

Journey to the Cross: Passion Week - Thursday

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Date: 02 April 2023

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[0 : 00] Go ahead and if you have your scriptures turn open to Luke chapter 22. And look at the passage that Ken just read for us versus 47 to 53. As we continue our study as Jesus journeys to the cross and now being here Thursday evening, let's pray.

Lord, we're reminded. That you have declared that heaven is your throne and the earth is your footstool.

God, you are one who is transcendent overall and yet you are near to us. You're imminent. And we thank you for the fact that God, you are knowable, that you've revealed yourself in the person of Jesus, that you have left us your word to guide us, to speak to us, to reveal yourself to us.

And Lord, I want to pray that this morning we would hear from you. We would be refreshed at the reality of who you are, your authority in our lives and upon this world.

And so we commit this time to you now, Lord Jesus. Spirit of God, would you guide me, fill me with unction and clarity of mind as I share your word with your people.

[1 : 33] It's in Jesus' name. We pray. Amen. Well, in Luke 19, verses 29 and 30, we read, when he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples saying, go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied on which no one has ever sat.

Untie it and bring it here. So Passion Week began on Sunday with Jesus riding a donkey over the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley into Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate, also known as the Golden Gate or the Gate Beautiful.

And that pathway in to the city is now the same route, road out of the city here on Thursday night at the end of the week. Jesus has celebrated the Passover meal in the upper room with his apostles, altering this Passover celebration forever.

Instead of a looking back, now it's a looking ahead. No longer is this to be about the shadow, your liberation from Egypt.

Now it's a looking ahead to what I'm about to accomplish, that my blood will cover your sins. My blood will liberate you.

[3 : 22] My blood will liberate you from the tyranny of sin for any who cry out to me in this life. In the upper room, Judas has been identified as a betrayer even after Jesus washes his feet.

And now east of the city, Jesus has retreated to spend some time with the Father in prayer. And the scene today for us takes place in this garden, this garden of Gethsemane, derived from the Aramaic which translates olive press, oil press, the small garden, this garden of Gethsemane at the foot of this olive orchard, or what we know as the Mount of Olives just east of the city.

And Luke describes for us the scene that Jesus is there in prayer on this particular evening, really in turmoil, earlier in the chapter in verse 44, and being in agony, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Jesus is in agony. The only time this word is used in the New Testament, complete and utter anguish. It's exertion that an athlete would have brought forth in a competition, and this is the level of intensity that Jesus is feeling.

This level of distress as Jesus is considering drinking the full cup of the Father's wrath for sin. Knowing that God would not forsake him in his presence, but he would not be present as Father in those hours on the cross, but rather there as judge.

[5 : 22] And in fact, Jesus, we get insight into the wrestling as he prays, Father, if you're willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

Church, this is a night of suffering. This is a night of betrayal. This is a night of evil. And for his followers, they are totally lost and confused at what is about to befall him.

And this is where we pick up our story. And this morning, I think there's encouragement for all of us as we consider this world in which we live, the evil that is present every day.

What are we to do with it? And I think there's some encouragement here from this scene on this Thursday night in the garden. So let's begin here in verse 47.

Luke writes, while he was still speaking, speaking, there came a crowd and the man called Judas, one of the 12, was leading them.

[6:33] He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? The garden had been a place of refuge for Jesus and his men, a place of solitude.

In fact, it says in verse 39 that this was his custom, Jesus would go out to the garden with his men. It was a place of safety, the place of spiritual refreshment until this night.

On this night, everything changes. And in the middle of Jesus giving instructions to his men to stay awake, he said, stay awake, pray, and they're struggling to do so.

And as he's giving them instruction to do this, he is approached as Luke records by a crowd and then one very familiar to Jesus, Judas. And he is described here as one of the 12, a man who spent three years with the Lord.

Earlier that evening, we know that Judas had left the dinner of the upper room. He secured the Jewish authorities to arrest Jesus. He makes a deal with the leaders.

[7:53] In fact, the day prior, you can read about that in verses four to six. But what I want us to know here is that Judas knew exactly where Jesus would be because he spent the whole week with him in that very same spot.

So as the betrayer as Judas leads the Jewish leaders and some Roman muscle directly to Jesus to arrest him, we actually get a more illustrative picture from the Gospel of John.

As John records it in John 18, verse three, he writes, so Judas having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and Pharisees went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

So this crowd, this mob, they're not here for a picnic. They're not here for a social call. They have dark intentions. And how does Jesus respond in the face of such hatred?

