

Good Friday Service

Mark 14:32-42

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Good evening, friends. It's good to be with you on this Good Friday evening. Those joining us on the livestream, I'm glad that we can spend this hour together as we continue to walk together on this week of Calvary to the foot of the cross.

Before I read anything, I just want to say by way of introduction that having now done this for 24 years, you would think it would get easier. But the irony is that it actually becomes more difficult, not the physical act of preaching but the content because as you become more familiar with the texts, you begin to live with them. You begin to breathe them. You sleep and you wake to them. You think about them on the way from church to home and home to church. I still sometimes get sweaty palms, not again from standing in front of people. I would feel more comfortable in front of 20,000 people than I would 20. That's not what makes me nervous. What makes me nervous is that I'm keenly aware that I don't feel that I can do justice to this word. And for that, I'm actually grateful. I feel incredibly inadequate to the task. And I'm glad that that has not been alleviated. I'm actually grateful that it has increased because what is required and invited for you, it is the same for me.

We come together to the foot of the cross on Good Friday, and we need the Holy Spirit. We need the Holy Spirit to teach us. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us.

And so as we begin tonight to look at His word, I want you to hear the words of a much older pastor who is no longer with us, over 250 years ago, Samuel Rutherford, a good Scottish Presbyterian, when he wrote these words,

"I counsel you to think highly of Christ and of free, free grace, more than you did before. O that he would draw back the curtains and that the king would come out of his gallery and his palace that I might see him. Angels cannot weigh him. O his weight, his worth, his sweetness, his overpassing beauty. If 10,000 worlds of angels were created, they might all tire themselves in wondering at his beauty. O that I could come near to kiss his feet and to hear his voice, and through the smell of his ointments. But, O alas, I have little, little of him. Yet I long for more. I long for more of him."

I long for you to see Him and to experience His grace.

Hear now God's word as we continue this Calvary week looking through the lens of Mark 14:32-42.

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come.

The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." [ESV]

Let's pray.

Now, Lord, we ask that you, by the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, would open our hearts, open our minds that our imagination would be able to grasp and receive more of you, that we would remember that on this night, we remember and we receive that our Savior was crushed for our iniquity. But by His wounds, we are healed. But we are more than healed. You mean to restore us, and through your church to restore all things. Do this, we ask. Help the teacher. In Jesus's name. Amen.

This evening as we look together again at this passage where we've been looking at the work of Christ and His experience in this week of Calvary, looking at it through the lens of these verses on the night where Jesus went into the olive groves, we've been looking at it through different perspectives. We've seen it from the perspective of Him being pressed. And last night, we looked at it from the perspective of Him being betrayed. And tonight, we look at it as the picture of Jesus voluntarily and vicariously being crushed for us.

As we look at these verses, I want us to consider tonight first to see and to hold in tension something which we must always hold and also rejoice in, that Jesus was crushed for our iniquity voluntarily. Not a single event occurred that He Himself did not give Himself to, that He was unaware that was going to take place. His death, His giving of Himself, was 100 percent voluntary.

Consider these words as Jesus teaches with regard to His work as our good shepherd in John 10:17-18 when He would teach, "For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." The reason this is important for us to remember about Jesus giving Himself over to death for our salvation and restoration is that this is not simply the will of the heavenly Father. And so when we hear the words of Jesus saying, "Remove this cup from me," it's not as if Jesus is arguing from a different perspective from the Father, that God the Father has one will, but Jesus is trying to figure out a way to get around it. You know, He's not a whining teenager who just doesn't want to do what his parent wants him to do. No. The Father and the Son remain in perfect intimate relationship, yet both understand the will for which Jesus had come. It was the will of the Father, and it was the will of the Son to delight the Father in obeying His will. That God so loved the world that Jesus came, but it is Jesus's love for the Father that He would give of Himself. It is a mutual work of the Godhead and a desire for Christ to obey the Father.

Dr. Mark Jones writes in his book *Knowing Christ*, "Christ's willingness encompassed not merely his voluntary death on the cross. Rather his entire life was an offering of willing obedience to God's will. From cradle to grave, Jesus acted out of love, which makes obedience acceptable to God." As believers in the word of God, we must consider the whole council of God, that Jesus's voluntary work on the cross, theologians call His passive obedience where He allowed it. He gave Himself over to death. We also acknowledge Jesus's voluntary active obedience which is what qualified Him to be our representative. From cradle to grave to resurrection, actively and passively, Jesus is our redeemer. He came, then, voluntarily for the sick and the lost.

You've already heard it read tonight. In the readings of John, we hear the sick and the lost. We hear the words of the witnesses to the crucifixion, and these witnesses encompass the godless and the god forsaken. The godless are the ones who would say, "Crucify him." And yet even from the cross, Jesus would say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Church, He didn't come for the righteous. He didn't come for the clean. He didn't come for the smug. He didn't come for the shiny ones. He came for the godless, but also the god forsaken. The god forsaken are the ones who are also on the crosses next to Him, the one rejecting Him, and the other said, "Remember me." The god forsaken are the ones of this world that the shiny, new, smug, and light, clean,

and young, and pretty, and vivacious, wealthy, and smart, all are afraid to look at. The forsaken ones are the ones who can't keep up, who have not made it, the ones who have not figured out a way to get around injustice but who have suffered. For the hungry, and for the naked, and for the poor. He has come for the one that the world says, "Out of my way. But here's a little something something in case you need it." He came for the godless and for the god forsaken voluntarily. He did not come for the smug, and He did not come for the crowds of indifferent religious consumers.

