

Jesus Prepares Himself for His Death

Matthew 26:36-46

Halifax: 25 March 2007

Introduction

This is one of the most sublime passages in all of scripture!

- Here we see into the very heart of our Lord Jesus in the midst of His deepest struggle.
 - The time has come for Him to drink the cup that the Father has appointed for Him.
 - The cup, of course, is the cross that the Father had appointed for Him to bear.
- At Gethsemane, we see Him wrestling in the conflict between His human desire that is recoils from the cross, and His calling from the Father to endure it.
 - Here we see our LORD revealed to us in a marvellously personal way...we get to see into the very heart of His struggle...
 - It shows us the intensity of His feelings at the prospect of the cross...
 - It shows us His wonderful holy character, His unfailing love and devotion to His Father as One ever and always committed to do His will no matter what the cost...
 - It shows us what great things He bore for our salvation—much more than mere physical death—in order that we might rest our faith in Him...
 - And it gives us an excellent example about how to handle the worst temptations that may come upon us.
 - We will do very well to take a good look at our Lord in this place...
 - It will do us much good to bring us to a fuller knowledge of Him, to enlarge our praise and our gratitude, to deepen our faith, and to teach us how to live.
 - Let us look at Him then with grateful, admiring reverence as He is here revealed to us...

TRANS> First of all, then,

I. See how distasteful the cup is to Jesus.

A. Brothers and sisters, you know what the Father had called Him to do!

1. He called Him to offer Himself up on the cross for the sins of His people!
 - This is why His struggle was so intense...
 - a. You know that the LORD God does not look upon sin lightly!

- From the very beginning,
 - He had told Adam that if he did not continue in submission, he would surely die.
- Adam had a great responsibility because he was made in the image of God.
 - As the image of God, he was created to be a true representation of God.
 - His very life was to represent the beauty, the love, the mercy, the justice, the purity, the wisdom, the goodness, of His Maker.
 - In all His dealings and all His relations, God was to be seen in truth.
- But Adam, by his fall into sin, became a teacher of lies—an image of God that represented God falsely...
 - He had become a twisted, distorted, mangled portrait of God.
- b. As the corrupted image of God, it became necessary for God to display His displeasure...
 - Now, God's glory (which always must shine forth) demanded that this false picture of Himself be judged...
 - His intense wrath must fall upon this one who daily represented the One He imaged falsely.
 - In Adam, mankind would have to be brought to shame, disgrace, and misery of the worst kind for so great an offence.
 - Adam was sentenced to the very place that had been prepared for the Devil and his angels...
 - The Lake of Fire would be His eternal home.
 - This is the second death, the final death,
 - that was justly appointed for fallen mankind.
- c. But the Triune God, in His great mercy, determined that He would redeem a great portion of mankind and restore them to His favour!
 - But His holy justice still required that the penalty for our transgression be paid in full.
 - The only way that could be done would be if God Himself paid it...
 - And that is exactly what the Holy Trinity purposed to do...
 - by sending God the Son to bear the shame, disgrace, and misery that was due to sinful man.

- To bear this for us,
 - He Himself would have to become a man and the day would have to come when He Himself would,
 - in human flesh, become that object of shame and disgrace before His heavenly Father on the cross.
 - There, on the cross, He would bear the pains of Hell for His people as one rejected by the Father for our sake...
 - He Himself would die in the place of those God had purposed to redeem!
 - This way, God would clearly show His displeasure with our sin and yet, make a way for us to be pardoned.

TRANS> When we see Jesus in Gethsemane, we meet Him as one who has come to this dreaded hour...

- He had agreed to do this from the counsels of eternity,

2. But now the hour of the dreadful event has come!

a. Brothers and sisters, you all know that resolutions are one thing—

- following through with your resolutions is quite another!

1) You can promise to pay a school bill, or a vacation bill...it's easy enough while you are enjoying the benefits...

- but the test comes each month when you have to do without in order to make those payments...

2) You can promise to bring up your child in the nurture and discipline of the Lord at his baptism,

- but its another story in the daily grind when your patience starts to run thin or when you are distracted by a thousand things and don't want to give yourself to the task.

b. So it is with our Lord...

- He had promised, but now, here He is at Gethsemane facing the reality of the cross.
- The hour has come!
 - Now He must learn obedience through suffering—through experience.

