

The Long Dark Night

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 14:26-50

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This morning I have a lot to do. And by that I don't mean length, I mean the weight of what this passage declares. So I will read the text this morning and just jump in straight away. It is Mark Chapter 14, verses 26-50. This is the description of what is the long dark night for Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we now ask that you would take this word. That you would equip us, encourage us, and take us deep by your Spirit to see the beauty of who Christ is and what he has done for us and why we need him. Father this centrality of what Christ has done for us we remember in several ways. One, we remember it when we celebrate Good Friday, Easter. And we remember it every week as we hear of the Gospel. We also remember it this particular Sunday, because we are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It began before 500 years ago, but it was something that took place 500 years ago that we were remember—returning to the centrality of the faith, the substitutionary atonement of Christ. And that our way into the Gospel, our way of staying in the Gospel, our way of growing in the Gospel is by faith alone. So help us, we pray, to remember Christ. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

²⁶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ²⁷ And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" ²⁸ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ²⁹ Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." ³⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." ³¹ But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

³² And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ 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." ³⁷ And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. ⁴¹ 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. ⁴² Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

⁴³ And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵ And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁴⁶ And they laid hands on him and seized him. ⁴⁷ But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁴⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ And they all left him and fled. [Mark 14:26-50, ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

As we look at this passage together you will see in your outline it forms a narrative that enables us to see these three things which I have outlined for you. **The Denial** which Jesus predicts. **The Cup** which he asks to pass from him. And **The Arrest**. **The Denial, The Cup, and The Arrest**.

Now I want to say that in preparation for this sermon it was my intention to have it be a full-throated three-point, but in its actual preparation I don't know if I'll get to the third point. I'll do the best I can. I hope you don't mind.

First, **The Denial** that Jesus predicts. The denial that Jesus predicts is the denial of Peter. And what I want you to see about this interaction are things that first are very ironic. You see, it's Peter who often is the first to open his mouth, which I find near and dear to my heart. But in opening up his mouth the first, he also is the first to get himself in trouble—something else I find near and dear to my heart. But the irony is very thick. Because several chapters before, when Jesus declares what is about to happen to him—the fact that he will give himself up, that he will be crucified, and on the third day rise again—it was Peter who took great offense at that and said no, Lord, this will not happen to you. In Peter's declaration he's saying no, it can't be that you would suffer. And Jesus said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan." But he wasn't just saying that to Peter. It was hard for any of the disciples to be able to face this declaration that Jesus gave, that he would face suffering to the point of an incredibly disgraceful death on a cross, particularly at the hands of the Romans. And then also be raised on the third day.

It's ironic that now, after Peter had already said you know, hey, listen, this cannot happen to you, that it would be Peter now that looks at Jesus and says wait a second, I'm not going to deny you in your suffering. No, I will be the most loyal. What a transition. First the suffering is something that he could not face. Now it's Peter who steps forward and says hey, listen, you said everybody's going to scatter. Not me. I will be with you. As we've heard, it was the use of Zechariah that Jesus used to predict the denial of the disciples. But he says truly, I tell you, listen, I will not do this.

And there is the irony. That while he was earlier offended by the prospect of Jesus's suffering, now he vows allegiance with Jesus in his suffering. What that demonstrates is the second thing about this predicted denial. It demonstrates Peter's blind spot. That Peter's blind spot has always been this over confidence. This living by this idea—that was also shared by the other

disciples—this very silent, but creeping success. This will not happen to you. We want to be with you when you come into your glory. We want to be sitting next to you. Where will we be. They argued about the place of privilege. Peter's saying hey, listen, there's no way you're going to give up yourself to suffering. How can you give up yourself to the very people who've been against you? No way. And now he's saying yet again—as if he hasn't been taught enough that Jesus's way is not the worldly success—he now is still stuck in the success model. But now, crazy, it's about Jesus's suffering.

He's saying OK, I get the suffering part, but I'm going to be right there with you. In other words, he has such an over self-confidence in what he believes he will be able to do. Despite all that he has seen and heard from Jesus, despite all the confrontation that he's already been given. His blind spot is he's living by the wrong model. That even though now he claims allegiance to Jesus in the suffering, he fails to see that to go with the Jesus in suffering is not the way of success, but the way of giving one's self up to the will of the Heavenly Father. And that is giving yourself up to an over confidence and reliance on yourself. Of seeing what your strengths are and being blinded to the weaknesses.

