

“The Arrest”

Saint Matthew’s Passion, Pt.3

We’re looking at Saint Matthew’s Passion, which, of course, is the gospel writer Matthew’s account of the last days of Jesus and his suffering. Why do we call it “The Passion?” It’s because the word “passion” originally meant suffering. It doesn’t mean that much anymore, although if you’ve ever been in love you’re not exactly shocked at the word linkage. Saint Matthew’s Passion is also the name of an incredible piece of choral music by Johan Sebastian Bach. If you’ve got a couple of hours to kill, go watch the full performance on YouTube – but unless your German is really strong you might want to search for one with English subtitles!

Bach was not only an incredible musician, but even more importantly for our purposes, he was an accomplished theologian as well. And that’s really important for our series, because, as easy as it is to get caught up emotionally in the sufferings of Jesus, that’s not really what’s important. You know in Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* film, he focused on the gory details and bloody violence, but that’s not really necessary. The gospels themselves don’t do that.

In the passages of the gospels, it’s almost as if the gospel writers are saying, “You don’t need to have your heart wrung by the *fact* of his suffering. You need to

understand the *meaning* of it. It’s not so important to be moved by the *fact* he died on the cross. You need to understand the *theology* of the cross. You need to understand what it accomplished. You need to understand *why* he did it. And so during this series we are asking the question each week, what did the death of Christ *mean*?

Lots of people saw Jesus dying, and were not transformed by it. You have to understand *why*, and the words of Jesus embedded in these accounts are what we really have to look at. There’s a very weird place in Luke 23 where Jesus turns to a group of women who are following after him, weeping for him on the way to the cross. And he turns to them and says something very weird. It’s almost never preached on because it’s so odd. **Luke 23:28**, “*Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.”*”

You know what? I’m afraid a lot of people come to church around the Easter season and hear about the sufferings of Jesus and are moved, they’re emotional. But they’re more like those daughters of Jerusalem, because what Jesus was saying is, “You are just moved sentimentally. You don’t really *get* it. You’re moved, in some general way, that I’m dying, but you don’t understand why. You don’t understand the theology of what I’m doing. You don’t understand what I *accomplished* on the cross.”

He says, “You shouldn’t be weeping for me. You should be weeping in repentance for yourself. You should understand I’m doing it for you. You should understand *why* I’m doing it for you. You should understand why I *have* to do it for you.” But they don’t. So that’s really what you have in these passages, in these words Jesus is speaking, a deep theology that we have to *understand* with our minds, not just *feel* in our hearts.

So let’s read the passage that we are going to attempt to understand this morning. Let’s take a look at Matthew’s account of the arrest of Jesus Christ. I’m only going to read **Matthew 26:47–56**, “*While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. 48 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. 50 Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus, and arrested him.*

51 With that, one of Jesus’ companions...” - who we know from the book of John was Peter - “...reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the

Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

55 At that time Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me.56 But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Now what you have in this particular narrative of the arrest are three pieces. You see, there’s the betrayal of Judas in 47–50 with a statement by Jesus, and then there is the impulsiveness of Peter and a statement by Jesus in 51-54, and then from 55 on there’s Jesus turning to the crowd and rebuking them. And in each case, Jesus is teaching us something about the cross and his death, because *everything* in all of these events, all of these descriptive narrative passages, is *all* about the cross. They’re all about what does his death mean.

And so there are three things we’re going to see here: In the word to *Judas*, we see that from the cross flows a *committed* life. From the word to *Peter*, we see that from the cross flows an *upside-down* life, a life of upside-down values, at least as the world sees it. And lastly, from the word to the *crowd*, we see that from the cross flows a *calm* life.

Let's look, number 1, Jesus' word to Judas. Now in a way, the story of the betrayal of Judas is not just here, but it is sort of woven through a number of the different passages. And Judas is of course a fascinating figure. How many people do you know named Peter, John, Mark, Luke, Paul? A couple, right? How many Judas' do you know? It's right up there with Adolf, isn't it?

Now, we've been featuring a classical painting each week that goes along with our text. And today we have my favorite artist of all time, Caravaggio. This is his *The Taking of Christ*, which was commissioned by a Roman nobleman in 1602 and was presumed lost for about 200 years before it was discovered in 1990 hanging in the dining room of a residence of Jesuit priests in Dublin, Ireland! It had been hanging there since the 1930's but they just assumed it was a copy! It's now on display at the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin – which I *wish* I would have known when I was there 2 years ago!

But there's a lot going on here. Caravaggio's Jesus is almost knocked off his feet by the lunging grasp of Judas, who desperately stares into Jesus's face – for reassurance? – while Jesus averts his eyes. But none of that is in the center of frame – look right into the middle of the painting.

Look at the detail of the polished metal arm of the soldier. Many have suggested it is meant to serve as a mirror – putting the viewer in the middle of the action. In fact, the artist has led by example, that's his self-portrait in the upper right hand corner holding the lantern.

It's appropriate that we turn the painting into a reflection, because it's too easy to simply scapegoat Judas as the villain and move on. I love how Judas is depicted here as an anxious, ordinary-looking, balding middle-aged man who almost seems to regret what he is doing. In fact, in the painting, as in the Scriptural narrative, Judas does not come into full focus. The lower half of his face is hidden in shadows. And he is in fact a shadowy figure.

Of course, there are plenty of traditional people, for whom Judas is simply the worst sinner ever. If you read Dante's *Inferno*, when you get to the lowest level of hell - where there's a lake of ice, by the way, not fire - you find Judas underneath the ice being constantly devoured by Satan like a never-ending, late-night snack. It literally doesn't get any lower than that. Contrarily, it's more popular in contemporary times – like in the rock-opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* - to be more sympathetic to Judas, and to view him as sort of being a complex, maybe tormented, person who meant well and so forth.

But when we actually read what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are saying about Judas, we see that neither of those is right. On the one hand, Judas is not a kind of admirable person who means best. You know what's interesting about this kiss? There is a Jewish scholar named Moses Aberbach who sheds some light on this. He says, "In any group of teacher and disciples in those days, the disciple was never permitted to ever greet his teacher first, since this implied equality."

Got that? In *that* culture at *that* time, he said, when you came up, if you were a disciple, you never, ever greeted the teacher first. That was equality. So he says, "Therefore, Judas' sign was not just a signal to the mob, but it was a deliberate insult and the final repudiation of his relationship with Jesus."

In other words, when Judas came up and said, "Hail, Master," he was not *just* giving them a sign. He was also saying to Jesus, "I'm as good as you. I've come out on top. I've always resented all of your claims to authority." Now that's not a tortured, well-meaning person, but on the other hand, the whole point of the gospel narrator is to tell us that what Judas did is *very* normal. It is *not* unique. It is *not* rare. It's *not* for the worst person on the face of the earth.

This is actually *incredibly* easy to do. A little farther up in Matthew 26 – we skipped over this part when we looked at the last supper - Jesus looks out at his disciples around the table and says, "...one of you will betray me," what do they say? It's interesting. Wouldn't you think the disciples – with their hyper egos and lack of self-awareness - would have said "Not me! Probably him!?" But it says, at least *most* of them, said, "Is it me, Lord?" because even *they* knew their own hearts enough to know what they were capable of. See, what is Judas doing? Judas is selling Jesus.

Of course, we all know about the 30 pieces of silver. He's selling Jesus. What does it mean to sell something? To use a terribly painful analogy for our week...imagine you own stock. Too soon? You keep your stock as long as what? As long as you don't get a privileged Senate security briefing about an approaching pandemic – Ooo, I wouldn't want to be in some of those Senators' shoes! No, you keep it...as long as it's making you money. As long as it's profitable. What happens if it starts losing you money? You *sell* it.

What does it mean to *sell* Jesus versus *serve* Jesus? What is the difference between selling and serving? They are the exact opposites of each other. Selling Jesus means you make *him* a means to the ultimate end of your happy life, whereas in serving Jesus, you make your *life* a means to the ultimate end of pleasing *him*.

Satan, in the book of Job, puts it perfectly. There's a dialogue between God and Satan in the very beginning of the book of Job where God says to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him..." And what does Satan say? Satan says, "Does Job serve God for *nothing*?" Now right there you've got it. God says, "Job is a servant. He serves me."

Satan says, "No, he's not a server. He's a *seller*. He's with you as long as he's turning a profit." In other words, what Satan says right here is, "He is not *your* servant. He is religious in order for you to be *his* servant." Now as it turns out in the end, Satan was wrong, but he has put his finger on the issue.

What happens when you've really lived a pretty good life as far as you can tell, and you've really tried to do your best by the Christian faith, and then some *major* prayer of yours is not answered? You ask for something you think is reasonable, logical, something you really feel, honestly, you deserve. And you ask for it, and it's very important to you, and it really means the world to you, and it's turned down. And what do you say?