Does he flee? No. Did they expect him to flee? Yes. In fact, that's why they have lanterns and torches and weapons.

[9:11] I believe they're ready for a manhunt over the hillside. But there is palpable evil in the air. I don't know if you've ever experienced a moment like that in life.

Yesterday I was Ubering and I picked up a young man and it was just something was off. And as we were driving he sat in the front seat next to me and began to describe his life up in the hills beyond Cortalain, building a cabin in a compound and looking down seeing Neo-Nazi ink on his hands. And it was just a palpable evil in my car. The conversation the whole time was just kind of off. And it just, you could feel it.

First time I've ever picked up someone associated with that sort of lifestyle. Well, if you were a disciple on this evening, experienced a threat of this crowd coming to arrest Jesus, what in the world would you be thinking?

You'd probably be thinking something has gone horribly wrong. Kind of reminds me of the Ten Boom family being their home raided during World War II and then being taken off to a concentration camp.

[10:37] Well, Jesus here, he doesn't flee. Jesus doesn't even flinch. Even after Judas brings this customary greeting of the day, this kiss to identify him to those who are arresting Jesus.

Hey, this is the guy, the guy that I greet and embrace and give the customary kiss on the cheek to. That's the guy put the cuffs on him. Treachery disguised by an embrace.

And in fact, Jesus then asked the question to Judas, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? And imagine being Judas just at that moment, just being cut to the quick.

Because I don't think Jesus, his question here was one of shock or surprise. I think this is rather Jesus asserting knowledge of the deceit that we have.

Jesus asserting knowledge of the deceit that was in Judas' heart. There's composure on the side of Jesus on this Thursday night.

[11:49] Much like when the storm was raging and the boat was rocking and the disciples are like, all is lost, we're going to die. And Jesus is napping. Wakes up and quiesce the storm and then says,

guys, you have little faith.

Jesus is in charge on this night. And then he asks a follow up question directed to the crowd. John records it, Luke doesn't.

He says, who do you seek? And consider the scene as John records it in John 18.5. They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. And Jesus said to them, well, I am he.

This who betrayed him was standing with them when Jesus said to them, I am he. They drew back and they fell to the ground.

Don't you love that scene, church? Amen? I don't know why, it just reminds me of the scene in Lord of the Rings when Erwin has Frodo over the horse fleeing from the ring race and crosses the river and then brings the river down, charging and the ring race are kind of like washed away.

[13:01] You want him? Come and claim him. There's authority there. And this is the authority that we see in Christ on this particular evening.

The one who declared creation into existence says three small words and the men, they're bowled over, they drop to the ground.

And I think the central question for us this morning is what does this scene tell us about all that will transpire over the next 24 hours?

Because see the disciples were thinking all is lost. Something's gone horribly wrong. Evil has won. And God has ceased to be in control. And some of us live there. We turn around the news and just stirs us up into anxiousness, the fear.

[14:05] Or maybe we're going through something. There's an illness in the home. Maybe there's personal crisis that you're experiencing. Maybe evil has directly touched you.

And you're wrestling here with God's authority and this idea that perhaps evil is winning.

This scene declares the exact opposite church. It in fact tells us there's no accident on this night. That Jesus is not a victim.

In fact that God is sovereign over the darkest event that history will ever know. Because there's comfort for us as we consider our own wrestling with evil, with suffering and things that feel so very out of control.

Yes, there's comfort. Absolutely there's comfort. This is a gift. This scene, this Thursday night scene is a gift to us today as we continue to endure on a fallen planet where things are not the way they're supposed to be.

[15:19] Because see if God was sovereign over the worst evil in history, then it follows that He's sovereign over all lesser evils as well.

In fact Paul says it this way in Ephesians 1-11. He says God works all things after the counsel of His will.

What lies outside of all things? Nothing. Even the most insignificant of events, God is still sovereign. Matthew 10-29 are not too sparrows sold for a penny and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

And this morning probably there are two responses depending on where we're at and what we're going through. What has perhaps touched our life.

[16:17] And either we hear these words of God's authority and His sovereignty and we're like, man, I love that. Because it means that there's no random events and I can sleep knowing that God is in charge even as everything feels so very out of control.

And yet on the other side as we wrestle with real suffering and real evil, our response can be, man, I don't like this. Because I see it, I've been touched by it.

And I feel rage. I'm angry. I feel sorrow that God could have done something about it and yet He stayed His hand.

Well I want to say a few things this morning about this difficult subject of God and His sovereignty in relation to evil and suffering.

This is not extensive, but this will begin your thinking. The first one is this, that evil is perhaps one of the soundest arguments for God's existence.

