



Matthew 17:22–23

22 When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. 23 They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.

Reflection

(Today’s reflection is given by Craig Tub-

man)

There is a dark shadow falling over the events in Matthew's gospel.

An undercurrent of tragedy. Jesus has continued to heal and teach just as Matthew records him doing in the first half of his account. However, in chapters 16, 17 and 20 there is an inserted refrain. Matthew records Jesus at regular intervals reminding his disciples that he is going to die. It's gloomy. It casts a shadow. And it can't be ignored.

Jesus is making things clear; you can't understand him as Messiah without associating this title primarily with his betrayal, death and resurrection. Jesus himself refuses to be known simply as a great teacher or a miracle worker or a social activist.

People tried and still try to place him in these boxes all the time, but Jesus himself makes it clear that he does not want to be known for that. He is the Messiah, who will be betrayed, killed and who will rise again.

Jesus' mission was not to simply add another voice to the human symphony of ideas. Jesus didn't come to establish a new politic or play his part in giving inspirational calendar quotes. Jesus' mission was clear and decisive. His death was bearing the sin of the human race. So that through that substitution – him for us – we might be forgiven, and restored into relationship with our God. There is nothing more important for us as humans than to see, understand and embrace the central mission of Jesus.

Yet did you notice Matthew's observation that the disciples are filled with grief. Why? Why are they filled with grief? Jesus has already told them once, why the surprise? Such a question highlights our own comfortable familiarity with such a shocking story.

Jesus' death is all too familiar to us. We know it. We've seen pictures of it, we've watched it on the big screen, we've sung songs about it, we've seen statues of it, Easter comes around again, year after year. There is no drama in Jesus' mission any more. No grieving for us – no surprise or confusion or fear.

But that is certainly not the disciples' experience. Jesus' arrest and death cannot mean anything to the disciples but de-

feat and failure. No model of success concludes with the one in charge being found guilty of treason and executed. And the rising again to life part is just beyond the disciples (or anyone's) comprehension at this point in time. To any observer at the time, Jesus' mission was nothing short of baffling.

But what it does highlight is the need for such a shocking solution to solve our greatest problem. Humanity needs help from outside of ourselves. The solution cannot come solely from within because the curse of sin can only be lifted by someone outside the curse. That is exactly why Matthew's account is called gospel – that is good news!

In Jesus we have the Son of God – that

is, someone outside of us – entering our broken world to lift the curse of sin off our shoulders but this was only achieved by bearing it on his own. God’s grace, his gift to us, was not without cost, but how easy it is to forget such a truth!

In the opening to his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words,

‘Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace. Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack’s wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cost prices. Grace is represented as the church’s inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous

hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?’

Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner. Grace alone does everything, they say, and so everything can remain as it was before. ‘All for sin could not atone’. The world goes on in the same old way, and we are still sinners ‘even in the best life’ as the protestant reformer Martin Luther said. Well then, let the Christian live like the rest of the world, let him model himself on the world’s stan-

dards in every sphere of life, and not presumptuously aspire to live a different life under grace from his old life under sin. This is cheap grace and it is the deadly enemy.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has (Matt 13:44). It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods (Matt 13:45–46). It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye that causes him to stumble (Matt 5:29), it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him (Matt 4:20).

Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it will cost a person their life, and it is grace

because it gives a person the only true life (Matt 10:39; 16:25). It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son. 'You were bought at a price' (1 Cor 6:20), and what has cost God much must not be cheap to us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our own life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation and death of the Son of God. Could there be any greater cost than this?

In Matthew 17, the cost of God's grace is starting to become apparent. The disciples are grieving because they don't want their teacher and Lord to die. But there was no other way for our sin to be atoned for. Jesus' love for his own creation is driving him

towards the cross, so that he can bear our sin on himself.

Think & Pray

Take some time today to check your heart and mind. God's love for you cost him dearly, yet it was a cost he was willing to pay to bring you back to him and forgive your sins.

Consider ways that you may have fallen victim to a cheapened view of grace and reflect again on the call God has on your life. Give thanks that God has not given up on you but loves you deeply and calls you into a new life of following his risen Son Jesus.