

Communion Preparatory Service

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 March 2023

Preacher: Rev. Iain Thompson

[0 : 00] We can turn back to Mark chapter 14. And we can read again from verse 33.

And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

Remain here and watch. Now, tonight and tomorrow morning, I'm hoping that we'll be able to get some insight into the sufferings that the Lord Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It was almost midnight when Jesus and his disciples came to the outskirts of the Garden.

It would have been a moonlit evening because it was the time of the Passover. And they had just shared the Passover. And it was during that time in the upper room that the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper.

[1 : 23] And after that, we learn from John's Gospel that he gave them quite a lengthy discourse, which we have recorded in John 14 through to 17.

And it was after that lengthy discourse that they made their way to the Garden. Now, we know that this was a favorite place for Jesus to go to and at times took his disciples with him.

This is a place that he found where he could pray to his Father in Heaven. Now, when they came to the Garden, he asked eight of his disciples to remain at the gate.

And he invited Peter, James, and John to come into the Garden with him. Now, these three had also been privileged to accompany him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

But how different was going to be the view that they would have of Jesus as they entered into the Garden?

[2 : 44] On the Mount of Transfiguration, he gave them an insight into his divine glory. But now they were going to witness his real humanity and all the weaknesses that belong to humanity.

And they were going to witness the fear and the dread that came into his experience at the thought of having to drink the cup that the Father had placed in his hands to drink in order to save sinners such as we are.

They were going to witness, in a measure, the agony of his soul. Obviously, they couldn't see into his soul. They could only see the effects that his agony of soul had upon him in his person.

And they were the ones that were privileged to witness this so that it might be recorded and that we might get some insight into the real humanness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And what made him the perfect high priest for sinners such as we are. Because if he was removed from our suffering, then we wouldn't have the same confidence in praying to him.

[4 : 23] But because we believe that he suffered far more than we can ever suffer in this life, we have confidence in coming to Jesus as one who can fully understand us, who can fully sympathize with us when we're going through whatever difficulties we're going through as a result of the weakness of our own flesh.

Now, the first thing I want to consider is the horror of the cup that has been placed into his hands.

Jesus and the three disciples that were with him had hardly begun to enter into the garden when he said to them that he was greatly, or where they witnessed that he was greatly distressed and troubled.

And he himself said to them, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. He was weighed down with grief, and by the gloom of the darkness that was now beginning to encompass his soul, he was astounded.

He was shocked at what he was now beginning to experience. And his disciples were equally shocked because this would probably have been the first time that they had witnessed him experiencing, or showing that he was experiencing great trouble within his own soul.

because as we read through the Gospels, what we ordinarily see is one who is usually composed, one who appears to be in full control of every situation that they encountered, and one whom they had seen so composed as he spoke about his own death just shortly before this, and so in control when he gave them the glorious promises that we have in John's Gospel, assuring them that they wouldn't be left as orphans when he died, that he would send the Holy Spirit to help them and to comfort them.

[6 : 56] But now we read that he became greatly distressed and troubled. Now the English words that are used to translate what has been described here fail to bring out the full force and emphasis of the original language.

For the anguish of soul which they reflect went far beyond all that he had yet encountered. And the anguish of soul that he experienced can't be put into words. Even the Greek language that is more expressive for the sufferings that he suffered at this time come far short, we believe, of what he actually experienced.

He no doubt had suffered many pangs before this because, as Isaiah prophesied concerning him, he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

But we don't read that the disciples had seen any of that side to the Lord prior to this occasion when he entered into the garden.

[8 : 25] He was no stranger to sorrow and to grief. But now his sorrows are affecting him in a new way.

The shadows of Gethsemane, which are bringing before him the death that is now so near, has filled him with distress.

And his distress can't be hidden from the eyes of the disciples that he brought along with him. All that has gone before when he experienced grief and sorrow is now intensified numerously.

It's intensified to a far greater degree than anything that he would have experienced prior to this.

