

Matthew 26:36-46

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: 17 May 2020

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Amen. We're in Matthew 26 verses 36 to 46. It's one that's repeated three times.

So look at verse 39. Where Jesus says, where it says, Going a little farther, Jesus fell on his face and he prayed, saying, My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. And that prayer is repeated three times. And so it's obviously, isn't it, the key to the whole section.

I've got two points that I want to make and then three applications. The first point is the agony of the son. The second point is the will of the father.

So look with me at the agony of the son in verse 38. Then Jesus said to them, My soul is very sorrowful.

[1 : 22] My soul is overwhelmingly sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me. And going a little farther, he fell on his face.

Fell to the ground. And at this point, we're out of our depth here. There's that hymn as they view him prostrate in the garden.

On the ground, your maker lies. And it seems like there is a sorrow that is so deep that it almost kills him. Jesus is all but overwhelmed by grief.

But why? What does it mean? What is distinctive about Jesus' suffering and the death that is ahead of him?

And I think we need to make some distinctions here between Jesus' death and other deaths. I can only mention a couple. First of all, what you see here is no passionate longing for martyrdom.

[2 : 27] He's not like the fanatics. He's not like kamikaze pilots in the Second World War driving into boats. He's not like a terrorist suicide bomber, thinking that if he blows himself up, this is the way to paradise.

Jesus is not a fanatic. There's another way of our death, which we're most likely to fall into, and that's the stoic death, isn't it? To cheerfully accept what we do.

Sometimes by the courage of unbelievers. You know the kind of thing, you'll have read it. They faced death bravely with no qualms but a smile on their lips.

And Jesus is not like that here, is he? Here is no cheerful courage. He is not a stoic. And he is not a fanatic.

And according to this account, it's not actually death which is terrifying him. Many young men have faced death in war, and they've not been intimidated by it.

[3 : 37] So what is it that fills Jesus here with such shuddering horror? And look carefully at the story. It's immediately plain that it's not physical pain.

It's not physical death. It's not even the suffering that is ahead of him mentally. It is put here in one word. Can you see it in verse 39? My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

And then go to verse 42. Again, for the second time, he went and he prayed, my father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, speaking of the cup again, your will be done.

Now I think we've seen that Matthew is writing for his countrymen. One of all the gospels, Matthew is the most Jewish gospel.

Matthew's readers are familiar with the Old Testament. And sometimes it's not so easy for us to kind of grasp his meaning because we're not so familiar with the Old Testament. But I want to give you two references to the cup.

[4 : 44] And the cup in the Old Testament had one meaning. First, Isaiah 51 and verse 17. Isaiah 51 verse 17, where the prophet says, Wake yourself, wake yourself.

Stand up, O Jerusalem. You who have drunk from the hand of the Lord. The cup of his wrath. Who have drunk to it the dregs, the bowl, the cup of staggering.

They're not comfortable words, are they? The cup of God's anger that has to be drunk by rebellious Jerusalem, the prophet is saying. You go to the next book of the Old Testament, Jeremiah. Jeremiah 25 verse 15. And thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of wine of wrath.

And make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.

[5 : 50] And so in Isaiah 51 verse 17 and Jeremiah 25 verse 15, the cup, if we understand it as the Old Testament would define it, is the cup of God's anger.

And this cup that Jesus is talking about is the righteous indignation of almighty God. There's no bad temper with God.

It is righteous indignation against willful rebellion. And so what Matthew is teaching you and I is that Good Friday is a judgment day.

It's a day when the rightful anger of God against a rebellious humanity comes upon Jesus. But how can the divine anger of God fall upon Jesus?

That's the question, isn't it? How can it fall of all men upon him? Him whom the Father has told us, This is my Son with whom I am well pleased.

[6 : 54] Faith, utterly pleasing to the Father, sinless. One who from all eternity has been one with the Father and enjoyed his love.

And there can be only one explanation. We're pointed back to last week, aren't we? And the Passover. Do you remember the Passover where the lamb is killed instead of the oldest son? And so the oldest son is safe from the angel of death because the little lamb was killed instead. And the blood is applied to the doorpost. And so John the Baptist, do you remember when he sees Jesus coming? He says, behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And obviously here there are depths that we can't plumb. And so I think what we have to do is we have to turn to the Bible to give us the words to explain what is happening.

