

This morning, we are continuing in our journey through Mark's gospel. If you don't know who Mark is, in Acts we read that Mark was the traveling companion of the Apostle Peter, and the early church fathers tell us that Mark's records Peter's eyewitness testimony in his gospel. When you understand that, you see how Peter is involved in just about everything in the whole gospel of Mark. And in this morning's passage, Peter is very much a central figure. In the context, Jesus and his disciples have just finished the Last Supper, where Jesus has taken a Passover meal and reinterpreted it to make it about his impending death, that like the original Lamb at the original Passover, Jesus' sacrificial death will free them from slavery to sin and death, just as the death of the Lamb freed the Israelites from slavery to Egypt. Let's continue in v. 27 this morning:

²⁷ "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" ²⁸ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." ²⁹ Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." ³⁰ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "today-- yes, tonight-- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." ³¹ But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

The story begins with contradicting declarations – Jesus declaring that when he is arrested, they will all scatter, and Peter, followed by the others, declaring that they will never disown Jesus, even if they have to die with him. Continuing in v. 32:

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he 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." ³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." ³⁹ Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. ⁴⁰ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus goes to pray in a garden called Gethsemane in the Mount of Olives. He leaves His disciples nearby while he goes to pray to His Father. There are many things worth noticing in this passage, but one of the more striking is just **how human Jesus is**. We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man, and he is never more human than he is here in Gethsemane. In His moment of trial, He asks his friends to keep watch with him, he is in deep agony at what is to come, and he asks the Father to not bring the suffering that is going to come if at all possible. Yet in the end, we will see that He declares, “not my will but yours be done.”

However, while this scene is in some ways encouraging to us in our humanity, **it is also disturbing to see how badly Jesus is handling this ordeal**. Listen to verses 32-35 again:

Mark 14:32-35 - They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he 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." ³⁵ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.

And in Luke's account of Gethsemane, we find this:

Luke 22:42-44 - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³ An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴ And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Jesus is “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”, as he puts it. The phrase “overwhelmed with sorrow” comes from a Greek word which is used to denote the most extreme anguish which the soul can feel—excruciating anxiety and torture of spirit. And Jesus is in such agony that he is sweating blood, a phenomenon called hematidrosis that only happens under extreme stress and anguish. Why is Jesus experiencing such sorrow, such anguish, such torture in His spirit? **What could this mean?**

Well, you say, Jesus is obviously in agony because he knows he is about to experience a very painful death. But Jesus knew he was going to die. Three times he mentioned this to his disciples. For example:

Mark 10:33-34 - "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Jesus knew he was going to die. Not only that, he knew he was going to rise again! He knows that there will be a happy ending. If I knew I would rise again, I don't think I would be sweating blood over my death. So why is he in such agony? He knows what is to come, and he knows how it will turn out. What could overwhelm him with sorrow to the point of death?

The answer to that question is found in what he prays.⁴² "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." He asks the Father to take away from him "the cup." What is "the cup"? Listen to some passages that explain what Jesus meant when he referred to the Cup:

Psalm 75:7-8 - But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. 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.

Isaiah 51:17 - Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.

Jeremiah 25:15-16 - This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them."

Ezekiel 23:33-34 - You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You will drink it and drain it dry; you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts.

Revelation 14:9-10 - A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb

The cup is more than just a simple metaphor for a difficult ordeal. The cup is a metaphor for God's wrath, God's righteous judgment on human sin, God's punishment for evil and wickedness. It causes men to stagger, to beat their breast, to go mad. When Jesus asks the Father to remove the cup from him, if at all possible, he is asking if there is any way to save us without having to bear the wrath of the Father on human sin. Can you understand why Jesus might have been sweating blood?

Now, I know that just mentioning the word "wrath" stirs up all sorts of reactions in people, who may see the concept of the wrath of God as something primitive and out of line with a God of love. Many people like the idea of a God of love, but don't like the wrath part. But his wrath towards sin and evil comes precisely out of His holiness and love. If we love something, then we hate what destroys or threatens it. God loves his people, and hates the evil that is done to them. And like any good judge, he must punish evil. A judge who will not punish evil but lets it off the hook is not a good judge but a wicked judge.

So, because God is holy, he can not stand sin. Because he is loving, he must punish evil. The dilemma is that, as read in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and therefore we all deserve judgment, all deserve punishment. And because God hates sin, we all deserve to be destroyed. We all deserve God's wrath. But because God loves us, he does not leave us without hope in our sinful condition, but takes the punishment on Himself, as God the Son comes and willingly drinks the cup of wrath full strength as our substitute, our Savior.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Can you understand now why Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death? It wasn't that he was about to die physically, or even that his friends were abandoning him. It was that as he came to the garden and turned to the Father in prayer, the Father was already beginning to pull away from Him. He was beginning to experience the absence of the Father. Jesus knew everything, but he had never known separation from the Father, let alone the full wrath of God on human sin.

