

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 14th April 2019

Matthew 26:31-56

“Jesus Anticipates His Death for us”

Introduction

As we approach ‘Holy Week’ we are continuing to look at the events that preceded Jesus’ death for us on Calvary’s cross.

Today is known as Palm Sunday. Graham Dougan will be preaching on that in his passage from Mark ch.10-11 tonight. Please come along and encourage him.

So this morning I thought we would look another key event in the run-up to the cross: **The Garden of Gethsemane.**

There are many areas of our Lord’s suffering that we as finite human beings will never fully understand - perhaps none more so than what took place in the Garden of Gethsemane. That’s what we’re going to think about this morning.

Jesus Predicted his death for us, as far back as Matthew ch.16, or Mark 8:31. On that occasion the Devil used Peter to try to stop him. (See Matt.16:21-23).

Last Sunday night we saw that **Jesus wants us to Remember his death for us**, and that’s why he instituted the Lord’s Supper for us in Matt.26:17-30. The Lord’s Supper grew out of the Jewish Passover meal.

The **Passover** reminded the Israelites of how God had delivered them from Egypt,

But it was now superseded by the **Lord’s Table** to remind Christians of how God in Christ has delivered us from our sins.

But we also noticed that this is only temporary as well. It will all be superseded by the **Marriage Supper of the Lamb** when we get to Heaven. (Rev.21).

This morning we come to consider the Garden of Gethsemane, where **Jesus Anticipated His Death for us** (Matthew 26:31-56).

Jesus and his disciples have left the Upper Room and have crossed the Kidron Valley and have now entered the **Garden of Gethsemane** - a place where Jesus often came to pray (cf. John 18:1-2).

On the way to the Garden Jesus begins to speak to his disciples.

First of all we see Jesus talking about...

1. The Striking of the Shepherd (vs.31-32)

Jesus often referred to himself as a Shepherd. e.g. in the previous chapter, Matt 25:31-33, He talks about how He will one day, separate the Sheep from the Goats on that Great Judgement Day, when He returns at the end of time.

Here in the next chapter, Matt 26:31, he’s quoting from Zechariah 13:7-9.

According to Zechariah 13:7, it says

‘Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’

But then God would bring the sheep through a time of testing and refining - until they are His People, and He is their God (v.9).

Do you hear the language of the New Covenant that God was making with His People in v.9?

*‘I will say **‘They are my people,’** and they will say: **‘The LORD is our God.’***

But this New Covenant wouldn’t be made with **all** of O.T. Israel, only with a remnant – one third of them (vs.8-9). Jesus was soon to fulfill this prophecy.

But notice the slight change in Matthew 26:31. Here God says,

“I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”

Jesus saw the cross not as man’s punishment of Him but God’s punishment of sin.

It was God Himself who was going to do the striking of the Shepherd, His Son!

The cross was God’s plan to punish and deal with sin;

It wasn’t just man’s way of getting back at Jesus!

God would strike him on Calvary’s cross with all the punishment that a world of sinners deserved and should have received.

The sheep – the disciples – would scatter at first (see v.56), but then God would bring them through their time of testing to refine them, and then they would be God’s People and He would be their God!

So Jesus saw the cross, as God striking Him in punishment for the sins of the world, on one hand, and yet at the same time He also saw the cross as something that He was going to submit to voluntarily (See John 10:11-18).

It’s still the same shepherd illustration but this time,

*“The Good Shepherd **lays down** his life for the sheep.” (v.11)*

*“**I lay down** my life for the sheep.” (v.15 & 17)*

*“No-one takes it from me; **I lay it down** of my own accord.” (v.18)*

Jesus anticipated the cross by saying, as the Good Shepherd, that He was going to lay down his life for the sheep *voluntarily*, of his own accord!

Let's never forget that!
Jesus willingly went to that cross for you and for me.
Let's always appreciate that!
And remember that he did so, because he loved us!

But one more thing, before we move on.
Both in John 10:17-18, and in Matthew 26:32, Jesus made it clear that He didn't intend to stay dead. HE WOULD RISE AGAIN! (*Take it up again*).

So Jesus had authority to lay his life down in death, and he had authority to take it up again, in resurrection life! And after He had risen from the dead He would see his disciples again in Galilee (v.32).

But of course the disciples missed that piece of good news, yet again!
It just didn't sink in! No matter how many times Jesus tried to tell them!
Instead Peter starts his protests against Jesus again in vs.33-35.

Anyhow, by this time, Jesus and his disciples have now arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane (v.36), and Jesus tells them to stay there, while He, and Peter, James and John would go a bit further to pray.

Remember, that earlier in ch.17, these same three disciples were given a preview of Jesus in His **glorified** resurrection body at the Transfiguration.

Now they are going to get a glimpse of something of the **suffering** and agony Jesus was about to endure for sinners, before He would be glorified.

But sadly they missed most of this, because instead of staying awake to support the Lord at this difficult time, they fell asleep! (vs.40, 43 & 45)

Anyhow, Matthew records it for us here so we are allowed to see...

