

Luke 18:31-34

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[0 : 0 0] 18. So, Luke's Gospel, chapter 18. We want to spend a little time thinking about that short section that we read just a few moments ago. They were just taking a break in the staff canteen when they heard the threatening rumblings and felt the earth tremble, and then the deadly landslide or mudslide engulfed them, and death took hold of so many with a vice-like grip. I'm talking, of course, about the tragedy that I've already made mention of in prayer at the iron ore mine in Brazil on Friday, where hundreds, it would seem, very tragically have lost their lives, buried alive when the dam collapsed and precipitated this deadly mudslide. So many widows, so many orphans, so many families engulfed in grief. Death is a cruel and merciless intruder in the human experience, and we recoil at the ugliness of death, and we ought to recoil at the ugliness of death. Death is an intruder.

It was not so at the beginning. And yet today, some might think very strangely, we will celebrate death, or more accurately, we will celebrate our death, the death that conquered death. In the face of the ugliness and power of death, it is good and necessary to remember and to celebrate the death that conquered death, the death that secured life for all who embrace the one who died and rose again.

Today, in the course of our service, we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper, a sacrament that draws our attention in a very vivid way to the bloody and cruel death of Jesus. And so, it is appropriate that we spend a few moments as we prepare to participate in the sacrament to reflect on that death. And we're going to do so in reference or with the help of the verses that we've read in Luke's gospel. In this passage, in these few verses, these four verses, we're given a number of insights into the death of Jesus that can help us, in a measure, grasp something of its significance, and so explain why, some 2,000 years later, we still remember and celebrate His death until He comes.

The passage in question there from verse 31 relates the beginning of the final journey of Jesus to Jerusalem. Jesus and the disciples, they traveled to Jerusalem on other occasions, but this is a significant journey because it is the last journey, the final journey of Jesus and His disciples to Jerusalem and to the death that awaited Him there. And as we read what is recorded for us, I think we can identify four key truths concerning Jesus' death. There may well be more than four, but there's four that I want to highlight and consider. And as we do, that I trust will help us to prepare to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of the death of Jesus. And if we wanted to give headings to these four aspects or truths, we could maybe do so in the following way. First of all, we want to think about a death announced, then also a death embraced, but then also death delivered or two death delivered, and then finally death conquered. So, four aspects that are touched on regarding the death of Jesus.

A death announced, death embraced, to death delivered, and death conquered. And let's think of each of these in turn. And first of all then, death announced. And if we had to expand that heading somewhat, we might do so in this way. Death announced by the Spirit. Notice there in verse 31, what the passage says. It says, Jesus took the twelfth side and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem, and then particularly what follows, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. Now, it's not my intention this morning to discuss the name that is used by Jesus to describe Himself or the title that He uses, the Son of Man, simply to say that Jesus, in using that title, is speaking about Himself. So, just to make that clear without, you know, further elaboration.

[5 : 30] And everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. The Colombian author and Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who died just three or four years ago, he wrote a novel with the title, Chronicle of a Death Foretold. And there is a sense in which the Old Testament is a chronicle is a chronicle of a death foretold. It is more than that, but it is certainly that, a chronicle announcing the coming, the life, and the death of the Messiah. And this is what Jesus is acknowledging as He declares to His disciples, everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. The death of the Messiah, the death of Jesus was written about and announced by the prophets. Or more precisely, as the heading, I hope, suggests, announced by the

Spirit of God through the prophets. The very language that Jesus uses here where He translated there in verse 31, and everything that is written by the prophets, the idea, the sense of it, everything that is written through the prophets or by means of the prophets. So, the author is the Spirit of God, but He communicates this announcement through the prophets. They are the mouthpiece, as it were, of the announcement that God makes, that the Spirit of God makes through them. And so, this is a death announced by the Spirit of God. And of course, when we turn to the Old Testament, we find how that is so, how on many occasions the death of the Messiah is announced. Sometimes in language it is very vivid and inexplicit, sometimes less so, but nonetheless clearly pointing towards these events surrounding the life and death and indeed resurrection of Messiah. Now, we don't have time this morning to go through the different and many occasions where these things were announced by or through the prophets. But if we were to focus on those passages that are particularly vivid, you know, we would turn to the passages in Isaiah that speak of the suffering servant, in Isaiah 49 and Isaiah 50, and then maybe very, very particularly and most vividly in Isaiah 53 from verse 3 to 7. Let me just read those two or three verses. They're familiar verses, I'm sure, for many of us here this morning. But in Isaiah 53 and from verse 3 we read, concerning the suffering servant, he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, like one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before her sheeters is silent, so he did not open his mouth, and we could go on. So there very vividly you have what Jesus is speaking about here when he says to his disciples, everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. These momentous announcements that we find in the Old Testament, well, they are about to be fulfilled. The time has come for their fulfillment.

