

Date: 13.4.2011

Text: Matthew 26:36 – 56

Place: Midweekchurch

Title: Jesus in the place of crushing

Preacher: Michael Boyd

The Passover meal had been celebrated. Jesus had spoken plainly about his coming betrayal and death, and he had comforted his disciples. Yet even as that special meal took place Judas left to complete his betrayal. Now, having sung a final hymn to close the meal, Jesus leads the eleven disciples out through the city.

The spring moon hangs heavy in the sky as they make their way through the streets, down into the Kidron valley and across to a private garden on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. The Garden is called Gethsemane. The name literally means 'Olive press.' The olives that give the Mountain its name were crushed in this place.

And as Jesus enters it he feels the crushing weight of what lies before him.

He leaves eight of the disciples near the entrance and takes Peter and James and John further into the garden. These are the men who have been closest to Jesus over the past three years. They were the only ones present at the raising of Jairus' daughter from death. They climbed the mountain with him and witnessed his Transfiguration, saw his heavenly glory. Just over a week ago James and John declared that they were willing to suffer with him, to drink the cup he is about to drink. Even on the walk over from Jerusalem Peter assured Jesus that he would rather die than disown him. Now Jesus confides in his closest friends, men ready to do anything for their Lord.

All through the evening meal Jesus comforted the disciples, prayed for them. Now, he needs them.

Matthew writes in **verse 37, Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled.** And in **verse 38** he bears his breaking heart to them, and asks for their support during this terrible time.

The One who is life himself is about to taste death.

The One who has enjoyed unbroken fellowship with his Father from eternity past is about to be forsaken.

The One who knew no sin is about to be made sin for us.

The One of whom the Father said, 'This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased' is now about to undergo the wrath of God and drink the cup of his fury.

No wonder he says to his close friends in **verse 38, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.** Jesus faces the prospect of the cross with overwhelming sorrow, profound agony, fearful loneliness. His heart is so burdened it is killing him. He looks to his friends for support as he faces this terrible time of testing.

Why is he so distraught?

Time and time again he warned his disciples that this was coming. He knew he was going to die, and he deliberately pushed on toward Jerusalem, even when the disciples warned him against it.

So why now does he look like faltering?

Why has the burden of his mission become so hard to bear?

I want to ask those questions carefully because too often we can just see Christ's death as a done thing: Of course he was going to do it! And we can picture Jesus almost as a superman, unaffected by his humanity.

Many people who have died for Jesus since have gone to their deaths with a far more settled mind than Jesus appears to have here.

So why is Jesus so sorrowful and troubled?

Mark describes Jesus as being deeply distressed.

Luke records that Jesus was in anguish, and his sweat was like great drops of blood.

Here is a man at the very limits of his emotions.

Why is that?

In Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion*, he begins his treatment of Christ's suffering here in the Garden. He was right to do that because Gethsemane is the moment of decision: will Jesus follow through with his mission, or will he walk away?

We see Jesus' absolute commitment to do his Father's will, yet he is overwhelmed by the consequences of that obedience. Gethsemane truly is the place of crushing for Jesus. Why?

He realises that he is about to bear the sins of the world, bear the weight of God's perfect wrath against that sin.

Martin Luther writes that **While each of us has merely our own sins upon us, Christ alone bears the sins of the whole world and must atone for them with his death.** From Adam to Judgement Day - all those sins! And all that wrath!

Here we clearly see Jesus as both fully man and fully God. Fully man: terrified, overwhelmed to the point of death, deeply grieved. Fully God: he was able to bear such a burden without succumbing.

Just before I became a Christian I was so burdened with the weight of my guilt. I felt literally bowed down as I realised the enormity of my sin and the weight of judgement. That was just my sin! And I deserved punishment! And I did not have a perfect understanding of God's wrath.

But Jesus had done nothing wrong, yet perfectly understood the nature of God's anger at sin and the punishment it will receive. And now it was being focused upon him. Yet he did not succumb to that. He bore my sins, he bore yours.

Two things stand out to me here.

Firstly, when I am tempted, I should think about this passage.

I caused him that grief! Why was Jesus overwhelmed with sorrow? Because he was facing the wrath of God for my sake. Every sin I have committed or will commit has been laid up him. How then can I treat sin so lightly?

Too many times I have thought, 'Oh yeah, I can sin and then just ask God for forgiveness and it will be OK.' If I think like that I totally misunderstand the cost of forgiveness. Jesus bore that anguish for me. How can I go on sinning and increase his burden?

The second thing that strikes me is more positive: If God has placed my sin upon him, then I am certainly released from sin! If he has borne the punishment for my sin, then he has freed me from the penalty and power of sin.

