

Mark 14:32-42 The Garden of Gethsemane (part 1)

Think of an example where we might say, “I must go through this alone” or “You can’t understand because you weren’t there.” This is what we see with Jesus. Although he was there with the disciples and they all experienced the same events in those hours leading up to his betrayal, what Jesus experienced was unique to Him alone. So, concerning difficult and trying times in life you might say, “*That it was my Gethsemane*” in that it was unique to you in such a way that no one can understand. But, our “gethsemanes” of life are not the same as the Gethsemane of Jesus. As Jesus began his earthly ministry in the desert being tested by Satan, so we see him again at the end of his ministry being tested again. This fact is what makes this event so important to us as believers. It was special; and in this garden we see some of the most beautiful truths about our Lord Jesus. Today, I hope to point out from our text what was unique to Jesus in the garden and what it means for us as believers. There is a lot here. So, I need to divide this sermon into two parts. I have 3 truths (1 ½ today).

In these verses Jesus came with the disciples to a garden called Gethsemane, which means “olive press.” Luke doesn’t mention the garden specifically, but says it was on the Mount of Olives. This was the same road in and out of the city Jesus and his disciples had been taking all week. And this garden is located somewhere on that road heading up the Mount of Olives. It was probably owned by someone they knew personally because Luke says it was his custom to go to this place (Luke 22:39). It was an ideal spot for resting, sleeping, praying, and teaching. We see all these things on that night, but there were some peculiarities that only Jesus experienced.

1. The agony of Jesus. Immediately we see Jesus with his disciples (minus Judas). As they arrived in the garden he said, “*Sit here while I pray.*” Then, he singled out his three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John, inviting them to come with him further into the garden. And, as they were walking together, Mark tells us that Jesus was “**greatly distressed and troubled**” (v. 33). Then, in v. 34 he said, “**My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.**” In v. 35 we see that he himself went a little further and “**fell to the ground**” in desperate prayer.

In the book of Mark Jesus prays alone 3 times. Every time it is at night. It is in solitude. And in every instance he is facing critical places (great trials) in his ministry (1:35; 6:46). In every case Jesus does not extend himself outward in compassion and ministry without first attending to the source of his mission and purpose with the father. Think about it. Tomorrow, he will die. Tonight he must settle this in his “soul” with the Father. This was a “Gethsemane” only for the Son of God.

The two words “distressed” and “troubled” are rare in the NT. The first occurs only 4 times in the book of Mark. The KJV translates this word “amazed.” It is the same word we see when Mary Magdalene saw the empty tomb. The second word “troubled” is found only 3 times in the NT. It has also been translated as “heavy.” A couple weeks ago while sleeping our carbon monoxide alarm went off about 3 in the morning. I was alarmed. I was even filled with some troubling terror for a moment; until I realized it was the battery. This is a good example of terror and some type emotional fear. But, Jesus’ emotions at that point in the garden went much deeper. Mark says he “began” to be greatly distressed and troubled. In my studies, the combination of these words indicates that Jesus was experiencing something new to him, even to the point that

he was amazed in terror at the agony in his soul. I am reminded of the words of the Psalmist, **“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? . . . My soul is cast down within me. . . Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me”** (Psalm 42:4-7).

I must ask: *“Why this terror and dismay?”* Was it because he knew that even at that hour Judas was approaching to betray him? Was it because he knew that Peter would deny him? Was it because he knew the Sanhedrin would condemn him or that Pilate would sentence him to death? Was it because of the ridicule and the scorn that would receive from his enemies? Was it because he knew the Roman soldiers would nail him to a cross? I believe all of these things were on his mind. But, there was so much more. Look at v. 34. He says to the 3 with him, *“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”* The KJV says, “exceeding sorrowful.” Another translation says, “deeply grieved.” Another version says “overwhelmed with sorrow.”

When you put these words with “even to death” we start to understand the agony of Jesus. It has something to do with his impending death. Luke tells us that this agony was so great that drops of blood came as Jesus’ sweat fell to the ground. Now, I must ask: *“Was he afraid to die?”* We can look through history and see that many men have gone to their death without such anguish and with great bravery. For many Christians throughout history there has been no fear in death. Even the Apostle Paul knew that to die was gain. Why such anguish in our Lord? Some may see this “weakness” as cowardly. But, I can assure you; the Word of God can assure you; the Son of Man was no coward!

The answer must be that Jesus is aware of facing something MORE than simply his own death. Jesus has already told the disciples 3 times in the book of Mark that he would die, and even said that the **“Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). Now, in the garden, this thought of being a ransom, overwhelmed his soul. Jesus knew that He alone could provide such a ransom. We will explore this point more in a moment. But, I would like to make an observation about this agony our Lord experienced.

To many, this agony, this grief and sorrow and anguish, appears to be inconsistent with the divine nature (glory) of Christ. Some have ridiculed our Lord and the Scriptures themselves for portraying such a weak man. But, I would argue (rightly) that his anguish in Gethsemane is a glorious display of the beauty of Christ in taking on the feelings of a man. Listen to the words of Ambrose: *“I not only do not think that there is any need of excuse, but there is no instance in which I admire more his kindness and his majesty; for he would not have done so much for me, if he had not taken upon him my feelings. He grieved for me, who had no cause of grief for himself; and, laying aside the delights of the eternal Godhead, he experiences the affliction of my weakness. I boldly call it sorrow, because I preach the cross. For he took upon him not the appearance, but the reality of incarnation. It was therefore necessary that he should experience grief, that he might overcome sorrow, and not shut it out; for the praise of fortitude is not bestowed on those who are rather stupefied than pained by wounds.”*

In other words, what a beautiful, compassionate, savior who would take on all of my humanity! Today, Christian, when you are sorrowful because of the death of your loved one, when cancer is eating the flesh of your spouse or your child or your friend, when the anxieties of life are like

waves over your head, when your agony says, “*Enough, I can’t go on any further,*” remember Jesus has felt your suffering.

