

# Communion

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Luke's Gospel and chapter 18. Luke chapter 18, and we're going to be thinking a little about the verses that we read there from verse 31 to verse 34. This is a communion service, and before us we have displayed the elements, the bread that speaks of Jesus' broken body, the wine that speaks of His shed blood.

And what we will be doing just in a few minutes is remembering and indeed celebrating the death of Jesus. Now that for us is maybe a very familiar thing to do, and familiarity may lead us to think it a very ordinary thing to do. But in the measure that we're able to take a step back and consider what we are to do, celebrating a death, I think we are able to see that it is a very peculiar thing to do. That anybody would celebrate a death does seem a very strange thing altogether.

Why would we do such a thing? Why would we celebrate the death of anybody? Well, I want to think a little bit about that, and to do so with the help of the verses that we've read there in Luke's Gospel.

There in these brief verses, we're granted a number of insights into the death of Jesus that will help us in a measure grasp the significance of His death and explain why 2,000 years later, here in Aberdeen this Sunday morning, we will remember and celebrate the death of Jesus Christ. Now, the passage that we've read relates for us, the beginning of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and ultimately to Golgotha and Calvary.

And in these verses, verses 31 to 34, I want us to notice five truths concerning Jesus' death that we might ponder on just for a moment as we prepare to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of this death. And I'll mention what these five truths are, and then we can think of each in turn. I want us, first of all, to notice that this is a death that is embraced by Jesus. It's embraced by Jesus. But we'll also notice in these verses that it is a death that is announced by the Spirit, by the Spirit of God.

[ 2 : 5 9 ] We'll notice also this, at first sight, strange reality that in His death, Jesus was delivered by the Father, delivered to death by the Father. We'll notice also that His death, certainly His announcement of the Spirit of God, and His death, was revealed by the Spirit of God. And He said, but also, finally, that His death was followed by the resurrection. These five aspects that are touched on in these verses, embraced by Jesus, announced by the Spirit, delivered by the Father, inconceivable to the disciples, and followed by the disciples, and followed by the resurrection. First of all, then, this truth that we find in these verses, that the death of Jesus was embraced by Jesus Himself. Notice that in verse 31, we read, Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem.

We are going up to Jerusalem. Jesus sets His face to Jerusalem. He is decided about where they are going and indeed why they are going there. He had been to Jerusalem on a number of occasions during His earthly ministry, but this is the final journey to Jerusalem. And so, a particularly poignant one as He heads to Jerusalem, heads to Jerusalem, knowing that death awaits Him there. This decision to go to Jerusalem was no random or spontaneous determination on the part of Jesus. Jesus had already on a number of occasions indicated to His disciples that this was His destiny, to go to Jerusalem to die. If we limit ourselves simply to noticing how in Luke's gospel, Jesus is recorded as instructing His disciples in this matter. Notice, for example, we'll just make note of one or two verses that speak of this in chapter 9, verse 22. The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. In the same chapter at verse 44, listen to what Jesus says again to His disciples. Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you. The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. And then if we just move forward to chapter 18, then we'll move forward to chapter 18 and, of course, the passage that we're considering. There again, with such detail, Jesus indicates to them that this is His destiny. Indeed, the detail provided in the verses we're particularly concerned with, the shocking detail turned over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him, and kill Him. The shocking detail introduces a note of immediacy and the suggestion of imminent fulfillment, which, of course, is precisely the case. This indication of Jesus as to what was awaiting Him was something that was very imminent for Him. He was on this final journey to Jerusalem. So, Jesus, knowing what awaits Him, embraces His death, if we can use that language. Now, we use that language with some reservation, or at least carefully, because we're not suggesting for a moment that somehow Jesus delights in His death. Far from it.

We can notice the language that He uses, again, in this same gospel concerning the death that awaited Him. In chapter 12 and in verse 50, we read, But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed.

There He's speaking of His death, and He speaks of the distress that accompanies the very thought of it. But, of course, even more powerfully, subsequent to these words to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, we are familiar with the great distress that Jesus experienced at the prospect of His imminent death. How He prayed to the Father, Let this cup pass from Me. How He sweated, as it were, drops of blood. So, when we speak of Jesus embracing His death, it's not that He delights in the prospect of death, but He embraces it in the sense that He is persuaded that this is what He has come for.

Maybe just developing a little more that reality of Jesus embracing death, and why is it that He embraces death? Well, He embraces death because of His own understanding of His mission. He came to die. Some of you will have seen, and I think I've made reference to this before the advent of Save the Children, no child born to die. And it's a powerful way of expressing their concern to help those who are born in very difficult circumstances, and their life is threatened. No child born to die. But, of course, in the case of Jesus, this was a child who was born to die.

[ 8 : 41 ] He came to die. This was at the heart of His mission. He came to hand His life over to death. And so, as He understands that this is His mission, so He embraces death, and He is able to declare to His disciples, we are going up to Jerusalem. But this embracing of death is not only because of His understanding of His understanding of His mission, of the need for Him to die in the place of sinners, such as you and me, but also His loyalty to His Father. It was His delight to do the Father's will.