[7 : 57] And so the obvious chapter is Isaiah 53. So if you've got a Bible, turn to Isaiah chapter 53. And I want you to notice there the simplicity of the language.

Listen to the prophet. It's impossible to misunderstand him. In Isaiah chapter 53, there are at least 12 illustrations or metaphors of substitution.

That is one suffering for many. So Isaiah 53 verse 4. The prophet tells us, surely he has borne our griefs.

And he's carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken. Smitten by God and afflicted. Verse 5. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace.

[9 : 03] And with his wounds we are healed. And now, for ultimate simplicity, even though it's talking about things beyond what you and I can understand, it's so simple.

We all like sheep have gone astray. That's the ultimate sin. It's the ultimate rebellion to live in God's world without God.

To go my way. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned every single one of us to his own way. And yet the prophet says the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

You see that too, if you go to verse 10 and 11 and 12. It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer and to make his life a guilt offering.

Verse 11, it talks about the suffering of his soul. Verse 12. Because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors, yet he bore the sin of many.

[10 : 05] This is what the Old Testament prophet teaches. What this great deed that Jesus is going to do is going to mean. And I think that really helps you and I to stop making some mistakes.

Come back with me to Matthew chapter 26. That the suffering of the Lord Jesus, the suffering of Calvary, the cross of Christ Jesus is not primarily physical.

I think preachers are tempted sometimes to rub your nose in the blood and the gore of crucifixion.

But when you come to the Gospels, there's so little of that. In the Gospel account, just flick over the page to Matthew 27, verse 35.

You come to the point of crucifixion, and we imagine that we're going to hear about the hammering of the nails, or the pierced flesh, the lifting up of the body.

But actually, we don't read that at all. We read Matthew 27, verse 35. And when they crucified him, they divided up his garments among them by casting lots. That's all.

[11:14] So you see, Matthew is crying out to us this morning, Do not concentrate on the visible things. The things which a painter can put down, or an actor can portray in a film, because that will never tell you the story.

That will not penetrate the mystery. What is it all about? It is about God putting our sins to his account, an invisible transaction.

And the anger of God being visited upon him. The agony of the Son. Secondly, the will of the Father. There's no doubt that, as you read this passage, you'll see that Jesus is utterly committed to the will of the Father.

To his Father's will. There's no doubt, is there, that Jesus will go God's way. Verse 39 and verse 42 are really plain. Yet not as I will, but as you will.

Verse 42, may your will be done. You know that, don't you? We pray that in the Lord's Prayer. Jesus has taught us to pray your will be done. And there's no doubt he will practice what he preaches.

[12:32] He's going to go God's way. But faced with this intolerable cup, he asks with the deepest reverence, can another way be found?

Father, is this the only way for your people to be redeemed? Just look at the language of possibility. I've not seen that before.

Look at the language of possibility in verse 39. He says, if it is possible. Look at this language in verse 42. If it is not possible.

The Bible tells us, doesn't it, that all things are possible with God. Don't we believe that? And so surely there's some possibility in the wisdom of Almighty God to find another route for his people to be saved.

For another route for his people to be saved than through Christ's sacrifice. But it's quite plain, isn't it, that there is no other way. There is no other way that even for God in his almighty wisdom, in his omnipotence, with his knowledge of the issues before us, that he, having decided to save mankind from the pains of hell, can at the same time save his son from drinking this cup.

[13:58] He cannot save us and save his son. Here's a problem to tax even the wisdom of God. And if I understand the story correctly, there was no other way.

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the door of heaven and let us in.

He only. It was not possible, it is not possible, for you and I to be saved from our sins without the death of God's only son.

And so here are the three applications, okay? First of all, God with us. Can you see that? I hope you've been following me along in Matthew's Gospel.

Do you remember right at the start of Matthew's Gospel, in the introduction, it opens with Jesus being given a name. What name is he given? He's given the name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

[15:01] Go to the end of Matthew's Gospel. And Matthew's Gospel ends with Jesus saying, I am with you always. And central to Matthew's Gospel is an affirmation that God is not too proud to be God with us.

And the Garden of Gethsemane shows us dramatically, I think, a with us God. How with us God is willing to be.