As we look back now, Peter should have been filled with a lot more self-doubt. And it's instructive that we have this recorded for us. We see the journey of Peter. We see Jesus's prediction. And now we know. On the other side of the work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we see a very different Peter. Not relying on his strength, but relying on the Lord. We see the journey. But that journey is not possible unless he goes through the place of being shown his blind spots. And this is precisely where Jesus seeks to do it. He's showing Peter his blind spot. And not only his, but also so the disciples.

And so this drama actually—before we even get to the cup—this one interaction works as a double-edged sword. Meaning it has two ways, two lessons. The first is not as great as the second, but let me give you the first. The first lesson—not only for the disciples, but for those of us who now hear it read again—it is a lesson of what are we building our lives on. How do we view ourselves?

What I mean is... I'm borrowing a phrase from David Brooks, a columnist for The New York Times several years ago, leading up to his book on the development of character and how character is developed, which is also a part of his coming to faith. He talks about the way in which we live. Do we live by way of resume or do we live by way of eulogy? And he draws the contrast. Our resumes are often built on what we think our strengths are. Our eulogy is built on what our character was. The one is an illustration of all of our experience and ways in which we can contribute and build. Our eulogy is the expression of the influence of our character. And so in the process of talking about this, he learned in studying this through one particular teacher, he says there is this idea that there is an Adam 1 and an Adam 2 in all of us. The Adam 1 one wants to live by the standards of the world: success, live by your resume. Adam 2 wants to live by eulogy: principles of love, redemption, and hope. The one is about strength; the other is an expression of our weakness and why we need something outside of ourselves to make us a people who help and love others.

Here is what he says. Yes, and this was given on a TED stage, which is a remarkable speech, nonetheless. He said these words. He says thirty three (?) people have gone back into their own

pasts. Sometimes to a precious time in their life, to their childhood, and often the mind gravitates in the past to a moment of shame, some sin committed, some act of selfishness, an act of omission, of shallowness, the sin of anger, the sin of self-pity, trying to be a people pleaser, a lack of courage. Adam 1 is built by building on your strengths. Adam 2 is built by fighting your weaknesses. You go into yourself, you find the sin which you've committed over and over again through your life, your signature sin, out of which the others emerge. You fight that sin and you wrestle with that sin. And out of that wrestling, that suffering, then a depth of character is constructed. And we're often not taught how to recognize the sin in ourselves, in that we're not taught in the culture how to wrestle with it, how to confront it, how to combat it. We live in a culture with an Adam 1 one mentality, where we're inarticulate about Adam 2.

And he closes with this thought. Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime. Therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history, therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous. . . Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone, therefore we must be saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of a friend or a foe, than from our own standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.

What we learn in this drama with Peter—one lesson—in seeing Peter's over self-confidence, what we see is he's living by a resume kind of world, a success world. But what Jesus does is he exposes Peter's weakness. Not to shame him, not to belittle him, but to awaken him. To awaken him to his need for love, forgiveness, hope, and faith. Not in himself, but in Christ. Peter cannot yet see it. Neither can the other disciples. Yet Jesus—and here's the second lesson of this first part of the drama—notice the grace that Jesus has to expose the sin and weakness of his disciples.

Christianity is not shame-based faith. It is a truth and grace-based faith. (Try to say that fast.) Meaning, that Jesus explores the truth with Peter and the disciples. You will deny me three times. The rest of you will be scattered. That is the truth. But here's the other truth. It must be so, because I'm the only one who can descend to the cross. Here is the truth. You have too much confidence in yourself. I will tell you the truth of your weakness, so that you can be led to the point and united with my weakness, so that in my death for your sin you can be redeemed. You can be renewed in a hope, not based on your resume, but a hope based on who I am.

It is a grace-based faith, because in so doing of telling this truth, it is not truth alone of exposing our sin. When Jesus allows our sin to be exposed, it isn't just well, there you go. It is a truth that leads to its solution, its covering, its forgiveness. And the power of what he's about to do. It is truth and grace. This is what Jesus demonstrates for us, this first lesson of predicted denial. It is about the disciples' sanctification through seeing their weakness. But it is also about the demonstration of the truth of what Christ is about to do and the grace which is more than enough. It is overflowing.

So what is it that he's about to do. We get to see it in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is **The Cup**. Look with me. Beginning in verse 32, in this place called Gethsemane, Jesus tells his disciples he wants to pray. But then he invites. First he summons a particular group. And who does he summon? Peter, who has just professed self-confidence; James and John, who are the sons of

Zebedee, who had desired that they would have a prominent place when Jesus came into his kingdom, do you remember. So these are the disciples that he calls to go with him into his hour of prayer. Again, as another part of seeing their own weakness, but it also is a part of a fulfillment, that even those who are closest to Jesus would not be with him in his greatest hours of suffering.

