

Not My Will But Yours

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Preacher: Andrew Moody

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 8th of April 2001. The preacher is Andrew Moody.

His sermon is entitled Not My Will But Yours and is from Mark chapter 14 verses 32 to 42.

I wonder if you've ever noticed how hard it can be to maintain a sense of gratitude and thankfulness.

I wonder if you've ever noticed how easy it can be to become blasé about the good things you've been given and to take them for granted or even to become dissatisfied with those things that you've been given.

A few years ago we had a powerful example of how easy it is to become ungrateful in this country when Australia gave refugee status or temporary refugee status to a number of families from the war zone in Kosovo.

[1 : 07] At first it started really well. It seemed like a coming together of nations. Australians opened their arms to the Kosovo refugees and there were scenes of the refugees on television saying how grateful they were to Australia and how much they loved the place.

And for a while it seemed great. We had a great act of generosity we felt on our part and a great response of gratitude on their part. But as things went on that gratitude seemed to grow cold.

There were allegations of criminal charges against at least one of the people in the group and as things went on there were increasing complaints from them.

At one stage there was a sit-in stage because they felt their accommodation wasn't adequately air conditioned. Later on by the time it was time for them to go home at the end of their temporary stay a number of them were protesting about their right to remain in the country and accusing the Australian government of almost murdering them sending them back to their deaths in Kosovo.

Somehow in the space of a few months a temporary refuge had become a right. Somehow in the space of a few short months people who were initially so grateful to get out of Kosovo where there was ethnic cleansing and rape and murder so grateful to get away from that now seemed dissatisfied with accommodation that didn't have air conditioning.

[2 : 54] Somehow gratitude seemed to have slipped away. Now I'm not saying this because I have anything against the Kosovo refugees I'm sure there's more to the story than I've just recounted nor do I think that Australians would have been a kind of great example of gratitude if our places had been swapped and we were the refugees.

I merely use this example because I think it's a fresh and powerful example of a tendency that is in all of us a universal human tendency. One of the great thinkers of the Christian church in history described humans as the creature that walks on two legs and is ungrateful.

Ingratitude is very much a part of who we are and what we're on about and of course Noah is that more clearly seen than in our relationship to God and in our tendency to become ungrateful toward him the one who's given us everything and who even sent his own son into the world to die for us.

How easy it is to become cold toward that truth and to lose sight of the gratitude that we had when we first believed in Jesus and grabbed hold of that gift from God.

It seems that gratitude is something that needs to be cultivated and nurtured and refreshed by continual reminders if we were to keep hold of it and to resist that growing cold and that taking for granted.

[4 : 26] And that reminder or an attempt at a reminder is what tonight's talk is all about. As we draw close to Easter it's all the more appropriate that we try to refresh and remember again what God has done for us in Jesus and to grow grateful again as we turn it over in our minds.

And I think there are some striking things in the passage that we're looking at tonight which help us refresh that sense of gratitude and remind us what Jesus has done for us.

The first thing that stands out here in this incident in the Garden of Gethsemane I think is the confronting and desperate nature of Jesus' suffering as he anticipates his betrayal and his arrest and his execution.

We're used to seeing Jesus as a man who's in control as we read the Gospels. Nothing seems to take Jesus by surprise. He knows who he is.

He seems to understand his role in God's plans and he seems to respond to his enemies with complete confidence throughout the Gospel. In the chapters that lead up to these verses Jesus clearly and without reservation speaks of the need that is imperative that he goes to the cross and that he is put to death and that in three days rises to life again.

[5 : 58] He realises that it's part of God's plan for him and in the verses that follow this interlude in the Garden again we see Jesus in control standing with dignity before the Jewish ruling council as they fumble their way through their prosecution standing again with dignity before Pilate as he chooses to answer and not answer and Pilate is amazed at him.

But here just for now in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus seems to be a man on the edge. His confidence and his assurance and his composure seem to desert him.

Once he gets away from the main body of the disciples Jesus begins to be overwhelmed with horror and dread at what lies ahead of him. Distressed and agitated our translation puts it but the words are stronger than that.

The first expression especially contains an element of shock or surprise as if Jesus is totally overwhelmed or taken off guard by what has suddenly occurred to him what he's suddenly realising is about to happen.

