

Passion Week Sermons
The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Part 1)
Mark 15:20-26
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Well, today begins the Passion Week, the week that 2,000 years ago culminated Jesus' sinless life, led to His substitutionary death on the cross on Friday, and ultimately His supernatural resurrection on Sunday, which we'll celebrate, Lord willing, next Sunday. At the center of the Christian faith is the reality of the death of Jesus Christ, and not just any death, but His death by crucifixion. Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:18, the message "of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

It's the message about the cross, Jesus crucified that is at the heart of the Christian gospel. First Corinthians 1:23, Paul writes, "We preach Christ crucified." First Corinthians 2:2, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

So, it matters not only that Jesus died for our sins, but as we'll discover, it matters how. It matters that He was crucified for us. Today and next Sunday, Lord willing, I want us to study together Mark's account of our Lord's crucifixion.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 15. Mark chapter 15, and I'll read verses 20 to 26. You follow along in your copy of God's Word. Mark 15, and verse 20.

After they had mocked Him, they took the purple robe off Him and put His own garments on Him, and they led him out to crucify Him. They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene,) the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross. Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull. They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh; but He did not take it. And they crucified Him, and divided up His garments among themselves, casting lots for them to decide what each man

should take. It was the third hour when they crucified Him. The inscription of the charge against Him read, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

The center of human history, and the center of God's eternal plan of redemption, is also the center of this text we have just read together.

It's really a remarkable text when you think about it, because in verse 24, Mark records in just three Greek words, the historical event that stands at the very center of our faith, the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son. But Mark's account of the crucifixion is much fuller than perhaps it appeared to you, even as we read it together, because his account of the crucifixion actually unfolds in four scenes that this week and next, I want us to consider together. Four scenes.

Let's look at the first scene in verses 20 and 21, the road to the cross, the road to the cross. Because the road that Jesus took to the site of the crucifixion actually teaches us two profoundly important lessons. Let's look at them.

These lessons that come to us from the road to the cross. First of all, the end of that road pointed to the cross's saving purpose. It pointed to the cross's saving purpose.

The traditional journey to the cross is a route that is marked through the city of Jerusalem called the Via Dolorosa, meaning “the way of suffering.” It's highly unlikely, however, that that was the route that Jesus took to the site of His crucifixion. Because the Via Dolorosa is based on the mistaken premise that Jesus' trial took place at the Fortress Antonia, which is attached or was attached to the Temple Mount.

However, the biblical evidence points to a different place for Jesus' trial before Pilate and that is to Herod's Palace. Look back at Mark 15 verse 16, “The soldiers took him away into the palace, (that is, the Praetorium.)”

The soldiers had been escorting Jesus back and forth during the three Roman trials between Pilate's Bema seat out in an open market just outside the palace and the courtyard of the palace

itself. They now take him back into the courtyard of the palace. Literally verse 16 says, “the soldiers led him away into the courtyard, which is the Praetorium.”

So, Mark is describing a large courtyard that sat between the two identical wings that Herod the Great built as a palace there in Jerusalem. During the feast time, Herod would have, Herod the Great from Galilee, or Herod rather, not Herod the Great, he had died by this time. But Herod from Galilee, one of his sons, would have been in one end of this palace.

And in the identical opposite end, Pilate the governor would have come in from Caesarea on the coast for the event, and they would have been staying just across the courtyard from each other, which enables all of the events that unfolded that morning to go very quickly. So, the Praetorium then was Herod's Palace on the upper west side of the city of Jerusalem, built high so that it could catch the afternoon breezes off the Mediterranean.

Now, that means that the route to the site of crucifixion was not the Via Dolorosa. Instead, it was a route of only about 350 yards from Herod's Palace to just outside the city wall. Now, look at verse 20, “After they had mocked Jesus, they took the purple robe off Him.”

When the soldiers, perhaps as many as 200 that morning, had taken turns insulting and brutalizing Jesus, they tore the faded and discarded Roman soldier's cape off of Him. During their brutal game, they had taunted Jesus, pretending that He was a king, putting a crown of thorns on His head and handing Him a reed, which was His scepter, and then coming up to Him, spitting in His face, grabbing that reed out of His hand and beating Him around the head and shoulders with that reed, as if to say, “Here's the scepter, which is the symbol of Your power. Here's how powerful You are, King of the Jews. Take this.”

The robe that they had put on Him for this mockery had undoubtedly become fastened to the clotting blood on His back from the earlier scourging, and they now tear it off of Him, undoubtedly introducing a fresh wave of pain that racked His body as the wounds re-opened.

