

Gethsemane- Christ the Suffering Servant

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

In public opinion Jesus was a reincarnated holy man, perhaps John the Baptist, Elijah or another prophet. But another view was dawning with those who followed Jesus closely. Peter declared Jesus the Christ or the Messiah. Jesus did not reject the title. Instead he warned his disciples not to tell anyone his identity.

The Jews had suffered oppression by foreign governments for more than 700 years. And the popular notion of the Messiah was of a political and national ruler. They were dreaming of liberation and the rule of the Messiah on earth. According to John, after the feeding of the 5000 the crowd 'intended to make Jesus king by force' (John 6:15). But he had not come to be a political Messiah. He had come to die, and through death to secure a spiritual liberation for his people.

So, when his disciples had recognised Him as the Messiah "He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again". And he spoke 'plainly about this'. He did not speak in riddles or metaphor. But clearly, plainly and openly describing the kind of Messiah he would be.

Now they had grasped his identity, the cross became his paramount emphasis. Mark's gospel records 3 further clear predictions of his death (Mark 9.31, 10.33 and 45) and spends the final 3rd of the book concentrating on the cross.

In this prediction Jesus' reference to 'the Son of Man' is important. This is a reference to the prophecy of Daniel (7) that "one like a son of man came with the clouds of heaven, approached the Ancient of Days on his throne, and was given authority, glory and sovereign power so that all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him". Daniel adds that his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus declares that the glorious, sovereign, eternal Son of Man in Daniel's vision must suffer. According to Daniel, all nations will serve him. According to Jesus, he would not be served but serve. Elsewhere Jesus declared that 'even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)

Jesus united the apparently contradictory tasks of the Son of Man who will reign, in Daniel 7, and the suffering servant who will save God's people from their sin, in Isaiah 53. Jesus taught that mankind was in captivity to sin, guilt and judgment. He declared that the Christ had come to give his life as ransom for many. To pay the price required to set us free. Because he died we can be set free from sin, guilt and judgment.

The disciples did not understand. They expected the Messiah to reveal his glory, lead them in victorious battle and rule over them. Peter had just acknowledged Jesus was the Christ and yet was ready to rebuke Jesus' talk of suffering. Peter considered the idea of Christ as victorious ruler inconsistent with suffering and death. In so doing he set himself up against the will of God, just as Satan has. Jesus turned and rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

To men, suffering looks like failure, even a curse of God. As Isaiah foresaw we considered Jesus: stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But God's ways are above our way and his understanding above our understanding. Isaiah's prophecy gives us the Lord's perspective. It declares "it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer".

Unlike Peter, Jesus was committed to following the Lord's will. He obedient to God through his temptation in the desert and in Gethsemane despite facing the greatest suffering. Jesus knew the suffering ahead of Him. But he put aside his own will in favour of the Father's will. He had in mind the things of God not things of men. "Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will". Jesus knew the Father's will for Him and denied his own will in favour of the Father's, even though the Father's meant certain suffering. Isaiah's prophecy declares the Christ to be the Lord's righteous servant. The Christ had to suffer because it was the Lord's will.

The suffering servant Isaiah had written about was Christ. By the grace of God, Isaiah had foreseen the suffering of Christ, a true foresight of the future. When the future came, it was therefore a matter of fact that Christ would suffer and scripture would be fulfilled. Isaiah wrote about a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Jesus became all too familiar with sorrows. He knew suffering well. The mental anguish of his rejection and abuse, the physical anguish of his torture and crucifixion and the spiritual anguish of carrying the sins of the world and the separation from God. Isaiah wrote of one despised and rejected by men. Jesus predicted he would be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law. Later the Jewish Elders plotted to kill Jesus, arrested Him in Gethsemane and incited the crowd to demand His crucifixion. As Isaiah predicted, by oppression and judgment he was taken away. Isaiah described one from whom men hide their faces. Considered stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. He was considered worthy of death, he was considered cursed by God to hang on the cross, a failure and he hung there alongside criminals. As Isaiah wrote, He was numbered with the transgressors. He was despised, men turned away from him in disgust.

Why was the Lord's will to crush the Christ? Isaiah's prophecy also explain this. The Lord intended Christ to suffer for our sake. He was not punishing Jesus' for his own wrongdoing. Isaiah wrote: He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. On the cross, God punished Jesus for our sin. Jesus paid the price that the violence of our behaviour and deceit of our words deserve.

Isaiah wrote that: He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. He bore the sin of many. He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. For the transgression of God's people he was stricken. God declared my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Jesus bore our sin, weaknesses and suffering. He was punished for our transgressions and iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. By taking our punishment on

himself Jesus made peace between us and God and left us free to have a relationship with God. His wounds healed us of the corruption of our iniquities.

The Lord also intended to glorify Jesus through suffering. In God's mind Jesus' suffering was victory and the path to life and glory. Isaiah wrote that: After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong he will see his offspring and prolong his days. For Jesus, the cross was the door to supreme glory. After the suffering of the cross, and death, He rose again in the fullness of life eternal and was satisfied.

The Lord promised that after his suffering the Christ would divide the spoils with the strong. What are the spoils of his suffering? The spoils of the cross are the opportunities of eternal life that Jesus won. Who are the strong? The men and women strong enough to follow Jesus.

Having taught His disciples that the Christ must suffer, die and rise again Jesus turned to deal with the people. He moved from teaching about his cross to teaching about ours. He called the crowd to him and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

Christian discipleship is more radical than a suggestion of good works, beliefs and religious rituals. The only imagery that does is justice it death and resurrection. It means dying to self, to rise with Christ. When we lose our life for Jesus we will find it, when we die then we shall live.

