

Matthew 26:31-46

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2020

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] Well, I want to add my welcome to the other Dan G's welcome as well, and I hope there's no confusion. He wore a beard so we can make sure we're separated that way, so I'll keep shaving anyway.

We continue our sermon series on the book of Matthew, wonderfully going through these last days of Jesus' life. And as you're turning there, I want to just say that this is a passage that draws us right into the heart of who Jesus is.

We see Jesus revealed in a way that we haven't seen before. And I don't know if you like watching documentaries. It's something that I like to do, famous people's lives especially, people who are fascinating.

And to be able to hear something about what makes them tick and what their motivations are, passions and so forth, is very an interesting thing to do. And one of the documentaries done recently in the last year on Netflix was one about Bill Gates.

And there was a three-part series. It was very well done. And it involved a lot of interviews of various people and Bill and Melinda, his wife, as well.

[1 : 19] And they told her in the interviews, you know, we're going to do this documentary. It's going to be called Inside Bill's Brain, Decoding Bill Gates. And she started laughing.

And they said, why are you laughing? She said, well, it's odd to do a documentary on the inside of Bill's brain. She said, you don't know what's in there. And she laughed again.

She said, you're going to do a whole documentary on that. They said, yes. She said, well, it'll be interesting to see how it turns out. But this passage does exactly that.

It gives a revealing glimpse into Jesus' mind and his heart. But the difference is, different from Inside Bill Gates' documentary, is that this revelation changes your life in a way that no documentary ever could.

Because through these verses, God invites us into an intimate relationship with God the Father. As we hear about who Jesus is, what is his motivation, what is his passion, it draws us into a deeply faithful relationship to Jesus, who is both fully God and fully human.

[2 : 35] It is a passage that is filled with emotion. It's an incredibly heartfelt kind of passage. It warns us here of the temptation of falling away.

But it also shows us how we can strengthen our loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has loved us and given his life for us.

It really goes into what is at the heart of our life, if you are one who believes in Jesus Christ. And if you don't believe in Jesus, I believe this is an invitation from God to you as well.

Because what it does is there's three things that this passage does that I'll talk about today. Jesus speaks of the danger of spiritual pride in those first five verses.

And then we see revealed the agony of Jesus' sacrifice for us in verses 36 through 44. And then we hear how Jesus is strengthened in his prayers to God, his Father.

[3 : 43] And there is a blessing to us as we go through that. We are drawn into the life of God. So first of all, the danger of spiritual pride. This scene all happens at night in the hours before Jesus is arrested.

And he and his disciples, except for Judas, has, as we've heard, gone through the Passover meal and sung a hymn. And they have gone into the Mount of Olives, which is a hill just to the east of Jerusalem.

And when you're on that hill, you can look over and see Jerusalem laid out before you. And they're together probably in front of a fire. And as they're together there in this orchard, there's another shocking prediction that Jesus has made.

Remember Jesus made the one about Judas, that Judas would betray. And then he says today that this very night, verse 31, they will all, every one of them, fall away from him.

Literally, they're going to be caused to stumble because of Jesus. Because of the failure that they will see in Jesus. Because of their fear of what might happen to them.

[4 : 59] They will no longer be loyal to him. They won't trust him. They will leave him. Jesus said, this is exactly what God said would happen. It's not a surprise to God.

Back in Zechariah, it says, I will strike the shepherd, who is Jesus. And the sheep of the flock, the disciples, will be scattered. You can see that in what Jesus says here.

And you might imagine what was going through those disciples' heads as they heard this. We are perfectly loyal to you. We know you, Jesus. For the last three years, we have lived with you.

We've ministered with you. There's a shock silence, probably, as they all look at each other. And of course, who breaks the shock silence? It's got to be Peter.

And he does. He jumps right into it. And he says, though they all fall away, pointing to all of them, I never will. I never will fall away.

[5 : 58] Well, Peter is a gift to us because he shows us very clearly what spiritual pride is. It says, I am not vulnerable to sin.

