on what makes a life worth living.
- There was one little phrase in his book that stuck in my head, and it's this one. He said, the fact of death is unsettling, yet there is no other way to live.
- [3 : 16] He appreciated that. And we see that in the case of Jesus, don't we? Here is Jesus in agony in Gethsemane because he knows his future.
- He knows the unique suffering that's coming to him as the son of God, as the savior of the world, as he will bear the sins of the world. We see Jesus is more than simply unsettled facing the fact of his death.

We see him in sorrow and in anguish. So today we're going to think about why is it that Mark slows down? The gospel of Mark is a really fast-paced gospel.

But Mark slows down and he zooms in here on the garden. And why does he do that? He's showing us life under the shadow of the cross for Jesus.

And he's also helping his readers to think about what does it mean for us to be followers of Jesus, for us too to live under the shadow of the cross of Jesus. Mark was writing at the time when the church was beginning to feel persecution from Rome.

[4 : 24] What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in that context? So we're going to think about the suffering of Jesus and think about how the suffering of Jesus informs the story of our lives and the life of God's church.

So we're going to begin by thinking about Jesus' emotions and seeing how Jesus' emotions connect with ours. In Mark's language, if we look at verses 33 and 34, we see Mark uses very intense language.

Jesus speaks with intense language. So it says there, Jesus took Peter and James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He said to them, stay here and keep watch. The American theologian B.B. Warfield wrote a study called The Emotional Life of Our Lord.

And as he examined these words, words like deeply distressed and troubled, it's the idea of Jesus being horror struck as he confronts the reality of the cross.

[5 : 36] Here is Jesus facing alarm, feeling a sense of despondency as he anticipates what's coming next. When it says he's overwhelmed with sorrow, it's describing his mental pain and distress as if he was in a prison and he's barred in on every side.

There's no escape from this weight of sorrow and distress. Deep emotional suffering, he says, that almost kills him.

Why does he feel this intense weight? Well, I think we need to connect it with his prayer in verse 36, and we need to connect it with the cup that he prays about.

So in verse 36, he prays, Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. So there's this image of Jesus needing to drink a cup.

What is that cup that he anticipates with a sense of horror and dismay? Well, Psalm 75 would be one place we can go to find out. In verse 8, we read this.

[6 : 44] In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of wine. He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs. What's the image of the cup?

It's the image of God's judgment against sin and wickedness being given to God's enemies to drink down, to drink in judgment on themselves.

What is it that causes Jesus to have such distress and agony? It's because he, he will drink this cup to make his enemies into his friends.

But that prospect horrifies him. Horrifies him because he anticipates this contact with sin that we'll have for the very first time in his existence.

One of the remarkable things about Jesus, one of the attractive things about Jesus, is he is known as a friend of sinners. You read the Gospels and you find him eating with, meeting with, having conversations with social, religious, moral outcasts.

[7 : 49] But Jesus, in being their friend, never began to sin himself. He remained totally holy, sinlessly perfect.

He lived among the broken, the despised, the rejected, the messed up, but he remained perfect himself. But here is Jesus, the perfect one, the only perfect one.

He is anticipating becoming the worst sinner who ever lived and being judged by God, treated as the worst sinner who ever lived because he will absorb our sin, because he will absorb the judgment of God for our sin.

And that causes him distress. Connected with that, he's also distressed because he knows that the cross will bring separation from God.

He will be alienated from the Father. He knows that his Father is holy and perfect. And a holy God cannot look at sin.

[8 : 52] What happens on the cross is Jesus becomes sin for his people. And in so doing, he will feel forsaken by his Father. His Father, as it were, will turn his face away from Jesus, the son he loves.

So we have this picture of real emotional distress. We have Jesus knowing he's about to be betrayed, going to this garden in order to pray to his Father, the Father who he loves, looking to receive comfort from heaven.

But as he does so, he receives anticipation of his own personal hell. What is hell? Hell is to know God, but only God as justice.