B. See how our Lord recoils at the very thought of drinking this cup!

1. Look at what it says of it in our text...

- a. Verse 37 tells us that He “began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.”
 - These words are expressive of the greatest sorrow imaginable...
 - The Greek word translated “deeply distressed” is a very strong word.
 - It speaks of heaviness, of great distress, of being pressed down and overwhelmed with anguish.
 - As Isaiah puts it,
 - “There is no sorrow like unto His sorrow!”
 - He was truly overwhelmed in anticipation of what He was called to bear.
- b. In verse 38, He communicates this to His disciples...
 - He says, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.”
 - The thing before Him is crushing Him.

TRANS> What are we to make of this extreme displeasure with the cup the Father had given to Him?

- 2. I would submit to you that His agony does not proceed from any defect in His human nature,
 - It proceeds from the perfection of that nature!
 - a. In other words, it was right for Him to despise the cross as a man!
 - 1) He did not take on the mere appearance of man, but fully took our nature to Himself—without the corruption of sin...
 - Here is our nature as it is meant to be...
 - And when faced with the cross, it is right for it to recoil in horror!

TRANS> I ask you...

- 2) What kind of man would He be if He, this perfectly holy godly man, had been asked to become the object of God’s loathing—
 - to become sin for us, to bear all the shame and disgrace of it before His father’s face...
 - to become, as it were, accounted as the chief blasphemer, the chief idolater, the chief Sabbath breaker, the chief murderer and adulterer and liar...
 - and He had taken it all in stride?

- What virtue would it be to be cavalier when He was faced with the dreadful tribunal of God,
 - and saw before Him an angry judge armed with terrible vengeance?
 - And this Judge being the Father with whom He had held joyful communion for all eternity?

3) J C Ryle says,

- “The real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was the weight of the sin of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force. It was the burden of our guilt imputed to Him, which was now laid on Him, as on the head of the scapegoat. How great that burden must have been, no heart of man can conceive. It is known only to God. Well may the Greek Litany speak of the ‘unknown sufferings of Christ’.”

TRANS> Deep anguish is the only right and holy response of human nature to such circumstances.

- This anguish shows the depth of His love for the Father.
 - To be an object of displeasure to the one He so loved was intensely despised by Him.
- b. Learn from His example that you, as a human being, are not supposed to be cold and stoical about the curse and its affects.
 - You are not meant to disregard suffering and death as though they were nothing to you...
 - You can take delight in them as God wisely uses them for good—
 - and that even in eternity, He will display the glory of His justice in His dealings with sin...
 - Jesus took delight in the cross in that sense...
 - in the good that it would bring and in that it displayed God’s justice...
 - but you are not to be friendly with suffering and death themselves— they have been brought into the world because of sin.
 - They are a revelation of God’s displeasure with human sin...
 - Such suffering will not be found in heaven when all is perfected...
 - The removal of these things is no occasion for sorrow but for gladness.
 - Their presence with us now is the reason for sadness.

- c. Sometimes we wrongly think the problem is that we dislike suffering too much...
- but that's not it!
- 1) The real problem with us is that we are not willing to go on and do the will of God when God's will involves suffering!
 - The virtue of Jesus was not that the suffering didn't bother Him,
 - but that even though it bothered Him immeasurably,
 - it did not keep Him from bearing His cross...
 - 2) But you know how it is not so with us...
 - We are cross-avoiders rather than cross-bearers...
 - We see trouble coming if we keep on doing God's will,
 - so we make a few adjustments—we alter our obedience a little to avoid the cross!
 - You know, someone gives you a hard time about your faith, so the next time you have opportunity to speak up about Christ, you keep silent!
 - Or you find it a hassle because your children complain about going to church, so you find a church that will entertain them—to avoid the trouble!
 - The point is not that you are supposed to like trouble...
 - You are not supposed to like the trouble,
 - but you are supposed to bear it rather than compromising what God has called you to do.
 - Wickedness is not in despising the cross, but in refusing to bear it because you despise it.
 - 3) Of course, sometimes you don't have an option to avoid suffering...
 - You contract a serious illness (or perhaps a not so serious one)...
 - The problem is not that you despised the illness...
 - The problem is that instead of bearing it patiently,
 - you become angry with God and try to get at Him by grumbling or by self-pity, or by withholding service to Him!
 - Perhaps you fall into hard financial times and become weary of it...

- That's okay to be weary of it—that's my point...
- but then you take it upon yourself to withhold your tithe...
 - or you begin to resent your neighbour who has more than you...
 - or you justify lying about something you are selling so you can get more,
 - or you begin to withhold praise from God.
- You don't have to like poverty, but you do have to bear it without rebellion when God, in His providence, gives it to you.

