

The cost of Easter

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Preacher: Benji Cook

- [0 : 0 0] And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.
- But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter answered him, Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away. Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.
- Peter said to him, Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. And all the disciples said the same. Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, Sit here while I go over there and pray.
- And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me.
- And going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.
- [1 : 0 6] And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, So could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.
- Again for the second time he went away and prayed, My father, if this cannot pass until I drink it, unless I drink it, your will be done. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.
- So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
- Rise, let us be going, see, my betrayer is at hand. Did Jesus have to die for our sins? Now I know, of course, again, as with last week, the Sunday school answer to that question is, Yes, Jesus had to die for our sins.
- We all know that answer. Every child that has ever been to any kind of Sunday school would know that answer. But to say that the death of Jesus for the sins of the world is the purpose of the cross, is heavily contested in our age, and I think that would probably be an understatement.
- [2 : 1 8] At a recent Southwark conference that I was at for Ordinands, one young man was asked a question why he wanted to be ordained, which is a posh word of saying running a church in the Church of England.
- And he says because he wants to preach against those hateful Christians who teach that God murdered his son to appease his own anger and sin. He means us, by the way.
- That's who he's talking about. And that view is hardly surprising given the church he attends called Oasis. Some of us might be familiar with it where the lead pastor, Steve Chalk, called the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins cosmic child abuse.

Now we might balk at that and be surprised and think, how could anyone think that about the death of Jesus? But many of our friends and family who aren't Christian, whilst they definitely wouldn't put it that way, would think something similar.

As soon as we say in our evangelistic conversations, Jesus' death is the only way, the only way we could come to God, we would be met with hostility.

[3 : 26] To say that there is only one way to God, and that the only way you can get there is not on your own efforts, but to have someone die for you, and you can't earn it.

No, rather, you're so lost that God considers any notion of you being a good person nonsense. To say that to someone, well that is quite offensive potentially, isn't it?

that Jesus' death on the cross is the only way. So perhaps that should be our question this morning. Is Jesus' death on the cross the only way? The only way to God?

Now Matthew has charged his readers, as we saw last week with this great commission, to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. And certainly therefore, Matthew needs to provide his readers with the reason.

Like why is it that the message of Jesus is the thing that you're supposed to bring? And he's a genius writer. So what he does, as we're going to see in this story, is he puts the three best men, the three best disciples, next to Jesus.

[4 : 32] That's what he does. And we're going to see this interplay where he flips between the disciples and between Jesus again and again and again to drive home that point. Now I've never bought a diamond, but I'm told that when you buy a diamond, the jeweler will put like a nice black canvas on the table and then with a flourish, put whatever the jewelry is on top of the canvas.

And the black canvas is supposed to be a kind of foil so that the beauty and the perfection of the diamond shines through all the more. Well, that's what we're going to see.

The three disciples that Matthew particularly focuses in on, they're the black canvas upon which the diamond of the Lord Jesus Christ shines all the more brightly.

Now on your handout, you've got your first point, the problem, strong spirit, weak flesh. I've changed my mind this morning, which is always a dangerous thing to do. So the first heading is, the problem, humanity is always faithless.

The problem, humanity is always faithless. Now as I said, Matthew is a genius storyteller and he constantly holds the disciples next to Jesus, flipping from one to the other, one to the other, one to the other.

[5 : 46] And he begins by doing so. Have a look with me at verse 30. And when they, that's the disciples, and Jesus had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to his disciples, you will all fall away because of me this night.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. Now that's an authoritative statement from Jesus, isn't it, about what's going to happen in the future.

He quotes an Old Testament prophecy about God's shepherd king being struck and his followers fleeing and makes clear that this is about him.

That's what Jesus says. He also makes a claim about the future that all of his followers, when he's struck, will desert him. That's what he says.

And that once this has all taken place, Jesus then says, I'm going to rise from the dead. Verse 32. Jesus speaking, but after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter then jumps in.

[6 : 46] So we've gone from Jesus and now we flip and we're looking at Peter at verse 33. Peter answered him, though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.

That's a breathtaking claim, isn't it, from Peter. Peter sets himself against both the disciples. Even though they fall away, I never will.

He sets himself against the Old Testament with that Zechariah quote. And he sets himself against Jesus all in one breath. It's very impressive, isn't it?

The disciples, yeah, fine, they're going to desert you, Jesus. Yeah, the Old Testament said, I will desert you, Jesus. Yeah, you've just said, we'll desert you, Jesus, but I, I won't desert you, Jesus.

I am the bee's knees. And Jesus doubles down, so we return back to Jesus in verse 34, where he directs now straight to Peter.

[7 : 43] Jesus said to him, truly I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows you, Peter, you will deny me three times. Peter's response, verse 35, Peter said to him, Jesus, even if I must die with you, I will not deny you.