Because of the trials and tests of Jesus while he was in the flesh, we do not have a savior who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15) Today, Christian, “**Cast your cares upon him for he cares for you.**” If you are not a Christian, you have never experienced the true love and the true compassion of such a savior. Turn unto Him and be saved today! Let’s continue the thought of this agony as we move on to point #2 and Jesus’ prayer.

2. The prayer of Jesus. Although the truths and implications are deeper, the whole passage is about prayer. Verse 32 says that Jesus told the disciples to “*stay here*” as I pray. In v. 38 Jesus tells Peter James and John to “*watch and pray.*” This was a place for prayer. But, now, I would like to focus on the specific prayer Jesus prayed in the garden. Look at v. 35 he prayed, “**If it were possible, the hour might pass from him.**” Then, in v. 36 he said, “**Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.**” These words should help us understand this agony that Jesus alone experienced. I believe these words give us the source of Jesus’ agony in the garden. These words also provide us with the truth that the Gethsemane of Jesus was unique to him. What he came to do, his mission on this earth, to die was something that He alone could accomplish. You might say, “*Jon what do you mean?*” Well, let’s explore this prayer for a moment. In these words we will see the reality of Jesus’ Gethsemane.

In considering the reality of death, Jesus knew that his crucifixion on the following day would be more than physical death. In this prayer as Jesus looked forward to an objective death on the cross, he had to deal with the subjective experience of it. It was in Gethsemane that Jesus had to be tested and *will* to become a sin-bearing sacrifice in the place of sinners. Jesus said, “**if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.**” Then in v. 36, “**Remove this cup from me.**” What was the “it,” the “hour” the “cup” to which Jesus is agonizing over? As I have noted before, Jesus is face to face with the essence of the cross as the place where his suffering will culminate. Let’s allow the words of Scripture to help us this morning. The words of Isaiah 53 give us insight into why Jesus would feel such agony. Let’s turn there together. “**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.** ⁵ **But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.** ⁶ **All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.** ⁷ **He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.** ⁸ **By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?** ⁹ **And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.** ¹⁰ **Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.** ¹¹ **Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied . . .”** (Is. 53:4-11).

In this passage there are many truths, but I would like to highlight two of them concerning Jesus prayer. First, we see throughout, that the cup of Jesus was his substitutionary death in the place of sinners. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was laid our chastisement. The stripes we deserved were laid upon him. The Lord had laid ON HIM the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, afflicted, led to the slaughter. He was stricken for the transgression of my people. His soul was made an offering for guilt.

In other words, when Jesus considered the cross, he agonized over bearing our sins. It is one thing, fearful as it will be, to answer for our own sins before a holy and almighty God; who can imagine what it would be like to stand before God to answer for all the sins of someone else. And, not just their sins, but the guilt they bring. How many of us have considered our own sin and wept with guilt? Even last night while I lay in my bed and thought about the depths of my sin, I was filled with emotion. I am guilty! We are guilty! And Jesus will bear all our guilt! In this thought alone we can see how Jesus must have experienced sorrow and horror and distress and amazement.

But, we cannot stop with this first thought. The second truth we see from the words of Is. 53 are found in the fact that God himself will pour out his anger and wrath upon His Son on the cross. He was stricken, smitten by God. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed. He was afflicted. He was cut off from the land of the living. It was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. This second thought is more awesome than the first. The worst part about becoming a ransom, a sin-bearer is that it spells complete alienation from God. We will see this on the cross when Jesus said, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**” In the garden, God is still Abba, Father. The death and separation was still to come. The next day, this would become reality. It is not his own mortality, but the thought of becoming a sin-bearer who must become the object of God’s wrath. It is this thought that overwhelms the “soul” of Jesus. Jesus was not afraid of physical death itself!

Today, if you are in Christ, he has bore your sins. He has taken your guilt. He has successfully taken the wrath of God that should have fallen on you. And, now, he sits at the right hand until all enemies are put under his feet. Listen to the words of Paul in Rom. 3:21-26. He says, “**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**”

Today, if you are not in Christ God will also be satisfied. He will be satisfied as his righteous wrath is poured out upon you forever in a place called hell. The only difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that for the Christian, the righteous anger of God has been poured out on his Son in the Christian’s place. For the non-Christian, his just anger will rest upon the sinner.

There are at least 3 more observations about Jesus' prayer that I can't just pass over. So, I will need to continue this thought next week with lots of applications. But, in closing let's consider just one.

As Christians we should trust the sovereignty of God to take patiently whatever God sends. As Jesus considered his death in Gethsemane, he said "*Not my will, but yours be done.*" This should always be our prayer. We should take patiently whatever God sends. We should aspire to like nothing but what God likes. We should wish nothing but what God approves. If it means pain, may God send it! If it is ease or comfort, may it be. This is the highest standard to which we should aim our thoughts and our lives. As Paul said, "Let us strive to have the mind of Christ." Nothing will bring you the most misery in your life than to say, "Lord, let my will be done." I would even say that if you are a Christian you will think more and more like this as you grow in sanctification. If you find that you are not thinking like this; you find yourself saying, "I don't want to live like Christ. I don't want to go and do the things that Christ did. I am not willing to say, Lord, your will be done." I would say to you beware. Test and see that you are saved.