And then verse 20 says, “They put His own garments on Him.” That was very unusual actually among the Romans. This was a concession to the Jewish sense of modesty. If Jesus had been crucified anywhere else in the Empire, He would have been led naked through the streets to His

execution, but it is Jerusalem and it is Passover. And so, they put His own garments back on Him.

Verse 20 ends by saying, “and they led Him out to crucify Him.” “They” here refers to the normal detail of four seasoned army veterans who were typically assigned the responsibility to oversee crucifixions. In charge of the four was a centurion, a commander of 100 men. He would have been the only likely true Roman in the group. Most of these men, these soldiers were not Romans. Most of the Roman army stationed in Judea in the first century were actually auxiliary soldiers recruited from the Gentile populations of Syria and Samaria and even the coastal city of Caesarea.

But all of them would have been career soldiers because that's what it meant to be a Roman soldier. They typically enlisted around the age of 19. After 20 years of service, they were discharged and granted land in one of the frontier territories as a sort of prize for their service.

Until the late AD 100's, some 70 years after this event, soldiers were not allowed to marry. In fact, if a married man joined the army, he had to dissolve his marriage. So, there was absolutely no family life whatsoever.

There was nothing to soften and temper the cruelty and coldness that comes with such a profession. These men were hardened, profane, and almost certainly pagan. It's possible that these four men picked for the crucifixion detail had been part of the much larger group that had arrested Jesus in Gethsemane about nine hours before.

After waking up that morning, they perhaps joined the rest of the cohort stationed at the governor's official residence. All of those off duty had almost certainly enjoyed making fun of a 30 something year old Jewish man who had somehow managed to turn all the local politicians against Him. And now these four had been assigned the grisly task of Jesus' crucifixion, a task that they had undoubtedly managed many times before because sadly, crucifixions were very common in first century Judea.

So, these four men are now responsible to lead Jesus and two other convicted criminals, likely followers of Barabbas, the one whose place Jesus has now taken in this crucifixion detail, and to

lead them to the site of the crucifixion. Normally, the condemned man was forced to carry the cross beam of his cross to the site of execution. Most of the time in Roman crucifixions, the vertical timber was left in the ground, and the horizontal timber was what the criminal carried and was later affixed to, and it affixed in turn to the cross.

But the criminal carried that cross beam to the site of execution. The Roman historian Plutarch writes, “Every criminal condemned to death bears his cross on his back.” It was no different in Jesus' case. John 19:17 says, “They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out bearing His own cross.”

In Latin, that cross bar called the *patibulum* typically weighed between 75 and 125 pounds. The soldiers placed that cross member, balanced across Jesus' shoulders, and if they did what was typically done, they then stretched His arms to that cross member and tied His arms to it.

And they began to leave Herod's Palace, making their way outside the city. Only Luke tells us that as they were making their way through the city, Jesus stopped for a moment, and He prophesied Jerusalem's coming destruction, Luke 23, verse 27 and following.

Because of all that Jesus had physically suffered over the previous 12 hours, He is now unable to carry the cross member, that hundred-pound cross member, all the way to the site of crucifixion, all 350 yards. Instead, He stumbled under its weight and collapsed. Matthew 27, verse 32 tells us that this happened as they were coming out. That is, as they were coming out of the city gate of Jerusalem. Look again how Mark puts it in verse 20, “And they led Him out to crucify Him.”

John says the same thing, John 19:17, “They took Jesus, therefore, and He went out . . . to the place called the Place of the Skull.” Why is it important that the road to the cross led Jesus outside the city? Well, obviously, the people of the city and the Romans, the Jewish leaders didn't want executions inside the city. That was the sort of practical reason. But there was more to it than that.

The fact that Jesus was to be crucified outside the city points to the purpose of the cross. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear. Hebrews chapter 13, verse 11, talking about the Day of Atonement, says, “The bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the

high priest as an offering for sin.” He's talking about the sacrifices on the annual Day of Atonement. He says those bodies are burned outside the camp.

You see, most of the time, the priest could eat the meat from the sacrifices, but the sin offering on the Day of Atonement was entirely different. The remains of those sacrificial animals were carried outside the camp, and there they were burned by fire, set apart to God in solemn judgment, according to Leviticus 16:27. Now, why is that important? Because the annual Day of Atonement pointed to the once for all sacrifice of Christ.

