

Three Cries and Rest

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0:00] Now please pray with me. God, open our hearts to your word, and please open your word to our hearts.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, if you are following along in your bulletin, you'll notice that the preacher this morning is Dan Gifford.

And not to worry, Dan as well, he's with us this morning. But I am not Dan Gifford, I'm James Wagner if you're a visitor here this morning. And after looking at your bulletin, it would be great if you actually turn to your Bible.

And turn to Matthew chapter 26, which Carolyn read earlier in our text this morning. It's on page 832.

This Sunday is called The Passion of Christ. When you hear those words, maybe it makes you think of Mel Gibson's movie by that name.

[1:12] And that probably wouldn't be very helpful. Because Mel Gibson spent little time on the meaning of Christ's suffering and really focused in on what that must have looked like. When you hear those words, The Passion of Christ, it probably doesn't make you think of Article 1 in our Book of Common Prayer.

But that might be helpful because it reads like this. There has been one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions.

Of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. The maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. It's with respect to God, the Trinity. Now when we hear the word passion, we very well may romanticize it.

And there's a romantic tradition in the likes of C.S. Lewis, G.K. Chesterton, and J.R.R. Tolkien. And while those are good traditions, the Passion of Christ isn't like that kind of romanticism.

And so today, the Passion of Christ is going to kick off a three-part mini-sermon series. Which is going to be followed on Palm Sunday and then Easter Sunday.

[2:19] And so today, we're going to look at a text from Matthew in chapter 26. And then it's going to be chapter 27 next week. And then on Easter Sunday, chapter 28. And it's going to take us from where we've been.

From meeting Jesus, which was before Lent and during part of Lent. To then sharing Jesus. And now I think to knowing Jesus. Our knowledge of the Lord is absolutely critical.

It raises the question, do we know Jesus Christ? And this ideal of the knowledge of our Lord is really important in Matthew's Gospel. And I want to look just briefly at chapter 7 on page 812.

What Jesus says about the importance of Him actually knowing us. Verse 21 to 23 of chapter 7 reads like this. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name?

[3:23] And do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. God's knowledge of us is really absolutely critical.

And we need to know that He actually knows us as much as we think we know Him. So the title of this sermon is Three Cries and One Rest. There's an image that's fixed right in the middle of this passage, which is that of a cup.

And I'm going to say that the message of this is that it shows that Jesus knows us through His suffering. And in two ways, through His sorrow and also His submission. So let's look at these two

things.

First, the sorrow of Jesus. And then secondly, the submission of Jesus to His Father. Our Lord's sorrow doesn't begin in verse 36 of chapter 26, but it intensifies there.

And after the Last Supper with His 12 disciples, Jesus remains on the Mount of Olives and relocates Himself there in a place called Gethsemane, which means pressed or crushed.

[4:26] You would have heard those in the Psalm 143 that we read earlier. This outward place parallels Jesus' inward condition. This pressing or crushing of olives for oil was like the pressing or crushing of our Lord's soul.

How do I know this? Well, let's look at the story. Jesus took three of His disciples with Him. The three are the usual three, that is Peter, James, and John.

They are the same three that attended Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, as our Lord's divinity was magnified. And they are the same three that attend Him on the Mount of Olives, where our Lord's humanity is magnified.

And so here Jesus has shown many of His emotions and limitations humanly up to this point. And on the Mount of Olives, Jesus then displays something more of His humanity.

Matthew says this about it. Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. In Jesus' own words, He tells His disciples, My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death.

[5:31] Jesus is sorrowful and distressed. As the Son of God and the Son of Man, He's now expressing His divine human life in and through His heart, His mind, His soul, and even His body.

He's maximizing His identification and empathy with those whom He came to save. And here we see our Lord is sorrowful. He's troubled. Philip Bliss had this text in mind when writing this great hymn, which we won't sing today, but maybe on Good Friday, and some do for Easter Sunday. Man of sorrows, what a name. Coming to the end, hallelujah, what a Savior. Well, Jesus is sorrowful because He knows what's coming.