TRANS> The virtue in our LORD Jesus is not that He did not mind the cross,

- but that even though He intensely minded it, He was yet willing to bear it if it was the Father's will.
 - The very depth of His hatred for it not only made His willingness to bear it all that much more praiseworthy...
 - But that hatred of being cursed by the Father was also a thing virtuous in itself!
 - I could certainly wish that there were many more who despised the cross in our land!
 - There are many today who have learned to accept death when the stinger of death has not yet been removed for them!
 - They glibly head for crisis eternity!
 - This is extreme folly and wickedness.
- And so, now having seen how much Jesus despised the cup of suffering He had been given...
 - now I want you to...

II. See how necessary it is for Jesus to drink this cup.

A. Mark it down right here and now!

- Jesus had to drink this cup if anyone was to be saved!
- It was absolutely necessary.
 1. If there had been another way for sin to be atoned,
 - the Father would have appointed that way!
 - a. If the blood of bulls and goats could have atoned for sin and satisfied God's justice, bulls and goats would have been the way...

- If atonement could have been made and God's wrath appeased by the killing of everyone's first born sons, it would have been by our first born sons...
 - If by gold and silver, it would have been gold silver...
 - If by deeds of goodness or by sacrifice that we could do, it would have been by these.
- b. But our offence is such and God's holy justice is such that nothing but the laying of the whole curse upon Christ could take away our sins...
- Nothing but the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God crucified was able to cover for our sins.
 - The Lion of the Tribe of Judah had to endure that which caused His frame to tremble and to sweat drops of blood and to be in great distress.
 - If anything else could have been substituted, the Lord would have spared His Son.
2. Do not think, as so many do, that salvation is based on the willing heart of man...
- a. The very reason that Jesus had to die for us is because of our rebellion—
- because we don't have a willing heart...
 - it was not that there were people looking to be saved so He came to make it happen for them.
 - No, it is His redemption that makes a willing people out of desperately rebellious people.
- b. The first Adam, whose sons we all are, failed at submitting to God.
- This meant that Christ, the second Adam, had to excel at it!
- 1) The first Adam's submission to God was tested by withholding one tree from him in paradise—
- By withholding one tree that was pleasing to the eyes and good for food,
 - the LORD tested him to see if he would keep his place under the rule of God.
 - As you know, he did not.
- 2) This meant that the second Adam, if He was to bring all His people to salvation,
- had to submit to God in a fallen world in behalf of fallen sinners...

- It was not a matter of having his desire for the fruit of a tree restrained...
 - It was now a matter of bearing God's curse for His people even though He Himself had done no wrong!
 - The cost of submission was much greater...
 - The first Adam only had to maintain life under God in paradise.
 - The second Adam had to restore life to His seed from the depths of Hell.
- c. And of course this is exactly what Jesus did.
- He submitted even to the point of death on a cross—
 - He bore the wrath and curse of God for us...
- 1) And in so doing, He brought all His elect into perfect submission!
- As our Head, He placed Himself under God where the human race belongs...
 - and so all who are in His kingdom through faith are brought under that submission with Him.
 - In Him, they have submitted to the cross and born the penalty that God requires of sinners.
 - In this way, Jesus brought us back to where we belong!
 - He restored us to our place of submission under God!
- 2) I hope you can see the beauty of this submission!
- If you can't, I might have to question if you have really repented—
 - if you are really in Christ, because His mission can be described as restoring us to our proper place of loving submission under God.
 - We often think of submission as something that destroys us...
 - something that ruins our personhood and our individuality...
 - But in fact it is by submission to God that we find our life...
 - It is by losing it for Christ that we find it!
 - We rightly belong under God!
 - This is our proper place!
 - We belong in communion with God as His creatures,
 - not in rebellious independence from Him...

- It is under Him that we reach perfection and beauty and the fullness of life.
- 3) Jesus shows us that submission is not demeaning...
- Even in His divine nature,
 - He has always done what pleases the Father.
 - This is the basis of the sweet union He has always had.
 - In His act of coming to earth and dying on the cross,
 - We are able to see His glorious submission to the Father in very concrete terms that we can understand!
 - His relationship to the Father is one of eternal submission...
 - That is why He was so perfectly suited to come to earth, to take on our nature, and show us how deep that submission goes...
 - even to the point of death on the cross!
 - It is this marvellous submission that He brings His church under.
 - This is the whole beauty and glory of humanity!
 - It is patterned after the eternal beauty and glory of the Son in eternal submission to the Father!
 - The ruin of humanity is to depart from it.

TRANS> And so you see that it was most necessary for Jesus to bear the cross if we were to be saved...

- In no other way could atonement be made...
- In no other way could we be brought under God's rule again.
 - If salvation could be accomplished apart from the atonement of Jesus, the Father would have answered His prayer and let the cup pass from Him.
- But now Christian, I have something else to say to you about this idea of the necessity of suffering...
 - I want you to understand that...

