

The Sorrow, Solitude and Submission of Jesus

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Date: 05 April 2020

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[0 : 0 0] to read from Matthew's Gospel. We're going to read from Matthew chapter 26. We're going to read from verse 36 down to verse 46. And you see that on your screen.

Then Jesus went with them, with his disciples, 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 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 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. And then in verse 42, again for the second time, he went away and prayed, my father of this cannot pass 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 his 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.

We see in our TV screens every day the growing human toll of suffering, the suffering that the coronavirus is causing our land and, of course, in every other country. And we truly do and must continue to pray for those who are suffering in this devastating illness. We pray for those who've been bereaved as a result of the virus, that death has come home, even to our very congregation in these last few days, in the passing of Andy's father, even last week. And we pray for the frontline workers who are seeking to alleviate the suffering with the very best of technology and the very best of the skill of human compassion. And as we see the virus that's brought to so many suffering, suffering directly, suffering indirectly, we pray that the Lord will have mercy upon us, that the Lord will have mercy upon us as a church, as individuals and as a nation. And we pray that even through this pandemic that lives will turn to the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus, who in his suffering suffered as the sinless saviour who came to save lives for his glory. And it's that suffering of Jesus that we'll focus on this morning as we see the suffering of Jesus, even there in Gethsemane, even just prior to his arrest and trial and crucifixion. As we see the suffering of Jesus, to see the sorrow in Jesus' heart, to see the affliction of his soul, even as he prepared to give his life as that ransom for many. And as we see Jesus in that hour, in that moment, or these moments of intense suffering, intense affliction, you know, as we see him who cried out, even not my will, but your will be done. And I pray that these words that we've heard so often that these words again will be a blessing to you all, because even the very suffering that we see of Jesus in Gethsemane, and even the acknowledgement that Jesus gave to his

[4 : 18] Father, even through that suffering, not my will, but your will be done. And I pray that they'll strengthen you and encourage you and draw you to the saviour and to realise that yes, as the expression goes, after darkness, light, even after the darkness of the suffering of Jesus' soul, the light of his grace, the light of his triumph over sin, over Satan, and over death itself.

And, you know, especially at this time of year, when so many in the church are preparing to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, then let's use this opportunity to remember the suffering of Jesus, even prior to his crucifixion, and that truly we will fix our eyes on Jesus, that we'll see him who obeyed his Father's will to the full, who obeyed that will even to the extent of going to the cross, sacrifice as the sinless sacrifice to pay the price for sin. And we're certainly not going to minimise the human suffering that we're seeing all around us as this virus, the coronavirus, sweeps through the world. And we do have to see beyond even that human suffering, to see the suffering of the Lord Jesus, that which Jesus endured for our sakes. And yes, there is purpose, God's purpose in the human suffering that we're seeing around us at this time. And we do bow before

God in his perfect will for all things. But above all, we bow before the great purpose of God, even the very suffering of Jesus for our sakes. And so we're going to return to Gethsemane. We've been there many times, whether it be in worship or our own private devotions, but we return to Gethsemane again.

And we see that place where in that very last full day of Jesus' life before his crucifixion, we see there the agony of the suffering of Jesus' soul. And yet, even in the place of suffering, we see hope that Jesus gave, the hope of salvation, because Jesus was willing to go to the cross for sinners such as ourselves. And it's that hope that we're given, even at this time of year, even in the circumstances in which we're finding ourselves in, that that hope will truly lift your spirits as we as we rejoice in Jesus. And to see again his beauty, the beauty of Jesus and his obedience to his Father's will, so that you who are his, who even dare to call God Father, that you'll worship him, that you'll glorify him, that you'll rejoice, is that Jesus took the punishment that you deserve, that he was willing to take that punishment and even suffered, even in the preparation to take the sins of his people upon himself. So let's just take a little time then reflecting on on what Jesus experienced there in Gethsemane. As we want to see the scale of the suffering of Jesus, what Jesus went through on our behalf, even before Calvary. And yes, to see what Jesus experienced in the agony of his soul, even as that prospect of his sin-bearing loomed closer and closer, even when it came to become almost, and we stress almost, too much for Jesus to bear. And so as we see that suffering, to marvel and to worship the Saviour. Because Jesus, as we'll see, Jesus submitted fully to the will of his Father. Jesus was prepared to drink from the cup of God's wrath, and to drink from that cup fully. Not to leave one drop left in that cup, but to drink it all, and to do it for the sake of sinners, for whom Jesus came to give his life. And as we see that willingness of Jesus to do his Father's will, to remember, and again we'll look at this more closely in a moment, to remember that Jesus suffered alone. There in Gethsemane, he showed his full resolve to do his Father's will, fully obedient to his Father, and to suffer there in full submission to his Father's will, and to suffer alone in that solitude.