So that the writer of Hebrews goes on to say this, after talking about the animals on the Day of Atonement being burned outside the city, he writes in the next verse, Hebrews 13:12, “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” So, the fact that the road to the cross ended outside the city pointed to the saving purpose of the cross. Jesus' death on that Friday 2,000 years ago was the great fulfillment of the Jewish Day of Atonement.

He was the one who truly purchased atonement. All of those years, through all of Jewish history, not one time did those animals truly purchase forgiveness. The writer of Hebrews says, it's not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.

They merely pointed forward to THE day of atonement. The day we're studying in this text.

Now, while Jesus was on that road headed outside the city, we discover a second crucial lesson, because what happened to one unsuspecting man also pictured the cross's saving power. Look at verse 21, “They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene, (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.”

When the soldiers saw that Jesus had collapsed, that He was no longer able to carry that cross member, they decided to conscript someone randomly from the crowd. The Greek word that's translated “pressed into service” in verse 21 is actually an old Persian word that described in Persia the right of government officials to conscript anyone's animals to make sure that the mail was delivered. Well, the Romans adopted and borrowed that very same concept and made a very similar law.

Roman soldiers and other government officials could conscript or demand assistance from anyone nearby for official Roman government business. In this case, verse 21, “They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country Simon of Cyrene, (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.” Now, verse 21 tells us really everything we know about this man.

First of all, the name Simon is Jewish, so it's likely that he was Jewish. We also find out that he was originally from Cyrene. That's a city on a plateau 10 miles from the coast of North Africa in modern-day Libya.

Now there was a large Jewish population in Cyrene in the first century, but there was also a large Jewish population from Cyrene living in Jerusalem in the first century. In fact, according to Acts 6-9, there was a synagogue in Jerusalem that was made up of Jews, in part from the city of Cyrene in North Africa.

We also know one other thing about Simon. We know that he was entering Jerusalem around 9 a.m., the time Jesus was crucified on the morning of Passover. But we don't know why. However, there are really only two reasons that are likely.

First of all, it's possible that he was a faithful believer in the God of Israel, and he had traveled from somewhere else in the empire to Jerusalem in order to celebrate the Passover, possibly from Rome, as we'll see in a moment. It's also possible that along with many others from Cyrene, he had moved to Jerusalem, called it his home. It's even possible that he owned a nice home in one of the suburbs just outside the city and belonged to the Synagogue there in Jerusalem, which had a number of folks from Cyrene who attended.

We know another thing about this man and that is the name of his sons. It's extremely unusual for Mark to mention Simon's sons, Rufus and Alexander, since they add absolutely nothing to the story. The only reasonable explanation is that these two boys were known to the Christians in Rome to whom Mark wrote his gospel.

You see, apparently Simon and his two sons, Rufus and Alexander, and Simon's wife had all, or all would later become true followers of Jesus and members of the early church in the city of Rome. Because when Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, in Romans 16:13, he says, “Greet

Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.” By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, tradition says Simon of Cyrene had died, and Alexander, one of his sons, had been martyred. But the other son, Rufus, and Rufus' mother, were still living.

Paul, here in Romans 16 calls Rufus, “a choice man in the Lord,” a fellow believer, and a special one at that. And he refers to Rufus' mother, that is the wife of Simon of Cyrene, as his own mother, meaning that apparently at some point, she had treated Paul as if he were her own son.

It's possible that Rufus and Alexander were with Simon when he was forced to carry Jesus' cross that morning. Being pressed into service by Roman soldiers was certainly not how Simon had planned to spend his Passover. He didn't know this criminal who was worthy of crucifixion. He had no interest in knowing him.

But now he's forced to carry His cross. You can only imagine what that was like. Put yourself for a moment through a bit of sanctified imagination in Simon's shoes. When he arrived at the place of execution, he likely did what we would have done. He likely threw that wretched cross member to the ground and tried desperately to wipe its blood and its defilement from his hands. This had changed everything. Now it would be impossible for him to go to the temple. Impossible to celebrate Passover. He was unclean. So likely he stayed to watch this man whose cross he had just carried be crucified.

Think about, even if he stayed only a short time, think about what he heard that morning. He heard the gospel. How did he hear the gospel? He heard it through the accusations of Jesus' enemies. As he stood there, he heard everything that Jesus had claimed. He heard that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the Messiah, the promised one of the Old Testament. He heard that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, that He'd come to save His people from their sins. He heard it all.

It's likely because of what happened that day and what he heard, Simon came to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Just think of the irony in this. Simon bore the cross for the one who was bearing the cross for him.

