

RTO™ School of Prayer

Go to Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46 (Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46)

by Dave Mozdin

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, 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." ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Those of us who are devout Christ followers know that the Easter season is a time of solemnity, a time of a serious, deeply earnest consideration of the events that took place in the life of our Lord toward the end of His first Advent on earth. From His triumphant entry into Jerusalem on what we know as Palm Sunday, through cleansing the temple, His final teaching and healing times, the Last Supper, the Passover meal where He instituted communion, His arrest, trial, torture and crucifixion, leading to His glorious victorious resurrection, and ascension into heaven, there are many significant events to contemplate.

This lesson will focus on the events of Thursday evening, the night before His crucifixion and His prayer to the Father in response to the impending suffering and death He was about to

undergo. In regards to prayer, this is yet another great example of how God's special people prayed, how these are useful as wonderful models of radical, biblical, effective and fervent prayer. And I can't think of a better place to start than with this prayer of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Himself.

I also want to thank Barbara Mill, who asked me to do this in recognition of this special day, the day before Good Friday, before Easter Sunday. For many churches, this day is known and commemorated as Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday. The word maundy comes from the word that means mandate, or command, and specifically relates to our Lord Jesus, and His "...new commandment I give you, to love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (John 13:34). He issued this command shortly after a direct illustration, performing the duty of a slave, namely washing the dirty feet of all the disciples (John 13:5). This night is also recognized in Scripture as the Last Supper, Jesus' last meal (the Passover) with His disciples before His death, and His institution of the communion rite, with the bread symbolizing His broken body, the wine His shed blood for the forgiveness of sins, the Lord's Table or Lord's Supper as we know it today.

In order to gain a better understanding of the profound significance of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane and how Jesus' prayer at that point is a valuable lesson to us, we must first understand what happened during the events that took place immediately before they went to the garden.

While the washing of the feet, the issuance of the new commandment, the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus' command to perpetuate it, and His final discourse to His disciples prior to His death and resurrection (John 14-17) are important events from that evening to consider and obey, even to this day, there is one more poignant scene that warrants special attention as well. It concerns what happened after the conclusion of the meal.

"Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane...." (Matt 26:36). "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Mark 14:26). "And He came out and went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed Him." (Luke 22:39).

Since Jesus is fully God, fully man, He knows everything (omniscient), and knows now that at last, the culmination of redemptive history is about to begin in earnest, that the ultimate purpose for the Father's sending Him to this earth was about to be achieved. He knows that this will be a heavy, deep undertaking, replete with sorrow, anguish, tremendous physical suffering, and the horror of having to bear the weight of all the sin of all who would believe, to endure God the Father's wrath for this.

The fully God Jesus knew all this since before time began, but the fully man Jesus reacted in a fully human way. He would have to experience the devastating hurt and pain of his disciples immediately abandoning Him shortly after His illegal arrest, the awful three denials by Peter, the mock and completely unlawful trial before the Sanhedrin, the taunts and insults of the Pharisees, the Roman soldiers and the crowd. He would have to endure the tremendous physical pain of wearing a crown of thorns, of being scourged to the point of his internal organs being exposed, being beaten to the point of his face becoming unrecognizable (Isa 52:14, 53:2-3), of having to drag a 200 lb. cross through the streets of Jerusalem on the way to Calvary in His greatly weakened and dehydrated state, of having His garments stripped from His bleeding body in a humiliating way, of having His feet and arms violently pierced through the nails that held Him to the cross. BUT MOST OF ALL, He knew He would be facing His Father's cup of wrath for all the sin He would bear for all humanity who would believe, and that His Father would turn His face away from Jesus, since the Father's "eyes are purer than to see evil and cannot look on wrong." (Hab 1:13, Ps 22:1) Even more than that, He would be facing broken fellowship from His Father which was, I believe, the greatest part of His agony in the garden, and a substantial reason as to why He went there, to spend time with His Father in prayer. As in many instances in Christ's life, prayer was an important part of His daily walk with the Father, as it ought to be for us. This particular evening it was arguably even more important. This is also seen in John 17 during the Last Supper, where Jesus prays to the Father, prayed for Himself, prayed for the disciples, and prayed for those who *will* believe in Him (that's us!)

They entered the garden as was His custom (Luke 22:39) and Jesus told His disciples to "sit here while I go over there and pray." (Matt 26:36) And He took Peter, James and John with Him, possibly because as He took them with Him to witness His glory on the Mount of

Transfiguration, so He would now take them with Him to witness His agony. He asked them to pray to not enter into the temptation (Luke 22:40). The enormity of the situation comes upon Him, and, being the man of sorrows (Isa 53:3), He laments to His disciples “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with Me.” (Matt 26:38) Matthew Poole Commentary: “**My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.** This was not wholly upon the sense of his approaching death, for he laid down his life, no man took it from him; nor yet to consider how his disciples would be left; but in the sense he had of the wrath of God due to man for sin, which he now felt, bearing our sins. So as this was a part, and a great part, of his suffering as appears by his following earnest prayers for the passing away of that cup, his sweating as it were drops of blood, **Luke 22:44**, the angels coming and ministering unto him, **Luke 22:43**. Luke saith, he was *in an agony*, which signifieth a great inward conflict.” He seeks their support in these crucial moments.

