

Lessons from Gethsemane - Part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Matthew 26:36-50

Preached on: Sunday, April 1, 2012

We can sing the psalms of redemption, songs that the world does not understand. Nor would we were it not for his grace.

We are moving away, for the next couple of Sundays from our study in Paul's epistle to the Romans given the fact that this is a period of time where we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. And so I would ask you to take your Bibles and turn to Matthew's gospel chapter 26. I would like to focus on some verses here from verse 36 through 50. It will take me at least this Sunday and next Sunday to share with you what I believe the Spirit of God has laid on my heart. Here in this text we are going to learn some lessons from Gethsemane.

Let me read the text to you, Matthew chapter 26 beginning in verse 36.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done."

And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he who was betraying Him

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gave them a sign, saying, "Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him."

And immediately he went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.¹

I bring you to a passage of Scripture this morning that is very disturbing. It is one that I enter into with great caution. Indeed, this is holy ground, because here the Holy Spirit allows us to witness one of the most profound mysteries of the universe. Here we behold the life threatening suffering of the Son of God who is also the Son of man, the incarnate Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, fully God yet fully man. And while we often marvel at his deity and rightfully so, many times we do not look that much at this humanity. But here we see it fully. Here we see the suffering Savior, the one who according to Isaiah's description of him in Isaiah 53, a prophecy written 700 years before was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. Isaiah described him as one who was despised and forsaken, one that was not held in high esteem. He was stricken, smitten of God, afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, oppressed, afflicted. He was described as like a Lamb that was led to the slaughter. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. He was cut off. And yet we are told that he had done no violence nor was there any deceit in his mouth. But the Lord was pleased to crush him, putting him to grief if he would render himself as a guilt offering.

My friends, this is absolutely astonishing to think that our creator God would set aside his glory and all of his divine prerogatives and take upon himself the likeness of a man. Paul described it in Philippians two and verse eight that he was being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Now the Holy Spirit knows how exceedingly difficult it is for us to even comprehend the incarnation of Christ. But, beloved, to come now and to somehow grasp even a tiny measure of the suffering of Christ for our sin, is absolutely inconceivable.

If you think about it, even our ability to grasp the heinousness of sin and the horrors of hell is really like an earthworm trying to comprehend the molten core of the earth. He cannot do it. The slimy little creature knows only the miniscule realm of his own habitat. He knows merely the very top of the top soil and he fears nothing more than the robin.

So, too, our understanding of the agonies of Gethsemane are equally superficial. Yet in the wisdom and love of God the Holy Spirit has revealed some tiny measure of these

¹ Matthew 26:36-50.

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unimaginable sufferings in his Word and by grace through the power of illumination he gives us a glimpse of these unfathomable wonders.

Now those who have suffered greatly will have some way of identifying with what the Savior suffered, but even the soul that has suffered the greatest can only identify with the most superficial realms of this divine sorrow and grief. And as we enter into the garden this morning with our Lord and with the disciples, I pray that we will see just a small glimpse of what he experienced. But beyond that, that we would be able to learn some lessons that Jesus has for us, the one who can sympathize with our weaknesses because he has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin.

Now all of us have weaknesses. We have brought them all here today. We live with them. And yet isn't it interesting how we are drawn to sin like a moth to a flame? But very often like the moth we only see the fleeting pleasures of the light and not the searing flame that can destroy us.

In Proverbs 14 verse 12 we read:

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”²

Some of you have come here today and you are struggling with life dominating sins. And in some cases you refuse to even admit it, much less deal with it. And others are quite comfortable, quite self confident in their spirituality. And if that is the case, we must be careful, my friends, because it is so easy for us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are something that we are not. And if you are comfortable with your spiritual condition then I would submit to you that the enemy has already laid his snares in the well worn paths of your iniquities that you do not see. And unless you wake up and become suspect and unless you deal forthrightly with your flesh, you will succumb to some kind of temptation that will lead you into all manner of sorrow and shame.

But if you heed the lessons that the Lord has for us in his Word, especially these lessons that we will look at here today and next week, I would submit to you that we will understand how to defeat Satan and triumph over temptation and how to find strength and yes even joy in the midst of great sorrow and suffering. And these lessons will become even more pronounced when seen against the dark contrast of the disciples that really picture us so vividly.

