

His Last Days, Part 2: The Garden of Gethsemane

Luke 22:39 ESV (Pg. 514) And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. **40** And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” **41** And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, **42** saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” **43** And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. **44** And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. **45** And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, **46** and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” **47** While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, **48** but Jesus said to him, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” **49** And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” **50** And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. **51** But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. **52** Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? **53** When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

- I. We are in the second part of a series entitled “His Last Days”, looking at the events preceding the death and resurrection of Christ.
 - A. Last week we talked about the Last Passover Supper that Jesus Shared with his disciples, and of how he washed their feet after they had been arguing about who was the greatest; of how Jesus said one of them would betray him, and that Peter would deny that he even knew him 3 times that very night.
 - B. But we also talked about how it was on that night that Jesus presented them with bread that represented his body, soon-to-be broken for their healing; and the cup of wine, which represented the New Covenant to be established by the pouring out of his precious blood in the events of the following day.
 - C. Today we will talk about what happened next: how Jesus went with his disciples to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.
- II. **Mark 14:26 ESV** And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. I have always loved the way this part of the story is introduced. The disciples have had a night of devastating news, and yet, before they are dismissed to the next thing, they unite in praise to the Father with the singing of a hymn.
 - A. How would things be placed in better perspective for us if we would intentionally praise God in the midst of our most stressful moments? What if we didn't have to be “worked up” in order to “feel like” praising the Lord, but we did it because, in the best and worst of our moments, he was worthy of it? This moment of worship sets the tone for everything that will follow on that night.
 - B. When they leave Jerusalem, they cross the Kidron Valley on the east and begin ascending the Mount of Olives, where Jesus often retired to pray with his disciples. They make their way to an olive grove at the base of the mount known as the Garden of Gethsemane.

1. Gethsemane means “olive press” in Hebrew. Gethsemane was the place where valuable oil was extracted from olives by placing them in a press and crushing them until their precious oil flowed out freely.
 2. The oil of the olive was used in ancient Israel for everything from personal cleansing, fuel for lamps, an ingredient in perfume, and even medicine.
- C. This was an appropriate place for Jesus to find himself on the night before his crucifixion, for He was about to be crushed for the sins of the world. **Isaiah 53:10a ESV** Yet it was the will of the Lord **to crush him**; he has put him to grief. But what majesty, what beauty would flow from the crushing of the Lord!
1. Like the olive oil that was used to cleanse the body, His blood would truly and permanently wash away all of our soul’s impurity! 1 John 1:7 tells us that “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from **all** sin.”
 2. Like the olive oil that fueled the lamps of the people, His death would ignite a light whereby the whole world could really see truth. “I am the Light of the World” he declared of himself in John chapter 8.
 3. As the olive oil was used in perfume, I tell you that there is no sweeter aroma to be found in all of the world than in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **2 Corinthians 2:14 ESV** But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads **the fragrance** of the knowledge of him everywhere.
 4. Just like olive oil was applied in days gone by to heal the sick, the blood of Jesus is a healing balm that cures our diseased souls. Peter, quoting Isaiah, reminds us that “By his wounds we have been healed”.
- D. It was in this dark, lonely olive orchard that he would begin to feel the crushing he must endure. When he arrived, he separated himself from everyone except Peter, James and John. He revealed to them the depth of his anguish. **Matthew 26:37b ESV** he began to be **sorrowful** and **troubled**. **38** Then he said to them, “My soul is **very sorrowful, even to death**; remain here, and watch with me.”
1. Have you ever felt like your soul was in so much turmoil that you were going to die? Jesus did! But he did not call on some divine power to remove the physical pain or emotional agony he was about to endure. Isaiah described him as “a man of sorrows” and one who was “acquainted with grief”.
 - a) I don’t know about you, I find tremendous comfort in that fact! If Jesus were some Zeus-like deity, untouchable, perched high atop Mount Olympus, I don’t know what comfort (if any) that would bring to me.
 - b) But it matters to me that he experienced loss, that he was despised and rejected, that he cried, and that at the highest stress point of his life, he was in extreme emotional distress! I can relate to that, but more importantly, that fact assures me that he can relate to me!
 2. The writer of Hebrews said he was a High Priest who was well able to sympathize with our weaknesses, yet he never caved to sin (like I often do!) in those moments. Next we see what his response to his own anguish was:
- E. **Mark 14:35 ESV** And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and **prayed** that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. **36a** And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.”

