

God Can't Do It

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Date: 21 February 2016

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[0 : 0 0] that normally this time of year I have been calling our attention on the cross and on Christ and His life, His death, His resurrection. And as I said, I was looking back over some of my notes as to what we have looked at previously, and we focused heavily on, of course, Christ fulfilling the will of His Father. We focused on what the death meant, what the sacrifice meant and continues to mean. We focused on what it means for Christ to be a servant of God and what it means now that Christ has done all of this, what continues to happen. So, we've focused on quite a lot over the years. So, I thought that this year we would focus primarily on the words of Jesus Christ that He spoke in the garden and on the cross, but then I'd want us to go one step further. And so, I put it into three main categories over these next few weeks on a Sunday evening, and that is the garden, the cross, and the kingdom. The garden, the cross, and the kingdom. And what I want to try and convince you of is, firstly, that the words of Christ, both in the garden and on the cross, are deeply encouraging for us as we deny ourselves and take up our own crosses. That there must be a similarity of kind between Christ and His cross and Christ saying to us, deny yourself and take up your cross. That there must be a similarity there. And so, I'm convinced, I truly believe, that the words of Christ in the garden and the cross will be very edifying for us. I then want us to move on to the death of Christ itself. And previously, we've looked primarily at forgiveness, how the death of Christ has forgiven us.

But, of course, the death of Christ has done much more than that. Much, much more than that. And so, while I will still make heavy reference to the death of Christ and our forgiveness, which is something we need to be assured of all the time, because the devil is probably the best blackmailer in the world and can get us even when we think we're strong against it. So, we'll make focus that. But we're also going to take a good look at all the other things that the death of Christ achieved. And then, of course, what that leads to in reference to the kingdom and the future. So, the garden, the cross, and the future.

And we begin here with a prayer. Now, what is interesting about this prayer, as the prayer in John 17, is this. We get to hear it. I mean, if you read through the Gospels, you can't help be taken back by the fact that we hardly ever get to hear what Jesus prays. We never, in fact, get to hear what Jesus prays. He goes off up onto the mountain. He goes off on his own, and he prays. We know that he's going to pray, and we know that when he comes down from the mountain, he has prayed. But when you, when you, it would be nice to go up the mountain with him and say, well, what kind of things are you saying to God the Father? I'd like to know. Well, if that's the type of question that you have, and what happens in Jesus praying life to the Father, we get to see it here, as we do in John 17, which is known as the priestly prayer, or the real Lord's prayer, because it is the Lord praying to the Father.

Father, here we get to hear exactly what Jesus Christ is praying to his Father, and it's interesting why we need to hear it. The other thing to notice is, is that Jesus never prays in a prayer meeting.

That's another thing that we notice. Now, that doesn't mean that we need to copy Jesus and not have prayer meetings, but Jesus never prays with his disciples. He prays near them in the garden here.

[4:19] There's, there's, some are left behind, some are in the garden with him, but then he goes a little further and prays on his own. Now, why? I'm, I'm not actually entirely sure why Jesus does that, but that is something that I think is worth noticing. My suggestion is that if we read this carefully and we take the words of Jesus in light of denying ourself and taking up our own cross, not that we could ever do what Jesus did, but Jesus clearly tells us to take up our own cross, that these words here, though they're said by Jesus, will somehow and in some way appear in our own life and our own Christian walk if we are carrying our own crosses. I truly believe it. It doesn't take much convincing to convince you tonight that perhaps you have prayed at some point, Lord, can it not be done another way? You know, we, we, we battle or struggle with the very issue of the will of God. What I want to suggest tonight also is that there's enormous comfort in the fact of an uncommon truth. It's a truth, but it's not necessarily known to all, and that is in the things that God cannot do. And you think, well, how can, how can there be anything comforting in the knowledge that God can't do something? And then if you give it a little thought, you begin to realize actually it's not that difficult, that there's enormous comfort in the fact that God can't lie. And so we always know we're going to hear the truth. So there's comfort in the fact that God cannot lie and that we'll always hear the truth. There's also comfort in the fact that God cannot be unfaithful. And so he's always remaining covenantally, steadfastly faithful to us.

And so there's a comfort in knowing actually that's one thing God can't do. Not just that he does it, but actually he can't do anything else but that. But that is a surface understanding.