When we think of other occasions in the Old Testament where the prophets were the means by which God announced the coming Messiah, and indeed the death of the coming Messiah, we also think of that dramatic picture that is painted in the prophecy of Zechariah, where the picture is painted there in chapter 13 of the shepherd being struck and the sheep being scattered, or the passage that we've already read in Psalm 22, but again, very vividly you have what Jesus is referring to here. Everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

The death that Jesus is anticipating to his disciples was announced by the Spirit of God. It was announced by God because God knew, and God knew because it was part of his eternal plan, a plan of salvation, a plan of salvation hatched in eternity, announced and executed in history, and remembered and celebrated even this morning. But note also the language that Jesus uses and the remarkable and profound implications of it. He speaks of everything that is written, and then he makes clear that everything that is written will be fulfilled. There is a certainty in what Jesus affirms. And when we think about what the implications of that are, it not only points to Jesus' remarkable grasp of the Old Testament Scriptures, but of the reality that God has His hands firmly on the steering wheel of the universe. You see, were it not so, it would not be possible for Jesus to announce with such confidence everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled.

[11 : 29] You know, there would have to be some caveats. Well, I imagine most of it will be fulfilled, but you never know. Something might stand in the way. You know, there might be something that kind of sends things awry.

But no, there's no need to have any caveats, no ifs or buts. There is this complete and absolute certainty that if God has announced that it will happen, then it will happen. And everything that has been announced will happen just as it has been announced. And of course, that has a very clear implication that the whole course of human history, everything that happens, even the most seemingly small and trivial detail, is all governed and ordered by God. God knows nothing of His plans being frustrated even by the most powerful who might seek to do so. And so that for us is a comfort as believers.

The God whom we worship, our Father God, is in control. In the words of the chorus that we sometimes sing, He's got the whole world in His hands. He's got the whole universe in His hands. He is in control.

As we think about Jesus here saying to His disciples also that everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled, it makes me imagine, and this maybe isn't such a significant point, but it makes me wonder about how remarkable it must have been for Jesus to read the Old Testament Scriptures with that insight, identifying that which was said about Him that perhaps we fail to identify.

You know, who knows, there's maybe many passages in the Old Testament that despite so much study by so many scholars that we've missed some of the messianic elements of them. But when Jesus read the Old Testament, He would have identified each and every one, and no doubt with great thrill and excitement, as He reads and sees in the Scriptures a mirror that points to Himself. We remember, of course, in that connection, it's a little bit of a tangent, I suppose, but we remember the disciples in the road to Emmaus and how Jesus opened up the Scriptures, everything that was said about Him. And they had this amazing sermon preached as they walked along the road. So, death announced by the Spirit. But in these verses, we also have described for us what we're describing or the way in which we're capturing it is death embraced. And if it was death announced by the Spirit, we could say death embraced by the Son.

[14 : 13] Again, in verse 31, Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem. You know, I began the sermon by referring to that terrible tragedy that is vivid in our memories, because it's just a day or two ago that it happened there in Brazil. And we know, of course, that the men and the women who were victims of that tragedy, they were snatched unawares by death.

You know, when they woke up that morning and headed to work, they had no notion, no conception of what would happen just a few hours into the day, snatched unawares. But not so with the death of Jesus. He was not snatched unawares by death. Rather, what we read here is of Jesus embracing death.

