

Dying Dream, Living Obedience

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to think for the work this morning about these three verses, 39 to 41, that we find in Matthew's account of the Gospel, chapter 26.

And he went a little further, verse 39, and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

And he come unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and said unto Peter, What could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

These three verses, then, initially, if we look at verse 39, he went a little further and fell on his face and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

First of all, we have a little space between Jesus and the three most inner disciples. There is a sense in which, no matter what our particular struggle or encounter is going to be, when we are seeking to encounter the eternal, there is always going to be a space between us and those perhaps nearest and dearest to us.

[1 : 15] Nobody can get their beloved wife, husband, son, daughter, children, parents into heaven with them, as it were.

Our individual salvation is between us and God. Our relationship is between us and God. And although, yes, Christ is the one who alone is able to, we could say, he's the one who can bring all these souls into heaven with them.

Insofar as here we see Christ as a pattern and example for ourselves, this relationship with his Father, which he is patterning for us, when you pray, say, Father, and so on, there is always going to be something of a space between us and those, however close we may be to them.

When it comes down to us and the Lord, it can only be between us and the Lord. There are many households in which, for example, one spouse may be a believer and the other is not, or parents may be, but children are not.

Or even some where the children are, or a child in the house is, but the parents are not. Those who are closest and nearest to us, when it comes to the things of the Lord, there will always be that certain space.

[2 : 35] And it is necessary that we may have better focused upon the one who alone is eternal. He found his face and prayed, saying, Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Now, Jesus is sinless. He is not in this prayer saying, I really want to get out of it, Lord. I really want to not do what you've called me to do. What he is asking is, is there some other way?

Is it possible, Lord, that I can serve you faithfully? I can do what you've called me to do, but just not this way. Just not by that means.

Is it possible this cup can pass from me? And it's a perfectly legitimate prayer in one sense. Jesus is not trying to wriggle off the hook, if we can say that reverently.

But there is within him, because he is wholly human, as well as wholly divine, there is that which inevitably recoils, not only from the physical torture and agony of crucifixion, which anyone would make their blood run cold, to think that they were about to endure that, but also being wholly God as well.

[3 : 54] He will have a sense of the spiritual depths into which he is going to have to be plunged. If he is going to experience, as it were, hell for all those whom he is going to redeem, so that they don't have to.

If he is going to be plunged into the very depths of experiencing a lost eternity, what it would be like on behalf of those who won't have to go there because he has paid their price, that is still a horrific prospect.

It is that from which inevitably, if there be some other way, anyone would choose that other way. Even, and we may say it with all reverence, even Jesus, if there was some other way, would choose that other way.

And there's one reason why, of course, it is such an insult to the Lord. It is so blasphemous. They say, oh, well, you know, all roads lead to God ultimately.

People take their different routes, and they have different religions, and this is okay for this culture, and that's okay for that culture. Everybody's finding their own way to God. Nonsense. If there was some other way, if there was even one other way, if there was any other way, Jesus would have been granted it, and the Father would not have put himself through the agony of watching his beloved son suffer on the cross and be plunged into the depths of a spiritual hell in the darkness.

[5 : 29] He would not have put his beloved son through that if there was any other way, but there was no other way. It is perfectly right that Jesus should ask, but also given that he is in a sense that upon which we see ourselves also reflected.

We see here something of the inevitable struggle when our relationship with the Lord is being tested, when it is being tried, because most people who know a little bit or something about the Lord and experience a wee bit of the Lord and so on, maybe they don't want to jettison all that.

Very few people would turn their back and say, well, that's it. I'm off to be an atheist now. I'm rejecting everything. I'm turning them back on the whole lot. Some people do that. But most people like to keep a wee bit of God in their lives.

Most people would like to have the world and the Lord and somehow say that that's okay. We don't need to completely take on the one and reject the other. We don't need to jettison one altogether.

We can have both. This, I would suggest to you, is one of the most subtle temptations of the evil one. One of his most subtle devices. Because you'll say, oh, no, you don't need to reject God.