And all the disciples said the same. One preacher that I heard recently preach on this said Peter had foot and mouth disease, that every time he opened his mouth, he stuck his foot in it, which I think is apt.

Peter has set himself up for a fall. Peter's essentially saying, Jesus, you're wrong, the other disciples are wrong, the Old Testament is wrong, I will never, ever let you down.

And Peter says, and Jesus says, Peter, not only will you not die for me, you will deny me three times. You will deny me three times. We now move to verses 36 to 46, and here we see Jesus basically give the disciples the easiest test in the world, easiest test in the world.

They've all said they would die for Jesus, and note with me the three disciples that Matthew specifically focuses in on. So verse 36, then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, I'll sit here while I go over there to pray.

[9 : 00] And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Why I mention the two sons of Zebedee? We'll flip back with me to Matthew 20, chapter 20, verses 20 to 22.

Matthew 20, verses 20 to 22. And this is why we see why Matthew has singled these two out. Matthew 20, 20 to 22. Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee, those are the two disciples, came up with her sons, and kneeling before Jesus, she asked him for something.

And Jesus said to her, what do you want? She said to him, say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom. Jesus answered, you do not know what you are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They, that's the two sons, said to Jesus, we are able. Flick back with me to Matthew, flick back to our passage.

Jesus, therefore, has taken the boldest disciples. We'll come on to what that cup is in a moment. But Jesus has taken the boldest disciples. Peter, I will die for you.

[10 : 10] Sons of Zebedee, I can drink the cup that you drink. He has taken them and he's zooming in on them. Peter, who above all other disciples, proclaimed his trustworthiness. And Jesus gives these three disciples his test.

Okay, here's the easiest test in the world for three people who've said that they'll die for Jesus. Verse 38 in our passage. Here's the test. Jesus says to them, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch with me. There's the test. Stay awake. There's the test. You say that you'll die for me. You'll say that you'll drink my cup.

I'm anguished to the point of death. Here's your test. Stay awake. In other words, your great enemy, Peter and sons of Zebedee, for this test, if you should be willing to take it, is a pillow.

And it's to stay awake, did we notice, to support Jesus. Verse 37 and 38 again. And taking with him, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled.

[11 : 14] Then Jesus said to them, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me. It's to stay awake and support Jesus in a time where he says, I am so sorrowful that I wish I was dead.

That I'm so anguished that I wish I wasn't here. That the person that they said they would die for, Jesus simply asks, he longs for their support, please just stay awake with me.

Please just stay awake. It's an easy test. An easy, very easy test. Just stay awake. Now some of us are so familiar with this story, and we know the outcome, that we think it's a pathetically easy thing just to stay awake.

There's no persecution, no effort really. Just pray and stay awake to support a friend. I want us to imagine all the things that we've done an all-nighter for. At university, it was because I'd not done an essay until, well, started it at midnight, which is always a thoroughly good time to start an essay.

It might be to binge watch that TV show that we particularly like. It might be because we're having a good time with friends. It might be because someone at work dumped something on us at 9pm and says, can I have it back by Monday morning?

[12 : 30] And there are many reasons. There are many reasons why we might stay awake all throughout the night. But if a friend came to us and said, please, I need your support. I am desperately, desperately sad.

Please just stay awake. Well, of course we would. Maybe. And what happens in verse 40? Sorry, starting at verse 39, and going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, so could you not watch with me one hour?

Can you imagine the heartbreak of Jesus? His darkest hour, the moment before he's about to die on the cross, his time of great need, a simple request to his closest friends, please stay awake with me.

And the disciples fall asleep. It's such a contrast, isn't it? Jesus, I'll die for you. Falls asleep. The reason as to why they do this is given by Jesus in verse 41.

[13 : 41] Jesus says to them again, watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Good intentions, no follow through. Big talk, no actions.

It is shocking, but it is utterly ordinary as well, isn't it? If we pause to think about it. How many of us here don't actually stick to our words? Or even the thoughts that we have about ourselves by week to week, day to day.

If we were to kind of hang a microphone around our chest and had it on for a month and it could record our words and our thoughts, and then we compared our words and our thoughts about ourselves at the end of the month to what we actually did, well, we know that we wouldn't live up.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Jesus, I'll die for you. He falls asleep. Peter says, as we've seen, that he'll die for Jesus.

The sons of Zebedee have said that they will drink the cup, but when it actually comes to it, when Jesus actually gives them the easiest of tests, they simply fall asleep. If we return to our question that we started with this morning, did Jesus have to die on the cross?