He's made it plain three times already, and He's said and done is all coming to a climax now in this story. It is the knowledge of what is to come, and also the waiting for it to unfold that makes Him so sorrowful.

I wonder if you've ever experienced anything like this. Ever come under the weight of sorrow and distress and trouble, that it's just killing you, or in Jesus' words, even unto death?

[6:46] Have you ever gotten to the point where you can't even cry tears? Let me help you think about that for just a moment. Remember the time when you were waiting for the bad result of the MRI?

Jesus gets it. Remember the time that you were waiting for that certain layoff when the market took a downturn? Jesus gets it. Remember when you were waiting for the report from the infertility specialist?

Jesus gets it. Or maybe the time that you were waiting for your parents to mend the marriage, and then they separated.

Well, Jesus gets it. Or maybe you were just waiting on the registrar's decision on your college application. Jesus gets it. I was on the phone this past week with someone who was waiting for a decision this coming week from the registrar, and the person said to me, I am so stressed.

And you know what I said? I said, I know exactly how you feel. No, that's not what I said. I'm so glad that I didn't have to say that. Don't ever say that to someone.

[7:58] But I could say, Jesus knows how you feel. He gets it. And it was even worse for him. Well, our experiences weren't and aren't exactly like our Lord's because the whole sin of the world was on his life, and he suffered and died for it.

It's not just that his body was bearing the weight of the whole world, but it was his soul. That is, in fact, what he says in verse 38.

If you look, he says, my soul is very sorrowful. And so the Lord shows us that he knows what's about to happen. And he knows us through his suffering and sorrow unto death.

But that's not all. He shows that he knows what's about to happen, and that he knows us through the submission to the Father's will.

Let's turn and look at that now. The Lord shows us submission in this section like nowhere else in all of Scripture. This is the submission that we see between the Son and the Father.

[9:05] This is unique. It's a unique scene of Matthew's about prayer. Usually in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will go away to pray by himself. But here there are three cries of the Son to the Father.

There are three commands of Jesus to his disciple, and then there are three corresponding failures of his disciples. And like Jonah of the Old Testament, who went to sleep in the boat, you remember that?

These three men just can't stay awake. The disciples failed to receive what God wanted for them. And by contrast, Jesus stays awake.

And more than that, after Jesus fell on his face, Matthew tells us, and prayed, we read this in verse 39. He says, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not I will, but as you will. Here Jesus addresses my Father, just like he taught his disciples earlier, our Father.

[10:08] Jesus' petition, though, here is focused on this cup. He says, Let this cup pass in verse 39. And again in verse 42, he says, If this cannot pass unless I drink it.

That is the cup. And then in verse 44, he says, Saying the same words again. That is Matthew. This cup isn't the same one Jesus shared earlier in the upper room.

This cup is the cup of God's wrath. The one that Jeremiah and Isaiah talk about in their prophecies. So Jesus wants to know that he's got it.

That he's going to get this right. And this isn't his idea alone, as he wants to submit to the Father's will. This is not just his idea, that this is the Father's. And he's willing to let it pass if the Father isn't calling him to this.

So what is this cup of wrath? Well, wrath is God's right response to sinful and willful actions. And Paul shows this to us in Romans chapter 1, beginning at the 18th verse, when he says that the wrath of God is being revealed.

[11:20] And then verse 24, 26, and 28, he says this about this handing over, this giving over. He says, God handed them over to the lusts of their hearts.

Verse 26, God handed them over to their dishonorable passions. And 28, God handed them over to their debased minds. This cup of wrath that Jesus will take is God handing Jesus over to us.

And when he does that, men's sin-infected hearts and passions and minds will have their way with Jesus. And we feel, think, and know what's right.

That's what we think, but we're wrong. In fact, not only are we wrong, but we're wicked. We attribute evil to that which is good and sometimes good to that which is evil.

So Jesus will take this wrath. And then Jesus says this, not my will, but thine be done. About the cup.

