

# Gethsemane

Mark 14:32-42 - Littlebourne, Sunday 13th March 2022

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We're getting ever closer to the climax of the story of Jesus' time on Earth. Time is sort of slowing down as get here - where at the beginning of Mark we saw events such as Jesus' forty days in the wilderness summed up in 2 verses, we now are looking at the same week for the fourth chapter running. The coming chapters show the most heinous and the most holy events played out side by side. Today, some of the most holy - the Son of God in prayer. Next week, some of the most heinous, the betrayal of Jesus by one of his own close disciples. When we get to the crucifixion, we'll see the most evil act ever committed, the murder of God himself, yet the most holy and God glorifying work of redemption. Overwhelming evil and overwhelming good meet together in these chapters.

All four gospels record Jesus having the passover meal with his disciples and then going off to pray in the garden. Mark's account is short, as is Matthew's, of the conversation and teaching that Jesus gave between the leaving of Judas from the meal they shared together and Jesus' betrayal. Luke records a little more of what was discussed - another occasion for the disciples to argue which of them was the greatest, and some comments on how scripture must be fulfilled in what was occurring. But John records a whole 4 1/2 chapters of what happened in between the last supper and the garden of Gethsemane. Chapters 13 through 17 of John all occur in the upper room.

Memorable passages such as when Jesus said he was 'the Way, the Truth and the Life' are in this section of John, as well his teaching on the coming Holy Spirit and before Jesus goes to pray privately, he prays in the hearing of his disciples.

Last week, we saw Jesus told his disciples that they would all fall away - they would all be scattered and even Jesus' closest disciples would deny they even know him. In John's recording of what was said in the upper room, that culminates in Jesus' high priestly prayer, John 17, Jesus prays for his disciples to be united and that they would not fall away.

Now we look at his prayer in private.

## v32

*32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."*

Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus went to Gethsemane, Luke tells us he went to the Mount of Olives, John says a garden near the Kidron Valley. As we've talked about before, in Chapter 13, the Mount of Olives is the opposite side of the Kidron Valley from the Temple.

Gethsemane is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name *gat shemanim*, meaning 'oil press'. Likely the garden was where this oil press was, something fairly private and enclosed amongst a mountainside of olive trees.

This was a place where Jesus and his disciples had been before - Luke's account says that they 'went out as usual' to the Mount of Olives, and at the end of our passage, Judas knows where to find Jesus.

Jesus leaves eight of the disciples, to sit whilst he prays. The other three (remember Judas left earlier) he takes with Him and presumably they go deeper into the garden.

## v33-34

*33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34 And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."*

It's the same three disciples that have been closest to Jesus as we've seen before - these three were the only ones permitted to witness the raising of Jairus' daughter in chapter 5, at the transfiguration in chapter 9, and these three and Andrew asked about the future of the Temple in chapter 13.

We saw last week that Peter boasted that he would never leave Jesus. James and John in chapter 10 (verse 39) told Jesus they would suffer with Him. As Jesus' suffering becomes more clear, he takes these three to keep over him as he prays.

We might imagine that the disciples, until this point, may have treated what Jesus was talking about as hypothetical - did they really believe that Jesus would suffer and die? Did they really believe that the man they've seen do miracles would now allow himself to be taken to death? Maybe Jesus wants these close disciples, who have with such confidence said they will join Jesus' suffering, see a glimpse of what is coming as Jesus show his distress in this situation.

Jesus has been with all the disciples, he's withdrawn with just the three, and now he goes off on his own to pray privately. Peter, James and John are instructed to keep watch.

## v35-36

*35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*

### **Private prayer**

We see that Jesus goes to pray, and to pray privately. He has talked and prayed with the disciples - he has prayed his high priestly prayer in the disciple's hearing and now he prays a different, more heartfelt, prayer in private. Early in Mark, in chapter 1, we saw Jesus going to be alone with God before the sun had risen. For Jesus, it seems that habitual private times of prayer were part of his life from the beginning of his ministry and likely before. Maybe this is why Judas knows where to find Jesus - that Jesus has gone each day to pray privately in this private garden?

Jesus doesn't hold back his feelings and emotions. I think he knew that what was coming was necessary and right and good and would happen, but he still prays to his Father in a way that expresses how he feels.