Then He begins to pray, on His knees. His prayer is short, anguished, honest, heartfelt, and to the point, pleading with the Father, repeating it three times, yet submitting. “... He fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’” (Matt 22:39). “And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44). **Please note at this point:** Great prayer takes great effort. Compared to all the other great things Jesus did, such as walk on water, feed the 5,000, cast out demons, heal sicknesses, raise others from the dead, this is the only instance in Scripture where it is recorded that He exhibits great physical effort. The fully human Jesus knows He is about to experience the horrifying physical and emotional pain, and the fully God Jesus knows He alone will be bearing the fury of the Father’s wrath for sin, AND the broken fellowship, the separation from Him as the Father turns away. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Ps 22:1, the only time Jesus does not call Him Father).

Each time He prays this prayer, He goes to the disciples and each time finds them asleep, not giving them the support which He sought from them. Yet being the gracious, loving merciful God that He is, He both challenges and exhorts them, in spite of the agony He is experiencing.

“And He said to Peter, ‘So, you could not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into the temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” (Matt 26:40-41).

After the third time that He says “Your will be done” (He does just as He taught us to pray in Matt 6:10), His submission to His Father’s will is complete, as He knows that the Father’s will is best, and will be accomplished (Isa 46:10). His acquiescence to the Father’s will is the fulfillment of Psalm 40:8 “I desire to do your will, O my God;”

Having concluded His prayer, Jesus proceeds to do the next thing, to carry on and face His betrayer and His accusers who are now approaching. “Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.” (Matt 26:46). Please note here that Jesus moves forward with resolve despite His disciples’ failure to support Him in His moment of great need. Oswald Chambers comments on this: “Never let the sense of past failures defeat your next step.” Good counsel for us to heed, a good example to follow.

We also see in this prayer that in several ways, Jesus modeled what He taught about prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, known as the Lord’s Prayer. He went “to His room”, away from everyone else to pray to His Father in secret. (Matt 6:6). He hallowed the Father’s Name (6:9) by having knelt down, and prayed “Your will be done”, (6:10). He exhorted His disciples to “watch and pray” to resist temptation (6:13).

Some thoughts on praying “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”: Christ knows that as sinners, we are subject to temptation to sin by Satan and we must not forget that some of our trials and sufferings that make us go to Gethsemane are as a result of our sin. Christ is teaching the disciples and us to be aware of this, to not have to go to Gethsemane because we have sinned.

Barnes Notes on the Bible says: “And pray - Seek aid from God by supplication, in view of the thickening calamities.” (They were, as we are now, unable to handle such unforeseen difficulties by ourselves.)

“That ye enter not into temptation - That ye be not overcome and oppressed with these trials of your faith so as to deny Me. The word ‘temptation’ here properly means what would test

their faith in the approaching calamities - in his rejection and death. It would 'try' their faith, because, though they believed that he was the Messiah, they were not very clearly aware of the necessity of his death, and they did not fully understand that he was to rise again. They had cherished the belief that he was to establish a kingdom 'while he lived.' When they should see him, therefore, rejected, tried, crucified, dead - when they should see him submit to all this as if he had not power to deliver himself - 'then' would be the trial of their faith; and, in view of that, he exhorted them to pray that they might not so enter temptation as to be overcome by it and fall."

Barnes continues: "The spirit indeed is willing ... - The mind, the heart is ready and disposed to bear these trials, but the 'flesh,' the natural feelings, through the fear of danger, is weak, and will be likely to lead you astray when the trial comes. Though you may have strong faith, and believe now that you will not deny me, yet human nature is weak, and shrinks at trials, and you should therefore seek strength from on high. This was intended to excite them, notwithstanding he knew that they loved him, to be on their guard, lest the weakness of human nature should be insufficient to sustain them in the hour of their temptation."

APPLICATION

Just to be sure that we correctly understand, this prayer of going to Gethsemane can be applied to situations where we are suffering a great trial, enduring much strife from it, and often there appears to be no end in sight. It can also be applicable to situations where we know we must do something difficult in a difficult dilemma that we are facing. It's doing the right thing, even when we know it will hurt---us and most likely involving someone we love. In Jesus' case it was both as He suffered both as God and man, paying the price for our sins, and it hurt those He loved who had to witness His awful crucifixion.

