

Gethsemane: The Shadow of Golgotha

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[0:00] Mark 14, verse 27 through to verse 42. This is the word of God. You will all fall away, Jesus told them.

For it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.! But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Peter declared, even if I fall away, even if all fall away, I will not.

I tell you the truth, Jesus answered. Today, yes, tonight, before the rooster crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times. But Peter insisted emphatically, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.

And all the others did the same. They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. He took Peter, James, and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them. Stay here and keep watch. Going a little further, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him.

[1:10] Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.

Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

Once more, he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, are you still sleeping and resting?

Enough, the hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Here comes my betrayer.

Amen. You may be seated. Well, in coming to Gethsemane, we can't help but feel that we are on holy ground.

[2:16] The intensity of our Savior's suffering have never risen to this height as he's left all alone with his Father to face the impending horror of the cross.

Just now, maybe nine hours away. It's a sacred spot where the Son of God offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and was heard because of his reverent submission, Hebrews 5, 7 tells us.

We almost feel like we don't belong here looking at this scene, like we're intruding into the holy of holies. And yet, the Scriptures beckon us to draw near.

They call us to see his sorrow, to witness the Son's delight to do the Father's will, even at the overwhelming cost to himself.

So, Gethsemane was the name given to this garden on the Mount of Olives, this mountain famous for its olive groves and trees. It's just outside the walls of Jerusalem, the other side of the Kidron Valley.

[3 : 30] And from the upper room, our Lord Jesus moves them from Jerusalem out to the garden called Gethsemane. In Hebrew, Gethsemane means oil press.

Perhaps the closest thing to it that I've seen is an old cider press. But instead of apples, it was olives that were put into the press. And then the press is tightened more and more so that the pressure squeezes the oil from the olives.

Oil press is a most fitting name for this event then, as the Son of God is, as it were, put into the press. As the horrors of Calvary are made vivid to him, pressing him down upon his soul.

And squeezing out of him these loud cries and tears of his prayers, made three times to his heavenly Father. So intense was the agony that Dr. Luke tells us that his sweat was like great sweat, drops of blood falling to the ground.

And wonder of wonders, as much as his own trial is of a concern to him, he carries an equal concern for the trial that is coming upon his disciples.

[4 : 54] A trial that will press upon them and test their loyalty to their master. The pressure of their trial will reveal their own weakness and failure, whereas the pressure of Christ's trials reveals his strength and his triumph for them and for us.

So Mark's account of this scene divides into two points, two things that were pressing hard upon the Savior's heart. First of all, his own cup to drink, and then his disciples' danger.

So let's follow them into the garden. First, his own cup to drink, verses 32 to 34. They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray.

He took Peter, James, and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them.

Stay here and keep watch. Luke's account says they went out as usual to the Mount of Olives. In other words, this was a favorite place where the twelve often went when they had come to Jerusalem during the feast.

[6 : 15] So earlier that night when Jesus said to Judas, what you're about to do, do quickly, Judas went out to get the arresting mob, and he knew where to lead them to find Jesus in a place where no crowd would be present.

Gethsemane, the usual place of the disciples and the Savior. So in going to Gethsemane, Jesus is not avoiding arrest.

He is deliberately walking right into their trap. And it shows us a Savior who is ever in control of the situation. Not some slave, not someone caught by surprise, but rather laying down his life willingly for his sheep.

And so this lesson of his own willing submission to his Father's will is emphasized in his whole visit to Gethsemane and the prayers that he utters here. He's not a victim, drag kicking and screaming to the cross, but a willing, surrendered, submissive servant of his Father.

And yet we see that this was no easy matter given what the Father's will was. And so in Gethsemane, we're given to see the real human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 39] He's deeply affected. He's wrestling with the coming ordeal of the cross. Gethsemane is a foretaste of Golgotha. Here the shadow of the looming cross is cast back upon him, and he's made to feel something of its agony and dread as never before.

Don't anyone ever think that because Jesus is the Son of God, he did not feel the fear that man faces and feels in going to such things as he was going.

Don't think that he was somehow shielded by his divine nature so that his pure, perfect human nature was not torn apart by what was awaiting him.

Gethsemane won't allow us that idea at all. And so as they enter Gethsemane, Jesus divides the eleven into two groups. Eight of the disciples, he leaves there at the entrance and says, sit here while I pray.

