

A Fearful Trust

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn this morning now to our Bible reading, and you'll find that in Mark's Gospel. Mark's Gospel, the second Gospel of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

I don't have the page number in our church Bibles, but if somebody shouts it out, then I will give it to you. Page 851, if you have one of the blue church Bibles.

And if not, it's about three-quarters of the way through whatever Bible you have. We're going to read Mark 14 at verse 12 down to verse 52.

And it begins with the Passover. And on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples said to him, Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?

He sent two of his disciples and said to them, Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, The teacher says, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

[1 : 18] And he'll show you a large upper room furnished and ready. There, prepare for us. And the disciples set out, went to the city, and found it just as he had told them.

And they prepared the Passover. And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, Truly I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

They began to be sorrowful and to say to him, one after another, Is it I? He said to them, It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.

For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.

And as they were eating, he took bread. And after blessing, it broke it and gave it to them and said, Take, this is my body. And he took a cup. And when he had given thanks, he gave it to them.

[2 : 29] And they all drank of it. And he said to them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, Even though they all fall away, I will not. And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.

But he said emphatically, If I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same. And they went to a place called Gethsemane.

And he said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.

[3 : 44] Remain here and watch. And going a little further, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. And he came and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, Simon, are you asleep?

Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.

And he came the third time and said to them, Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

[4 : 49] Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand. And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.

Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard. When he came, he went up to him at once and said, Rabbi, and he kissed him.

And they laid hands on him and seized him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?

Day after day I was with you in the temple, teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled. And they all left him and fled.

And a young man followed him with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him. But he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

[6 : 04] Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. May we decide that the word Well, as we're being seated, let's pray together and ask for God's help as we come to his word.

We thank you, Heavenly Father, for your words in our own language and for freedom to gather around and to learn from you. And we pray for your help now in understanding and believing and obeying what you have said.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Many of you will have come across on the news yesterday the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Lance Corporal James Ashworth, who died last year in Afghanistan, demonstrating outstanding bravery in combat in the course of protecting his colleagues.

Bravery is a strange thing. On the one hand, it's exceptional. Only 13 Victoria Crosses have been awarded since the Second World War.

And that kind of bravery in conflict is obviously not an everyday thing. And seeing this kind of thing happen makes us all wonder, well, how brave am I?

[7 : 39] In a situation like that, would I behave in the same way? On the other hand, I suspect that if you were to ask somebody who had been awarded the Victoria Cross if they were still alive, whether they felt brave at the time, they'd probably say, well, it just seemed the right thing to do.

Suddenly we were in danger. Suddenly I saw that I could do something, and I did it. I imagine there's not much time to think in most situations like that, to weigh up courses of action.

Clarity of vision and concern for others rules the day. We're looking at a passage of the Bible today which is all about extreme bravery. In this situation too, the one in the center of the activity has marvelous clarity of vision and a huge concern for those he loves.

However, there is a difference between this situation and the situations of unexpected bravery, unanticipated bravery, in which most bravery medals are won.

On this occasion, there's plenty of time for weighing up alternative courses of action. On this situation, there's plenty of time for decision making.

[9 : 06] This is not an unexpected danger that comes upon this person as a surprise and needs an instant response. Far from it. This is a long expected danger, a path deliberately chosen, a pain anticipated before the creation of the world, which makes it all the more remarkable.

Now, if you're not there already, please turn to page 851 to Mark chapter 14. We're on the eve of Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion and death.

The action has not yet really started. The danger is not yet at hand. It's all very quiet and private. And yet, there isn't a more extreme moment than this anywhere in the Bible.

It's deeply moving. It'll stretch our understanding to the very limits. And it's at this point, in the dark, in the garden, where the fate of the world is decided.

Who are the players in the drama? Well, as so often in Mark's gospel, we have Jesus and his disciples. They've just come from one of the great celebrations of the year, the Passover meal, well-fed, tired after a long day, and yet, worrying things have happened at the Passover meal.

[10:33] Everything has been strangely different. The usual food, but not the usual Passover words. Dark words have been spoken about betrayal, and bloodshed, and death.

At the meal, Jesus has seemed calm, and in control. His disciples, on the other hand, are uncertain, and confused. And this contrast between him, and them, runs all the way through the rest of the story.

