



Mark 14:35–36

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Reflection

Today’s passage comes from Mark 14:35–

36,

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Midnight in Gethsemane. It's dark, late, the disciples are so traumatised and exhausted from the emotional toll of the evening that they can barely keep their eyes open. The nine, at a distance, no doubt already dozing; Peter, James and John are with Jesus, to offer him emotional support, but they too are on the verge of nodding off. But not Jesus. In Friday's passage it was as if Jesus allowed the enormity of what

he was about to endure to finally sink in. We read in verses 33 and 34 that Jesus,

began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

But the English lets us down. In the Greek these words more have the sense of ‘terrible distress and misery’, of being ‘crushed with anguish’, so overwhelmed with sorrow that the weight of it takes you to the brink of death. In Luke’s gospel he describes Jesus’ physical anxiety in this moment in these terms,

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was

like drops of blood falling to the ground. Luke 22:44

Because Jesus knows what's coming. In the words of the prophet Zechariah the shepherd is about to be struck down, and the sheep about to scatter. It's less than an hour before his arrest. He's going to be betrayed, mocked, slapped across the face, whipped, beaten, suffer the ignominy of two false trials, the first in the dead of the night, and then after a sleepless night he's going to be forced to carry his own cross until he can bear it no more, then at Golgotha, the place of the skull, he'll be crucified. Six long hours of excruciating pain before he gives up his Spirit – but that isn't even the half of it. In fact, that's nothing at all compared, to what Jesus prays about in today's passage,

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In his most human moment, falling to the ground and planting his face in the dust in prayer, Jesus, overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, prays,

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

He’s praying against God’s wrath about

to be poured out on him for the sins of humanity. That's what he means when he says 'may this cup be taken from me.' Jesus is using Old Testament terminology. Just listen to some of these awful verses,

Psalm 75:8 reads,

8 In the hand of the Lord is a cup
full of foaming wine mixed with
spices;
he pours it out, and all the wicked
of the earth
drink it down to its very dregs.

In Isaiah it's 'the goblet of my wrath' (Isa 51:22). Jeremiah calls it 'the wine of my wrath' (Jer 25:15). In Ezekiel it's described as 'the cup of ruin and desolation' (Ezek 23:31–34). Jesus is about to drain it to its

very dregs. So that we might never have to drink it. Early in the night he replaced it for us with the communion cup, the cup of the new covenant in his blood.

But right now, Jesus is facing head-on the horror of the moment. The wrath of God poured out in full measure on him for the sins of every believer. The separation from the one he has loved and been in perfect relationship for all eternity. The horror. The obedience. The trust.

“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

‘If it’s possible, if there is another way, then please take this cup from me. But if not,

then not as I will, but your will be done.’ Even in his darkest hour he’s teaching us. About God’s omnipotence, anything is possible for him. About prayer, but not everything that is possible is part of God’s will. And about trust and obedience, ‘If there’s a way out my Father then please let me take it, but if not, then not as I will, but as you will. I love you. I trust you. And nothing will ever stop me from obeying you.’

Think & Pray

As we turn again to reflect over the scene in today’s passage I’ll remind you of Don Carson’s words from Friday,

‘As his death is unique, so also was his anguish; and our best response

to it is hushed worship.’

Charles Spurgeon approached these verses in similar fashion,

‘Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord’s life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language.’

William Barclay said simply,

‘Surely this is a passage we must approach upon our knees.’

Hushed worship. Prayerful, heart-broken meditation. A passage we must approach on our knees. Do so now.

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