And then he takes three, Peter, James, and John, the most intimate friends of the twelve, and he takes them a bit further to witness more of his inner agony of soul.

[8 : 54] Is it not a natural human longing to desire the presence and the support of friends when you're going through deep trials? Proverbs tells us a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

That's what he's for. He's for adverse times. And in this, our Savior's true humanity is seen in that he takes the three with him.

But then it says he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. Translators struggle to express the level of sorrow and agitation of our Lord here.

Some say he was sorely amazed and appalled, deeply troubled. Hendrickson translates, he began to be filled with horror and anguish.

The fact that he began to feel this way, as the text tells us, seems to indicate that this was a degree of suffering that our Savior had never felt before.

[9 : 56] But only now, in Gethsemane, hours away, begins to have this sense of dread and darkness fall upon his soul. The very one who earlier that evening had told his disciples, let not your hearts be troubled, is now finding his own heart deeply distressed and troubled, the very word.

Evidently, this was something noticed by his three disciples as they expressed the sudden change that came over him, sorrow that they had never seen in him before to this degree.

And then Jesus opens his mouth and gives us a window right into his soul by saying, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch. Sorrow is overwhelming him. Think of a drowning man. And here are the waves or waves of grief that are pounding him, pushing him down, pouring over his soul.

And remember, he's not actually going through the ordeal of Calvary. He's just contemplating Calvary. And the thought alone nearly killed him, so overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

[11 : 26] The hymn writer puts it this way, but none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere he found his sheep that was lost.

No words can fully express it. No commentator can fully explain it. No mind can fully grasp it. Will it not be a source of wonder, love and praise to us throughout the eternal ages?

What he bore for us. Well, the agony continues and increases as Jesus prays. Verse 35, going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, this hour might pass from him.

In reading the Gospels, we find the Lord Jesus had different postures in prayer. Sometimes we find him standing, sometimes kneeling, sometimes sitting, sometimes looking up to heaven.

But this is the only time we ever hear of him falling prostrate to the ground, face plant on Mother Earth, face down as low as he could get.

[12 : 39] And in it, we see something of the depths to which he is being pressed down by what lies ahead of him. This is the Son of God, the creator of heaven and earth, down on the ground, flat, as if he could get no lower as he pours out his heart to his Father in heaven with loud cries and tears, pleading that if possible, this cup, this hour, might pass from him.

And many times, they had attempted to kill him, but it never happened. And the reason repeatedly given in the Gospels was because his hour had not yet come.

His hour. But now his hour has come, and it is at hand on the clock of heaven, and he asks that if possible, this hour might pass from him.

Verse 36, he goes on praying, Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

He calls on God as Father. Jesus is God's eternal Son in whom the Father delights. Where do you go when you're overwhelmed with sorrow and grief and trouble?

[14:03] Jesus prays to his Father. He does what he taught his disciples in how they should pray, saying, Our Father. That's what Jesus, God's eternal Son, does.

And brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus had a Father in heaven to run to, to pray to, to unburden his soul to, and so do you, because in Jesus Christ, his God and Father has become your God and Father.

That's the privilege that is ours as children bought with the Savior's blood. And he prays, Everything is possible for you.

There's a question in the children's catechism. Can God do anything? And the answer is, yes, God can do all his holy will. Jesus is convinced that God has power to do whatever he wants, whatever he wills.

And so he says, Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Now here, the Savior's putting his finger on the true source of his overwhelming agony.

[15:19] It's true that the whole ordeal of the betrayal by Judas, the arrest, the scattering of his disciples, the mock trials, the denial by Peter, the beatings, the scourging with the whips, the nails, the thorns, all of it, is such that sinless human nature would instinctively recoil and want to be spared from it.

and Jesus' human nature is no different in that regard. But that's just touching the outer fringes of his sufferings. That's not the sufferings that saved us.

No, other martyrs have faced torture and death far more composed than Jesus does. No, all of that together is not the overwhelming, horrific thing he's dreading. What is it?

It's the cup. And here he states it. Father, you can do all things. Take this cup from me. And so we ask, what's in this cup?

What is it that the Father has put into the cup for him to drink that makes his soul recoil at the very thought of it? Well, it's the cup of God's wrath spoken of in the Old Testament that was reserved for his enemies.