Because his vision of sin has never been so vast and so terrible as it now appears to be before his eyes.

[9 : 47] And the reason that we say that is because it doesn't seem to have affected him up until this point in the same way that it's now affecting him.

Because he's drawing closer to what he's now going to have to suffer. And it's similar to ourselves when we learn of something that we're going to have to experience in the future.

It's easy for us not to worry too much about it because it's not imminent. But as it draws closer we begin to worry more about it and we begin to think about it.

And the same would have been true of the Lord Jesus Christ as he was now drawing closer to the death that he was going to have to suffer. He had seen sin.

He had seen the devastation that sin had caused in the experience of mankind. But now he's seen sin with all the terrible pains that are associated with the penalty of it.

[11 : 04] And he's beginning to tremble. His soul is beginning to experience a grief and a sorrow that he has never experienced before this point.

and his soul is beginning to suffer the violence of the powers of darkness as they begin to encompass his soul.

And it's thrown him into an experience that he never experienced where his emotions have been turned upside down.

It's as if a vast tsunami has just been released and flooded his soul. And we've all seen pictures on the television of tsunamis as the wave hits.

Nothing can stand in its way. It sweeps everything aside. And that's similar to the experience that the Lord is now beginning to experience in his soul.

[12 : 25] It's as if the tsunami, the tidal wave, has begun to break over his soul, and it's sweeping aside all his human resources.

And it's bringing before him the weakness of the human flesh to stand in the way of this power that is now beginning to make its presence felt.

The power of darkness, the power of death as it's beginning to make its presence felt as it tries to snatch his soul and bring it down into the depths of hell.

Now, Mark is the only one of the gospel writers that uses words that give a more graphic picture of the horror that has now encompassed his soul.

He is greatly distressed and troubled. For those of you who are familiar with the authorized version, it's translated, he became sore amazed.

[13:54] And I think that translation gives us to see that there's more to this than what we usually associate with distress and trouble.

That this has shocked and rocked his soul to the foundations. And that he's beginning to experience a darkness similar to the experience that Abraham had when he experienced that strange darkness that fell upon him and filled him with horror.

Now, the root idea of the word that's translated trouble is that he was stunned. He was shocked. It was as if he was taken completely by surprise. And he felt that this was the beginning of the dreaded cup that he was going to have to drink.

The dreaded storm that was now bursting over his head. And it shocked him. It shocked him out of the calm that he had just recently experienced in fellowship with his disciples in the upper room.

[15:27] And it stunned him and filled him with grief. And we're told that he was greatly distressed.

Now, that word that's translated there gives us a deeper insight into the agony that he was experiencing in his soul.

The first word, the first Greek word that's translated trouble, gives us to understand the shock and the horror that's hidden.

But now, this word that's translated for us greatly distressed, is a word that helps us to see the effect that this has had upon him.

It adds another element to the sorrow that he was beginning to experience. And it's giving us a greater sense of the intensity of the suffering of soul that he's experiencing here in the garden.

[16:45] And this is before he actually dies. This is an anticipation of what's going to happen the following day.

This is a realization as the Lord is giving him to see the ugliness and the horror of sin and the great penalty that our sins deserve, which he knows that he will have to exhaust in the following day.

And it causes him to be deeply distressed. Now the word that is translated there, greatly distressed, is only used one more time in the New Testament.

And it's used by Paul in describing an experience that Epaphroditus had at a point that he was at death's door in a strange land, longing that he might see a friendly face.

And it was said of Epaphroditus that he was greatly distressed. Christ. And that gives us an insight into the experience that the Lord Jesus Christ is experiencing here.

[18:12] He's realizing I'm far away from home. I'm in a strange experience that I've never experienced before.

And I would love to be in fellowship with those that I was in fellowship with before I came down to this world. This strange world that is alien to my nature, where there doesn't appear to be any friendly face to give me comfort.

comfort. And he's experiencing that he's far away from the father's bosom, which he enjoyed with him from all of eternity.