[6 : 55] You could still be a Christian. It's just you, you'd be a worldly Christian. You just go along with the world. At best, you still have to believe in God. You still acknowledge God.

You behave like the world. It's okay. I think it's James that says to us, John, know you not, that friendship with the world is enmity with God. I used to read those verses.

Now, that's terrible. Of course we like the things in the world. Of course we like being in the world. It's the only world we know. We've got friends in the world. How do you say that friendship with the world is enmity with God? What it means is, if you put these things first, if you're prepared to compromise your relationship with the Lord so that you can gratify your relationship with the world, then it is God who's being shortchanged.

Now, Jesus said, you cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God and worldliness and money or the powers, the forces, the things of this world.

Something's got to give. What is the right relationship with the Lord? The right relationship with the Lord is that he gives us the things of the world and in the world to be rightly used, food and drink and shelter and employment and work and a certain amount of money that we need to do all our business in the world.

[8 : 12] These things are necessary in the sense of the oil is necessary to make the machinery go. But oil doesn't become our be-all and our end-all. The things in the world don't become our be-all and our end-all.

The other means don't end. And the most important thing is our relationship to the Lord. That is what is eternal. That is what lasts. There is a sense of wrestling here with the Lord Jesus, which is holy and divine and righteous.

We often wrestle in a far less worthy way. Say, oh, is it not possible to just have the Lord and have the world in equal measure? Just to have both at the same time and carry them both so that I can still see I'm the Lord's blood.

I still don't have to let go of all these things that I like. Well, we can have that kind of relationship if we want. We can have that that is neither hot nor cold.

But remember what Jesus said about that with the church in Laodicea. That we have to eventually be one thing or the other. The Lord will allow us to go so far along the road with all the things that we want to bring us and our baggage and all our addictions and all our things that we get like in the world.

[9 : 30] But somewhere along the line, he may call upon us to choose. Somewhere along the line, he is going to require to be first in our lives.

He is going to say, what do you actually love more? Is it me or is it this way? When the rich young ruler came to Jesus and he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

He says, well, you know the commandments. He says, do not kill, not murder, not adultery, not air, pardon. He says, yes, yes, yes, all these I have kept from my youth up. What do I lack? He knew that he lacked something.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. He knew that he was sincere. But there was something standing in the way. And what was standing in the way for that young man was that he loved the world.

He loved the reputation that he had. He loved the fact he was wealthy, that he had good things in the world. And Jesus says, if you're really serious, go and sell all that you have.

[10 : 25] Come and follow me. Put me absolutely first. And he went away sadly. And then Jesus gave his teaching of how difficult it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Not because his riches count against him, but rather because he has a tendency, he has a greater temptation to make these things of perhaps equal importance with the Lord.

You know, if you're on a ship and it goes down, and you've got so many bars or nuggets of gold in your luggage, and you take your bag, your carpet bag, whatever, and it's got three or four gold bars in it, you're determined to hang on to this when you're clinging on your piece of driftwood when the ship's gone down.

Those gold bars are going to drag you down to the bottom of the sea. Somewhere along the line, you're going to have to say, which is more important? To save my life and grab onto this driftwood with all my heart?

Or to hang onto the gold and go down with it? Somewhere along the way, we are going to have to choose. And Jesus, with that rich young ruler, he put his finger on the one thing that was most precious to him.

[11 : 38] We don't know whether eventually, I always like to hope, that eventually, somewhere along the line, that rich young ruler came back and says, you know, he was right. I've got to get rid of all this.

I've got to sell it all. I've got to come. I've got to give my life, give my heart to this man and follow this Jesus. I love to think that maybe he was one of those who, after Pentecost, was one of those who adhered to the disciples, one of those who sold his property, his land, and laid it down at the disciples' feet.

Maybe he was. Maybe he wasn't. We will never know until eternity. But the point is that Jesus put his finger on that one thing that was holding him back.

Jesus, in this prayer, is asking if there is some other way. Can I either keep my life, my relationship with these men, the disciples who are so dear to me, can I keep the way I've been serving you now, I've been teaching, I've been preaching, I've been spreading your good news, is there some other way they can do that without having to go through this fearful experience?

Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. And when eventually the Lord puts his finger on something that is so dear to us that we just do not want to let it go, and it may be something that we are convinced is going on, but Jesus may say, this is actually becoming your idol.

[13 : 05] Lord, this is getting in the way. Are you prepared to let this go? Are you prepared to die to this, to die to self, so you can live to me? Is there going to be anything between you and me, anything coming between us?

Are you prepared to let that go to me? We'll put his finger on it. Now, I don't know what that may be in your life. I know some of the things that has been in my life in the past, and some of the things that may be, for all I know, even now, which the Lord may yet be quiet of us, because as we go along our life with the Lord, little by little, he will identify things one at a time, and say, now at this stage in the journey, I want you to choose.

There will come a fork in the road. You may be able to go so far along, carrying all your baggage with this loud, I see, and kind of lukewarm Christianity, which the world is very happy with.

This is why literal Christianity is such an appeal to so many people. They can be as much like the world as possible, and say, oh, we're doing it so that the world will connect with us.

We connect with them. We want to be like them, and they'll respect us, and that way, they may listen to what we have to say about Jesus. But in fact, they're not really saying anything about Jesus, other than he's not important enough to us to make us choose something different.

[14 : 23] We want to be like you, and the Lord says, that's fine, you be like us. You just be the religious person of us. Why should you listen to what you say? You're just like us. You've got nothing we don't have. You have nothing different.

Yeah, we're not going to give you a hard time, but don't expect respect either. It's the opposite of what the liberal Christianity will think it is presenting.

It is the opposite of what the world thinks he's presenting. He thinks he's got God and the world. He thinks he can do both. He thinks he can have the best of both worlds. Well, in fact, he gets neither.

Because the world does not respect him because he's a bit religious. And Christ will not value or honor that which puts something else before him.

What does he say in Matthew chapter 7, remember, to those who say, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the king of heaven, but whoso doeth the will of my father which is in heaven. And many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, are we not prophesying in thy name and in that name cast out demons and done many great works.

[15 : 27] We've done all these things and we will say, I never knew you. Depart from me. It's not so much what we're able to wow in this world or what we're able to accumulate or do by way of reputation or life in works.

If we have put other things before Christ, then ultimately he will put other things before us. If we are going to be redeemed, then we must be redeemed by a Christ who has given all for us.

Which means that we in turn must give all for him. Jesus, in all honour, in all diligence and faithfulness is faced with this task.

Is it possible there'll be some other way? And in due course, it was impossible. And he himself, a couple of verses later, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

And then he went away again and said the same words. In other words, he is prepared to let go of life itself as he has known it. There will be another one, there'll be eternal life, there'll be glory, there'll be heaven, but he's prepared to let go of this life on earth.

[16 : 43] And it's strange, is it not, to think that one who has known the glory of heaven, one who has filled the heavens and the earth from all eternity, when he becomes human, when he is constrained initially within the womb of the virgin, a tiny little pinhead size that the fetal child is within the womb, and then gradually expanding to the size of like a kidney bean, and then growing in the process of all through the nine months, and then being birthed.

And all the constriction of infancy and childhood, and then manhood, where being confined in the body, he can only be in one place at one time, and yet, he has so loved this earthly life.

He has so loved these, his companions. He has so loved those whom he came to minister amongst, the poor, and the lepers, and the blind, and the lame, those he can help, those he can serve.

He has so loved being amongst them. He has so loved this earthly life, which he would think was such a condom for the God of heaven and earth, that if there was any way of keeping it, he would love to do so.

But there was no way that he could keep it and fulfill the task, the purpose for which he had come. And if we, friends, are to fulfill the task, the purpose for which we are designed, to glorify God and enjoy him forever, we will not glorify the Lord by giving more or equal glory to something else, whether it be the world, whether it be our job, whether it be our families, whether it be our bank account, whether it be our hobbies, or our particular pastimes, or our own self-image, or whatever it be.

