

Communion

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] Now, this evening, as is very evident, we will be joining together at the Lord's table to remember and to give thanks for the death of Jesus in our place.

We will be reminded of his broken body in the bread that we eat. We will be reminded of the blood that he shed in the wine that we drink.

We will be reminded again that Jesus died for us. He died in our place. But it was not only his death that was vicarious or in our place, in the place of others.

The totality of his suffering endured as the appointed sacrifice for sin was vicarious.

It was in the place of others. And one aspect of Christ's suffering, one part of Christ's suffering, was the agony he endured at the prospect of what awaited him at Calvary, an agony that reached its deepest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[1 : 30] It was, of course, to the Garden that Jesus and the disciples directed their steps following their celebration of the Passover meal where this sacrament was instituted.

And Matthew records for us words that Jesus spoke to his disciples in Gethsemane. We've read them in the chapter that we read a few moments ago in Matthew chapter 26, and very particularly the words recorded in verse 38.

Then Jesus said to them, they are the reference particularly to the three, Peter, James, and John, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee.

Then he said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.

And these are the words of Jesus that I want to briefly reflect on this evening. I want to think about four aspects of Christ's sorrow.

[2 : 39] I want to think of the intensity of Christ's sorrow. That's maybe the aspect of his sorrow that is so pronounced and so very much before us in the very vocabulary that Jesus employs.

So we want to think a little bit about that, the intensity of Christ's sorrow. But then, of course, we need to think of the cause of Christ's sorrow. Why was he overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, as he himself describes the sorrow that he was experiencing?

So the intensity of Christ's sorrow, the cause of Christ's sorrow. But then also in this verse, we are confronted with what we're calling the need that accompanied Christ's sorrow.

This very sorrow produced in Jesus a very real need that he sought to be met. And we want to think about what that need was and how that need was met.

And then we will just close by making reference to the outcome of Christ's sorrow, or perhaps more particularly the death that was the cause of this sorrow, the outcome of Christ's sorrow.

[3 : 59] So let's think a little bit about this verse along these lines. What can we say concerning the intensity of Christ's sorrow?

The first thing that I want to propose or suggest on the basis of the text before us is that it was a sorrow of growing and developing and deepening intensity.

In the immediately preceding verse to the one that we're particularly focusing on in verse 37, we read, He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

The very language that Matthew uses there, that Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled, presents to us this reality that his sorrow was of a developing, of a growing intensity.

Now, when Matthew here speaks of Jesus as the one who began to be sorrowful and troubled, he's not saying, of course, that he had never been sorrowful before, that he'd never been troubled before, but that on this occasion, as he approached Calvary, as the hours were ticking by, there was a growing intensity in the sorrow, in the distress that he was subject to.

[5 : 25] We know that Jesus was characterized in significant measure by sorrow throughout his life.

Indeed, when we think of the manner in which he's described by the prophet, the prophet Isaiah, as he prophetically speaks of the suffering servant, he speaks of him and describes him as a man of sorrows, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

And to speak of somebody as a man of sorrows isn't simply to speak of somebody who occasionally, when the cause merits it, sorrows. That's true for all of us. But to speak of him as a man of sorrows goes beyond that.

He says that there is a sense in which sorrow characterized his incarnate existence. He was a man of sorrows.

He was, of course, a man also who rejoiced. He wasn't only a man of sorrows, but he is described using this language. And he was a man of sorrows because he was a man who knew why he had come into this world.

[6 : 35] He knew that he had come to die. This was his mission. And that's something we come across so often in the Gospels, how his self-consciousness, his self-awareness concerning his mission was so clear to him.

We imagine that that clarity was a clarity that grew and developed throughout his life. But certainly when we meet him in his public ministry, it's clear that he is very clear as to why he has come and what awaits him in due course in Jerusalem.

And, of course, that would have been the cause of sorrow for him. In Gethsemane, of course, as it is so imminent, there is an intensity that there had not been previously.

But sorrow was a feature of his emotional life. And, indeed, we would contend throughout his life. But that said, there is, without doubt, an intensity of sorrow that deepens as the dreadful hour approaches.