Now, Epaphroditus, when he was in Rome, was very sick and near to death. And he was hungering for the comfort of a friendly face.

And that's similar to the experience that the Lord Jesus Christ has here. He's homesick for the father's presence, because he's far away from his home.

[19:28] He's now beginning to enter into a new phase of his experience. It was an infinite step that he took by coming down from heaven to earth.

death. But this is, if we could say, a greater infinite step, as he's now beginning to experience descending into the bowels of death, and the powers of darkness being unleashed against his soul.

And where he finds that his human resources seem to be failing, and seem to be being swept away, and that he's fearing that he's not going to be able to stand.

Now, no words can clearly give us to understand what the Lord is experiencing here, when he experiences this great sense of terror that he's experiencing in his soul, and where he himself confesses to the three that are with him, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

My soul. He had only spoken of a soul once prior to this occasion, and it was just recently on his way up to Jerusalem and Bethany, where he used that phrase to describe that his soul was troubled, as he's throwing nearer, in anticipation of the death that he's going to have to suffer, it's beginning to become clearer for him, and the clearer it's becoming for him, the more it's causing his

soul to be troubled.

[21 : 32] Now, the soul is, as you know, speaking of the inner being, the real person, because he hasn't yet suffered anything physically.

His face has not yet been marred more than the sons of men. His body hasn't yet been reduced to a bloody pulp under the lashes of the Roman whips.

He's not talking about the sufferings of his body that he's going to have to suffer. He's talking about the sufferings of his soul that he's already beginning to suffer.

And he's suffering them as he anticipates what awaits him at Calvary on the following day. The horror that fills his soul was due to his foresight of the load of sin that was shortly to be placed upon his shoulder where he was going to become the scapegoat and where he was going to have to carry the sins of his people and where he was going to have to go into the wilderness of hell in order to make atonement for the sins of his people.

And he's seeing the great weight that that sin is now beginning to bring upon him. And he senses the shame and the guilt that's attached to these sins that he's going to bear.

[23 : 22] He had never any reason to experience shame. His conscience was never going to convict him of him being guilty of anything because he had never sinned.

Satan could find nothing in him. He was the lamb without spot and without blemish. Sinless, harmless, undefiled.

He had never experienced shame and guilt, but he was going to experience it now as the sins of his people were placed upon him.

And he began to understand the horror of what sin brought into the experience of mankind. And he was beginning to understand the wrath that sin deserved.

And he was beginning to experience that wrath as it was beginning to burst over his head as the just reward for our sins.

[24 : 31] Because the wages of sin is death. And it's not physical death. death. It's spiritual, eternal death. And that's the cup that he was going to have to drink.

He was going to have to exhaust the eternal and infinite wrath of God in order to make atonement for our sins.

And the darkness that begins to encompass a soul here in death's enemy. It's only a faint shadow of the great darkness that he was going to go into on the cross out of which he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And it was the clear prospect of that that made him very sorrowful, greatly distressed and troubled. the psalmist in Psalm 116 prophesied that this would be his experience, where at the beginning of the psalm he says, the pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of hell laid hold on me.

[26 : 02] death was closing in on him. The power of darkness has now been unleashed.

He himself had told the disciples, the hour has come. This is the hour of the power of darkness. darkness. And that power is making its presence felt, as the psalmist said, the pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of hell laid hold on me.

His soul has been hemmed in on every side. Sorrow was pouring into the depth of his soul. And although it was a bright night outside, because it was a moonlight night, there was no moonlight in the depth of his soul.

He was entering into deep darkness, and he knew that it was going to get greater, as he would continue to drink that cup that the father had placed into his hand.

The weight of the woe that had befallen him seemed enough to crush the very life out of him. And he was beginning to feel his body sink under the weight of the great burden that had been placed upon him.

[27 : 44] there have been those who have died as a result of the sheer terror that they've experienced, because it was too much for them to bear.

People have died of fright. died. And it would seem that the Lord was beginning to fear that his human resources would not be able to stand, and that it was testing him to the very last limit of his power.

