

The Obedient Master - Matthew 26:36-46
Argyle – 3/19/17 – *Encounters With Jesus* (Keller)

Introduction to Scripture

Since Tim Keller didn't write *Encounters With Jesus* as a Lenten series, it doesn't follow a sequence we would normally expect for a Lenten preaching series. A few weeks ago, for instance, we studied Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene after the resurrection. In a couple of weeks we will conclude this series by looking at the angel's announcement to Mary that she was going to give birth to the Messiah. And today we are looking at Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified.

John Aldridge gave us a little head start on this passage last week in his observation that Jesus' agony in the garden wasn't primarily his fear of physical suffering. His distress went much deeper. It came as a result of his recognition of the spiritual suffering he was about to experience when he would take our sins and the sins of the whole world upon himself on the cross. This is a hard passage to read, but an important one for us in understanding the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross.

(Read) (Pray)

In looking at what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane that night, we are given helpful insights into what it means to be the Savior, what it means to pray, and what it means to be loved.

What it Means to be the Savior

First, I want to look at what it means to be the Savior. We often talk about Jesus dying for our sins often in a pretty casual way. If, however, we really understood what it means that Jesus is our Savior, our tone of voice would be different.

One of the things the commentators point out is that Jesus didn't die as a martyr. His death was different in style and meaning than that of a martyr. For instance, when Stephen was stoned to death for his faith, Luke tells us in Acts 7 that he claimed to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father. He calmly asked Jesus to receive his spirit

John Huss, a Czech priest, was one of the early reformers about 100 years before Martin Luther. On the morning of his death when he was given the opportunity to recant he said, "In the same truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached, drawing upon the sayings and positions of the holy doctors, I am ready to die today."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged in a Nazi concentration camp on April 9, 1945. Knowing that he was facing execution, the day before he led a worship service for a small group of fellow prisoners, speaking on the phrase in Isaiah 53, "By his wounds we are healed." The service was interrupted by two members of the Gestapo who demanded that Bonhoeffer come with them. Everyone knew what this meant. As he was being led out, Bonhoeffer said to a fellow prisoner, "This is the end— for

me, the beginning of life.” The next day as he was led to the gallows at Flossenbürg, Bonhoeffer knelt and prayed. The camp doctor, who had to witness the execution, remarked, “I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. . . . In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.”

There is a long history of Christian martyrs dying with similar calm and courage and confidence. Yet, Jesus, their Lord pleaded with God the Father for his life and cried out as he was dying out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” D.A. Carson wrote, “Many of Jesus followers throughout the centuries willingly suffer martyrdom because of the strength Jesus’ death and resurrection give them. But Jesus went to his death knowing that it was his Father’s will that he face death completely alone as the sacrificial, wrath-averting Passover Lamb. As his death was unique, so also his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship.” That phrase - “sacrificial, wrath-averting Passover lamb” - helps us understand the difference between being a martyr and being the Savior.

Michael Green adds, “...nobody has ever had to face a fraction of what he had to face as he took responsibility for all the evil in the world. It was not the prospect of physical suffering, or even the appalling torture of crucifixion, that caused him to seat blood; it was the sin bearing that was so terrifying.”

As we listen in on Jesus pleading asking that the “cup” be taken from him, we are helped to understand what it means to be the Savior.

What it Means to Pray

A second thing I want to look at in this event is what it means to pray. Jesus fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Two more times he prayed the same thing.

One of the things we learn about prayer here is that it is okay to be honest with God in our prayers. Genuine prayer is always honest. Jesus doesn’t want to die the “sacrificial, wrath averting” death he is faced with and, so, tells the Father. He doesn’t try to construct a pious sounding request. He just blurts out, “If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” We can be honest with God about what we want in prayer.

A second thing we learn is that it is okay to pray for the same thing over and over again. In the span of about an hour, Jesus prayed the same thing three times. Didn’t he think the Father could hear him the first time? Of course he knew that God the Father heard him. Yet, Jesus prayed the same prayer two more times because this was important to him. Jesus warns us in the Sermon on the Mount about mindless repetition in our praying. That is a warning we need to take seriously when we pray the Lord’s Prayer together each week. But what we seen here in the Garden of Eden

is not mindless repetition, but the kind of honest and passionate praying that God welcomes.