And Jesus on the cross will experience the full weight of God's justice against sin. Here we are being reminded in Gethsemane that the price of our reconciliation is Christ's alienation.

He feels far so that we can be brought near. And that impacts Jesus intensely. Perhaps you saw in the news over the weekend, the good news story of Pauline Kafferke.

[10 : 07] Pauline Kafferke, in case you don't know who she was, she was a Scottish nurse who's just had twins. But back in 2014, she went out to Sierra Leone to be an Ebola nurse.

So she went out there to seek to deal with those who were suffering from that disease, but she contracted it herself. So over 2014, 2016, three times she found herself in hospital seriously unwell.

And thinking about her story, thinking here is a nurse who'd been working with victims who knew exactly what was coming, what I thought that must have been when she saw the early signs. She contracted the very things she'd gone to seek to help cure.

And that, in a sense, gives us an insight into the cross. Because Jesus saves us from sin by contracting sin for us.

He takes our sin on himself to cure us from that horrible disease leading to death. He saves at infinite cost to himself.

[11 : 23] He was aware of the implications of what it meant to be the Savior. We see it in Gethsemane. That knowledge causes him to feel horror. He feels that weight on himself.

But still he went because of love. So we see Jesus' emotions. But how does that connect with our emotions as a church? Well, I think Mark would want the incredible suffering of Jesus to fuel our grateful joy and love and worship.

To see Jesus did this for me. Jesus voluntarily became my substitute. Taking my place.

That Jesus gave himself as that perfect sacrifice for me. Abandoned for my sake. For my sin.

That that should move our hearts and cause us to worship him. Cause him to, cause us to love him. There was a man on the news yesterday talking about his stem cell donor.

[12 : 33] He calls his stem cell donor his sister. There's a bond established because he's received stem cells. He's received the gift of health.

In light of the cross. Shouldn't it be our instinct to call Jesus our Savior and Lord and to live for him with joy and with worship? And it's true that the clearer our vision of the cross, the clearer our understanding of what it meant for Jesus to rescue us, the greater, the more alive our worship is going to be.

And we cannot get too far away from the cross. We need to remember what lies at the heart of our salvation. And so Mark is zooming us in in the gospel so that ultimately we'll be moved towards gratitude.

We'll be moved towards worship. So that's Jesus' emotions and ours. Another thing that Mark draws our attention to in Gethsemane is Jesus' prayers.

Let's think about Jesus' prayers and ours. Mike Reeves in his little book, *Enjoying Your Prayer Life*, reminds us that it was Calvin that said that prayer is the chief exercise of faith.

[13 : 47] How do we express our faith? We express it through prayer. To pray is to say, whenever we pray, I want to know God.

I want to enjoy my relationship with my Father in heaven. Prayer is a way to say in any situation, whatever brings us before God, I want to trust God in this moment.

If I'm praying about my family or praying about a decision, I want to trust God in this situation. So prayer is an exercise of faith. And so it's no surprise to us then, when we think about Jesus, the ultimate man of faith, that He is our model of praying for us.

He is the model praying life. You see, all through the gospels, Jesus had a decision to make. He would pray. When Jesus had a successful time of ministry, healing and teaching and the crowds were flocking, He would take time away to be with His Father in heaven.

So it's no surprise that when He comes to confront His place of suffering, that He would instinctively come to pray. Four things to notice as Jesus prays under the shadow of the cross.

[15 : 04] Firstly, that Jesus calls to His Father. Verse 36, Abba, Father, He said. J.I. Packer, another theologian said, if you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much they make of the thought of being God's child and having God as their Father.

Or to put it another way, does the chance that we have when we pray the Lord's Prayer to say, our Father in heaven, does that make us feel a sense of joy and gratitude?

Well, for Jesus, His Father was everything. He has lived in an eternal communion of love with His Father.