[17:34] And I share that because many conversations I have over the course of interacting with people, particularly in my car, is that they say I've rejected the faith. I've rejected God because, man, I can't quite comprehend a good God in the midst of all of this junk that's occurring around me.

I've seen too much suffering. I've been disappointed. Hence there cannot be a God.

I appreciate how C.S. Lewis confides and opens his heart and his mind to us in his days of atheism.

He said my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.

What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?

[18 : 42] That which is broken can only be defined as such as broken against that which has capacity to be whole.

I can say that the transmission in my car is broken, but how do I know that? I know that because it only goes in reverse.

And I know that there's a designer of that car who designed it to go the other direction as well. And yet if there's no designer, the category of broken, it's just relative. It's not actually broken. It's just not up to my standards of what I would prefer. Just as evil can only be defined as evil if there is an objective standard for that which we call good.

[19 : 48] Which is why in our culture right now we're having such a hard time defining what a woman is because we've eliminated God, the people designer from the equation.

He's been omitted and now the definition rides upon the masses or the might to define what a woman is.

God must be part of the equation as the good definer or we're left with no real categories of good or evil.

Which is really untenable when a person is confronted with true evil. The exploitation of children. That's evil. But without God, the good definer than the exploitation of children, it's simply a description of events without moral qualities.

[20 : 57] And I would just suggest that anyone who uses the term, the category evil, they're actually at risk of losing their atheism.

How could there be a God with so much suffering? No, no, no. How could there not be a God with so much suffering?

Because without God, that suffering is not real. Moving on from just God's existence to this issue of His sovereignty and when we talk about sovereignty, a simple definition is God has complete authority over the entire universe.

Period. That's pretty all inclusive. Right? If you want a biblical definition, probably the best definition from Scripture comes from Job 42 verse 2.

Job conversing with the Lord has a light bulb moment. He says, I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.

[22 : 03] It's God's sovereignty. He's sovereign over all things.

And so if we believe God to be God, then we really have no other option than to recognize that God is sovereign, yes, even over evil.

Because if God were not sovereign over evil, God would cease to be God. What?

Think of it this way. Evil would have authority over God. Evil in a sense would be God. There would be something outside of God dictating, exerting authority over God.

Marcy Spurl says it this way, he says, if there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.

[23 : 10] And if God can't make good on His promises, is He God? I think it's time to go God shopping at that point.

So maybe you're sitting there thinking, J, are you saying essentially that God has authority over all things, even evil?

It doesn't really matter what I say. Scripture seems to imply that. In fact, let me just share a little mosaic here.

A few verses, Amos 3.6 says, does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it? Isaiah 45.7, I am the Lord and there is no other.

I form light and create darkness. I make peace and create woe. I am the Lord who does all these things. Lamentations 3.37, who has commanded it and it came to pass unless the Lord has ordained it?

[24 : 11] Is it not from the mouth of the most high that good and evil come? God is so much more in charge than we often give Him credit for.

And so perhaps you're now asking the next logical question, if God is sovereign, even over evil is now God responsible for the sinful actions of man?

And Scripture says, no, not at all. And I get it, at this point in the sermon, the finite is trying to jump in and understand the infinite.

And theologians have had brain aneurysms over this issue of sovereignty and man's responsibility. Let me say a few things. In sovereignty, God uses the means of evil to carry out His purposes and yet man is still responsible.

[25 : 25] Recall Israel wanted a king. We want to be like everyone else. And they sinned against God in that. And yet according to the Abrahamic covenant, a king was promised through God's people.

There's mystery there. And just thinking specifically about this Thursday evening, Luke 22, 22 says it this way, for the Son of man goes as it has been determined.

Jesus being betrayed in the garden, it has been determined. Acts 2, 23 says it was according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God that this was going to occur.

But as Luke continues, he says, it's been determined by God, but woe to the man by whom he is betrayed. So somehow God has capacity to maintain His sovereignty while yet holding man responsible for evil.

So if evil doesn't lie outside of God's sovereignty, is God then the author of evil?

[26 : 46] No. No, not at all. It's contrary to His very nature. God hates sin. He abhors it 1 John 1.5. He is light.

God is light. There is no darkness at all. In fact, when God created what did He call it? He called it good.

Evil was birthed through a secondary cause. Yes, God put conditions, capacities in place, but evil did not originate from Him.

We have a scene of this from Ezekiel 28 describing Lucifer. Verse 14, you were an anointed guardian cherub by placed you. You were in the holy mountain of God in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.

