

“John: Doing the Hard Thing”

Isaiah 53:1-9 • John 12:27-43

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 15, 2023

Have you ever had an intense feeling of anxiety? I’m talking about that sickening sense of dread about something that’s about to happen. Many people experience some of that kind of anxiety about public speaking. Maybe you experience it before a meeting with your boss where you’re worried about getting fired, or when you’re out of money and your car breaks down and you don’t know how you’re going to be able to get it fixed or even get to work. That kind of anxiety makes your heart race and you get a knot in your stomach and you feel terrible.

Thinking about that feeling helps us understand, at least a tiny amount, what Jesus describes in today’s passage. He says, “Now is my soul troubled.” The word translated as “troubled” literally means “to strike one’s spirit with fear and dread.” What was it that Jesus was troubled about? He’s God in person. What did he dread?

For one thing, he knew that his crucifixion was coming. He knew that it would be excruciatingly painful. But lots of other people, especially the Christian martyrs, have faced pain and suffering with much less fear and dread. For example, in Acts 7 we read about the death of Stephen. As the people were stoning him Stephen said, “Lord, do not hold this against them.” About fifty years later, Polycarp, a bishop in what is modern-day Turkey, was burned at the stake. Polycarp was a student of the Apostle John. He was executed because he refused to burn incense to the Roman emperor. The issue was that burning incense was a sign of worship. As they were about to execute him, they asked Polycarp if he wanted to make a statement. He said, “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the

fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked.”

That hardly sounds like dread. In fact, just before they lit the fire, Polycarp prayed, “I bless you, Father, for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share in the cup of Christ.” His attitude, and the attitude of many of the Christian martyrs, was very different from “now my soul is in torment.” Why the different responses?

The answer is in the reason for Jesus’ torment. You see, as bad as the cross would be, the greater suffering that Jesus would endure would come from bearing the full wrath of God for our sin. Second Corinthians 5:21 says, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus, who never sinned, would experience the penalty for all of humanity’s sin. As Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” In his humanity he would experience separation from God the Father.

Jesus, however, knew that this was why he came. He says, “for this purpose I have come to this hour.” In addition to the suffering, he also knew that this would bring God glory. He says, “Father, glorify your name.” He was so perfectly intent on glorifying His Father that nothing could stop Him from going to the cross. You and I should be like Jesus. The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism says that the chief end of man, the primary purpose of your life, is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Your goal should be that nothing can get in the way of glorifying God every moment of every day.

When Jesus said, “Father, glorify your name,” he got a response. “Then a voice came from heaven: ‘I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.’” Jesus glorifies the Father by going to the cross and bringing salvation to God’s people. The Father glorifies Jesus by

raising Him from the dead and returning Him to heaven. This is one of only three instances recorded in the New Testament of God the Father speaking out loud. The first was at Jesus' baptism. The second was at Jesus' transfiguration. R.C. Sproul points out that "The Father spoke to let the people there know that He would be glorified through the Son." Notice the different responses of the people to hearing God speak. Some refused to believe and said it was only thunder. We find the same thing today. For many people the Word of God is just noise. They hear it but refuse to listen.

John tells us here how dangerous that is. This passage is important because this is the last time Jesus speaks in public before his crucifixion. This is His final appeal for the Jews to believe in Him. He says, "Now is the judgment of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast out." He goes on, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He's not saying all people will be saved. A better way to understand it is, "I will draw all kinds of people to myself—all nations, all races, all languages."

Instead of repenting and believing, the people instead want to argue over theology. So Jesus gives them this last warning. He says, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." God is described a number of times in the Bible as light. By applying that to himself, Jesus is once again declaring publicly that He is God.

As the light of the world, Jesus makes God visible to us. In 2 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul says, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." This is the work of the Holy Spirit. When we read the Bible and hear the sermon, the Holy Spirit shines in our hearts to give us the light of the

knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus. In other words, it's the light of Christ that allows us to see Him as God and trust in Him as our savior.

But Jesus warns that if we continue to reject him, there will come a time when it's too late. A lot of people today like Jesus and they like the idea of eternity with Him, but they are not ready to commit their lives to Him, to follow Him every day. So they put it off. They say, "one day I'll get to it. But right now I like the way my life is. John says of the people around Jesus, "Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him." They had seen Jesus give sight to the man born blind. They had seen him raise Lazarus from the grave! What more proof could they need?

The truth is that there is never enough light for those who refuse to see. John goes on to say that this is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah 6 begins, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." In verse 41 John tells us that what Isaiah saw was the pre-incarnate Jesus on His throne. He said, "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him." Isaiah's message was that when the people turned their backs on God, when they continually rejected Him, eventually they were no longer able to believe. John says that the Pharisees are doing the same thing, and that by doing so they are fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies.

Friends, let me encourage you that if you have heard the gospel, if you've heard what Jesus accomplished for you on the cross, and have not committed your life to Him, do it today. Don't wait. As Jesus said, "walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." The longer you wait, the harder it gets. The same is true if you profess to be a Christian but have not surrendered your life to Him. As 2 Corinthians 6 says, "Behold, *now* is the favorable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation."