

“Christ’s Passion: The Mount of Olives”

February 24, 2019

Luke 22:39-46

SI: It’s eight weeks until Easter so we’re going to take a break in our study of the life of King David in 2 Samuel and we’re going to spend these eight weeks preparing for Easter.

We’re going to do so by meditating on the most holy event in salvation history.

That is the suffering of Jesus Christ for our salvation.

All the sacrifices of the Old Testament, all the miracles, all the battles, and the sermons and songs of the Old Testament climax in Christ’s suffering.

When Jesus was having the last supper with his disciples he told them:

I have eagerly desired to eat Passover with you “before I suffer.”

He knew that when the supper was over, his suffering would begin.

When they finished supper, Jesus left the upper room with his disciples, they left the city of Jerusalem, crossed the valley, went up the Mount of Olives, and that’s where his suffering began.

He was betrayed, arrested, put on trial, mocked, flogged, and crucified.

Those are the events we’re going to meditate on.

Let me say something about the word passion. Sermon title, Christ’s passion.

We use the word passion to mean intense desire or enthusiasm or love.

But passion comes from the Latin word passio which means suffering.

That was the old meaning of the word.

So the church has traditionally called everything Jesus suffered on his final journey to the cross and death his passion. The passion of the Christ.

Back in 2004 I preached through Matthew’s account of the passion,

And then in 2008 I preached through Mark’s account of the passion.

This time we’re going to look at Luke.

Luke includes some details that are not found in Matthew, Mark, and John.

I’m going to point those out and the special things they reveal about Lord.

Let’s read the beginning of the passion of the Christ, Luke 22:39

INTRO: I've got an uncle who is notoriously tight with his money.

To say he is a scrooge doesn't even begin cover it.

There are family legends about his unwillingness to part with a penny.

But when Adrienne got married, she sent my aunt and uncle a wedding invitation.

He sent a reply with his regrets and in the envelope was a check for \$800.

I was dumbfounded.

This was so completely out of character that I knew it must be a mistake.

So I called my mother and told her and she was also shocked.

This is her brother-in-law and she's been fighting with him on her sister's behalf for decades, trying to shame him into being generous.

Mother and I talked for about 20 minutes trying to make sense of this \$800 check.

So I said, should I tell Adrienne to call Uncle John or should I call him and ask if this was a mistake. And my mother said, No. Cash it!

After the last supper, Jesus went with his disciples to the Mount of Olives.

Luke tells us, one of his unique details, this "was his custom."

So this was a favorite place of Jesus where he went to pray and meditate,

looking over the city of Jerusalem. The other Gospels are more specific.

They tell us the place on the Mount of Olives, a garden called Gethsemane.

That's where Jesus went. A place he often went to pray. Nothing unusual.

But something happened to Jesus there that was so startling to the disciples, so out of character, that all the Gospels mention it, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Jesus suddenly became overcome with such extreme mental and emotional anguish that he was near the point of physical collapse.

Mark tells us Jesus said: My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

The disciples had never heard him say anything like that before.

Jesus had always been courageous, unshakable, unperturbed.

He was this calm, authoritative presence in every situation.

He ordered storms to be still, he made demons tremble, he swept the money-changers out of the temple, he confounded his critics when they attacked him.

Just before this, in the upper room, at the last supper, Jesus had been in full control.

He choreographed that entire evening.

He washed their feet. He presided at the Passover table.

He spoke about the coming of the Holy Spirit, prayed the High Priestly prayer,

Warned them about the coming temptation, encouraged them for the last time.

The disciples were their usual competitive and clueless selves.

And Jesus was his usual self, their teacher and rabbi had known for three years.

Then he gets to the Mount of Olives and collapses.

Luke tells us that an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. It seems that God sent that angel because if he hadn't, Jesus would not have had strength to go on. He would have become unconscious or catatonic.

Remember he said that he was at the point of death.

But once the angel strengthened him and left, the agony continued.

Because it was after the angel left Luke has that famous detail about Jesus' sweating like drops of blood falling to the ground.

That could mean that his sweat actually became bloody.

There is a rare condition called hema-ti-drosis where a person's sweat becomes bloody due to extreme psychological stress. Google it.

But most likely it's describing how profusely Jesus was perspiring.

The sweat was dripping off him, pooling around him, like he had been stabbed.

We know Jesus Christ was fully human, but the majesty of his person makes it difficult for us to imagine him doing the more coarse human activities.

It's hard for us to picture Jesus vomiting, or going to the bathroom.

He seems above those things.

But here he is with sweat pouring off his body, stomach churning, hands shaking.

A person in great distress. Why was he like that?

It's so out of character.

Charles Spurgeon said:

Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. This is a mystery . . . No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation.

D.A. Carson wrote:

As his death was unique, so also was his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship.

Don't try to preach this, just read and sit in silence.

But of course, that's not what they literally mean, that it shouldn't be preached.

They are saying, approach with an open heart. We're treading on holy ground. God wants you to trust his one and only Son.