Some of you know that pain of being left and abandoned. When a friend does it, it hurts; when a spouse does it, or a parent, it's much worse. But this is way beyond that – this is abandonment of the Son by the Father, with whom He had shared

intimacy for all eternity. That was sorrow to the point of death. And it would continue all the way to the cross, where Jesus would cry out before his death, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death because in the garden, he began to experience the Cup – the wrath of God, separation from the Father. And it caused him to stagger, to sweat blood. In Gethsemane, the Father gave Jesus the choice. This is just a taste of what you will experience on the cross – do you still want to do this? Will you still do it? Will you love me even though I will crush you?

And Jesus says, “Not my will but yours be done.” And He drinks the cup of God’s wrath for us.

Hebrews 2:9 - But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

In the garden of Gethsemane, we see a very human Jesus choosing obedience to the Father, out of love for us, despite the immense cost and terrible suffering He will endure. Let’s continue reading the rest of Mark 14:

Mark 14:43-72 - Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." ⁴⁵ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁴⁶ The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷ Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁴⁸ "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? ⁴⁹ Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." ⁵⁰ Then everyone deserted him and fled. ⁵¹ A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, ⁵² he fled naked, leaving his garment behind. ⁵³ They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together. ⁵⁴ Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire. ⁵⁵ The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. ⁵⁶ Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. ⁵⁷ Then some stood up and gave

this false testimony against him: ⁵⁸ "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" ⁵⁹ Yet even then their testimony did not agree. ⁶⁰ Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" ⁶¹ But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" ⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. ⁶⁵ Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him. ⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. ⁶⁸ But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway. ⁶⁹ When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." ⁷⁰ Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." ⁷¹ He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." ⁷² Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

Next week, I want to focus more on the trial. But I wanted to continue reading just so we could see more of Peter's story. In the Garden of Gethsemane, God is essentially asking Jesus, are you willing to go through with this, to drink the cup of my wrath? And just to make it more painfully clear what he has to do and who he has to do this for, look at his disciples. Judas betrays him with a kiss. The other disciples fall asleep, and then when they wake up they don't understand what is happening and try to fight his captors with swords. And Peter, possibly Jesus' closest earthly friend, denies even knowing Jesus three times when asked if he knows him. It's as if the Father is saying, **"THIS IS WHO YOU ARE DYING FOR!"** Miserable human beings who betray you, deny you, fall asleep on you, don't understand you. Will you still drink the cup of God's wrath for them?

And in the Garden, Jesus says, "if there is any other way, please, Lord, let's do that. But if not, then yes. I will drink the cup for them."

What does this mean for you?

1) God's justice must be satisfied

You have sinned against a holy God. You have fallen short of His perfect standard. And God can not have sin in his presence. His justice must be met. Someone must drink the cup. It's either going to be you, or it's going to be Jesus.

John 3:16-18 – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*

John 3:35-36 - *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

It is your choice this morning. Reject God and you can continue to live for yourself, as your own God. But your sin remains on you, and you are still under His condemnation. Or repent, confess your sins, turn to Jesus as your Savior and Lord and watch Him drink the cup for you so that you might go free.

The more you understand the depth of your sin, the more you understand and are transformed by what Christ did for you, the depth of His love.

2) You can trust God's will

There will be many times in your life when you find yourself in tears, like Jesus, crying out “if there is any other way, God...”, or like Jesus on the cross, feeling forsaken by God. We see Jesus here about to experience the worst possible punishment for sins that he did not commit, and he is able to say out of trust, “not my will but yours be done.” He knew that this great evil and suffering was going to be the very means by which God would save the world.

When you find yourself in this place, plead with God to deliver you, to open any other door. It is right to contend with God for what is on your heart. But it is right to end by saying “not my will but yours be done,” to leave His presence reaffirming your trust in Him as your good and loving Father. Prayer is not so much about changing God's mind as it is about aligning ourselves with God's will.

3) There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ

***Romans 8:1-4** - Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

God's justice must be met. But when Jesus drank the cup, he drank it to the bottom. There is no condemnation left for you. Only love and acceptance and forgiveness.

Have you ever felt like “there is no way God could love me or forgive me for what I’ve done”? **Do you know that every time you sin, there is a battle over your soul?** .In Luke’s account of the Last Supper, there is an amazing and bone-chilling passage: **Luke 22:31-32** - “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to **sift** you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” You don’t need to understand farming to understand what is going on. Peter will deny Jesus, and **Satan** wants to take that opportunity to disqualify Peter from service. But Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed for him that his faith may not fail. The same battle is going on over you. When you fail God, Satan wants to sift you like wheat. He wants to convince you that you are no good, and that you can’t go back to God. Brothers and sisters, in Jesus’ name, don’t listen to him!

Look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane! If he was willing to drink the Cup, how could anything you do lead Him to say, “That is too much – I can’t love you anymore”? There is no condemnation left for you! Nothing can ever separate you from his love!