You were blameless, which is how God made Him. In your ways from the day you were created till unrighteousness was found in you.

[27 : 54] So God is not the direct cause. And yet, what theologians call God's permissive will or permissive decree, He decreed that evil would come about through a secondary cause.

Why? For His glory, church. For God's ultimate glory. God's glory, His goodness now has a backdrop to be seen and understood within.

Jay, why couldn't God have just done things like without sin? Why couldn't He have kept Adam and Eve from partaking in the fruit that He says, don't partake in?

Why didn't God do it the right way the first time? And yet we learn and we understand something about the Father's heart as we consider now the redeemed life.

And it's the story of the prodigal, is it not? That this Son who betrayed the Father now understands something far more profound and beautiful about His Father's heart as He experiences redemption, forgiveness.

[29 : 15] God has purposes, yes, even for evil and suffering. I like how Dr. Piper says it, he says God's permissions, they're always purposeful.

And this is hard because there are many things that we don't know how they fit together in this life. Amen? We don't get answers.

We see Scripture tells us some ways we see how evils use. Job 33:19, man is rebuked with pain on his bed.

So God uses pain, suffering. Here we have the example of using it for correction. Hebrews 5a, Jesus learned obedience through that which He suffered.

So there again it was for obedience there. We see then the purpose. James tells us that trials of various times, kinds produced steadfastness that you'd be perfect and complete.

[30 : 14] So these things, suffering comes into our lives and these things produce maturity. We call this sanctification. And I think our difficulty often comes when we take trials in isolation because in isolation they're always distasteful, always.

You imagine having friends over for an evening of dessert and you bring out a bowl of salt. That would be horrendous. You would fail in hospitality at that moment.

And yet you bring out a beautiful cake and what's one of those ingredients in that delicious cake? Well, it's salt. It's something that is just, man, you wouldn't want to eat it by itself.

And yet that's often what we do in terms of suffering and evil. We just look at them in isolation. Joseph suffered.

Joseph languished in prison. And yet this was all part of the recipe God had to then utilize him to basically save a nation from famine and preserve God's people.

[31 : 38] Yeah. It's hard to piece these things together. And I think certainly Genesis 50-20 is helpful that what man meant for evil God had purpose.

Amen. God had purpose. I like the illustration of a camera lens, focal range that God sees through both.

He sees that narrow lens. He sees events in their isolation and God engages in those and he weeps and he suffers himself.

Psalm 58, excuse me, 56-8, Psalm says, you've kept count of my tossing. Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?

I think God was grieving this Thursday night, the Father seeing what was occurring. And yet God has a wider angle as well.

[32 : 39] God has an interconnected sovereign plan to carry out His purposes. And sometimes we see it and sometimes we don't.

Sixteen years ago, March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, a former student of mine, Kim of Anger, she was hit by a semi.

She was riding a street bike, just got married and was on vacation with her husband.

And they were riding and bike hit a curb and bounced her into the street and a semi ran over her.

That was 16 years ago.

I remember it every year because it's St. Patrick's Day and she was an amazing young woman.

Sixteen years ago, that was also the day that God called her younger brother into full-time ministry.

[33 : 44] His brother David, who's a friend of mine, pastor of a church in Seattle, Sederis, he was in a bar watching Madritch Madness with his buddies. He gets to call, your sister just hit by a semi, she didn't make it.

And he went out that day, sat behind the bar in the alleyway and just wept for three hours. And in that time, the Lord called him, the whole story there, but it was essentially the Lord says, David, your life, it needs to be about what was on your sister's heart, which was to tell people about Jesus. I want you to commit your life to having people consider Jesus, consider, which is the translation Sederis actually means consider in the language it's written.

So we see there, and we don't always get that. But we see that God has this interconnected sovereign plan. And even when we can't understand the bitter pill, we just have to rest.

So this Thursday evening in the garden, who was in charge? Church, who was in charge? God was in charge.

[35 : 01] Jesus was in charge. He in fact could have walked away. He was praying about it. He could have walked away. In fact, he had met around him ready to help him walk away.

Look at verse 47 or 49. To 51, when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword?

And one of them, and by the way, John indicts Peter, because he tells us it's Peter, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. But Jesus says, no more of this.

And he touched the ear and he healed him. This scene is a bit absurd. Totally. Right? Think about this. Peter, Jesus, we got your back.

We're ready. We're going to defend. We're winning. Check it out, man. There's a guy who can hear only out of one side. We're winning.

[35 : 58] Yes, Jesus is 18. That's what Jesus loves to use. And you know it, right? Right? I mean, you know it. So, and what does Jesus say?