So it is this summons. And the irony is, these sons of Zebedee were also the ones who said that they would want to drink of the cup. They can't drink of this cup. So look at what it notices as we go into the text. Verse 34. After he summoned them, he then by these words demonstrates for us the reality that he's facing. 34: "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." And he would know if they were to pray, because the overwhelming practice of prayer in the Scriptures would have been out loud prayer. It wouldn't have been silent and off into a corner by themselves. They were called to be at watch. Stay awake, and pray out loud.

But in this reality of what Jesus is facing, when he says that his soul was very sorrowful, what is he talking about? What is the reality that he's facing? Is it that he is looking out at the torment of the cross? It could be. But I believe that that is not what is at the heart of these words. I believe that what is at the heart of these words—that my soul is very sorrowful, even to death—is, as one writer says, it's not that Jesus is being confronted with the cruel destiny that he is getting ready to walk into. It's that he knows he's getting ready to face the judgment of God. It's not the cruel nature of the cross that he is most sorrowful for. It's the fact that he knows that what is about to happen is that all of God's judgment and wrath for sin that has ever been committed and that will ever be committed—that that wrath is about to be poured out, to the very last, drop on his Son. Who is innocent of any sin, who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And though he deserved nothing but glory, he gave it up that he might be in our place.

To see it further. It's not just to see the summons of who is with him and their failure to pray. It's not just to see that the reality that Jesus is getting ready to face the judgment of God. It's even more so in the meaning of the cup that he uses as a metaphor. In his prayer, verse 36, he says, "Abba, Father." Those very words would never ever have been prayed by any Jew. To even translate it as 'Daddy' doesn't get at it. It is so familiar. It is such a tender and intimate name, that only Jesus dare and only Jesus can call him 'Abba, Father.' And he begins with the tenderest of language. "Abba, Father, all things are possible..." Do you hear that even the Son of God praises God in all of his glory and strength.

And he then says, "Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." What is the Cup? What is its meaning? Wine in cups is very familiar to the Scriptures. But this cup is the cup of God's wrath. Here now Psalm 75. This is now God's proclamation through the psalmist of how God uses the cup of wrath to pour judgment. "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours it out on all the wicked of the earth, and they shall drain it down to the dregs." [Psalm 75:8, ESV]

Then in Isaiah Chapter 51. This is now Isaiah the prophet prophesying of how God is getting ready to give out his judgment. This is what he says. "Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering. There is none to guide her among all of the

sons she has borne; there is none to take her by the hand among all the sons she has brought up. These two things have happened to you—(that is, to you who have drunk of this cup)—who will console you?” Who will comfort you when you drink of this cup? Not his disciples. No one will console him. “Devastation and destruction, famine and the sword; who will comfort you?” No one. “Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the Lord, the rebuke of your God.” [Isaiah 51:17-20, ESV]. The rebuke of your God.

This cup that Jesus drinks is a cup not of fine wine, but wine that is foaming. What that means is, if you're familiar, when you stir wine really fast [??], but when you shake it about it has bubbles at the top because of the fermentation. But what it does is it stirs up the sediment. That's what the dregs are. It's the sediment—it's the wine skins and the stems and everything that actually give the unique character to a wine, but you don't want to drink it. But this cup of wrath is a glass cup of wine that has been stirred and poured out, and those who have to drink it to the bottom—it's a horrible taste—know that what they have just done is they've drunk something according to the Scriptures, and it tells us that it leads to disgrace, being caught by your enemies, staggering about. But most principally it is a picture of the power of God and his wrath against sin that must be poured out.

So stop there for just a moment. What we want is we want to have a God of love, not a God of wrath. But we cannot have a God of love without a God of wrath. What do I mean? In the event that it is not self-evident, if you have ever had someone do something to you in hurting you or hurting someone that you love, isn't it interesting that what riles up within us is a desire for justice, for something to be done, for that hurt to be righted, for those who injured to pay the price. Where does that come from? It does not come from evolution. It comes from something completely other. It comes from the hand of the one who created us, the God of justice. So if we as human beings, who fail often, every day, who stand against one another and are sinned against—if what rises up within us when we are hurt or when others are hurt, if what rises up within us is justice—because we recognize that sin must be paid for, justice must be doled out—then why do we get so squeamish when we bring up the name of God?

