

Gethsemane: If it is possible...

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0:00] Hello and welcome to our pre-recorded service for Sunday 21st March. This service is brought to you by Calvary Church Brighton. My name is Steve Ellacott and I'm one of the deacons.

If you're not a local, Brighton is a city on the south coast of the UK, directly south of London. Our congregation in normal times is about 70 to 80 people. And if you're one of our regulars, then we thank you for joining with us in this virtual way, even though we would prefer to meet in person. And if you're not part of our regular congregation, then a particular welcome. I trust you will find something helpful in these extraordinary times. Perhaps like me, you're wondering if things will ever get back to normal, whatever normal is.

Even as vaccines seem to give us a way out of pandemic, the vaccines themselves become a scarce resource. An old national rivalries resurface as nations compete.

How can nations speak peace to nation when each has its own need? And as always in such cases, it is the poorest and the weakest who suffer the most.

[1:10] What should we make of this? First, we need to remind ourselves that even as disorder reigns, there is a God who holds the nations as the dust on the scales.

Secondly, we need to examine ourselves individually as a church and as far as it lies with us as a nation. After all, it's easy enough for me to mouth generous words.

I've had my first jab. And actually, I'm one of those pensioners who have done quite well financially after the pandemic. But does that not put an obligation on me to help?

As James wrote, religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

And a bit later, he wrote, suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs.

[2:15] What good is it? How can we accuse our nation or other nations of selfishness when we know better ourselves? That just becomes hypocrisy.

And of course, the third thing we need to do is pray. But to pray not as an excuse for inaction, but rather that we might find ways to help.

So let's do these three things now. First, we will remind ourselves of the sovereign God as we sing, who has held the ocean in his hands.

Who has held the ocean in his hands? Who has held the ocean in his hands? Who has numbered every grain of sand?

Kings and nations tremble at his voice. All creation rises to rejoice.

[3:19] Behold our God, seated on his throne. Behold our God, seated on his throne. Come let us adore him. Behold our God, seated on his throne. Come let us adore him. Behold our King, nothing can compare. Behold our God, seated on his throne. Come let us adore him.

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him who has given counsel to the lord who can question many of his words who can teach the one who knows all things who can fathom all his wondrous peace behold our god seated on his throne come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare come let us adore him who has felt the nails upon his hands bearing all the guilt of sinful man god eternal humbled to the grave jesus

saviour risen now to reign behold his love god seated on his throne come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare nothing can compare come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare behold our king come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare come let us adore him so let us so let us turn now to prayer so let us turn now to prayer father as we come to you we acknowledge that you are holy and constant but we are not so we come to you as the one who is sovereign who did not spare his own son to come to our aid father we thank you for the work of the scientists who produce these vaccines and treatments we thank you for the work of medical staff and all key workers who have kept the fabric of society together and held back the chaos!

we pray now for the leaders of nations as national rivalries resurface in the face of scarce supply we pray indeed that nation will speak peace to nation and will cooperate for the general good and yet we confess that these national rivalries only reflect the selfishness of our own hearts father stir our consciences to see what we each can do even if only it is to provide resource for those on the front line and we pray particularly for the poor and weak both in our own nation and in the affairs of nations as we lift up to you the places already torn apart by war or famine for whom the pandemic is just another layer of misery but above all father we pray that the message of Jesus Christ who is the Prince of Peace may shine out at this gloomy time we turn to your word reminding ourselves that out of compassion for us he faced a trial besides which our trials are insignificant may we refine may we find rebuke that we need but also peace and joy in your word we ask this in the name of Jesus

[8:36] Amen now we'll shortly turn to study your word study the word of God and our scripture for this evening is Matthew 26 36 to 46 then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and he said to them sit here while I go over there and pray he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him and he began to be sorrowful and troubled then he said to them my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death stay here and keep watch with me going a little farther he fell with his face to the ground and prayed my father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me yet not as I will but as you will then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping could you men not keep watch with me for one hour he asked Peter watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation the spirit is willing but the body is weak he went away a second time and prayed my father if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it may your will be done when he came back he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy so he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time saying the same thing then he returned to the disciples and said to them are you still sleeping and resting look the hour is near and the son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners rise let us go here comes my betrayer so we're going to look shortly at those words of Jesus my father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me yet not as I will but as you will but before we do that we will sing again remind ourselves that that the Lord Jesus Christ came to help us in love and face that terrible trial will sing my Lord what love is this that pain so dearly that I the guilty one of the sins of the Lord my Lord what love is this that pain so dearly that I my Lord what love is this that pain so dearly that I the guilty one may go free amazing love

May he go free Amazing love, oh what sacrifice The Son has got him for me My debt he pays and my debt he dies That I might live That I might live And so they watched him die Despised, rejected And all the blood he shed Lord, born me

Amazing love, oh what sacrifice The Son of God did for me My debt he pays and my debt he dies That I might live That I might live And now this love of Christ Shall flow like rivers Come wash your guilt away Live again Amazing love, oh what sacrifice

The Son of God Give for me My debt he pays and my debt he dies That I might live That I might live Well, if you've listened to my talks before You know that I like to speak in the modern style Putting the passage into the context of the Bible narrative And the flow of redemption history But just for

this evening I'm going to go old school Back to the tradition of some of the great preachers of the past C.H. Spurgeon for example Sadly I lack the rhetorical skills of that great man But I'm going to try anyway Specifically I'm going to preach to a text

Just to a few words And my text for this evening is the last part of verse 39 From our reading My Father, if it is possible May this cup be taken from me Yet not as I will But as you will Why am I focusing on just these few words?

[15:03] Because of all the many pages of Jesus' words That we have in the Gospels Surely these are the most puzzling The more you think about them The more questions they raise My Father, if it is possible May this cup be taken from me Yet not as I will But as you will Don't miss the significance of that little word If To see why these words are so strange Let us compare them with some other words of Jesus He always insisted on the role of faith in prayer I tell you the truth If you have faith and do not doubt Not only can you do what was done to the fig tree But also you can say to this mountain Go throw yourself into the sea And it will be done

If you believe You will receive whatever you ask for in prayer Even more striking is what happened When Jesus was presented with a boy Who had an unclean spirit Jesus asked the boy's father How long has he been like this?

From childhood, he answered It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him But if you can do anything Take pity on us and help us If you can, said Jesus Everything is possible for him who believes Immediately the boy's father exclaimed I do believe Help me overcome my unbelief When it comes to prayer The word if is just not in Jesus' vocabulary At least not until Gethsemane Suddenly Jesus introduces this note of uncertainty But if that word if is unsettling What comes next is positively shocking If it is possible The possibility raised here is not the possibility of escape Jesus knew perfectly well that the traitor was coming He was already outside the city And could easily slip away to Galilee Under cover of darkness Or Jesus could have exerted his power He'd walked through a hostile crowd before He'd walked on water If Jesus wanted to avoid it All the legions of Rome would not have been enough to arrest him No, the possibility raised here Was of an entirely different nature What was constraining Jesus here Was not military power But the will of God What is he saying?

Didn't the angel tell Elizabeth For nothing is impossible with God That's Luke 1.37 And when Jesus himself was asked Who could be saved Jesus looked to them and said With man this is impossible But not with God All things are possible with God Mark 10.27 Yet here it seems Jesus is questioning the Father's power The Greek word translated possible in English Is donatos It refers not so much to a logical possibility As to a matter of power or authority As an advocate might go to a judge and say You have the power to send this man to prison But is it possible you can set him free?

[18:55] But the judge might reply I'm sorry but the law is clear I have no choice I must impose a prison sentence It seems that we have an issue here That God cannot resolve Even when asked by his beloved Son It appears that there is something impossible for God After all How can we make sense of this?

A hypothetical judge is bearing to a higher authority Perhaps the Supreme Court or to Parliament itself But God is lawgiver and supreme judge both There is no higher authority To overrule the Father in this matter So how can God have no choice?