Even though others might fall into it, I can't. I'm a good person. I'm valued by God. Therefore, I could never really rebel against God. I could never be involved in evil.

I'm a good person. In my first church, there was a member of the church who was very critical of other peoples, often very critical of other people in this little church.

And I remember preaching from a Bible reading that talked about how important it is to build one another up and not to tear down. How destructive gossip can be as well.

Well, she came up to me right after the service and said, I'm so glad that sermon was preached. There are so many people in this church who need to hear it. Well, I think she was the one who needed to hear the sermon most.

[7 : 00] And here, Peter is the one who needs to learn about spiritual pride the most of all the disciples. And Jesus says, Peter, you are going to learn an unforgettable and very hard lesson.

And truly, I tell you, this is going to happen. This very night before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. And in just a few hours, he will do exactly that.

Just a few hours. He is going to fail Jesus more than any disciple other than Judas. But what does Peter do? Does he listen to that?

No, he doubles down on the spiritual pride. And he contradicts Jesus. He said, even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. Well, the disciples pick up on that.

And every one of them says, I will do the same thing. I will do the same thing. I will not deny. I will die for you. And so they're not going to be outdone in Peter's spiritual pride.

[8 : 03] They'll follow through in it. And you can see here how spiritual pride in its nature contradicts God. It contradicts Jesus' words. The disciples are not seeing that Jesus is God.

And he cannot be contradicted. He knows his disciples' hearts better than they know it themselves. He knows our hearts more than we know our own hearts as well.

And he's teaching us that we all have the potential to fall away from Jesus. We have actually all done it. We are all vulnerable to temptation.

This is who we are. And we are being revealed even as Jesus is teaching. That's why Jesus teaches us to pray every day in the Lord's Prayer. Lead us not into temptation.

Lead us away from temptation. And deliver us from evil. It's a prayer of humility. It's saying that I am a poor sinner.

[9 : 08] I need Jesus to save me every day. Spiritual pride says I don't need Jesus in this way. But Jesus says, Come to me in your temptation.

And I will deliver you from evil. That is the promise of that prayer that Jesus gave to us. And Jesus does deliver from temptation.

Even in this passage. I don't know if you noticed. But in verse 32. There is this bright light in a very dark emotional night. He says, Even though they all scatter.

The disciples scatter and forsake him. He says, After I am raised up. I will go before you disciples to Galilee. You see what he's saying here.

There's going to be a resurrection. And he will gather them to himself in Galilee. Because of that resurrection. And he'll restore all the disciples who fell away.

[10:07] He's gathering them like a sheep. And for Peter. He is going to individually come to him. And give him opportunity. To affirm his love and loyalty to Jesus.

For every time. He denied Jesus. It is in Galilee. A place of new beginnings. It's a place of restoration. That Jesus is pointing to.

In the midst of their spiritual pride. And this is the gift that Jesus brings to each of us as well. He brings that new beginning. And restoration of Galilee to us.

And the key. As he's pointing out here. Is to recognize our own spiritual pride. Because then we can come humbly to him for help. And for restoration.

In our own prayers. As Peter had to do. And he will do it. Peter's life shows for all time. That it is true. So secondly.

[11:08] Besides revealing our hearts. Jesus reveals his own heart. In the agony. Of his sacrifice. This is in verses 36 through 44.

Jesus allows us here into his soul. And his mind. And his heart. On an awful night. And in doing it. God draws us deeper into relationship with Jesus.

In this relation. In this. In this little section. Jesus takes his disciples. Close to himself. He brings them to a particular place. In the Mount of Olives.

Called. Gethsemane. And that word simply means. Olive press. John tells us. That Jesus often met with his disciples there. And they camped there.

And we know it as the Garden of Gethsemane. And I wonder if it is because. It is the place. Where the very opposite. Of what happened in another garden.

[12:03] The Garden of Eden. Happens. There is. Because of the prayers on this night. A reversal. Of that curse that comes through disobedience.

