



Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Road to Gethsemane, the Cup, Divine Love and Determination

Matthew 26:31-46

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Last week, beloved, we were taken into the Upper Room by Matthew and saw how Jesus forever redefined the bread and wine that were a part of the Passover feast, rendering the Passover obsolete and explained in beautifully simple terms His death on the sinner's behalf. The Lord's Supper and what it represents – the death of Christ, the shedding of His blood for the forgiveness of His people's sins – symbolized by the broken bread and the poured out wine, and the personal response of faith by the human heart to that truth – symbolized by eating the bread and drinking the wine is what defines and constitutes the people of God today and forever. It is a memorable and gripping picture of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, a holy moment.

Like I said a couple of weeks ago, these last few chapters of Matthew are holy ground and that is especially true of the text that we are looking at this morning as Jesus makes His way with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. One time as he was preaching, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, made a comment concerning preaching about Jesus Christ that holds true for me today. He said, "I am never more vexed with myself (never more troubled with myself) than when I have done my very best to extol his dear name. What is it but holding a candle to the sun?" I understand his emotions. I cannot speak as I wish I could of Christ. And it especially true when I stand to teach and preach concerning the passion of Jesus Christ, when I stand to preach concerning all of the facets of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Desperately we need the unction and the anointing of God's Spirit upon us we read and consider these events as they unfold in Scripture.

As we begin to really look deep into the meaning of the passion of Jesus Christ, we are going to see the very heart of our Savior, the plan of the Holy God for our redemption, and the core of Christianity. When we use the words grace, forgiveness, mercy, blessing, redemption and so

on, we must remember that the reality of those words was purchased at the cost of inconceivable violence to the Son of God. We are going to be reminded of that today.

When we left the text last week, the Lord's Supper had ended and Jesus and His disciples had sung a hymn and were now on their way to Gethsemane. Verse 30 says: "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30, ESV) I told you that they would have been singing from the Hallel Psalms, specifically Psalm 118. Imagine being Jesus and singing these words: "I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!" (Psalm 118:21–29, ESV) Only He could have known in fullness the meaning of these words. Only He could have understood that He was the very fulfillment, the perfect embodiment of them all. He is the stone the builders rejected become the cornerstone. This day had been made for the salvation of His people – God the Father had ordained it; it was His doing. The prayer "Save us" would be answered with His blood. He is the festal sacrifice. His death the proof that His steadfast love endures forever. No one ever sang this song with such a depth of understanding like Jesus. So it after singing this Psalm and while they are on their way to Gethsemane that Jesus gives one more

Prophecy of the Passion (v. 31-35) Look again with me starting in verse 31: "Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same." (Matthew 26:31–35, ESV) As they are walking in the night, toward the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus tells His disciples words that they can scarcely believe. "You will all fall away because of me this night."

How this must have come to them like a bolt from the blue. First, one of the band of brothers would betray the Master and now, all of them would fall away? The message was clear, though there was only one traitor, all would desert Christ in this defining hour. Jesus would face His Passion alone, all alone. The word that is used for “fall away” is a word that means to stumble, to be offended; it is the word “scandalidzo” from which we get the word scandalized. The disciples would not apostatize, not fall away from Christ forever, but they would stumble and for a time turn from Him – and here is the key – because of Him. They would stumble, scatter, because of the opposition to Him, because of His death, because of His mission, because of what Christ had come to do. When Jesus says that they will fall away because of Him, He is speaking of His mission, His sacrificial, substitutionary death, His work of redemption and salvation, that although Christ had repeatedly explained to them, they still did not fully understand.

