

## **THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE: GETHSEMANE**

Matthew 26:36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, **Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.**

Mark 14:32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

Luke 22:40-46 When He came to the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." 43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45 When He rose up from prayer, and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow. 46 Then He said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation."

"When Jesus<sup>1</sup> had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron" (v.1). The "these words" refer to the Paschal Discourse and the High Priestly prayer which have engaged our attention in the previous chapters. Having delivered His prophetic message, He now prepares to go forth to His priestly work. The "Garden" is the same one mentioned in the other Gospels, though here the Holy Spirit significantly omits its name - Gethsemane. In its place, he mentions the "brook Cedreon," identical with "Kidron," its Hebrew name, which means "dark waters" - emblematic of that black stream through which He was about to pass. The Cedron was on the east side of the city, dividing Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives (Josephus). It was on the west side of the city that He was crucified: thus did the Sun of Righteousness complete His atoning circuit!

Olive Press pillar is called a "geth semane", the olive press, as in the fenced area by the capernaum synagogue, Jesus would have been around Gethsemanes all His life. The press has the job of squeezing the precious oil out of the olives with tremendous pressure. Jesus as He bore the burden of the sin of the whole world had His own blood pressed and squeezed out in the Garden of Gethsemane. The weight of your sin and mine was so immense, and in a real sense it was you and me who became the pillar, the geth semane press that crushed Jesus

"Great Drops of Blood"

The physical suffering of Jesus began in the Garden of Gethsemane on the evening before His crucifixion. While the disciples slept, the Gospel of Luke records that the LORD "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."<sup>2</sup>

**B**efore the crucifixion, as Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, the disciple and physician Luke noted that:

"And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

-Luke 22:44 (NKJV)

This was written by the physician Luke, a well-educated man and a careful observer by profession.

Luke is also the only gospel writer to mention the bloody sweat, possibly because of his interest as a physician in

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<sup>1</sup> Pink, Arthur, W., Exposition of the Gospel of John Volume 4. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1945, p. 141-142.

this rare physiological phenomenon, which spoke eloquently of the intense spiritual agony Jesus was suffering... (Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defenders Bible*, marginal notes for Luke 22:44)

Although this medical condition is relatively rare, according to Dr. Frederick Zugibe (Chief Medical Examiner of Rockland County, New York) it is well-known, and there have been many cases of it. The clinical term is "hematohidrosis." "Around the sweat glands, there are multiple blood vessels in a net-like form." Under the pressure of great stress the vessels constrict. Then as the anxiety passes "the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture. The blood goes into the sweat glands." As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface - coming out as droplets of blood mixed with sweat. Jesus wasn't sweating blood because he was afraid of the physical pain of the cross. Indeed, the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus looked forward to the cross:

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

It is impossible<sup>2</sup> for us to comprehend Jesus' love for His followers and His devotion to God. Not only is it difficult for us to imagine loving someone as much as He does, but also the fact that the ones He loves don't deserve it makes it almost impossible to understand. The human mind cannot grasp the level of Jesus' devotion to His Father's will. He willingly went to His death on the cross. Yet Jesus did leave a record of His last hours of agony. Reading that record can help us begin to sense His love, and seeing that record in its proper setting can provide us with even more understanding. Jesus faced not only the pressure of His walk to the cross, but also the realization that He would be forsaken there by everyone, including His heavenly Father. Before His crucifixion, He chose to face that burden in a place created to apply enormous pressure: a *Gethsemane* olive press. This unit explores the hours Jesus spent at Gethsemane and how we can apply them to understand more about His love. This study should inspire you to be more dedicated to Him and willing to become more like Him.

The word *Gethsemane* comes from the Hebrew word *gat-shemanim*, which means "oil press." After they were picked, olives were placed in

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<sup>2</sup> Ray Vander Laan, *That The World May Know: Set 4 Leaders Guide for Faith Lessons 19-27*, Colorado Springs, CO: Focus On The Family, 1997, Pg. 169.

a large basin to be crushed. As the millstone was turned, it rolled over the olives, crushing them to a pulp. The pulp was collected in baskets and placed under a stone weight in a pit. A horizontal beam, with one end in a hole in the wall, was placed across the weight, and some other heavy stone weights were suspended from it, placing enormous pressure on the pulp. Under this great pressure, oil from the olives flowed out of the baskets and into a pit underneath. The great weights and the beam used for pressing the oil are the *Gethsemane*.

