

Introduction

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," written and preached by Jonathan Edwards in 1741, is considered one of the great examples of early American literature. More importantly, it is a powerful biblical sermon which puts sinners on notice of the precarious position in which we find ourselves. God is a holy judge and we sinners dangle over the fiery abyss as though on a spider's slender silk. He might justly at any moment release us to fall into the everlasting judgment we so deserve. Edwards states, "He is of purer eyes than to bear you in his sight; you are ten thousand times as abominable in his eyes as the most hateful, venomous serpent is in yours." The sermon serves to highlight how great is the mercy of God by showing how just and severe is his wrath toward sinners.

In our study of Matthew this morning, we are looking at the reverse of Edwards' sermon. We turn from the image of sinners in the hands of an angry God to God in the hands of angry sinners as we consider what Jesus foretold would happen to him when he went to Jerusalem.

[Read Text and Pray]

The main idea in our text this morning is the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples for the third time in the gospel according to Matthew that he will be killed and on the third day be raised. When you repeat something three times, you are making clear that thing is of the utmost significance. The Son of Man, who is the Son of God, is about to be delivered into the hands of sinners. What Jesus explains to the disciples is the hub of the Bible. The Old Testament points forward to the sufferings and crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. And the New Testament looks back to those sufferings and their implications. As Jesus points to his sufferings, he calls attention to four details.

Jesus directs attention to . . .

I. The Place He was to suffer

They were headed to Jerusalem, the most important city in the world. The world may not think so, but God does. The Bible refers to this city as the city of God (Psalm 46:4; 48:1). In 1 Kings 14:21 Jerusalem is called "the city that the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there."

Jesus says to his disciples, "We are going UP to Jerusalem." They were going UP because they were in the Jordan valley, the deepest valley in the world. Meanwhile, Jerusalem is on a mountain—namely Mt. Moriah. This is the place Jesus was to suffer.

A. To understand the significance of this place, we go back to the book of Genesis. God called Abram. He promised him a son. When in his old age God gave him that son, the Lord also tested his faith. Genesis 22 tells us:

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. 5 Then

Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." 6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. 7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" 8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Jesus is heading for Jerusalem led by his Father, the very same place Abraham had taken his son Isaac. God spared the son of Abraham by providing a ram on Mt Moriah. And now here many years later, God provided the offering that he requires. On that same mount God provided. He spared NOT his own son on that same mountain. God's Son is the ram caught in the thicket. God has provided his own Son as the substitutionary sacrifice for his people.

B. Jerusalem was the place of another foreshadowing of Christ in the days of David. In the latter days of his reign, David sinned against the Lord. The details are in 1 Chronicles 21. In an act of personal pride, David took a census of Israel. God was displeased and David became sorrowful and admitted that he had sinned greatly. He asked the Lord to take away his iniquity. The Lord offered David a choice between three sets of consequences—three years of famine, three months of devastation by his foes, or three days of the sword of the Lord involving pestilence and destruction. David chose the sword of the Lord, for he said, "his mercy is very great."

So the Lord sent pestilence on Israel. Seventy thousand men fell and God sent his angel to destroy Jerusalem. The angel stood poised above the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. His hand held a drawn out sword stretching out over Jerusalem. Seeing him there, David fell on his face and pleaded for mercy for the city. The angel instructed David to lift up an altar on Ornan's threshing floor. David purchased the threshing floor and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings and called on the Lord. The Lord answered with fire from heaven, which came down upon the altar. And then the Lord commanded the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath.

In going up to Jerusalem, Jesus is going up to the city once threatened by the sword of the Lord. It is the city where his father according to the flesh, David, presented an offering to turn away God's wrath. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to be the sacrifice foreshadowed by David's offering. He was coming to take the wrath of the sword so it could be turned away from his people.

C. It was right there on Mt Moriah in the city of Jerusalem at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, that Solomon built the Temple. 2 Chronicles 3:1 states that Solomon built "the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Jerusalem then

became the city of sacrifice because the central feature of the temple was the worshipful offering of sacrifices.

