

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 313
Series: St. John's Passion - Gospel of John chapters 12-21
Today's verses: John 18:1-2
Today's Topic: Crossing the Kidron
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John 18:1-2 MKJV Having spoken these words, Jesus went out with His disciples over the winter stream Kidron, where there was a garden. He and His disciples entered into it. (2) And Judas who betrayed Him also knew the place. For Jesus oftentimes went there with His disciples.

Jesus finishes His High Priestly prayer and crosses the Kidron. He goes from the place of prayer to the place of betrayal. From prayer to Passion. We cannot accomplish everything by prayer alone – or Jesus could have prayed the High Priestly prayer and gone home! We also need to face evil and overcome it.

The incarnation means the gospel is not just a concept – it also has to be lived out in flesh and blood in the midst of the world. Jesus gospel demanded His being torn apart – and our ministries may also do that to us.

It would be great if ministry was always a spiritual high – the crowds, the healings, the exorcisms, and the grand miracles of God. However the time comes when we have to leave that behind and cross over the Kidron into our redemptive suffering for the sake of the gospel.

Jesus could have avoided Judas and the crowds with swords and clubs simply by going to a different place where He could not be so easily found. But He chose to enter into the place of danger and of suffering as an act of obedience to God. This does not make sense to the flesh at all. It is only in the Spirit that we can willingly enter into such moments and ministries.

This requires the Lord's leading and timing. For most of His ministry Jesus would escape – he would walk through the crowd or avoid certain hostile places, and did so with great wisdom and caution – and sometimes with seemingly supernatural help. Jesus was not in love with risk for risk's sake. And, in my opinion, I think Scripture cautions us towards wisdom, rather than to headstrong folly. I am a strong believer in minimizing risk in missions wherever possible.

Yet there is a time when risk must be taken and danger entered fully into for the sake of the gospel. There is a time to plunge into a situation that we know will bring opposition, and horror and risk and pain and even death. This is the case with many of the missionaries working in the slums of the mega-cities of Asia – among people with tuberculosis and HIV, amidst injustice and violence and often physically threatened by vested interests. They cross the Kidron and enter into Gethsemane with Christ.

Jesus often went there – most of the time the Garden of Gethsemane would have been a place of prayer and refreshment and fellowship. This night it was a place of doom. So there are times when our normal routine that we follow can be the bravest thing we ever do. We are used to preaching but we know that on a particular day, if we get up in the pulpit, and preach what we know that we should preach, that it will expose us to rejection and may end our ministry – but we preach anyway.

Daniel was like that, when the edict was issued, he went to his room and resumed his routine of praying towards Jerusalem - with the windows open. He resumed his godly routine, even though it was now tinged with danger. So Jesus went, as He often did, to Gethsemane, even though He knew that Judas would soon come.

Jesus went with His disciples. He lived in community and He suffered in community. Jesus is never an isolated individualist, ruggedly facing the Universe alone. Even on the cross there was Mary and John and a crowd. He was part of them and was praying for them. Love operates with others, not apart from others. Ego is isolating. Love is communal.

Jesus lived in constant relationship with the Father, and amongst His disciples. It was the exception when He would head off into the wilderness alone to pray. Jesus is portrayed as enjoying people and parties and weddings and life in general. We learn to love in Spirit-filled community. So Jesus takes His friends with Him across the Kidron. He let His disciples see Him weep and cry out to God, and His sweat falling like drops of blood. He let them into the midst of His darkest hour.

Very few leaders let their followers see them in anguish or in any kind of suffering. Such moments are kept very secret and even having a cold is denied. But Jesus suffered in front of His friends and later, on the cross, in front of the world – and we adore Him for it. Jesus was utterly real and transparent and open to loving and being loved. Such transparent vulnerability, that drops all masks, can generally only be achieved by the most mature of leaders.

The Kidron was a brook (cheimarrhos) – a winter stream that dried up in summer, a storm runlet; quite insignificant boundary. It was probably dry at the time. It was not like crossing the Jordan, the Red Sea or the Euphrates, it was not a great national boundary, but it was a decisive spiritual line nonetheless.

The decisive spiritual moments and the grand life moments are often not related. When four young men had a prayer meeting in a haystack during a thunderstorm and began the Great Awakening or when Wesley listened to the preface to the Epistle to Romans and was “strangely warmed”, these were ordinary moments. Our great spiritual decisions can be as simple as a few quick steps across a dry creek bed.

It is in the heart and in the Spirit that the great decisions are made. Rarely do trumpets blow when we make a significant spiritual move. I have never had a grand commissioning service in front of hundreds of people. Rather just a few friends have laid hands on me and I have hopped on the plane and gone to the place of the Lord’s calling. Such a small group also commissioned Saul and Barnabas. We do not need to announce that we are going to cross the Kidron – we just take the steps.

We need to crucify the need for applause and for public recognition. God’s approval should be enough. We can never enter into redemptive suffering if everything we do must be noted and applauded, such people become stuck spiritually and are permanently shallow. Approval may come, but we should never make it a prerequisite to our obedience. We should cross the Kidron quietly, prayerfully and in fellowship with others.

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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