Just as with Barabbas, here's another illustration of the divine purpose behind the cross, the purpose of substitution, that Jesus was dying in the place of as a substitute for His people who deserved God's wrath.

In Barabbas' case, we see a picture of Jesus' substitution for the worst of men. Barabbas was a murderer, a terrorist, connected to all the sedition that was going on in Jerusalem, to a number of deaths.

In Simon, we see a picture of Jesus' substitution for the best and most religious of men. You see, the truth is, they both, we all, are guilty before God. It doesn't matter how good you think you are on the scale of human goodness. You're not good enough for God. None of us are. We're all guilty before Him.

The heavens are not clean in His sight, the Scripture says. We certainly aren't. We needed our sins to be forgiven. We needed someone to stand in our place and absorb the wrath of God that we deserved. And that's exactly what Jesus was doing on the cross. If you're here this morning and you've never come to Jesus Christ, listen, the only way your sins can ever be forgiven is if they are paid for.

And the only One who can pay for them is the only One who had none of His own. That's Jesus, the One the Father appointed as the mediator, the One He appointed as the substitute to stand in the place of, to receive the wrath against the sins of everyone who would ever believe in Him. He's your only hope. I plead with you this morning, repent of your sins and believe in the One the Father appointed.

For the Roman Christians, to whom Mark wrote his gospel, and for us, there's also another powerful lesson, even for us as Christians, in Simon's carrying Jesus' cross. Because earlier in Mark's gospel, chapter 8 verse 34, Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

You talk about a graphic illustration of that reality. Simon saw it, he experienced it. So, the first scene, then, in the story of the crucifixion is the road to the cross with two profound spiritual lessons.

That brings us to the second scene that will just begin today, and that is the record of the cross. The record of the cross, verses 22 to 25. Mark begins his record of what actually happened at the cross in verse 22 with its grizzly setting.

Verse 22 says, “Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull.” Both Jewish and Roman custom called for criminals to be executed outside the city limits. For example, Leviticus 21:23, “Bring the one who has cursed God outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, then let all the congregation stone him outside the city.” That's where this place was. And this place is called, in Aramaic, Golgotha. When it's transliterated into Greek, it became Golgotha. It means, as Mark translates it here, “Place of a Skull.”

So where does the word “Calvary” come from? Well, when Jerome translated this Greek expression into the Latin Vulgate, he used the Latin word for skull, which is *calvaria*, from which we get our word, “calvary.”

Now, why was this place called the Place of a Skull? There are two common explanations that are offered. One of them is not likely, and that is that as a site of execution, skulls littered the ground all around.

That is highly unlikely. The Jews insisted on burial, even if their corpses were thrown in Gehenna, the bodies had to be disposed of, because to touch any part of a dead body was to become unclean.

A second explanation is far more likely, and that is that there was a hill there, shaped in some way like a skull. Now, understand this, there is no explicit mention in the gospels of a hill where Jesus was crucified. And the name Mount Calvary didn't become popular until after the Latin Vulgate.

However, it's still very likely that there was a small hill where Jesus was crucified. How do we know that? Because the nearby graves, including the one where Jesus was buried, were dug into a hillside, and the stone was rolled in front of them, you remember? So, that implies a hill of some kind.

It's possible that small hill had a smooth knoll with no vegetation that looked like the smooth top of a skull. We do know that that area where Jesus was crucified was an ancient stone quarry from which many of the stones for the city were quarried. When they got to this section, the limestone was too soft to produce stones from it, and so they left it.

And so, you can picture the stones quarried all around, and the middle of that quarry field was a rise, a hill made out of limestone too soft to quarry. And so there they dug graves into the side of the hill, and it was on that hill that Jesus was likely crucified. We know that Golgotha was just outside the ancient north wall of the city, because John 19:20 says the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city.

We know it was close to a public road, so that those who passed could see and ridicule Jesus as the gospel records detail, and even Simon was passing by and was conscripted. Excavations have revealed that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the city of Jerusalem actually meets all the necessary criteria. In fact, they have discovered that beneath the site where Jesus was crucified is a stone outcropping that's some almost 40 feet high.

So that's likely the site. By the time Constantine's mother, Helena, built the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in AD 335, there was already an ancient tradition that the spot was the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

Sadly, it's been completely obliterated by the Roman Catholic Church today, but that spot was likely the place where Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead. It's where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher stands today. It was, in the first century, the place of a skull.