Other scriptures do throw some light on this Referring actually to the risen Jesus Paul writes If we are faithless He will remain faithful For he cannot disown himself The writer to Hebrews makes a similar point Men swear by someone greater than themselves And the oath confirms what is said And puts an end to all argument Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature Of his purpose very clear To the heirs of what was promised He confirmed it with an oath God did that So that by two unchangeable things In which it is impossible for God to lie We who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us May be greatly encouraged That's Hebrews 6 16 to 18 Yes there is indeed something that God cannot do He cannot lie He cannot deny his own word in nature One can hardly overestimate this point It seems that the very laws of physics Which God set in place To guide the motions of stars Can be bent to let Jesus walk on water But what is the

fundamental truth of life And this planet As it's recorded in Genesis 3.19 Dust you are And to dust you will return But it turns out that even this will have a loophole A get out clause But whatever this cup is That Jesus refers to Is something so fundamental So bound up with God's own being That there is no wriggle room No space for negotiation There is no other possibility For if there was Jesus would have taken it God's will must be done And so a few minutes later After he prayed this prayer

We read that Jesus commanded Peter Put your sword away Shall I not drink the cup The Father has given me John 18.11 So what is this cup?

[21:58] What is it that's so horrific That Jesus would ask the Father To change his mind? We just have this cryptic reference To a cup What is this cup?

There are references in scripture To a cup of blessing But it can hardly be that There seems to be only one cup In scripture that fits the bill Isaiah wrote This is what your sovereign Lord says Your God who defends his people See I have taken out of your hand The cup that made you stagger From that cup The goblet of my wrath You will never drink again I will put it into the hands Of your tormentors Who said to you Fall prostrate That we may walk over you And you made your back Like the ground Like a street To be walked over Or in the Psalms we read In the hand of the Lord Is a cup Full of foaming wine Mixed with spices He pours it out And all the wicked of the earth Drink it down To its very dregs This is the cup

That Jesus is referring to What Isaiah calls The goblet of my wrath Of the Lord's wrath It appears at various times And with various targets In the scripture But whenever it appears It has just two characteristics Firstly it causes men and women To stagger as if drunk Because of the horror of it And secondly It always reflects God's anger God's wrath Against sin So how can the cup Be taken from the hand Of his people As Isaiah predicts Hebrews reminds us In fact the law requires That nearly everything Be cleansed with blood And without the shedding of blood There is no forgiveness As we have said The laws of physics Can be bent at need But for this law There is no let out clause The best lawyer in the world Can't find an exception The wrath of God Must fall on the wicked And rebellious world

Of course we don't like To talk of that Or even think of it Surely the world Is not that bad There's good here as well Isn't there We mostly get on With our unbelieving neighbours Quite well don't we We often find them Kind and helpful Well yes that's true But it's not the point If I have committed murder The fact that I help An old lady with her shopping Just doesn't match up If we have turned aside From God And declared ourselves Morally independent Then the very nature Of reality is shaken As Paul wrote In Romans 8.22 We know that the whole creation Has been groaning As in the pains of childbirth Right up to the present time Long ago God had promised to Abraham In the fourth generation Of your descendants We'll come back here For the sin of the Amorites Has not yet reached Its full measure Things were not yet

As bad as they could be But the course of destruction Was set Proverbs tells us There is a way That seems right to a man But in the end It leads to death The world was on a path To destruction As night follows day But John wrote For God so loved the world That he gave his one And only son That whoever believes in him Shall not perish But have eternal life That was why Jesus had come And this is why The cup could not be avoided This is why the son Came to the world In the person of Jesus On the cross Jesus took the cup Of God's wrath And drank it down He did it voluntarily That is why he had come Order was restored To a world On the brink of chaos But what does this mean

[26:15] For you and for me It means that there is Something even more Certain than the law Of gravity There is something More clear and certain Than the crystal clarity Of mathematics Perhaps I should Say I am a mathematician By profession In fact there is Something more certain Than even the certainty Of death itself And that is that Without help We are all As a race And each of us Individually On a path To destruction I repeat Without help We are all As a race And each of us Individually On a path To destruction And yet Do we really Believe that I have been a Christian In a long time And I ask myself Whether I feel that To the depths Of my soul And I have to answer Perhaps I do not Feel it as I should Peter and James And John Certainly did not When Jesus

