

Good Friday – 2017
Return From Exile
The Exile of Jesus

Over the last few weeks I've been looking at what the Bible has to say about exile. Exile refers to when someone is forced out of their homeland to live as an alien.

But what we've also seen is that exile is a metaphor for any kind of loss, or failure, or personal setback in life. We all experience exile. It's a lonely and confusing place to be.

Tonight I want to look at the suffering and death of Jesus through the grid of exile. You see, Jesus knows all about exile. He understands the pain of exile, and so, he can help us in our exile. He's been there.

If you think about it, Jesus' exile started the day he was born. Heaven was his home. Earth was his place of exile for 33 years. And then, at the start of Jesus' ministry, he experienced a unique forty-day exile when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness.

Then Jesus entered an even darker time of exile when he entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Let's take a look at this.

Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. Matthew 26:36

Gethsemane was an olive orchard. In fact, the word Gethsemane means "oil press". Every olive grove had an olive press. Farmers dumped their olives in the base of the press and then a large stone would slowly roll over the olives...crushing the olives and releasing the oil.

It's no coincidence that Jesus chose this place to pray. The oil press symbolized what Jesus was feeling. The weight of the world pressed down on him. More specifically, it was the weight of the world's sin. That's why it says....

He began to be sad and troubled. Matthew 26:36

The word "troubled" means to be severely depressed. Then Jesus said that he was not just sad, but he said...

My soul is deeply grieved (overwhelmed) to the point of death. Matthew 26:37

That's why Luke tells us that:

Jesus withdrew about a stone's throw beyond the disciples, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:42,43

Some people wonder why this was hard for Jesus if he was God. Jesus WAS fully God, but he was fully human too. The Bible tells us that Jesus emptied himself of his godlikeness and fully embraced his humanity. So he felt the same crushing weight that you and I would in that situation (only his situation was infinitely worse, of course, since he carried the weight

of the world's sin.)

When we suffer, we often want to give up. And so did Jesus. He wanted to give up, but he wanted to please God more. That's why he said: Not my will but yours.

And look what happened when he made that commitment.

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. Luke 22:43

Jesus was strengthened... but notice that the problem didn't go away. His exile continued. God didn't let Jesus escape his exile. God gave Jesus what he needed to keep moving through his exile. Luke explains more;

And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Luke 22:44

When olives come under pressure they drip oil. When Jesus came under pressure, he dripped blood...that's how intense his exile was. But it only got worse.

When Jesus got done praying, he found his disciples sleeping. It's hard enough to suffer in exile, but it's like salt in the wound when we find out that the people who should care the most for us, aren't even paying attention.

After this, Jesus was arrested and Matthew tells us:

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled. Matthew 26:56

But worse than sleep and desertion, Peter, one of his closest friends, denied him:

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Matthew 26:73,74

From here Jesus subjects himself to misunderstandings, false accusations, and unspeakable brutality, culminating in his crucifixion. As he hangs on the cross Matthew tells us:

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?". Matthew 27:45,46

This is what everyone feels in exile, isn't it? They feel forsaken of God. Even Jesus felt forsaken. As far as exiles go, it's safe to say that Jesus experienced the ultimate exile.

So what can we learn from Jesus' exile about our own seasons of exile? First, we learn that **Jesus' suffering validates our suffering**. What I mean is: sometimes we think that normal people don't struggle. Only unspiritual people suffer.

And then we feel weak or guilty for wanting to give up and run for the exits. But Jesus suffered and he wanted to give up too.

So, if you are suffering and exile tonight, Jesus appreciates the pressure you are under. He even understands if you feel like you've been abandoned by God. He gets it.

Second, we learn that **Jesus' suffering had a purpose**...to restore us to God. There's a letter in the Bible that goes into great detail about what happened when Jesus suffered and died. It makes this amazing statement:

By one sacrifice Jesus made us perfect forever... Hebrews 10:14

That was Jesus' purpose in dying for us: to make us perfect... forever...not just for one day, but forever. You see, a perfect God requires perfect people. There's no way we can be perfect, so Jesus made us perfect.

God sent Jesus into exile for a purpose. And the same is true for us: God has a purpose in our exile.

The third thing Jesus' suffering shows us is that **good things can come from exile**. If the salvation of the world came through a bloody cross then good things can come from your exile too. It doesn't matter if your exile is the result of your bad decisions or not. God can make good out of anything we put in his hands.

What I want us to see here is that Jesus' death did more than pay for our sins. Most of us understand that. But what I want us to understand tonight is that Jesus' exile shows us that he understands our pain and he will bring us through it.

If you are going through a hard time, God doesn't want you to give up. He wants you to cry out to him for the strength to be faithful and the hope to believe that you will return from your exile.

Right now we are going to celebrate communion. First and foremost, we are going to celebrate that we've been made perfect forever by the death of Jesus. Jesus made a way for us all to come back to God. That's why we call this day: GOOD Friday.

But if you are in a season of exile right now, I want to help you make this communion even more personal and meaningful. We have rice paper up here. Rice paper has a unique quality in that it dissolves in water. So I want you to write your exile on the rice paper and place it in the vase. As it dissolves I want you to see that as a promise that one day your exile will be over. One day you will return from exile to a better place.

You might say, Remy, how can you be sure of that. How do you know? I say that because I'm absolutely convinced that God is a god of resurrection and he never leaves anyone in the grave who calls on his name.