

Matthew 26:36-47
Gethsemane: The Beginning of His Sorrow
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We will be partaking of the Lord's Supper today. Partaking of the Lord's Supper is a great privilege, but it is also carries with it great responsibilities. We are to partake in such a way that we focus on our Savior, that we remember our Lord and His work of redemption on our behalf, that we proclaim His death until He comes at the end of this age. Our passage today helps prepare us to remember and to proclaim. In our passage for today, we see the beginning of our Lord's descent into that lonely ordeal of suffering which is the atonement for our sins. We read in verse 27 that here at Gethsemane, Jesus began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Our Savior at this point said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death."

Our text identifies this point in time as the beginning of our Savior's special suffering as the Man of Sorrows, and that is consistent with our Savior's prior conduct. He has just come from the upper room where He ate the last Passover meal and the first Lord's Supper with His disciples. There Jesus had shown no sign of deep sorrow or despair. There Jesus had focussed not on His coming suffering but on His disciples' needs. Jesus, who is the prophesied Servant of Jehovah, had put on the garb of a lowly servant and had washed His disciples feet. Jesus, the first Comforter, had said to His anxious disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God,

believe also in Me." Jesus had told His disciples that it was good that He was going away because He would send them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Jesus, who is the source of our spiritual nourishment and growth, not only instituted the Lord's Supper there in that upper room but also had said, "I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." Jesus, the son of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, had sung a hymn with His disciples after the Passover. Jesus, the great High Priest of the new covenant, had prayed for His faithful disciples, saying "Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me." In all these actions and words, Jesus had ministered to His disciples and had shown Himself to be their Rock and Strength and Tower. Jesus had told His disciples about His coming ordeal, but His focus at that time had been on strengthening them and comforting them and preparing them.

Then Jesus had led His disciples on a road to the north of the temple. They had traveled outside the city walls to the east across the brook Kedron. They continued to a point where the road divides into three branches, all leading to the Mount of Olives. Near this fork in the road, there was a garden called Gethsemane, which probably means "oil press." It must have been a small enclosed garden area which included an oil press for use with the olive harvest from the Mount of Olives. Jesus went here for two reasons. He knew that Judas had gone that night to get the authorities to arrest Him. In the upper room, Jesus had informed Judas that He knew of His betrayal. Jesus had said to Judas, "What you do, do quickly." Judas had left, and gone to the authorities. Jesus then went to Gethsemane

because He knew Judas would find Him there without much trouble. Jesus knew that Judas knew about Gethsemane and that Jesus often met there with His disciples. Jesus went to Gethsemane as part of His voluntary decision to go to Calvary and to submit to the ordeal of the cross.

The second reason Jesus went to Gethsemane was to prepare for that ordeal. Jesus knew that His Father had sent Him into the world to endure suffering as an atonement for sin. Endurance requires strength, and Jesus in His humanity received strength through prayer to His Heavenly Father. Jesus came to this Garden to pray.

As Jesus entered this Garden and shifted His focus from the needs of His disciples to His own approaching ordeal, the cold waves of distress came pouring upon His human soul. To use the words of Alfred Edersheim, "Within these few moments, He had passed from the calm of assured victory into the anguish of the contest." What Edersheim called "the anguish of the contest," became so great at that point that Jesus' sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Jesus' soul became exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Yet Jesus must not die then, not prematurely. His hour was even then approaching, but it had not yet arrived. Before He dies, He must first be hung on a tree, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." Before He dies, He must first refuse the drugged wine and with full consciousness endure God's holy wrath against the sin of the world. Before He dies, He must first in His humanity experience a break in fellowship with His Heavenly Father and cry out, "My God, My God, why have You

forsaken Me?" Before He dies, He must first pay the full ransom for the sins of many and then cry out those words of triumphant closure, "It is finished." At Gethsemane, Jesus' time was fast approaching, but it had not yet come. He prayed three times there in the Garden. In His high priestly prayer, He had prayed for His disciples. Here in the Garden, He prayed for Himself. The Father answered His prayer. We read in Luke that an angel came from heaven to strengthen Jesus. Jesus left Gethsemane with His strength restored and His spirit revived for the ordeal He had to endure.