Jesus was no passive victim overtaken by tragic circumstances, but rather He decides to go to Jerusalem. And the language there is very clear. We are going up to Jerusalem. And everything that is written, and Jesus knew everything that was written, He knew what awaited Him. He knew what Isaiah had said of what the Messiah would suffer. And He's saying, well, I am going to where that will happen. I'm not fleeing from it, but rather I am confronting it, embracing it even.

In this decision, as He sets His face to Jerusalem, as He sets His face to the Holy City, this decision that He shares with the disciples, we are going up to Jerusalem, this was no random or spontaneous urge on the part of Jesus. Indeed, He had already on numerous occasions indicated to His disciples that this was His mission and destiny. Even if we were to limit ourselves to this Gospel and the Gospel of Luke, on a number of occasions, Jesus has already anticipated to His disciples that this is where He is heading.

If we just limit ourselves to a couple of those occasions. In chapter 9 and in verse 22, we read again Jesus speaking to His disciples, the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life. In the same chapter in verse 44, in Luke 9, 44, listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

[16 : 47] But they did not understand what this meant. And we could go on, on three occasions where it's very explicit, and on three or four other occasions when it's perhaps less explicit, but in the light of events, clear that that is what Jesus was referring to. Now on this occasion, in our passage in chapter 18, the detail that is provided is at a new level as it were, and it does suggest that what He is speaking about is so much more immediate. He will be turned over to the Gentiles, they will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. And on the third day, He will rise again. And as I say, that very detail introduces a note of immediacy and implies imminent fulfillment. And so, what we see here, what we witness here is Jesus embracing His death. Now, one thing to say about that, just to clarify and avoid misunderstanding, this is not to say that He somehow delights in His death.

And far from it, indeed, even in this Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus testifying to how He viewed His imminent death. In chapter 12 and in verse 50, we read, and this is really another of the occasions when He announces it, but the interesting thing about it is that we are given a sense of how He views what is about to occur. There in verse 50, He says, but I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed. So, when we say that Jesus embraces His death, we're talking about the manner in which He deliberately hands Himself over to death.

Not that He delights in death, but that He embraces death in our place. When we think about, or when we make this clarification that to embrace death is not to delight in death is, of course, also so clearly evident when we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And He's praying that anguished prayer, let this cup pass from me. And we're told, we're described how He sweated as it were drops of blood. But He does embrace death in a deliberate and decided manner. And the question is, why so? Why does He embrace death? Well, you could maybe suggest three overlapping reasons and just mention what they are without developing them in any detail. I think in the first place, He embraces death because of His understanding of His mission. We've already mentioned how He reminds the disciples of everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man. And Jesus knew what was written about the Son of Man. He knew what His mission was. And so, He embraces death because death was central to His mission. He came to die.

Why? Why else could we say that He embraces death? And these things are very connected. Well, He embraces death because of loyalty to His Father. It was His delight to do His Father's will.

He was ever obedient to His Father's will. And His Father had sent Him to die. And so, out of loyalty to His Father, He fulfills that mission and embraces death. And thirdly, and again, these are all connected out of love for His people. He knew what His death would accomplish. He knew that His death was a death in the place of others to secure for sinners such as you and me, and forgiveness and eternal life. And He so loved His people that He embraced the death that He had to die in their place. And so, even this morning when we gather around the Lord's table, let's ever be mindful of the love that drove Jesus to embrace His death at Calvary. So, death announced by the Spirit, death embraced by the Son. But then, thirdly, death delivered, or rather, to death delivered by the Father. Notice what we read there in verse 32.

[21 : 06] We read there, Jesus is speaking about the Son of Man. He chooses to speak of Himself in this way. And He says of the Son of Man, He will be turned over to the Gentiles. And then it goes on to describe all the indignities that He would suffer. But particularly this expression, He will be turned over to the Gentiles.

And of course, that rather begs the question, well, who does the turning over? And we could maybe give different answers to that question, all of which would be true in a measure. We could think of Judas as being one who turned Him over. We could think of the Jewish authorities turning Him over to the Gentiles, particularly when it speaks of them being turned over to the Gentiles, then maybe that would fit particularly the Jewish authorities who had first received Him from Judas. And then, because of the needs of the time, the only way they could secure the outcome that they desired was by handing Him over to the Gentiles, to the Roman authorities. We might think of Pilate as being one who turned Him over, certainly to death. And of course, these are all true answers to the question, who turned Him over?

