

“GETHSEMANE”

I. Introduction

- A. As we come to Luke’s account of Jesus’s time of prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, we are approaching one of the most profound passages in the entire Bible.
- B. There is a sense in which we are treading on holy ground here.
- C. A twentieth-century Dutch preacher named Klaas Schilder published three volumes of meditations on the Passion of our Lord, and in it he devoted just over a hundred pages to Jesus’s anguish in Gethsemane.
- D. It is not very hard to see why he would feel the need to do so.
- E. This text gives us a glimpse into the mystery of the relationship between our Lord’s two natures as fully God and fully man.
- F. It shows us something of the inner workings of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son.
- G. And it provides us with a strikingly vivid picture of the terrible price that Jesus had to pay to deliver us from the judgment that we deserve for our sin.

II. A Model Prayer

- A. While the other Gospel writers refer to the location where the events that are described in this passage took place as “Gethsemane,” you may have noticed that Luke does not use this name in this passage.
 - 1. “Gethsemane” is a Semitic word that means “oil-press.”
 - 2. Luke often omits Semitic terms, perhaps because the bulk of his original readers were Greek-speaking.

3. Gethsemane was probably an olive orchard somewhere on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.
 4. Luke tells us that it was Jesus's custom to go to this place.
 5. That is, this was the place where he had been spending the nights while he was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast.
 6. By going to this location, Jesus ensured that Judas would be able to find him and betray him into the hands of the Jewish leaders.
 7. Jesus knew that the hour appointed for his death had come, and his movements that night demonstrated his resolve to complete the task for which he came into the world.
- B. When Jesus arrived at the garden with his disciples, he told them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation," and then he withdrew from them a short distance so that he could pray.
1. One of the lessons that this teaches us is that prayer is one of the outward and ordinary means of grace.
 2. God uses prayer to deliver his help.
 3. We saw this in the previous passage, where Jesus said that his prayers for Peter would keep Peter from permanently falling away.
 4. This theme continues in this passage, as Jesus, knowing that he is about to be arrested, tells his disciples to prepare for the trial that is about to come upon them by praying.
 5. Then, as he sees the cross looming before him, he himself cries out to God in prayer, and God responds by sending an angel to strengthen him.
 6. These things underscore that prayer is an essential component of the life of faith.

7. As it says in the Heidelberg Catechism, prayer is necessary “because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them.” [Q/A 116]
- C. There are a couple of ways in which Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane serves as a model prayer for us.
1. The first is seen in the fact that Jesus addressed God as his Father.
 2. Jews in Jesus’s day did not address God in this way.
 3. When Jesus called upon God as his Father, he gave us a glimpse of the intimate communion that exists between the first two members of the Godhead.
 4. The second member of the Trinity is called the Son because he is eternally begotten of the first member of the Trinity.
 5. While Jesus stands in a unique relationship to God the Father because he is fully divine, we too are children of God by the grace of adoption.
 6. When we call upon God as our Father, we are giving expression to our childlike reverence toward God and to our childlike trust in him.
- D. The second way in which Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane is a model prayer for us is in how he submits his will to the will of God in his prayer.
1. He expresses his will by saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.”
 2. But then he qualifies his request by saying, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”
 3. This reminds us that we do not pray in order to change God’s will but in order to bring our will into alignment with God’s will.

4. We do not have perfect insight into the will of God in every situation that we face.
 5. While we always know God's revealed will, which is set forth in his moral law, we do not know God's secret will, which is kept hidden until the things that he has decreed come to pass.
 6. We should never pray for something that clearly goes against God's revealed will.
 7. However, when it comes to things that remain hidden to us, we should offer up our desires to God for things that are agreeable to his will.
 8. And when we do this, we should always pray as Jesus did, with a readiness to submit our desires to God's will, even if his will is different than ours.
- E. Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane does raise a question.
1. Our Lord knew that it was his Father's will for him to go to the cross.
 2. He knew that this was God's plan from all eternity.
 3. That being the case, how could he ask God to spare him from what he was about to experience?
 4. Wasn't he asking for something that was not agreeable to God's will?
 5. I think the best way to address this question is to focus our attention on what this prayer tells us about our Lord's humanity.
 6. We have to remember that while Christ is fully divine, he is also fully man.

7. Jesus prayed in the same way that we pray when we are greatly troubled by something.
 8. He was not thinking of everything when he gave voice to his concerns.
 9. He was simply expressing what was troubling him and crying out for help.
 10. John Calvin provides a helpful explanation when he says that the strength and violence of our Lord's grief "took away from him the immediate recollection of the heavenly decree, so that he did not at that moment reflect, that it was on this condition that he was sent to be the Redeemer of mankind; as distressing anxiety often brings darkness over our eyes, so that we do not at once remember the whole state of the matter. In short, there is no impropriety, if in prayer we do not always direct our immediate attention to every thing... We ought to be satisfied with this single consideration, that at the time when he uttered a prayer to be delivered from death, he was not thinking of other things which would have shut the door against such a wish."
- F. While Jesus expressed his desire for the cup of judgment to be removed from him, he also submitted his will to the will of his Father.
1. This helps us to understand why it has been said that the overarching category for understanding Jesus's atoning work is that of obedience.
 2. This obedience is sometimes broken down into two subcategories: Christ's active obedience, which refers to how he perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf; and his passive obedience, which refers to how he bore the penalty for his people's sins by dying on the cross.
 3. At Gethsemane we see the convergence of these two aspects of Christ's obedience.
 4. He actively submits himself to God's will, and this results in his being hung on the cross to pay for our sins.