[12:26] That's what Jesus said to the Father in submission to his will and suffering. But he also says something to the disciples. He says this, Watch and pray. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.

What's true of the disciples is also true of Jesus. Jesus knows he is as tempted, if not more, than his disciples. He doesn't say your spirit, your flesh.

He says the spirit, the flesh. He includes himself. This statement applies to all human beings. And we can either enter into temptation and so could he, or enter into the kingdom of God and so can we.

And the kingdom of God is a major, major theme mentioned 50 plus times in Matthew's gospel. It is the place that our Lord rules and reigns.

But every time we enter into temptation and fall into that, choose that, we forfeit the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, this realm of God's judgment, this realm of grace.

[13:33] It is the region of surrender and submission to the will of God. So you see, when Jesus prays, your will be done, and then Jesus says to the disciples, the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Jesus isn't saying this, protect me from a slow and painful death. He isn't even saying, well, let's just get this over with, would you? Thy will be done is what Jesus is saying.

In other words, I'll submit to you through suffering now and on the cross. The spirit is willing, Jesus says. The flesh is weak. And even though it's not natural to die, and especially on the cross, thy will be done, Father, I'll submit to your will, Father.

Submission to the Father requires suffering. This submission isn't coercion or acquiescing. It is kind of an exchange of our will for the Father's will.

But in this case, it's the will of the Father and the Son coming together in unity. And through this, Jesus is addressing our greatest need, our need to admit our sin, our need to acknowledge that God only can forgive, and our need to turn to Him for that forgiveness and live a life of impossibility, but only by the grace of God as we submit to His will.

[14:59] I once read that for people who enter religious orders, you know, the ones that include poverty and chastity and obedience, the hardest one to accept is obedience.

Submitting to the will of another cuts right to our sin and our need for a Savior. Well, as we come to draw to the end, look at how this scene ends though.

After Jesus' third submission petition to the Father, He returns to find the three disciples the same way that He left them asleep again, but not very restful at that. No, the real and true rest will come later.

And as that rest has to wait, things begin now to ramp up even more, more conflictual.

The time has come for the Scripture to be fulfilled. The governance of God through the cross is now about to take place. And so the hour is at hand and the betrayer is at hand.

[16:00] Sorrow and submission of our Lord's choice will now bear some fruit. Jesus, though, mind you, is no victim or even a survivor.

We're going to see that through Jesus' death, He will be the victor. John Calvin commented, after Jesus wept at the knowledge of Lazarus' death and also the grief of His sisters, that Jesus rose like a champion and strided into victory.

And if there were ever a time to make that statement, it was now. No doubt there was agony in the garden and there still would be on the cross, but Jesus rises and strides, submitting to the Father, demonstrating that He knows us and what our greatest need is so that we might know Him.

And so Matthew tells us that Jesus commands His disciples to rise and Jesus will do the same thing after His death. And when Jesus does that, then finally, we will have our rest and that Jesus knows us.

This whole scene at the Garden of Gethsemane is about prayer, so let me end with just talking about these two aspects of prayer with two people. The first one is John Owen.

[17:23] John Owen was a Puritan, something of a divine, though he might have resisted that, but he said with respect to prayer that when I have no rest, I give God no rest.

Not confidently, not presumptuously, but imagine that. Our Lord shows us the priority and passion of praying when we're sorrowful and distressed.

Not about just anything that makes us anxious, but in particular the knowledge of the Father's will. Friends, can we watch and pray for an hour a day, a lifetime, so that by God's great goodness we may be governed and preserved, as today's collect reads.

Another figure, Elizabeth Gouge, she's a fiction writer, and she wrote that we basically only have two prayers. The first one is, Lord have mercy, and the second one is, Thy will be done.

There are probably more prayers than that, praise and thanksgiving. But friends, can we watch and pray for one hour, one day, for a lifetime, so that we who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished by the comfort of God's grace, we may mercifully be relieved.

[18:43] That was last week's call. I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.