I think this is illustrative for us - Jesus shows we can come to God privately and express ourselves. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is deep and theological and you can see that it's delivered in a way that seems like it's for the consumption both of God and the people listening. Our corporate prayers, our prayers out loud in the hearing of others are often like this, they are more thought out and deliberate and are made knowing other people can hear them. But Jesus goes to God and expresses his emotions - emotions that may have been confusing to the disciples, had they heard them. With public prayer there's a balance to be had - we be mindful of the earthly audience we have, even if we should direct our prayers to God alone. We all hold back when we pray in public, but we needn't hold back when we talk to God in private.

In one sense, we can't lie to God. If we don't tell God what we're feeling, what we desire, he still knows. He understands our emotions and our thoughts and knows what we're thinking. But we can lie to God in the sense that we can pick and choose what we pray, what we directly talk about with God. Jesus shows us, don't hide your feelings from God - you can't anyway - but take those feelings to Him.

This is also illustrative of what we should do in the face of suffering. When we face suffering, we should pray. Jesus had precious little time before his betrayal and he uses it in prayer. Since Judas left the disciples, Jesus spends his time wisely - he teaches the disciples further and he goes to pray. If I knew I were only hours from an experience of great suffering, would I spend much time in prayer? I don't know what I would do, but Jesus gives us the example - prayer is of the greatest importance. James 5:13 "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."

## **Abba, Father**

And Jesus doesn't pray in high minded terms. He doesn't get out his theological thesaurus to pray - he prays 'Abba, Father'.

Where in John 17, he starts by lifting his eyes to heaven, Jesus here falls on his knees. Where he starts John 17 rather formally, here Jesus cries out 'Abba'. Mark records for us, as he has before, an aramaic word that he then translates for the reader. In this case, Abba is a colloquial, informal word - more daddy than father. Not the sort of language a typical pious Jew would use to address God. I think Mark is pointing out the familial, personal, nature of Jesus' words - Jesus isn't merely calling out to one he knows intellectually is something like a father figure, rather he's calling out to his very own Father, who he enjoys an intimate and close relationship with, who he loves and who loves him perfectly.

Is this closeness something only Jesus can experience? We may think that the closeness of Jesus in prayer to his Father is something that is limited to him as the second person of the Trinity - he's special surely. As Jesus closes his prayer in John 17, he says:

*22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

Not only is this closeness of prayerful communion open to us, but Jesus' desire and purpose is that we would be brought in to this closeness of relationship with the Father too, that we would be like him and experience that same love as he experienced before the foundation of the world.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:6 and also in Romans 8:15 that by the Spirit we cry 'Abba! Father!'

Galatians 4:6:

*6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"*

Romans 8:15

*15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"*

## **Praying for what we want and for God's will**

The next thing we might notice is the way Jesus prays in what might be a contradictory way. He knows what's coming, that it must happen. Yet he prays that it might not happen. But actually, I think Jesus models for us how to pray for our desires, cognizent of God's authority.

When thinking about prayer in relation to God's will, I can think of two ways in which we may go wrong.

First, our natural tendency is to be self-centered. Sinful as we are, we will all too often pray for exactly what we want and neglect to consider God's will in our prayers. If our prayers end when we reach the end of our wish list, we are not praying effectively. God is not a vending machine, or a genie.

Second, and this is something that has tripped me up before, is for us to be so focussed on praying 'properly', praying in such a way as to include God's will that we end up vague and surface level. We may pray that God's will be done, as we should do, but never get to the really nitty gritty of what troubles us. We stay high minded and never express ourselves to God truly.

Jesus shows us the right way - to both express our desires and be totally honest with God and also to pray that God's will be done and that we want to glorify Him as He sees fit.

Jesus says "Father, everything is possible for You." As we bring our desires to God, we should acknowledge that it's God's wisdom and His plan for us that precludes our prayers being answered as we would wish, not his ability. All things are possible for Him, and it is in His great wisdom and His mercy also, that He grants our desires as he wills and not as we will.

## The Cup

Let's turn now to what is surely the most cryptic part of Jesus' prayer: "Take this cup from me."