III. A Picture of Agony

- A. In addition to serving as a model for us, Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane also gives us a picture of the agony that he was experiencing.
1. In his prayer, Jesus refers to the fate that is about to come upon him as "this cup."
 2. The notion of a cup is sometimes used in the Bible in a figurative sense to describe a person's assigned portion or to describe divine judgment.
 3. Jesus is saying that his assigned portion is the cup of God's wrath.
 4. This tells us that our Lord knew that the cross was not just about physical suffering.
 5. It was a matter of drinking the bitter cup of divine judgment.
 6. This is why Jesus was so distressed in the Garden.
 7. He was not shrinking back at the thought of dying such an excruciatingly painful death.
 8. He was troubled by the prospect of being made sin and being looked upon by God as the vilest sinner who ever lived.
 9. We cannot even imagine what that would have meant for the eternal Son of God.
 10. As Klaas Schilder explains, "One would have to have been in hell for some time in order to understand what it is that is tearing Jesus apart in the garden." [*Christ in His Suffering*, 296]
 11. Jesus's agony in Gethsemane begins to open our eyes to the wretchedness of our sinful condition.

- B. Luke tells us that Jesus was in such great anguish that his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood.
1. This does not need to be taken literally, though there are some who contend for such an interpretation.
 2. But Luke does not say that Jesus sweated drops of blood, only that his sweat was “like” drops of blood.
 3. This calls our attention to the intensity of our Lord’s anguish of soul.
 4. The source of his agony was the fact that he was beginning to feel the crushing weight of our sins, which were about to be imputed to him so that he could die for them.
 5. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus had an innate understanding of the wrath of God against sin.
 6. He was feeling that wrath directed toward him.
 7. The fact that he had to deal with such intense feelings further underscores his full humanity.
 8. Because Jesus was a real human being, he had real human emotions, and those emotions were greatly affected as the cross approached.
 9. In the words of Ambrose of Milan, the great preacher who was instrumental in the conversion of Augustine: “For he took upon him not the appearance, but the reality, of incarnation. It was therefore necessary that he should experience grief, that he might overcome sorrow, and not shut it out.”
- C. Jesus responded to the agonizing emotions that were tearing him apart by praying all the more earnestly.

1. As he felt great distress in his soul, he did exactly what the Scriptures tell us to do: he cried out to the Lord.
2. He is doing what we see the psalmist doing in the refrain that is repeated throughout Psalms 42 and 43, where it says, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." (Psa 43:5 ESV)
3. In Gethsemane we see Christ responding to his tumultuous feelings by placing his hope in God.
4. This is what we should do whenever our souls are in a state of turmoil.

IV. A Warning Against Spiritual Sloth

- A. After spending time in prayer, Jesus returns to his disciples and finds that they are asleep.
 1. Luke tells us that they were "sleeping for sorrow."
 2. Even though they did not yet understand what was about to happen, their love for their Lord caused them to share in the sorrows that he was experiencing.
 3. Their sorrow ended up overwhelming them, and they fell asleep.
- B. When Jesus finds that they are sleeping, he rebukes them, saying, "Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."
 1. While the disciples had begun to have a sense of the grievousness of the events that were unfolding around them, they did not understand the urgency of the situation.
 2. Jesus's arrest will be a sore trial for them.
 3. Jesus knows this, and this is why he exhorts them to pray.

4. One of the things that we should note about this is that Jesus is not utterly consumed by the horror that he is personally experiencing.
 5. Even in his darkest hour, he is still thinking about others, about those whom he came to save.
 6. He is urging them to prepare for the ordeal that they are about to face.
- C. Jesus's words to the disciples remind us that prayer is hard work.
1. We do not always feel like praying.
 2. Even when we do get around to praying, isn't it amazing how almost anything has the power to distract us from prayer?
 3. It is hard for us to pray, yet prayer is indispensable to a life of faith.
 4. Being a disciple of Christ is not easy.
 5. There are disciplines of heart, mind and will that need to be cultivated if we are going to walk faithfully with our Lord.
 6. Prayer is one of those disciplines.
 7. If Jesus himself found prayer to be absolutely vital in his life, then how much more vital is it for us?
- D. Though the disciples were spiritually slothful in Gethsemane, they eventually learned the lesson about the importance of prayer.
1. We see this in Acts 4, where Luke tells us that the apostles responded to the persecution and threats of the Sanhedrin by crying out to God in earnest prayer.
 2. They prayed for boldness to continue speaking the word of God in the face of opposition.

3. That request was immediately granted.
4. We are told in Acts 4 that after they prayed, “the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

V. Conclusion

- A. The writer of Hebrews may have had Gethsemane in mind when he wrote these words: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” (Heb. 5:7)
- B. Jesus’s request to have the cup removed from him was not granted.
- C. He had to drink that bitter cup.
- D. But this does not mean that God turned a deaf ear to his prayer.
- E. Jesus was heard.
- F. What an encouragement this is to us.
- G. Since we have a great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.