

## Maundy Thursday 2014

### Why?

Dr. David Jeremiah shares a story which, fittingly for this church's heritage, took place in Wales. It goes: "Years ago, a young mother was making her way across the hills of South Wales, carrying her tiny baby in her arms when she was overtaken by a blinding blizzard. She never reached her destination; and when the blizzard had subsided, searchers found her body beneath a mound of snow. But they discovered that before her death, she had taken off all her outer clothing and wrapped it about her baby. When they unwrapped the child, to their great surprise and joy, they found he was alive and well. She had mounded her body over his and given her life for her child, proving the depths of her mother love." Tonight we remember how two thousand years ago, when we were powerless, trapped in the blinding blizzard of sin and threatened with death and hell, Jesus gave his life for us and proved the depths of his love. I want to look briefly at a passage in John 18, and see the knowledge of Christ, the power of Christ, and the love of Christ.

### The Knowledge of Christ

Jesus saw Judas enter the garden of Gethsemane, leading a detachment of soldiers and officers; and the evangelist writes, "Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that would come upon him went forward."

Our Lord's Passion did not take him by surprise. More than once he had informed his apostles about everything that would happen. In Mark's gospel narrative, as Jesus and his apostles were going up to Jerusalem, he told them: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and scribes; and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and scourge him, and spit on him, and kill him. And the third day he will rise again." (**Mark 10:33-34**) Imagine how hard it would be as a soldier to charge knowing the enemy lay in wait, or maybe you know from personal experience how hard it is to go into work knowing the boss is going to fire you or going to the hospital knowing your surgery is high-risk. Jesus went up to Jerusalem and in Gethsemane that night he went forward knowing everything that was going to happen. Jesus knew that there would be an Easter Sunday, but first there must be a Good Friday. Jesus knew that one of his apostles - yes, even his own familiar friend whom he trusted, would betray him for a paltry thirty pieces of silver - the price of a slave. Jesus knew that they would strike the shepherd, and the sheep - his beloved apostles - would scatter and abandon him. Jesus knew that a kangaroo court would seek after false witnesses to testify against him before condemning him to death. Jesus knew that they would manually pummel him and spit in his face while mocking him, saying "Prophecy to us Christ! Who is the one who struck you." Jesus knew that brutal Roman guards would scourge him, shredding his flesh into long, bloody ribbons. Jesus knew that the soldiers would mock him, pressing down a crown of thorns into his brow and hailing him as King of the Jews. Jesus knew that they would drive spikes through his hands and feet, nailing him to the cross, and that the religious leaders, Roman soldiers, condemned criminals and others all would mock him and heap insults on him. Jesus knew that he would bear our sins in his body on the tree and that he would even suffer separation from his Father, so that he would cry out "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" Tonight and tomorrow, we see Jesus: the Man of Sorrows; and he knew all that would happen to him; yet we read "Jesus therefore, knowing all

things that would come upon him, went *forward*.” Why?

### **The Power of Christ**

“Now when he [I.e. Jesus] said to them ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.” (**John 18:6**) Here we see the power of Christ as the incarnate Deity, as very God in the person of his eternal and only begotten Son. Jesus asks them whom they seek, and when they answer Jesus of Nazareth, he tells them, in the original Greek, not “I am he,” but “I Am” - he tells them his name.

We see this earlier in John’s gospel narrative, when Jesus says, “Before Abraham was, I Am.” Now when he said that, the people took up stones to throw at him - because he was calling himself by God’s holy name that he had revealed unto Moses in the book of Exodus: “Then Moses said to God, ‘Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, thus you shall say to the children of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.” (**Exodus 3:13-14**) When Judas with the guards and officials come to arrest Jesus, he reveals his identity to them as Jehovah God saying “I AM,” and the power of his name knocks them down.

Christ had power; and if we wielded such power, might we not be tempted to use it in the interest of self-preservation? Might we not be tempted to at least pray to the Father that he might send twelve legions of angels as Jesus told his apostles he could? But notice how Jesus used his power: not to preserve his life but lay down his life. As Jesus taught, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from my Father.” (**John 10:18**) I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down.” Jesus had power; but he didn’t use it to resist or retreat; and these verses from John 18 end with him being bound and led away for trial. Why?

### **The Love of Christ**

Well, we’ve pointed out Jesus knowledge and Jesus power, but here’s a question prompted by both: why? Why, knowing everything that would happen, did he go forward to meet his betrayer and the guards sent to arrest him? Why, when he possessed power as the second person of the Tri-une God-head, such that his name alone toppled tough troops to the ground did he not use his power to perform a miraculous sign that would convert them or slay them with the breath of his mouth or summon legions of angels to thwart their mission and prevent his arrest? Why? Love.

Jesus loved the Father, and he manifested his love of the Father by his obedience to the Father; remember, Jesus said “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command have I received from my Father.” God the Father commanded, and God the Son obeyed: Jesus loved the Father. But what I want us to remember this evening as we hear the readings about our Lord’s passion is Jesus’ love for us.

The childrens’ song is true: “Jesus loves me, this I know,” and he manifested his love for us by laying down his life for us, as the apostle John writes, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” (**1 John 3:16**) Jesus had the power to resist those sent to arrest him or to break free of their chains or to come down from the cross, but he remained pinned there, not by 6 inch spikes but by an immeasurable love for

us, a love of which the apostle Paul writes, “And I pray that you and all God’s people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ’s love – how wide and how long and how deep that love is. Christ’s love is greater than anyone can ever know.” (**Ephesians 3:18-19**)

Think about the fathomless depths and inexhaustible store of his amazing love: when we were yet sinners – dead in our transgressions, estranged from God and at enmity with God in our minds by our evil behavior – it was then when we deserved nothing but death and hell that Christ died for us for our sins as our substitute. This is how the prophet Isaiah put it: “He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God for his own sins! But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped and we were healed! All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all.” (**Isaiah 53:3-6**)

Tonight, if there is anyone who doesn’t know God and you’re hoping that, if there is a God, that he is a loving God; hear the story of our Lord’s passion, and realize that God so loved the world he gave his only begotten Son and sent him to be the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. Hear the story of our Lord’s passion and realize that God the Son loved you and me and everyone who has ever lived or will ever live so much that he laid down his life to pay the penalty for our sins and make peace between us and God; and tonight, if there is anyone who already has a personal relationship with Christ our loving God and Savior, but the story of his passion has become boring from hearing it year after year after year, I encourage you at each instant to add the words “because he loved me.” When they read about how he was slapped and spit on, add “because he loved me.” When they read about how they drove nails through his hands and feet, add “because he loved me;” and hopefully as we remember how he showed us his love we will have a renewed sense of astonishment and gratitude and devotion as we stand at the foot of the cross.

A story in closing: Bryan Chappel writes, “On August 16, 1987, Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after taking off from the Detroit airport, killing 155 people. One survived: a four year old named Cecelia. Cecelia survived because, even as her plane was falling, Cecelia’s mother unbuckled her own seatbelt, got down on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecelia, and then would not let go.” Nothing could separate that child from her parent’s love – neither tragedy nor disaster, neither the fall nor the flames that followed, neither the height nor depth, neither life nor death.” He then concludes: “Such is the love of our Savior for us. He left heaven, lowered himself to us, and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us.”