



SERMON TITLE: "Journey to the Cross"

DATE: February 21, 2021

SCRIPTURE: John 18:1-14

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SERIES SUMMARY

"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, millions of Christians all around the world take time to think about why Jesus suffered and died. Way back about 9 months ago, as Jim and I talked about the preaching calendar, we worked things out so that we would be at this place, at this time. So, what we're going to do for the weeks leading up to Easter is this: we're going to look at how John tells the story of Jesus' last days—his arrest, his trial, his suffering, and his death on the Cross. I've entitled this message, "Journey to the Cross," but it's not just the title of this message. It's really an umbrella title for this whole next section (Jn18-19). And the very first scene here in Jn18, which we will be looking at for the next several weeks, is very famous. It's about the arrest of Jesus: Judas bringing the soldiers to the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus being arrested. And there's a lot tucked inside this chapter.

READ John 18:1-14 ~ The story starts with an "unholy alliance," and we see that in the first three verses. You have Jews and Gentiles and Romans—sworn enemies—aligned together. You have pagans and religious, Bible-believing people, all coming together to arrest Jesus. Basically, it's a picture of the whole world rejecting Jesus. "... Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him" (v4), and he was in control of everything that's happening. *That's the first point—Jesus is in complete control of everything that's happening (vv4-9).* He's not a helpless victim. He's not powerless to stop what's happening. He's very much in control of this whole situation. Let me show you. Jesus steps forward and he asks, "Who are you looking for?" And someone in charge says, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus says, "I am he," and Judas and the whole crowd fall backward to the ground. They're knocked off their feet. Many scholars and commentators believe that, for a brief moment, a bursting ray of God's power and wrath knocked them down. Again, Jesus is not a victim here. He is in complete control of this situation. He has all the power he needs to end this thing right here and now, but he has submitted himself to the Father's will. We don't read that in John's Gospel, but the other Gospel writers tell us that Jesus, knowing everything that was about to happen, agonized in prayer, asking the Father, "If there is any other way, let this cup pass from me." And he ends that prayer by saying, "But not my will, but thy will be done"—that's already happened. Jesus has bowed the knee to the Father's will. He has submitted himself to this "Journey to the Cross" so even though he has the power to stop what's happening—*B-A-M—they all fall down*—he takes control of the situation and he asks a second time. "Whom do you seek?" They say again, "Jesus of Nazareth." And Jesus says, "I told you, I am he." Actually, he says, "I AM"—there's no "he" in the Greek. He says, "I AM," which, as some of you know is the OT name of God—the sacred name of God. And here, like many other times in the Gospel of John, Jesus claims for himself the sacred name of God. "I am the God of Moses. I am the God of deliverance. I am the God that takes down nations. I am the God who raises up kings and brings them down. I am the God who can blow you down if needed." Jesus is put to death because he keeps saying he's God. There's no major world religion in the history of the world that has its founder claiming that he is God, only Jesus makes that claim. Then Jesus says v8, "If it's me you want, let these men go." This is a command in the Greek, "Let these men go." I love that Jesus tells these unbelieving soldiers what to do and they follow his orders. Again, Jesus has authority. He's in control. If he didn't want to be taken, they couldn't take him. He's not a

victim. He commands this cohort of soldiers, "Let these men go." But Peter is not liking what he's hearing. He's not going anywhere. He's not willing to allow Jesus to be taken without a fight. I'm not going to talk about Peter this week—we'll come back to him next week. But Peter is like, "Don't worry Jesus, I got this"—that's Peter—courageous, but dumb—maybe he thought if he started a fight Jesus would finish it with another ray of wrath. But Peter goes after a lowly servant, not a soldier, the high priests' servant who, I'm quite sure, had no sword. He's probably the one guy in the crowd who is not armed, and Peter goes after him. So, Peter, with a swing and a miss, ends up whacking off poor Malchus' ear. (Don't worry, we know from the other Gospels that Jesus put his ear back on.) ...And now, we come to the turning point of this story.

Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (v11). Jesus has prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me" (cf Matt26:42; Mk14:36; Lk22:42). Having submitted to the Father's will, he now asks, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" The question is, what is this cup Jesus is talking about here? The cup is the cup of God's wrath poured out against sin (cf Ezk23:33; Isa51:22; Jer25:15). The OT talks about God's wrath as a cup. It's a Judgment Day kind of thing. But the NT talks about God's wrath in much the same way (cf Rev14:10). God's love and God's wrath are not at odds with one another. In the Bible, the attribute of God that's spoken about more than anything else is the holiness of God—God is good, not bad. God is just, not unjust. God is merciful, not harsh. God is active, not passive. God is loving and God is just—he's angry over how sin has brought hurt and pain and suffering and death into his good world. The wrath of God is the loving justice of God aimed at eradicating sin. You see, our biggest problem with this whole idea of God being a God of wrath is that we think of God's wrath in the way we think of our wrath. However, the anger of God is not like human anger. God's wrath is never temper. God is controlled here because his wrath is always under control. It's never cranky, never arbitrary. It's never temper. God's wrath is connected to God's love. They're not contradictory. They are one and the same thing, two sides of the same "God is holy" coin. Here's the point—God loves us so much that he came in the person of Jesus to take his own wrath against our sin into himself. And all those who turn from their sin to trust Jesus experience an eternity of his love. All those who reject Jesus are storing up God's wrath for themselves, and they will die in their sin (cf Rom2:5). Those who rebel against God, those who reject his Son, Jesus Christ, are getting away with nothing. They're storing up everything for the day of wrath. This is the cup—the cup of God's wrath poured out against sin. When Jesus went to the cross, *metaphorically speaking*, there was a cup that was filled with all of your sin, all of your faults, all your failures, and all of your rebellion, and Jesus drank every drop. On the Cross, God is suffering and dying in the body of Jesus for you. He's taking his own wrath against sin into himself for you. The wrath of God was poured out on the Son of God so we could experience the mercy of God. *This is my second point—Jesus drinks the cup of God's wrath for you so you never have to drink it.* Every one of us fills a cup, and every cup will be emptied. Either Jesus drank the cup for you, or you will drink it yourself (cf Jn3:36). He drank the cup of God's wrath so we could partake of the cup of God's blessing.

Discussion Starters —

1. From what Charlie said in his introduction about this passage, how is the Bible like Google Earth?
2. What is significant about Jesus and his disciples walking from Jerusalem through the Kidron Valley and crossing the stream at the bottom of the valley?
3. What is so strange about the great crowd of people who showed up to arrest Jesus in the Garden?
4. Why do you think that crowd of people fell backward to the ground when they heard Jesus say, "I am he?" Why is that detail so important to this story?
5. What is significant about Jesus telling the soldiers, "If it's me you want, let these men go?"
6. Jesus claims that he is "I AM"—the OT, sacred name of God. Why did this infuriate both the Roman and the Jewish religious leadership?
7. Ultimately, why was Jesus put to death?
8. When Peter pathetically tries to start a fight, Jesus stops him. What does Jesus mean by the statement, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" What is this "cup" that Jesus talks about here?
9. How might you help someone understand that God's wrath and God's love do not contradict each other? How is God's wrath/justice a function of his love?