Although he's known all along that he's going to have to die and that he would rise again suddenly as it dawns upon him in his emotions what is about to happen Jesus seems overwhelmed and Jesus' sudden vulnerability shows up also in the way he deals with his disciples.

[7 : 29] here too. He asks for their support I am deeply grieved even to death remain here and keep awake with the burden of his death almost crushing him now Jesus for the first time relies on his disciples to keep awake and support him.

He wants them to keep watch the word has both connotations of keeping awake and looking keeping watch. It seems that Jesus wants his disciples to keep guard so that he'll be notified when Judas and the soldiers arrive to arrest him and this tells us some interesting things it tells us both about his mental state but it tells us also I think something about what's going on in his relationship to God.

If we read the earlier chapters of Mark's gospel then we are very aware that Jesus is never taken by surprise in relation to his enemies.

The idea that he could be caught off guard seems laughable. Jesus is always aware of what's going on in his opponents' hearts he knows their secret motivations he knows full well in advance of Judas' plans to betray him and of course he knows that this very night in the olive grove of Gethsemane this is where it's going to happen.

He knows it's right at hand but suddenly it seems as if that special channel of information that Jesus has is shut down. Suddenly in the last moments he doesn't know exactly when his betrayer is going to arrive and he's so anxious about this that not only does he leave his disciples on guard to keep watch and notify him but he keeps returning to them keeps coming back to their spot to find out if the moment has arrived yet because of course he can't trust them they keep falling asleep.

[9 : 24] So the suggestion is that Jesus is cut off from the special insights given to him by his father at this moment. I think this is also indicated in the way Jesus prays in the very next verse.

Throwing himself on the ground Jesus starts praying that if it is possible he might escape from what's about to happen. Abba father he says for you all things are possible remove this cup from me yet not what I want but what you want.

And here suddenly Jesus seems to be in the midst of doubt. not doubt about God's goodness or God's reality like we doubt and not a sinful doubt that makes excuses for sin but there seems to be a real doubt here as to what is about to happen to him next.

In his mind and in the things that he said beforehand Jesus knows what's about to happen. He's going to have to be handed over. He's going to be put on trial and he's going to be crucified and eventually he will rise again from the dead.

But now it seems that he's in this fog of distress and he can hardly think straight. He seems to have lost that sense of assurance and the clarity that was with him throughout the rest of his life in ministry and we find him praying this desperate prayer.

[10 : 57] A prayer that the cup of suffering might be taken from him. And it's a prayer of course that will be answered no. Jesus prays a prayer that God will answer no.

Of course the final, this isn't a rebellion, Jesus concludes his prayers each time he prays them, he prays it three times with the request that God's will be done.

He's not setting his will against God's. But he certainly seems for a moment confused about what God's will is. He seems to doubt and have doubts about what lies ahead for him.

What I'm suggesting is going on here is that Jesus has been cut off from God. If we have already read ahead in Mark's gospel then we are ready for that cry from the cross where Jesus calls out, my God, my God why have you forsaken me?

But what I'm suggesting now is that already Jesus has been cut off from God. Perhaps already Jesus has been, had that link to his father severed.

[12 : 08] He's been cut off from the assurance and confidence that he has from knowing his father's will precisely and immediately. Jesus is already God forsaken. In any case, whatever the reality, the spiritual reality here, there's no mistaking the fact that Jesus is alone in human terms.

Jesus has here his three closest friends with him, doesn't he? Peter, James and John. But even they are woefully inadequate to give him comfort or support at this time.

He asks them to stay awake and keep watch but they can't even do this simple thing for an hour. Peter will fail Jesus before the night's through and swear black and blue that he's never known Jesus.

In a matter of minutes, all Jesus' disciples will abandon him and flee into the darkness. And so even now, Jesus, while he's with his disciples, is alone.

He prepares for his death and they sleep. So this is a harrowing picture we get of Jesus last hours before his execution. He's disturbed and reeling from the realisation of what's about to come.

[13 : 17] He seems abandoned by God and certainly abandoned by his disciples. But what is the significance of it all? What does it tell us about Jesus?

And what does it tell us about what he achieved when he went through his suffering? Well, the first thing it tells us about Jesus is that he really knew what it was to suffer as a human.

