

"The One Who Feared Death the Most"

Mark 14:32-42

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to ask you a question. What one person feared death more than any other person who has ever lived? You might think that we can't answer that question but we can and that's what I'm going to talk about for a few minutes tonight – the one who feared death the most.

HOW CHRISTIANS FACED THEIR DEATHS

Let's start by considering a simple fact. Down through the centuries, many Christians have faced their deaths with courage and joy.

In the second half of the second century, for instance, the Romans systematically persecuted Christians. They imprisoned, tortured, and brutally killed them. But as Chuck Colson points out in one of his books, those Christians often went to their deaths singing and praising Jesus. That in turn became the church's most potent witness to the pagan world. Pagan Romans were convinced that Jesus had taken away their pains and many came to believe in Him as a result. That partially explains the old adage that *"the church was built on the blood of the martyrs."*

Anyway, it's true. Many Christians down through the centuries have faced their deaths with courage and joy.

HOW JESUS FACED DEATH

How then do we explain this passage that I just read?

Knowing that He was going to die the next day, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane and talked with Father God about that. Mark 14:32-42 recounts what His frame of mind and heart was as He did.

Notice the details here. Verse 33 says, *"He began to be very distressed and troubled."* In verse 34, He declared to Peter, James, and John, *"My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death."* And finally, in verses 35-36, He prayed and asked Father God, if it was possible, that He not die the next day. Luke 22:44 adds the poignant

detail this His anguish was so deep that He actually sweat drops of blood.

It's plain to see. Jesus faced death quite differently than the Christian martyrs that I mentioned faced theirs. They faced their deaths with courage and joy. He faced His with anguish and fear. Martin Luther, in fact, said about that, "*Never man feared death like this man.*" He was right. Jesus feared His death more than any other person who has ever lived feared his or hers.

The burning question of course is "why did He?" If you study the gospels, it seems out of character for Him. He had never before shown even the least fear of men or the pain and loss they could inflict on Him. So why did He now respond so grievously to His impending death?

A DIFFERENT DEATH

Most of you know the answer to that. It's because His was a different death. There have been approximately 80 billion deaths in human history. And I can safely say that His was utterly unique. It was different than the death of any person who has ever lived, including the Christian martyrs.

Remember. Father God was with those Christian martyrs as they suffered and died. His presence was more vivid and real to them during that time than probably any other time in their lives.

But Father God wasn't with Jesus as He suffered and died. From the moment that He was arrested in Gethsemane, Father God withdrew His presence completely from Him. No person has ever been as intimate with Father God as Jesus was. No person has also ever been as separated from Father God as Jesus was. When He cried out on the cross, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*", He was only stating the truth. Father God had in fact totally forsaken Him.

And here's why. It's because the death of Jesus was a substitutionary death. You've heard me use that word, "substitutionary," many times. It means that Jesus was our substitute on the cross. You know what a substitute is. It's one person who stands in for another

person. That's exactly what Jesus did on the cross. He stood in for us. The Bible explains quite specifically what that means – two things.

First, it means that He took into Himself all of our sins. I read about a husband leaving his wife of two years because she was diagnosed with MS. That's a despicable thing to do. Jesus took into Himself that sin and every other sin that has been and will be committed. 80 billion people have lived in human history. Imagine how many sins those 80 billion people committed – trillions of them. Jesus took each and every one of those trillions into Himself on the cross.

That Jesus stood in for us on the cross means a second thing. He paid the penalty for all of our sins that we should have paid. I identified that penalty several weeks ago. The wrath of Father God came against Him and did two things. First, separated Him completely from love, peace, and joy. Second, it brought on to Him and into Him utter hatred, loneliness, and despair. It cut Him off from heaven, in other words, and connected Him to hell.

Imagine that if you can. J.I. Packer explains it vividly and well in his book Knowing God. He writes this about the cross experience of Jesus: *"The physical pain, thought great (for crucifixion remains the cruelest form of judicial execution that the world has ever known), was yet only a small part of the story; Jesus' chief sufferings were mental and spiritual, and what was packed into less than four hundred minutes was an eternity of agony – agony such that each minute was an eternity in itself, as mental sufferers know that individual minutes can be."*

All of us can relate to that can't we? We often talk about a certain period of time seeming like an eternity. A mother's 25 year-old son was taken into surgery for a life and death operation. The surgery lasted five hours, which, she testified later, seemed like an eternity to her. Take that mother's mental suffering for those five hours and multiply it by a billion. You'll have some idea of what Jesus went through on the cross if you do.

What I've just explained doesn't do justice to the horror of Jesus; death. But I hope it helps us grasp why He feared His death as He did. It's because it was the only one of its kind. There has never been and will never be a death like it. He experienced Father God's wrath and an eternity of agony so that you and I wouldn't have to.

HONOR JESUS' DEATH

That's what Jesus did for us. Not let's consider what we should do for Him. We should honor His death.

Several years ago, the television show *20/20* told the story of a World War II veteran who returned to Europe. He did so to visit the grave of the fellow soldier who had died saving his life. This veteran had lived an exemplary life after the war ended. He had been an outstanding husband, father, citizen, worker, and man. He explained as he visited his rescuer's grave why he had been. He said: *"After the war was over, I dedicated myself to honoring this man's death for me. The only way I could do that was by becoming the very best person I could be and by living the very best life I could live."* He was grateful, you see, and showed it.

And so should we! We should be eternally grateful that Jesus died for us and we should show it – by honoring His death. We honor His death in a specific way. We decide to become and live like Him. We firmly make and purposely carry out the decision to be with and like Him. We're ingrates if we don't.

So, if you haven't done it, do it tonight. Honor Jesus' death. Firmly make and purposely carry out the decision to be with and like Him.