[18 : 46] If there is some other way, Lord, we can keep all these things and have you, that would be wonderful. And the Lord will allow that for so long. But eventually, we come to the fork of the road and he will say, this thing, this thing, or me, choose.

And if we choose the thing that is in the world, then all our pretense at serving the Lord, having the Lord, loving the Lord, pretense is all it is.

We carry on in a different role. We have made a choice. There is a fearful passage in Hebrews in chapter 6 that always gives me a certain anxiety.

Your blood runs cold. Now read it for us in a sense. chapter 6, verse 4, it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame.

Now, that doesn't perhaps mean that they will never turn. Maybe, like Manasseh, the ancient king of Judah, they will eventually repent and turn from even all those he is trying that he was guilty of.

[20 : 12] One always hopes, prays, trusts there will be repentance. But I think it is the Anglican Bishop J.C. Ryan who is supposed to have said, I grant you that true repentance is never too late.

But I must warn you that late repentance is seldom true. When we have the choice and we choose the world over the Lord, it creates a certain deadening effect in our soul.

It is a genuine temptation, the genuine temptation to have the ability to serve the Lord and to keep these things that are precious. And as I say, the Lord will allow it for so long.

But sooner or later there will come the choice that has to be made. And we choose the Lord and that is well and good. But there will be other things that we'll think, oh, thank goodness he hasn't made me let go of this yet.

It was only that thing. Ah, and I can let go of that as long as I still hold on to this. And eventually the day will come and the Lord says, now I've got to do this. It's this or me.

[21 : 25] And then you may say, okay, okay, well, I'll have to like go of this but that's my one last little prize that I'm holding on to. At least I've still got this final precious nugget of whatever it is that is so dear to my heart and it may be something I can tell myself that this is a good thing, a positive thing, a not only thing, somewhere along the line.

the Lord may likewise say, now you must choose obedience to me or holding fast to that. Little by little I would suggest to you it is not merely a once in a lifetime choice but rather than a process of sanctification the Lord may strip away from us little by little all those things which we may be clinging to, which may not be wrong in themselves but wherein perhaps our love for them may be coming between us and the pure love for the Lord.

If it be possible that this cup pass from me nevertheless not as I will but as thou wilt.

Jesus was totally prepared whilst he desired to be able to keep this life if he could he was totally prepared to let it go and deep down probably he knew that whilst he had to make this one last plea probably wasn't going to be a yes for him.

And he went back and prayed as we say if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it thy will be done. He left and went away again prayed a third time saying the same words.

[23 : 14] Now we don't know of course exactly what passes between the Lord Jesus and the Father during this time in Gethsemane. What we do know is that there is nothing recorded of any interaction and for all that we know and again if we can say it reverently because the decision of God is set and is known to his beloved son in a sense he is crying out into the darkness and there is perhaps for all we know no sound no response no answer because the answer is already no.

Now I don't mean in that sense to say oh God doesn't hear or God isn't listening but rather the Lord perhaps is not speaking back to his son because his son really knows what the answer is going to be and all he needs to do is make himself completely at the Father's disposal and the way is clear beforehand.

Sometimes friends we may pray to the Lord or we may ask Lord make it clear to me what it is I must do Lord give me the answer that I need Lord help me to know can I keep this thing or must I let it go or whatever and sometimes despite all our pleas it may seem as if all we are giving back is silence and that may be true because perhaps in our case as in the case of the Lord Jesus the answer may be already known and it is simply our willingness to engage with that answer to embrace that answer which is yet to be fulfilled now all of this I realise it could be King of saying oh Jesus was just like us he was struggling with the world Jesus wasn't struggling with the world Jesus was hoping in his personal human self that it might be possible to keep all the things that were so good so precious so beloved to him in this fallen world where he engaged with the godly apostles who loved him albeit imperfectly the poor that he had been able to help the women that he had been able to lift up into dignity when they threw themselves and he spooked in their tears and in their repentance and sorrow from broken lives or fallen lives or whatever the people he was able to restore could he keep it not now not at this stage for this stage required something different another stage must be entered the time of sacrifice had come oh my father if it be possible let this cup pass from me which of us has not prayed something similar at some point not as divinely vital as Jesus was he but for us to be born nevertheless not as I will but as I will and he cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and saith unto Peter what could you not watch between one hour this is the second thing we need to recognise that just as there has to be this little distance this little space between us and those we love when our relationship with the Lord is concerned there is not going to be any help from anyone in the world in terms of what we must do before God nobody can take those decisions for us nobody can be a strength to us if we must draw our strength from the Lord