[7 : 44] So that's the first thing we can say concerning the intensity of Christ's sorrow, that it was of a growing intensity. But using the language that Jesus himself uses, we can also describe it as of overwhelming intensity.

As we say, this is what Jesus himself says. This is his own testimony there in the verse that we're considering. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Indeed, the different evangelists who record this occasion, Matthew and Mark and Luke, they seem to struggle to find the vocabulary that would do justice to what Jesus is experiencing.

And it ought not to surprise us, because I suspect that there is no vocabulary available to them to do justice to what was going on and to what Jesus was experiencing.

But they have to make do with what is available to them. And directed by the Spirit of God, they choose the words that at least approximate to describing what Jesus is experiencing.

[9 : 03] And the language they do use speak of the utmost degree of unbounded horror and suffering that Jesus endured there in Gethsemane.

He was deeply aggrieved. He was in the grip of quite unimaginable anguish. Luke doesn't limit himself to finding words that in some measure could describe the emotions that he was going through.

But he also describes for us the physical manifestation of his anguish, of the manner in which his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

And this sorrow that the evangelists struggle to try and describe for us, this sorrow gripped and pierced his very soul.

Again, using the words of Jesus himself, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow. The very depth of my being, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow.

[10 : 11] There is no part of me that is not sorrowful, that is not gripped by this anguish and grief that has overcome me in the light of what lies before me.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow. It was of an overwhelming intensity, but we can also say, and this of course is very much related, that it was of a deathly intensity.

Just picking up again on the language that Jesus himself employs, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. It's possible that Jesus speaks in this way simply to emphasize the extent and the depth of his sorrow to the point of death.

But I think it also suggests that the sorrow itself was of a nature, was of an intensity to almost provoke death itself.

His heart was near broken by the sorrow that he endures. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

[11 : 25] I'm this close to death itself, consumed and gripped by this sorrow. All this he suffered for you, for me.

All this he suffered in our place. But we can't speak meaningfully of the intensity of Christ's sorrow. We can't even speak, I don't think, very helpfully of the intensity of Christ's sorrow without considering the cause of Christ's sorrow. Why is it that Jesus is overwhelmed with sorrow in the manner that he himself describes?

Well, the evident, the immediate, the obvious cause would seem to be his impending death. But the fact that he is about to die, and we know that is true, we know that Jesus knew that he was about to die, that fact alone doesn't seem to adequately explain the sorrow that Jesus himself speaks of. Does mere death, if we can use even that language of mere death, we certainly don't want to belittle the horror of death, but does mere death explain the sorrow and the anguish?

[12 : 46] We know, and church history has provided us with many examples of martyrs who have faced death with joyful serenity and remarkable courage.

Their emotional state in the face of impending death would seem to have been very different to what we find in Jesus. Why is it that Jesus was gripped by sorrow and anguish to the extent that he evidently was, as we have it described for us here in his very own words?

The overwhelming sorrow is to be explained by the nature of the death that Jesus was to experience. It was not death as such that he feared, though it is worth recognizing that Jesus' understanding of why death existed at all was so much greater than ours that he would have appreciated the horror of death itself in a way that we do not.

But even recognizing that, we have to acknowledge that it was the nature of the death that he was going to face that particularly would explain the overwhelming sorrow that he describes.

This death that he was to die was the death, which is the wages of sin. Jesus himself, in this very passage, in the following verse, speaks of his death as a cup to be drunk.

[14 : 18] Notice, as he prays to the Father there, in verse 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.

And this image of a cup that Jesus uses in praying to the Father is not only an image of death, it is an image, a picture of death, drinking the cup, but it's not only an image of death, it is more solemnly an image of judgment.

His death was a drinking, or the drinking, of the cup of God's wrath, of God's anger towards sin, His righteous anger towards sin.

It was the cup that Habakkuk speaks of, as Jesse was speaking about this last Sunday evening, the cup from the Lord's right hand, the cup of God's wrath.

This is the cup that Jesus had to drink, and it is the prospect of dying such a death, drinking such a cup, that is the cause of this overwhelming sorrow that He speaks of.