Well, I know what an awful lot of people say. You say, "What good is all this Christian faith? What good is all this obedience? Why have I done all this,

and then God won't even answer me? What good is it to be a Christian?" That's seller-heart language. What you're saying is, "My happiness, my agenda, is the non-negotiable. That's never sold. That's always there, but if God isn't the way to get to it..." See, God is the means, and you are the end.

That's *selling*, and every one of the disciples - even the stupid disciples knew! - they were on the verge of that all the time. Caravaggio was onto it, we've all got to look in the mirror. See, even in a real server, there's always a seller. There are always two natures, right? There's the old and the new, and even in the best servers, there's a seller, and we're always wrestling, and we're always fighting.

All the gospel writers include a story - with varying degrees of detail - that sets up a contrast between Judas and a woman named Mary. John tells us that she is Mary, the sister of Lazarus - whom Jesus had raised from the dead, you'll remember. She shows up at a dinner party and she pours an incredibly valuable bottle of ointment or perfume on Jesus' feet. Have you heard that story? It's like she's pouring out her whole family net worth, and it's her way of saying, "I give you everything. I put everything at your disposal."

And who there is grumpy about it? Who says, “What’s she doing that for? We could have used that!” It’s Judas. And this is the way all the gospel narrators are saying even though you know you’re struggling between being a seller and being a server, there really is nothing in the middle. You are *either* Judas or you’re Mary. You *either* say to Jesus Christ, “I will obey you unconditionally. I will make you the supreme thing in my life,” or else you’re a Judas. See, Judas is not the worst sinner in the world. That’s why even the disciples knew, “I have the same problem.”

You either are saying to God, “I will obey you no matter what the consequences are practically. I will obey you no matter what the consequences are socially and culturally. I will obey you even when you tell me something that goes completely against my feelings and my desires. I will obey you utterly and unconditionally. I will make you the supreme thing in my life, like Mary, pouring everything out,” or else you’re Judas. Because, see, if you have *any* conditions, if you say, “I’ll obey you *if*…” what you’re really saying is, “As long as you’re profiting me, I’ll stick with you, but if I start to lose, I have to dump my Jesus stock,” and you’re Judas.

Now how do you get to the place of being utterly committed to him? See, Jesus is calling Judas, but he’s also calling us all. Paint yourself onto the canvas. You can’t live a life of divided loyalties. You need to be completely and wholly and totally committed to Jesus, *or else* you’re Judas. You’re a seller. You’re serving God not for nothing, but for something, which means you’re selling him.”

What’s the answer? Well, what’s *always* the answer? The cross! The thing you have to realize about *all* of these passion narratives is they’re all telling us about the cross. Stoicism, willpower, and self-effort won’t do it. The only way you’ll ever become a Mary, not a Judas, is if you look at the cross. Why? Because look at the cross, and here’s what it tells you: Jesus’ commitment to you was unconditional. Jesus’ commitment to you had no ifs. The cross means Jesus did not say, “Father, I’ll love them *if*…” “I’ll love them *as long as*…” or “I’ll love them *unless*…” There are no “unless’s”, no “ifs”, no “ands”, and no “buts” at the cross.

The cross means his commitment to you is *absolutely* complete, and therefore, the *only* way - but the *natural* way - to respond to that is to be absolutely committed back. You can’t dabble in Jesus. He can’t be an enrichment project. He can’t be one of four or five best practices that kind of help you along.

The cross means Jesus was committed to you without conditions, and the only possible way, and the natural way, to know someone like that is to be committed to him with no conditions at all. So the first thing is out of the cross flows a committed life, a whole life, a life that's not split up into competing concerns.

Secondly, Jesus' word to Peter. And here we have a very, very famous but, I think, very seldom-understood statement. We know it's Peter from John 18 – John puts names to a lot of these characters – and of course it really fits with what we know about Peter. He's very impulsive. It says, **v.51-52**, *“With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ‘Put your sword back in its place,’ Jesus said ...”* and here we go: *“... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”*

What does that mean? The sword, of course, is a symbol - in the Bible and today - of force and judgment, and what Peter was doing was whipping out the sword to what? To help Jesus with his messianic program, to help Jesus set up his kingdom. Jesus Christ came to save the world by establishing his own kingdom. Peter understood that, and he said, “Well, of course the thing to do is bring out the weapons – lean into the power dynamics.”

But Jesus says, “Put it away. All who live by the sword will die by the sword.” What is he saying? Is this about Christian pacifism? Well, I have a lot of sympathy with Christian pacifism; we don't take that nearly as seriously as we should as gun-toting American Christians. But I think this is about more than that. This is pretty nuanced.

