

The Distress of Jesus
The Real Jesus: Emotional Life
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Bible Text: Mark 14:32-42
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The heavens proclaim your glory from day to day. Throughout the world your children rise to bless you because you have blessed them with every spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. We are of all people most blessed and we rise to praise you and magnify you for the wonders of your ways in our lives, for your great patience with us, for your perfect knowledge of us and yet your ongoing love and care although you know us through and through and better than we know ourselves and each other. And, therefore, we are glad to come to you for your Word because your Word is sharper than any two edged sword and is able to break through into our lives to unearth secret places unknown to ourselves where we need the outpouring of our grace and pardon. And, at the same time, to shine upon the face of our Savior, our dear Savior Jesus Christ. We desire to know him better because we have found every blessing in him and we pray, our heavenly Father, as we turn afresh to your Word today, follow our Lord Jesus into dark Gethsemane that we may learn to see him more clearly, to love him more dearly, not follow him more nearly day by day. Hear our prayer and speak to us we pray through your Word for Jesus' sake and for our good we ask it in his name. Amen.

Please be seated.

Now we come today to the sixth in a series of, I think, eight messages on this theme of the real Jesus, the emotional life of our Savior. We are so accustomed as Christian people in the world to finding ourselves having to defend the deity of our Lord Jesus from the Scriptures that we very often overlook the reality of his humanity. The truth of the matter is that for some people Jesus' humanity is too close for comfort and, as we have been following his emotional life, we have seen, I think, among other things the riches of that emotional life and especially when we remember that what God's purpose is, is to make us like Jesus. And many of us, perhaps because of upbringing or because of circumstance in the world or because of our ethnic background have been brought up to keep our upper lip as stiff as we possibly can and show no emotion. And one of the things the Spirit does in our lives through the gospel is to begin to shake us and expand us because an emotionless Christian is as much a contradiction as an emotionless Savior.

This is why for some of us when we become Christians we thought life was going to become rather like this and very orderly and we discover the Lord is stretching us and squeezing us and he is untwisting us because he wants to make us normal, like Jesus. And

so it is a wonderful thing together to explore this great theme we find in the gospels of the emotional life of our Lord Jesus.

And today we come to read in Mark's gospel chapter 14 from verse 32 to 42. You will find the passage in the pew Bible page 851. For children who have the children's Bible it is on page 1241.

Jesus has instituted the Lord's supper. He has predicted Peter's denial. Judas Iscariot is already on his way to betray him. Let us hear God's Word.

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."¹

I was fascinated at the end of last week to see some of the comments of the political pundits on some language that was used in the televised vice presidential debate. I ought to issue a church health warning at this point and say the comment I am about to make is purely and absolutely sociological. You all know I have taxation without representation and so I stress this is a sociological and not a political comment. But it did strike me in the light of the endless millions that are being spent on the election of a president and in the light of some of the very strong language that is used in the media, television, in the press, in advertising, I must confess I was somewhat surprised and bemused to discover that some of the political pundits whom I read, maybe not the same political pundits you read, but some of them were complaining about Mr. Ryan's use of the word duress to describe the *sitz im leiben*, the life situation of the vice president. And they regarded that as a kind of breach of etiquette, that he would speak so strongly under duress.

Well, I have spent the last 30 years of my life trying not understand American English and my antennae are not always perfect to the etiquette of American speech and rhetoric. But I do want to say to you this morning under duress is not too strong language to describe the situation of your Savior in the garden of Gethsemane. Indeed, he uses language himself, doesn't he, about his soul being sorrowful here in verse 34. And Mark

¹ Mark 14:32-42.

speaks of him as being greatly distressed and troubled. And you will notice in verse 35 that when he prays he does a very unJewish thing. He falls on the ground for prayer.

Luke, of course, tells us in his account of Gethsemane that the Lord Jesus sweated great globules of bloody sweat. He experienced what the physicians called hemotydrosis. I would imagine there isn't a physician among the scores of physicians in this congregation, I would imagine there isn't a physician in our congregation who has ever encountered that condition when some one is under such intense pressure. It is rarely been examined in the medical literature. I understand that such is the physical and mental pressure on an individual that their sweat comes as globules of congealed blood so that here we might say Jesus is quite literally sweating blood.

