“Not My Will but Yours Be Done”

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0:00] C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia series, once wrote, courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.

! I wonder what you think of that. He's saying you don't have faith, love, self-control, and courage, or courage on its own. Courage, he says, is what our other virtues become.
When they are stress-tested and proven. Very similarly, another writer, Ernest Hemingway, wrote, courage is grace under pressure. Grace at its testing point.
Tonight, I think Matthew gives us three portraits, if you like, of Christ's courage, and sets them off against three portraits of his disciples' cowardice.
Courage, not only in that they run away at the end, but cowardice in the sense that their virtue, their faith, their love, crumbles at this testing point.
[1:09] It gives way under pressure. Which is all the more striking for the courage that we do see in the Lord Jesus, and the unshakable constancy of his character, even as the shadow of the cross stretches over him.

As he and the twelve walk to the Mount of Olives, we are minutes away from his arrest. Only hours until his crucifixion.
I wonder, how would you cope under the pressure of knowing that all that is thundering towards you with every passing second? But how does Christ cope?
What do we see in him, in this moment of deepest darkness? All we're going to do tonight is look at these three portraits in turn, as if they were pictures hung next to one another in the gallery, and gaze in wonder at Jesus, as we see his faithfulness, his love, his self-control, be tested as they never had been before.
And as we see the cowardice in his disciples, the cowardice in our own hearts, we'll see his courage, his character, all the more clearly. Because he endured all this for us.
[2:33] So let's gaze in awe at him then, as we see what he did for people like us. Firstly, as we see how Christ made promises to those who would fall.

As they leave the Last Supper, Jesus shocks his disciples again. He did it at the meal, but he knows that they can only take in so much at a time.
So now he tells them, verse 31, It's not only one of them who will betray him, but all of them will forsake him.
Christianity explored this past week. We got to the point in Mark's Gospel where Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. But then Jesus started to say that he had to suffer many things.
From the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed. And on the third day rise again.
And Peter was having none of that. Far be it from you, Lord. That will never happen to you.
[3:37] Well, now we're at the cusp of Jesus' prediction coming true. And Peter's at it again. You will all fall away, says Jesus. Peter answered him, Though they all fall away from you, I will never fall away.

Here he goes again, contradicting Jesus, even as he declares his faith in Jesus. Now, we might notice that this is a little bit different, isn't it?
This time, he's committing himself to God's plan. Before he was getting in the way of God's plan. Surely, we think it's a good thing not to want to fall away.
Right? Before he was saying, no, you're not going to the cross. Now he seems to be saying, I'll be right there with you. But if the Lord Jesus tells you, you will fall away, because the Bible says you will fall away, it takes extreme self-confidence, does it not, to say that you won't.
God has ordained that Peter and the disciples will stumble. Their shepherd is about to be struck. Jesus is bracing for impact. And when it comes, he knows that they won't be beside him.

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[4:56] They will scatter like sheep. It's a really sobering thought, isn't it? His words call for humble, quiet reflection.

At this point, they needed faith in God's word, faith in Jesus, even though they could not get their heads around why or how they would ever forsake their Lord Jesus.
Yet he says that they will. But even when Jesus gets specific, before the alarm goes off this morning, Peter, you'll have denied me three times. He's still not having it.
Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you. Now I don't know, but I reckon those words probably haunted Peter for the rest of his life.
He told me I would fall. I told him I would be there for him. What a self-confident, what an arrogant thing to have promised.
[5:58] Let me say we can't copy and paste this directly onto our lives. Jesus isn't saying that every Christian has to go through a time of backsliding or falling away. The point, I think, is that we see, by contrast, Jesus' unwavering determination to go through with the cross for those who he knew would forsake him in his darkest hour.

See, if Peter had stopped talking for a moment, he might have listened to the rest of what Jesus said in verse 32. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.
Now, what does that imply? It means, surely, doesn't it, that the death inflicted on him, the shepherd, would not last. He would rise from the dead.
And also that the fall that Peter and the others would go through, the scattering of the sheep, would also not be permanent. The risen shepherd would gather his sheep again in Galilee.
It's one of the clearest, greatest promises Jesus makes in the dark hours before the cross. If they had had ears to hear it, how would it have transformed their experience of the next 24 hours?
[7:16] Think of the light that this sheds on Jesus' dark saying about them falling away. Even if it has to be that way, even if we do fall away, he's promising that we will be with him when he's alive again in Galilee.