What we're going to be tested with this evening is something a little bit deeper than that. And I'm not going to apologize for just taking you down a little bit deeper into the text, but what about when it comes to the suffering that believers go through? The sorrow of heart, the deep trouble, and what if it is the case that God can't take it away? Not that he doesn't take it away, but that he can't take it away. And how on earth could that be comforting? How can it be the case that that is comforting to know that God can't take our suffering away? I want to put it to you this way, that if God could get us to be the people he wants us to be without suffering, without us taking up our own crosses, God would. Okay, if God could get us to be the people he wanted us to be without any type of trial whatsoever, then God would. If it is the case that God doesn't need to use suffering, but he does use suffering. If it is the case that God doesn't need to use something that will create you to be troubled or sorrow of heart, but he does use that, that, you know, God just uses it anyway, then it makes it unnecessary. God uses it, but it's unnecessary. And so we've got a whole new tension with God where we know that God can do it another way, but now we're struggling, why are you not doing it another way when I know you can do it another way? Right? And so the point that I want to bring down to us this evening is what if it is, at least open your mind to the thought for a moment, what if it is actually the case that God takes us through what he takes us through because it cannot be done any other way, that God can't do it another way, and that actually, strange as it may seem, that there's actually deep comfort there, because the comfort comes from the fact that if God could, then he would. The question is, why can't he? Why can't he? And all of this begins, or our investigation begins, our at least devotion to this begins with Jesus' prayer in the garden, asking his father if what he's about to go through, if it can be done another way.

So Jesus is asking this question, can you not do it another way? And the answer that comes back to Jesus is, no. No, it can't be done another way. God cannot do it another way. It's not that God can do it another way, but he chooses not to. It is actually the fact that God cannot do it another way. Now, this may be strange to think of God in this way, because we don't normally think of God in what he cannot do. But I want to suggest to you, this is incredibly important for you to grasp this, because it will help you with the type of struggle mentally, emotionally, physically, that you have either gone through, or you have either witnessed somebody else go through.

And if another believer is going through the kind of struggles and torment and sorrow, that this is actually the answer for why. So let's have a look at what's happening.

[10 : 27] You ought to notice that there's a parallel here between the beginning of the Bible and what is going to be the beginning of a new life in Christ, and it is that there are two men named Adam in a garden. The Bible begins with a man named Adam in the garden, and new life begins with another Adam in the garden. Jesus, remember, is also called Adam. He's called the last Adam. The first Adam, what he did in the garden, affected every single one of us.

What he did in reference to the will of God in the garden, affected every single one of us. And what this last Adam does in the garden, in reference to the will of God, will also affect every single one of us. And so we're meant to see this beautiful picture of two Adams, one who failed the test in the garden, who had the test of obeying God's word, but did not obey God's word.

And then this second Adam, this last Adam, who also was tested with obeying God's word, but passed the test. And so the first Adam introduced into this world through his disobedience, sin and death and corruption. But this last Adam introduces into this world through garden obedience, life and fellowship with God. And this is the picture that we're meant to see, that what is happening in the garden here is a test in reference to the will of God. So if you read the Bible, if you were to read the Bible from beginning to end, and you were able to retain the whole story, you would quite clearly see that it began with a man in the garden who disobeyed God's word and it led to sin, death and destruction.

But new life begins with a second, a last Adam in a garden who then introduces life and blessing and forgiveness and restoration into the world. That is something here that we're meant to see.

And on top of all of this, especially with Jesus, we are meant to see what God cannot do. So let's have a look at Jesus in the garden. Jesus knows that his death is imminent. He knows that he's going to die. And he also knows that he's going to die on a cross. He's known that right since the beginning of his ministry. You listen to his reference to Nicodemus in John 3. He references quite strikingly, the serpent that is lifted up in the wilderness. Well, the serpent, if you remember, that's lifted up in the wilderness, was not a symbol of salvation. Okay, the serpent was the thing that was killing everybody. And so when the serpent is lifted up and people look to it and that they're saved from the snake bites, they don't die. And Jesus makes reference to his death early on in the gospel that he too is going to be lifted up. He's saying that this is the end of death.

[13 : 39] That when I lift up, I am going to kill death, which is a very strange concept to think about. But the end of the death, the end of death is in the death of Christ. Or as John Owen said it, the death of death is in the death of Christ. Death dies in the death of Christ. And we're yet to experience that ultimately. But that's what is happening. So Jesus knows that he's going to die.

And so his heart, verse 37, he began to be sorrowful and deeply troubled. He says to his disciples, verse 38, my soul is very sorrowful, even unto death. Two things to recognize here. First, the physical pain that Jesus will endure. But that's not all. Something is going to happen that has never happened since the creation of the world or even before the creation of the world. And that's what Jesus is about to consider. That's why his heart is deeply sorrowful. Jesus is not just thinking of the physical pain. He is not just thinking of carrying the cross or even being nailed to the cross or even being beaten by the Romans or the horrible judicial review as it was before Pilate. That is clearly enough to make anybody sorrowful and clearly enough to cause anybody pain. But what Jesus is actually considering, hence why he asked the question, is that for the first time in history between the eternal God and God the Son who is also eternal, is a break in communion.

That Jesus, for the first time, will experience abandonment. And so Jesus is not just sorrowful because he's thinking of the physical pain and none of us would want to go through that. But the reason why Jesus is so sorrowful and troubled is because for the first time he will experience loss of communion with his Father, something which he has enjoyed for eternity.