That was its grim setting. Next, in verse 23, Mark points us to its resolute Savior. Its resolute Savior, I love this, verse 23, "They tried to give Him wine mixed with myrrh, but He did not take it."

In the first century, myrrh, a resin or gum, was used for several purposes. It was used for perfume, for flavoring, and for embalming. But it was also used for an anesthetic.

Now the reason for giving Jesus wine mixed with an anesthetic depends on who exactly gave it to Him. There are two possibilities. The Babylonian Talmud says that it was standard practice for the Jewish women of Jerusalem to offer wine laced with a narcotic to those who were being crucified.

This group of wealthy women were motivated by Proverbs 31:6, and 7, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more.”

So, it's possible that this wine mixed with myrrh was offered Jesus by these wealthy, well-intentioned, compassionate women. On the other hand, if the Roman soldiers offered Him this drink, their purpose was not to lessen the total pain of crucifixion. That typically went on over a number of days and nothing else would be given to the criminal.

More likely, if they gave it to Him, they gave it to Him as a temporary narcotic to lessen the pain and shock of driving the nails into His body and fastening Him to the cross. In this case, it wouldn't be so much an act of mercy as a tool to help them get their grisly job done with the least amount of resistance from Jesus.

But don't miss the point of verse 23. Whether this offer of wine mixed with myrrh came from the women of Jerusalem as an act of mercy, or whether it came from the soldiers in an attempt to get their job done, Jesus refused to drink it. Look at verse 23, “He did not take it.” Now that's surprising.

Because as we learned when we were studying the first temptation, God created our bodies with legitimate physical needs and the related desires that move us to meet those needs. One of our body's legitimate needs, as we discovered, is the avoidance or alleviation of pain and discomfort. God made us that way.

That's why He made your nervous system to respond. The moment you touch something hot that could harm you, you immediately pull it back. It's just hardwired by God into us.

There's nothing wrong with taking medications to avoid or alleviate pain and discomfort. So, why did Jesus refuse to take this narcotic in this moment to limit his pain?

The answer is really staggering. He wanted absolutely nothing to dull His senses in this hour when He would bear the wrath of God and pay for our sins. He chose instead to drink the wrath of God in full so that He could redeem His people to the uttermost. What would compel Jesus to do this?

What would move Him to refuse any alleviation of His pain and suffering? He knew what was coming, and yet He refused it. What compelled Him to embrace the fullness of His suffering?

Scripture gives us two answers to that question. The first answer isn't surprising at all. Christ was driven by His obedience to the Father. Go back to chapter 14. Chapter 14 verse 34, we find Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before. Verse 34, He said to his disciples,

“My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and keep watch.”

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me.”

Now don't misunderstand, Jesus wasn't asking to be relieved from the physical pain and suffering. Clearly, He just refused to take a narcotic that would have alleviated that suffering.

No, what Jesus is praying here is, Father, if there's a way for Me to redeem My people without being separated from You, without the experience of, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why have you abandoned Me?” If that's possible, let this pass from Me.

But notice verse 36 ends, “yet, not what I will, but what You will.” Jesus was driven to the cross by obedience to the Father.

But the second answer the Scripture offers to why Jesus would do this is shocking. If you really stop and think about it. Jesus, secondly, was driven by His love for us. He was driven by His love for us. That's why He refused to take the narcotic. He loved us and wanted to pay the debt in full. Look at Ephesians chapter 5, turn there with me. Ephesians chapter 5, verse 25, “Husbands love

your wives.” But listen to this, “Just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that's what moved Him.” Go back to verse 2 of that same chapter, “Walk in love just as Christ also loved you”—plural. God's people, His people, He loved you and gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

That's what drove Jesus, His love for His people. Go back to John's Gospel. John 13 verse 1, at the beginning of the Lord's Supper, the night before His crucifixion, we read in verse 1, “Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father.” Knowing about His suffering, knowing about His death.

Notice the end of verse 13. What was on His mind? His physical suffering? No, it was His love for us. “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end,” to the *telos* in Greek, “to the maximum,” “to the uttermost.” And forever, the word has both connotations. He loved them to the maximum. He loved us to the maximum.

Go over to John 15. I love verse 9. John 15 verse 9, Jesus says, “Just as the Father has loved Me,”—as God the Father has loved God the Son—“I have also loved you; abide in My love.” And what did that drive Jesus to do? Look at verse 13, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” This is what drove Jesus. It's amazing.

What drove Him to the cross, what drove Him to that suffering, what drove Him to refuse the narcotic was His love for His people.

