Text: Isaiah 53:11; Matthew 26:36-46
Title: "Living Courageously in the Face of Despair"

INTRODUCTION

Over the next few weeks I want us to take a long look at the sufferings of Christ. As a follower of Jesus Christ, I not only put my faith in what He did <u>for me</u> on the Cross, but I also put my faith in what Jesus did <u>with me</u> when He endured the sufferings that went with being the Messiah.

- **For us –** As we think about the sufferings of Jesus, we cannot escape the price Jesus paid for our sins.

  Matthew 20:28 (NIV) - The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

  1 John 2:2 (NIV) - He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

- **With us –** Now there's benefit to thinking about not just *why* Jesus suffered, but also *how* He suffered with us. The sufferings of Christ show us how to endure suffering in the will of God. Watching Jesus' courage in the face of His suffering shows us how we can have courage in the face of our suffering.

  Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV) - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] <u>Consider him</u> who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The Holy Spirit lets us watch Jesus suffer so we can learn from Him how to live courageously through the sufferings of life. Now the Bible tells us the many ways that the Messiah suffered. Turn with me to Isaiah 53:11. This is that towering prophecy given hundreds of years before Jesus was born that so accurately described the sufferings of the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:11 (NIV) - After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

It's important to know that Jesus' sufferings were not just physical. Isaiah talks about the suffering of His soul. It means that along with the physical agony He endured on the Cross, He also endured great spiritual and emotional agony in His soul.

Isaiah 53:3 (NIV) – "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."

This morning I want us to think together about "Living Courageously in the Face of Despair."

Remember that Jesus is not just completely God. He is and was completely man. Therefore, the weakness that you and I face, He faced. The fears that you and I deal with, He dealt with. This

despair that we live through, Jesus lived through. How do I know that? We see it in the Gospel accounts of the sufferings of Jesus. Turn now to Matthew 26:36-46.

> The scene is what is called the Garden of Gethsemane. Here Jesus went with His disciples to pray after He had shared in the Passover meal with them, and at the very hour he was being betrayed by Judas that would lead to Jesus' arrest, and, the next day, His crucifixion.

Read Matthew 26:36-46 NIV

Now go back to vv.37-38, and I want you to notice something.

"He began to be sorrowful and troubled…" (v.37)

> "He began" doesn't mean that this was the first time Jesus ever felt sorrow or trouble in His soul. Rather, with the Cross so near, Jesus' despair now was greatly intensified. "Sorrowful" means to be very sad. And "troubled" means "distressed."
>
> Then in the next verse Jesus described his despair to the three:

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death…" (v.38)

> The NIV says "overwhelmed with sorrow." Jesus uses a word here that means "to be surrounded by sorrow." Have you ever been at a place in your life where you were surrounded by sorrow and despair? Every way you turned it was still there staring you in the face.

We can face times like this courageously by watching Jesus live courageously in the face of despair.

Now when I talk about this despair, it can come in different shapes and sizes. This despair can be triggered by some loss or tragedy, like the death of a loved one or the loss of a job. For some, this despair is like a spring thunderstorm … it moves in quickly and then moves out just as quickly. For others of us, this despair can be like a hurricane that builds slowly and then when it arrives it sits on top of us for a long time. Sometimes this takes the form of depression.

ILLUSTRATION – John McCain, US Senator from Arizona, was a Vietnam vet, and was held for a period of time as a POW in North Vietnam. In his autobiography, the great hero told of how during his captivity, he twice tried to hang himself, using his shirt as a noose, but was caught both times by the guards, who then beat him. McCain wrote: "I couldn't control my despair. All my pride was lost, and I doubted I would ever stand up to any man again. Nothing could save me."

> But somehow, McCain was able to muster the courage to endure the despair until he was rescued.

And we see this courage in Jesus as He endured the sufferings in His soul. He courageously faced the despair that He had to endure.

Many people have tried to define courage. Here are just a few:

- Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear - not absence of fear. ~Mark Twain
- Courage is being afraid but going on anyhow. ~Dan Rather
- Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point. ~C.S. Lewis
- Courage is fear that has said its prayers. ~Dorothy Bernard
- Courage is fear holding on a minute longer. ~George Patton
- Courage is being scared to death... and saddling up anyway. ~John Wayne

Jesus lived courageously in the face of the despair that came with His sufferings. How did He do it?

1. WITH <u>PARTNERS</u>

Matthew 26:36-38 (NIV) - Then Jesus <u>went with his disciples</u> to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." [37] <u>He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him</u>, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. [38] Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. <u>Stay here and keep watch with me</u>."

Why did Jesus take His disciples with him to the garden, and then Peter, James and John on to the place of prayer? Some say they were there to stand guard, and perhaps there is some validity to that. Some speculate that Jesus took the inner circle with Him so He could teach them about prayer. And that's certainly the case.

> But I'm impressed at the transparency of Jesus with these men. He told them what was going on in His soul. "I am surrounded by sorrow and despair." Then he told Peter, James and John in v.38, "Stay here and keep watch with me."

Now Jesus is God, and God isn't dependent on man. But Jesus is also completely man, and as a human being, He benefited from having his closest friends with Him in His despair.