And the cross takes that away. And that's why we hear those words from Jesus on the cross, my God, my God, my God, not my Father, but my God, my God, why have thou forsaken me?

And do you know what God says to that question? Nothing. Nothing. Doesn't answer his son.

[16 : 22] Real sense of abandonment. Jesus knows what's coming. A real sense of abandonment. And so with this in mind, I think we can appreciate the question of Jesus a little bit more. Can you not do it another way, God? It says in verse 39, in going a little further, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

Jesus is saying, look, I know what's going to happen, but can we not do it another way? Jesus is, naturally speaking, Jesus is wanting to avoid the physical pain. He's wanting to avoid the suffering, but of course he's wanting to avoid more than anything else, the abandonment from the Father, the loss of communion from the Father. But he doesn't want to avoid all of that by disobeying God's will. He doesn't want to avoid doing the will of God. And so there's no conflict here between the Son and the Father regarding the will of God. The issue that's being debated, or at least raised in this question, is Jesus simply saying to his Father, can it not be done another way?

Can not the salvation of the world, of men and women, boys and girls throughout the ages, even the ages that are yet to come, in 2,000 years' time or 50,000 years' time, all those people that are yet to be saved, can it not be done in a different way? And the Father's answer is, no, I can't do that.

If you've ever asked the question, like Jesus is asking the question, in the midst of, say, sorrow or trouble or personal suffering, can you not do it another way? And God, perhaps by silence, but he's not been silent because we've got the answer here. Okay, this answer is helpful to us.

God answers my prayer of, God, can you not do it another way? Well, go to the Garden of Gethsemane and ask that question there. But here's what we can be assured of. Would a loving Father put his Son through the cross if he didn't have to go through the cross? And I think the answer clearly has to be, no, not even a human Father would put his Son through that if there was no need to go through that. And so if a human Father wouldn't do it, how much more would the heavenly Father not put his Son through the cross if the cross wasn't necessary? It's not that God could do it another way, but he chose not to. He chose to do it the way of the cross. Actually, there was no other way.

[19 : 24] God couldn't save us in any other way but this way. And the reason why Jesus obeys the will of the Father is not just because he is the Father and he is without sin and he obeys his Father and carries it all the way through, but also, and this is something I think we need to appreciate a lot, is that Jesus knows that death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person.

Death is not the worst thing that can happen to you. The worst thing that can happen to anybody is abandonment from God, is separation from God eternally. That's the worst thing that can, and then facing the judgment with God. That's the worst thing that can happen to a person. And so Jesus knows that death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. There are far worse things. But God can't save us if he's going to save Jesus from the cup. Okay? God can't save us if he says to Jesus, no, you can pass the cup on.

Well, before we ever get to see the need for judgment, which we'll see in a later part, do you appreciate that there are some things that God can't do if he decides to do other things?

And so it's the case that God can't save us in a different way, because if he could, he would. And that God can't spare his son from drinking this cup, because if he could, he would. And what that means for us, and what that means for us, is that there are some things that happen in your life that are so specific, they have to happen in that way.

That certain purposes and results cannot happen in your life unless they happen in the way that they are happening. Because God can't do it in another way. Not because God is somehow incapable, but because not even God can make an omelet without breaking eggs.

[21 : 38] You just can't do it. It's impossible to make an omelet without breaking eggs. You need to break eggs to make an omelet. There is no other way of making an omelet in any other way, shape, or form.

And so in order to have this result, that must happen. And so you can't have an omelet if you don't have eggs broken. And you can't have salvation unless you have Christ dying on the cross.

To illustrate this another way, you'll remember that Jesus was on the cross between two thieves. One of them said to Jesus this, are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us.

Now, when he asked that question, it probably didn't occur to him that one, Jesus was there to save from sin rather than just save a physical body. But secondly, that it would be impossible for Jesus to do that. The same type of thing was said by the bystanders, the soldiers, and even the religious leaders. Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us. But you see, that's the one thing Jesus can't do. Jesus can't do it. Jesus can't, if Jesus steps down from the cross, or if he, as the song says, if he called 10,000 angels that removed him from the crucifixion, then he could not be saved himself and save us as well. It just cannot be, not even God can do that because of the requirements that are necessary for us to be saved. So I'm trying to make the point here at least to show you that biblically speaking, there is a case for understanding the things that God cannot do and why God cannot do them. But how does this help us? How does this encourage us? And how is this a form of comfort? So here are some sort of concluding thoughts, and they are thoughts, concluding thoughts.

If God can make you the person he wants you to be in any other way, don't you think he would? Okay, if God can make you the person he wants you to be in any other way, don't you think he would?

[24 : 11] Then it means that if we go through what we go through, it seems to be necessary because God can't do it any other way. Because if God could do it another way, then what you go through is completely unnecessary.