That in Jesus, he knew what it was to be abandoned by his friends. In Jesus, he knew what it was to be lonely. In Jesus, he knew what it was to be betrayed.

He knew what it was to be afraid. He knows what it is to be in agony of spirit. And the letter to the Hebrews says, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who's been tempted in every way as we are yet.

He did not sin. And so this morning, if you are lonely, or you are betrayed, or you're afraid, well, in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God in Christ, he's been there with you.

[16:27] He knows what it's like. He understands. Donald MacLeod writes so movingly, for a moment, he stands with the millions of people who have found God's will almost unendurable, shrunk from the work given them to do, shuddered at the prospect set before them, and prayed that God would change his mind.

But solidarity is not the main thing here. This is not a road less traveled. It is a road never trodden. Before or since, the cup of one man, the Son of God, he shudders, hesitates for a moment.

The whole salvation of the world, the whole of God's determinate counsel, hangs in the balance, suspended on the free, unconstrained decision of this man.

There is dread here, and bewilderment, and awe, and self-doubt, and fear.

He is God with us, but that leads us on, doesn't it? To God instead of us. God with us, God instead of us. The Apostle Paul, he reflects, on the reality, of the garden of Gethsemane, on the agony of the son, and the will of the father, and he says, he who knew no sin, became sin for us.

[17 : 59] And in the Passover, God's judgment, came upon Egypt, but there was a safe place to stand, do you remember? That in the homes, that had the blood of the lamb, on the door, that was the sign, to the angel of death, Passover.

Blood has already been shed here. And what the blood marked door, was for those houses, the death of Jesus, is for us, who trust upon him.

To be a Christian, is to stand there. It is to look at the death, of Jesus, and say, that was instead of me. That cup, was for me.

It was deserved, by me. But it was drunk, by him. He drinks, the cup of God's wrath, so that you and I, might know, the cup of God's blessing.

And so he is, God with us. He is God, instead of us. And thirdly, he is Christ, without us. As we think upon this story, we see, don't we, the frustration, of Jesus, that his disciples slept.

[19 : 18] I think that was for the very human reason, that he wanted their company. This was his moment of trial, and he did not want to face it all alone.

Nothing, I think, more graphically illustrates the reality of the incarnation, the sense of dependence, that went along with it, the paradox, that the Son of God, the Almighty, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, he asks mortals, to remember him in their prayers.

But there was another reason, why, they should not have slept. There's a reason, that you might not realize, why they should not have slept.

Do you know what it is? Because, it's because, during the Passover, we're told in Exodus 12, verse 42, that the Lord, kept vigil, to bring them out of Egypt.

On this night, all the Israelites, are to keep vigil. And so for the Israelites, to observe the Passover, you're meant to stay up all night.

[20 : 32] And notice why, why are you meant to stay up all night? Because the Lord, kept vigil, to bring you out of Egypt. In the language of the Exodus, the Lord, stayed awake all night, to do his work of salvation.

And now on this night, more than a thousand years, after the Exodus, Jesus stayed awake all night, to do his work of salvation. And he did so alone.

He alone stays awake. He alone, keeps vigil, to secure our salvation. Represented by the apostles, the people of God, they do nothing.

They are there, but they don't contribute. We see that the church, it's a great and a precious gift, but the church, as represented by the disciples, the apostles in the garden, proved perfectly useless, at the point of salvation.

Jesus did that by himself, without us, and yet for us. Do you remember what Donald MacLeod said?

[21 : 48] This is not a road less traveled, it is a road never trodden. Before or since, the cup of one man, the Son of God, he shudders, he hesitates. For a moment, the whole salvation of the world, the whole of God's determinate counsel, hangs in the balance.

Suspended on the free, unconstrained decision of this man. And there is dread here, and there is bewilderment, and there is awe, and there is self-doubt, and there is fear, but look at verse 46.

Then he says, rise. Let us be going. There is determination. In the words of the hymn, Jesus paid it all.

All to him. I owe. God with us. God instead of us.

Christ alone. What do I want you to do? What's the application? What do you want me to do? I want you to go to the garden.

[23 : 05] I want you to view him prostrate. On the ground your maker lies. And worship him. And adore him.

And bow your knee. Let's pray.