But they're completely deaf to it, aren't they? They just keep coming out with tin-eared denials of what Jesus tells them plainly has to happen. Now, step back a minute and think, what must that have been like for Jesus?
He knows exactly how this next 24 hours will play out. And he is trying to prepare those closest to him for what they will do.
He tries to give them hope that the story will have a happy ending. And they just shout over him and tell him that he's wrong. At this point, they're still with him physically.
But in every other sense, Jesus is facing the darkness of the coming hours entirely alone. And yet, knowing that, knowing them, he makes this promise to them.
[8:27] Whatever happens between now and then, I'll see you in Galilee after my resurrection. At this pressure point, where the disciples' faith gives way, Jesus' faithfulness is proved.

That disciples' words reveal not bravery, confidence, but cowardice, don't they? Like us, they're putting on a brave, face so that they don't have to actually reflect on a face up to their profound weakness.
Do we not do this? We pretend that we're stronger than we are because we're scared to show that we are as weak as Jesus says that we are. Friends, it is a good thing not to want to fall away.
It's a good thing to cling to Jesus when it's tough. But let's not think for a moment that our making it to the finish line depends on our willpower, our own strength to get us there.
When Jesus says, our hearts are sick and need a doctor, our souls are starving and need the bread of life, it is the utmost pride for us to say, it's not that bad.
[9:38] I can make it. You may be for other Christians, lesser Christians than me, that might be a problem, but I know that I will get there. Jesus says, we need a miracle for it all to be all right in the end.

We need nothing less than for him to have risen from the dead, for us to be gathered to him at the end. How incredible, brothers and sisters, that even for people like us who live as if we were immune from spiritual sickness or starvation, who tell ourselves, I will never fall away and live as if that were true, Jesus still promises us that on the other side of our stubbornness and deafness, our sin, our self-deception, our wondering and stumbling, he will meet us in his resurrection and gather us close to himself.

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We spend our days talking over his promises and not taking them to heart, yet he makes them to us anyway and unfailingly keeps them for those who would fall in a moment unless he kept us standing by his grace.
Brothers and sisters, praise the Lord Jesus for his constant faithfulness, his faithfulness become courage in this hour of testing in the face of our cowardly refusal to front up to this reality about ourselves, that we are not enough, that we cannot do it apart from him.
That's our first portrait. Let's move on to the second. And this portrait of his courage against our cowardice, that Christ prayed for those who failed.
[11:32] Now, this is one of the rare windows that we get into Jesus' inner life in the Gospels. We've seen Matthew's emphasis through these verses, haven't we, of Jesus being in control. So what Jesus says and does now is really very striking.

They arrive together in a place called Gethsemane. He leaves most of his disciples a way off, but takes Peter, James, and John with him to keep watch while he prays.
And as the seconds count down now to his arrest, we read that he became very sorrowful and troubled. He even says, my soul is very sorrowful even to death.
Now, it's hard to say what that means, but I think we can take it that as far as sinless human emotion reaches downwards, that is as far as Jesus' sinless human emotion reached in this hour, even to the very gates of death.
It's a crushing weight of sadness, of distress, upset, humanly. Humanly, I think we can say that Jesus was overwhelmed by the feeling, the waves of dread and terror at what was coming.
[12:54] It's always a remarkable thing, isn't it, to see somebody who we have always known as being composed and in control show emotional weakness. Perhaps you've had a friend or a parent, a grandparent who you had never seen cry, until one day it all became too much and we don't know what to do, do we?

Well, multiply that feeling by a very big number and we've got to something like the shock of hearing the Lord Jesus say his soul was sorrowful to the point of death. He asks his disciples to keep watch, presumably for those who were coming to arrest him, so that he can quite literally throw himself down in prayer before the Father, where the rawness of his heart becomes even clearer.
Now, a few weeks ago, we were in Exodus in our morning service and we saw there how reluctant Moses was to be the saviour that God had called him to be.
And we said it's as shocking and as unthinkable as if Jesus himself had been unwilling to go through with God's rescue plan.
Well, now we see how close Jesus' dread of what awaits him drives him to that point, not beyond it, but right up to it.
[14:21] Verse 39, going a little farther, he fell on his face and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

If it is possible for me not to have to go through with this, let me not do it. To fully get this, we have to understand he's not just talking here about his suffering at the hands of the authorities or even the agony of his crucifixion, but the terrifying prospect of draining what he calls here this cup.
Various places in the Bible speak of a cup in God's hand filled up with his anger against sin. It's a symbol of his judgment against what is wrong.
Psalm 75 says, For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup with foaming wine well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.
A cup filled up with God's wrath for the wicked of the earth. It's an incredible thought. All God's holy, righteous indignation every day being poured and mixed into this one cup.
[15:38] Every sin of all his people wrung out into the foaming wine of his wrath. and it should be drunk by every one of us who has added to it by our sin.