B. It is also necessary for you to drink the cup of suffering that God gives you.

1. As with Jesus, if our afflictions were not necessary, the Lord would not send them.
 - a. But they are necessary...

- In Acts 14:22, we are told that when Paul went to visit the churches he had planted, he exhorted them to continue in the faith, saying,
 - "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."
- In Philippians 1:29, He says:
 - "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."
- And in 1 Peter 1:6, Peter, speaking of our future hope, says:
 - "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, **if need be**, you have been grieved by various trials,"

TRANS> We have suffering and trials because we need them...

- b. God will not send a single trial into your life unless it has a purpose.
 - He takes no pleasure in afflicting us without cause.
 - You may not always know the details of his purpose—usually there are many...
 - but you can be sure that He always has good reason.
 - You can and should pray that the affliction would be removed,
 - but if it is not His will to take it away in answer to your prayer, you can be sure that He has a purpose for it...
 - You can be sure that it falls under the category of the "all things" in Romans 8 that causes to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose...
2. But how is it that suffering is necessary for us?
 - a. It is necessary because, as those fallen into rebellion, we must learn to submit to God again...
 - 1) Submission is not learned by God asking you to do what you already want to do...
 - It is learned when He calls you to do something distasteful to you—or to refrain from something you very much want.
 - And because we are in training in this world,
 - we have to be exercised through suffering that we might learn to keep our place under God's rule.
 - Like Jesus, we must learn obedience through suffering.
 - 2) In heaven, there will be no more suffering because it will no longer be necessary—

- but in this world, it is very necessary so that we might cultivate loving submission to our heavenly Father.
 - We will be stretched and tried as Abraham was when God commanded him to sacrifice his son...
 - Abraham was prepared to do it in submission to God,
 - but once he raised his hand to slay him, the Lord said,
 - Genesis 22:12: Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."
- 3) He regularly tests those whom He loves today...
- Whenever obedience to Him is difficult and costly, He is testing you and teaching you your place under His rule.
 - You say that you have repented of your sin and come to Jesus that you might be forgiven and have life...
 - then demonstrate your faith by your works...
 - Show that you have indeed been restored to a life of true submission to God by bearing the cross He gives you to bear!
 - "Faith without works," as James says, "is dead."
 - That kind of faith cannot save anyone.
- b. You can surely see how such testing not only teaches you your place before God,
- It also proves to you and to others that you belong to Him.
 - Romans 5 teaches that tribulation produces patience, but then it goes on to say that patience brings about proven character.
 - It proves you to yourself...
 - John says,
 - 1 John 2:3: Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
 - You know that His grace is at work in you when you continue to obey through trials—
 - it proves to you that you have been changed and have been restored to your proper place under God.
 - It proves you to others...
 - They see that God is truly at work in us!

- Many are converted when they see believers bearing affliction for their Lord...
 - They see that our faith and our love for Him are real.
 - In this way, our sufferings are used to spread the gospel.
 - The Thessalonians' faith was spoken of throughout all the world because they received the word despite much affliction:
 - 1 Thes 1:6-7: And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.
- c. Consider that drinking the bitter cups gives you an opportunity to demonstrate your love to God that you would not otherwise have had!
- 1) We would not have known our Saviour's love for the Father so well if He had not left the glory of Heaven to come to earth and suffer on the cross according to His will.
 - We could have been told of His great love for His Father,
 - but now we have seen it clearly demonstrated before our eyes!
 - The cross will stand forever as a testimony of His love...
 - It will remain as the great monument of love that would not have been possible to demonstrate but in this fallen world of sin.
 - 2) Consider also that now (in this world) you have a unique opportunity to show your love and submission to God through suffering for Him...
 - a) In heaven, you will no longer have that opportunity!
 - You will no longer have the opportunity to love someone who hates you...
 - You will no longer have the opportunity to be patient and kind when you are suffering pain...
 - You will no longer have the opportunity to speak of Christ when you will be laughed at or denied a promotion...
 - b) It is now (in this fallen world of suffering) that your love is to be cultivated and grown—
 - Now is the time for the fruit to grow—
 - fruit that will abide forever...
 - On the day of judgement, whatever fruit you have will be harvested—
 - The time of growing will be ended.