And so part of Jesus' agony is knowing that that sense of God, the Father's close presence with Him, will be lost to Him at the cross.

As He goes under the darkness, as He faces God's judgment, those three hours on the cross, He will cry out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[16 : 20] His relationship with His Father was everything to Him. And so in His suffering, He calls to His Father. Notice, too, the extent to which Jesus recognizes the power and the rule of His Father.

Abba, Father, He said, everything is possible for you. One of the things we recognize about God is that He is independent, that the only limits on God are that He cannot sin and He must always be true to His character and His word.

And so Jesus, as He goes into this suffering, He goes there trusting in the sovereignty of God. And that's so important for us as a foundation for prayer.

Notice, too, He commits Himself to doing the will of God. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

Here is Jesus, fully human as well as fully God, wrestling with the horror to come, praying, take this cup from me, asking, is there any other way?

[17 : 40] As He anticipates the cost of being Savior in the most intense way, but still He's able to say, not my will, but yours be done. Completely committed, completely obedient to doing the will of God.

And also, as we saw last week, when Jesus faces suffering and Jesus thinks about prayer and suffering, it's important to recognize that He asks His friends to support Him in prayer.

So again, verse 38, watch and pray. Watch and pray. He's face to face with this prospect of being separated from His Father at the cross. He's facing a time of intense trial and distress, and He looks to His friends for prayer support.

So again, Mark is zooming in here, and he's zooming in to show us the prayer life of Jesus, to show us, I think, how to approach our times of suffering. That here we are invited as Christians to approach suffering with God, in prayer, knowing Jesus has been there, knowing Jesus understands, knowing Jesus is with us and for us.

So that when we experience hardships and dark times, we too are praying to our Father in heaven. Again, to borrow from Mike Reeves, prayer is enjoying the care of a powerful Father instead of being left to a frightening loneliness.

[19 : 08] Perhaps you've had those experiences of intense darkness, frightening loneliness. It's so helpful to remember we have a powerful Father in heaven who loves us.

To recognize, actually, that Jesus went to the cross and He suffered that frightening loneliness for us so that we'll never go through anything by ourselves.

We also learn from Jesus' experience to pray both with trust and with tears. Jesus in the Lord's Prayer said we should pray, Your kingdom come and Your will be done.

And sometimes we'll pray that prayer with joy because we are content and we're happy about our circumstances. But are there other times where we'll pray that prayer with grief?

Perhaps a sense of protest. Not sure why this thing is happening. But like Jesus, we need that solid foundation to recognize that God's in control and to recognize that God is in control as one who loves.

[20 : 13] He's one who cares. He's one who's faithful. He's one who's wise. He knows what He's doing. So even when we can't see what God's doing, we're invited to trust, say, not my will but Yours.

Be done. And sometimes we'll do that with tears. And also for us to remember that prayer is part of family life. Prayer is a way to say you don't have to go through this thing alone.

It's a way to say let me bear the load with you. It's an expression of, one expression of our shared love for one another. Jesus gave us a new command to love one another.

Well, one way that we do that is through praying with each other and praying for one another and walking through hard times with one another.

So there's Jesus' prayers and ours. The last thing I want us to notice from the end of this little section is Jesus' obedience and ours.

[21 : 24] We've just finished watching a Spanish TV drama, melodrama better called, called The High Seas. And it's lots of intrigue happening on a great big cruise liner on the way from Spain to Brazil.

Well, in one particular episode, the captain finds himself having to steer a ship directly through the eye of a storm.

There's no other way to go. And so you get these wonderful images of the captain up in the bridge and he's calling on his men to stay the course. And you see people are flying and tables are flying and they're going right through the storm.

And then at one point, you see a little chink of light on the horizon and the captain says, well, head for the patch of light and we'll be safe. And you get this wonderful picture. One side, there's a storm and then you see this cruise liner coming out and you see flat cam.