1. At an infinitely greater point of crisis than you and I will ever face, Jesus casts himself on the goodness and sovereignty of his Father.
 - a) Much has been written and preached about this, but the term Christ uses, “Abba, Father” is a very intimate term for God. It’s relational implication is deeper than just to say “Father”; it’s more like Jesus is calling God his “Daddy”. Jesus knew who loved him, heard him, and could be trusted to accomplish what was best: his beloved Father.
 - b) But Jesus also asks boldly. “If it is possible, if there’s another way, let this hour, let this cup pass from me.”
 2. Think about what has transpired in the last few hours. The disciples argue about the pecking order. Peter boasts of his superior (but untested) bravery. In a few moments one of them will draw a sword to take matters into their own hand, but where do we find Jesus? Casting himself on God’s mercy!
- F. This is not at all because he was powerless. In Matthew, he tells the disciples that he had legions of angels at his disposal ready to put a stop to all of this if he so desired. But what some mistake for powerlessness was in fact trusting submission to God’s plan of salvation. This is confirmed for us in the next words of his prayer: **Mark 14:36b ESV** “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”
1. From before the foundation of the world, Jesus knew, loved and was committed to the plan of salvation for the human race. But if that’s true, what was this “cup”, and why did Jesus petition that it be removed from him?
 - a) The cup that Jesus preferred not to drink from had nothing to do with a Roman whip, or 3 nails. Many men have bravely faced all kinds of horrible deaths for a noble cause!
 - b) I was that the perfect, holy, 2nd Person of the Trinity had never once for all time been stained with sin. Now he would bear all the guilt, shame and punishment of sin for all who would ever believe.
 - c) He had never had a moment’s separation from his Father, but now he would cry out on the cross, **Matthew 27:46 ESV** “My God, my God, *why have you forsaken me?*”
 2. Luke says this reality began to tear at his physical frame, as his sweat became great drops of blood. Though rare, this is an actual medical phenomenon called “hematidrosis” that happens to people under extreme duress. This tells us the reality of Christ’s emotional state in the garden, yet he kept on praying!
- G. Matthew and Mark says that he prayed, and then went to find the three disciples who had accompanied him sleeping. Luke says they had fallen asleep because of their sorrow. But Christ encouraged them to rouse themselves and continue to pray, so that “**you may not enter into temptation.**”
1. Sometimes when life becomes unbearable, don’t you just want to do what the disciples did? Just pull down the shades and pull up the blankets and check out for a while? Are you tempted to give in to apathy or fatalism?
 2. Jesus said they did this because **Matthew 26:41b ESV** “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Though our spirits were made to connect with, and be sustained by perfect fellowship with God, the flesh is always pulling us down the path of least resistance; to do whatever feels most comfortable.