So when Jesus says to his disciples, "we are going to Jerusalem," and when he combines that intent with the prediction of his death, it is clear that what stands before them is not a holiday. They were on the verge of Passover and Jesus was to be offered as the Passover lamb to turn away God's sword, to be a soothing aroma in the nostrils of God. He is the true offering of which all the Old Testament offerings are but a shadow.

D. Now one more thing about Jerusalem. It may have been the city of God, but it had become a rebellious city. Isaiah prophesied, "How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness had lodged in her, but now murderers." Jesus lamented over Jerusalem this way, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it." God greatly favored the city, and the city had thanked God by unfaithfulness and corruption. And now what would happen in this favored city when God sends his Son to proclaim righteousness and to summon its people to the kingdom of heaven? The people would show themselves to be angry sinners against God.

II. The People who made him suffer

Jesus provided meticulous details about who would be involved in his sufferings and death. The idea of the Messiah being handed over to anybody was not anything a Jew would easily accept. Messiah was a savior to bring redemption to God's people. He would be formidable. Others would certainly be delivered over to him but not him to others. Jesus contradicted those ideas. He asserted that the Son of Man was to be DELIVERED OVER to the chief priests and scribes, and they would deliver him over to the Gentiles.

A. Who were the chief priests and scribes? These two groups were the pastors and the teachers of the Jews. These were the two official groups in Jewish life vested with authority and at the heart of what went on at the Temple. The chief priests ministered in the Temple and the scribes were teachers of the law. Together they represent the religious establishment. The forerunner of these scribes would have been a man like Ezra. He stands out in Jewish history because he set his heart to understand God's law and live accordingly. The trouble is that many, many rabbinic traditions and additional laws had by this time been added to God's law. The scribes had become so caught up in laws that they missed what the law was all about. Here were the people who should have been able to recognize that the Messiah would offer himself as a sacrifice. But they were more concerned with keeping traditions and manmade laws and were in great conflict with Jesus.

We are urged to study God's word and search the scriptures, to delight ourselves in the law of the Lord. But we need to be sure we are riveted not on our own thoughts and opinions. We must not add to the scriptures or take from the scriptures. We must not judge the Scripture by our thoughts but judge our thoughts by the Scripture.

B. Jesus also mentions the Gentiles. The chief priests and scribes would deliver Jesus over to the Gentiles. The Romans were in power and they had the final say in cases that called for capital punishment. But there seems to be an element of the involvement of the Romans that corresponds to part of the Mosaic law. One of the outstanding features of Jewish life was the annual day of atonement. On that day the people were to take two goats. One would be offered as a sacrifice. And on the head of the other, the high priest would lay his hands and confess over it all the iniquities, sins, and transgressions of the people of Israel. He was putting Israel's sins on the goat.

The goat would then be led far away from the camp to take those sins away. It is said that the Jews did not want to touch this goat and so they would call on a Gentile to take the goat out of the camp bearing their sins far away. Being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles is also a picture of being carried away into exile. Being handed over to the Gentiles, Jesus was carried away from the people and the presence of God and outside the camp of the Jews to bear sins away.

If you believe in Jesus as your savior and Lord, this is what he has done for you. He has borne your sins and your guilt and your shame and he has taken them far away. He went outside the camp so that you can be on the inside. He embraced your exile from God's glorious presence so you can enter in.

III. The Purpose for his sufferings

Jesus' venture into Jerusalem was not an accident. It took place under the direction of the sovereign will of God. It was God's purpose and intent that his Son go to Jerusalem for the express purpose of being delivered over to the Jewish leaders and then to the Romans. Jesus had come to the fullness of the time for submitting to the darkest and most painful aspect for which he had taken on flesh. And he was not turning back. He knew full well that he was destined to suffer and die. On the day of Pentecost, Peter explained to the multitude that gathered that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Jesus told Pilate, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above (John 19:11). And the authority given from heaven above allowed sinners to treat God despicably. He came to his own people but they did not receive him. In fact they hated him. So they killed him.