2. The Sorrow of the Sin-bearer (vs.36-38)

As I said earlier, at this point we are entering into an area of great mystery as we watch Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As finite, fallen, sinful men and women it is hard for us to imagine what exactly Jesus went through for us in that garden, or to appreciate the weight of sorrow that He bore for us at that moment.

The hymn, 'I stand amazed in the presence' comes close:

*"He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own,
He bore [my] burden to Calvary,
And suffered, and died alone.*

*How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! how wonderful!
Is my Saviour's love for me!"*

Why was Jesus so sorrowful at this point in the Garden?

Well, it's hard to know, but I wonder was it at this point, while Jesus was in the Garden, that the weight, and the burden, of the sins of the whole world were laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ?

It says in v.37, "**He began to be sorrowful and troubled.**"

Was this when our sin was laid upon Him?

Was this when your sin and mine was laid upon the perfect, sinless Lamb of God?

Think about it...

What a weight of sin that must have been!?

Even if it had only been my personal sins, or your personal sins.

Do you not sometimes feel the weight of your own sin yourself?

But what must that have felt like, to someone "*who knew no sin*" himself?

But it wasn't just my sin, and it wasn't just your sin...

It was the weight of the sins of every person in this room added together, and more than that...

It was the weight of the sins of every respectable church-goer, and the weight of the sins of every wicked, hell-deserving sinner, who would never darken a church door...

But then it's not just those who are alive today, but every person who has ever lived, of all time...

What a weight of sin that must have been? – and it was **all** laid upon Him!

He was so weighed down by that sorrow that He had to share it with someone and he chose his three closest friends (v.38)

*"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.
Stay here and keep watch with me."*

The Lord Jesus, The Son of God, was asking for the fellowship and support of his disciples, in prayer, at that terrible point in His experience.

And yet what did they do? (v.40) - They fell asleep!

Can we even begin to grasp the lengths the Lord had to go to, to make it possible for you and me to be saved?

And yet at times we treat it so lightly!

At times we have so little thought of him!

Some even put off finding time to get right with Him at all!

If you went to even a fraction of the lengths that Christ went to for you, to do something for somebody else, you'd be pretty offended if they treated you with as little notice as we sometimes give Him!

Will we ever be able to understand what Paul really meant when he said that the perfect, sinless, absolutely holy, Son of God, **became sin** for us? (2 Cor.5:21)

*"God made Him who had no sin.... to be sin for us....
So that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*

How His righteous soul must have been vexed as He carried all our sin, all the effects of those sins, and all the consequences of those sins... all the hurt...all the pain...all the misery...that sin has caused down through the years.

And on top of that, all God's righteous anger, and fury, and wrath against sin, poured out as punishment for our sins – all laid upon Him too!

No wonder we read that his:

"soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." (v.38)

Gethsemane was well named, because it means "**wine-press**".

It was the place where the grapes were brought to and then trodden underfoot until every last drop of juice had been squeezed out of them.

It was there that Jesus began to suffer the winepress of God's wrath for your sins and mine that would end in his cruel death for us on the cross!

The Striking of the Shepherd, The Sorrow of the Sin-bearer, and thirdly...

3. The Submission of the Saviour (vs.39-46)

Jesus prays three times in these verses (vs.39, 42, & 44) something like...

"If it is possible...may this cup be taken from me" (v.39)

"If this cup cannot pass away...unless I drink it" (v.42)

"May Your will be done." (v.42)

The prospect of bearing the sins of the world, and the prospect of enduring the full force of God's punishment for those sins, was so fearful that even the obedient Son of God prayed that He wouldn't have to go through with it!

And He didn't just pray it once. He prayed it earnestly – 3 times over!

And yet, of course, this is what Jesus had come to earth to do -

To die for sinners, in the sinners' place.

To deal with sin once and for all.

To take the punishment of God for sin.

To make it possible for sins to be forgiven by God.

And so ultimately to take our sins away completely!

And so in v.42 Jesus prays that the Father's will might be done.

And then He becomes the answer to His own prayer as He gets up from the place of prayer to be **betrayed** (vs.47-50), to be **arrested** (vs.50-56) and then to be **falsely charged and judged** (27:1-26) and eventually to be **nailed to a cross of wood** as the once and for all sacrifice for sin (v.27-54)

Conclusion

I hope, this morning, that you have seen something of the agony that Jesus went through for you. The turmoil of heart he suffered as he anticipated his death for you and for me.

Because sometimes we know the story of the cross so well, that we almost treat it as something that just happened. We can almost take it for granted.

Can we see this morning, how close it came to not happening, as Jesus in his humanity, and in the heat of his suffering, prayed that he wouldn't have to go through with it?

If there had been some other way for sin to be truly dealt with,
I'm sure the Father would have found it, and let his own Son go free.

But there was no other way!

Jesus did go through with it, for us, because He loved us!

All we can do is accept what He has done, and trust Him as our Saviour, and try to appreciate more and more what it meant for Him, the Holy One, to bear away **my sin**...to bear away **your sin**...to bear away **our sin**!

If you've never done so before, will you fall at His feet right now, and thank Him, and ask Him to be your Saviour too? Amen.