[16:45] You can read it in Jeremiah 49. This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me. Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

And when they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them. Isaiah 51, 22 calls it the cup that made you stagger the goblet of my wrath.

This boiling, hot, anger, indignation of God is his instinctive response to sin, human sin, our sin.

And what sinks our Lord in sorrow is the full weight then of all of our sins and guilt, all the sin and guilt of his people of all time as the Father laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Think of the weight, think of the oil press, think of what is pressing him down as he, the sinless one, is made sin for us and our sins are put on him and he identifies with it so much that he becomes sin for us, Paul says.

[17:59] And then the Father treats him as sin deserves rather than as his son that he loves. He crushes him for our iniquities.

He took my sins and my sorrows. He made them his very own. He bore the burden to Calvary, suffered and died alone. And already in Gethsemane, he's feeling the weight of it and it's got him face planted on the ground crying that if possible, this cup could be passed from him.

Is it any wonder then that just the thought of drinking the cup nearly killed him? Is it any wonder that his human soul would cry, Father, if possible, let this cup pass from me.

William Lane, the commentator, says, Jesus came to Gethsemane to be with his father before it all starts to happen, but found hell rather than heaven open before him and he staggered.

Yes, even at the sight of the cup. ye who think of sin but lightly, nor suppose the evil great, here it may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate.

[19:23] See Jesus flat down on the ground crying for God to remove the cup. God will.

Now let's be perfectly clear about this. Jesus' perfect submission to his father's will was never at issue here. Jesus makes that clear every time we hear him pray.

Yet not my will but yours be done. Not once did he want something different than what God willed. Rather, each time he laid his petition before his father, submitting it to whatever God wanted.

What I want more than anything father, what I want more than what I am asking is what you want. That's where he lays his petition. That was the bottom line with Jesus.

That was the rule that guided him all through his 33 years that governed his life. Not my will but yours be done. I only want you to take this cup away from me if that is what you want.

[20:28] And that rule of submitting to his father is now being put to the greatest test of all here in Gethsemane. And we find Jesus as always submitting his will, his human will, to the father's will, being obedient unto death, yes, even the death of the cross.

And so the struggle in Gethsemane was never whether Jesus would embrace the will of his father. He delighted to do his will. That's why he came. He's unwavering in that delight.

This is human nature speaking here, sinless human nature. And the issue here was only whether God's will must involve the drinking of the cup of God's wrath, or whether if possible there was some other way.

way. But the silence of heaven made it clear there was no other way. There is no other land. So Jesus most willingly takes the cup of God's wrath, ever refusing to set his will against his father's will, perfectly surrendered, not what I will, but what you will.

And again, is Jesus not praying as he taught his disciples? When you pray, say, our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

[21:59] And that's how Jesus prayed, always surrendering to the will of his father in heaven. So what is possible for God's power to deliver Jesus from his enemies was not possible if guilty sinners like you and me are to be saved.

God's power could spare Jesus from death. He had done it many times. But heaven silences God's reply saying, what you are asking is not possible.

It is not possible for the cup of my wrath to pass from you and from them. Justice must be satisfied to remove the offense of my holiness.

One or the other must pay. If we're not to be condemned, then he must be condemned. And so the choice was clear to save himself or us.

And he chose to save us in sweet surrender to his father. We cannot be saved from hell's punishment unless he suffers it for us. So Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