And so, remember why we're here in our different homes. We are together in this worship. We're here to worship God. We're here to praise him for that great salvation in Christ. We're here to call upon God's name, to offer unto him the praises of our heart, the worship of our heart. Because truly we do turn our eyes upon Jesus and look on his wondrous face, and the things of earth will grow dim in the light of his glory and grace. And even these things that we've seen in recent weeks that have grown strangely dim, things that at one time we put so much stress and emphasis on what we felt were truly things that matter, but no longer. No, we see that when we do see the Lord Jesus and what he suffered for us, then we know that it's in him that true satisfaction lies. He is the one who satisfies fully. So, let's, as we say, turn to Jesus' experience in Gethsemane. And as we said, this passage that we read really focuses on three aspects of that experience of Jesus in Gethsemane.

[10:17] The sorrow of Jesus, the solitude of Jesus, and the submission of Jesus. So, let's turn first of all to the sorrow of Jesus. And what do we find in that passage? Well, we find that Jesus has taken his eleven disciples with him. He's taken the remaining eleven disciples onto the Mount of Olives and there into the Garden of Gethsemane. And as we saw in the passage, Jesus tells his disciples to sit down while he goes to a particular spot in the Garden of Gethsemane with three of his closest disciples, Peter, James and John. And he's going there to pray. And Jesus knows more than ever before, we might say, that he truly needs to commune with his Father as that moment of sin bearing is so close.

And so, as we say, he takes with him Peter, James and John. Even in that great need that Jesus had to commune with his Father in prayer, Jesus needs human companionship. Even Peter, James and John to watch with him and to pray with him in his hour of need. And, you know, as we see there, and as Matthew tells us, we see that we might see that the emotions of Jesus' heart as he's experienced the prospect, as he's facing that prospect of his death for sinners. You see the intense sorrow of Jesus in Jesus' soul. And Matthew gives us particular language really to latch on to, to focus our hearts and minds on, just to even to get a, even an idea of what Jesus suffered there in the garden.

Let's look at these words again, verse 37, taking with them Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, where of course, James and John, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. And then in verse 38, we read Jesus saying, my soul is very sorrowful even today. Remain here and watch with me.

And you'll see these three expressions of deep, intense sorrow of heart, where we again see these words, he began to be sorrowful. And then we read that he was troubled. And then we're told his soul that he was very sorrowful, even to death. You know, Jesus' soul is suffering in a way that we have to say that he'd never experienced before. But yes, of course, there have been times when he was greatly distressed. He wept at the death of Lazarus, his friend. He grieved over Jerusalem. Jerusalem, whom he cried tears over because they weren't willing to receive him as the savior. But the suffering that we read off of Jesus there in Gethsemane is a suffering that Jesus has not in the intensity experienced before. Because we're told that his soul is sorrowful. He's very sorrowful.

This is Jesus, the one and only Son of God, the one, the Son of God, the only begotten of God. And he's realizing the horror that's about to happen when he dies that sinner's death.

[13:37] Jesus had known the eternal love of the Father in heaven. And now what awaits him is the wrath of God against sin. Jesus, the sinless one, is about, it will become sin for us. And so he's troubled, he's distressed, he's distressed, he's distressed at that prospect of his death for sinners. And even to the point, we're told, even to the point of death there in Gethsemane. As somebody has written, he was a hair's breadth from death. Such was the intensity of the agony of his soul as he faced that prospect of sin bearing, the sinless savior for sinners. And yes, we truly do grieve at the suffering that we're seeing all around us in this pandemic that's caused so much agony and heart and pain and distress.

We truly are distressed at the human cost of this illness and the suffering of body and mind. We truly must be sorrowful at the human tragedies that we're seeing all around us.

And we will grieve and we will mourn with the compassion of Christ. We will show our love for our neighbor even as we grieve with them and over them. But surely the more and infinitely more we see the sorrow and troubled soul of Jesus. And we see the intensity, the deep, deep sorrow that Jesus knew before he was crucified for us. We can't even enter into that sorrow, the sorrow that Jesus endured there in Gethsemane. But we know that that sorrow was real and even to the point of death because he knew that in a few moments time he'd be forsaken of his father, even the cross. As we know, he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And the prospect even of that forsaken is so appalled Jesus.