3. But Jesus' example shows us that real comfort and lasting peace come from the pursuit of open intimate communication with our Heavenly Father at all times. Jesus kept praying! This same cycle happened three times in this story: Jesus prayed for a while, went and found the disciples asleep, woke them and encouraged them to stay the course to watch and pray.
- H. And what was the result of Jesus' commitment to pressing in to the Father? In a short time Jesus would be arrested unjustly, yet remain calm, trusting in his Father. In fact, instead of being questioned, he questioned those arresting him!
 1. In John, when the mob shows up, he twice asks them whom they are seeking. They respond, "Jesus of Nazareth". When he responds by saying "I AM" (the Holy name of God, though most translators put it as "I am he"), the crowd falls back at the weight of the revelation of his true Person and glory.
 2. In the other gospels, he reminds them that he was with them every day in the temple, peacefully teaching over the last week. He asks them why they now come with torches and clubs to arrest him as a common criminal. He is reminding them that they are playing in *his* drama, he's not playing in theirs.
 - I. Now compare that with the reaction of the sleeping disciples, who could not muster the strength to pray even one watch of the night. When the mob arrives, Peter draws a sword in a total panic and cuts off a man's ear (Even here, Jesus mercifully heals the man). Soon they will all scatter like rats, abandoning Jesus to protect their own skins. Soon Peter, the great swordsman, will be weeping in a corner realizing he has denied the Lord of Life when he needed him most. This story shows us just what a difference a passionate life of prayer makes!
- III. "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit! Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."
- A. Martin Luther once said, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." Jesus knew that. He modeled it. He lived it.
 1. And his prayer was not like ours: "Oh God! Give me this! Or get me out of that!" His prayer was evidence of an intimate connection with his Abba Father.
 2. This doesn't mean that he was afraid to ask for things from God. We saw earlier that he did exactly that! But it seems as though Jesus cared more about being *with* God more than receiving any particular answer or temporal deliverance from momentary suffering, as evidenced by his powerfully praying, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done."
 - B. He looked upon the Father as faithful and trustworthy; someone to whom he could entrust both his best days and his worst days, and there was no worse day than the one on which the Lord of Glory would be put to death.
 1. In other places in the Bible we see Jesus praying very celebratory and worshipful prayers, and here we see Christ offering up an agonized prayer.
 2. What does that teach us? Two things: That it's always an appropriate response to pray; and that Christian maturity is in evidence when our prayer is not is not mainly about getting certain results, but about faith in, reliance and dependence on, and relationship to the Father.

- C. Where are you at this morning? Are you praying “that you may not enter into temptation” or are you soundly sleeping? Which part of you is steering your life? The flesh (which is weak), or the spirit (which is willing)? If you are praying, how are you praying? Is your god a deity to be appeased with bargains and sacrifices, or a Father who can be trusted no matter what?
- D. I hope that you can feel the Holy Spirit prompting you to live a life of greater, more trusting prayer. Perhaps you are intimidated not knowing where to start.
1. The best counsel I can give you is **just start**. Take every opportunity to talk to God. For example, you can start with sincere gratitude at all times.
 - a) If you don’t thank God for your meals, begin to do so. If you do routinely (but casually), take a moment and ask God to do a work in you to make you genuinely grateful for what he’s provided for you.
 - b) From there, begin to pray when you feel joy. Pray when you feel anxious. Pray when you are sick. Pray when you feel love. Pray when you feel anger. Pray when you’re in need. Pray when you lay down to rest. The Bible says “Pray without ceasing”. I don’t think it means only at church!
 2. You may feel like your prayers are not good enough, not spiritually sophisticated enough. But that’s certainly not what God thinks!
 - a) Think about your own kids if you have any. If your daughter were to bring you a fistful of dandelions, freshly plucked from the backyard, would you say, “What is this? Mommy wants roses from a florist! Try again!”
 - b) If your kid brings you a picture he scribbled at school just for you, would you look at him and say, “Well you’re certainly no Rembrandt!”
- E. Of course not! You delight in the **gift** because of the love you have for the **giver**! You are overjoyed because your child is attempting to express love in even the most inept and meager way! Are you a better parent than God? Do you suppose he’s any less thrilled to hear our inept and meager attempts to touch his heart?
- IV. Let’s respond today by making a fresh commitment to approaching our Father, whether we’re in good times or bad. We’re not saying discipline yourself to pray in 5 easy steps. We’re not saying learn religious verbiage or an advanced theology of prayer. We are calling you to begin to communicate with your Father who loves you immeasurably. Let us be quick to pray that we may not enter into temptation!