Look, for example, at verse 27. Jesus said to them, you will all fall away, for it's written, I'll strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.

But after I'm raised up, I'll go before you to Galilee. Peter said to him, nah, I'm not going to do that. They might, but I'm not going to. You see the contrast there?

He predicts their failure and his success. They are boldly confident, but he, when the action happens, is full of anguish. They sleep, he prays.

[11:36] He's ready for what happens. They're totally unprepared for what happens. They fight, he submits. He is brave. They run away. All the way through this narrative, Jesus and his disciples are sharply contrasted with one another.

They differ at every point, and one of the main reasons of this is that he understands what's happening, and they do not. His exploration is in verse 27.

He quotes here from the prophet Zechariah, one of the prophets of old, hundreds of years before, looking forward to a day when God's chosen king, the ruler and rescuer of his people, would be struck and his people scattered.

Here, God's people are likened to a bunch of sheep. Not a very flattering image, that, but the picture is clear enough. something is going to happen to the shepherd, which the sheep don't understand and will be scattered.

He knows it, they don't. And so, all the way through this chapter, the contrast is between, on one hand, his clear-eyed control, and on the other hand, their failure to grasp what's going on.

[12:55] Now, that's not new in this book. Jesus and his disciples are contrasted constantly through Mark's gospel. He gets it, they don't. But something about this passage is profoundly new.

there is something about Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane that you can't see in the same way anywhere else that we have in the records of Jesus.

This prayer gives us a unique window into the significance of his coming death and into the character of God. And before we get to the prayer itself, let me just flag up the fact that the uniqueness of this event is, well, flagged up at various points.

First, this is a prayer. Now, you might think, well, how remarkable is that in the Bible? A prayer. But actually, it's not common for Mark, in his account, to record the prayers of Jesus.

Only on three occasions does Mark mention Jesus praying in his gospel. The other two are at very significant points in the story. And this is the only one where the words are recorded.

[14:10] This is a very significant point. Second indication that this is a very significant point is that the witnesses are unusual.

Here we have three witnesses who listen in on Jesus' prayer. Peter and James and John. And just as Mark mentions Jesus' prayers three times in his gospel, so there are three occasions in his gospel when these three witnesses are particularly at hand.

On each occasion, the things they witness are very unusual. In chapter 5, the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead. In chapter 9, the transfiguration where Jesus appears glorious in front of them.

and here in this dark prayer in the garden. These are very unusual occasions. This one is too. The third thing which flags this up as being unusual and most significantly is Jesus himself.

Now, I imagine some of you here this morning will be quite new to thinking about Jesus, just having a look and seeing what you make of him. Some of us here are very familiar with Jesus. But whoever you are, if you've come across Jesus at all in one of the gospel accounts, you will know that the Jesus you meet here in this chapter is really not like the Jesus you meet in the rest of the gospels.

[15:44] The Jesus of Mark's gospel is a powerful person. Gently confident in every circumstance. What would you do if tomorrow morning somebody brought their crippled friend to your door and asked you to heal them?

Well, you would think they're mad. Jesus, on the other hand, calmly sorts the problem out. What would you do if next time you were in a sea crossing you got involved in a sudden and fatal-looking storm?

Jesus calmly gets up and commands the wind and waves and all is immediately quiet. What would you do faced with the anguished parents of a little girl who'd just died? Well, I know what I'd do because I've had to do it. Be sad, sympathize, soak up the grief. Jesus goes to the body and says, up you get, little girl. And up she gets. He's calmly confident in all those situations in life where human beings are usually all over the place. Even confident about talking about his own death. [16:59] He's talked about it on three occasions before this. His own betrayal, his own sufferings, his own certain death. He's talked about with calm confidence.

But here, he is not calm. Not composed. Verse 34. My soul is very sorrowful even to death. Going a little further, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. Here we find this amazing person. Well, frightened, that's not too strong a word, is it? Pleading that what is about to happen might not happen if possible. And that ought to wake us up. It is quite normal for ordinary human beings to be in pieces at one time or another in life. See a human being in distress and that is unsurprising. Experience yourself in distress. Unsurprising. But this person, this is very much a surprise. [18:12] This prayer will teach us things we cannot learn elsewhere. Teach us things about God that cannot be learned in the same way anywhere else. If you want to know what God is like, this is a great morning to be here.

