

#27 - Gethsemane and the Betrayal - Matthew 26:36-56

Engage:

- The last week before the crucifixion of Jesus began with a triumphal entry to the city of Jerusalem as a king. The week would end with Jesus being arrested as a “criminal.” Right before the arrest, there was the fellowship of the Passover meal with Jesus and His disciples, the institution of the Lord’s Supper, followed by further teaching (John 14-16) and ending with a pastoral prayer with His disciples (John 17 – Jesus prayer for Himself [vv. 1-5]; for His disciples [vv.6-19] and for all believers, including us [vv. 20-27]). From this point, everything turned to the agony of Gethsemane, the betrayal by Judas and the arrest which led to the crucifixion.

Note: “This is Jesus’ crucible hour. Here He makes His final decision. Will He go to the cross or not? We know what Jesus is going to do; He always obeys His Father. But that doesn’t make it one bit easier. Not since the wilderness temptations had Jesus wrestled so strenuously with the evil one. Nor has He been so alone since then. Yet, as in the wilderness, in His deepest pain, God sent an angel to minister to Him (Luke 22:43). And as in the wilderness, Jesus resolves to carry out His mission. From here on out, there will be no vacillation, no more questions, no turning back. (Mark Moore).

Thoughts about the story:

* The text references are included for the harmony of this story with the other three gospels.

- Matthew 26:36-46 (* Mark 14:32-41a; Luke 22:40-46) – Jesus Prays In The Garden of Gethsemane

- Matthew 26:36-38 – Jesus led His disciples out of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley and over to the Mount of Olives to a garden called Gethsemane (meaning “oil-press”). Eight of the disciples were left at the gate and were told to pray. Jesus took the other three, Peter, James and John, with Him further into the garden to pray. Here the passion of the Christ began to increase and would continue to increase through the unfair trials and scourging, and followed by the cross. Language is not able to adequately communicate the strong feelings that Jesus expressed.

- Matthew 26:39 – Luke said that Jesus went about a “stone’s throw” further (Luke 22:41). Matthew said that He “fell with His face to the ground and prayed.” The agony of what Jesus knew was coming caused Him to cry out with strong emotion to the Father for another way to redeem humankind. He asked if it would be possible that this “cup” might be removed from Him. Note: The metaphor of the “cup” indicates that He was facing the judgment of God (See Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:22). Jesus was not just shrinking from the experience of physical death, but He understood that He was about to face the agony of spiritual death and temporary separation from the Father as He paid the price for the sins of world. Here are two examples of how the apostles understood what Jesus did. Peter said, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Paul said, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Mark added the personal term “Abba” to address the Father (Mark 14:36). This is an expression of obedient surrender and unconditional faith. At this time an angel appeared from heaven to help strengthen Him (Luke 22:43; See Matthew 4:11 - This would be the first time since the

temptation in the wilderness that an angel would appear to minister to Jesus.). He followed this request with an expression of willingness to act in a way that would please the Father. Note: His emotions were normal for any human. His willingness to act according to the will of the Father demonstrated the character and love that our Lord and Savior has for the world.

Jesus' prayer to have this "cup" to be removed was repeated 3 times (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44). Each time the answer was same – no.

- Matthew 26:40-46 – After each time of prayer Jesus was no doubt disappointed to return to find His disciples asleep, rather than doing as He asked. He had asked them to "watch and pray" so as to not fall into temptation. Jesus singled out Peter to "warn him about the kinds of temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to keep watch and pray. Watching means being more aware of the possibilities of temptation, sensitive to the subtleties, and spiritually equipped to fight it. Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can't resist it alone. Prayer is essential because God's strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan's power" (Life Application Bible). This was the first indication that Peter was not as strong as he said he was when he had said a short time earlier that he would be willing to die for Jesus (Matthew 26:33, 35).

"Sleep" - His disciples had to be embarrassed because they slept, rather than pray. Because of this they did "not know what to say to Him" (Mark 14:40).

The second time He did not pray for a way out, but that the Father's will be done (Matthew 26:42). He went and prayed a third time. He returned to find them still sleeping. He told them that His betrayal was about to occur. He was now resolved to drink the "cup" of God's judgment on behalf of sinful humanity – you and I included. The writer of Hebrews said it well:

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:7-10).

Note: "Had Jesus marched like a stoic through the passion we could have little hope of Him understanding our human frailty. It is, paradoxically, His humanity that draws us to His divinity. The writer of Hebrews recalls the weight of this prayer of Jesus (Hebrews 5:7)" (Mark Moore).

Note: What Jesus asked for He did not receive. With confidence in answered prayer, Jesus was ready to face His betrayer. God's will had to be done so that the kingdom could come! The answer to Jesus' prayer was His resurrection after death, not His exemption from death. See Darrell Bock, Jesus and D. A. Carson, Matthew.

- Matthew 26:47-56 (Mark 14:41b-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12) – Jesus Was Betrayed By Judas And Arrested

- Matthew 26:47-48 – Judas came with a large armed crowd to obviously make sure that Jesus would not escape. He had arranged the sign of a betrayal kiss to indicate the identity of Jesus..

- Matthew 26:49-54 – Judas kissed Jesus. Jesus' response indicated that He still cared for him. He called him "friend." One of the men who came with Judas then seized Jesus. Peter then acted according to his nature. He stepped forward and attempted to defend Jesus by cutting off

an ear of one of the servants of the high priest, a man named Malchus (John 18:10). Jesus immediately rebuked Peter and stopped him from administering any further violence. He did not need Peter's help. He said that He could have called for 12 legions (a Roman legion is equal to 6,000 soldiers) of angels to come and rescue Him. (Note: From past examples, one angel would have been enough. See 2 Kings 19:35; Daniel 6:22). But it was God's will that Jesus be arrested – and so He was. Though Matthew did not mention it, Luke the physician, said that Jesus healed Malchus by restoring his ear (Luke 22:51).

Note: One commentator suggested that if Jesus had not healed the ear of Malchus, there might have been a 4th cross – an additional one for Peter (Bible Knowledge Commentary).

- Matthew 26:55-56 – Matthew did record a brief response by Jesus to the crowd that came to take Him. He asked why they had come armed to arrest Him, when they could have taken Him during the day when He was in the temple teaching. But this was not to be so that Scripture could be fulfilled according to the prophets of old. Note: It is thought that Zechariah 13:7 is what Jesus referred to. Throughout the gospel of Matthew there are references to fulfilled prophecy, but there is usually a direct quote mentioned, i.e. 2:5-6, 17-18; 3:3; etc.

At this point, the disciples desert Jesus, leaving Him alone, even though they had vowed to never do so (Matthew 26:35).

Extra: “The human race began in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8); Jesus suffered His agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32); He was crucified and buried in a garden (John 19:41); and according to Revelation 2:7, paradise will be a garden!” *DW* October, 1981

Discussion starters:

- Why do you think that Jesus wanted His disciples to stay awake while He prayed? Who would you call upon to “watch and pray” for you when you next have a “Gethsemane” type experience?
- What amazes you about the attitude of Jesus during His agonizing time of prayer at Gethsemane? What do you appreciate the most about Jesus from this story?
- How can you be a better friend to someone who is going through a difficult situation?
- When have you responded like Peter - taking matters into your own hands, and finding that it was the wrong thing to do?
- What can you do to be prepared to be strong the next time you are tested greatly? See Matthew 26:41.