[14 : 51] Is that really the only way to God? Well, Matthew is giving us, as I said, this black canvas of the disciples and then the Lord Jesus Christ next to it. Now, there's a famous illustration that's kind of fallen out of use, I think perhaps because it's slightly old, called the Boathouse Illustration.

Apologies if some of us have heard it before, but the Boathouse Illustration goes something like this. So, there's a boatman and his job is to pull the lever. I presume this is before the days of automation and his job is to pull the lever when a boat is coming towards the bridge.

Now, if he doesn't pull the lever, we can imagine what happens. Once the boat crashes in to the bridge and there's disaster and the boatman loves to take his son. He loves to take his son to come and enjoy, I don't know, skimming stones by the river whilst he's pulling the lever.

And one day, he sees a steamer and the steamer is coming at quite a pace towards the bridge and he hops up into his boathouse and he's about to pull the lever and he hears a shout and he hears a cry and he looks over to the bridge's gear mechanism and he sees that his little boy has fallen into the gears and the boy can't get out and the boy is trapped and the father has a choice.

Is he going to pull the lever and thus kill his son or is he going to let the boat crash into the bridge and potentially lose hundreds of lives? That's the dilemma that the boatman has.

[16 : 13] Is he going to pull the lever? And of course, let's say that the boatman did make the decision to pull the lever. That he realised with tears in his eyes that he had to grab the lever and he had to pull it to save the people on the boat.

Do we honestly think that the boatman would have pulled the lever if there was any other way to save his boy and save the people in the boat? Do we honestly think that? When Steve Chalk stands up and says that the cross is cosmic child abuse, that the Lord is cruel to send his son to die for our sins?

Do we honestly think when we see the anguish of Jesus that if there was another way, any other way at all, for the father to do something about our sin, that he would have done it?

No, we see here in the disciples the utter weakness of humanity. We need the death of Jesus. If there had been another way than the cross, trust me and trust God, they would have used it.

This comes on to our second and final point of solution. The only faithful man in the world. The only faithful man in the world. This is verses 39 to 46.

[17 : 25] Now it should give us pause to realise when we read these verses, and I wonder again, for those of us who are familiar with this passage, if we've noticed this before, that Jesus did not want to go to the cross.

I wonder if we've ever noticed that before. Jesus did not want to go. Verse 39. This is Jesus speaking. And going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Now the cup, as we mentioned, it's a metaphor for the anger of God at the world's sin. It's a metaphor.

But in the Old Testament, over and over and over again, we won't jump to it now because we don't have time, but if you want to look it up, it's in Jeremiah 25. Over and over, the whole world is told, nation by nation, that you are going to drink this cup.

You are going to drink the anger of the Lord because of your sin. That's what you're going to do. And there's lots of details that we could pull out of the Old Testament about this cup, but the most significant thing is to realize, I think, that Jesus is one man and every single time the cup is referenced in the Old Testament, it is nations that are drinking it.

[18 : 41] So the nations and thousands upon thousands of people are to drink this cup and then we zoom in on the Lord Jesus Christ and it is one man, one lonely man, with his anguish and with his grief.

Now I hadn't really noticed the horror of this cup until kind of studying this again recently and I think we get a sense of this horror when we go back to verse 39 and realize that the thing that Jesus doesn't want to happen is not the cross but drinking this cup.

Verse 39, Jesus prayed, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. In other words, it's not the cross itself that Jesus asked God to take away but this cup.

Jesus is more afraid in other words than taking the anger of God his father than he is going to the cross. Now that is impossible for us to fathom, isn't it? That something could be worse, far worse than the crucifixion.

And another thing that I had never noticed before, before prepping this, that we must not miss is the desperate loneliness of Jesus here. In Matthew, God the Father that we've seen previously has twice ripped open the heavens and spoken to Jesus saying, my son, whom I love, he's spoken twice.

[20 : 08] This time, in Jesus' most desperate hour, Jesus is met every single time with silence. Verse 39, my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Silence. Verse 42, Jesus again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, my father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.

Silence. Verse 44, so leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Silence. No response.

Jesus prays to his father and his father does not answer. And not only that, Jesus, each time God does not reply, Jesus returns to his closest friends, those three disciples that we saw for comfort, and each and every single time when he prays to the father, please take this cup from me, and the father does not respond, he turns to his closest friends, thinking, if my father does not respond, will they?

And each and every single time, they are fast asleep. Verse 40, Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping. Verse 43, and again Jesus came and found them sleeping.

[21 : 27] And verse 45, then he came to the disciples and said to them, sleep and take your rest later on. Here we see, don't we, the sharp relief, the diamond of the Lord Jesus Christ, held above the black canvas of the disciples and our utter failure.

The disciples, sons of Zebedee, Jesus, I will drink the Jeremiah Old Testament cup for you, the cup that staggers nations, the cup worse than the cross. Sons of Zebedee, fall asleep.