Romans 8:37 says, speaking of all the things that we might encounter in this life and all these things, “we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” First John 3:16, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.” This is how we really understand, how we really grasp love.

But turn with me to Revelation chapter 1, because here John says something unique. Revelation chapter 1 verse 5, he says, “from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth” as we sang even this morning. Now watch what he says about Jesus at the end of verse 5, “To Him who loves us.” In Greek, “to Him who is loving us.” His love wasn't just something in the past.

It wasn't just drove Him to the cross. That love continues to this day. "To Him who is loving us and released us from our sins by His blood."

So Christian, Christ loved us. And it was His love for us. That's why He gave Himself up for us. And He still loves us. It hasn't changed one bit. He loves His own to the end, to the *telos*, to the maximum, forever.

So, when Jesus refused the narcotic, don't misunderstand. When Jesus refused that narcotic so He could drink the cup of God's wrath to the dregs, Jesus wasn't merely thinking about potentially saving some people out there. And He wasn't merely thinking about saving all His people, those the Father had given Him in eternity past.

He was, but not only that. Jesus wanted His mind to be clear in that moment because the Son of God was thinking about each one of us. He was thinking about us as individuals. You say, Tom, is that biblical? It is. Turn with me to Galatians chapter two. Galatians chapter two, verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ." Every true believer, the moment of their salvation, it's as if the person they used to be died with Jesus Christ. That person doesn't live anymore, "and it is no longer I who live." Doesn't mean I lose my personality. No, it means I'm not the person I once was. That person doesn't live anymore. He goes on to say, "but Christ lives in me." My current life, "Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh." In other words, I live like everybody else. I go to work, and I eat, and I drink, and I sleep, and I have friends, and I do all those things. "But the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God."

And watch this, "who loved me and gave Himself for me." This is the only place in the New Testament where we're reminded that Jesus' death was very intensely personal. Wasn't just for us as His people, although that's how we're normally encouraged to think of it so that we don't get too myopic and too inward focused. He died for us. But it wasn't just for us in general terms. It was for me.

If you're a Christian, He loved you and gave Himself for you. You were on his mind that day. The eternal Son of God knew those the Father had given Him an eternity past. And as He died, He knew He was dying for you. The one He's loved since the Father gave you to Him an eternity past and the one for whom He gave His life.

As you read the events of the Passion Week, as you reflect on Jesus' suffering and death, meditate on this amazing reality. He suffered everything that you will read about, and He gave His life as a substitute in your place. And He didn't do anything to alleviate the pain and the suffering physically or under the wrath of God.

Why? Because he loved me, He loved you, and He gave himself for you. Understanding His love should cause you to respond in several ways.

You can jot these down, there's none on the slide. But because you understand Christ's love for you, first of all, you should love him. Ephesians 6:24 says, "Grace be to all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an incorruptible love."

As Christians, we know His love and we respond to that love. We love Him. Secondly, we obey Him. We read it in John 15, right? I've loved you, you love Me, and if you love Me, you'll keep My commandments. Number three, because of Jesus' love, we love one another.

Jesus says that. He says, just as I have loved you, John 15 verse 12, just as I have loved you, love one another. Listen, look around. Jesus loved these people and He gave Himself for them. And if you're a Christian, you should love them too.

Number four, because of Jesus' love, we should live no longer for ourselves, but for Him. Second Corinthians chapter 5, verses 14 and 15. The love of Christ, His love for us and understanding that love, compels us to do what? To no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Christian, your life doesn't belong to you. Stop living as though it did. It's His. He bought you with the price of Himself. You belong to Him, body and soul, and that's a huge blessing. But live as though it were true, because it is.

And finally, pray that you can truly come to understand His love. Ephesians chapter 3, verses 18 and 19. Paul says, "I pray that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened, so that you may comprehend with all the saints what is the height and breadth and depth and to know the love of Christ."

Pray that God would open your eyes. You see, all of us think we understand, and to some extent we do, but none of us have scratched the surface of His love. What we know of the love of Christ is a drop in the ocean compared to the ocean of his love.

Pray that God would open your eyes, even in this season, to understand.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we are overwhelmed by the truth we have studied together this morning. I pray that You would drive these truths deep within our hearts and help us understand something of the love of Jesus to respond in these ways with loving Him, obeying Him, loving His people, not living for ourselves, and praying to better comprehend the depth and height and length of His love for us. And may this week accomplish that in our souls.

Lord, I pray for those who are here who don't know You, open their eyes to see and understand. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.