Both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus. Judas, however, could not believe in the possibility of forgiveness, and ended up taking his own life. Peter did not. And eventually, after Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to Peter in John 21, took him aside, cooked him breakfast, and asked him three times, “do you love me?” And when Peter answered yes, Jesus said three times, “feed my sheep.” Pastor my people. Three times Peter denied him. And three times Jesus asked him if he loved him, eliciting a “yes, Lord, you know that I love you” from Peter. The last time

Peter said, “Lord, you know all things, and you know that I love you.” And so Jesus lovingly forgave and reinstated Peter as a leader among the disciples. **There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

I’d like to finish by telling you a story. When I was in college, I always found myself feeling depressed and discouraged at the end of every school year. Every year, I came into the fall with high hopes of sharing the love of Jesus with the people on my floor, and every spring I looked back at failure after failure, missed opportunity after missed opportunity. I felt like I hadn’t made any difference at all. At the end of my senior year, this feeling of discouragement was worse. Here I was, leaving UConn, and what difference had I made? How many lives of my unbelieving friends had been changed by my witness? I truly felt like I had failed God.

After exams were over, most of the campus was empty, except for the seniors. One day, as I was walking across campus, I was stopped by a young woman who explained that she was with the Daily Campus, and wanted to ask me a question for Husky Talk. Now, the Daily Campus is the school newspaper, and Husky Talk is the first thing every student reads when they open up the newspaper. Husky Talk consists of one question, such as “What are you doing for spring break?” or “what’s the most embarrassing thing you’ve ever done?”, and three students give their short one sentence answers. The answers are usually weak attempts at humor and tend to be full of sexual innuendo, but every day we’d open up to the paper to see if someone we knew was in Husky Talk. In my four years I had never been interviewed for Husky Talk... until now.

I told the woman that I would be glad to answer her question, and she explained that this was for the graduation edition of the Daily Campus, which would be given to every graduating senior and every family and friend that came to graduation later that week. The question she asked me was, “Now that you are graduating, what do you hope to do with your life?” I stepped back and thought. Whatever I said was going to be read by thousands of people in a few days. What did I want to say? I thought of something funny to say, and then I thought of the truth. I knew that all I really wanted to do with my life was to serve God, to love him and to love those around me. But could I say that? Could I really put myself out there like that? I thought it over, tried to find a way out of it or something funny that would still be sort of true, but I knew what I had to say. “OK, I’ve got it,” I said. “I want to love God with all I am and love those around me.” “That’s it?” she said. “That’s it,” I said. “All right... thanks,” she said, wrote it down, and turned to leave. I walked back to my dorm, feeling very exposed, but also a nervous

excitement. I felt like God was redeeming my mistakes and was giving me the opportunity to tell the whole campus that I loved him.

Well, the day of graduation came, and I went to the site where graduation would take place. The paper hadn't come out yet, and I was so nervous that I could hardly sit still. Finally, as we were sitting in our seats, I saw some people looking through the newspaper, and I asked someone if I could borrow their paper. I opened to the middle, and looked at the Husky Talk. There was the question – “Now that you are graduating, what are you hoping to do?” Six people had been interviewed and given answers – some serious, about becoming a lawyer or working with animals, and some attempts at humor, like one guy who wanted to follow Van Halen around on tour. But as I looked over the replies, I didn't see mine. She had left mine out. Part of me felt relief, that I hadn't been exposed. But part of me was truly disappointed. And as I sat there thinking about it, I thought of Jesus sitting with Peter after his resurrection. Peter had felt like a failure, just like I had, and Jesus had asked him, do you love me? And Peter had replied from his heart, “Lord, you know I love you.” And I realized what had happened. That interview wasn't for other people to hear. It was for me to hear. In the midst of my failure, the Lord had asked me, “Eric, do you love me?” And in doing that he had revealed my heart. I did love him. I do love him. And I will always love him.

What do you hear in your heart when God asks you “do you love me?” What is revealed in there? Do you hear “well, I think you're a good teacher and you help me when I pray to you”? **That's not the question** – “do you love me?” “Well, I don't want to go to Hell, and you're better than the alternatives.” That's not the question – “do you love me?” “But I've failed you so many times.” That's not the question – “do you love me?” What is revealed when He asks your heart that question? Do you know him? Do you know his love? Do you know that out of love He drank the cup of God's wrath so that there would be no condemnation left for you? Do you know that He can be trusted? Or is there just confusion, or something else in there? If you love him, know that He knows all things and he knows that beneath your sin and failure and mixed motives and misplaced affection, he knows you love him, and His forgiveness is over you. But if you do not have that love in your heart, then cry out to him and ask him for that kind of relationship, that kind of love, because that is what this faith is all about. It is about loving God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. If you do not know that, draw near to God, confess your sin and your lack of love, and ask him to give that love to you.