Interesting that that should appear exclusively in Dr. Luke's account of Gethsemane. And although Mark doesn't record that, what he does record is full of language that speaks volumes about the intensity of this experience of the Lord Jesus. In some ways there is an intensity of description here that we find nowhere else in the gospel record of our Lord Jesus Christ's life and also of his death. And all of it focuses on one thing and you see that in his prayer. "Father," he says, "remove this cup from me."

Now you know he had already spoken of that cup. He would speak of that cup again as he left the garden of Gethsemane. "The cup that my Father gives me to drink," he had said, "shall I not drink it?" He had looked forward to this week and this night and the day that would follow and had spoken about the cup that his father would give him to drink. And this passage and its atmosphere is very instructive for us of the emotions of our Lord Jesus as he enters into the last 24 hours of his life and ministry.

And Mark seems to see this in three dimensions, three stages. I think we can fairly easily describe those stages in three simple words. The first word is this. Jesus is experiencing isolation. He is experiencing isolation. That is actually described by Mark in an almost geographical or locational sense as he watches Jesus there in the center of the old city of Jerusalem in an upper room where they are celebrating a Passover meal. And then he moved during the course of the late afternoon from the center of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives on the outskirts there and then he moves from the Mount of Olives in general in its spaciousness to a small garden that he is accustomed to visiting in order that he may be alone with his heavenly Father. That, of course, is how Judas Iscariot knew where to find him. And there in the garden of Gethsemane our Lord Jesus goes into a kind of complete isolation as he falls before his heavenly Father in prayer.

And there is an emotional side to this that is very clear in the gospel records in the sense that when he was in the upper room he was surrounded by the 12. He knew one of them would deny him, another would betray him and the other 10 would flee him. But he was surrounded by the 12 who had been with him these past three years, but by the time he leaves the room he is surrounded by only 11. And then as he comes to the garden of Gethsemane he tells eight of them to stay near the entrance to Gethsemane and he takes only three of them, Peter and James and John, and they go deeper into the garden and then he tells them to sit here and to watch and pray and he himself we are told goes a

little further in verse 35 and falls to the ground. And he is utterly alone with God and he addresses him, you will notice with the most intimate language that Jesus ever uses in prayer. “Abba, Father, oh dear, heavenly Father.”

And yet there is something very different in the atmosphere here from other occasions when Jesus prays Abba, Father, isn't there? The key to it, I think, is in a verse that the women of the church will consider during the course of the conference in the prayer that Jesus has just made recorded in John 17 when he says in John 17:19, “For their sake I consecrate myself, Father.” Or, perhaps, “For their sakes I separate myself,” or, “For their sakes I completely isolate myself.”

And this is the clue to what Jesus is doing. He is, I think, very clearly fulfilling a pattern that was built into the Old Testament ritual for the forgiveness of the people's sins when in two rather different ways, a very dramatic isolation was seen in the medium that God used to bring forgiveness to the people or the hope of forgiveness to the people. The one was in the total isolation of the high priest when Jesus time the high priest went through a very extensive series of experiences absolutely to isolate him from the people. And then you remember he would go into the holiest place of all and it was a dramatic experience of isolation. . Because we think of that picture as Christians, we sometimes say, “Absolutely marvelous to be able to go through that curtain into the very presence of God,” but it wasn't regarded as marvelous by God's people in the Old Testament days. It was regarded as awesome. That was the reason why the high priest's robe had bells around the hems so that as he moved the people outside could hear the bells and know that in his ministry of sacrifice God had not struck him down and that their sacrifice was being accepted.

So what was the high point of the high priest's annual experience was, in a sense, the most devastating point of it, because now he went into the presence of God as a lonely individual and stood, as it were, between man and God annually wondering if God would accept the sacrifice that was going to be brought. And here is Jesus our high priest. He is about to enter into the very presence of God with the sacrifice of his own blood for our sin. It is the most awesome moment of his life, because there he is going to be isolated. And at the end he is going to sense that he is even isolated from God and he had already said this. He had quoted Zechariah chapter 13 verse seven and said in distinction from what happens to the high priest, the shepherd of Israel, about me God has said in his word, “The day will come when I will smite the shepherd. It pleased the Lord to bruise him. He has put him to grief,” says Isaiah in his great prophecy in Isaiah 53.

