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Series: Power of Moments

Title: Faithful Under Trial

Text: Matt 26:10-12, 37-39; Ps 22:1; Matt 27:46, 26:39, 42, 44; Js 4:8, Prov 18:24; Matt 26:41

A couple of weeks ago, I asked you, "What is the most difficult moment in your life?" In John 16, Jesus tells us that we should expect hard things in this life. Whether those hard things come from living in a broken world, our own sinful decisions, the effects of someone else's sin to us, or our decision to associate with Jesus, we should expect hard things to come our way.

So, how do we remain faithful in those difficult moments? Well, it is fitting that when Jesus tells us to expect that hard things are going to come that He would show us how to remain faithful during these incredibly difficult moments in our lives.

In fact, in Matthew 26, we get a picture of how Jesus handled the most difficult moment in His earthly life.

Let me set the scene for you. As Jesus' final week on earth is coming to a close, Jesus and His disciples make a pit stop at Simon's house in Bethany where they were able to rest and share a meal together; but something interesting happens that evening. As Jesus sat at the table, Mary takes an alabaster jar full of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus. This may seem like an odd thing to do, and the disciples would agree! In fact, the text says they were indignant and even angry for what she had done. They even question her – "Why not do something meaningful with this money?"

But Jesus corrected the disciples. He said in v. 10, *"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial."*

I bet that was an awkward moment! What do you say to that? I imagine the disciples were thinking, *"He has talked about going away, now He is talking about His burial. What does all of this mean?"*

Later on, the disciples gather together for dinner to celebrate the Passover. At the Passover feast, Jesus speaks of the one to betray Him and in that moment, Judas gets up and leaves to follow through with his plan. After Judas leaves, Jesus starts what we now celebrate as the Lord's Supper, which we will cover next week. In the Supper, He uses bread and wine as a metaphor to demonstrate how He will die – His body will be broken, and His blood will be poured out to offer salvation to the world.

This statement leads us into the Garden of Gethsemane. As the darkness sets in, Jesus and the disciples head into the garden and Jesus tells the disciples to stay put as He takes Peter, James, and John deeper into the garden to pray. V. 37 says, *"And taking with him Peter and the*

*two sons of Zebedee (James and John), he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch with me.' And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'"*

What a powerful moment! This is the first time that we have on record where Jesus demonstrates some kind of fear and angst. To the disciples, they observed that His physical appearance was one of sorrow and fear. Soon thereafter His voice caught up to His physical response as He tells the disciples of His sorrow and fear. Some people get concerned about this and think, *"But Jesus couldn't have been fearful or anxious, He is God."* But we all have to remember, for Jesus to be a proper substitute for sin, though He is God, He must also be 100% man. Pastor Kent Hughes put it this way: *"If Jesus was not fully human, in body, mind, and emotion then He could not stand in our place as our substitute for sin and as our representative before the Father."*

Knowing what was before Him, Jesus was overwhelmed with fear. Here is why: When Jesus refers to "the cup", He is referring to the cup referenced in Isaiah 51 as the cup of God's wrath toward sin. Jesus is getting ready to drink the FULL cup of God's wrath toward sin. On the cross, He will bear the FULL punishment for the sin of the world.

Understand that bearing this cup has physical implications, but it also has emotional and spiritual implications as well. In His foretelling of this moment in history, David prophesies the very words that Jesus will speak on the cross just before His death, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning (Psalm 22:1)?"* Then on the cross, Matthew records as Jesus calls out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (Matthew 27:46)?"*

Most people wonder – what was more difficult for Jesus, experiencing the physical pain of crucifixion or the spiritual and emotional pain of silence and separation from the Father? On the cross, Jesus experiences the physical pain of God's wrath, but He also experiences something He has never known – silence and separation from His Father.

Anticipating all of this, Jesus says, *"My soul is very troubled, even unto death."* Luke adds that Jesus was experiencing so much angst over what lay ahead that He was sweating drops of blood. So, what does He do in this unbearable moment of His life?

He prays. V. 39 says, *"And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed..."* In His darkest hour, He doesn't run from the Father in fear, but takes His fear to His Father knowing that He loves Him, wants the best for Him, and has the power to change His circumstances.