- So you see that what you do here (in this world of suffering) is extremely important...
 - Just as what Jesus did here has ramifications for all eternity, so what you do has ramifications for all eternity!
- It is in the soil of affliction here in this world that we lay up treasure in heaven.
 - Make the most of the opportunity.
- c) You see then that the cup of affliction is most necessary for us as believers!
 - Affliction is not just something to endure until at last we get to heaven...
 - It is something to make the most of—
 - it is the fertile ground in which love grows in the fallen sinful human race—love that will abide forever.

TRANS> Ah, but brothers and sisters, how hard it is for us to drink the cup!

- Let us then learn from Jesus how to prepare ourselves to drink...

III. See at Gethsemane how He prepared Himself to drink His cup...

A. Jesus prepared Himself by fervent prayer!

1. When He was faced with the conflict between what His human nature desired and what God had called Him to do...
 - When He recoiled at the idea of bearing the cross but heard the Father's call to do it...
 - as when Adam and Eve saw the fruit of the tree, that is was good to eat and desirable to make one wise, but know that God had forbade it...
 - as when you are called to go to your brother and reconcile with Him when you would rather strangle him...
 - or when you are called to read the Bible and pray when you would rather watch television...
 - When the conflict was there between what Jesus wanted and what God had called Him to do...
 - It was then that Jesus went to His Father in earnest fervent prayer!
2. And look at what He says:

- a. In verse 39,
 - “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”
 - And then in verse 42, He says,
 - “Oh My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”
 - b. You see in this that the question for Jesus as the perfect man was not whether or not He would do the will of God...
 - That was never a question for him as it often is for us...
 - The question for Him was whether or not it was necessary for Him to do this—
 - whether something else might be done instead to accomplish the same purposes.
 - c. In this way, Jesus turned it over to His Master to resolve...
 - Rather than taking the matter into His own hands and trying to find a way around it,
 - He simply presented His conflict to the Father and submitted Himself to do whatever His Father decided...
 - “Not my will, but yours be done!”
 - He was recognising His own place as a submissive servant under God.
 - d. Notice that He takes this to His Father three times!
 - In this way, He repeatedly affirmed that His purpose and resolution was to do the will of God...
 - He was not about to take the cup from the Chief Priests or from the Romans!
 - He was not submitting to them, but to His Father...
- B. Jesus repeatedly admonishes His disciples to prepare themselves in the same way...
1. Each time He comes back to them, He finds them asleep...
 - a. And that even though He had plainly told them,
 - “watch with Me”...
 - that is “stay awake with me” which was His initial command in verse 38...
 - He came back and rebuked them for not staying awake for a mere hour...

- b. And then He told them again in v. 41...
 - “Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak...”
 - Here, you see, He gives them the reason to stay awake and pray—it is so that they will not enter into temptation...
 - but that, He means,
 - give in to temptation—
 - yield to it because of their weakness!
 - It is a most solemn warning, but when He returns again, He finds them sleeping again...
 - Well, now it is too late for them to watch and pray—the enemy is at hand and they are unprepared for the contest...
 - v. 45-46: Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."
2. Are we not often like the disciples?
 - a. We do not see a real need to pray that we enter not into temptation.
 - 1) We suppose that when trouble comes, we will be ready enough for it!
 - But if we have not wrestled in prayer to give it to God,
 - we are not prepared!
 - It will seem to us that things have all gone wrong!
 - 2) There are many today who don't even understand prayer in this manner at all...
 - They see prayer as something that gives strength to God so that He can put down Satan...
 - When affliction comes, they believe the cup has been given to them by the Devil or by the chief priests...
 - They feel they must fight them...
 - They are unable to willingly take the cup from God because they have not resigned themselves to do so in earnest prayer.
 - b. What a contrast this is!
 - Here is a sinless Saviour, earnestly preparing Himself for the temptation that He might be able to bear it...
 - And here is a company of weak disciples supposing that for them, no preparation is needed.

- Indeed they were ready to fight,
 - but they were not at all ready to submit to the will of God.

Conclusion:

How glad we should be that Jesus did not neglect His duty, but fully and freely gave Himself to do His Father's will!

- Because of this, we have every reason to admire Him and to praise Him...
- Because of this, we have a perfect example to follow...
- But most of all, because of this, we have an all sufficient Saviour to trust in!
 - By His own will, He has offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to take away our sin.
 - He has done what none of us could do, or would do even if we could.
 - And though you admire Him and though you endeavour to imitate Him,
 - it is only by trusting in Him that you can be saved.
 - Your obedience and your sacrifices are not sufficient to atone for your sin or to commend you to God, for they are all corrupted by sin,
 - and even if they were without corruption, they lack the value that only His sacrifice can have because He is the Son of God...
 - But His obedience and His sacrifice alone are able to save...
 - It is for you, therefore, to rely on what He has done.