But instead of pouring it out for us to drink, to suffer his righteous punishment that we deserve for our sin, the Father instead hands that whole cup now to his Son to drink.
and as Jesus prepares himself to take that cup from the Father's hand and drain it to the dregs upon the cross, there is a holy, righteous fear of God's judgment in him that causes him to pray that if there is any other way for it to be dealt with, please let him not have to do it.
to remind you and passing friends that God's anger with sin is something we should rightly fear if we are not troubled by the thought of anyone needing to drink from that cup.

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We haven't really taken in or accepted the reality that Jesus so clearly sees before him. The absolute terror of facing God's wrath against sin that made even Jesus Christ fear.
[17:08] And yet that isn't where he leaves his prayer but prays nevertheless not what I will but as you will.

Ultimately the Lord Jesus wants what the Father wants. It's not forced upon him and ultimately he knows that he does have to drink this cup on the cross. This is how much he loves his Father.
This is how much he loves his people that he would drink the whole cup of God's anger against our sins to do the Father's will and to spare us ever having to drink it for ourselves.
But where are those very disciples for whom he committed himself in prayer to the cross? Verse 40 he came to the disciples and found them sleeping.
While he is being torn apart in the shadow of the cross for them they are busy not keeping watch for him. Hear the disappointment in Jesus' question.
[18:12] He said to Peter, so could you not watch with me one hour? If the last portrait was one of faith and faithfulness at its testing point I think we could say that this one is of love at its testing point.

Look at the heights of courage that Jesus' love has produced in him in the garden of Gethsemane and now look at the cowardice of the disciples' love that cannot even keep an eye open for him while he prays.
We see that contrast all the more sharply don't we when we see Jesus' words in verse 41. Now he's speaking to them isn't he about their wrestle with temptation but is this not his wrestle too?
If we think it could never be we won't properly grasp how deep his love is for these failing followers. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. What has Jesus been doing himself if not that very thing?
The temptation to let the cup pass, to avert the cross, to call down twelve legions of angels from heaven to rescue him from his captors. On one level he rightly fears to go through with it and yet in the face of that temptation he throws himself in prayer on the father, takes his anguish and desperation, puts it in his almighty hands and leaves it there.
[19:34] Your will be done. Again in passing we could do worse couldn't we than follow Jesus' example here. If prayer to the father is where the son of God on earth took his fears, his temptations we can scarcely afford not to hand our own anxieties and temptations over to the father if we want to do his will, love him well on earth.

In terms of the disciples the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak is probably speaking isn't it about their spiritual boldness a moment ago the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak their drowsiness, their creatureliness.
Flesh I think isn't referring to their sinful nature but their bodily weakness. They want to be there for Jesus in some sense don't they? But their creatureliness is not up to it.
In a similar way Jesus himself is entirely willing to go through with the cross yet he has come to share in our weakness. his nervous system, his stress hormones are putting up a fight.
Matthew wants us to see that that is a battle that Jesus wins but the disciples lose. His love tested in the garden reveals an unshakable courage.
[21:04] Even though he has to go back doesn't he a second and a third time to pray the same prayer. My father if this cannot pass unless I drink it your will be done.

Yet he is resolved to go to the cross. That is why he prays this prayer. But each time he comes back to find the disciples giving in to much lighter temptation.
Their love is tested and it breaks doesn't it under this pressure. They literally close their eyes to the suffering of their savior so as not to see it. They do not love him by being there for him in his darkest hour.
Some things you have to get right at the time don't you? Or you can't go back and replay it.
Whatever happened later these disciples could never go back and stay awake for Jesus as he'd asked them to do as he wept and prayed in the garden.
He asked them to step up and they failed. I wonder again did that too hang over them as they thought back later on their time with the Lord Jesus. And yet what does Jesus do in that moment?
[22:17] Well exactly what he's committed himself to do in love. He's right there isn't he? He's ready. He's waiting. See the hour is at hand. The son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

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Rise let us be going. See my betrayer is at hand. What should he say at this point? Why am I bothering to do this for people who can't even follow an easy instruction?
Why am I going to the cross for people who don't even love me enough to stay awake? But he knows doesn't he? That is exactly why he needs to do it. That is why he needs to do it to give himself up.
Friends we fail the Lord Jesus every day in more ways than we can count or keep track of. We will never face the extremity of the temptation he faced in Gethsemane yet we give in to far weaker temptations with far less struggle.
Let us gaze from ourselves then in awe at the suffering Christ endured in resisting temptation so that he could save us from all the times that we have given in.
[23:32] We last two three rounds don't we in the ring and we count ourselves strong because we put up a fight at all. Watch then our mighty champion outlast his opponent in the twelfth round and step out of the ring to claim his crown.

