

Three Cries and Rest (Evening Service)

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Preacher: Ben Short

- [0 : 00] I'll pray. Father, we thank you so much for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to us. I ask your Holy Spirit be with us to help us to understand his suffering.
- Amen. Please have a seat. Hello, my name's Ben, if I haven't met you before.
- Nice to meet you. And we are starting something new today. I think my voice is quite loud, maybe a little bit more quiet. We are three weeks away from Easter, and so we are going to take three weeks to look at three stories, three of the passion stories to think about Jesus and his death and resurrection.
- Today we are looking at the story of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane. And we are going to look at one point, and the point is that Jesus suffered.
- In our absolution, if you notice, one of the things we ask Aaron praise for us is that we would be mindful of Jesus' sufferings. So my hope is that tonight we will be mindful of Jesus' sufferings.
- [1 : 22] The gospels in this story open up a reality that Jesus experiences pain and suffering. And the meaning, one of the meanings of Easter, there's many meanings of Easter.
- One of the meanings is that Jesus suffers. Actually, that's what the word passion means. The passion of Jesus means the sufferings of Jesus. And I want us to understand our own sufferings through the lens of Jesus' sufferings.
- So I want to develop, maybe we'll call it a theology of suffering. So we need to learn together how to think with our minds about suffering. And we need to learn how to walk with our lives when we experience suffering.
- We need both these things to understand and to deal with it. And Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane give us resources to do that.
- Now, before I start, I just want, as we begin to talk about this subject, the subject of suffering, I want to acknowledge that there are different people here.
- [2 : 28] Some people have relatively happy lives. And other people are experiencing suffering. I just want to acknowledge that this will not be a theoretical topic for some people.
- And I realize that it's important to just acknowledge at the beginning of a sermon about suffering. Okay, I have two points and one application.
- My two points are Jesus suffers with us and Jesus suffered for us. And then I'll have one application. Okay, let's open up our Bibles to Matthew 26.
- I need to do that too. So this story of Jesus praying in the garden points to a very important theological truth.
- And that's the theological truth of the incarnation. Jesus, Jesus is God. God created the world through Jesus.
- [3 : 34] And yet, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, chose to become a person, a human. And when he did that, he chose to enter into our experience and every part of our experience, including suffering.

Chapter 26, verse 37. And taking with him Peter and the two sons of David, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled.

The word sorrowful here is the word from which we get lupus. It means grief and pain, both of the body and of the heart.

And Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew does not talk about Jesus' heart much, the least of any of the Gospels. This is probably one of the few places in the entire Gospel of Matthew that he talks about Jesus' heart.

And he wants us to notice this. Verse 38. Then Jesus said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

[4 : 38] Jesus is peri-lupus, surrounded by lupus. Surrounded by anxiety, pain, and grief. This story is a window to one of the aspects of Jesus' life.

The fact that Jesus suffered. That he chose to come and suffer with us. There's suffering throughout his life, But it's this story where it bursts out from him and comes out before us.

And we see that Jesus suffers. We see it when he speaks and when he prays. And the significance is this. God does not deal with suffering at arm's length.

God is not far from our suffering. He deals with our suffering. But when he does so, he is close. He is with us. He is dealing with the suffering of the world by becoming a human and suffering.

Jesus suffers with us. And this means we cannot say that God doesn't care. We cannot say that God does not love us.

[5 : 43] We cannot say that he is far from us when we suffer. He has demonstrated his love to us in this. He suffered. I have been listening to Roman history a lot recently.

And one of the features of Roman history is wars with generals. And there are two kinds of generals in Roman history. Some generals were rich aristocrats who stood behind their soldiers and sent their soldiers forwards.

Other generals started their careers as soldiers. And they fought and became generals as they fought a lot. And they were the generals who went in the front of their armies into battle.

And they led their soldiers into battle as a soldier. And those armies, led by the generals who were soldiers, often did much more successfully.

We have a general who is a soldier too. God does not ask us to fight like an aristocrat sitting back. He is the one walking into suffering first.

[6 : 53] This is the empathy of God. We see that God loves us because Jesus suffered. So my first point is Jesus suffers with us. But Jesus does not simply suffer with us.

The second point is that Jesus suffers for us. Now, we experience suffering. And when we experience suffering, sometimes what happens is the experience of suffering looms large.

Like the sky of Vancouver. It comes gray and down upon you. And the sky of Vancouver is the only thing that you can see or feel or hear or understand.

We cannot see beyond the thing that is with us. Jesus suffered for us. And because he suffered for us, we see there is a plan that God has which is bigger than our suffering.

I'll say that again. Because Jesus suffered for us, we see that there is a plan that God has that is bigger than our suffering. Jesus suffered for us, we see that there is a plan that God has that is bigger than our suffering.

[8 : 04] And Jesus redeems our experiences. If you read, it's worth doing this for Easter, to take Matthew 21 to 28 and ask this question, Who's in charge?

You'll get a very clear answer. The answer is Jesus. Jesus is totally in charge of everything that's happening throughout the whole passion narrative. And yet, he is choosing a path of suffering.

What's the deal? The key to this is the fact that he has a mission. Verse 39. Jesus goes and he prays.

And as he prays, we see what he thinks about this suffering. Going little farther, Jesus fell on his face and prayed. And he said, My father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Jesus is wrestling. He is anxious about the fact that he is going to the cross.

[9 : 11] He is going to die. He is going to experience separation from God. And he talks about a cup. This is a picture from the Old Testament, which talks about God's anger being fully poured out.