The Jews condemned him to death and the Romans carried it out. It was the Jewish leaders who called for crucifixion and it was the Romans who did the deed. The details of the treatment of Jesus are hard for me to say. But these details were described clearly by Jesus. He would be "mocked and flogged and crucified." These were his sufferings. He was treated worse than scum, with hostility, disdain, and deep-seated anger. Here he is, the God-man, in the hands of angry sinners. It is an ugly scene. You and I do not even begin to understand the horror of our sin until we see ourselves in the place of those who mistreated the Lord. They laughed at and made fun of Jesus; they beat him and flogged him until blood flowed. Chunks of flesh were ripped away exposing his internal organs. They subjected him to the most excruciating torturous death known to mankind.

Psalms 109 looks out from the standpoint of Jesus. "Wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love." This is God in the hands of angry sinners. This is the personification of our every act of disobedience.

And you and I do not understand the depths of love until we consider that Jesus bore up under all of this anguish for love. He loves Father and he loves those he saves by this ignominious death.

I have been singing this hymn this week by Thomas Kelly:
Stricken, smitten, and afflicted, see Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ by man rejected; yes, my soul, 'tis He 'tis He!
'Tis the long expected Prophet, David's son, yet David's Lord;
By His Son God now has spoken; 'tis the true and faithful Word.

Tell me, ye who hear Him groaning, was there ever grief like His?

Friends thru' fear His cause disowning, foes insulting His distress;
Many hands were raised to wound Him, none would interpose to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that Justice gave.

Ye who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great,
Here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God.

And why did he do this? Well, he tells us later in this 20th chapter of Matthew that he came "to give his life as a ransom." We will look at that next week. Considering the significance of Jerusalem and Mt Moriah, we can also assert that He did this to be the ram caught in the thicket that adopted children of God might be spared. He demonstrated that God will surely bless his people abundantly because he did not spare his own son but freely gave him.

Why did Jesus subject himself to these who hated him? He was delivered over to satisfy the just wrath of God due sinners so that the sword of justice might be placed back in its sheath. He suffered to take the place of the scapegoat and carry the sin of his people far outside the camp to remove their sins from them as far as the east is from the west. He did it to set sinners free. He did it to cancel the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands (Colossians 2:14). He did it as one act of righteousness by which to bring justification and life to those who believe (Romans 5:18). He did it so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but have eternal life. He did it so that those who are united with him by faith might die to sin and live to righteousness. He died this way to reconcile to God those once alienated and hostile (Colossians 1:22). He did it to free us from sin's penalty and sin's power and ultimately from sin's presence.

These are some of the many accomplishments of Jesus' mocking and flogging and crucifixion. Human beings here are at their worst. They have God in their hands and display the repulsive and shameful hostility of human sin. Meanwhile, however, Jesus is displaying the enormity of the beauty and power of God's love for sinners.

IV. The Power over his suffering

The gospel is not complete without the mention of the resurrection of Jesus. He was mocked, flogged, and crucified, AND he was RAISED the third day. The suffering and death of Jesus were acceptable to God the Father and he raised him up from the dead. The resurrection is proof that for Jesus, his death was not his defeat. It was the setup for his victory. Human beings did everything they could to destroy Jesus, but they could not keep him from rising again.

God's power toward us who believe is immeasurable. It is according to the working of his great might which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead. The power of God in the resurrection of Christ enables us who believe to live in newness of life. The resurrection also holds before us the assurance that believers in Christ will also be raised.

We live in hope because of what Jesus did when he went to Jerusalem. He took everything angry sinners could dish out and yet he overcame to the glory of God.

Conclusion

This text informs us of a number of things—the sovereign purpose of God, the willing suffering of Jesus, the nauseating nature of human sin against God. It also warns us. We are warned of the

hostility of this world toward the righteous. If it treated Jesus like this, do not expect it to treat his followers any different. Finally though, this text assures us. It assures us as it points to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. He has risen to the right hand of God until he makes his enemies his footstool. It assures Christ's followers because when we face death, we can be confident it is not defeat.

This has been a tumultuous week. We live in troubled times. But this morning we have come to what really matters and matters eternally, to truths that sustain us in the face of adversity. We need not fear. Our Lord has overcome. He is alive. He sits at the right hand of God until he makes his enemies his footstool.

If you believe in Jesus Christ, with confidence you can say, "HE is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."