To God. The prayers that we are going to hear. Are prayers of incredible obedience. And love of God the Father. And he asked his disciples.

I want you to stay here. And I want you to pray. And they must have known. That he was under some sort of great stress. And that they needed to pray for him. And to somehow watch and protect him.

As he prayed. And then what he does. Is he goes with Peter, James and John. Those who were close to him. He goes with them a little further on. To pray with them.

And you can see in verse 38. As they went out. He said to Peter, James and John. My soul is very sorrowful. Even to death. So remain here.

[12:59] And watch with me. That word sorrowful. Is a very strong word in the original. What Jesus is saying here. Is that I am so deeply distressed.

That it is killing me. This is what is happening in Jesus' heart. And his mind. And his soul. And the question we have to ask is. Why is Jesus so emotionally distressed here?

Why such a strong reaction? Is it because of this awful nature of the death on a cross? The physical pain involved? Is it because the emotional pain of everyone in his life.

That's close to him. Abandoning him soon? It's none of that. What we find. And the answer to. Is in the prayer of verse 39. We find out why this emotional distress.

Going a little further. Jesus falls on his face. And he prays. And he says. My father. If it be possible. Let this cup. Pass from me. Nevertheless.

[14:02] Not as I will. But as you will. Now that word cup. Is this. Is our big clue. Because. That cup. In the old testament.

Is the cup of God's judgment. And his wrath. That Jesus. Will need. To drink. And it fills him. With revulsion. Isaiah 51.

117. Tells us this. It says. Wake yourself. Wake yourself. Stand up. O Jerusalem. You have drunk. From the hand of the Lord. The cup. Of his wrath. Who have drunk.

To the dregs. The bowl. The cup. Of staggering. You see. This is the cup. That Jesus drank. On the cross. And we have to.

Admit. That we cannot. Fully. Understand this. Ever. How can the cup. Of God's anger. Come on. Jesus. Who has loved. The father.

[15:00] Eternally. How can this happen. It is a mystery. But that is what happens. On the cross. That is what is before Jesus. He takes. God's righteous judgment.

And wrath. Against sin. Upon himself. Fully. God's grace. And there is. In the most awful way. A forsakenness. By the father.

That is ahead of Jesus. Because he drinks. That cup. It is costly. A costly gift. Beyond anything. We can imagine. The pain.

Of that separation. From God. That somehow. Takes place. Even though he continues. To be. The son of God. Is the costliest gift. Of all. God so loved.

The world. That he gave. His son. It was costly. To the father. It was costly. To the son. And the amazing thing is.

[15 : 56] For us this morning. Is it is all. For you. And for me. And for all. Who would put their trust. In this Jesus. Because it is about God.

Putting our sin. To Jesus account. And the anger. Of God. God. Visited upon him. Instead of. Ourselves. So if you believe.

And trust in Jesus. Then good Friday. This day that Jesus is facing. Is. Our judgment day. It has already happened to him. On the cross.

That is why Jesus falls. On his face. In prayer. That's why his emotions. Are killing him. As awful as that physical pain. Will be on the cross.

This suffering. Is far. Far. Far. Far. Worse. So Jesus is opening his heart. To us here. And what do we see?

[16 : 52] We do see the awfulness of sin. We see God's perfect judgment. And his wrath. And his wrath. And we see. That all of this is happening to him on the cross.

Where he drinks that cup. But what shines so brightly. On this dark night in Gethsemane. Is the incredible depth. Of Jesus love for his father.

And the unimaginable love. Of Jesus for each of us. As well. How do we see this? We see the love of the father.

Because as deeply emotional as his cry. Is to let this cup pass. If it can all be possible. That I don't have to go through. This thing. To fulfill my mission.

Even though that was deeply emotional. It's even more deeply heartfelt. When Jesus says. Nevertheless. Not as I will.