But he actually tells, he goes to his close disciples and he tells them about his sorrow. He's informing them of how horrific even his life is at that moment. And we might even say that Jesus shows even a sinless vulnerability when he asks these three weak individual disciples to stay here and watch with me.

Because that really takes us to our second point, the solitude of Jesus. Because Jesus would, in a few hours of time, he would bear the sins of his people alone, alone on that cross. But even before that aloneness on the cross, he experiences an aloneness in the garden. And that's why we read verses 36 to 46 in Matthew's Gospel. And let's look at them again as we see the events unfolding that Matthew describes.

[16 : 38] These 11 disciples that have gone into the Garden of Gethsemane, they're really unaware of the full significance of what's about to happen as they follow Jesus into the garden. And again, just going over again what we read is as they enter into the garden, Jesus tells his disciples to sit down while Jesus goes a wee bit further from them to pray. As we said, he's going to take three of these 11 disciples, he's going to take these three with him, because his need even for human companionship at this point, it was real. And yes, he's coming before his father in prayer. But he still communicates with these three disciples at this point. He's telling them of his intense sorrow. He's telling them, watch with me in prayer. But as we saw in the passage we read, as he separates from them just a little, as he communes with his father in prayer, and then he returns to his disciples. What does he find? He finds them sleeping. They hadn't watched with him in prayer. They'd neglected to obey him. They'd left Jesus alone to pray. But then Jesus wakes Peter and speaks to him and the other two disciples, and he gives them that gentle rebuke, that rebuke of grace, that rebuke of love. He's not condemning them outright. But no, he's telling them how far they'd fallen in their loyalty to him. Just think of Peter. Peter, who just moments before had claimed that if all else deserted Jesus, he wouldn't. In fact, Jesus claiming, Peter rather claiming that even he was ready to die for Jesus. And Peter can't even keep awake with Jesus and pray with him and for him, even for one hour. And it happens again. And in that intensity of Jesus' prayer to his father, the disciples fall asleep again. And Jesus continues in prayer alone. And alone, he has to go to the cross. Mark tells us in his gospel that soon after this, all his disciples desert him.

And he's going to stand before the high priest alone. He's going to face Pontius Pilate alone. He's going to bear the sins of his people alone. And he'll face the hostility of man alone.

And above all, he'll face the wrath of God alone. And he'll be alone for your sake, so that you might not be alone without the Savior who gave his life for you.

And, you know, even at this moment, we might say, we're all bearing this relative aloneness. We're here in our current predicament. We're here in this lockdown. But I pray even in this relative aloneness that we're facing, that we'll see the more the power of Christ's love for sinners when he bore the sins of his people. When he bore your sins alone on that cross. And to see again how the perseverance of Jesus, even when he was that hair's breadth from death, even in that deep agony of his soul that he was willing to face what lay ahead of him. And that surely testifies to you and to me, the great love of Jesus for sinners. None of us, I don't particularly like this particular period of being alone. But we look to the Lord Jesus, who in his aloneness Jesus gave his life for sinners who suffered for your sake. Jesus suffered that solitude, the solitude even in these moments before his death. He did it to protect you. We're here in our aloneness for the sake of protection. But above all, Jesus endured that solitude in these moments to protect you. And to protect all for whom he gave his life. So rejoice that what Jesus faced, he faced alone for your sake. But then thirdly and finally, we see the submission of Jesus. We've seen the sorrow of Jesus. We've seen the solitude of Jesus. But now we see the submission of Jesus. And you see that submission in his prayers. See in verse 39, where Jesus prays to the Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And then in his second prayer, you see again his submission to his Father's will. My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done. Remember that Jesus came to earth to do his Father's will. He'd come to do what the name Jesus means. The name Jesus means Savior. He'd come to save his people from their sins. And

Jesus, from coming to earth, was on that road to Calvary to accomplish his Father's will. He'd come to fulfill the sovereign purposes of God and bring salvation to his own. As we saw on Wednesday night, Jesus even had taught his disciples to pray, your will be done. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And now Jesus is about to fully accomplish that will on the cross. But before that happens, he's trembling. He's trembling at that prospect. He's saying, if it's possible, let this cup pass from me. What did that cup mean? It spoke of the wrath of God. That cup that Jesus must drink and drink to the full. And the prospect of drinking that cup, of facing the wrath of his Father, that prospect appalled him. As we said just a moment ago, Jesus, the Son of God, the eternal Son of

