

VI. The Passion Narrative (18:1-19:42)

According to John's account, after Jesus completed His prayer He and His apostles departed the room where they'd celebrated the Passover meal and began to make their way toward the Garden of Gethsemane. John mentioned a garden but didn't identify it; he only noted that it was across the Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem (18:1). The three Synoptists named the Mount of Olives as the group's destination and Matthew and Mark identified Gethsemane (*oil valley* or *oil press*) as the specific place where they stopped. The phrase, "Garden of Gethsemane," results from harmonizing the four gospel accounts and this site has traditionally been associated with an olive grove at the foot of the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley.

John's account of this episode culminating with Jesus' arrest is the briefest of the four. He omitted several details recorded by his counterparts, jumping immediately from the group's departure from the Upper Room to Judas' arrival at the garden with the arresting forces (18:1-3). Matthew and Mark's accounts are nearly identical and are the most extensive, although it was Luke alone who recorded Jesus' healing of Malchus' ear after Peter cut it off. In terms of their agreement with one another, all three Synoptists provided an account of Jesus' repeated prayer, Judas' betrayal with a kiss and Jesus' rebuke on the men who'd come to arrest Him.

1. John chose not to record various details his counterparts did and it's pointless to speculate why. But those details fill out the narrative and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, in particular, is important to consider because of the window it provides into the true nature of Calvary's horror and glory and the Savior's relationship with it.
 - a. Following the chronology laid out by the Synoptists, the first thing to note is Jesus' warning to His apostles as they made their way out of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. As they walked along, He told them that they were all going to fall away that night and that their scattering in fear would itself be a matter of prophetic fulfillment (Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31). This warning provided the backdrop for Jesus' later exhortation to the apostles to "keep watch" with Him while He engaged His Father in prayer. They might not have known what exactly they were supposed to be watching for, but their Lord had told them what to expect from it and that should have been enough for them to heed His instruction. But He hadn't left it there; He'd amplified the gravity of the situation by connecting it with a prediction from Zechariah's prophecy. Jesus' words should have shaken the apostles, but they remained resolutely confident; joining his voice with the others, Peter insisted a second time that He'd follow His Lord even into death and again Jesus had to rebuff his claim (cf. 13:36-38).
 - b. However they understood His warning, the apostles believed they were fully prepared for whatever was to come; Zechariah's prediction notwithstanding, they'd be able to stand firm when the need arose. At the same time, Jesus' words added to their sorrow and the exhaustion they felt from all that had transpired that evening. Even His distressed demeanor and urgent plea to keep watch with Him weren't enough to keep the disciples awake (Luke 22:45; cf. Matthew 26:37ff; Mark 14:33ff). They slept while He grappled with the cataclysmic work to come.

The Eleven couldn't have understood the full significance of what lay ahead – that this man they embraced as Israel's Messiah was about to accomplish the cataclysmic, world-transforming work which the entire salvation history had prepared for. Jesus' generation was looking for a messianic deliverer to free Israel from Roman occupation and oppression, not a Messiah who'd liberate the creation from its bondage under the curse of sin, alienation and death. Jesus had explained some of what would come from His death and what it would mean for them, His chosen apostles, but they couldn't see what He saw and so were unable to join Him in His agonized wrestling with His Father. Their only concern that night was having the courage to stand alongside Him; Jesus was concerned with the cosmic struggle He was entering into and the immense implications of fully and faithfully completing His mission. He recognized that much more than His own obedience as a human being hung in the balance; the integrity of His Father – *indeed, the integrity of the very being of God* – was at stake. For Jesus was not only a son of Adam, He was the embodiment of Yahweh, His truth and His purpose for the world. His failure would mean the victory of sin and the curse, but far more significantly, it would mean the end of God as God; in the incarnation and its work, the triune God had actually hazarded Himself. He'd pledged the world's judgment, liberation and renewal, but also taken upon Himself the responsibility to fulfill that promise (Isaiah 59; Hosea 1-2; Zechariah 1-2; etc.).