[17 : 47] But as you will. That's his heart cry. And you notice that. Every one of his prayers. He begins by saying. My father. It reveals that within the trinity.

Father, son and holy spirit. There is an intimate trusting love. That is for all of eternity. It is so great. We cannot imagine it. And it's because of that eternal love.

That Jesus always desires. What the father desires. Even to death on a cross. For us. And so when we think of Jesus. And how we can be Christ like.

In our own lives. That's what it looks like. To love what the father loves. To obey what the father commands. And to absolutely desire. What the father desires.

But we also see Jesus. Deep love for us. There's only one reason. Why Jesus goes through this incredible agony on the cross.

[18 : 45] It is very simply. Because he loves us. It is so that you and I can have the most incredible gift. That we were made for.

To know his father. As our father. And by the forgiveness of our sins. To be adopted by Jesus father.

As his daughter. And his son. Forever. This is love. This is our best interest. Being brought about. At the costliest of measures.

Jesus wanted that for us more. Than he wanted his own life. Isn't that amazing love? Isn't that what we see here. In Gethsemane.

And that love for us. Has implications. Because. When Jesus went through temptation. It wasn't something that was just. For that night. He knew ultimate loneliness.

[19 : 43] He knew emotional depression. And agony. And what Jesus was doing. Is to walk with us. In our own times of weakness. And our own darkness.

As he's going through that. That's why Hebrew 2 says. That. It is because. He himself. Jesus. Has suffered. When tempted. That he is able to help those.

Who are being tempted. He can be like. A chief priest for us. Praying for us. All of the time. Forgiving our sin. And helping us.

In our temptation. In our loneliness. In our darkness. In our uncertainty. Helping us to love the father. As he does. And knowing that he is.

Always present. With us. In all of our darkness. Jesus prays with us. As we bring even the darkest thing. To him. And we ought to do that.

[20 : 40] Continually. Jesus friend. Wrote a letter later on. John. And he said. We love. Because. God first.

Loved us. Does Jesus love. Revealed for us. In Gethsemane. Change the way that you live. The way you pray. The way you reach out to people. In their own darkness. And pain. The way that you use your gifts. Does that love we see. In the agony of this sacrifice. Change. Who we are. It does. If we take that in. Well the last point.

In the last two verses. Is that Jesus draws us deeper. Into relationship. Not by. Not just by showing us. Our spiritual pride. Not just by showing us. The agony.

Of his sacrifice. But by showing us. That there is deep strength. In praying to God. Our father. There is a really big.

[21 : 37] Contrast in this passage. I don't know if you noticed it. But. The disciples go from great strength. To great weakness. And Jesus goes from great weakness. To great strength.

In this passage. That we're reading. Today. Remember the disciples. Begin the night. With great confidence. None of us will deny you. In fact. Will die for you. And as the night continues.

Jesus tells them. Each to watch and pray. As he prays in his agony. But they can't do it. They all fall asleep. We can relate to that. This morning. On a time change morning. Their eyes are heavy.

They get weighed down. They fall asleep. And Jesus comes to his disciples. The first time. That he was praying. Finds them sleeping. He says to Peter. So you could not watch with me.

One hour. In verse 40. Watch and pray. That you don't enter into temptation. Because the spirit indeed is willing. But the flesh is weak.

[22 : 34] You see. Peter thought. I'll do the active ministry. Of preaching. And protecting Jesus. And speaking up for him. And leading the ministry. And I'll sleep.

To gain strength for that. And he'll say. You know. I'll leave the praying. To the weak ones. Over there. They can do it. But in fact. What happened. Is that Peter.

Was weakened. Because he did not pray. To God. The father. In fact. He was weakened. To the point. Of denying Jesus. Because he didn't do. What Jesus. Very simply.

And clearly. Commanded. Him. And us. Watch. And pray. It's not easy. The flesh. Is willing. In the original. It says.

The flesh. Is zealous. It's really enthusiastic. But the spirit. That the flesh. The spirit. The flesh is willing. But the. Sorry. The spirit is willing.