But He doesn't merely tell them this; He explains His statement from Scripture. Quoting Zechariah 13, Jesus says: For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' We have said before that the OT is to be understood in light of Christ and that is especially true in this context. If you read Zechariah 13, it declares that God will judge the false prophets and the idolatry of His people. It talks of how God will cleanse the land of the spirit of uncleanness and the lies spoken in His name. But then in verse 7, the text suddenly and unexpectedly shifts the focus from the false prophets to the One whom God describes as the Shepherd who stands next to Him. What does this mean? It is a prophecy that is impossible to understand apart from the interpretation that Christ gives to it. “I will strike the Shepherd,” the Lord of Hosts says, and that Shepherd is none other than Jesus Christ, His Son, the Messiah. God the Father would strike down His own Son on behalf of a rebellious race of sinners, to save His elect from every corner of the earth and throughout all time. Again we hear the echoes of Isaiah 53: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all... Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:4-6, 10-11, ESV) God the Father will strike Him down, the disciples will all flee, and it is all in accordance with the plan of God. The Father is sending Him to the cross, Christ is willingly going, because the Father knows that it is only through the vicarious suffering of His Son our

sins can be atoned for and the love of the Father for His chosen is so unrelenting that He will strike His Son and the love of the Son is such that He will give Himself to be struck for the salvation of His people. This is the Father's will.

Now we understand this verse from Zechariah. Jesus is explaining that this is the way that God would cut off idolatry and the false prophets spoken of In Zechariah, the lies spoken in His name, the false and worthless religion to which His people had fallen prey. The way that God would bring eternal life to His people was through His striking of the true Shepherd, through the suffering of the cross and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ through which Jesus Christ would be proven and declared to the only Savior, the Only True Shepherd, and His – the only true gospel, and Him the only Lord. By this act, every false religious notion, every human philosophy, every empty religious belief would be shown to be worthless and bankrupt. The false prophets would be defeated, the lies told in His name overcome. Christ and His gospel would reign supreme.

And here is why. Because, as Jesus makes clear, His death is not without end and His disciples' defection is not forever. He says to them: But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. After the Father strikes Me down, He will raise Me up! Then He would gather His disciples to Himself again.

Make sure that you do not miss the promise and consolation that Jesus is expressing here. Jesus proclaimed that on that night they would all fall away because of Him. The Shepherd would be struck and the sheep would scatter but that would not be the end. What He would accomplish on the cross and through His resurrection from the dead was the guarantee that they would be forgiven, their sins cleansed, put away forever and paid for by His blood, His glory as Messiah fully and finally revealed and that He would gather them to Himself in triumph in the days ahead at Galilee. They would fall away but it would be momentary, and after He had made an offering for sin, He would gather them to Himself once more, their redemption and their fellowship with Him secured forever. All of this was the plan of the Father in Heaven!

Do you hear the triumph in this, beloved? Because it is clear that the disciples did not. All they heard was that they would fall away. And Peter could not let that alone. Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Everyone else may run, they may not be as steadfast as me, they may not love You as much as me, but I am not going anywhere – that is the gist of what Peter says. Now to be fair, this is coming from a heart that

loves Christ. It is coming from the disciple who wore his heart on his sleeve and he did love Christ, but Peter is speaking foolishness. In his presumption, he thought himself above the other disciples but even worse, he thought himself above the Word of God. Do you see that? This prophecy may apply to everyone else, Peter thought, but not to him.

Before we pile on Peter here, let's be honest. He is not that different than any of us. Who of us has never fallen prey to foolish presumption? Who among us have never presumed we were more spiritually mature than we are? Or presumed that we could never be taken down by some grievous sin? Or presumed that we could ignore the fellowship of the saints, or the reading of Scripture, or prayer or corporate worship, or sitting under the preaching of the Word of God and still maintain a vibrant or significant life with Christ? Who of us has never thought ourselves above the Word of God by hearing or reading the plain truth of Scripture and then willfully ignoring its implications for our lives or conduct, either by re-interpreting it to fit our desires or simply turning a blind eye to its truth? We have all done this at one point or another. The one thing we can say for Peter, that we cannot always say for ourselves is that most likely his response was motivated in part by love for Christ, as misinformed and misguided as it was. Directly, Jesus rebukes him.

Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." In a shock to Peter I am sure, Jesus goes even further to say to him, "You will not only flee, you will deny me three times tonight." It is like a knife through Peter's heart. He does not want to hear this. How could it be? So he says the only thing he can think to say -- Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same." Peter pledges his faithfulness to Christ unto death this night and predictably the other disciples follow his lead. They speak what they do not know and yet here is the wonder and the consolation, the encouragement of what we see before us. Even in the midst of their denials of the reality that they will fall away from Jesus, their expressions of ignorance and even disbelief of what Jesus is saying, still out of love Christ is determined to give Himself to redeem their souls – not because of their faithfulness or their protestations of devotion, but because of Christ's love, because of His eternal devotion to these men and to us. As for the disciples, their boldness would be short-lived, as we watch Jesus making His way to Gethsemane, to seek the Father in prayer and with courage, embracing the cup.

Embracing the Cup (v. 36-46) Starting in verse 36: "Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking

with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.”” (Matthew 26:36–38, ESV) They come to a place called Gethsemane. The name of it is fitting. It literally means “the place where the olive is pressed or the place of crushing.” You can imagine how an olive press works. Beautiful, ripe olives go in; heavy stones apply irresistible pressure and the precious oil flows out. All that remains in the press is unrecognizable pulp. It was here, where the olives were pressed to get precious oil that Jesus was pressed, crushed to make the resolute decision to give his life once and for all of the elect of God.

As Jesus enters Gethsemane, he leaves the majority of his disciples at the entrance and takes with Him the inner circle – Peter, James and John. Matthew describes Jesus as “sorrowful and troubled”. A profound sadness, an inner agony comes upon Jesus and we are given a glimpse into the heart and soul of our Savior. It is a holy moment, a moment of wonder and awe. We see our Lord, the Master of all of creation, the Almighty One, gripped with agony, of sorrow, and anguish. As the cross loomed, only hours away, the Scripture shows us Jesus on His knees, on His face, in the Garden of Gethsemane, crying out to his Father in deep, impassioned prayer. This is real agony, real dread. Though He is the God-man with all power and glory, He is suffering in His soul. This is a divine mystery and here is the truth, though may be able to explain the why of His agony, why His heart is gripped with sorrow, we can never even begin to enter into the depths of it. Leaving His three closest friends with the request, “remain here, and watch with me (pray with me),” Jesus makes His way into the garden alone, to meet with His Father alone, to contemplate the cross alone, to consider his coming suffering and sacrifice alone. That is the key –what He must do He must do alone.

“And going a little farther he fell on his face (he fell face down upon the dirt which He had made) and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”” (Matthew 26:39, ESV) Here is the reason for His agony, the reason for His sorrow – it is the cup He must drink for us, the issue is the cup.

Beloved, do not make the mistake of thinking that it was merely the thought of death that caused Christ such great anguish. It was not the prospect of physical death, as horrific as death by crucifixion and the scourging that would be upon His back would be. Jesus, as God, knew what lay ahead for him in that regard. He knew they were going to rip open his back with a whip. He knew they were going to tear the beard from his face. He knew He would be spat upon and humiliated. He knew He would be scourged and beaten. He knew they were going to

pound spikes through His wrists and feet. He set His face to endure it. He wouldn't shrink from the wicked accusation and plotting of Caiaphas or the cowardice of Pilate as the governor gave the order for His execution. He wasn't moved by the heartlessness of the Roman soldiers that would kill Him without thinking twice, or by the knowledge that His own disciples would soon desert Him, or even that Judas Iscariot would betray and turn on Him. While that was all painful it was not the crux of what caused His wrenching anguish of soul. That is not the reason that He is filled with sorrow. It is the cup. Jesus knew what awaited Him. The suffering, which the Father had prepared for Him, was not a vague, fuzzy, indiscernible thing in the future. He knew exactly its depths and its extent. Christ knew. He knew how unworthy we were. He knew the penalty for sin. He knew what He must suffer to save us. The cup.

What was in that cup? What is "the cup" to which Jesus the Lord Jesus is referring? Scripture tells us:

"The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup." (Psalm 11:5–6, ESV)

"It is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." (Psalm 75:7–8, ESV)

"Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering." (Isaiah 51:17, ESV)

"And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these

worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.””
(Revelation 14:9–11, ESV)

What is this cup that Christ dreaded? It is the cup of God’s wrath, rightly and justly poured out on sinners. The cup held before Jesus was the full measure of the suffering God had set out as the way of payment, or atonement, for the sins of His people. The cross was not simply an act of injustice on the part of men, nor is it an example of what awaits men if they do not repent and believe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The cross was substitutionary suffering. It was God's Son in our flesh, standing in the place of all God’s elect, bearing in His body what we deserve as sinners – the full fury of God’s holy wrath against our sin, the measure of torment and agony that we deserve who have owed to us who have sinned against the God of heaven.