Peter, Jesus, I will never leave you. Jesus, I will die for you. Peter, falls asleep. Jesus, Lord, I do not want to die.

Lord, I do not want this cup. Please, any other way, any other way at all, take it from me. Jesus, verse 46, rise, let us be going, see my betrayer is at hand.

Jesus walks willingly to his death. He doesn't pause, he doesn't hesitate, he doesn't procrastinate, he doesn't beg, he doesn't delay, rise, let's go from here, my betrayer is at hand.

[22 : 48] Peter did not want to stay awake, so he slept. Jesus did not want to die, so he died. To return to our boatman illustration, the boatman illustration breaks down at this point.

It doesn't perfectly match, because for the illustrations to perfectly match, the boy in the gears would have to look at the father and say, pull the lever. That's what the boy would have to do, because that's what the Lord Jesus Christ does here.

Not my will, Lord, but yours. If this is the only way, I will go to my death. I will go to my death for the sins of the world. Here is a picture of the only faithful man in the world.

Here is King Jesus, our King. For Matthew's readers, they would have been left in no doubt, no doubt at all off the back of this, that the proclamation of Jesus Christ is the only message that saves.

There is only one, and only ever has been one, faithful man, the Lord Jesus Christ. For us, as we conclude, we started by asking why Jesus had to die, or I suppose more specifically, is Jesus' death the only way, the only way to God?

[24 : 06] I hope that as we see Matthew's answer, the universal need, the universal uniqueness of King Jesus is clearer and clearer.

But yet, in our society, particularly within the Church of England and wider society, that idea is coming more and more under attack. To return to Steve Chalk quote again, it's cosmic child abuse to preach that Jesus died for our sins.

Do we see how that is just like Peter? Just like the sons of Zebedee. Jesus, I'll die for you. Jesus, I'll drink the cup. Jesus, you didn't need to die.

But it's such a vile and dangerous and arrogant belief to turn around to the Lord Jesus Christ and say, you didn't need to go to the cross.

I'm okay. You didn't need to die for me. I'm fine, thank you very much. How dangerous. How arrogant. Only Jesus, only the death of our precious faithful Lord can see mankind.

[25 : 14] And this microcosm of the disciples' weakness, well that is us. That is us. we are that black canvas just as well. Two implications for us as we close.

The first, beauty. And the second, comfort. Now, I like football. So I often go to Millwall.

I know I don't look like I'm a Millwall fan, but trust me, I am a Millwall fan. And it's striking that when you go to a football match, the love, the passion, some would say that British men are not very good at expressing their emotions, don't know where they get that from.

But at football, it's an entirely different story. The passion, the love, the adoration, the anguish, the ups, the downs, the hugging strangers, the swearing at people you don't know for no reason.

The emotions go up and down. And of course, the reason really is because the connection with someone that they think is doing something extraordinary, well we feel it, don't we? It doesn't have to be football.

[26 : 19] It could be swimming, it could be badminton, or whatever the case may be. But it's that longing, isn't it, for greatness, uniqueness, to seeing someone achieve something magnificent.

And we talk about it being the beautiful game. Millwall doesn't play beautiful football, but we get the impression. In other words, we recognise beauty in other people, don't we?

But when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, is there anything more beautiful, anything more precious than seeing someone say, I do not want to die, but Lord, if that is your will to give my life for the sins of the world, to give my life for people who have fallen asleep next to me, I'll do it.

And no delay, and to the cross he goes. Sure, we can get excited by football, and our favourite sports person. But is there anyone more beautiful, more precious, more magnificent, more worthy of glory, more worthy of praise, than the Lord Jesus Christ?

Finally, comfort. The Lord Jesus Christ is not surprised when we mess up. I wonder if you've ever thought about that.

[27 : 31] The Lord Jesus Christ is not there thinking, gosh, they've failed again. Maybe it's time for me not to kind of take away my forgiveness for them. You know, when we feel like that coldness and that deadness that, oh, I haven't prayed in ages, oh, I've turned away from God for so many years, oh, I haven't, you know, I'm not evangelising enough at work or whatever the case may be, or I've not done what I said I would do, that is not a surprise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord knew that Peter was going to deny him. The Lord knew that the sons of Zebedee were going to fall asleep and he went to the cross anyway. No, here in the person of Jesus' beauty and comfort, the Lord Jesus Christ knows us.

He knows our weaknesses and he says, I love you all the same. I died for you all the same. Did Jesus have to die? Yes. Thank the Lord that he did.

Why don't I close us in prayer? Father, we thank you that the Lord Jesus Christ was the only faithful man in the world, that he went to the cross, that he took our sin and that in him and him alone we have eternal life.

Amen.