[23 : 27] It's very enthusiastic. But the flesh. Is very weak. And this is what happens. To the disciples. They have great intentions. As we do. But it's hard.

To persevere. And that's why Jesus. Sends us the Holy Spirit. Who is called the helper. Our great helper. To follow that great command. Watch. And pray.

Now in contrast. To Jesus. To the disciples. Jesus. On that night. Begins weakened. He is weighed down. He is faced by all kinds.

Of distress. That he is going through. And he falls on his face. In prayer. He is so weighed down. He will experience. The forsakenness of God.

And he has a strong desire. To avoid it. Even though this is why. He was born. But what Jesus does. Is he brings that temptation. To God the Father. Over and over again.

[24 : 22] And he asks. Is there any way. Any other way. To fulfill that mission. And each time he prayed. But your will be done. Your will be done.

Father. And something very powerful. Happened through those prayers. It is because of communion. With his Father. That Jesus.

Changes. There is this deep strength. To stand. That flows into him. He is strengthened. To go ahead. With what is so very. Very difficult. And if you look at verses 45.

And 46. Jesus goes to his disciples. And said. Sleep. And take your rest later. See the hours at hand. The son of man. Is betrayed. Into the hands of sinners.

Rise. Let us be going. See my betrayer. Is at hand. And you can hear. Jesus strength. And his authority.

[25 : 19] That even in his grief. He says. It's time. We're going ahead with it. I'm going ahead. With all those things. That were prepared. From the beginning. Of the world. I know my father's will.

And whatever happens to me. In the next day. Three days. Will be for him. And for his glory. It's a very strong place.

To be in. And that strength comes. Through prayer. To his father. And that is the call. To us today too. To be strengthened.

By our prayers. To the father. In fact. I think that this is the reason. The big reason. That Jesus. Shares with his disciples. Watch. And pray.

The reason for this passage. Is for us. To strengthen. The mission of the church. By our prayers. Just as Jesus. Was strengthened. In his mission.

[26 : 13] In fact. Really. Prayer. Is the work. Of mission. Because. In our prayers. God. Our father. In heaven. Changes us. He strengthens us.

In our temptation. He. Brings us. To be able. To live for Jesus. Effectively. In this world. We can't do that. Without praying. To our father.

It's what is at the heart. Of Jesus. Carrying through. With this gospel. Of Jesus. Dying for us. And for our sins. And rising. To give us life. Life. And you know.

I think that in this time. Of uncertainty. This time. Of wondering. About what happens. With this coronavirus. One of the things. That we can. Thinking about. Is how is God. Strengthening you. To reach out.

To people. In this time. Where it's very easy. To be afraid. To pull ourselves in. And to isolate. How do we. Care for. Sacrificially. Those in our lives.

[27 : 10] In this time. Of real uncertainty. This is something. That God. In our prayers. Will strengthen us. To consider. And finally.

Very simply. And we'll close with this. I think this is. An important way. For us to close. The reason Jesus. Calls us. To watch and pray. Is because. He loves.

Us. To pray. With him. He loves us. To be present with him. You know. Why did his friends. Ask. Why did he ask. His friends.

To pray with him. This night. He could have done. Those prayers. Without them. After all. He's the God. Of the universe. Yet. He loved. Their presence.

Their companionship. Blessed him. Jesus actually. Took comfort. And pleasure. That they would. Join him. In life. And in the deepest.

[28 : 04] Worst. Time. Of life. And for you. And for me. Jesus is blessed. By your presence. With him. As you pray. As well. As you pray. As well. So as we leave.

This passage. May we enter. Into his joy. As we pray. To him. That we will find. Our loyalty. To him. Strengthened.

And that we will. Stand to him. For him. In the time. Of distress. In the time. Of needing to give. Ourselves. To him. And may we do this. In the power. Of the Holy Spirit.

That Jesus. Gives to us. For the sake. Of his glory. Amen.