He was right up against the gates of death. And in the garden, it's as if he's looking into the jaws of hell.

And he's seeing, I'm going to have to go in there. I'm going to have to enter into the very depth of everything that death contains.

And this is what he's seeing as he acknowledges to his disciples, my soul is very sorrowful even unto death.

[29 : 09] His whole human nature is distraught and at the point of collapse. Now, unlike us, sin has not marred the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ.

sin has marred our vision. And it will continue to do so although our vision is being cleared, the more we are being sanctified.

And the more we begin to see the glory of God, and in the light of the glory of God, we begin to see the horror of our own sinful nature.

And the longer you've been on the road as a Christian, the more you realize just how sinful you actually are. And you haven't yet begun to understand the full extent of your sinfulness and your depravity.

Why? Because our vision of it is marred. But Jesus' vision of sin was not marred. He could see the horror of sin.

[30 : 24] He could see the devastation that sin has caused. And now he can see into what sin deserves. And he's looking face to face with death.

And he's staring hell in the eyes. Now, most people today have a peaceful deathbed.

And that's due to medication which helps people not to suffer as much physically if they're going through some terminal illness.

But it's also as a result of ignorance. In former generations, it wouldn't be unusual to hear of somebody that was dying and being terrified as to what awaited them if they were out of Christ. And the reason for that is they were better versed in their Bibles than this current generation is. And they had heard more about hell than the current generation have.

[31 : 51] And they had a small understanding of the terror that awaited them if they died without Christ as their saviour.

And when it came to die, they were afraid. But you very rarely hear anybody being afraid now.

Why? Because it's ignorance. and they believe that if they're suffering, that once death comes, they'll be out of their pain and some people welcome death.

But if they knew what is contained in death, they would be terrified of it if they haven't got Jesus as their saviour.

the reason that they're not terrified is because they can't see. And they can't see what death contains.

But Jesus could see. He could see very clearly what death contains. And Jesus was terrified. May God grant that he would bless to us these thoughts.

[33 : 03] Let's pray. Lord, Father in heaven, it's only as we begin to understand the sufferings of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, that we begin to appreciate the great love that you had for this world when you were prepared to sacrifice him, when you were prepared to give him over to the awful death that he would have to die in order to redeem a people for yourself because you loved them and you loved them from before the foundations of the world and the lamb was sacrificed from before the foundations of the world.

This was your eternal plan. And our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, your only begotten Son, was willing to fulfil your plan.

He came to do the work that you had given him to do. It was his great delight to do it. And we see him now as he anticipates the great suffering that he was going to have to experience in the fullness of time, that his body shrinks back from it.

And as we consider tomorrow, he cried out to you if it were possible for this cup to pass from him. Lord, help us to understand something of that suffering so that we might love you more for the love with which you have loved us.

Lord, lead us and go before us as we anticipate getting further insight into that suffering tomorrow. Be with us and guide us and help us to grow in our knowledge of you, the living and the true God and Jesus Christ whom you sent forth.

[35 : 19] For we're asking it in his precious name. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing in Psalm 18 on page 19.

Psalm 18 on page 19. We're going to sing from the beginning of the psalm.

I love you, Lord, you are my strength, a fortress, the Lord to me, my rock and my deliverer, for refuge to my God I flee.

We're going to sing to the end of verse 6, Psalm 18 from the beginning. I love you, Lord, you are my strength, a fortress is the Lord to me.

I love you, Lord, you are my strength, a fortress is the Lord to me, my rock and my deliverer, for refuge to my God I flee.

[36 : 42] He is my stronghold and my shield, the Lord who saves me by his might.

I'll call on him and give him praise, I'm safety boots, life goes to flight.

The courts of death entangled me, destruction hit me like a wave.

Encircled by the of death, I face the terrors of the grave.

In my distress I called on God, I cried out to the Lord for aid.

[38 : 01] he from his temple heard my voice, he listened to the prayer I made.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all, now and forevermore.

Amen.