[15 : 34] My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Now, we cannot begin to imagine or conceive of the anguish associated with such a death.

We have been spared not only the experience of such a death, for Jesus has died that death for us, but we've also been spared the capacity to conceive of what such a death would involve, of what sorrow would accompany such a death.

So, the cause of His overwhelming sorrow is death, but it is very particularly the kind of death or the nature of the death that He was to endure.

And very much tied in with this, as we think of the cause of this overwhelming sorrow, of this anguish, there is also the prospect that Jesus anticipates and is very aware of, the prospect of abandonment by the Father.

So, added to the death that He is going to die, and the kind of death that He is going to die, there is this foresight and the part of Jesus as to what that death will involve, and one of the most horrendous elements of it is that He will be abandoned by the Father.

[17 : 00] Jesus knew what His Father's purpose was. He knew that at the cross, in the words of the Apostle Paul, as He writes to the Corinthians, the Father would make Him, who had no sin, to be sin for us.

He would be made sin for us. This is what would happen at Calvary. At the cross, Jesus would bear the curse of sin and so experience desolation and abandonment.

He would cry those words we've heard so often, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And the anguish of Gethsemane is the anguish of anticipation of this cry of desolation, a cry that marks the hellish descent of the sinless Son of God, a descent into utter separation from the Father.

And as we consider how Jesus anticipates and is overwhelmed with sorrow and in anticipating what awaits Him at Calvary, we must stress that this cry of desolation was not simply Jesus expressing what He felt, but that wasn't actually what was happening.

As is sometimes suggested, yes, Jesus felt abandoned. That was what He felt, but of course He wasn't abandoned. No. Jesus was abandoned by the Father on Calvary's tree.

[18 : 33] If I could just quote from a New Testament theologian who died this past week in his 100th year, Charles Cranfield, his commentary on Romans, particularly well known, but also the author of other very helpful theological literature.

Well, he just died in this past week. And he speaks of this matter concerning Christ's cry of desolation. And he says this, the burden of the world's sin, his complete self-identification with sinners involved not merely a felt, but a real abandonment by his Father.

The Father could do no other as Jesus is made sin and as Jesus is accursed for us than to leave Him and to abandon Him.

And it was the prospect of this abandonment that was the cause of Christ's overwhelming sorrow. Now, as we speak of and as we stress this reality, we do, of course, recognize, and we must stress, that the time came in due course as Jesus was true to His calling that He was then vindicated by the Father.

And the resurrection, of course, is the Father's great act of vindication. And we can only imagine the great joy with which the Father rose in from the grave, having abandoned Him, in order that we might be saved, in order that salvation might be secured for sinners such as we are.

[20 : 12] It was love that led the Father to do what is so difficult for us to even conceive of. And so, when we think of the cause of this overwhelming sorrow, the cause, of course, is the death that He was to die, the nature of that death, and the prospect of, as He died, a sinner's death, so enduring this forsakenness, even from the One who had loved Him from all eternity.

But let's also move on and just briefly think of one other aspect of this that we find in this verse, and that is what we're talking about as the need that accompanied Christ's sorrow.

The need that accompanied Christ's sorrow. And to put it simply, we can say this, that Jesus needed help. He needed help. He needed company.

He needed the help and company of His Father, and He needed the help and company of His friends at this time, as He is gripped by overwhelming sorrow. And we find how He seeks out this help and this company.

We read in this passage, our focus is very particularly on one verse, but in what follows, we find Jesus praying to His Father. He prays to His Father.

[21 : 31] The question emerges, did His Father answer Him? We only come across silence. In terms of the Father's response to the Son's prayer.

You almost wonder if even in Gethsemane, He's already experiencing a measure of abandonment. But of course, that is not so. The Father did answer Jesus.

His very silence at the Son's inquiry as to the possibility of the cup passing from Him is the Father's answer. It is His eloquent answer. But we also have, in this matter of the Father's answers, Jesus seeks His company and seeks His help, seeks His fellowship at this time.

We also have, to provide greater insight, the passage that we read in Hebrews. And the passage that we read in Hebrews would seem to be describing this very scene in Gethsemane.