And Christ's agony on the Mount of Olives gives you reason to trust him.

Usually, this is where I say: I have three points for you note-takers.

But instead, let's work our way through this mystery.

Why did the always-strong Jesus collapse?

And what does this tell us about why we need him?

Credit where credit is due: Sermon by Robert Rayburn

The first thing that strikes you about this scene on the Mount of Olives is how authentic it is. Think about it!

If the first Christians and the early church were preaching a message that this man Jesus of Nazareth is actually the Messiah of Israel and God in the flesh, would they ever have invented this story?

Would they have said?

When we write about his death, let's put in a part where our Lord and Savior falls under such a cloud of fear and doubt that he becomes physically and emotionally incapacitated and has to be helped by an angel.

That will convince people he's the Son of God. Of course not.

In fact, the weakness of Jesus in Gethsemane was one of the early arguments that both Jews and pagans used against Christianity.

They said it proves he could not have been the Messiah or the Son of God. The only explanation for this being in the Gospels is that it actually happened.

So how then are we to understand this sudden break-down on Mt of Olives?

It couldn't be that Jesus fell apart because he suddenly realized he was going to die.

Because he had known for a long time the death he was going to die.

He even knew Judas was going to betray him.

So you can't explain what happened as Jesus being caught off guard and surprised that he was about to die.

There's only one satisfactory explanation for Gethsemane.

It's the explanation that has been given from the earliest days of the church. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The reason for Jesus' break-down was that at this point he began to bear the guilt and shame of sin, and God the Father was beginning to pour out the cup of his wrath for sin into the soul of his beloved Son.

His disciples were there with him, he leaned on Peter, James, John.

But they couldn't go with him into this agony. They fell asleep in their sorrow.

Jesus had to drink the cup of God's wrath alone.

And as he began to feel how terrible this death would be, it shook him to the core.

Let's probe deeper. What made this experience so terrible?

Jesus had been through many trials during his three years of ministry.

How was this different? Two important reasons.

First, Christ's suffering was terrible because he was sinless

This is why we will never fully understand this event in Jesus' life.

Because we're not sinless. We're sinners.

We are used to sin. We eat sin like food, drink it like water, and breathe it like air. Every morning we wake up and sin. We're comfortable with it. And even as Christians, we still love it—shameful as that is to admit. Because sin is so much a part of our being, we cannot appreciate what it was like for a sinless man to be made sin for us.

Jesus certainly knew a lot about sin. He grew up in a sinful world. From the time he was a boy he had watched people sin. He saw clearly how stupid and irrational sin is. He saw how people are enslaved by sin and harmed by it but still love it. In his preaching and conversations he was always trying to show people their bondage to sin and how they could be free from sin. (Woman at the well) So sin itself wasn't a new thing to Jesus. He was an expert in the human heart

But Jesus learned something about sin that night that he never knew before. He knew for the first time how horrible sin feels. God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

Think about that. Jesus was sinless and he was made sin. For the first time, to his horror, he felt himself carrying the guilt of sin, the stain of sin, the shame of sin, the condemnation of sin before a holy God. He felt as if he had committed every sin ever committed in the world. God laid on him the iniquity of us all and it tormented him.

Allison and I watched an Amazon video series recently called White Dragon. It was a murder mystery set in Hong Kong.

And I don't want to spoil it for you, but at the end, several people are exposed. One of the characters is a woman who set things in motion that led to the murder which she did to protect a rising political figure who she's hitched her star to. When she realizes she's going to lose everything because of what she's done—her position, power, freedom, custody of daughter to her ex-husband, and at the same time she's confronted by one of the only moral voices in her life who says: You weren't always like this. Where did you go off the rails? She's staggered. Her face becomes a mask of regret and shame and she stumbles away.

I looked up the actresses' name, Raquel Cassidy. British. In Downton Abby. She conveyed so convincingly the horror of her own sin crashing down on her, that I couldn't cheer when she was brought down. It felt too close to home. There have been times when I have hated sin. And I'm sure you have too. One time I lied about a person and hurt him with the lie and for weeks the thought of that made me so ashamed I lost my appetite. I've sinned and the fear of possible consequences have made me miserable.

In those moments I really did hate sin. It felt horrible.
But those moments are few and far between

But try to imagine if you felt that intense hatred for all your sins every day.
You wouldn't be able to keep food down. You would be sweating until you stunk.
You would be revolted by who you are and what you've done and you'd be
filled with dread over the consequences of your actions.
That's how Jesus felt. He was sinless, he hated sin with a pure hatred.
And he was being treated as if he was the worst sinner who ever lived.
He felt shame upon shame, disgust upon disgust, fear of consequences heaped.

Next week we'll read about Judas betraying Jesus with a kiss.
Do you remember what Judas did after the guilt of that act sank in?
He committed suicide. People sometimes kill themselves for shame and guilt.
Jesus felt what Judas felt. Only it was multiplied by every person in human race.