A third thing we learn about prayer is that the ultimate goal is submission to the Father's will. Jesus prayer didn't end with "may this cup be taken from me," but with "yet not as I will, but as you will." What is it we really want when we pray - our will or God's will? In the abstract, that is not a hard question to answer. Of course, we want the will of our all loving, all knowing, all wise, all powerful God. In the heat of the moment we are not so sure. Prayer helps us move from wanting our will to desiring and submitting to God's will.

One of the study guides I used this week said, "Prayer has always been one of the most difficult disciplines for Christ's followers to master." I found some comfort in that statement as this has certainly been true for me. It is not nearly as hard for me to stay focused and interested in my Bible reading and study as it is in my praying. It is one of the reasons I have found being a part of our various prayer groups helpful. I think it is important to pray for our worship services, but joining with others at 9:30 on Sunday mornings to pray guarantees that I do that. I want to pray regularly for our missionaries, but joining with others at 6:30 on Tuesday mornings guarantees that I do that. Prayer is one of the great privileges and responsibilities we have as God's children. Watching Jesus wrestle with God in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane helps us understand more what it means to pray.

What it Means to be Loved

One other thing I want us to see in this passage is what it means to be loved. Jesus was sent here by God the Father with a mission. That mission was to die as the “sacrificial, wrath averting Passover Lamb.” The Passover lambs in Moses day were a type or foretaste of the ultimate Passover Lamb who was to come. Just as the blood on the doorpost of the Israelite homes cause the angel of God’s wrath to pass over their homes, so if we take shelter under the blood of Christ that was poured out on the cross, God’s wrath against our sin passes over us.

No wonder Jesus was in agony in the garden as he faced this kind of death. One of the things we don’t often realize when we read this passage is that Jesus had a choice. Like all of us, as a human being, he had free will. He had the choice to obey God the Father and accept the mission he had been given, or to go his own way. As he faced that choice it was in the context of his closest friends being unable to stay awake to support him and of another one of his followers about to betray him and with the knowledge that even if he went through with the Father’s plans, his future followers, folks like us, would often let him down.

What would you do in that situation? I know how hard it is for me to serve a meal at the soup kitchen when I sense that the person is grateful. Or, to work on the home that has been damaged by a hurricane when I don’t think the person will take care of it. Or, yesterday installing free smoke detectors with the fire department in homes big TVs. My love is so conditional and limited.

Well, it is a good thing that Jesus isn't like me. When faced with a sacrifice much greater than anything you or I have done or could imagine he chose out of obedience to his Heavenly Father and out of love for us to die on the cross, not as martyr, but as the Savior, as our Savior if we receive him as such. He did this knowing that even after believing in him and submitting to him as the Lord of our lives, that we would sometimes ignore him and disobey him and lose interest in him and bring disgrace on his name. In those moments we may think that Jesus will stop loving us and give up on us. Tim Keller points out that in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had the opportunity to do just that, but he didn't. He faced Hell for us in the garden, literally, and he didn't turn away. That's how great his love is for us. Keller writes, "His love for us has already taken everything that the universe could throw at it and held fast - and you think that you somehow are going to upset him? Is Jesus going to look at you and say, 'Well that does it! Infinitesimal existential torment was one thing, but I can only take so much?'"

If facing the "cup" of God's wrath in the Garden of Gethsemane didn't cause Jesus to give up on us, nothing we do will. That's why Paul wrote in Romans 8 that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Those of you who know that passage know that he goes through a list of things that might possibly separate us from Christ's love. Paul concludes, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither

height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39)

Knowing what Jesus was facing as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane and knowing the choice he faced and made because of his love for us, helps us to understand what it means to be loved by Jesus. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me how he expressed that love for me 2000 years ago. Therefore, I will never doubt it.

Conclusion

Jesus struggle in the garden the night before his death helps us to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Savior. His death was as the “sacrificial, wrath averting Passover Lamb” on our behalf. Therefore, we should never doubt his love for us. In paying the consequences for our sin on the cross he has already seen the worse that we can throw at him. Rather than wonder if he still loves us because of something we have done, again, let’s, empowered by that love, live as the disciples he has called and enabled us to be - investing ourselves in the spiritual disciplines that help connect us more deeply to him, obeying his commands, loving one another as he has loved us and loving him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹ “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”