

Embracing the Pain of the Cross

Introduction: In a few moments we will share together in one of the holiest and most sacred expressions of worship-Holy Communion

- ✓ It is as Paul described, an opportunity for us to “show the Lord’s death until He comes.”
- ✓ Can be no discussion or participation in communion that is of any value, that does not call us to deep, sincere, and significant reflection upon the cross of Jesus.

Text in Matthew

- ✓ Jesus has shared His final meal with His disciples (Matthew 26:26-30)
- ✓ Predicted Peter’s denial (three times) and led the disciples to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:31-35)
- ✓ Asked them to sit while He prayed, took the inner circle and began praying

He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39 NKJV

- ✓ Upon returning found His disciples sleeping and rebuked them

Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matthew 26:40-41 NKJV

- ✓ Returned a second time to pray (see Luke’s description)

And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:44 NKJV

(Also Matthew)

Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." Matthew 26:42 NKJV

Here I want to pause and reflect-three thoughts to consider

I. **The Presence of the Cross Reveals a Reality of Pain**

- A. When Jesus came face to face with the cross, He knew what lay before Him
 - 1. Anguish marked His prayers
 - 2. Wanted His disciples close (and to stay close)
- B. His prayer almost catches us off guard

Saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Luke 22:42 NKJV

- C. So what was the dread of Jesus? What was the anticipated pain which had him in such anguish?
 - 1. Physical suffering? Surely not!
 - 2. Ravi Zacharias nails it-

"It was the knowledge and the feeling of being abandoned by even God the Father while at the same time being in the center of God's will. God would not be near during that eternal transaction but would turn His back on His Son."

- D. Implications for us
 - 1. Pain is a real feeling: A sense of loneliness among the deepest pain
 - 2. The sense that God is distant-He is not near-something we have all felt
 - 3. The question: Where is God in THIS situation? Deepest of all pain

(ILL) Ravi Zacharias (Cries of the Heart)

- ✓ Brother-in-law (Gordon) Sister-in-law (Barbara)
- ✓ Gordon-flight instructor/Colorado-flight down in the mountains
- ✓ Late in the day a signal (had hit trees) all three survived but badly hurt
- ✓ Hours of silence (she's thinking the worst) he's horrified because he could not assure her he was okay
- ✓ Only solution-bring her feelings and his reality together, hand-in-hand
- ✓ We often like her, don't feel, don't see-the pain of not knowing He is with us is excruciating

II. The Presence of the Cross Reveals the Reality of Choice

A. Jesus could have sidestepped Calvary-decided to avoid the cross altogether

(ILL) Jesus arrested-Peter's sword-ear of the High Priest's servant

But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" Matthew 26:52-54 NKJV

B. We too, have the choice to avoid our cross

1. Easy way out-deny it, counsel it, run from it, cover it up, or drown it out
2. So often the course we take

C. Jesus could have walked away from the cross (sacrifice)

1. Could have avoided the rupture of relationship with His Father
2. Could have stepped away from the loneliness, the questions, the distance between He and His Father
3. BUT-He would have been alienating Himself from the heart and will of His Father at the same time

D. By choosing to die and endure momentary separation, He was drawn more completely into the bosom of the Father

1. Could have resisted the cross and left the world a broken place
2. Or be broken Himself so that the world might draw near and live
3. In His separation, He was able to bring us into the Father's embrace

III. The Presence of the Cross Reveals the Reality of God's Presence

NOTE: *Hint of this in 1 Corinthians 1:18*

IMPORTANT: *The cross on which our Lord was broken when he took our sin and suffering, when he took our alienation, when he was abandoned by all, that cross is at the heart of the Gospel*

- ✓ A place of God-forsakenness
- ✓ A place of God's Divine counsel and will being accomplished

A. It merits more than a "been there" "done that" didn't work

1. The cross is foreign to skeptics and to humanities normal way of thinking
2. Yet, it reveals that even in the most evil expression of life, God must be somewhere within reach

(ILL) Elie Wiesel (Jewish survivor of the Holocaust and Nobel Prize Winner)

- ✓ In concentration camp
- ✓ Had to witness the hanging of 2 Jewish men and Jewish boy
- ✓ Men die quickly-boy struggles for half an hour
- ✓ Behind Wiesel-someone muttered-“where is God? Where is He?”
- ✓ Wiesel says-a voice spoke up within him saying, “He is hanging there on the gallows.”

NOTE: *Jurgen Moltmann added, “any other answer would be blasphemy.”*

B. No other faith other than Christianity can answer that question in its fullest sense.
“Where is God?” “Where is He?”

1. He is right in the middle
2. He is at the receiving end of our atrocities

- ✓ 911
- ✓ Awful atrocities to children
- ✓ Loss of a loved one
- ✓ Pain and suffering

C. “The cross invades us as the only reasonable point of definition for a wounded world.” (Zacharias)

1. God is on the gallows so that we might draw near
2. Any other answer is blasphemous

Conclusion: Personal challenge: When we come face to face with our cross we either accept its pain, implications, and bring ourselves to be crucified with Christ so that we might live within the grip of His voice and heart-or walk away and feel alienated from God.

1. It’s a lie to think we can be close to the Father and away from the cross
2. For Christ it was impossible-for us it is the same
3. We will be broken by something-the truth of the crucified life that brings us to the Father’s heart or the lie that avoids the cross but alienates us from the Father