So how do we apply this tremendous example provided by our Lord Jesus to our own lives as we walk with Him in our moments of agony, anguish or despair? How do we apply this to

prolonged suffering or to endure suffering that we cannot avoid? I'll begin with a part of my own personal testimony, recalling a situation I faced some years ago as my marriage was in big trouble and I was subject to constant increasingly harsh treatment from my then estranged wife. I sought counsel from a Christian counselor, and after several sessions of my disclosing a number of trying incidents, he turned to me and said "Dave, I have seen that you know the Bible very well, much better than I do. Let me put it to you this way, when these things happen and you question if you have the strength to endure and to respond in a God honoring way, go to Gethsemane, go to Gethsemane." The light bulb went on in my head and I instinctively, spiritually knew exactly what he meant, and I have increasingly applied this to my life to additional agonizing circumstances through the years since that time. This is the inspiration for the title of this lesson.

REMEMBER AND DO THESE THINGS WHEN YOU ARE IN YOUR AGONY AND IT IS TIME TO GO TO GETHSEMANE

- 1.) As Jesus did, go to your special place, apart from everything and everyone else, as Jesus did, on your knees, pouring yourself out to the Father. As Jesus also prayed, pray "nevertheless not as I will, but as You will (Matt 26:39). You can also ask others to "watch and pray" for you as Jesus did. (hopefully they won't fall asleep).

- 2.) Begin with worship of the One true living eternal God. "Hallowed be Your Name" "And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw and knelt down and prayed." (Luke 22:41). Do you know this One true living eternal God who we worship? You can know Him through His Son Jesus Christ. You cannot, however, know Him in your sin. As mentioned earlier in this lesson "His eyes are purer than to see evil and cannot look on wrong." This is why Jesus went to Gethsemane, to prepare for His death to forgive our sins and to give us our right standing with God. So if you commit to repent and place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins, admit that you are a sinner and ask Him for forgiveness, you will be saved from the fury of God's wrath forever in hell and welcomed into His kingdom where one day you will

be with Him forever in the joy of heaven. “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9) If you have not yet made this decision, make this it today, tomorrow may be too late! If you have questions, ask someone who you know is a Christian.

- 3.) Come as you are before Him. “And going a little farther, He fell on His face and prayed.” (Matt 26:39). Pour out your heart to Him. From Francois Fenelon: “Tell God all that is in your heart, as one unloads its pleasures and pain, to a dear friend. Tell Him your troubles that He may comfort you, tell Him your longings that He may purify them. Blessed are those who attain such familiar unreserved communication with God.” Sometimes our suffering, our Gethsemane moment is because of our own sin, that always merits consideration as we view our sufferings. If your suffering is a result of your sin, admit your fault, confess your sin(s), tell Him you grieve over offending Him, and ask for His forgiveness. 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

- 4.) “U-K-D”, Understand, know and do God’s will. (Eph 5:17, Rom 12:2, Matt 6:10, 1 John 5:14-15) “...nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt 26:39). Your burden may be easier to bear if you have a clearer understanding of God’s will for you. Be a doer of God’s will. Pray: “I desire to do Your will, O my God.” (Psalm 40:8). A part of God’s revealed will is 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18: “**17**pray without ceasing, **18**give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” After a while, God will often bring you to a realization of good things that come from enduring your trials, so it can be beneficial to thank Him even for the trials He allows in your life. You can refer to the School of Prayer lesson “Praying God’s Will”.

- 5.) Besides Christ’s response and prayer in Gethsemane, be encouraged by the examples of other biblical people who by going to God in prayer endured great suffering, trials and

tribulation, such as Moses in Exodus 33:7-23, Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:1-12, the entire book of Job, David in the Psalms, Psalms 3-7, 12, 13, 51, just to name a few, the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

6.) After lovingly submitting to God's will, go and do the next thing, trusting in Him, even if it is after an episode of failure. "Rise, let us be going," as Jesus said.

CONCLUSION

When you are in agony, anguish or near despair, go to Gethsemane, go to Gethsemane. Jesus has been there. Minister Jerrold H. Lewis writes: "Our Blessed Redeemer- in whom was found no guile, in whose face no personal guilt could stare- when suffering in our place, and carrying our sorrows on this earth, gave us a window into the torment of eternal wrath when He said, 'Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.' It's as if He had said, 'Couldst Thou be glorified, Thy justice satisfied, and the elect saved ant other way than by My drinking this tremendous cup, O let it be done. Yet not My will, but Thine be done.' Now if the Son of God expressed Himself this way under a sense of eternal wrath, how dreadful, terrible and unbearable it must be." He knows. He most certainly knows! He cares. "Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7). He will help you. "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 55:22) Amen, Alleluia!

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