- [23 : 08] Christians stand amazed at the Savior's love, at the length and depth and height and width, the ends to which he would go, the sorrow, the grief that he bore to save you.
- There was hell in his cup. My hell and your hell. And he drank that compressed, concentrated wrath.
- Infinite wrath, given to our Savior and he drank it for us. He took our hell and he gave us his heaven. Doesn't make you want to love him, thank him, serve him, trust him, obey him.
- The sinner, friend, sometimes we hear sinners boasting, if there is even such a place as hell, I want to go there because all my friends will be there. Oh, listen, here's where you see what hell is.
- Here's where you see the Son of God down on his face begging that if possible this could pass from him. There's no games, there's no playing in hell.
- [24 : 23] There is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It's not something you would wish upon your neighbor, your enemy. Then have pity on your own soul and flee to the only Savior.
- The only way out is the Savior who took hell in the place of guilty sinners. So here's the example for us in praying, to never want anything other than what God wants.
- Yes, we have that liberty of bringing to him our desires, of bringing to him our wants. Father, it would be nice to have this, but always, if not in word, yet in heart, submissive to the Father's will.
- Not what I want, Lord, but what you want. Thomas Brooks tells of a Christian woman who was sick and potentially on her deathbed, and visitors came calling and asked her, what do you want, to live or to die?
- And she said, whatever the Lord wants. Oh, they said, but if he deferred the choice to you, which would you choose? She said, oh, if he deferred the choice to me, I'd defer it right back to him.
- [25 : 44] I don't want to choose. He loves me better than I love myself. He knows better than I what's right and good and for his glory. If I had the choice, I would give it right.
- That's what Jesus is doing. Not my will, but yours be done. Not even God's one and only son could pray without saying, not my will, but yours be done.
- You know, I was rebuked by a Christian once as I prayed and used this language of if it be thy will. And he claimed that the prayer of faith did not need to pray that way.
- That it was a lack of faith to pray if it is your will. That just gives you excuse. If he doesn't do it, then you can say, well, it must not have been his will.
- No, the prayer of faith doesn't say that. There was no lack of faith in Jesus' prayer. He says, Father, all things are possible for you.
- [26 : 46] That's no lack of faith. And yet, he submitted and said, if it's your will, otherwise I don't want it. None of us are beyond that.
- And so, what Jesus' example, should teach us, we can ask anything but only with the surrender of our will to his. And we'll see next, Jesus praying three times as matched by finding his disciples sleeping three times.
- And I believe Mark is emphasizing among other things that Jesus has to face this greatest trial of his all alone. Remember how he said it, you will leave me all alone, yet I am not alone for my Father is with me.
- but his closest friends, they don't have a clue what he's going through. They can't enter into his suffering.
- They don't understand it. No human heart could enter into his grief. Child of God, learn from Jesus in your sorrow.

- [27 : 48] There is one in heaven who does understand your grief. There is one that you can go to and say, Father, here's my heart.
- And to lay your heart before him, telling him all, and worshiping him as you say, but not my will, but yours be done. Furthermore, when all other friends fail you, you have the best of friends in Jesus.
- What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to him in prayer. No one understands like Jesus.
- He gets the depth of every sorrow you've had. His sorrow went way deeper. He's the man of sorrows. He's familiar with grief. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- And when we do come to him, we don't find him sleeping. No, he never slumbers or sleeps. You can cast your cares on him because he cares for you.
- [29 : 00] He's always ready to sympathize with you. He's always understanding exactly what you're going to do. He's been here tempted in every way like we are tried. And he has just the mercy and grace you need for that hour of your need.
- So we have a compassionate father. We have a caring son to turn to when all alone in our griefs. And they together have sent another comforter, the Holy Spirit, to be with us and to be to us all that Jesus was bodily present to his disciples.
- He's the healer of wounded hearts, broken hearts, weighed down with sorrow. Then let's make use of our comforting triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- The severity of our Lord's overwhelming suffering in Gethsemane is unmatched. Well might he ask, is any suffering like unto my suffering? And it is Dr. Luke who says that the intensity of the strain upon him was so great that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.
- That's no ordinary stress, but pressure so great that his blood was squeezed through his sweat glands. It's a rare but known medical condition called hematidrosis, often linked to extreme stress or emotional trauma, causes the blood vessels near the skin to rupture and then to bleed through the sweat glands.
- [30 : 32] So it's severe. Sorrow and grief. And yet, what we see next is that Jesus is not so preoccupied with his own horrific trial that he has no concern for his men who are minutes away from their own trial that's about to overwhelm them.
- This is your Savior. Yes, he's in heaven. Yes, he has angels and spirits of just men made perfect worshiping him, but he's got his eye on you and your danger and your troubles.
- And so we see very briefly then the second point, his concern for his disciples' danger. For he returned, verse 37 says, he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.
- Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? You? You asleep? You who were the first to boast of your loyalty to me over all the rest?
- It's not hard to see something of the disappointment of Jesus in these words. Could you not keep watch for one hour? How then will Peter expect to stand in the time of temptation?
- [31 : 36] So he says then in verse 38, watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Such a powerful temptation to be untrue to their Lord is coming that they will indeed fall if they do not watch and pray.
- Watching means to be spiritually alert, on guard, with your Christian armor on, shield of faith, belt of truth, sword of the spirit, word of God, always praying, ready for the fight.
- Watch. And then Jesus tells them the reason they need to watch and pray, because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

We've recently heard how willing their spirit was. Lord, I'll never fall away. Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you. The spirit of Peter was willing.