Jesus looks for some companionship he looks for some support he just said to them stay with me stay awake watch with me one hour and they couldn't do that Simon Peter's protestation said oh if I have to go to prison I'll never leave I'll never forsake you and there he is snoring away within an hour he wouldn't even stay awake for the Lord he wanted to but he just couldn't Jesus said to him in Luke's account of the gospel Simon Simon behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may soothe you as wheat but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not and when thou art converted strengthen thy brother and that's when he makes his protestation oh Lord I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death and that's what he says before the croc crows I shall deny me the vice which he says here again in Matthew's account Peter is making this protestation of loyalty in an unconverted state he knows of Jesus he knows Jesus personally he loves Jesus as far as he's loyal to Jesus and we are all perhaps if we have been brought up with the Lord we have all perhaps known that stage well yes we're doing what we should and we do pray to the Lord and we do try to love the Lord and we want to be faithful to Jesus but we're not in a converted state and all our protestations of loyalty and all our determination to be good and so on it's all been made in an unconverted state and in that unconverted state we have no strength in that unconverted state it is bluster it may be well intentioned bluster and it may be sincere and it may be genuine just as Peter is genuine and loyal and to an extent brave but in the sense that he is unconverted the flesh does not have the strength that is needed for what is essentially a spiritual warfare the disciples are asleep because they do not have the spiritual strength they are in an unconverted state as yet what could you not watch with me one hour all your protestations speak and all your bluster and you couldn't watch with me one hour this is the help that is to be had from the world we think oh they all love us oh I've finished there with my friends my friends love me they support me and so on

I remember hearing the testimony of an Irishman who had become a Christian in his later life and the musical instrument that he had played so often in clubs and pubs and so on he took it on tour and he played hymns and sounds and songs in public gatherings he praised the Lord people said you should break that thing you should put it away and he said I've been playing it so long for the devil now let me play it for the Lord but one of the things he said in his testimony was that all the people he used to have is his drinking pals and his buddies and so on he said you know any one of them would have bought me any number of rounds but if I had been in the street short of food they wouldn't have bought food for me I'd buy any number of rounds and give me hallelujah and yeah one of the boys but if you need help with your rent or you need help with food or you're really struggling all that's a different matter the world wants to enjoy itself and if you help and enjoy itself that's fine they will love you to that extent but the world doesn't love you the world only loves itself the world is the servant of the prince of this world it only loves itself somebody once remarked and how a person had been in New

[30 : 54] York and had a busy job and high profile and so on and then they were on some trip and they had gone missing they'd gone missing such that after all the searches and everything else had gone on that people generally thought they were dead and you know they held a memorial service and everything and their colleagues all shared a fear and then they went back to work and eventually wherever they had been they'd been lost or separated when they came back and before they made themselves known to everybody else they looked around at the familiar haunts and places and so on and everything was going on just as normal the city didn't sleep the city just carried on it's a remarkably short time once our little footprint in this world is removed before everybody else is just carrying on their work as normal carrying on their lives as normal those who have known us closest and be as just they will remember for a time and they will mourn our passing but the world will get on with its life the world doesn't love you the world cannot give you the strength the flesh does not have the power for the spiritual contest that is ahead this is why