And if Jesus benefited from partners in His despair, how much more can we. You can certainly turn to Jesus in your despair. And we need others around us when we are going through the dark night of our soul. Having partners around us gives us courage.

But there's something else about Jesus' courage in the face of despair. He faced the despair …

2. WITH <u>PRAYER</u>

Matthew 26:36 (NIV) - Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and <u>pray</u>."

Matthew 26:39 (NIV) - Going a little farther, <u>he fell with his face to the ground and prayed</u>, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Matthew 26:41 (NIV) - "<u>Watch and pray</u> so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Matthew 26:42 (NIV) - <u>He went away a second time and prayed</u>, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Note: Don't just skip over this. Look at the kind of praying that Jesus was doing. It was honest prayer. So much of our praying is so fake, so unreal, so dishonest to God.

It was on His knees that Jesus struggled. We struggle with despair, but often never seem to make it to our knees where we pour out our despair before God, and where the deepest need of our soul is met … not by escaping despair, but by finding God in the midst of our despair.

ILLUSTRATION – Larry Crabb, in his book The PaPa Prayer opens with a quote from George MacDonald, the great Scottish author and minister. (See opening page)

ILLUSTRATION - In *Holding On to Hope*, Nancy Guthrie writes:

> We had Hope for 199 days. We loved her. We enjoyed her richly and shared her with everyone we could. We held her during seizures. Then we let her go. The day after we buried Hope, my husband said to me, "You know, I think we expected our faith to make this hurt less, but it doesn't." Our faith gave us an incredible amount of strength and encouragement while we had Hope, and we were comforted by the knowledge that she is in heaven. Our faith keeps us from being swallowed by despair.
> But I don't think it makes our loss hurt any less. Early on in my journey, I said to God, "Okay, if I have to go through this, then give me everything. Teach me everything you want to teach me through this. Don't let this incredible pain be wasted in my life!" God…allows good and bad into our lives and we can trust him with both.…Trusting God when the miracle does not come, when the urgent prayer gets no answer, when there is only darkness—this is the kind of faith God values most of all…. I believe that the purpose of Hope's short life, and my life, was and is to glorify God.

Jesus lived courageously in the face of despair with partners, with prayer, and …

3. WITH <u>PERSPECTIVE</u>

In times of despair, we tend to lose our perspective.

ILLUSTRATION – This is what happens to pilots when they are socked in with clouds, flying only by instruments? They have to train to overcome the sense of feeling like their right-side-up, when they are really upside-down. They do this by keeping their eyes on that little instrument before them that keeps the plane level with the horizon.

Jesus' perspective is revealed in His praying.

Matthew 26:39 (NIV) - Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "<u>My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will</u>."

Note: What is this "cup"? It was the will of God for His life. It was the reason for which Jesus came … the sufferings of the Cross.

Matthew 26:42 (NIV) - He went away a second time and prayed, "<u>My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done</u>."

Matthew 26:45 (NIV) - Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, <u>the hour is near</u>, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

ILLUSTRATION – Author Max Lucado, in *The Cross*, writes vividly of the abandonment of the Son on the cross as he bore our sin:

> "Here is the cup, my Son. Drink it alone." God must have wept as he performed his task. Every lie, every lure, every act done in shadows was in that cup. Slowly, hideously they were absorbed in the body of the Son. The final act of incarnation. The spotless Lamb was blemished. The King turns away from his Prince. The undiluted wrath of a sin-hating Father falls upon his sin-filled Son. The fire envelops him. The shadows hide him. The Son looks for his Father, but the Father cannot be seen. "My God, my God…why?" It was the most gut-wrenching cry of loneliness in history, and it came not from a prisoner or a widow or a patient. It came from a hill, from a cross, from a Messiah. "My God, my God," he screamed, "why did you abandon me!" Never have words carried such hurt. Never has one being been so lonely. The despair is darker than the sky. The two who have been one are now two.

It is when we lose our perspective, or when we buy into a wrong perspective that despair can be so dangerous. Satan is the father of lies, as the Bible says. And depression and despair is his cell phone. When we are discouraged and depressed and in despair, Satan starts ringing us up and telling us all kinds of lies …

- God doesn't care about you.
- No one is interested in you.
- You deserve this.
- You'll never get over this.

Jesus was able to move through the despair to accomplish the Father's will for His life because He kept his perspective. But there's something else. Jesus lived courageously …

4. WITH <u>PERSISTENCE</u>

Jesus was persistent in His praying. He never quit praying in spite of the despair.

But then, with still no relief from the sorrow and the trouble in His soul, He went forward to do what He knew He must do.

Matthew 26:46 (NIV) - <u>Rise, let us go</u>! Here comes my betrayer!"

Friends, that's courage.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION - "Resignation is surrender to fate; acceptance is surrender to God," says Elizabeth Elliot. "Resignation lies down quietly in an empty universe. Acceptance rises up to meet the God who fills that universe with purpose and destiny. Resignation says, 'I can't,' and God says, 'I can.' Resignation says, 'It's all over for me.' Acceptance asks, 'Now that I'm here, Lord, what's next?' Resignation says, 'What a waste.' Acceptance says, 'In what redemptive way can you use this mess, Lord?'"