You remember there was another kind of isolation that was represented on the Day of Atonement when those goats were taken as sacrifices and the sins of God's people confessed over them and one of them was slain as a sacrifice and the other experienced a different kind of sacrifice. He was taken by somebody who was prepared for this task outside of Jerusalem. Away into the wilderness the man would take the goat on its leash with the sins of God's people, as it were, on the goat's head and then that man would unleash that goat into the loneliness and isolation of the desert where that goat symbolically would carry the sins of God's people until its life was ended.

And that is what is happening here. The very first state it is stunning to think that this is just the first stage. The first stage of what our Savior is experiencing here is that he has come in God's purposes in order that he may enter into this isolation.

I sometimes think of those marvelous words in the old gospel song that Ira Sankey used to sing. There were ninety and nine, but none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through e'er he found the sheep that was lost.

So for Jesus his distress is caused by a sense of isolation. But also for Jesus there is a second word that describes his experience, not only isolation, but desolation. And you will notice the language that Mark uses here in his gospel in verses 33 and 34. He uses a whole series of verbs to describe Jesus' experience. He began to be greatly distressed.

I remember how stunned I was as a young student reading the words of one of the great Greek scholars of the English speaking world as he tried to express what the language Mark is using here really means. He says, "This language describes the confused, restless state of a half distracted soul experiencing physical confusion or mental derangement."

Of course, how could he possibly look into this cup that his Father was placing in his hands of which the Old Testament prophets had spoken frequently. Drink of this cup and you will be moved and stagger. Drink of this cup and they will turn your glory into shame. The cup of God's wrath is coming to you. And as Jesus, as it were, stares into the contents of this cup he is distressed. The sheer mental energy to keep focus on what God has called him to must have been absolutely astonishing, the sense of your whole mind being assailed by what you see is about to happen to you there as the holy Son of God within a matter of hours you are going to be crying out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

And so he is troubled, says Mark. He experiences a kind of infinite sense of homesickness. As some of you know what homesickness is, many of you should know what homesickness is because you love being home here and you cross the Mason Dixon line and you feel homesick. But here is Jesus who has never, ever, ever had a moment of cloud in his fellowship with his heavenly Father from all eternity and the home sickness is beginning to dawn upon him and the knowledge that when the morrow comes he will experience that desolation far beyond anything human being has ever tasted when he feels far away from home and there is none to comfort him and he looks up into heaven and says, "Oh, God, I have been forsaken even at home." And so he is very sorrowful and literally Mark says here that Jesus spoke about being surrounded by sorrow. And most of us, whatever our sorrows, we haven't tasted that, have we? There has been somebody to come to comfort us. For us, as Christian believers, there has been the hope of the resurrection in the darkest night, the sweetness of the presence of the Lord Jesus, the knowledge he has been through this before and he has broken a hole in death.

But no one has ever done that before. There are people who have gone straight to heaven bypassing death. Enoch who walked with God, Elijah who is taken up in that amazing experience and they have bypassed it, but nobody has broken a hole in the defenses of the last enemy and gone into that dark world and come through it. And in the midst of all these sorrows a man who shared bread with him has lifted up his heel against him. One of his closest and dearest a few yards, there he is sleeping. He is going to deny he ever knew the Lord Jesus. They are all going to scatter.

And yet you know there is something much deeper than that, because you will notice what it is that Jesus prays and it is so important to us, if we are ever to understand what Jesus has done for us that we listen very carefully to his prayer in verse 36. Jesus said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you, absolutely everything. You can do anything that is according to your holy will. Everything is possible. So here is my request.”

Now, dear brothers and sisters, notice this is a request of Jesus of his heavenly Father. This is not a serving suggestion. This is a specific request of the Lord Jesus Christ to the heavenly Father and there request is this. “Remove this cup from me.” It is not a suggestion. It is not part of his imagination. It is a specific prayer request he makes to his heavenly Father. Please, heavenly Father, remove this cup from me.