Sometimes we get the feeling that Jesus' experience as a human was all a bit phony. That he didn't really suffer like we suffer or that he didn't really face temptation like we face temptation.

And you know, the fact that he succeeded where we fail, that he carried it off while we sin, seems to make us feel like he was cheating somehow.

But this episode in the Garden of Gethsemane tells us how real Jesus' experience of temptation and suffering and how real his experience as a human was. He really did experience uncertainty and doubt.

[14 : 23] He really did feel far away from God sometimes. He really did know what it's like not to be sure of God's will. And he really did know what it's like to be faced with having to do something he didn't want to do and yet carry it off.

And the significance of this for us is that it means Jesus is able to sympathise with us and he knows what it's like for us to be human. The letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus' experience of suffering makes him perfectly equipped to be our great high priest.

that is the one who acts as the go between, between God and humanity. Because he's endured every temptation and suffered and endured the being cut off from God and the confusion of not knowing how to please God exactly or being at least unsure exactly what God's will is.

He is able to comfort us when we feel that way. Listen to how Hebrews 4.15-16 describes it. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are yet was without sin.

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. Jesus' suffering and the reality of it here in Garden of Gethsemane but also the suffering that he endured throughout his life and ministry and especially in his death means that he can comfort us and that he has sympathy for us when we approach him.

[16 : 02] The writer says in Hebrews that we can approach God's throne, the throne of grace with boldness because we have somebody there who knows what it's like. Is our life filled with temptation and struggle and uncertainty and suffering?

Well, Jesus was there first. He knows what it's like. We can draw close to him. We can turn to him and find help. So that's the first great implication of the suffering that Jesus went through.

But the second is that Jesus' suffering doesn't merely say that Jesus knows what it's like for us. It shows us that Jesus has done something about the root of the problem.

God, through Jesus, has taken on our sin, the sin that separates us from God and that gets in the way of our relationship with God. Those of you who were here a couple of weeks ago might remember that Paul pointed out that the cup Jesus speaks of here and the cup that Jesus begs his father to take away from him contains a reference to the Old Testament image of the cup of God's wrath, that symbol of God's judgment on human sin.

Have a listen to a couple of representative passages from the Old Testament which used this image. Jeremiah 25, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

[17 : 30] They shall drink and stagger and go out of their minds because of the sword that I am sending among them. Or Ezekiel 23, verses 32 to 33, Thus says the Lord God, You shall drink your sister's cup deep and wide.

You shall be scorned and derided. It holds so much. You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, a cup of horror and desolation is the cup of your sister Samaria. The cup is a symbol of God's wrath, his judgment on human rebellion, the righteous anger that he pours out in judgment on humans that stand against him and resist him.

It's a symbol of destruction and horror. But if this cup is a symbol of God's wrath and his judgment, then why is Jesus about to drink it?

He is the man who never rebelled against God, who had such a perfect relationship with God that here in the Garden of Gethsemane he is calling God Abba, Father. Here he is in deep anxiety that he is about to drink this cup.

The only explanation can be, of course, that he's experiencing or is about to experience the cup of God's wrath in our place, that he's about to take on himself God's judgment and God's wrath.

[18 : 58] As he had warned in Mark 10, 45, for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. As the Apostle Peter would describe it years later in 1 Peter 3, 18.

For Christ suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. Or as the great prophet Isaiah had predicted 700 years before this night in Gethsemane, he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.

Upon him was the punishment that made us whole. By his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The Bible speaks with one voice that the death and suffering of Jesus was a substitution. It was him taking our punishment, him taking on himself the wrath that was due to us.

That's the reason why Jesus was so distressed as he anticipated going to the cross. It wasn't the nails being driven through his hands and feet. It wasn't the mocking and the having the crown of thorns rammed onto his scalp.

[20 : 18] All those things would be terrible. But there would be nothing compared to the judgment that he would take in our place. He was about to die a sinner's death for us.

Now what amazing things that tells us and what great insights that gives us into God and his attitude towards us. Firstly it tells us about the terrifying holiness of God and his righteous judgment against sin and against our sin.

We don't like thinking about God as a judge these days and we certainly don't like thinking that God might take our sin seriously. But Jesus' suffering shows that God takes our rebellion and our indifference towards God.