I think what Jesus is saying here is, “Peter, you don't understand the gospel. You don't understand the cross,” he's saying, “By taking up the sword you prove that you have a worldly mindset. You don't understand the cross is, in the world's eyes, a completely upside-down way.”

I would suggest that when Peter pulls out the sword, he misunderstands the cross in three ways. First of all, he misunderstands the upside-down way of the cross's **salvation**. Jesus Christ, on the cross, *substituted* himself for us. Now we've said that almost every week, and I'm going to say it again, because this is the essence of how the cross changes you. If you don't believe this, the cross will not change you.

What is substitution? What it means is obviously upside-down. God deserves to be up here. We deserve to be down here. The cross means the Lord God comes down and takes the place we deserve to be in. He substitutes himself for us. He puts himself on the cross. He puts himself under the penalty, so God *switches*.

The cross means nothing if not the greatest reversal ever. God puts Himself where we deserve to be so if we believe in what Jesus did on the cross, we will go where Jesus deserves to be. In other words, the Lord Jesus takes upon himself what we deserve to get, so that when we believe in him, we get what he deserved. That's the reason why **2 Corinthians 5:21** says, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

That is the first thing. When he pulls out the sword, Jesus says, "Peter, I came not to *bring* judgment but to *bear* judgment. I came not to wield a sword but to take the sword into myself." What sword? In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve decide they're going to be their own masters, their own saviors, their own lords, and as a result of what they did, they lost God.

They were thrown out of the garden of Eden. And **Genesis 3:24** says that God, "*After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*" Because of what we have done, there's no way back into the presence of God except under the sword. This is represented in the Temple by the Holy of Holies, if you go in, you're dead.

And yet the New Testament book of **Hebrews 10:19-20** says this, "*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,*". What is it saying? It's saying something very simple. The only way for us to get back into the presence of God was to go under the sword, and Jesus did that for us. He opened the way with his body. He lay down over the barbed wire so we could get across.

And so for Peter to pull the sword out means he doesn't believe in the gospel of substitution. He believes in the gospel of self-salvation. Basically, what he's saying is, "Oh, I understand! All good people get to heaven. Bad people do not. So I am getting ready to do the right thing. I'm going to fight against the bad people." Jesus says, "Oh, you don't understand. The gospel is utterly the reverse of what the world thinks."

The gospel does not come by the Messiah showing up bearing the sword, but by *receiving* the sword. Not *bringing* judgment, but *receiving* judgment, and that's the first thing. Peter, by pulling out the sword, demonstrates he does not understand the upside-down gospel - that God comes down so we can be lifted up...*but* that's not all.

The second thing he does when he pulls out the sword is demonstrate that he misunderstands the upside-down way of the cross' psychology. There's a cross psychology. There's a gospel psychology. And it's *exactly* the opposite of what the world thinks. The gospel psychology is based on substitution. This means on the one hand, I'm so bad that Jesus had to be substituted for me. There's no other way. But on the *other hand*, I'm so valued and so loved that Jesus would substitute himself for me. We say the gospel humbles you to the ground and lifts you to the heavens *at the same time*.

And here's what that means, in cross psychology, the cross way of the self is exactly the opposite of what the world thinks, because in cross psychology, the way up is down. The way to receive honor and confidence is to admit you're a sinner. The way to know you are more loved and accepted than you ever dared hope is to accept and admit you're more sinful than you ever dared believe. The way to know you're so *valued* Jesus would substitute for you is to admit you're so *lost* Jesus had to substitute for you.

And so, the way you can tell the cross has come in and has changed your self-image is that you never feel superior to other people. You don't feel like you can ever say, "I'm the good person. You're the bad person. *I'm* the person the world needs, and *you're* the kind of people who are making the world a nasty place." And in the world's psychology, everyone is doing that. And I mean *everyone*.

You can see it on both sides of our political divide in America. There's the blue state mindset which says, "You know, the problem with the world is oppressive, bigoted, narrow-minded people. *I'm* not one of those people," and therefore, liberal people without the gospel look down. They condemn. They say, "I'm the good person. You're the bad people."

But of course, the red state people are doing the same thing. There's a conservative mindset without the gospel, that says, "What the world needs are virtuous people, people who believe in traditional values. *I'm* one of those people. *You're* not," and therefore, they condemn.