As Jesus now prepares himself for the cross he also prepares us to deal with temptation, though the temptations we experience will never be anything close to what he experienced. So by God's grace, through Christ's supreme example we can learn how to live with victory in temptation and how to find joy in suffering.

² Proverbs 14:12.

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He will teach us about three things. Number one, the privilege of prayer; number two, the priority of submission; and, finally, the power of obedience.

Let me give you the context. Jesus' three year public ministry is now finished. Israel has been able to scrutinize the Passover Lamb who was without blemish and he now is moving inexorably towards the cross to be the final sacrifice.

Six days before this scenario in Gethsemane on Saturday, Jesus came into a little village about two miles east of Jerusalem called Bethany. And that is where he raised Lazarus from the dead, a very deliberate miracle. And the word of that miracle spread like wildfire as you can imagine. And that led to the events surrounding his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

That happened on Sunday. And this would be the day that we would remember that. This Sunday, the Sunday before resurrection Sunday. And then on Monday and Tuesday he cleansed the temple. He took possession of the temple for two days and during that time he absolutely humiliated all of his enemies in open debate and then pronounced judgment upon them. And then on Tuesday and Wednesday he delivered his marvelous Olivet Discourse that we read in Matthew 24 and 25. Actually that would have been Tuesday afternoon. Wednesday seems to be a silent day in the gospels. And then Thursday sometime in the afternoon, early evening, preparation is made of the Passover meal. And this will be the time of Jesus' last supper with his disciples when he would transform the Passover of the old covenant into the Lord's supper of the new covenant, a memorial unto himself. And in that evening Satan will enter into Judas and he will be dismissed so that he can go and plot his betrayal.

Jesus has now warned the disciples that they are going to desert him. And yet they remain incredulous, skeptical of that possibility, foolishly confident in their own strength. And now it is Thursday after that final supper with his disciples, around midnight. After they sang hymns of thanksgiving and redemptive hope they leave the upper room. They begin to exit their way around the temple mount, down into the Kidron Valley. They would have crossed the Brook Kidron which by now would be red with crimson because of all of the blood of the sacrifices, thousands of them that have been made in the temple above. And, no doubt, as Jesus walked through that crimson brook he was undoubtedly reminded of his blood that would soon be shed as the perfect Passover Lamb.

And now they begin to ascend the Mount of Olives. And partway up, close to the top there is a garden called Gethsemane. And here is where we pick up the narrative, verse 36.

“Then Jesus *came with them to a place called Gethsemane.”³

³ Matthew 25:36.

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The word actually means olive press, a very fitting place, for even as the great stones of an olive press would crush the fruit so as to extract the precious oil, so, too, the Savior is about to be crushed by the excruciating weight of satanic temptation and as he prepared to take upon himself the sins of the elect and worst of all endure the absolutely unspeakable horror of the wrath of the Father being poured out upon him and even being forsaken by the Father.

So they come to a place called Gethsemane, a garden that probably belonged to another believer. Many times the gardens were grown up along the mountainsides outside of the city. It was a familiar place of retreat for Jesus and his disciples. According to John 18 we read that Jesus had often met there with his disciples.

So he says to his disciples,

“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”⁴

And here, my friends, we come to the first lesson on suffering. Number one, the privilege of prayer.

“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”⁵

Now this was the habit of Jesus’ life. In Luke five verse 16 we read that he would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. What a simple, yet profound lesson. When confronted with great trials, when we are tempted to despair of life itself, what should we do? We must go to our knees and then, perhaps, to our face in fervent prayer as Jesus did.

My friends, this is the great privilege that we have been given because of Christ. In fact, we read in Hebrews chapter four beginning in verse 15:

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.⁶

Dear Christian, you must remember. Because of Christ we have been justified. We have been declared righteous. We now have the imputed righteousness of Christ. We are hidden in him and therefore we have access into the very presence of God and to his throne room. And we must learn to live in the presence of his glory, especially in time of great need.

⁴ Matthew 26:36.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hebrews 4:15.