*Gethsemane* provides a picture of Jesus' suffering the night before His crucifixion. The task Jesus knew lay before Him: rejection, suffering, and finally death on a cross to pay for the sin of humanity pressed down upon Him like a heavy millstone. Jesus, straining under the pressure, was crushed like the olives in their baskets. His sweat, "like drops of blood falling to the ground," flowed from Him like olive oil, a precious gift from God. Ask your students for their reactions to the fact that the weight on Jesus was the pressure of bearing our sin and its penalty. Then have them answer the following questions: Who was responsible for Jesus' suffering? How does this help us relate to God? How should Jesus' night of agony affect our lives? What can we learn from His anguish? What can Jesus' response to the pressure He was under teach us about how we should respond to the needs of others? To the obligations God places on us? Some final thoughts: What if Jesus had chosen to walk away into the night instead of facing His imminent arrest? Jesus wants us to love as He loves. Think about what this means for the attitude you have toward those God has placed in your life.

Conclusion: Spend some time in quiet prayer. Ask God to help you begin to appreciate the depth of the love Jesus has for you. Ask Him to help you realize that HE was in agony because of your sin. Pray for a commitment to resist sin because of your appreciation for the price Jesus paid. Ask for assurance that His blood has fully paid the price for your sin, and admit that you need Him to give you enough compassion to face suffering and stress in order to love others and act according to what is best for them. Pray for the strength and wisdom you need to follow Jesus' pattern when you face the stress of sorrow and agony in your own life, turning honestly to God in complete devotion to His will.

**W**e need to pay attention to the prayer that our Lord is praying here. "This cup" evidently represents His cross, and the contents are the sins of the whole world. More than the death itself and the terrible suffering of crucifixion is something else that we do not seem to realize. It is this: Jesus, holy, harmless, and separate from sinners, was made *sin*

for us. There on the cross the sin of humanity was put on Him—not in some forensic or academic manner, but in reality. We cannot even imagine the *horror* He felt when that sin was placed upon Him. It was a horrendous experience for this One who was holy. Notice that He was not asking to escape the cross, but He was praying that God’s will be done. It is impossible for you and me to enter into the full significance of Gethsemane, but I think it was there that He won the victory of Calvary. Undoubtedly, He was tempted by Satan in Gethsemane as truly as He was in the wilderness. Notice verse 42: “He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.” He was accepting it. To say that our Lord was trying to avoid going to the cross is not exactly true. In His humanity He felt a repugnance and the awful horror of having the sins of the world placed upon Himself, and He recoiled for a moment from it. But He committed Himself to the Father. He came to do the Father’s will.<sup>3</sup>

Bible history can be summarized with four gardens: (1) Eden, where sin entered; (2) Gethsemane, where Christ yielded to death; (3) Calvary, where He died and was buried (see John 19:41–42); and (4) the heavenly “paradise garden” (Rev. 21:1ff). Moses describes the first home God gave to the first couple. Further details given here are not included in the creation account of chap. 1; these are complementary, not contradictory. Verse 5 indicates that God needed man to help till the ground. Man was “formed” as the potter forms the clay (same word in Jer. 18:1ff). Man was responsible to dress the garden (tend it) and keep it (guard it, suggesting the presence of an enemy). God gave Adam and Eve all they needed for life and happiness, all that was good and pleasant, and He allowed them to enjoy it in abundance.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Lonely Garden (Luke 22:39)**

The Son of man left the Upper Room and went with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. This was His customary place of retirement when in Jerusalem (Luke 21:37). Knowing that the Lord would be there (John 18:1–2), Judas led his band of Roman soldiers and temple guards into the Garden to arrest Jesus, who willingly yielded Himself into their hands.

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<sup>3</sup>McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

<sup>4</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, (Jewish New Testament Publications: The Jewish New Testament Commentary) Clarksville, MD.

But why a Garden? Human history began in a Garden (Gen. 2:7–25) and so did human sin (Gen. 3). For the redeemed, the whole story will climax in a “garden city” where there will be no sin (Rev. 21:1–22:7). But between the Garden where man failed and the Garden where God reigns is Gethsemane, the Garden where Jesus accepted the cup from the Father’s hand.

John informs us that when Jesus went to the Garden, He crossed the Kidron brook (John 18:1). John may have had in mind King David’s experience when he left Jerusalem and fled from his son Absalom (2 Sam. 15; and note especially v. a). Both David and Jesus were throneless kings, accompanied by their closest friends and rejected by their own people. The name means “murky, dark,” and means “olive press.” Surely these names are significant.

