

MATTHEW 26: 30 – 45

THE CUP OF WRATH AND THE ULTIMATE LOVE

Death – and how it is approached is something we read about and see in the movies all the time. John Wayne and Clint Eastwood never backed down from it. Whenever a hero faces death, he/ she seems to take it in stride. Indeed, when we read of actual accounts of martyrdom, we see those put to the ultimate end resigning themselves to their fate.

Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer were burned at the stake for their faith in Oxford, England, in 1555. They were tied to the stake side by side. And when the fire was lit at their feet, Latimer said, **“Be of good comfort Master Ridley, and play the man: we shall this day light such a candle by God’s grace in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”**

Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and Bishop of Smyrna shared a similar fate. The magistrate told him that he could reject Christianity, repent and thereby avoid execution. Polycarp responded, **“The fire you threaten burns but an hour and is quenched after a little . . . You do not know the fire of the coming judgment . . . But why do you delay? Come, do what you will.”**

These men died in a manner we would refer to as “honorable.” But we will see today, in the disciples, that fear is a powerful thing. We will even see in Jesus, that fear is a powerful thing. Indeed, by all accounts, the disciples did die in an “honorable” manner. Jesus of course did also. But leading up to the actual event, there is a dread and fear that can drive us all into dark places.

Jesus and His “family” have just finished their Passover meal – ending it in the traditional manner, singing from the Old Testament. And then Jesus, the only one there who fully grasps the situation, lays another heavy trip on them.

Mt. 26: 31 - 35

31 Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

‘I will strike the Shepherd,

And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

**35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"
And so said all the disciples.**

This has been a rather different and dark Passover meal. Jesus has once again spoken of His death and even of a betrayal from among His closest companions. There is a deep sense of foreboding. It is late and they are tired. In a sense, they have been drinking out of a fire hose. They have had a lot of theology and prophesy dumped on them in the last few days, let alone the last several hours. They are tired, somewhat confused and have for all intents and purposes, checked out of the scene. Then, Jesus tells them that they will all be made to stumble tonight. And he then links it to the OT reference of Zechariah 13. The shepherd will be struck and they will scatter. That was a very vivid picture. And they understood what that meant, even if they didn't appreciate it fully. We can see that by their responses. Adding to their confusion is the promise that Jesus would meet up with them once again in Galilee.

Jesus had already partaken of the cup four times during the Passover meal – and He is about to partake of another cup; the cup of the wrath of God.

BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU ASK

Earlier in Matthew we read this:

Mt. 20: 20 – 27

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.

21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?"

She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."

22 But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

They said to Him, "We are able."

23 So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father."

They didn't know what they were asking. Many times we don't either. We may have our lives mapped out in the way we think they should occur, but the will of God is another thing altogether. And as we shall see, our knee-jerk reaction most of the

time is to remove ourselves from anxiety and persecution. But that is not always what is best and it isn't necessarily God's will for us.

But the reaction to Jesus' words regarding the soon to come epic failure of His disciples meets with the worst response the disciples could have given. They poke out their chests and proclaim that they're stumbling is an impossibility. However, it is a foregone conclusion.

It is good to be steadfast in our faith. In fact we are to be steadfast. But on this night, these men will be faced with death, not an argument or debate. This is no mere form of peer-pressure. This is the ultimate enemy. And pride goes before a fall. Be steadfast in your faith, but be humble at the same time.

But hidden in Jesus' warning is light at the end of the tunnel. Jesus' prediction of a post-resurrection meeting will be fulfilled in the closing scene of Matthew. This serves to remind us that the hostility and apparent triumph of Jerusalem is not the end of the story.

By alerting the disciples to what is about to happen, Jesus aims to prepare them not only for the shock of His arrest and execution, but also of their own inability to stand with Him when everything hits the fan.

In chapter four, Jesus' ministry began in Galilee. It will also be the place of a new beginning, which will spread to all nations. And in this process, the disciples, restored after their failure and disgrace, have a leading role.