Who are the sinners in the news today?
Robert Kraft, billionaire owner of the New England Patriots, busted in
a prostitution sting in a massage parlor serviced by sex trafficked women.
Actor Jussie Smollett, exposed as a liar for his fabricated racial attack,
he's become a laughing stock, his career in tatters, facing criminal charges.
That's who Jesus was in Gethsemane.
He was every Robert Kraft, every Jussie Smollett, every unfaithful spouse who
has broken a husband or wife's heart and the hearts of their children, he was
every thief, every liar, every selfish, petty, cruel, disreputable man or woman.
He was made sin while never having actually done any of those things.
And as a sinless man, he felt the horror of them in his soul in a way that we
never can because we're so used to our own sin.

This is a mystery but it explains the great drops of sweat pouring off his face,
and the pounding of his heart, and the shaking of his hands in the darkness
on the Mount of Olives.
If that's how bad sin really is. If it's terrible enough to cause the only perfect man
to stagger and collapse, what will it do to us when our sins are exposed to the
penetrating light of God's holiness?

Second, Christ's suffering was terrible because he was the substitute

He was the representative man for all God's people.

That's what made him feel overwhelmed with dread at the thought of his death.

There have been many Christian men and women, and even Christian boys and girls

who have faced violent death with complete serenity, without any fear.
I could give hundreds of examples but one will do.

Anne Askew, a 25 year old woman, lived in England in 1545.

She was intelligent, from a high ranking family, husband in Henry VIII's court
She became a Christian and started reading her Bible and witnessing to people
in the court about her new faith in Jesus Christ.

She was saying what all true Christians say, that she was saved by faith in Jesus
alone and not by the sacraments and rituals of the church.

Her gospel message infuriated church officials, so she was arrested and told she
better tow the line, and say salvation was through the church not Christ alone.

She was imprisoned, she became very ill, she was denied visitation from pastor.

They tortured her on the rack and pulled all her bones out of joint.

She still wouldn't deny her faith. Sentenced her to be burned at the stake.

She was so crippled by the torture she couldn't walk, had to be carried.

And then at the very last moment, when the fire was about to be lit,
a messenger came galloping up. King Henry VIII was offering her a full pardon
if she would simply recant her testimony of salvation through Christ alone.

She replied: "I am not come hither to deny my Lord and Master."

She didn't tremble and sweat and collapse.

She faced death with poise and confidence, and many others have too.

For that matter, even unbelievers even face death with serenity, or at least with
calm resignation. They know they are dying and are at peace with it.

So how is it that so many people, believers and unbelievers, have faced the threat
of death and even violent death with more calm than Jesus in Gethsemane?

We'll let's think about both groups of people.

How do Christians face death calmly?

Not because they are stronger than Christ, but because he was stronger.

Christ has suffered the fears and pains of death for us, robbed death of sting.
Our peace and serenity in death is a benefit of Christ's grief and fear of death,
just as our forgiveness is a benefit of his death for our guilt on the cross.

So believers can lean on Jesus in death and pull strength from him.

But who did Jesus have to lean on when he died? No one.

He couldn't draw on the strength of anyone else.

What about unbelievers? How do they often face death calmly?

Because they've been deceived. They don't know death will bring judgment.

They say: Don't worry about me. I'll be ok. Death is a part of life.

They've spent their lives sinning and suppressing the truth about God,
so by the time they get to the end, they're dead spiritually.

They've lost the capacity to feel anything about the fate of their souls.
But Jesus faced death with full knowledge of how terrible it is and how death
is a curse and God's punishment for sin.

Nobody ever faced death or died like Jesus did.

He is the only man who ever had to die looking death full in the face.

He couldn't take refuge in ignorance or hardness of heart.

He couldn't find relief or courage in someone else's victory over death.

He didn't just die as a man, he died as the man. The second Adam.

The head of a new race of redeemed humanity.

And he had to deliberately choose that death and embrace it—

knowing that it would mean for him the judgment of God for sin.

Even though his hands shook and his stomach revolted,

he took the cup of wrath and drank it to the last drop.

This is a mystery. This is holy ground.

We can barely understand what Jesus suffered as the sinless substitute.

But here's the important question: Have you taken the trembling, agonizing Jesus
into your heart? When you read this, do you believe that everything he suffered
on that horrible night was to pay for your sins?

And does the image of his sweat and distress and pleading with God cause you to
see how truly bad your sin is and how amazing it is that Jesus willingly died for
you and took your sins away?

If you believe that, you're blessed.

No matter your problems now, your future is full of courage and light.

But, if you haven't taken the suffering Christ into your heart,

and if you think your sins are not a big deal and that God will overlook them,
please look again at Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Look again at the only perfect man trembling and sweating under the weight of sin
and pray God will convict you and turn you before it's too late.

You can't save yourself.

You can't change your heart and make it hate sin and want Jesus.

The disciples couldn't even stay awake and pray at the crucial moment.

So don't think you can wait until some crucial moment and then change your
life and turn to God. You can't.

Jesus is the man. Jesus is the suffering Savior. He can do all things.

Trust him today.