Says no more of this. No more of this. Right? Peter, put your sword away. Put it in his sheath.

Right? I'm going to drink the cup the Father has given me to drink.

Right? My kingdom is not going to advance by the sword. And I'm going to do the thing the Father has asked. I'm going to drink this cup. Church, let me give us two encouragements this morning from this scene.

Two profound encouragements related to suffering and evil in this life.

First one is this. Our God who owes us absolutely nothing did not avert himself from suffering. [36 : 58] In fact, he obligated himself to go to the cross in order to heal us of our worst disease. That's God.

He didn't bow out, right? It's like potluck time and it's the college students like, yeah, I'll bring the napkins. So helpful.

Sorry, college students. I mean, I was one. Sometimes I didn't bring napkins. But Jesus is like, man, I'm going to provide the meal. I'm going to do it all. I'm going to do it all.

And so the next time that we shake our fist at God as though he is silent, uninvolved, let us remember that he has already intervened.

Amen? It just so happens to be at a wide angle that actually heals into eternity, not just in the immediate moment.

[38 : 10] God doesn't understand my pain. Yes, he does. And I'll tell you what, church, that's a God to worship.

Amen? That's a God to worship. Second encouragement from this scene actually comes in the final verses, look at verses 52 and 53, then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come out against him, have you come out as against a robber with swords and clubs?

I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me, but this is your hour and the power of darkness.

Now first Jesus calls out these men who are approaching him that night. He indicts them.

In fact, you know what you're doing is wrong by the fact that you're doing it under the cover of darkness. But let me highlight this phrase that Jesus utters, he says, this is your hour, the power of darkness.

[39 : 28] The second encouragement for us church here related to God's sovereignty and suffering and evil is this. I'm struggling, evil is temporary.

Evil has an hour, but there is a day coming when King Jesus will make all things right.

But Jay, I'm hurting today. I'm struggling today. God is just taking so long to make things right.

And I think this is the same conflict, the same difficulty the prophet Habakkuk wrestled with in his day, about 650 BC.

He's looking at the nation of the kingdom of Judah and the Babylonians and the harassing that they're doing and the evil that's touching Judah and he's wrestling with God and his presence and his timing.

[40 : 35] In Habakkuk 1, verse 2 and 3, he says, oh Lord, how long shall I cry for help? And you will not hear or cry to you violence and you will not save.

Why do you make me see iniquity and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me, strife and contention arise.

And yet Habakkuk is answered by God because if you go to the next chapter, Habakkuk 2, verse 3, God gives him an answer and says, for still the vision awaits its appointed time.

It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it. It will surely come. It will not delay.

Habakkuk, I've got plans. I will rescue. And sure enough, God makes good on that promise because it's about 100 years later in 539 BC that God uses the nation of Persia to destroy Babylon and deliverance comes.

[41 : 48] God acted in history on Habakkuk's prayer and his behalf. And I would say the same thing is true for us today that God, for the believer today, God has acted in history and in fact deliverance has already come.

And we're actually going to celebrate it next Sunday as we celebrate the resurrection. And that deliverance means that despite the evil of today, evil doesn't win.

Yeah, our sins really are forgiven. God is victor and reunion lies ahead and guess what? The story ends as it should.

See the king who walked into the city on Sunday and then exited on Thursday from the same course will again someday stand in that olive orchard.

In fact, that's the promise in Zechariah who says in 14-4, on that day at the return of Christ his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east.

[43 : 06] See our king who walked out through that eastern gate will then walk back through it and he will sit on his throne. And the promise later in Habakkuk 2, 14 is that the earth it will be filled with

the knowledge and with the glory of the Lord.

As waters cover the sea. Church our king, he drank the cup of suffering that we could be forgiven and free and market he will return.

So let's persevere on. Father thank You for this scene in the garden on this Thursday evening of Passion Week.

Thank You for the reminder that You were fully in control. You were not surprised and as bitter as this night was in the Friday that follows, Lord, all of it was part of Your interconnected sovereign plan.

Lord we rest in the fact that You stand above all things. Lord there's things that we cannot make sense of in this life but we know there's a day coming when we will see You face to face.

[44 : 39] And Father all those things will come into focus.

Lord they will melt away the sufferings, the trials, the heartache, the sorrow. And so Lord I want to thank You that Your suffering that You willingly entered into, it was meant to not touch us simply for today in this new life we live in the here and now but it was meant to touch us into all of eternity.

And Lord we look forward to that. Thank You Lord that there is a day coming when we will be away finally from the presence of say.