The world is hot pursuit of the life it dreams of. It sweats in pursuit of pleasure, comfort, success and riches. The way of Jesus is radically different. Jesus gave up his life that he might take it up again in glory. He warns that those who find their life in this world will lose it. And promises that those who lose their life in this world will find it. Jesus notes the folly of throwing away eternal life in pursuit of an earthly one: What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? And notes that we need Him, we cannot save ourselves. what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

Jesus is the way, the way to God and the way to life. He is the only way with a future. All other ways of men lead to death and destruction. Jesus was with God in the beginning; He will be in the end. He demonstrated his eternity in his resurrection. He alone has the power to give eternity to men. If we are to share the life of Christ, the spoils of the cross, He says we must walk as He did.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way. The way we are going may seem right to us, it may be comfortable, it may promise good times but it leads to destruction. As Piers encouraged us last week, we must repent, which means turning from our own way. We must deny ourselves, if we are going to follow Jesus.

And we must be ready to suffer for the way. In his first letter Peter confirmed: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:20) Peter could not be clearer. Christ's suffering obedience is an example for us. Christ suffered for us, so that we should follow in his steps. When Jesus

gave the disciples the example of washing each others feet, He said they would be blessed if they did likewise. We are not blessed if we understand, we are blessed if we do it.

Jesus end the passage in Mark by warning that: If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels." I think we incorrectly refer this passage only to being embarrassed about our faith. I think Jesus meant it to explain our call to take up our cross. Jesus referred to the full counsel of his words. His calls to righteousness, service and love. It speaks of following all his ways. When we have denied ourself and taken up our cross then we must follow Him. If we do not walk in his ways he will not acknowledge us his.

Jesus' call is personal. We can help each other answer the call but the call comes to us as individuals. He says, if anyone, including any one of us, should wish to join Him in heaven he must (i) deny himself; (ii) take up his cross and (iii) follow Him.

He has shown us the way of suffering service, of obedience to the Lord's will whatever the cost. We are not yet being asked to die for the Lord's will, but it may not be comfortable. Are we ready to put His will before our own? Are we ready to suffer for his will? Even to die for His will?

On Good Friday, we plan to offer prayer at Angel. Praying in public might be embarrassing, it might not be a very English, we might even get some abuse. We could have a nice lunch at home instead. Is there more chance of us making disciples at Angel or at home? What does it mean to be obedient to the Lord's will?

Your friends are rejoicing in some financial scheme that makes unscrupulous men rich at the expense of others. Your soul aches at the emptiness and injustice of the scheme. You say a little prayer and gently argue in defence of those who lose out in this scheme. With your boldness growing, you suggest true contentment is never found in money but in Christ alone. They think you are stupid, a nutter and pathetic and they tell you so. If you endure it, God will commend you. Peter encourages that if we suffer for doing good and, like Christ, endure our suffering without complaint or retaliation, this is commendable before God (1 Peter:2:20) For in this way we follow Christ in suffering without complaint. James encouraged that we take the prophets as an example of patience in the face of suffering. Those who persevere under unjust suffering are blessed by God

Facing temptation eg – just the same

It is not always easy to deny our own will in favour of the Lord's. Our will is often powerfully attractive and the Lord's way seems hard. But Jesus has made it possible for us to walk in obedience. Lets remember how Jesus remained obedient. He arrived in Gethsemane with his 'soul overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'. He was so mentally distressed it nearly killed Him. Through prayer he found the strength to face the cross. He sought the Lord in prayer for hours, he even asked the Lord to save Him from the cross, but he never waived from his desire to put the Lord's will first.

Remember the disciples in Gethsemane, they couldn't stay awake. 3 times Jesus returned from prayer to find them sleeping. Jesus told them "pray so that you will not fall into

temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak". Jesus was not just providing an anti-sleeping strategy. He was declaring the power of prayer over our natural weaknesses.

Jesus knew the spirit was willing but the body was weak. He was suffering the same battle, though he was facing the cross not tiredness. The right path may seem tough. Our body may cry out for sleep. It may seem impossible to resist the temptation. But we need not give in to the weakness of the body. In prayer, we can seek the willingness of the spirit. The Spirit is God and has the mind of God. Hence, the Spirit is willing and able to do right. We can only remain obedient to the Lord's will in the face of suffering by the power of the spirit. Pray: the spirit is willing but the body is weak.

Isaiah declared that the Lord's will would prosper in Christ's hand. Jesus did not refuse the Lord's will, or half-heartedly obey. Despite the suffering ahead, he went to the cross without complaint. He became the promised sacrifice and through him the Lord's will is still prospering today. We are still being healed by the wounds of Jesus. The only way for us to have peace with God, healing of from sin and eternal life was Christ crucified. If Jesus had not been obedient, the Lord's will would not have prospered, the world would not have been redeemed. The same is true for us. We will only see God's will prosper in our hand if we are obedient to it.

Let me end with the example of Peter. Peter feared he would suffer with Jesus and three times he denied he knew Jesus. Realising what he had done Peter broke down and wept. But later we find Peter boldly proclaiming the gospel and leading the church, despite imprisonment and persecution. We have all denied the Lord and failed to walk in his purposes. If we are to see the Lord's will prosper in our hand, as it did in Peter's, we must repent of this way of living and chose to deny Christ no longer. We must choose his will over our will, dismiss the consequences, pray for strength, deny our sinful desires and pursue the Lord's will.