But see, the gospel is purple. A Christian who understand the cross says, “The problem with the world is *me* - my heart - and I’m saved simply because of the grace of God. What that means is I never go out looking at other people and pull a sword on them.” Do you see what I mean by that? I’m never in a position to say, “I’m the good person. You’re the bad people. You’re what’s wrong with this country. You’re what’s wrong with this world.” Never. That’s how you know the gospel has changed you. When you look into the pain and you see *your* sin. You paint yourself into the image. And then you are in a position to repent and you actually begin to feel better and better and more valued, because the cross has come in.

When you are no longer quick to pull a sword on people - condemn people. When you respect people from whom you deeply differ, when you have hope for them, when you have love for them, yet you have the courage to tell them the truth - courage and humility leads to respect - that shows you understand the upside-down nature of gospel psychology, of cross psychology.

So when Peter pulls out the sword, it means he doesn’t understand the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross and it shows he doesn’t understand cross psychology, that the way up is down, the way to really, really have a great self-image is to repent. He doesn’t understand that at all. But there’s a **third thing, when he pulls out the sword, is he shows he doesn’t understand the cross’ upside-down way of social change.**

Peter doesn’t understand the way to change the world is not with coercive power - with military, financial, social, or political power - but through sacrificial service. See, when Peter pulls out the sword, what he is showing is in the world, all that matters is political, military, social, and financial power. *That’s* what really matters: the sword. This is my problem with a lot of Christians in America today who think they way to change the world is to leverage their political power as Christians – PACS and petitions and boycotts and nasty grams on social media – red Christians and blue Christians.

We are *killing* our gospel witness with our religious based partisan politics. Guys, I have a doctorate in historical theology, I’ve seen this before in the history of the church. It does not end pretty. It’s a sword. For many centuries in the global church a *literal* sword! But if the church lives by the sword, it will die by the sword. But there are plenty of Christians these days who refuse to believe it. Plenty of Peters who are in basic agreement with the world that the way to *really* change things is through coercive power.

But I think I can prove them wrong. Who is the most influential human being in the history of the world? Who has changed the most societies? Who has changed the most lives? Who is the most influential person in the history of the world? Jesus Christ, of course. Now, class, let me ask you, how many elections did he win? How many armies did he field? How many battles did he win? How much PAC money did he have? He had *nothing*.

He *gave* his life in sacrificial service. He says, (**Matthew 8:20**), “*Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*” What does the cross mean? The cross means the world’s values are wrong, and the cross brings into your life it’s upside-down values that say this: The way to change the world is through sacrificial service, not through wielding power. The cross does not power over, it serves under. The way to change the world is not to kill you, but to die for you.

The cross seems upside-down in so many ways. For example, the cross shows me someone who, though he was rich, became poor so that through his poverty I might become rich. That will forever change my attitude toward money. If, through the cross, I realize I am this loved, that means money is just money to me now. It’s not my identity anymore. In the world, money is your identity, and you *can’t* give it away. Especially in uncertain times...let me just let that hang there a minute.

But even in boom times; if you suddenly get a huge raise, you’re going to spend 80 percent of that raise on getting into a nicer neighborhood and getting nicer things, because money is a power to you. Money is an identity to you, but the cross stops it. The cross crucifies money to you and you to money, and therefore, you’re so radically generous that if any of the people in the world hear how much money you’re giving away, they’re going to think you’re nuts.

Another thing: The cross shows you a man dying for his enemies. If you are a member of a particular class or race, and right on the other side is another class or race that has hurt you and upset you and alienated you, and you become a Christian, and the cross comes into your life, that means you have been saved by a man who made space for you while *you* were an enemy.

And that means you are going to start looking at people who, in the past, you saw as your enemies, you saw as your opponents, people you didn’t want to have anything to do with. But the cross will change that. You’ll even break bread with them now. You’re not going to just want to hang out with your class, with your race, with your ethnic group. Of course, the world is going to think you’re nuts, but the cross turns *everything* upside-down psychologically, sociologically, theologically.

Substitution turns your *psychology* upside-down, and it turns your *sociology* upside-down. It turns you into people who are radically generous. It turns you into people who don't want to just hang out with your kind of people. See? It turns you into people who care about the poor and the needy, because Jesus Christ became poor voluntarily so you could be pulled out of your spiritual poverty into spiritual wealth. That changes your attitude toward the poor and toward your own wealth *forever*. Now do you see?

Out of *understanding* the cross, he looks at Peter, and Peter is pulling out this sword, and he says, "Peter, you have the world's mindset. Anybody who lives by the sword and – call it what it is - tries to earn his own salvation - you're going to be condemned by judgment. Anybody who is judgmental to another people, you yourself will be judged. Anybody who uses the world's power and tries to use money and power and military might to get your way, you'll be crushed by it. Put away your sword."