John the Baptist said of Jesus, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who *takes away* the sin of the world!' That's another help for when I do sin.

My forgiveness is assured! My sin has definitely been taken away. I am free!

Martin Luther is my favourite person in Church history. He lived about 500 years ago. He used to have some knock-down, drag-out arguments with the devil. One day Satan took out a big piece of paper and wrote out a long, long list of all the sins Martin had committed. It went on and on and on! And all of them were true. He had done those things.

But he took out his own pen and wrote across them all 'Paid in full.'

Yes, he was a sinner. But Jesus had paid for every one of them. Martin was a forgiven and free man.

And so are you and I if we have placed out trust in Jesus. Jesus has set us free!

So Jesus' anguish teaches me a lot. However, there is another aspect to his suffering that deepens that anguish: he must suffer alone. And it starts right here in the Garden.

The very friends he confided in, who knew of his anguish, were the ones who fell asleep. His simple request was **Stay here and keep watch with me**. In the midst of his suffering, he longed for the companionship and support of his dear friends. When we are hurting, worried, we look to others for assurance and support. Jesus' disciples did not give that to him. Their desertion he spoke about on the way to the Garden is already beginning.

This is one of the more terrible aspects of his suffering.

Many of his followers had left him before he came to Jerusalem. The city itself had rejected him as it had rejected the prophets before him. They welcomed him with palm branches days before yet tomorrow will scream for his crucifixion. Judas had already left him to betray him.

The other eleven will desert him, then finally he will cry out on the cross, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** He faces all this alone.

In the Garden we see Jesus' anguish, his loneliness, but also his trust. He commits himself to the will of his Father.

He is honest in prayer: **If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.** This prayer lets us see the horror of what Jesus is about to go through, yet his perfect submission to his Father.

This is what true obedience is all about.

On many occasions Jesus said 'I have come to do my Father's will.' That commitment is now being put to the ultimate test.

Now if the only commands my Dad ever gave me were 'Michael, eat your ice cream' or 'Michael, go outside and play' I would have been a perfectly obedient child! But when he said, 'Michael, go and clean your room' well now that was a test of obedience!

True obedience is not doing something you would have done anyway. True obedience is doing the thing that your whole body and soul screams against.

True obedience comes at a cost. And as Paul would later write in **Philippians 2, Jesus became obedient to death – even death on a cross!**

It was in Gethsemane that his final resolve was made.

Verses 45 & 46 show that his prayer has been answered. God's will is that Jesus does go on to the cross. With that, Jesus' resolve is perfected. The certainty returns to his voice, and he is strengthened to fulfil what the Father has sent him to do.

In *The Passion* Mel Gibson shows that beautifully. As Jesus agonises, Satan is whispering his temptations. A snake begins to curl itself towards Jesus. Jesus rises after prayer and crushes the serpent's head with his foot. In the screening I was at a cheer went up!

Jesus is determined to destroy the work of the evil one. And his suffering and execution is the way he conquers.

And with his mind and heart set, his enemies appear. And here comes Judas again. Matthew describes him as **one of the Twelve**. It's a fact we well know, but Matthew is emphasising the wickedness of his crime. One of the Twelve is Jesus' betrayer. His close companion for three years. The treasurer of the group, a trusted position. One who shared meals with Jesus. And a kiss, the universal symbol of love and friendship is transformed by Judas into a lasting symbol of ultimate betrayal.

Arrested by the mob, Jesus goes on to die alone.

At the end of the passage we read **all the disciples deserted him and fled**. His trusted twelve disciples have either betrayed or deserted him. Including the writer of this Gospel, Matthew.

Jesus goes on to face his suffering alone.

As we read this, what is Matthew wanting us to see?

He's saying, 'This is your God!'

Here is the Son of God, innocent, without fault, fully aware of the suffering that is his tomorrow, yet deliberately going on to it. Why? Because he had come to take away the sins of the world. Your sins. My sins.

We need to take time to quietly reflect on that. To understand once again the cost of our salvation.

If you are here and you are not a Christian as yet, you haven't accepted his death on your behalf, see what he has done for you! See the love he has for you! See his commitment, his resolution as he prepares to endure the punishment of God for your sake! And see his terror, his overwhelming grief as he faces that prospect!

Too often we go and sin with a shrug of our shoulders and sniff at the enormity of what we are doing. Look at Jesus' agony as he faced the wrath of God!

But Jesus has endured all that so that you don't.

See your Saviour!

Turn to him!

Find in him the refuge from wrath!

And see in him a love that is beyond measure – love that laid down his life for you.