All the sins that we think of as light and trivial. God regards those with such a burning anger that he is prepared to judge us and destroy us.

Yet on the other hand if this suffering of Jesus tells us about God's wrath and his judgment then it also speaks about his great mercy and his love doesn't it?

[21 : 34] The God who is ready to judge us and to pour out his wrath on us instead pours out his wrath on God's, his own son. Jesus is the one who drinks the cup for us and goes to the cross in our stead.

The Apostle Paul looks at this transaction that God makes and he concludes that it's the ultimate proof of God's love for us. Romans 8 verses 31 onwards he says, What then are we to say about these things?

If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own son but gave him up for us all, will he not along with him give us everything?

There are enormous encouragements here, great warnings of God's wrath, but great encouragements of God's love. When we look at Jesus' suffering, we see everything made clear that is true about God.

We see his holiness, we see his love, we see his reaching down to us and taking the judgment into himself that we deserve.

[22 : 51] Well, I can think of no better way to respond to this than by saying thanks to God and praying and asking God to help us live in the light of this.

But before I do that, let me ask just for a moment whether this stuff is something that you have taken to heart yourself, whether you have applied to yourself and grabbed hold of.

Did you know that Jesus is the go-between and that his suffering makes us able to approach God with boldness? Did you know that God takes our sins so seriously that he's angry at them and he's prepared to judge them?

Did you know for yourself that God loves us so much that he sent his son to die for our sins, for your sins? And have you ever done anything about it?

Did you know that you have to respond to this great love that God offers us through Jesus? Let me tell you finally about one of my great failings.

[24 : 01] I'm a person that's very hard to buy presents for. Maybe it's because I don't have too many hobbies or interests or maybe it's just because I have the kind of things I want.

But my family finds it very hard to buy me things for Christmas or my birthday. So what they do is they give me money or vouchers. They might give me a \$50 voucher, say, for a bookshop or \$50 in a card or something like that.

They're pretty generous and these are great presents. The only trouble is I tend to lose them. One Christmas when I was tidying up all the wrapping paper, I threw away \$50 along with the wrapping paper.

Sometimes I let the whole year go past without using the voucher that I've been sent. And when I finally find it in the drawer, I think, oh, fantastic, \$50 worth of books.

It's expired. It's kind of stupid. But my point with this illustration is that the offer that God makes through Jesus is a bit like that.

[25 : 07] It's a fantastic offer. It's an offer that demonstrates God's love more than anything else we can imagine. But it's something that we have to take hold of and apply.

It's an offer of reconciliation and forgiveness. But if we don't want to grab hold of that reconciliation and be reconciled to God and live in a new relationship with him, it's all for nothing.

It's a waste. So what I want to urge you to do is, if you haven't grabbed hold of this great gift of God, is to do it.

Thank God for what he's done in Jesus. Enter into that new relationship that Jesus' suffering and death makes possible. Draw close to God with boldness, because we have somebody who sympathizes with us and has done something about our sins.

I'm going to pray a prayer to finish. It's really a prayer for Christians. It's something we can all say. But if you have never personally thanked God for what he's done in Jesus, if you've never taken advantage of it and entered into the new relationship that it makes possible, then you should say it along in your heart.

[26 : 23] And you should, for yourself, grab hold of Jesus' forgiveness and use his services as our great high priest or the go-between between us and God.

You should take hold of the forgiveness that God makes available through him. I'll read through the prayer, and then I'll pray it, and we can all pray it in our hearts together, I think.

God, our Father, we thank you that you sent Jesus to suffer and die in our place. Thank you that his sufferings made him able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Thank you that he went to the cross and took on himself the wrath and judgment that our sins deserve.

We claim for ourselves the forgiveness Jesus achieved, and we ask you to help us live for you with Jesus' help. I'm going to pray that now. God, our Father, we thank you that you sent Jesus to suffer and die in our place.

Thank you that his sufferings made him able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Thank you that he went to the cross and took on himself the wrath and the judgment that our sins deserve.

[27 : 37] We claim for ourselves the benefits and the forgiveness that Jesus achieved, and we ask you to help us to live for you with Jesus' help.

Amen.