But not only does He pray to the Father, but notice what He prays: *"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..."* In His darkest moment, Jesus prays to His Father asking Him to take away His circumstances. *"Father, if there is any other way to accomplish this, please remove these circumstances from Me."*

In all of this, Jesus humbled Himself before His Father and surrenders to His Father's will. What an act of worship and trust. Nevertheless, Jesus says, *"Not as I will, but as you will."* It is as though Jesus is praying, *"Father, please take this away, but more than I want this pain to pass, I want your will to be done because I know that you know what is best and I trust you."*

In what seems to be the night leading to the most unbearable moment of His life, Jesus runs to the Father but notice He doesn't just do it one time, rather, He persists in prayer. In v. 42 Matthew records Jesus as He went away again and prayed, *"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."* V. 44 says that *"He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again."*

I don't know if this is intentional or not, but I find it really interesting that as Jesus persists in prayer, His heart seems to align with the Father's. His circumstances don't change - He will still "drink of the cup" - but the way He views it seems to change. His first prayer is pleading with the Father to remove the cup as He surrenders His will to His Father's. The second and third time, it seems as though Jesus asks the Father to remove the cup, but then seems to align His will with the Father's. Most commentators say, at this moment, while the cup remains, Jesus declares to the Father, *"While I wish there was another way, I am ready."*

What a picture of faithfulness under unbearable circumstances!

While as Christians we will never again have to experience God's judgment for sin or His silence and separation because of what Christ has done, we will still experience hard things in life, hard things that we can't escape - moments when the walls are crashing in and it feels like God is distant and silent. As we talked a few weeks ago, these hard things will come because we live in a broken world. Living in a broken world, we will always experience hard things. Wars, disease, natural disaster, and loss. Sometimes these hardships are because of our sin. While God's grace is sufficient, we will still face the consequences of our poor decisions. There will be moments in life when we experience hardship because of something that someone did to us or to ones we love. There will also be times when we experience hardship because we associate with Jesus. We will, without doubt, experience hard, and sometimes unbearable, things.

I love what N.T. Wright says of this moment, *"When we ourselves find the ground giving way beneath our feet, as sooner or later we shall, Gethsemane is where to go. This is where we find that the Lord of the world, the one to whom is now committed all authority, has been before us."*

So, the question remains, "How do we remain faithful in the most unbearable moments of our lives?" The answer is simple - we follow Jesus into the garden. In the garden, Jesus models for us how we are to remain faithful during these times.

**We run to the Father in prayer.** Ever since the first garden, we have this temptation to run away from the Father instead of running to Him. Just after Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord, they ran and hid from Him. Now, because of Jesus' obedience to the Father in the second garden, so to speak, no matter what we face, our first step ought to be to run to the Father, for

there we find a safe refuge for our souls. James offers us this promise in James 4:8, *"If we draw near to God, he will draw near to you."*

**We aren't afraid of asking God for big things.** Jesus asked His Father to remove the cup. We shouldn't be afraid to ask God, who has both the power and the capacity to move mountains. Ask Him. He loves you, desires to hear from you, and is eager, like a good Father, to provide for you.

**We empty ourselves before the Lord as we ask Him to move.** Notice Jesus' posture in the garden. He got down on His knees and face to the ground, He prayed to the Father. While it may not be comfortable, our posture communicates our desperate need for God in that moment. Sometimes our hearts need to catch up to our posture and sometimes our posture needs to catch up to our hearts.

**We persist in prayer.** Jesus prayed three times. As did Jesus, so do we and here is why: God will either change our circumstances or He will change us. He didn't change Jesus' circumstances, but He aligned His heart with His and made Him ready to face the cross.

**We invite our closest friends into the journey with us.** This is really important. We all need really good friends. Proverbs 18:24 says, *"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* Friendships are important in the garden. Perhaps Jesus should have chosen better friends. As soon as they enter the garden, they notice He is troubled and He even tells them, my soul is troubled even unto death. And what do they do? Just after telling Jesus they would give their lives for Him, in His hour of greatest need, they fall asleep. Not once, but three times.

**We trust His plan.** This can be really difficult. Earlier I mentioned that we are to ask big things of God knowing that He will either change our circumstances or change us. Sometimes we can expect God to change our circumstances and even think we deserve Him to do so. And yet, God has a plan far bigger and greater than our own. We are limited by what we can see in front of us, where He sees the full picture. While we focus on one puzzle piece at a time, He has a plan for the whole puzzle to come together. His plan is good, even when it hurts. Trust Him. As did Jesus, let us also say, *"Not my will but your will be done, Father."*

I close with this: in life, we will experience hard things. So, like Jesus told His disciples (Matt. 26:41), *"Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."* Let's be ready for these difficult moments. Let's stay alert, be watchful, and be ready. And when those moments come, let us follow Jesus into the garden knowing that, just as He went to the cross and three days later walked out of an empty tomb, He will see us through in this life or the next.