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It is staggering to me. We have a creator God that never sleeps, never slumbers. He is always available to hear our supplications like a father would always have a tender ear for his child that would come to him in need.

James the half brother of Jesus learned this well in James 5:13. He says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."⁷

You know, too often when we are confronted with trials we go first to the phone rather than the throne. We run to our friends. Or we run to the mall to buy something to somehow alleviate the pain, get our mind off our problems. Or we run to the theater or the television or the pharmacist or the therapist. My friends, how foolish. To think that we have an omniscient, omnipotent God that is the lover of our souls, that long for us to come to him.

So in verse 36 we see Jesus doing this and he tells his disciples:

"Sit here while I go over there and pray."⁸

The original language helps us see that there is an indication here that he pointed.

"Sit here while I go over there and pray."⁹

Verse 37.

"And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee..."¹⁰

...which would have been James and John. Peter was the leader of the 12. James and John were close behind, kind of the three in the inner most circle. All three of them were Jesus' closest earthly companions. And certainly fellowship with close friends is important in times of great stress.

In verse 37 the text goes on to say he began to be grieved and distressed. The term distressed is interesting. It describes a state of extreme anxiety, sorrow and pain, one that could lead to even difficulty in breathing.

Verse 38.

"Then He *said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.'"¹¹

⁷ James 5:13.

⁸ Matthew 26:36.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Matthew 26:37.

¹¹ Matthew 26:38.

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Literally, stay awake. Don't go to sleep.

I am sure Jesus was well aware of Satan and his demonic horde that surrounded him at that time. They were absolutely salivating with delight to see their creator in such a state of pain and vulnerability. Certainly the disciples were unable to see this fiendish force. Moreover, Jesus knew about the foolish pride of the disciples, their sense of self confidence. And he also knew about their fatigue, their fear. He knew, therefore, that they, too, should pray, not only for him, but for themselves. In fact, earlier on the way up the Mount of Olives Jesus had warned them according to verse 31:

“You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’”¹²

By the way, Jesus was citing Zechariah's prophecy in Zechariah 13:7 where we read:

“‘Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, And against the man, My Associate,’ Declares the LORD of hosts. ‘Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered; And I will turn My hand against the little ones.’”¹³

Now, you would think that upon hearing such a shocking warning that the disciples would have stopped in their tracks and been absolutely overwhelmed and say, “Lord, help us understand. What are you saying? What should we do?” And then beg him to help them overcome that temptation. But apparently that is not what they did.

And as I meditated upon that passage I think, my, is that not a picture of me and you? All of the warnings that the Lord gives us. It won't happen to me. I am too strong. I have walked with the Lord for years. I know the Word.

We are confident of our spiritual prowess and many times we think that the warnings of Scripture are given to those who are immature, those who are weak, that those things really wouldn't happen to us.

Back in verse 33:

“But Peter answered and said to Him, ‘Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.’”¹⁴

I see my picture there, don't you?

¹² Matthew 26:31.

¹³ Zechariah 13:7.

¹⁴ Matthew 26:33.

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Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times."

Peter *said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You."
All the disciples said the same thing too.¹⁵

“We will never defect. We are too strong.”

Right. In fact, it is interesting as we study the gospel accounts, we see that although Jesus continued to speak about his impending death, his ultimate sacrifice, the disciples just couldn't come to grips with it. That is not what they wanted to hear. That is very often how we approach Scripture. We know what we want it to say and if it says something we don't want it to say, we don't really hear it. They were looking for the kingdom. They wanted to see the Romans out. They were preoccupied with who was going to be greatest in the kingdom. In fact, that was the undercurrent of rivalry that continued to build among the 12 disciples as Jesus is talking about his impending death.

It is amazing, isn't it? Although Jesus had instructed them about humility in Matthew 18 and in Matthew 20 we read James and John get their mom and they go to Jesus and try to get her to see if she... if he wouldn't let one of them have the place of prominence in the kingdom, you know, right and a left, set on either side.

In fact, in Luke 22:24 we read:

“And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.”¹⁶

Oh, I am so glad that never happens in our church. So this ambitious pride was a recurring theme among the disciples right up to the last supper before Jesus' death and we see that even in John 13. Obviously, they had much to learn about weakness. They much to learn about their own pride, about being overconfident. They had much to learn about humility and love.