The churches and their beautiful buildings, our beautiful programs, they're all good. But He didn't come to do that. He came for the church. He came for people. And He came for you and me, the godless and the god forsaken. He came for the ones who were willing to be so desperate that they would say, "Father, forgive me, for I am a sinner," voluntarily.

But not just voluntarily. We can say as Jesus says, "Not my will but your will be done," in those words, "Not my will" is the cry of the voluntary redeemer, "but your will be done" is the voluntary redeemer who would give Himself vicariously for the godless and the god forsaken. His life and death is the mediator God who comes to the world, to the godless and the god forsaken, to forgive and to welcome. To do so means that His death is not an apparent death. It is not a momentary death that can be thwarted through resuscitation. It was and is, the article at the center of our faith, a real death and a real crucifixion and a real burial. This is what we believe.

But more than that, this vicarious death is described for us in the words of Paul where in Romans 8 beginning in verse 3, this is what Paul says.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
[ESV]

Now, in Romans 8:3-4, Paul is describing the nature of this vicarious death on the part of Jesus. And what he uses there is the word which means "sin" and then the word for "flesh." Now, when he says, "sin," the word is not referring to a particular sin. When he's referring to the word which is translated "flesh," unfortunately, we hear that in Western ears, and what we hear is the material stuff which is not what is being referred to there. And we hear the word "sin." And when we hear it was sin and flesh, we think sins of the flesh like sexual sin, for example. But that is not what is in reference here.

What is in reference here is the power of sin in that it weakens human flesh, which is unable because of the power of sin, to obey God perfectly and righteously. The law could not undue the power of sin and its weakening of the flesh. Therefore, God took the flesh of Christ, and He condemned sin in His flesh. Notice it doesn't say that God condemned Jesus. He condemned sin in Jesus. Do you see the difference? He doesn't go from being the beloved Son of God to one who is hated. No. He is the beloved Son of God in whose flesh the power of sin and its results which are death were upon the perfect righteous flesh of Jesus.

Stick with me. My words are inadequate, but stick with me, friends. Jesus in becoming the incarnate Son of God in human flesh clothed Himself with our weakness, meaning He didn't have flesh that He suddenly had this shield. No. He could feel real pain. He had real hunger. He had real thirst. And His flesh could be given over to death. He willingly took on our weakness, and in our weakness went through all that you and I must go through and obeyed all the way through.

Consider the wonderful words of the great theologian T. F. Torrance when he writes this regarding the work of our blessed redeemer. He says these words,

"From beginning to end, what Jesus Christ has done for you, he has done not only as God but as man. He has acted in your place in the whole range of your human life and activity, including your personal decisions, your

response to God's love, even your acts of faith. He has believed for you, fulfilled your human response to God, even made your personal decision for you so that he acknowledges you before God as one who has already responded to God in him, who has already believed in God through him whose personal decision is already implicated in Christ's self-offering love to the Father. It is not upon my faith, my believing, or my personal commitment that I rely, but solely upon what he has done for me in my place and on my behalf. And what he is and always will be stands in for me before the face of the Father."

His perfect righteous obedience as a child, as a teenager, as an adult, as a student, as a worker, as a prophet, as a priest, as a king in His temptation, in His hunger, in His thirst, in His betrayal, in His being squeezed, Jesus in all of it covered the completely panoply of human existence. And in all of it, on our behalf, He said, "Yes, Lord, my God. I have come to do your will and not mine." We need this redeemer. Why? Because I doubt. I fail. I am weak. The spirit is willing but say it with me. The flesh is weak.

So Jesus, in His perfect obedience in the flesh, never deserved death. And yet giving Himself over to death is itself how God then vicariously takes what is deserving to us in our flesh and allows His Son to drink it all to the bottom. And so do you know He hasn't condemned His Son? He loves His Son, and He loves you through His Son. It is His faith. It is His love. It is His goodness and grace that sustains you and me. Are you weak? Do you feel overwhelmed? Look to your redeemer, who on your behalf has given Himself.

And then He says, "It is finished." This night, in Him when He declared "It is finished," we are in Him, perfectly righteous and secure as if all of it was ours. Before one of our days came to be, our righteousness has been established through our redeemer voluntarily and vicariously. If Jesus was despised and rejected on the cross, it is because He took upon Himself the burden of all that was despised and rejected by God. He took it for our sake. "He took it so that it would be removed from us," Fleming Rutledge. And she finishes with these words.

"What the church needs to hear is the radical message of the good news, not only for the well-meaning and the well-intentioned but also for those who plan to do harm or drift into doing harm or lead others into doing harm. And that in the final analysis includes every single one of us. We were children of wrath. We were dead in our sins. But the Son of God did not come to make good people better but to give life to the dead."

This is our story. This is our song. What a savior. What a savior.

But, friends, as you and I continue in this night and will finish this service, I hope that you will consider the voluntary vicarious work of your savior for your salvation. But please know it is never merely for our forgiveness. It is so that you and I can be set free who have been given the Spirit, who then with the power and grace of God through the presence of His Spirit now can move into one another's lives and move towards those who are godless and those who are god forsaken, and we can empathize with them and say, "My savior has loved me, and I, by His grace, will love you. I have been forgiven. I have tasted the sweetness of His mercy. Let me give you that."

He has restored us that we might be the hands and feet of Christ in the world doing His restoration work. What a savior. What a work. Let's pray together.

Almighty and merciful God, you sent your Son into the world to save His people, but He was betrayed, denied, abandoned, mocked, and killed. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. You came to give us new life. Lord, have mercy. Jesus, remember us. Amen.