Now where does the desolation come in? The desolation comes in because Jesus knows this cup is the cup of the wrath of God that will turn his glory into shame and bring confusion and staggering and his Father says no.

We will never fully grasp what our Lord Jesus has done for us, nor will we ever fully grasp the greatness of the Father’s love for us unless we grasp that Jesus asked that this cup would be removed from him and his Father who had sent him in his love for us, in order to bring us to himself said, “No, Son. We cannot do that.”

Now why? There isn’t any other place in the gospels or in the New Testament where we read that the Father said no to a prayer of his Son. Indeed, Jesus makes it clear the Father has never done that. The Father always hears and answers his prayer. So what is the explanation for this that leaves him so desolated? Well, I think the answer is found in the third word. If the first word is isolation and the second word is desolation, then the third word is salvation.

Let me try and help you understand what Mark sees here. You remember how unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark begins his gospel very quickly. There are no chapters on the nativity. There is nothing as in Luke about the teenage year of the Lord Jesus. He moves immediately to Jesus’ appearance on the scene in his baptism and then his temptations in the wilderness. And he has a very unique way of describing Jesus’ experience there in the wilderness that is the key to the picture he wants us to see, the portrait he is painting of the Lord Jesus. It is unique. He says, “Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness and he was surrounded by the wild beasts.”

Now what is he saying? Well, you see, he is saying, “Don’t you see a mirror image of something here? Don’t you see a kind of echo of something here? Don’t you remember how when God made man, when God made Adam he set him in this beautiful garden with all its luxury and he was so master of the beasts that he named them?”

Now, little lion. I am going to call you lion. Now, big giraffe. I am going to call you big giraffe and you get to hug a lion and hug a giraffe in the garden of Eden.

And then comes the fall, you see, and Adam turns the garden of Eden into a wilderness. And the creatures that God had given to be companions, but not his best companion become wild nature, red in tooth and claw. That is the world into which the Lord Jesus enters to be tempted and tested. And that is why when he overcomes he begins to show that he is overcome by throwing the effects of sin into their reverse order by healing those who have been damaged by the fall by saying to people in need, “Your faith has saved you. Your faith has made you well.”

But he has still got the last temptation to face, hasn’t he, the last test, the last opportunity for the devil to destroy what God means to do through his Son Jesus. And so he has got to reverse what Adam did. Now what did Adam do? Let me put it like this. This will help you to understand what is going on here. God said to Adam, “I set you in this garden. You are going to have all of the fruit of all of these trees, but, Adam, there is one tree there, don’t eat it.”

And I can imagine saying, because the Bible tells us this, “But, Father, that tree looks as gorgeous as all the other trees.”

“Yes, I know, my son.”

“But, Father, look at that fruit. I can’t look at that fruit without all my instincts saying, ‘Reach out and pluck it and eat it and enjoy it.’”

“I know, my son, but I want you to show me that you trust me as the good and gracious heavenly Father I am just by doing what I say.”

That is no different from you as a father, if you have been a father, isn’t it? Don’t do that, son. Why? Looks great to me. You will understand later. Please just don’t do it.

And, you see, here is Adam as he comes to that tree and all his instincts, all his holy instincts say that tree is as good as any other tree. And God is saying, “My child, I want you here to show me that you trust me by listening to what I say, not just by your holy instincts.”

And now in order to reverse Adam’s failure you see the picture. Jesus comes and the Father presses a cup into his hands and this cup is full of isolation and desolation and alienation from God. Drinking this cup is going to bring Jesus to the place where he is no longer conscious of the face of God smiling upon him and every holy instinct in him must

say, "Father, remove it." I go so far as to say if Jesus had not prayed that prayer he would not have been truly holy. He had to pray that prayer. Why? Because there was no instinct in the holiness of our Savior Jesus Christ ever to want to drink a cup that would leave him to a sense of desolation from his Father and his beautiful face clouded from his sight. And in crying on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" And it is because of that there is nothing more amazing than there in the garden of Eden Jesus who has prayed, "Father, if it is possible, remove this cup from me," and his heavenly Father says to him, "My Son, it is not possible. It is not possible that I remove this cup and sinners be saved. So if sinners are going to be saved, you will have to drink that cup."