And Jesus knows that he is going to have God's anger fully poured out upon him. And through this means of suffering of Jesus, he is going to win redemption.

Through his suffering, he wins redemption for us. It's amazing. Jesus suffers with us, which means we can't say God doesn't care.

But Jesus also suffers for us. And this means we cannot say that God is not in control. We cannot say God is an administrator trying to figure things out.

No. God is God. God is God. He is in control. He has a plan.

[10 : 17] And his plan is the redemption of the world. Now, I'm not saying that this means we always know the plan of every piece of our suffering.

Our own stories contain lots of opaque things, hidden meanings that we will never know the meaning to. There is an opaqueness to suffering.

And we cannot always understand why. But I want you to imagine a painting. And there's a camera looking at the painting. And what you do is you take the camera and zoom in into one little thing.

If you look through the camera, all you can see is one piece of the painting. And it will be a correct piece of the painting. You will correctly see that piece of the painting.

But to understand the whole painting, you need to step back and look at the whole perspective. What this garden here shows us, the plan of God is huge.

[11 : 27] It involves the suffering of Jesus Christ. But it means the redemption of the world. Through the cup and the death of Jesus Christ, he wins a way for us.

And so that means we know that God has a plan. We do not know all the details of the plan. When we suffer, it points to the fact that the world is broken.

Our suffering proves to us that there is something wrong. When Jesus suffered, it points to the fact that God is redeeming the world. Jesus is a healer.

We do not always understand how he is healing. We don't always know his methods. But we know he is a healer. Healing the sin and the brokenness and the pain.

Okay. Okay. So these are the two truths we learned from the garden. These are the two truths of Easter. That God suffers for us and God suffers with us.

[12 : 26] And what we need to do as Christians is take these two things and hold them in together as hard as that is. And when we do that, the space in between will be like a charged two electrical poles with an electrical field that's filled with energy.

It's like two train tracks. The train runs down with great speed. And I want to, there's so many, so much in that charged space between. Empathy lives there.

We, if we know that God is in control and he loves us, that'll mean when somebody shares pain with us, my first response will be empathy. I don't need to fix their problem, but I can love them.

I can listen. I can be with them. It means there's room to grieve and room to grow. Both. I have space to grieve.

God's in control. I can have space to grieve. But there's room to grow, too, through suffering. However, I want to speak to one point.

[13 : 35] One point of application, which is the right stance towards suffering. And the Christian stance towards suffering is walking. The Christian stance towards suffering is walking.

There's a sociologist named Peter Berger. And he argues that one of the roles of a society traditionally has been to help people deal with suffering.

Ancients and societies all over have given different stories to help people think about suffering. And to make meaning out of suffering when they experience it.

It was a society's role to help people deal with suffering. And it did in different ways. But Peter Berger also argues that modern society has lost its coping mechanisms to deal with suffering.

Why? Well, the modern approach is based on technology. What we're really good at is technology in the modern world. We're really great at technology.

[14 : 39] It's amazing. And the modern approach is to eliminate suffering as much as possible through technology. And we've done a pretty good job of it, actually.

Doctors are wonderful people. There are a number of people here tonight who are doctors. And the main thing that doctors do is deal with suffering people. Medicine has alleviated much suffering and much pain.

And that is a good thing. But the problem is we're not God. Although we can eliminate some forms of suffering, we cannot eliminate it all.

We can't. And what's happened is as we've got better and better with the techniques around suffering, we've become worse and worse in dealing with suffering in meaningful ways.

There is a book by a man named Dr. Paul Brand. He is a leprosy doctor. And his book is called The Gift of Pain.

[15 : 45] And he writes very beautifully about suffering. He has seen a lot of it. He spent something like 27 years of his career working in India.

And then he spent some 25 years working in America. And he says when he was in India, he saw people deal with suffering with grace and humility.

And then I quote from him now. In the United States, I encountered a society that seeks to avoid pain at all costs. Patients lived at a greater comfort level than any I had previously encountered.

But they seemed far less equipped to handle suffering and far more traumatized by it. It's a scary thing he says.

He is saying that we have lost our coping mechanisms to deal with suffering. And I think part of the reason is we've lost touch with Christianity. And even us in the church, many of our ways of dealing with suffering are those that come from the secular world.

[16 : 51] The main concern of secularism is this life and thus comfort. And it rejects the gift of pain. In the secular world, suffering can only be a bad thing.

And Dr. Paul Brand says suffering is a gift. Now, I am not saying suffering is good. That's called sadism.

And that's not right. Jesus died to get rid of suffering. That's why he came. But I am saying that good can come from suffering.

Suffering can teach us. Suffering can help us. As we walk with God through suffering, we will learn about who we are and who he is.

But we need to believe the truths of Jesus. We need to believe that Jesus suffered with us. And we need to believe that Jesus suffered for us.

[17 : 57] Otherwise, we'll walk into despair and suffering will turn us inwards. Because Isaiah 43 says, God says to his people, you can walk through the fires of suffering because I will be with you.

And that's true. That's true. I was going to ask my wife to read something. But sorry, Kelsey. I'm out of time. So, I just want to finish by saying, I think this, if we sit with Jesus in the garden, it will shape our hearts and teach us how to accept the gift of suffering to teach us.

Let me pray. Father, we thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, coming to die for us. And I pray that you will teach us how to walk through the fires of suffering with you.

Amen.