To receive that cup, the spotless, always pleasing, Son of God must stand in our place before God's holy justice, and answer in His own body upon the cross the penalty of our sin by enduring the burning and holy vengeance of the wrath of God or we could not be saved. The hour had come. He who was holy, righteous, and pure was about to take on Himself everything that was unholy, unrighteous and impure. All of the depravity and sinfulness of every person who would ever come to faith was about to be placed upon this perfect and blameless Son of God. How He recoiled from that thought. We cannot imagine. We cannot because we are immersed in sin. We have never known what it is like to be without sin. Cesspool analogy – no analogy can do this justice.

But worse even than this, was what drinking the cup would mean. His eternal fellowship with the Father must, for a time, be broken. He knew that in just a few short hours He would cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He would be separated from fellowship with the Father, something that had never been experienced in all of eternity past. Never had the Son been separated from the Father. Forever they had been in perfect unity. But He must bear our sin and be cut off for a time from the Father. He would endure on that cross, Hell on our behalf. By drinking the cup, the judgment that should have fallen upon us would instead be poured upon the spotless Son, and in that horrible moment the Father would crush Him, treat Him as the most vile sinner who had ever lived and He would experience utter wrath, utter cursing of the soul – torment, horrific pain, the burning vengeance of God. Divine mystery of mysteries, the Father would turn His face away and Jesus would bear our guilt, in our place, my guilt in my place...alone. That was the bedrock reason for Jesus’ cry in the garden. That’s what this cup is all about. Beloved, when we see this anguish and travail in our Savior, How

could we ever question the love of Christ? How could we ever be casual toward worship and devotion to Him? How could we have apathetic and divided hearts toward this One who suffered for us? How could we ever speak of little sins? We cannot. So that we could be saved, redeemed from our rebellion, forgiven for our willful sin, and turned from traitor to worshipper, He must drink the cup of wrath reserved for you and me. Jesus goes apart and prays, anguish filling His heart and at the end of the first hour of prayer, He comes again to His disciples.

“And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”” (Matthew 26:40–41, ESV) He comes to His disciples, men who moments before had claimed everlasting fidelity to Jesus, a willingness to die with Him and yet they cannot even pray and intercede for Him for one hour. And in Jesus’ words, we get a glimpse, an insight into what He is enduring in the Garden. He is being tempted, tempted in a way we cannot even begin to comprehend. Out of the heart of love He tells His disciples: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” Watch and pray that you do not enter into the temptation that He must endure, on our behalf, to avoid the cross. With His words we get an insight into His own travail – The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He is telling us of the ferocity of the battle. There is an unseen battle raging in the garden.

I would agree with the old theologians who say that this was the hour of Christ’s greatest temptation to turn away from the path to the cross. We often think that after His temptation in the wilderness, Satan never tempted Jesus again. But that is not what Scripture says. It says that he left Jesus for a more opportune time. There was no more opportune time than this. There is no way we can know the extent of that temptation. We can only imagine Satan’s evil mantra. “Why is Your face in the dirt, in agony crying out to God? You cannot do this. No-one could. Not even You. The cost is too great. Who are you? Who is your Father that you call out to? Why would Your Father require this of You?” Even as Satan tried to pry Him from the Father’s will and purpose, Jesus clung to His Father. The spirit was willing though His flesh was weak. He would not distrust Him. So Jesus prays.

“Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were

heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.” (Matthew 26:42–44, ESV)

Earnestly Christ prayed and with each successive time He sought the Father’s face, the more and more resolute He became to finish the work He had come to do. Do you see it? He anguished. He sought the Father’s face, troubled and sorrowful He cried out to His Father to remove the cup, and yet the Father answered “No!” But rather than shrinking back at His Father’s response, the more and more resolute and determined Christ became. Do you think that was easy for God the Father to say no? No. Do you think this was easy for Christ to hear that response? A thousand times, no! But understand this. There was simply no other way for men to be saved than Christ drink the cup of God’s wrath on the cross and drain it to the dregs.