The Old testament mentions in several places 'the cup'. Psalm 75 (verse 8):

*In the hand of the Lord is a cup  
full of foaming wine mixed with spices;  
he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth  
drink it down to its very dregs.*

Isaiah 51 (verse 22):

*...“See, I have taken out of your hand  
the cup that made you stagger;  
from that cup, the goblet of my wrath,  
you will never drink again.*

There's also instances in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. (Ps. 75:8; Is. 51:17–22; Jer. 25:15; Ezek. 23:31–34).

This is the cup of God's wrath. The pouring out of His righteous anger and punishment on the wicked.

Now I've just told you about the great love between the Father and the Son - what is this about God's wrath? Is the Son to drink from the cup of God's wrath, as it is prophesied in the Old Testament that the wicked will do?

Yes. The punishment for sin that we deserve - God's righteous judgement - is taken by Jesus on the cross. 1 Peter 2:24:

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.*

2 Corinthians 5:21:

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

The sin of all those that believe in Him, both past and future, no matter how small or great, he bore on the cross for us.

Jesus here in the garden knows his suffering will be more than just the physical. The stress from what is coming shortly would be overwhelming - Luke's account adds the detail that Jesus's sweat was like drops of blood. The price Jesus paid for our sin is beyond our understanding. The enormous load of human guilt, the immeasurable weight of our sins laid upon Him. He was being "made a curse for us." In his holiness, he may have felt even more acutely the tremendous burden.

## v37-38

*37 And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

These disciples, who very recently had all promised they would never leave Jesus, they who promised they would suffer with Him, are asleep.

They may not have deserted him yet - though as Jesus predicted, they will - but they have shown little care. What little Jesus had asked of his disciples, they could do: 'Could you not watch one hour?' How indifferent to Jesus' suffering they are.

But even as Jesus is aware that they will do worse still, he rebukes in a very gentle way. He has every reason to be angry at those who will shortly deny they ever knew him, yet his advice is to watch and pray.

As temptation looms, watch and pray. This should remind us of the end of chapter 13 where Jesus instructs his disciples to stay awake, to keep watch and pray, because like the servants in that parable, we do not know when the master will return.

Jesus says "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." I think Jesus may be saying that the disciples have the right words, the right desires - they wanted to stay awake, they wanted to follow Jesus no matter what happened, they keep saying it, but they were sinful humans. The flesh, their sinful human nature, had a hold over them such that their desires to follow Jesus were thwarted. Think of the end of Romans 7 (verses 21-25):

*21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.*

Paul, just as Peter, James and John, experiences this battle within him, as does every Christian. We all have the weakness of the flesh. Jesus' answer to a situation where we are at battle with our flesh is watchfulness and prayer.

## v39-42

*39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. 41 And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."*

Jesus prays again the same things, showing us that repetition in prayer is not bad thing. If something is pressing upon you, don't stop at one prayer - pray continually.

Jesus repeatedly returns to his disciples - his care for them, even at this time, is clear. Jesus now intercedes for us - Hebrews 7:25 tells us that 'he always lives to intercede for us'. His care for his disciples is not limited to his time on Earth, not limited by circumstance, but continual and forever. Our great mediator, passing between us and the Father, as he does here between the Father and these three. Even those closest to Jesus are repeatedly failing - but Jesus does not leave them.

Now we come to the end of the passage. Next week we will see that Judas arrives, with an armed crowd to betray Jesus. The time in the garden is over - Jesus no longer able to go quietly to pray, the disciples now faced with the temptation to turn from Jesus, to which they will succumb.

## Conclusion

We've seen several times in Mark that Jesus knows of his coming death, but it's been, for us and for those we read about, quite a far off abstract thing. The disciples haven't known what to make of Jesus' prophecies of his death. It's only now that the disciples are beginning to understand the weight of Jesus' words. A weight that they cannot bear - they will, as Jesus predicted, all fall away.

But the events that are causing the disciples to fall away are the same events that will save them.



## Prayer

- The importance of private prayer as well as communal prayer
- The response of prayer that we all should have in the face of suffering
- There is no shame in crying out to God in prayer - it is no mark of weakness, our own Lord sets us a clear example
- What Christlike will to put God's purposes above our own
- What frailty even those that walk near to Christ have
- The great price of sin that Jesus paid
- Help us to not be careless in sin, to not take lightly our sin but to see the great price paid for sin
- Help us to watch and pray when temptation is near
- Thank you that despite our continual, repeated failures, we are yet saved