- c. The gravity of His task rested heavily on Jesus' shoulders as He made His way into Gethsemane and this surely motivated His agonized prayer. According to Matthew and Mark, He had Peter, James and John follow Him to His place of prayer while the others sat and waited. There Jesus instructed them to watch and pray while He stepped aside to engage His Father. All three of the Synoptists record the same scenario: Jesus wrestled in prayer while they slept, presenting a sharp contrast between their complacency and His anguish. They felt prepared to meet whatever lay ahead; He agonized over it and would have set aside that "cup" if it were possible (Matthew 26:39, 42; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:41-42).

Jesus' struggle in Gethsemane has been endlessly analyzed through the centuries and, not surprisingly, different interpreters view it differently. But a couple of things are clear. First, Jesus was a human being and knew the unimaginable torture that awaited Him. Any person would have avoided that if he could. But He also understood that His messianic mission involved Him taking upon Himself the world's alienation and guilt and the consequence of it. More than simply a son of Adam and Abraham, He was the *embodiment of Israel* and the *Last Adam*.

Yahweh had appointed a day – the prophesied "Day of the Lord" – when He'd arise and accomplish His work of creational judgment, liberation, cleansing and restoration. He would come as a refiner's fire and fuller's soap, but the impurity of Israel and the nations meant that no one would be able to endure that day unscathed (Malachi 3:1-2). For that reason it was to be a day of darkness and wrath (Amos 5:18-20); its goal was reconciliation and healing, but that required a purging. Purified silver has passed through the smelter's fire.

Jesus knew all of this, but, more importantly, He recognized that it all focused on *Him*. Yahweh's "Day" was going to see Israel and the nations purged and reconciled through the fire of His judgment, but judgment *He* would bear. Jesus came into the world as Israel's God returned to Zion (Isaiah 40), but as embodying Israel and, more broadly, Adamic humanness. He was a son of Abraham and Adam and there was no fiction in Him standing before His Father as *man* and *Israel*. In Him Israel was to become Israel indeed and Adam's race truly human, but this transformation was a matter of *life out of death* – the new life that can only come through a destroying fire. And so, what awaited Jesus was more than human torture; it was a death that would yield the death of death. But putting death to death meant enduring God's sentence against sin and death, but as God manifesting and upholding His own love and faithfulness. So Torrance: "*In Christ Jesus, God has burdened Himself with the whole of our nature with all its human weakness and shame, unrighteousness and meanness, has made Himself responsible for all we are in our sin and guilt. And so He has entered into our damnation and ruin, into the corruption and chaos of our existence, and transformed it all, overcoming sin and guilt, damnation, corruption and death.*"

These truths lay behind Jesus' deep distress as He prayed to His Father. He was fully committed to the goodness and glory of His Father's purpose for the world, but that glorious outcome was going to take Him through the destroying fire (Hebrews 12:1-2). His Father was going to condemn and put to death in His body the "body of sin and death" (Romans 6:1-10, 8:1-4) and enduring this ordeal would require everything He had. But Jesus didn't look for this resource in Himself; His prayer reflected His dependence on His Father to carry Him through. The same fatherly love and devotion which necessitated the Son's death made every provision for the Son's triumph in it. As Jesus' great duress caused blood to seep from His capillaries and commingle with the sweat that dripped from Him, His Father dispatched an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43-44). Even here, at the end, Jesus showed Himself to be the true *Israel* – the covenant son who prevails because of the determined faithfulness of the covenant God (Genesis 32:24-28). As Yahweh had carried the Abrahamic household through the centuries until the "fullness of the times" and the coming of the promised Seed, so the Father carried that One through His ministration unto the day when all of His promises – the promises that are "yes and amen" in the Son – would be fulfilled.

For their part, the apostles had their own ordeal to agonize over, though an ordeal which paled by comparison. But, unlike their Lord, they failed to grasp what was coming upon them. They, too, were entering a temptation to fall away and needed to exercise the same vigilance in prayerful dependence on their God, but they failed where He stood firm. Even Peter, James and John, whom Jesus drew near in His distress, couldn't manage to stay awake and stand with Him, though He specifically directed them to keep watch and pray. And not just once, but three times they abandoned their Lord in His hour of need (Matthew 26:40-45; Mark 14:37-41). Whatever their expectation of themselves, it was clear that they, along with the rest, would indeed scatter when their Shepherd was struck.