And He knew full well that this was His Father's will. And so, out of obedience and loyalty to His Father, He embraces death. But He embraces death also, and these things all go together, out of love for His people, out of love for us, we who know what it is to experience forgiveness of sins, grounded in what Jesus has done, out of love for us, He embraces death. Out of love for these very disciples who were clueless as to what He was talking about, out of love for them, out of love for us, He embraces death. So, the death of Jesus that we remember and celebrate today is a death that was embraced by our Savior. But we notice in these verses not only that His death was embraced by Jesus, but this was a death announced by the Spirit. Then in verse 31, we pick up the reading,

Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. So, Jesus makes explicit reference to the manner in which this death had been announced by the Spirit through the prophets. We know that the Spirit of God is the one who is the author of the Scriptures, but He authored the Scriptures through the prophets. And here Jesus speaks of how the prophets had announced His death in time gone by.

Everything that was written concerning the Son of Man will be fulfilled. Now, we know that in the Old Testament there are many references to the coming of Messiah, and particularly to the coming of a suffering servant. That, of course, very especially in the book of Isaiah, in chapter 49 and chapter 50, and perhaps most famously or most vividly in chapter 53 of the prophet Isaiah, where the suffering servant is presented to us. And we're familiar with the powerful language of that passage. 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. And Isaiah goes on.

[12:18] All that had been written by the prophets about the Son of Man, his death announced by the Spirit, the words of the prophet Zechariah, the shepherd that will be struck, the poignant words of Psalm 22 that we've already read this morning. The death of Jesus was announced by the Spirit of God, and it was announced by God because God knew that this is what was going to happen.

And God knew that this was going to happen, not only because of his omniscience, but because this was in his eternal plan, indeed at the very heart of his eternal plan for the saving of sinners.

A plan of redemption hatched in eternity, announced and executed in history and celebrated today. So, Jesus embraces his death. This death is a death announced by the Spirit. But we can also say of the death of Jesus that he was delivered by the Father. Again, if we turn to our passage in verse 32, there Jesus announces he will be turned over. He, a reference to the Son of Man, that is to himself, he will be turned over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. Turned over to the Gentiles, which begs the question, well, who was to turn over Jesus to the Gentiles? We might respond, well, Judas. That's what Judas did, didn't he? He turned him over to his enemies.

We might speak of the Jewish religious authorities who turned over Jesus to Pilate. And of course, that is so. But it is also so, ultimately, that Jesus was turned over by God the Father. It's God the Father who turned over his Son to death. Listen to the language that we find in Acts chapter 2 and verse 23, speaking of Jesus. This man, this man Jesus, was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. And you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

And Jesus, of course, knew that this was so. And that, in part, explains his cry from the cross.

[ 14 : 54 ] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? In the words of the prophet Isaiah, it was the Lord's will to crush him. Just as Israel was handed over to the Gentile nations for the punishment of their sin, the punishment of Israel's sin and rebellion. So, Jesus was handed over to bear God's wrath for the sins of his people for us. Is this cruelty that the Father would hand over his Son to such a death as some have blasphemously suggested? Cosmic child abuse is one particularly horrible phrase that has been used to describe this handing over of Jesus to this death in our place. This is not cruelty.

This is love. This is love. For God so loved the world that he gave, that he turned over his Son to die in our place. And as we know, Jesus was no unwilling victim. He was in full accord with the divine plan of redemption and so embraces this death that he is turned over to, delivered by the Father.

But also, these verses speak of the disciples' response. What Jesus is speaking of is inconceivable to them. They misunderstand or simply don't understand what it is that he is speaking about.

Then in verse 34, the disciples did not understand any of this. They didn't have an inkling of what it was he was on about. It was not the first time that he had spoken of his death. We've noticed that already here certainly with great detail, and yet they did not understand. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about. Just as in his being delivered to death, we see the interplay, if we can use that word, of human responsibility and divine purpose. So, here, the disciples are responsible and in a measure culpable for failing to understand, and yet, as is explicitly stated, it was in God's purpose that they would not understand.

His death, inconceivable, misunderstood by his disciples, are not understood at all. It's not so different today. How many misunderstand the death of Jesus, those who even give any thought to it?

[ 17 : 34 ] How many think of it as an act of heroism alone, as an act of example of selfless love alone? And yet, misunderstand that at the heart of this death is Jesus dying in the place of sinners, dying in our place, a substitute for us. These things rejected by many, ignored by many, but this is what Jesus is doing as he dies. But there's a final thing I want us to note this morning that these verses speak of, and that is that this death was followed by the resurrection. Notice there in verse 33, on the third day he will rise again. The death and resurrection of Jesus are presented in the scriptures so often as practically a single event. And they're presented in that way, certainly for this reason, among others perhaps, that there could be no other outcome than the resurrection. Jesus himself, here as he faces death, was in no doubt, on the third day, he, the Son of Man, will rise again.

Death, the wages of sin, could have no permanent hold on the sinless one. Vindication and visible victory were of necessity just around the corner from Calvary. No doubt, no risk, no possible obstacle to his victory. And we, this morning, remember the death of Jesus in the light of his resurrection. And in that sense, it is so fitting that it is on the Lord's Day that we remember and celebrate his death, while at the very same time we remember and celebrate his resurrection. For the two are married together. He died in our place, but he died to rise again, to be raised by the Father in victory and in resurrection life, which he now shares with us, his people. So, yes, he died, but on the third day he rose again, triumphant from the grave, having conquered death and sin and guilt for us and in our place. So, the death of Jesus that this morning we remember and celebrate, a death that was embraced by Jesus, conscious and understanding the reason he had come, in loyalty to his Father, in love for us, a death announced by the prophets, a death in which he was delivered by his own Father, misunderstood by the disciples, and gloriously followed by the resurrection. Let us pray.