Returned to his disciples He found them sleeping Could you men Not keep watch With me For one hour He asked That's verse 40 Of our passage I don't know Maybe as humans We are just not capable Of feeling that truth In its full horror Perhaps if we did It would drive us To insanity But that's all The moral reason We need to take warning Because Jesus Looked into that picture And it shook him To the core He said My soul Is overwhelmed With sorrow To the point Of death Even he found it Hard to hang on To reason In the face Of that insight Jesus had himself Many times Warned of the way Things are going Here's just one Example So upon you Will come All the righteous Blood that has Been shed on earth From the blood Of righteous Abel To the blood Of Zechariah Son of Barakai

Whom you murdered Between the temple And the altar I tell you I tell you the truth All this will come Upon this generation Oh Jerusalem Jerusalem You who kill The prophets And stone those Who sent you How often Have I longed To gather Your children Together As a hen Gathers her chicks Under her wings But you were not Willing Look Your house Is left to you Desolate Most of the Inhabitants Of Jerusalem Of course Had not murdered Anybody And yet They were on That path To destruction And the city Would of course Be destroyed In AD 70 In Gethsemane The full horror Of that Came upon Jesus And it threatened To overwhelm him Because we know That he had to Shoulder that Horror Of God's wrath Himself So as we

Come towards Easter We ask Ourselves What is Easter About Certainly Not really About bunnies And chocolate Easter Comes with a Message of Hope But also A warning Because Jesus Said yet Not as I Will But as you Will There was Not a way Out But there Was a way Through And perhaps At that very Moment the Victory was Really won From then on Jesus was Resolute The message Of Easter Is that Jesus Shoulders All that Wrath For us As Hebrew Says It's a dreadful Thing to Fall into The hands Of the Living God But Jesus Went that Way for Us Staring Into the Abyss To view Something we Can not even Bear to See So he Has looked At it But will We heed His Warning Nowhere

Does Jesus Even Hint That everyone Will Avoid That terrible Place As some Say Nowadays But again And again Jesus warns Repeatedly That only Through him Is the Path to Life Found Matthew 7 13 And 14 Says Enter Through The Narrow Gate For Wide Is The Gate And Broad Is The Road That Leads To Destruction And Many Enter Through It But Small Is The Gate And Narrow That Leads To Life And Only A Few Find It But The One Who Hears My Words And Does Not Put Them Into Practice Is Like A Man Who Builds A House On The Ground Without A Foundation The moment The Torrent The Torrent Struck That House It Collapsed And Its Destruction Was Complete That Was Luke 6 49 There Are Many Other Passages Of Scripture Of Jesus Teaching Where He Warns Us That We

[31:23] Need To Heed His Words And Follow Him Jesus Feeds Face The Horror So That We Need Not But Who Will Heed His Warning So As We Draw Our Time To A Close Let Us Remind Ourselves That He Suffered So That We May Go Free We Shall Sing That Old Hymn How Sweet The Name Of Jesus Sounds In A Believer's Ear Does It Sound Sweet!

To Us If We Have Truly Learned The Lesson Of Gethsemane Than It Should Do How Sweet The Name Of Jesus Sounds Inner Believer's Hear It Soothes Our Sorrows Heals Our Wounds And Drives Away

Our Fear It Makes The Wounded Spirit Whole And Calms Each Heart Oppressed Its Manner To The Hungry Soul And To The Weary Rest And To The Weary Rest To The Weary Rest To You Name The Rock On Which I Build My Shield And Hiding Place My Never Failing Treasury Filled With Boundless Doors Of Grace By You My Prayers Acceptance Gain Although With Sin Defiled Satan Accuses Me In Vain Since I Am God's Own Child Since I Am God's Own Child Jesus My Shepherd Brother Friend My Prophet Priest And King My Lord My Life My Way My End Accept The Praise I Bring Weak Is The Effort Of My Heart And Cold My Warmest Thought But When I See You As You Are I'll Praise You As I Ought I'll Praise You As I Ought Till Then I Would

[35:56] Your Love Proclaim With Every Fleeting Breath And May The Music Of Your Name Refresh My Soul In Death Refresh My Soul In Death We conclude our time with those words of Paul from Romans chapter 16 verses 25 to 27 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery

hidden for long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God so that all nations might believe and obey him to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ Amen So may God bless you at this difficult time