If you want to know what the Christian message is all about, this is a great morning to be here. For here it is opened up as perhaps nowhere else. Now we're going to spend the rest of this time briefly looking at this prayer, this short prayer in verse 36 and then thinking about its significance. Let me read it to you. Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

Let me make a few observations about this prayer. First, notice how intimate it is. Abba, Father. Jesus talks to God as his Father.

Father. Here is the Son talking to the Father. A couple of things worth clearing up here. First, when Jesus calls God Father, he's not merely using the words of human relationship to illustrate his relationship with God.

[19:32] That's not what's going on here. He's not saying God's a bit like Father to me, we're so close. He's saying Father. This is the Father-Son relationship.

The one that all Father-Son relationships are a picture of. Some people have difficulty in life addressing God as Father because their own human experience of God as Father has not been a positive, of their human Father, has not been a positive one.

Well, the truth is that God is the Father. He's the one from whom all fatherhood derives its name. He is the one by which human fathers are measured, not the other way around.

If your experience of human fatherhood has not been great, that's because the human father hasn't been a great model of what God is like. In as much as your experience of fatherhood has been good, it's because your father has demonstrated something at least of the attributes of the Father. The Father in the Bible makes, teaches, owns, takes responsibility, responsibility, cares for, provides for, loves generously.

[20:47] Even sinful fathers do that. Jesus said, if you who are evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more will the ultimate father give good gifts to his children?

Second thing worth clearing up here is that Jesus is not saying that he was procreated by the Father. It's common in Islam to think that Christians believe that Jesus is in some way the result of sexual activity between God and Mary.

That is not the way this language is being used here. For that would be to say that Jesus is like a human son fundamentally, but he is the son, the eternal son of the Father.

Human sons are true sons in as much as they reflect his submission, his dependent obedience to his Father in heaven. the essence of father and sonhood here is not who came first or who's more important or who's got more cash.

No, it's the way they relate to one another. They're equal, united, one, and yet the son prays to the father, depends on his father, submits to the will of his father.

[22:03] This is the eternal father-son relationship being demonstrated in intimate prayer. It's an intimate prayer. Second, it's a trusting prayer. Everything is possible for you, he says.

There's great confidence here that the father can do whatever the father wants to do. This is the son coming to a father that he knows is not like a human father, for it is not true of human fathers that everything is possible to them.

Now, I know it is true that small boys do go through that phase of life when they think, my dad's better than your dad, he can do anything, you know, my dad's car's bigger than your dad's car, his computer is an Apple computer, that kind of thing.

But that phase of life does not last long, and reality soon dawns. However, it is true of this father that everything is possible for him.

Here is a true son coming to the perfect father to ask for what he knows his father could give, a way of escape from a terrible event.

[23 : 20] Sons often ask their fathers for things. Dad, can you play cricket? Dad, can we go to the football? Dad, can I have some cash? Dad, can I have a Ferrari? And fathers love to give things to their children, not Ferraris usually.

But this is such a good request, isn't it? Think of this son. Does this son not deserve everything good from the hand of his father?

This is not a wayward, awkward, willful son. This is not the sort of son who's a pain in the neck, who doesn't do what you ask him to do.

No, Jesus says, I honour my father, I know him, I keep his word, I and the father are one. Whatever I say is just what the father told me to say, and many such things.

Here is a magnificent son asking his father for something. Should not a father like this give to a son like this that which he asks for?

[24 : 28] It's a legitimate request, a trusting request. Third, this prayer is a fearful prayer. Take this cup from me.

Verse 35, he pleaded that the hour might pass from him. Now, we said that the Jesus we meet here is not quite the Jesus we'd expect to see.

Here, we learn why. And we learn here, I think, what we spend so much time in life trying to avoid, that death for human beings is a terrible thing.

Now, of course, at one level, we know it's bad. We don't want what comes with it, loss of control, loss of relationship, suffering.

Death by crucifixion, which Jesus is looking forward to, would indeed be a fearful prospect. agonizing, humiliating. But that is not what Jesus fears.