A crown of thorns to be lifted up in glory on a wooden cross. that is why he battled on the prize that he was fighting for to give his body and blood for us who have failed him for our forgiveness. Brothers and sisters praise him for his courageous love for we who were too cowardly to fight on against temptation and sin. that is our second portrait.
Finally our third where we see Christ persevere for those who fought then fled. Judas now comes with a great crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and elders of the people. Remember back this is when Jesus said this would happen. The chief priest said not during the Passover. Jesus said two days time. Right on time. We looked at Jesus betrayal last time didn't we?
[24:52] See now how vicious it is. How he twists the knife. How does he choose to show them which one Jesus is but with a kiss. A symbol of allegiance of love of loyalty twisted into the opposite isn't it?

He even seems to enjoy the moment he came to Jesus at once. Greetings Rabbi and kissed him. And in the stress of the moment we read one of the disciples reaches for his sword and chops off one of the guy's ears who's been sent to arrest Jesus.
Again a show of what bravery courage faith no misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what he's come for.
He does not need defending. He has the armies of heaven on standby. Twelve legions is about 72,000 angels but of course it is only an illustrative number.
The point is he has all heaven's power on call. He says I could ask for angelic backup but here's the thing about Jesus he doesn't because he has not come to fight his death.
[26:07] He has not come to take up a sword. How will he win the nations not by force but by the cross. But even now on the eve of his death his closest followers don't get him.

They are lashing out against his orders. They lack self-control. And again we're forced to ask are these people worth dying for? Have they proven their worth to Jesus over three years or instead have they shown the weakness of their faith?
Their ignorance? Their lack of love? Should Christ have to go through with it? But such is Jesus' steadfastness, his devotion to his people, his commitment to our salvation, that he simply says verse 54 how then must the scriptures be fulfilled that it must be so.
This has to happen that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. with those words his fate is sealed. And what did his disciples do?
Exactly what he said. Then all the disciples left him and fled. The very fallen, failing disciples who Jesus at that very moment was going to the cross for did exactly what they said they'd never do.
[27:33] They left Jesus all alone in the hands of his enemies. ways. And here it is that we see the climax in this passage of Jesus' courage, the sum of all his perfections under the worst pressure any person has ever felt shine forth in his self giving and cast into the deepest shadow and shade the cowardice of his people as our own faith, love, and loyalty crumble when he is taken away.

Friends, above all, that is the point of these verses, that we reflect on the cowardice we see here in our own cowardice, our own lack of faith in Jesus' word, how easily we give him to temptation, our tendency to bottle it for Jesus, our projecting onto him what we would prefer him to be rather than lean into who he truly is.
but as we see that shadow, that shade, as we sit under that, then our eyes would be lifted to the majesty, the glory, the unshakable boldness and courage that Jesus is for us and our salvation, that

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he would suffer all that is to come for us who have so misunderstood and failed him, that he would give his life to drink the cup of God's wrath to spend with us.
He would bear us that wrath for our own sins, that he would do it to pay in full for our forgiveness. Friends, the only way for us to benefit from his death, to receive that forgiveness that he bought for us on the cross, is to look upon him and put our trust in him and what he did on our behalf.
And so as we close tonight, if you have never done that, would you tonight, look upon Jesus' unwavering love, his faithfulness, his grace under pressure, and trust in him to deal with all the times you've got it wrong, all the times you've failed him, tried to talk over him, done it your way. [29:49] He went to the cross for proud and stubborn and cowardly people like us, so that even our sins would be forgiven. So will you take hold of that forgiveness for yourself tonight as you take hold of Jesus as your savior?

And if you have done that, friends, won't you gaze at him in awe, stand amazed in his presence? grace. When your sin doesn't seem so bad, and Christ does not seem so great, we need to come back, don't we, and see just what he did for us, just who we are, and just what he did for us.
Lift your eyes to him who bowed his head before the Father and gave his life, so that disciples who have let him down daily and deeply, disciples like me and you could be forgiven and brought into God's kingdom forever, and one day never stumble again, because we will meet him in his risen glory, not in Galilee, but in a new heavens and new earth.
Let's lift our hearts to him now as we pray, and then our voices to him as we sing. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we pray you'd forgive us the times where we count your suffering cheaply, Lord, where we look lightly upon what you went through for us.
Lord, instead, we pray by your Spirit, help us to call to mind each day your love, your faithfulness. Lord, how you gave yourself into the hands of sinners so that we could be delivered from our sin. [31:50] Lord, impress upon us the majesty of your self-giving love. Lord, help us to see, too, our own weakness, not to think more of ourselves than we are.

Lord, humble us, we pray, before the cross. let us kneel in awe before you, Lord Jesus, and let us take hold of you in faith that we might be saved from our every sin.
For we ask in your name, amen. Amen.

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