Lastly ... let me be really brief on this ... number three **Jesus word to the crowd**. And in those words, he demonstrates that from the cross comes the most incredibly calm life. They come at him with torches and pitchforks, right? It's a violent group. And how does he respond? Not like I would respond, I'd be

like, "What's that?", and then run away when they looked! Not Jesus, he rebukes them.

Look at **v.55**, "At that time Jesus said to the crowd, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?" First of all, he says, "A: You're wrong. I'm not leading a rebellion. You're as wrong as Peter. The gospel has enormous social transforming power, but it doesn't *start* as a social program. And then B:, "Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, and you did not arrest me." He's trolling them. He says, "Ahem. Excuse me. I've been arrest-able all week. What are you coming here in the middle of the night for?" As if we didn't know. Cowards.

But then, lastly, he says, **v.56**, "*But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*" In other words, "this has all taken place because it has to." Now you know what this means? The last thing I'm trying to tell you here today is if you really understand the cross, you're going to have this same attitude. The cross means no matter how **bad** things look, no matter how **unjust** everything seems to be, no matter how **out-of-control** things seem to be, they're not.

His friends ran away. Why? The cross meant God has abandoned him. Well, in a way, He had, but on the other hand, no. You see, the cross means no matter how much I can't understand it, no matter how much everything seems to be God just not answering prayer, everything seems to be blown out of the water, what does it tell us?

God is still there. God is working it out redemptively. He's working His purposes out, no matter how bad things are. See, Jesus is able to say, "I want you to realize my cross is part of a plan, and therefore, I don't get all bent out of shape. God is working." You know what that means? Your crosses are part of a plan.

Do you remember that reference in **v.53**, "*Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?*" It's interesting...strange, but interesting. Back in the Old Testament book of 2 Kings, there's a story where Elisha the prophet was in a town called Dothan, and he was surrounded by hostile forces, and his servant was scared to death and said, "Oh my goodness. It's just terrible. We're all going to die!" The servant is freaking out and Elisha is calm. And so Elisha prayed his servant's eyes would be opened – that the servant could see what he saw.

The servant's eyes are opened, and he sees there to protect them, legions of angels, chariots of fire, all around the city. And the next day, God actually smites the enemy blind, and Elisha and his servant are saved. What's interesting is Dothan was also the place where Joseph, many centuries before that, was thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers, and there undoubtedly prayed for God to help him...but instead he was sold into slavery and carried to a far away land. And Joseph probably thought, "What is God doing? Why this cross in my life? Why is everything going wrong?"

But, of course, if you know the story, what? If he *hadn't* been sold into slavery, he never would have been able to save his family. In fact, he never would have been able to save many, many people from starvation. But what's so interesting is here is Elisha, praying in Dothan, "Oh Lord, help me," and here is Joseph praying, "Oh Lord, help me," and in one place, God seems to come through, and in another place, God seems to not come through...but looking down on both stories, what do *we* know? God is always coming through.

God is as much there in the silence for Joseph as He is in the dramatic deliverance of Elisha, and the cross is telling us about all of that. Because the cross is saying this: You can look at the things that come into your life and say, “Come on, crosses. The lower you lay me, the higher you’ll raise me, because this is the way God works. Whatever comes into my life, if I follow God, is only going to bring me through to some kind of resurrection. It’s going to bring me through into His grace, into His presence. God has not lost control. So come on, do your worst.”

You know, Easter is just a couple weeks away – I don’t know what it will look like this year – but there’s an Easter hymn you often hear with a spot that says:

Made like him, like him we rise...
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

“Ours the cross? The grave?” Yes. It means the death that comes into your life, disaster that comes into your life – the *plague* that comes into your life! - terrible things that come into your life...are *for* you. God *hates* suffering. God *hates* evil, and yet He is overruling it somehow so for even the things that come into your life that are really terrible, that you can’t see any purpose for, Jesus says, “There’s a plan.”

I quoted part of George Herbert’s poem “*The Sacrifice*” last week - where Jesus is looking down from the cross – let’s close today with another verse. He says...

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,
Who am the Way and Truth, the true relief;
Most true to those, who are my greatest grief:
Was ever grief like mine?

You’re more like Judas than you think. More like Peter...more like the crowd. It’s ok, turn to Jesus anyway. Turn to the cross and see that he’s still true to you no matter what.

Let’s pray...