[25 : 36] And when we get to it, interestingly, there's almost nothing in the account in this gospel about the physical side of crucifixion. No, what Jesus fears is the judgment that comes along with the death of human beings.

and I think we've pretty effectively blotted that out of everyday consciousness, don't you? We hear about near death experiences and so assure ourselves that no matter what the dying might be like, the future beyond is bright and welcoming.

With stories of distant memories from previous incarnations, we've conned ourselves into thinking that we might have another go, perhaps with a more favorable outcome. by singing songs about how our love will last forever and talking fondly about those who've died as though they're looking down benevolently on us from above, we have reassured ourselves that all will be well beyond the grave.

Existence beyond death holds little fear for the generation in which we live. Jesus disagrees. do not fear those who can kill the body but can't kill the soul, he said.

Don't fear the physical side of death, rather, be afraid of the one who has judgment over both body and soul. Those are the words of the most compassionate man, the gentlest and kindest man that has ever lived.

[27 : 15] The death of human beings is associated with dreadful judgment, and it's expressed here in verse 36.

Take this cup from me. Now that symbol of a cup is an old, is a Bible symbol of God's stored up waiting to be poured out anger against human wickedness.

Psalms 75 for example, 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.

What makes this prayer all the more poignant is that it is a right prayer. Does this son deserve to bear the anger of God against human sin?

Of course he doesn't. Does this person deserve to carry the judgment that sins deserve? Hardly. This is a faithful son, an obedient son, a loving son, pleading with his most generous father that a punishment he doesn't deserve might not fall on him.

[28 : 29] Isn't that a prayer that any father would say yes to? Of course there's another way. Of course that's not the way to go. Think if it were your child asking you something like that.

Please help that. I'm so frightened. You can help. You can do anything. Please let me not have to do that. I trust you.

Imagine them asking again and again. Three times Jesus asks. Here is the one who's afraid of nothing, pleading that another way might be found.

It's a fearful prayer. And yet amazingly it's a submissive prayer. Yet not what I will but what you will. Here is a son willing for his father's will to be done. And it's because of that willingness a willingness in God the father and in God the son to do what would be painful for them but good for us that we can have any hope at all.

[29 : 52] Notice that this is a prayer of faith. Sometimes people say that praying not my will be done but yours is somehow weak, indecisive.

If you're a proper believer, you have to pray confidently. None of that uncertainty. Well, that uncertainty was good enough for God the son. It's the spiritual thing to pray that, isn't it?

It recognizes the father's loving control over everything, even the most difficult things. It was always right to pray what you want and pray that God would do what he wants.

Now, let me draw out some implications. All too superficially, no doubt. In this prayer, verse 36, we learn deeply significant things about God and about ourselves.

Let me mention four very briefly. First, how appalling our sinfulness is. We get so used to the way we are, do we not?

[30 : 57] So used to the way we are. And the normality of our sinfulness makes it unremarkable. Our everyday acts of self-centeredness, malice, envy, hatred, they're just so ordinary we hardly bother about them.

Our holding God at arm's length, pushing him out to the edge of life, seems such a small thing, but how big it is really.

Notice, the consequence of the way we are causes this supremely powerful person, tremendous anguish.

If you want to see how big and bad the human condition really is, listen to these words, Father, please, not that, anything but that.

Secondly, notice that our sinfulness, our human condition, has in some way intruded into the relationship between the Father and the Son.

[32 : 07] From eternity, this has been a perfect relationship, untroubled by the normal human father-son problems, untroubled by irritation, anger, self-centeredness, difference of opinion, a relationship of eternal, generous, other-centered love.

No anguish there ever. And our sinfulness has in some way intruded into that, been allowed to intrude into that.

Of course, neither the father nor the son have their arm twisted by us being bad. We don't force their hand into providing a way of forgiveness. But it was our sins that caused Jesus such anguish in Gethsemane.

It was our sins that made the father say, no, another way is not possible. It was our sins that made Jesus cry on the cross, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It was our sins that made this one so precious to his father be treated by his father like a sinful human being.

[33 : 22] Is that not an extraordinary idea? And yet so often we human beings proudly assert that independence from God is a good thing.