I'm not saying that what we read there in Hebrews is to be understood exclusively as describing this scene, but it certainly would seem to describe the scene here in the garden.

[22 : 37] We've read these words in Hebrews chapter 5. During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death.

Does that not seem to describe the scene here in Gethsemane? And then what do we read? And this is the very telling part of the verse for our purposes. Then we read, And He was hurt because of

His reverent submission.

He was hurt. There wasn't an audible answer from heaven, but He was hurt. In the garden then, He sought the help and company of His own Father.

But in the garden, He also seeks the company of His friends. What is it that Jesus needs from them? Well, what do we find? Well, He needs them to listen. In verse 38, He is speaking to them. Then He said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. He simply wants them to listen to what He's going through. They can't understand it.

[23 : 42] They can't identify with it in any meaningful measure, but He just wants them to listen. Jesus doesn't say, Well, there's no point in saying anything to them.

No, He needs their help and He wants them to listen. And so He speaks to them. This is what I am going through. This is what I am experiencing. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

They need to listen. But not only listen, He says to them, Stay here and keep watch with me. Stay here. He needs them to be there with Him, accompanying Him.

You might say, Well, what could they do? Well, they could do nothing, but they could be there. Just be there for Him. Stay here and keep watch.

Accompany me in this time of overwhelming sorrow. accompany Jesus in sorrowful solidarity, even if it was so difficult, perhaps even impossible for them to grasp the nature of the sorrow that He was enduring.

[24 : 57] And they are not simply to sorrow for Him, to sympathize with Him as they witness this sorrow that maybe they don't really understand. They also, and more significantly, they are to sorrow with Him, not just for Him, but with Him.

The sorrow and suffering of Jesus is in huge measure, and particularly the sorrow we're thinking about this evening, a unique and unrepeatable. But the need that accompanied His suffering is replicated in our suffering and in the suffering of others.

And we can learn from Jesus in this regard as to what we can do, what we need when we suffer, and how we can be of help to others who suffer. We need to listen.

We need to be there. We need to watch, to accompany. So often there's very little we can do, but we can listen, we can be there, we can accompany the very things often that we fail to do.

As the Bible also encourages us to do, we need to rejoice with those who rejoice, but also to weep with those who weep. But then finally, let's just notice very briefly the outcome of Christ's sorrow.

[26 : 17] And the outcome of Christ's sorrow is really the outcome of Christ's death that was, as we've already argued, the cause of His sorrow. And the outcome was and is our salvation.

It is the securing of forgiveness of sins for you and me. And again, we can turn to Hebrews chapter 5 and verses 7 to 10 where we've suggested that the language that we find there does seem to describe the garden.

We're not saying that that's the only occasion that it describes, but it certainly does seem to describe that occasion. But then we can go on and see what the passage goes on to say.

So let's just read again these verses in Hebrews chapter 5. During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save Him from death.

And He was hurt because of His reverent submission. Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered and once made perfect. And there's so much here, but we just want to focus on what follows.

[27 : 26] Once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. This was, this is, the outcome of Christ's overwhelming sorrow, of His embracing this awful death that lay before Him, of not flinching in the face of it.

This is the outcome that He became the source of eternal salvation for you and me. And we are here this evening, 2,000 years later, a group of believers here in the city of Aberdeen and we'll eat the bread and we'll drink the wine and we will testify that we are saved, that we know and experience forgiveness of sins because this was the outcome of Christ's suffering, of His sorrow, of His death, of His suffering in our place.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Son, Jesus. We do recognize that when we turn to a passage that says this, we're so conscious of our limitations, of how we but scratch the surface of what is recorded and we acknowledge that what is recorded does not do justice to all that would have occurred in the depths of Christ's soul.

And yet, we thank You that in some measure You help us and You direct us to appreciate something of what our Savior endured in our place, of the suffering that He was willing to endure, that we might be saved, that we might be forgiven, that we might be brought and enabled to be part of the family of God.

[29 : 37] And so, we thank You for this and we pray that these truths and these realities would help us even as we participate and as we eat of the bread and drink of the wine to reflect on one more aspect of all that Jesus has done for us.

And we pray in His name. Amen.