[22 : 53] God. Jesus had known the eternal love of his Father in heaven. And now he's about to face the wrath of God against sin. And that's overshadowing his soul. I mean, you know, in life, in ordinary human life, you know, the prospect of facing human anger, it's not very pleasant. It's dreadful. And we all recoil at that. So how much infinitely more the prospect of Jesus, the eternal Son of God, facing the wrath of his Father. Jesus will not bypass that cup. Jesus will drink it and drink it to the full. And you see there the majesty of his submission to his Father, when Jesus says, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. You know, in life, we live so often with the reverse, when we say to God, not your will, but my will be done.

Jesus knew the will of his Father. Jesus knew the sovereign control of his Father. Jesus knew that that controlling all things. Jesus knew that the only means by which salvation could be achieved is by fulfilling his Father's will to the full. And you see that again in Jesus' second prayer, Jesus submits to his Father's will. He says, it's not possible for any other way, no other way than the way of the cross to be, for sinners to be reconciled to God. And so he's confirming his submission to his Father. Your will be done. And so there in Gethsemane, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Gethsemane where olives were crushed. Well, Jesus' soul, we might say, was crushed, even crushed at the prospect of his fully submitting to his Father's will. Look, and his Gospel tells us, in fact, that second prayer of submission, when Jesus was in such anguish that, in fact, he was sweating. His sweat was like great drops of blood. And here's Jesus. He's appalled at the consequence of being the sinless sacrifice for sin. And someone's put it like this. The wonder of the love of Christ for his people is not that for their sake he faced death without fear, but that for their sake he faced it and faced it terrified. And faced it terrified. And so we see again the submission of Jesus to his Father's will. And as we see that submission where Jesus says, your will be done,

God, I pray that we'll all do two things in response. And first of all, that you will submit, as I must submit, to the will of the Father of God in every circumstance of your life.

And seek to know and find out the will of God for you. Do it by searching his word. Do it as you come before God in prayer. Seek to delight to do the will of God for you. And seek to follow his will. Do his will as you witness for him. The very circumstances that we're finding ourselves in, even in the pandemic around. Show the world around that God is God. That the Lord Jesus is your savior. And that you seek to follow him. That you have that faith that overcomes fear.

And that you trust in him for all things. So do his will. Seek out his will and follow that will. But secondly, give praise and thanks to Jesus that Jesus was fully resolved to do the will of his Father for your sake. Even in his tears, even in the tears, even in the suffering, we might say that Jesus learned obedience to his Father, even there in that crucial hour before his arrest and trial and crucifixion.

[27 : 14] Jesus was very afraid of the kind of death he was about to face in the will of God. He might put it like this, that the sword of God's wrath, even there in Gethsemane was being raised above Jesus. And when Jesus saw that sword, he trembled. He literally shook for fear. His soul, as we said, as we go back to the beginning, his soul knew a depth of sorrow that only Jesus himself could experience.

But through that turmoil of his soul, Jesus emerged with that full knowledge that doing God's will was utterly, right, utterly suitable for the sake of the salvation of God's own people.

And so as we come now to the close of this part of our worship, pray that you will come before Jesus and give him thanks and praise, even for that suffering that he endured there in Gethsemane.

And that you'll know that he suffered for your sake, so that you might not and never know that depth of suffering that we have to say is the law of all who reject Jesus as Saviour. And I pray then that even in this time of worship, even for some of you who as yet haven't given your life to the Lord Jesus, that you'll see what Jesus, even there before the intense suffering of the cross, that you'll see what Jesus suffered for you and that you'll give your life to Jesus and that you will know, yes, even in your submission to him, that he is Lord, that he has come to save you from your sins. So let's close now in prayer. Let's pray and then after our prayer we'll sing in Psalm 40. So let's join together in prayer.

Lord, we bless you for your word. We bless you, Lord, that you've given us to know even of the suffering of Jesus in Gethsemane. And we thank you, Lord, that you've given to us that knowledge so that we might truly honour him and glorify him and put our trust in him. Lord, if there are any here even this morning who as yet have not submitted to you, we pray, Lord, that you will touch their lives, that you will make them whole and that you will bring them into your glorious kingdom.

[29 : 42] So hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.