Now that we have reviewed the history of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane, I want to examine the event from three angles or perspectives. These are Gethsemane as a perplexity, Gethsemane as a pattern, and Gethsemane as a picture.

First, there is Gethsemane as a perplexity or puzzle. Some ask why Jesus was so disturbed at His approaching death when others have faced death calmly. The example of Socrates in Athens is often given. According to the received story, Socrates voluntarily drank a cup of hemlock and died without expressing any despair or anguish. We also have the examples of many Christian saints who have died in perfect peace. In the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul said, "To die is gain." Why was Jesus in such agony at Gethsemane when others have approached death calmly and fearlessly?

Let's first consider the pagan such as Socrates. He approaches death calmly, but that is because of his ignorance and his hardness of heart. He has come to think of death only as the

shedding of the physical body with all its limitations and pains. In regard to his human spirit, he regards death at worse as a loss of conscious existence, and at best as a transition to some place of bliss such as the Elysian Fields. He views death as an inevitable and natural experience, and so he accepts death with a stoic resignation. He has suppressed the truth about death as a judgment and as a prelude to greater judgment. The pagan who is able to face death calmly is able to do so only because of his illusions and insensitivity.

But what about the saints? Why is the apostle Paul able to say "to die is gain," when Christ agonized over dying? The reason is that the experience of death which they faced was vastly different. Paul experienced death as transformed by the saving work of Jesus. Jesus had to travel the road of death alone, but now He accompanies the saints as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death and comforts them with His rod and staff. Jesus through His death took the sting out of death and transformed it from a judgment into a time of rest and reward.

The experience of death which Jesus faced was different, even unique. Unlike all others, Jesus did not have to die because Jesus never sinned. For Jesus, death was not something inevitable; it was something He had to voluntarily choose. Jesus had to face death knowing He did not have to die. Also, Jesus had to face death in its full horror as a judgment and curse. He had no illusions about death being merely the freeing of the body from a creaturely bondage. Also, Jesus experienced death with a totally pure heart, with a heart totally free from the insensitivity of callousness. Jesus' heart was fully sensitive to

the horror of death as an experience of the wrath of God against sin. Jesus suffered the full force of death with a full knowledge and understanding of what He was enduring and with complete sensitivity to the pain. Jesus had to look death square in the face.

Perhaps the best measure of the intense suffering of the death of Jesus is its effect. Because of His death, a multitude beyond numbering will not have to suffer punishment for their sins. If they were to suffer this punishment themselves, they would suffer an eternity in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels and still not satisfy God's wrath against them. Jesus satisfied God's wrath against them completely through His special ordeal upon the cross.

There was a uniqueness to Jesus' death that accounts for His agony at Gethsemane. And because of Jesus' agony, we can say with the apostle Paul, "To die is gain" and "O Death, where is your sting?"

We've looked at Gethsemane as a puzzle. Secondly, let's look at Gethsemane as a pattern. I mean a pattern for us to follow, an example of Christ for us to emulate. Christ on one level wanted to avoid the pain and shame of the cruel cross. Yet Christ had a higher desire, and that was for the will of His heavenly Father to do done, even if that involved pain and humiliation. This is the example for us to follow. Certainly we want to avoid pain and humiliation. Yet we must believe that God's will for our life is what is best, even when it involves such suffering. We must trust God's wisdom, love and power. In His wisdom, God knows what is truly best for us. In His love, God desires what is

truly best for us. In His power, God is able to do what is truly best for us. We must in faith submit to God's plan as what is best for us even when another course appears better based on our limited knowledge and understanding. We should follow the example of Jesus who prayed to His heavenly Father, "Not My will but Yours."