I can't imagine what that meant in the heart of the heavenly Father. You know, for all the horror of this, there is nothing short of the death of the Lord Jesus that shows me how much both the Father and the Son love me, that the Father would say no to his Son's prayer because he loved me. I want to say, "Father, have you loved me more than you loved him?"

Oh how much my Lord Jesus loved me to pray, "Father, although every instinct in me wants to beg you to remove this cup from me, your will and not mine be done." The very words indicate to us, don't they, that actually was Jesus' will that that cup would be removed. But his greatest will was to do the will of his heavenly Father and that they did that for me, that he took my place and died my death and bore my judgment on the cross for me that he experienced all that duress for me, that he took those covenant curses that were in that cup of wrath and judgment and that he did it for me.

Now, my dear friends, a good 50 percent of us in this room are, well, maybe over 40. And if you are over 40 in this church you probably learned to sing in Sunday school Mrs. Alexander's lovely hymn. *There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall.* So you have known this truth all of your life. There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. We may not know. We cannot tell what pains he had to bear, but we believe it was for us, for you, for me he hung and suffered there.

May I say two things to you today on the basis of this passage? The first is this. This passage proves to us that there is no other way of salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ, doesn't it? The Son of God asked his heavenly Father, "Is there no other way?" And his Father said, "There is no other way."

I can understand it, dear ones, when somebody who knows nothing about the gospel as a pagan, a non Christian, an Atheist or whatever says, "I will find my own way of salvation." But I wonder if you see the extent to which people who know about this gospel spit in the face of the heavenly Father when they say, "I will find my own way, thank you."

Interesting, isn't it, that if our children were to do that to us when we had provided everything for them, we would regard that as a scandal, wouldn't we? That happened in a family you know in your society among your friends. The child spat in the face of the

parents and said, "I will find my own way, thank you very much." And so we do with the heavenly Father. We say, "Frankly, I don't care how much your Son suffered for me. I will find my own way, thank you." And at the last he will say, "I believe I told you I the gospel there is no other way."

So I want to beg you if you are here this morning. You may be a visitor here this morning from another church and maybe you have never heard this before. I want to say to you if you will just read these words you will realize there is no other way. And any other way is it spit in the face of the Lord Jesus and to spit in the face of the heavenly Father. And actually when your eyes are open you will tremble at the appalling arrogance that you have had of saying that I will find another way. Do you think he would have done this if there was another way? Would he have refused his Son's prayer as he faced the desolation of the cross?

But the other thing to say is this. If on the one hand here is a passage of all passages in Scripture where Jesus himself says, "Father, is there no other way," and the Father says, "My Son, there is no other way." "There is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved," says Peter. {?} is this that when you see this passage you become deeply persuaded that he is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through him. He has gone down so deeply into the isolation and desolation of bearing the weight of God's judgment on my sin to bring me salvation that I want to sing, "Yes, in my place condemned he stood and sealed my pardon with his blood. Hallelujah, what a Savior."

To think that he did all this because he loves us. That is why we need to go to dark Gethsemane, because there are some things that we can see most clearly when we are in the dark and when we look up into the night sky of the gospel and we see the stars of grace sparkling in the sky and we come to him and we say, "Father, I am so ashamed of how little attention I have paid to the gospel, how little I have thought of your Son, how I have taken your love casually, how I never realized how much it cost you to give your Son for me. Dear Lord, I give myself away. It is all that I can do. Love so amazing, so divine shall have my life, my soul, my all."

Because he was forsaken we can be accepted. Because he was isolated we can be brought near. Because he was in desolation we can be in salvation through faith in this glorious, glorious Savior.

Heavenly Father, we know when we come to the edge of this garden we tread on holy ground where our best words are hardly adequate even to begin to describe what your Son has done for us or to express how greatly you must love us to give your only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Lord Jesus, we are sorry for our sins that cost you so dear, but grateful to you for paying the price of our salvation. With all our hearts we trust you as our Savior. We yield to you as our Lord. We want to give the whole of our lives to you. Hear us and bless us that we may do this we pray in Jesus our Savior's name. Amen.