There would be no capitulation to the enemy in this garden, no rebellion against the will of the Father. Unlike the first Adam who rebelled against God the Father and so brought sin into this world, the Second Adam would remain steadfast and faithful to His Father’s will, determined to bring the deathblow to sin and Satan. What a contrast from the Garden of Eden to the garden of Gethsemane. In one, paradise was lost; in the other paradise was regained. In the one, mankind was lost; from the other mankind would be redeemed. In one, the selfishness of man cried out, “Not your will God, but mine be done.” In the other, the selfless love of God’s Son cried out, “not my will, Father, but yours be done.” Out of deep love for His Father, and out of profound and incalculable love for and devotion to His people, Christ determined to drain the cup of God’s wrath to the dregs. We see His resolve in these last two verses.

“Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”” (Matthew 26:45–46, ESV) Rising from the ground, the hour at hand, His resolve set, Jesus goes and awakens His disciples and boldly marches out to face the betrayal of Judas and His arrest. There would be no hiding, no attempting to flee, no search for escape, only holy boldness and certain resolve – Christ would finish the work that the Father was pleased to give to Him. He has accepted the cup from His Father and what He did in marching to meet His betrayer and those who conspired to put Him to death shows the fullness of His embrace of that cup. The might and the resolve of the Lord Jesus Christ is glorious in this passage, and we can never understand the degree of the commitment of His love for us until we see that this is the practical expression – boldly going out to meet Judas – of His willing

embrace of the penalty for our sin, your sin and my sin, for the saving of our souls. No one else is powerful or worthy to drink the cup of God's wrath on behalf of sinners. He took our cup.

Jesus took our cup. Ours was the sin, the rebellion, and the wrath of God. God gave this cup to his Son, who prayed and took it. Understanding the will of God, Jesus took the cup from the hand of God himself. He took that cup of wrath and gave to us another, one undeserved but graciously given...the cup of salvation. What a wonderful, glorious exchange! What insuperable, insurmountable, overwhelming love. How do you, as one redeemed by His sacrifice, respond to such a love, such a gift?

Listen to these words from Psalm 116: "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live." (Psalm 116:1-2, ESV) "For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." (Psalm 116:8-9, ESV) "What shall I render to the LORD for all his benefits to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD," (Psalm 116:12-13, ESV) "I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the LORD." (Psalm 116:17, ESV)

Lift up the cup of salvation, redeemed of the Lord and rejoice that because of what Christ has done, when God deals with you as His child, there is no wrath in it. It was extinguished. It was exhausted. It was finished in Christ. The cup has been drained and then dashed in pieces at the foot of the cross. God deals with you out of a heart of love, never to destroy you, but to perfect you and make you into the image of His perfect, holy, submissive, and loving Son who did not shy away from the will of the Father but embraced it fully in that Garden long ago. Rejoice, worship, praise, and honor be in awe of Jesus Christ that, for your sake and mine, He tasted the bitterness of sin's penalty, so that we might have no condemnation any longer. Praise our God and King. Call upon Him, love Him, serve Him, obey Him, extol His great name, and sing His praises. The cup of wrath He has drunk for you and He has given to you the cup of salvation, the cup of joy. Drink deeply of all its benefits.

And for those of you who are here who are still unconvinced. How I pray the eyes of your heart would be opened. There is no other way to God. We do not come to God in our own strength, in our own power, in our own virtue. It takes Christ dying on the cross to save you. If the

thought of divine judgment caused Christ, the Holy Son of God, such anguish and travail, should it not terrify you? If Jesus Christ so recoiled from the horror and the fury of God's wrath that He prayed for the Father to let the cup of His wrath pass, should you not be deeply concerned about our own fate before Holy God? Christ drank the cup of God's wrath that you might receive the cup of salvation from His hand, if you will only repent of your sin and believe in Him. Take the cup of salvation, by faith, and join the company of the redeemed.

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