Jesus, God's obedient son, what's happening here? He's heading straight into the storm of God's judgment. Jesus, the captain of our salvation, is heading straight for the judgment of God.

[22 : 29] That storm that should fall on us and overwhelm us, he takes it on himself. Jesus, the one who always put God first in his life, he delighted to do the will of God.

He dies for our idolatry. All those ways in which we put other things and other people ahead of God, where we find our identity and security and hope and purpose in something other than our faith in the Lord Jesus.

He goes to the cross and he dies as if he were an idolater. Jesus, the one who always honored his father at every point in his life.

He dies for our dishonoring of God, for treating God with shame when we turn our back on God, when we want nothing to do with God, when we ignore his word and his will.

Jesus, the one who always walked in perfect obedience, dies for rebel sinners like us. We see the cost of his obedience.

[23 : 37] We see his obedience in the garden. You know, three times he's asked, is there any other way? Is there any other way for people to be saved other than for me to go to the cross? And the answer that he clearly receives because he walks resolutely towards the cross is I cannot save you and save them.

Jesus is willing to be killed so that we might be saved. And we see that, the change in verse 41. So he's gone and he's prayed three times.

We're returning the third time. He said to them, are you still sleeping and resting? Enough, the hour has come. Luke, the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go.

Here comes my betrayer. Jesus walks with courage. He is resolute. He understands that this hour is from God. And so he goes to the cross in obedience.

As he headed into that storm of God's judgment, was there a patch of light for Jesus? Maybe think of Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 2, where we read Jesus, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame.

[24 : 58] There was joy. There was light beyond the cross for Jesus. It's the prospect of returning to his father in heaven, of bringing glory to God through the cross, of returning to fellowship with God in glory.

And also that joy of knowing mission accomplished, of knowing that through his death, he would bring life for all those who would put their trust in him. And so Jesus faces the cross with joy, which is our remarkable truth.

Jesus anticipates the cost of his rescue, that emotional distress, anticipating the loss of his father's felt presence.

And yet Jesus says, you are worth it. And he obediently walks to the cross. And so Mark zooms in again on Jesus' costly obedience to encourage us.

Encourage us by showing us, well, here's the pattern of the Christian life. The pattern of the Christian life is suffering first with glory to follow. Like Jesus, we are invited, we are encouraged to set our eyes on an eternal prize, to be willing to count the cost, to be willing to carry our cross, to deny ourselves in order to follow Jesus.

[26 : 17] We follow this Jesus. We follow a crucified Savior. And so there is sacrifice. And so there is suffering first, but there is glory to follow. And we understand too that the Christian life and the Christian church is established through the obedient, through the costly, through the sacrificial, loving, self-giving of Jesus.

And it's that grace that we receive that fuels our obedience. It's where we receive new life and it's where our motive for obedience comes from.

So we are called to live in the shadow of the cross, to look at what Jesus has done for us so that it would change us, so that it would transform us.

What's going to kill our pride and selfishness? Well, nothing less than seeing Jesus, our Savior, seeing his selfless love and humiliation for us on the cross.

How are we going to be able to show patience and forgiveness to those who hurt, disappoint and fail us? Well, surely it's as we hear Jesus cry, Father, forgive them.

[27 : 31] They don't know what they're doing. As we understand that Jesus has forgiven us a much greater debt, a much greater wrong than anyone could ever do to us.

How do we love others? How do we keep loving them when they disappoint us? Well, just look at how Jesus treated his disciples, those disciples who would abandon him.

He promised to restore them, to renew friendship with them. So it's as we look at the cross, it's as we are filled with God's grace, that's where the strength to love and to serve comes from.

And so Mark encourages us as he writes his gospel to slow down, to see the cost of your salvation, to recognize God's love for you at the cross so that you and I, we would also make that choice to live under the shadow of the cross, that we would worship from that place, that we would pray knowing that Jesus has gone there and done that for us.

We would serve, we would obey as our grateful response to Jesus, the one who walked that path for us.