

Sermon for Quinquagesima – Luke 18:31-43

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

It was all so unbelievable to them. The disciples heard from the mouth of their own Teacher and Lord that He was to be killed. In the prime of His life, fully grown and mature, but before the troubles and weaknesses of old age set in, He was going to die. This was now the third time that they had heard Him say it, and by far the most detailed prediction. At the hands of Gentiles He was to be shamefully treated, flogged, spit upon, and murdered. This was unthinkable, yes, incomprehensible! They could not grasp how this could be possible. They were riding the euphoric wave of miracles and great wisdom through His preaching – what could stop them now, and who would want to? The disciples would do anything to prevent His death. They were faithful and loyal to Him; they would allow no one to lay a finger on Him to harm him, so they thought.

Jesus tells them what will happen to Him. He shares the bad news of His imminent death. They had put their trust in Him; the disciples had staked it all on Him, and now what? He's just going to give up and die in a shameful public way?

Would He die just like other men die? They thought He was more. The miracles, the parables, the kingdom He promised them: it all had to mean something. They thought He was much more than a mere man.

Heroes fall. The Pete Roses, the Tiger Woods, the Kobe Bryants, the Bill Cosbys, the Mel Gibsons remind us that even at the peak of greatness, men fall. They are not immune to this world's traps. Was this the type of fallen hero that Jesus was? Do we only think of His life, suffering, and death in purely human terms? Was His end an easily explainable thing?

It's true that Christ taught doctrine that was offensive – offensive to the powerful authorities of the Roman government. His teachings were opposed by the elitist powers that were within the temple hierarchy. Bitter vindictiveness seethed through His opponents. In rage and spite they railed against Him. So, was the natural outcome that Christ became a victim of the cunning power and cruelty of His opponents? Did He just make the wrong people mad? They outwitted Him. They overpowered Him. He lost.

He calls Himself "the Son of Man." He is the Seed born of woman, "the Man." He was to crush the head of the serpent ... so why doesn't He get stomping? Peter tries to jump in. He wields His sword. It is to no avail. During Christ's spiritual suffering in Gethsemane, He said, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But the cup of inexpressible suffering did not pass from Him. We have put our trust in men. They have failed us. Would He fail us, too?

When Christ made His first public appearance, preaching in Nazareth, His hearers were boiling mad, throwing Him out of the city and forcing Him to the steepest slope on the outskirts of town to throw Him down and kill Him. But because God had determined that the hour of His death had not yet come, He was able to escape, "passing through their midst." Again, later on, when Jesus said in the temple, "Before Abraham was, I AM," affirming that He is indeed the eternal God, many that day picked up rocks to stone Him. But once again, the appointed hour of His suffering and death

had not yet come. "Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple," passing through the midst of them, He made Himself invisible and left.

Finally, when the appointed time had come, when an army had surrounded Him, they all fell to their knees when He announced Himself, "I am He." He could have run and hid, or He could have destroyed them all right then and there, but this was not the Father's will, and therefore not Jesus' will either. The will of God was that the Christ should be captured, suffer, and die. Herod and Pilate did merely what God decreed beforehand. Jesus of Nazareth, attested by mighty works, wonders, and signs was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God in that He was crucified and killed through the hands of lawless men.

So this was not man's plan that the Christ must die. It was determined by God Himself from eternity. He revealed it in time through the prophets. The death of Jesus Christ was not by chance. He didn't suffer because His enemies outwitted and overpowered Him. He died because God – and even Christ Himself – wanted it to happen.

There is no doubt: the suffering and death of Christ were no accident. It was not forced upon Him by the will of men. This was decided, appointed, and administered by God Himself.

Why? Because the cup of suffering had to be drunk. Christ had to empty it. God's answer to His Son's request to let the cup pass from Him was, in effect, this: "No, My dear Son, in whom I am well pleased, it is not possible for this cup to pass from you if the world is to be redeemed."

In this, God is by no means some lenient Father, winking at sins, as some may suppose. He is holy. He is just. He hates sin and His wrath burns against it. Had Christ, the Son of God, been unwilling to take all of man's sins upon Himself and to atone for them with His excruciating suffering and agonizing death, God neither could nor would have been able to save any one of us.

So how foolish it is for us to think that we can hope for God's grace while we continue to cling to our secret sins! The devil ignores sin. God will not. Who will seek to make the devil out of God? Who will trample the Son of God who bled for us sinners? For this reason He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities! The life of the Son was given for the sacrifice of us sinners!

The Crucified One still stands in the middle of world history as the banner to whom the prophets pointed forward. He stands as the Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world to whom the apostles and faithful preachers point backward.

During this upcoming Lent season, see in the suffering and dying Christ, as in a mirror, the abomination of your sins and God's rightful anger over them. But see there also in the Crucified Lord, the complete payment for your sins, the riches of God's grace, and the paid cost of Divine love. In the God-willed crucifixion, the humanity and divinity of Christ find their fullest meaning, "For greater love have no man than this, that He lay down His life for His friends," or perhaps you prefer it said this way, "Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