Dr. Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentions “sweat... like great drops of blood.” His use of the word *like* may suggest that the sweat merely fell to the ground like clots of blood. But there is a rare physical phenomenon known as *hematidrosis*, in which, under great emotional stress, the tiny blood vessels rupture in the sweat glands and produce a mixture of blood and sweat. The first Adam sinned in a Garden and was condemned to living by the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:19). Jesus, the Last Adam, obeyed the Father in a Garden and conquered Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12–21).

Luke is also the only writer to mention the ministry of the angel (Luke 22:43). In fact, both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts give angels a prominent place in the work of the Lord. Angels could not come to die for our sins, but they could strengthen our Saviour as He courageously accepted the cup from His Father’s hand. Dr. George Morrison said, “Every life has its Gethsemane, and every Gethsemane has its angel.” What an encouragement to God’s people when they wrestle and pray about difficult and costly decisions! 5

**J**esus staggered in Gethsemane as he gazed into the cup he must drink, for taking it meant he would drink man’s *sin* to the full and would drink the *wrath* of God which man’s sin deserved. Casting himself to the ground in passionate night-long prayer empowered our Lord Jesus to go in sovereign submission to meet death. The struggle in Gethsemane ended with Jesus admonishing his sleepy disciples, “Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” (vv.

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5Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

41, 42). From here on, Jesus' steeled humanity willingly took all that our sin could heap on him.<sup>6</sup>

John Calvin quotes Cyril of Alexandria: "You see that death was not voluntary for Christ as far as the flesh was concerned, but it was voluntary, because by it, according to the will of the Father, salvation and life were given to all men."

Christ asked that the cup be taken away because he was truly man as well as God. We must also realize that his request for another way came from the two things he saw in the cup.

First, *it was a cup full of sin*. He saw all the brutality of a thousand "Killing Fields"—all the whoring of earthly civilizations—blasphemy — profanity—a cup brimming with jealousy, hatred, and covetousness—*which he must drink!* And Jesus recoiled!

Second, he saw that *it was a cup full of wrath*. As sin-bearer, he became the object of the Father's holy wrath against sin. "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). The drinking also made him a curse. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Gazing into the cup, Jesus saw Hell opened for him, and he staggered (cf. Isaiah 51:17, 22). It is no wonder that we see the blood-like sweat and the tears, that we hear him crying out for deliverance. It is no wonder, as we read in Luke, that the Father sent an angel to strengthen him (Luke 22:43).

Such supreme concern with doing the Father's will culminated in this amazing act of submission. The writer of Hebrews sums it up with this triumphant passage:

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. (Hebrews 5:7–9)

In the greatest display of obedience that will ever be known, Jesus took the full chalice of man's sin and God's wrath, looked, shuddering, deep into its depth, and in a steel act of his will drank it all! What was it that steeled Jesus? From earth's level it was his life of dependent prayer! There are three recorded instances of Jesus in

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

prayer in Mark (1:35, 6:46, and here). The similarity of the setting (night, solitude, demonic pressures) and the positioning of the passages at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end tell us that Mark saw these events as fundamental to understanding Jesus. Without the vibrant discipline of prayer, Jesus, the Son of God, would never have made it. If the actual Son of God needed a life of dependent prayer to fulfill God's will, how much more do we adopted sons and daughters need it. It is this reality which brings us to the steeling of the disciples.<sup>7</sup>

Most scholars (all ten I consulted) believe that the young man was probably John Mark, the writer of this Gospel. They surmise that, as tradition suggests, the Passover meal had been eaten in the upper room of his family home, which became a prominent gathering-place for Jesus' followers (Acts 12:12). When Jesus and the Eleven went out to the Mount of Olives, Mark hastily dressed in only a linen garment. (Mark undoubtedly had been an eyewitness to Gethsemane. Hence the intimate details.) Poor Mark was almost grabbed by the mob, escaping *au naturel* in the night. But while there is much that can be said about John Mark, his point is simply this: *Jesus was absolutely alone as he submitted himself to the Cross.*

The steeling of Jesus through prayer in Gethsemane wrought the most amazing results in his life.

- He went forth intrepidly to meet his end.
- He received the terrible kiss of betrayal, and responded with love.
- He submitted to the arrest of the mob.
- He refused the exercise of natural strength.
- He depended upon the Father and his angels.
- He did it all alone.

As partakers of the life of Christ, we must realize there is only one acceptable posture—submission to him who gave himself for us..<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

<sup>8</sup>Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Mark—Jesus, Servant and Savior*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.