And if God could do it another way, then what you are put through by God is almost capricious. There becomes a form of gratuitous evil that there's no reason for it to happen other than the fact that God's letting it happen. And that is a very hard thing to stomach, and so you're only left with two conclusions.

The first conclusion is this, that if God wants you to make you the person that you really ought to be, then it is necessary. And if God could do it another way, but chooses not to, then what he puts you through is unnecessary. But would God, the God that you read in Scripture, do that type of thing? No, I don't think so. Well, clearly not. So it does seem to be the case that God can't do certain things. Because in order to have the results that God wants in our lives, it cannot happen any other way. So what you go through, dare I say, even the sins that are committed are never pointless.

If God could, say, move the process on a little faster, do you not think he would? Have you not prayed, Lord, can you not just get me through this a little bit quicker? Can we not just hurry up the process here? I think God, I think that's exactly what God wants to do most of the time. I imagine God like parents are with little, come on, a little bit faster.

You're taking your time. Come on, just, you know, get a shift on, you know. And I think God's like that with us. I think God wants us to move a lot faster than we move, but I don't think God can do it.

[26 : 15] I think God is like the loving parent that's sort of like this and almost dragging us. And, you know, given that little push where we're shuffling our feet, where I'm going as fast as I can, and you can go faster. And I don't think God gets frustrated, but I definitely believe God would move us along a lot faster than the speed in which we go. But it seems that he can't do that either.

And so we even pray, Lord, can we not go a little bit faster? Can you not get me through this a little bit faster? Can you not make me mature faster in a different way? And the answer is no. I don't think it can happen that way. Not because I think God can't do it, but I think because we can't move that fast. And here's an example. When God saved his people from Egypt, God wanted to lead them one way, a much, much quicker way. But the trouble was, it was through the land of the Philistines. But God decided at that moment that he was going to change his mind and not lead them through the way of the Philistines, lest God's people see war and return to Egypt.

Now, could God handle the Philistines? I think he can handle, if he can handle the Egyptians, he can handle the Philistines. There are going to be no problem for God whatsoever. Do I think that God could get the children of Israel through the land of the Philistines and out the other side? Yes, I don't think that would be a problem for God at all. But it seems to God that he can't do that.

Why not? Because lest the children of Israel see war and return to Egypt. It's not that God didn't want to take them the faster way or the quicker route, but he couldn't because they couldn't handle it. Their hearts and minds couldn't handle, even though God could do it, they couldn't handle it. Their hearts and minds were not just ready for that type of step just yet. And so the route that they ended up going was much longer.

So do I think that God wants us to hurry along faster than we go? Yeah, I think he does it all the time. But can he get us to go any faster? I don't think God can do that. And I don't think God can do that because there's somehow a problem on his side.

[28 : 35] I think because he can't do it because he wants to love us. And love doesn't force in that kind of way. It doesn't force us into an uncomfortable position to the point where it then damages us following God. Remember, the whole point of God not leading them the way he wanted to was so that they wouldn't turn back. God doesn't do anything in our life, though it may seem, and you may even hear some people say, God took me to a place that was too much for me, and I stopped following him. No, no, no. God wouldn't do that. You may get close, but that's not the reason for turning back.

So God can't move us along faster. He can't remove certain things any quicker. He can't stop certain things from happening if he has chosen to make us the people that he wants us to be.

It seems that God can't do that. And so what does that mean? Well, it means that what I go through, though I may pray just like Jesus did for it to be shortened or for it to be stopped or for it to happen another way, that when it doesn't, that when it doesn't happen another way or it doesn't stop or it's not shortened, I'm reminded by a God who is doing something in my life and who cannot do it another way. Not because there's a limitation on God's side, but because I can't move that fast.

I can't change that quickly. My heart and my mind just cannot cope with that level and pace.

And so however difficult a hard providence may be, it is absolutely necessary. Because for what God is doing in your life, he cannot do in any other way.

[30 : 40] And I think that there is great, great comfort there. That what I go through is not unnecessary. And how long I go through it is not unnecessary. And why I go through it is not unnecessary.

Because God, if he could do it another way, he would do it another way. And so it seems that he can't. And we, just like Jesus, just like Jesus, would naturally want to avoid any tension in our relationship with the Father, any sense of abandonment, any kind of physical suffering, any kind of mental or emotional suffering. But in the same way that Jesus had to go to his cross, we also, according to Jesus, have to take up our own. And it was never going to be easy to take up our cross and carry it daily.

So what you go through, remember, that God is making you to be the people he wants you to be. And if there was another way to do it, he would do it. But because there's not another way to do it, you can be certain that what you go through, you go through with God and not without him.

That's the point here. Okay? God can't do it another way. And there's great comfort in that. Because if he could, he would. Amen.