Jesus says to his disciples not just don't fall asleep but watch and pray that he enter not into temptation the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak the flesh of course is only weak when it comes to doing what is good and right and righteous the flesh is often all too strong when it comes to that which is unholy and impure and which is of this world but this is the third thing we have to recognise yes there is no help to be had from the world the world does not love you there is no help for Jesus from the disciples they love them but they didn't have the spiritual strength when they were still in the flesh when they were still unconverted this then is the advice the teaching Jesus gives to his disciples and to all of us that if we are to have the strength to endure it will not come from us watch and pray that he enter not into temptation when you pray who are you praying to you're praying to your heavenly father what are you asking for you're asking for the strength that only he can give you're asking for his only spirit you're asking for that spiritual power which alone will protect us and give us strength against the evil one in Luke chapter 11 remember

Jesus says in verse 13 he will give it he will give the strength that you need he will give the spiritual power without which you and I will perish watch and pray that he enter not into temptation see sometimes people have a crazy idea that everything just goes near the fires maybe and put their hand almost in the flames and then draw back to look how brave I am I can dice with death I can move along with temptation I can run shoulders on the devil and still come off best no you can't you and I do not have that kind of strength you put your hand in the fire you better get burned you dice with death it's going to come near you it might even clear you you go putting yourself in the way of danger you have no promise of deliverance pray that you don't enter into temptation it is always better to avoid the trouble if we can it is always better to be free of the persecution if we can it is always better to be clear of the temptation and danger than it is to go through the midst of it if there is a way round then pray that we be given it if the cup can pass once pray that it might but if not then pray the

Lord will give us the strength and the power and the spirit to endure whatever may come our way but if we are watchful and vigilant and trusting in him and letting go of the baggage and the temptations and things of this world that drag us down and may come between us and the Lord we will know that we face the attacks of the evil one in that spiritually leaner fitter better prepared condition which enables us to harness and access the Lord's strength by his spirit that we have prayed for that we have asked for so that if we do enter into temptation we are equipped to deal with it you think David was loving the fact he was facing the giant oh yeah can't wait for this or do you think he went to the battle and thinking oh I'm really bored today let's have some excitement there's a giant think I'm going to fight them no another once there was nowhere else to go he put his trust in the

Lord he put off Saul's armor he put it all up the hill and he had saved the gold but he couldn't because he hadn't tried them it was no use to him he put his trust in the Lord he took his five stones from the brook and he faced the giant and when the giant came out with all his invective and abuse he said you're coming against me with a sword and a spear and a shield but I come against you in the name of the Lord whose armies you have insulted the battle is not yours the battle is the Lord's and that is the case when we face whatever difficulties or temptations in the world or of the world spiritual attacks or physical attacks in this world the advice the teaching is always going to be the same watch and pray that ye enter into temptation because we need the Lord's spirit not just in times of spiritual danger because the devil does not actually give us a wee warning like say actually this time tomorrow you're going to be really tempted in such and such a thing this time tomorrow or next week I'm really going to attack you he's not going to tell us it it will come when you least expect it it will come when you are least prepared therefore be always prepared watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation the world will not help you your friends will not be able to fight this battle with you or for you the only person who can give you the strength is Christ the only one who can supply the spiritual power is Jesus watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation the spirit is willing it is a spiritual battle but the flesh is weak you cannot fight that battle in an unconverted fleshly state

[37 : 37] Jesus prayed if there was a way to keep the world that he the people that he loved and not have to face what he was so anxious about then that would be possible if that was possible could it possibly be the case Lord if you can take this cup away from me take it away but nevertheless not as I will but as I will maybe the Lord spoke back to him maybe there was silence maybe you prayed to the Lord in times of difficulty and maybe there was silence is that because both you and the Lord really actually know what the answer has to be and you may be afraid of taking that step and you may be afraid of what the answer is so here is your answer watch and pray ask for the strength that you need ask for the spiritual power to go through that difficulty or that temptation or that problem or that challenge ask the Lord to be with you in it and as you go step by step in faith he will never leave you or forsake you this is in a sense about dying to self that we may live to Christ that we may die only to the things which are themselves dying away anyway and that we may have life in all in its fullness gosh awesome guys that i think that i killed to the others that i killed that i we may of especially that i to the sus who of course and that i felt in outskirts that i did not to »sse good« i did not at least that i think either for it or to be was is