No circumstance, not even our failures take Jesus by surprise! In fact, many times He is attempting to prepare us for them. That is grace, my friend!

36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." 37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Jesus knows that His time to partake of another cup is at hand. But this cup is the "cup of the wrath of God."

In Ezekiel 23: 32 -34 and Isaiah 51:22, we read of the cup of the wrath of God. Jesus is about to drink this cup. This turns off many people. I have been asked why Jesus had to die and why couldn't God rescue mankind some other way. These are legitimate questions. After all, Jesus asked this same question, though I believe He asked it for a different reason.

A God of wrath and judgment is off-putting to say the least, to most people. They want a God of love. But there's a problem with that sentiment. **If you want a God of love, then you MUST have an angry God.** That may sound counter-intuitive, but think about it for a second. Loving people can get angry, not in spite of their love but because of it. In fact, the more closely and deeply you love people, the angrier you can get. When you see someone being harmed and abused, you should get angry. You get angry at the abusive person out of love. Your senses of love and anger work together, not in opposition to one another. If you see someone destroying himself, you get mad at them because you love them. If you don't get mad, it's because you don't care. You have become jaded or apathetic. If you are angry because of the injustice, it is because you place a value on that person's life. If you don't value them, then you don't care about them. So I want a loving God, one that gets angry at injustice because He sees value in me. Otherwise, if there is no justice, it is because there is no love. And a God who is willing to pay the ultimate price for me must value me. Your conception of God's love – and of your value in His sight will only be as big as your understanding of His wrath.

Buddhism and other philosophical systems teach that you are to detach yourself from your emotions, (and emotions carried too far can be a problem) but to become detached from emotions, especially in an attempt to not hurt, quickly turns to apathy and hardness of heart. But that is not what we see in Jesus.

We see that Jesus was deeply sorrowed and distressed, even to the point of death. He took His three closest disciples with Him and asked them to pray – not for Him but for themselves because He knew that temptation was coming for them. He prayed three different times – wanting to know if there was any other way to accomplish the ultimate goal of His Father. Alas, there was no other way.

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You

will.”

Father, is this the only way for your will to be done?

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

He hasn't just repeated the prayer. It appears He has already gotten some sort of answer. He is resigned at this point, to the fact that there is no other way.

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Jesus got His answer and He is now ready for the task at hand.

But why did Jesus seemingly die in more anguish than the martyrs we read of earlier or the heroes in our movies?

It is because Jesus saw what WE would have to endure if He didn't yield to the will of His Father. And therefore He realized that the ultimate expression of love would have to be His death in order that the ultimate judgment would be avoided.

It would have been possible, even at this eleventh hour for Jesus to abort His mission and leave us to perish, but He doesn't consider that to be an option. Instead, He is begging the Father to carry out the mission some other way, but He doesn't ask Him to abandon it. Why? Because as horrible as the cup is, He knows that His immediate desire to be spared must bow His ultimate desire – that WE be spared. Jesus doesn't deny His emotions. In the midst of His suffering He obeys for the love of His Father and for His love for us!

Now for us what that means is that instead of perpetually attempting to change our circumstances or denying our desires (the good ones) we can trust that because Jesus took the cup, your deepest desires and your actual circumstances are going to keep converging until they eventually unite forever on the day of the wedding feast.

All of us are and have been looking for love. Unfortunately, as the old song goes, many of us have been looking in all the wrong places. But the love that Jesus showed at the cross – the kind of love that tore Him up that night in Gethsemane – the kind of love that allowed Him to be obedient in spite of His own pain – the kind that caused Him to be angry with the disciples when they failed to stay awake and pray for their own sakes; that kind of love is able to do away with a mountain of wrath.

The kind of love that knows our coming failures and still pays the ultimate price – and is still willing to take the same men who will flee and fail Him at the time He

needed them most – is the same love we need. No other person, no spouse, no family member, no parent or child can love you like that. Everyone else will let you down at some point. But the kind of love Jesus is showing in this passage will never leave you nor forsake you.