It's because what rises up within us is justice, but we also want [??]. We want justice for everybody else, but we are ashamed of the fact, and we don't want to face the fact, that I have screwed up, and that God's justice can be for everybody else, but not for me. That the reality of justice also exposes how we fail, and it should not make us squeamish because of these verses, don't you see. Because without these verses, God's love is glib. It's just a nice afternoon story. It's someone who loves us, but doesn't care all that much about wrong. We would not want to be surrounded by judges or a justice system that refuses to punish wrongdoing. And a God who refuses to point out and punish and pour out wrath on sin is a God not worthy of our worship. He's just a nice old grandfather with a Snickers bar ready to give out to all the good boys and girls. That is not worthy of worship. But these verses declare a God of wrath and a God of love.

Why? Because we deserve this cup, but what we want, is we want the good stuff. I was a professional waiter for eight years. I had to do this several times, but it was the first time that scared me to death. The day prior to this important dinner party happening in the middle of the restaurant, in front of everyone else, they had ordered a \$500 bottle of wine, which meant it had to be sitting straight up or down for more than twenty four hours. And then at the table,

very carefully, I had to bring that bottle of wine, without it in any way shape or form being jostled about, as much as I possibly could. Then I had to remove the glass covering over an open flame. I then had to bring out this \$200 decanter, clear glass, very large, hold it in one hand and before the open flame for the entire party of the table, I had to pour this very expensive bottle of wine, but making sure that not any sediment got into the decanter. Because if any of that sediment got into the decanter, the bottle the wine would be ruined. And I would probably lose my job. And I remember that night standing over that open flame I was burning up inside. I was like, I do not want to mess this up. Because what happens in that moment is we want what we get paid for. We want to take the good stuff; we don't want the dregs.

But here is the beauty of what we celebrate in communion. We get the good stuff, because somebody else drank the cup to the dregs. If you've never tasted unfiltered wine and had those pieces in your mouth, perhaps you cannot understand how it... just it's horrible. You want to spit it out. But the wine we get, the wine of God's love and grace and forgiveness and hope and faith are all a gift. Because this Son, this Savior, this Messiah said if there is any other way, take this cup, but not my will, but your will be done. And on the cross he takes the cup, and he drinks it to the last. God's wrath poured out. But God's wrath satisfied.

And the invitation of the Savior is now an invitation of grace. Come, as we've already sung. Come to Jesus without money. Leave your resumes at home. Bring all that we are and who we are in our weaknesses and our sin and come to Jesus. Because he has gone before us and taken the cup that was due to us. And in so doing, we get to taste of forgiveness, of love, of mercy, and of grace. We can't have the love of God without the wrath of God being satisfied. This is what we mean, central to the gospel, of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. One in our place who drank the cup.

So what does that mean? That means as Jesus takes of this cup and then is **arrested**. But even in his being arrested he continues to show grace and mercy. It's not by way of sword. He doesn't come by way of wrath. He didn't come under compulsion. He comes because he willingly gives himself over. He doesn't have to be arrested. He's been here the whole time. He gives himself over. You don't need clubs, you don't need swords. Here, take me. Because Christ is a willing sacrifice.

And his disciples flee. Jesus is in the garden and is arrested. And everyone who had pledged faithfulness is no longer. Jesus recognizes even just being asked to pray, they are unable. That is how marvelous and how complete is the work of Christ. Though he confronts them, though he predicts, it is Jesus who willingly gives himself over.

And so because he is and because he has taken on God's wrath, and because he has done this for you and for me, the invitation of Christ is to any who come weary and heavy laden. Are you wearied by sin? Have you been unconvinced of your sin, but now by the Holy Spirit you've come to see it? The invitation is to you to trust in Christ. Because what is on offer for you today is grace and love. But the Lord will return, and the day of grace will be over. And judgment will come, because judgment has already been [??]. Its execution will take place. So the invitation during this day of grace is to come and drink what Jesus offers you. And you will receive forgiveness and redemption and renewal. Jesus's long dark night gives us a brand new day. And this is one of those days. It is a day of grace.

Let's pray. Father, we ask by your grace, by your Spirit—help us to see how marvelous, how wonderful, how beautiful is Christ Jesus our Lord, who took the cup of wrath and drank it to its dregs so that we would not have to. And so we ask you, O Father, through the beauty and power of your Son, by the power of your Spirit, help us to rejoice in Christ, our Redeemer. In Jesus' name. Amen.