Let's next look at Gethsemane as a picture. I am referring to the rich symbolism of Gethsemane as it relates to other events in redemptive history. Jesus is here in a garden in the midst of olive trees. That brings to mind the garden of Eden where God provided an abundance of fruit trees for Adam and Eve at the beginning of history. In that Garden there were two trees, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life. God had forbidden Adam from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, saying that in the day he ate of it, he would die. The tree represented obedience to God, submission to God's right to determine what is good and what is evil. Satan came and tempted Eve to eat of the fruit and to become as God herself, deciding for herself what is good and what is evil. In disobedience, first Eve and then Adam ate the forbidden fruit. When they partook of that fruit, they partook of death and came under God's curse. God drove them out of the Garden lest they eat of the Tree of Life and live forever.

Now think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a garden in the midst of fruit trees. Jesus was there as the second Adam. The first Adam had been tempted to sin. The second Adam consented to become sin in the sense of accepting the responsibility for the sins of God's people. The first Adam

disobeyed God by partaking of the forbidden fruit. The second Adam obeyed God, even when obedience meant putting to His lips the cup of suffering. The first Adam, through His wife Eve, talked with the devil about the alleged advantages of disobedience. The second Adam talked with God in prayer about His desire to do the will of His Father in heaven. The first Adam stretched forth his hands in disobedience to pluck fruit from a tree. The second Adam stretched out His hands in obedience to be nailed to a tree. The first Adam through His disobedience lost fellowship with God. The second Adam through His obedience reconciled God's people with God. The first Adam through his disobedience lost access to the tree of life. The second Adam through His obedience regained for God's people access to the tree of life.

Let's also compare Gethsemane with Christ's temptation in the wilderness. At Gethsemane, Christ prayed three times about going to the cross. In the wilderness, Satan tempted Christ three times to avoid the cross.

There in the wilderness, a barren and dry place symbolic of God's curse upon the world, Satan tempted Christ to turn a stone into bread to satisfy His hunger. Jesus also could have used His divine powers to feed the masses as a way to obtain a political kingdom. Jesus refused to use His divine powers either for His personal benefit or as a political tool.

When God cursed Adam for his sin, God said that Adam would now have to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow. Jesus never turned any stones into bread, but at Gethsemane Jesus sweat as

it were drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus did provide bread for His people, spiritual bread and nourishment, but He earned it with the sweat of His brow in the context of the curse. He paid the wages of obedience even unto suffering on the cross.

Satan also tempted Jesus to use spectacular miracles as a political tool. Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple because the angels would not allow Jesus to dash His foot against a stone. How ironic! At Gethsemane, the Father answered Jesus' prayer by sending an angel to strengthen Him so Jesus could go to the cross where His feet would be nailed to a cross. The first promise of the gospel is found in Genesis 3:15:

15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

There the suffering of Christ is described as a bruising of the heel. Do you see the irony? Satan promised Christ that angels would protect His feet. God sent an angel to strengthen Christ so He could go to the place where His heel would be bruised.

The apostle Paul said, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace.' How much more beautiful are the feet of Him whose feet were bruised on the cross accomplishing the gospel of peace.

Satan also tempted Jesus by promising that he would give Jesus the kingdoms of this world if Jesus would bow down and serve

him. At Gethsemane, Jesus prostrates Himself before the Father in prayer and says, "Your will, not mine." Jesus submits Himself to the Father even when that means going to the place of pain and curse.

Jesus began His public ministry rejecting Satan's temptations to avoid the cross. Jesus here ended His public ministry consenting to the cross in prayer.

We have looked at Gethsemane as a puzzle, a pattern and a picture. Let us now prepare for the Lord's Supper in gratitude that Jesus at Gethsemane prayed that prayer, "Not My will, but Yours." Let us prepare for the Lord's Supper in gratitude that Jesus consented to go to the cross. Only by that work on the cross can we be saved from God's wrath against our sins. Only through His agony are we able to have peace.