But in the light of all that we read in the Scriptures, we can affirm very solemnly that ultimately, Jesus was turned over by God, by His own Father. Isaiah speaks of how it was the Lord's will to crush Him, even in verses that we've already read this morning. Luke, in the book of Acts, speaks of how Jesus was handed over or delivered to His enemies by God's set purpose and foreknowledge.

And so, in God's plan of redemption, He is the one who turns over His Son to death in the place of sinners. And we can see perhaps a parallel there with the manner in which Israel in the Old Testament was, and in different points in Israel's history, handed over to the Gentile nations for the punishment of their sin. You know, when Israel rebelled against God, despite all that they received from God, how they foolishly and stubbornly rebelled against Him, there would be occasions when God handed them over to be punished by the Gentiles. And the Gentiles were used by God to punish His own people and draw them back to Himself. And so, in a kind of parallel way, Jesus was handed over by the Father to bear God's just anger for the sins of His people. And so, hence, on the cross, we hear the cry of Jesus, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you handed me over to this death?

Of course, some, when this is affirmed, see it as a very cruel action on the part of God the Father. There's the famous expression that has blasphemously been coined, describing the Father's role, if indeed this is what He has done as cosmic child abuse. Of course, we reject entirely such a caricature, such a blasphemous caricature. What is it that drove the Father to hand over His Son to death? It was love for you and me. For God so loved the world that He gave, that He turned over, that He delivered His Son to death. And as we think of what He was turned over to, we have all the, or some of the descriptions there in the verse about Him being mocked and insulted and spat upon and flogged and killed.

[24 : 53] But then also we have what is said about the disciples not understanding any of this. And that maybe points to the solitude that Jesus experienced in His death. Even His nearest and dearest, even His closest friends, entirely bemused by what He was saying, not able to comprehend what He was anticipating and much less what He was about to experience. So, to death delivered. Death announced by the Spirit, death embraced by the Son, to death delivered by the Father, but finally death conquered. You see, there in verse 33, Jesus doesn't stop at His death, but He says to His disciples, on the third day, He will rise again. The prophets and Jesus don't just announce His death, they also announce His resurrection. And Jesus does so in such a matter-of-fact manner, on the third day, He will rise again.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are presented in the Bible as practically a single event. There could be no other outcome following His death. Jesus here clearly is in no doubt, He will rise again.

This is not an aspiration, this is not a hope, this is an absolute certainty. He will rise again. Death, the wages of sin could have no permanent hold on the sinless one. Vindication and victory, were of necessity, were of necessity just around the corner from Calvary. There were no doubts. There was, in a very real sense, no risk involved of this not being the outcome, no possible obstacle to His victory and vindication. The same Father who turns Him over will, on the third day, raise Him up again.

And we remember the death of Jesus, as we'll do this morning, in the light of, or together with, His resurrection. And in that sense, it is fitting that we celebrate the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day. On this, the first day of the week, when we celebrate that Jesus rose from the grave, we can also remember the death that He died in our place. And so, as we remember the death, and all that it secured for us, let us also be mindful of and celebrate that the one who died rose again from the grave. Indeed, we'll close our service by singing the hymn, Christ is risen, He is risen indeed, so that these two realities are never prized apart. The one who died rose again. And so, in these verses, we identify some of these aspects of the death of Jesus, announced by the Spirit, embraced by the Son, to death delivered by the Father, and followed by the resurrection, death conquered by the death.

And resurrection of Jesus. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the manner in which we do indeed find in the Old Testament Scriptures all that is said concerning the coming of Messiah. We thank You for the manner in which each of these prophecies were fulfilled in the life and ministry and death and resurrection of our Savior. We thank You for Jesus. We thank You for the clarity with which He understood the mission that He had been given, and for the courage with which He embraced His mission and embraced death itself in our place. We thank You for all that His death has secured, that He died in our place, bearing upon Himself the punishment that we were due. And we thank You that the one who died rose again triumphant from the grave. And we pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.