Rebellion is liberty and that we've never really done anything wrong. Remove this cup from me. Nothing wrong?

This tells us what we're really like. Second, it tells us how fearful God's judgment is. What's being illustrated here is unspeakably dreadful.

I think we've domesticated death and judgment and hell, persuaded ourselves that the last two don't even exist. Christ. This tells us that only after death will we know the full horror of having turned our noses up at the affection of the great father and the loving son who richly pour out all things good in

life and on top of that forgiveness.

So terrible is this judgment that the one who fears nothing pleads for escape. We must not think that it will be all right for us to remain indifferent to God.

[34 : 42] We must not think that. Why on earth would father and son have endured this if it would be okay for us to remain unforgiven.

It's inconceivable that they would. Third, we learn from this how great God's love is. Understand this, that so great is God's concern for you that the father was willing to let his son not have his prayer answered in the way he personally would have liked.

so great is the love of the son for you that he was willing not to have that prayer answered in the way he personally would have liked.

So great are they and so wonderfully generous that they have been willing to let our sins intrude into that relationship relationship so that we can in turn be welcomed into that relationship.

Here is the overspilling of an eternal other-centered generous self-effacing love which extends even to rebellious creatures.

[36 : 11] It's extraordinary and it's no clearer anywhere else than here. fourthly and briefly we learn here how secure Jesus' plans are.

The disciples don't want to follow a man going to a cross. They want to fall away they say they're big and brave they're not cowards they're ready to fight. Look at verse 47 one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear.

They're willing to have a go but they're not willing to be associated with one who puts up no fight at all. Verse 51 A young man followed him with nothing but a linen cloth about his body and they seized him but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

When Jesus submits doesn't put up resistance then at that point everybody runs away. Even the shame of nakedness is worse in the mind of this young man than being linked with a king who puts up no resistance on the route to death on a cross.

And yet look what Jesus says in verse 28 After I'm raised up I will go before you to Galilee.

[37 : 33] you lot who think you're not going to run away but will really. After I've been raised up I'll go before you into Galilee. He describes a future beyond his death.

When these people who at this point can't follow him because they haven't got a clue what's going on and they don't want to be associated with that sort of thing will follow him. He is very confident that this will turn out well despite the pain that's coming.

I was reading this week about another Victoria Cross winner from the past Major General George Perks.

Somebody wrote of him in the character of this distinguished Canadian soldier and statesman. He won his Victoria Cross in the First World War and lived to tell the tale.

were conspicuous bravery, utmost gallantry, supreme contempt of danger, combined with a deep sense of duty and a zeal for service.

[38 : 39] One of his men wrote this, I would have followed him through hell. He was an inspiring person and an inspiring leader and Jesus is just that sort of person.

let me ask you then, will you follow him? The one who endured the anguish of the cross for us shouldered the burden of our sins so that we could be forgiven them.

The one willing to endure his father's will so that we who by nature are not would know him as father. are you willing to follow him?

Perhaps you're just looking at Jesus for the first time. Is he not an inspiring figure and worth following? Don't you think? You'll never meet anybody else like this.

And let me say, if you've been following for a long time, maybe you've grown tired of following, maybe tired of the moral demands of being a Christian, maybe tired of the difficulty of being known as a Christian.

[39 : 52] It is a hard way to go. But here is one who has done all that is necessary for us to follow, who inspires his followers, who sends the spirit of himself into his followers so that in difficulty we too can cry, Abba, Father, help me in the difficulty.

Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. Here we learn what we're like.

Here we learn what God is like. Let's pray together. just a few minutes in the quiet to reflect on what we've heard and to respond in our own hearts to God.

God God gracious God, these words that we've read from the lips of your son test our understanding.

God we find it hard to understand the eternal relationship between the father and the son and how that could possibly have been intruded upon by human rebellion and yet we recognize it to be so.

[41 : 35] We find it difficult to understand how father and son together could have conspired to do this wonderfully generous thing and yet here we read it as so.

And we pray that you would please give us understanding and we pray that you would give us in response to what you've done. Love for you. We pray that you would help us to turn our back on those things in life which are not worth following and people and ideas that are not worth following and be glad to follow a rescuer, a savior like this one.

Hear our prayer for we ask it in his name. Amen.