He's genuine. He loves his Lord that much. At that moment, he says, I would die for you. And Jesus recognizes the spirit is willing.

[32 : 44] God, I would die with you. I would die with you. I would die with you. But, the flesh is weak, and much weaker than they knew. The word here is not the usual Greek word, soma, for the body.

It's the word, sarx, which sometimes can mean body, but more often means human nature. And it was this weakness of human nature that not only lulled them to sleep at this late hour, but it was especially the weakness of human nature indwelt by the power of sin that made them so susceptible to fall to temptation.

They'd soon find themselves under this tremendous outside pressure to flee and scatter and to leave Jesus and to deny him. Oh, but they would find worse than that.

There was an inward traitor. The flesh warring against the spirit, ready to hand them over to their temptation.

Believers, we don't know how weak we are until we have factored in the flesh, that there is dwelling in me this indwelling principle of sin, a moral law of gravity that is ever pulling us down.

[34 : 03] That even when we would do good, evil is present with us. And it was especially that weakness that they were unaware of.

And Jesus says, that's why you need to watch and pray. If we're not aware of the flesh within, we'll not watch and pray as we ought, and we'll find ourselves sinning like Peter in ways we never thought possible.

To watch without prayer is to ignore our own weakness. To pray without watching is to ignore our own responsibility of spiritual alertness.

Both are recipes for disaster. No, it's watch and pray that you enter not in temptation. Charlotte Elliott puts it this way, watch as if on that alone hung the issue of the day.

Pray that help may be sent down. Watch and pray. And this too is very similar to the Lord's prayer, isn't it? That he taught us to pray on a very regular basis.

[35 : 10] Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. When have you last prayed for God's power to keep you from falling into temptation?

Don't underestimate the power of your own weakness or the power of temptation. Prayer is the answer to our weakness because it calls in the almighty power of God.

You know, there are few things more hated by the flesh than prayer. Thomas Shepard, instrumental in founding Harvard University in the 17th century, said, there are days when I would rather die than pray.

Maybe you felt that as well. The flesh hates to pray. It's ever pulling you away from the throne of grace. Why? Because that's the place you get help. Help to not fall into temptation.

And add to that watching, watching. Ready to nip sin in the bud. You know, it's never easier to say no to sin than the first time it comes knocking.

[36 : 22] You just let it linger a while and it will be harder to say no the second time. And the very first time it comes knocking, slam the door shut. That's watching as well as praying.

So out of concern for his disciples, Jesus sounds the warning, calls them to watch in prayer. Once more, 39, he went away and prayed the same thing.

When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. They didn't know what to say to him. They didn't have an excuse. Returning the third time, he said to them, are you still sleeping and resting?

Enough. The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go.

Here comes my betrayer. Not at all meaning, rise, let's get away. He's coming. But rather, let us go and meet him.

[37 : 26] And we'll see that in our subsequent study. What have we seen? Three times Peter sleeping when he should have been watching and praying. And so three times Peter denies his Lord.

Three times Jesus, on the other hand, prays. And so stands victorious in his greatest trial. He comes from the crushing experience of Gethsemane.

Of just staring into that cup that's just hours away now. Contemplating the cross, fully surrendered to his Father's will. And at peace with him.

Ready now to finish the work that the Father has given him to do. Just as it was in a garden that the first Adam rebelled against God's will. So now in a garden, the last Adam, Jesus Christ, submits to God's will.

And whereas Adam's rebellion brought sin and death upon all his descendants, Christ's obedience reverses the curse, destroys sin and death, and brings eternal life to all who belong to him by the surrender of faith and repentance.

[38 : 39] Let's love him for being willing to drink the bitter cup of wrath for us, that we might drink that sweet cup of salvation and eternal pleasures at his right hand.

And let's show our gratitude by heeding his words to watch and pray that we not enter into temptation. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.