And what did Jesus do in the upper room? He washed their feet to teach them that lesson. And then that lesson could be even more profoundly taught the next day when he hung upon the cross.

My friends, we must not shake our heads at the disciples as if somehow we would never be like them because they picture us very clearly. You know, like the disciples we all mean well, right? We all mean well. We all think we are pretty strong. We think, my, I, you know, boy, I know the Word here. I go to Calvary Bible Church. I am not going to suckered by some false teacher or some temptation. I am beyond that.

¹⁵ Matthew 26:34.

¹⁶ Luke 22:24.

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But isn't it interesting what Jesus told them in verse 41? He said:

“Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”¹⁷

In other words he is saying, “Men, recognize your human limitations and cry out for divine assistance. Be spiritually alert. You are not as strong as you think you are. Your spirit is willing, but that is not the problem. It is your flesh that is weak.”

And certainly for the disciples that night and the next day they were going to be tested in ways that they could not imagine. You never know when the testing is coming your way. Amazing. Just as Jesus is preparing to gain victory of his spirit over the flesh, see the disciples are losing the battle. Their flesh is gaining victory over their spirit.

Beloved, it is so easy to deceive ourselves into believing that we are something that we are not, that we have a corner on the truth, that somehow our convictions and our character are superior to other people, that somehow we have arrived spiritually. But I would submit to you that Satan is the master of spiritual judo. He knows how to use the direction of our aggression so that he can throw us to the ground in defeat. He uses our own spiritual momentum to destroy us. That is what we see happening with the disciples.

Proverbs 16 verse 18:

“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.”¹⁸

And Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:12:

“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”¹⁹

I ask you. How often do you go to a secret place and fall on your knees before the Lord and plead with him for spiritual discernment and faith and strength to obey?

Beloved, please hear this in love. If the answer to that question is seldom, then I would submit to you that you are vulnerable. You are weak and your faith is superficial. And if your answer to that question is never, then I would submit to you that you are operating in the power of the flesh and not the Spirit and your spiritual life is a disaster and you don't even know it.

Beloved, a willing spirit is too frail to prevail against temptation. It is simply not enough. It simply must be supplemented with fervent prayer. That is the privilege that we have

¹⁷ Matthew 26:41.

¹⁸ Proverbs 16:18.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:11.

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and Jesus understood this not only for his disciples, but for himself. It is amazing. What a contrast. The incarnate Christ the Lord of heaven and earth knows full well the weakness of his humanity and his desperate need to depend upon his Father, the Holy Spirit to gain victory in this great battle.

This is a scene of unimaginable struggle. Naturally his frail flesh feared torture and death and the temptations of Satan to get him to totally abandon this excruciating plan. And certainly a vast army of Satan's minions had gathered around him that lonely night. But, my friends, the greatest fear that gripped the Savior's heart was not that which men could do to his body, but what his Father was about to do to his soul.

Now we can't fathom this, but what Jesus fears is the wrath of God that will soon be poured out upon him as he bears in his body the full force of divine fury for the sins of all whom the Father had given him. He dreads being alienated. He dreads being separated from his Father because of sin, something his sinless person has never experienced nor will we ever experience because he experienced that for us.

This is something so unimaginably painful that it exceeds the limits of language to even express. It is beyond our imagination. This is the inconceivable horror of what Christ endured on our behalf. My, what a testimony this is with respect to how greatly Jesus loved the Father and how greatly the triune godhead loves us and how committed Jesus was to doing his Father's will, come what may.

"Guard the gate," he is saying. "My heart is heavy. My only source of comfort, my only source of strength can be found in communion with my Father."

So, to be sure, Jesus found comfort in the privilege of prayer. My friend, does this describe the habit of your life? So, being grieved and distressed we see that Jesus stations eight of his disciples in one place. Then he proceeds further into the garden with Peter, James and John and he tells them in verse 38:

"My soul is deeply grieved."²⁰

The word there means to experience profound sorrow beyond measure. And he even adds:

"...to the point of death."²¹

He obviously thought that unless the Father does something here, I am going to die.

Later, according to Luke's account, he began to sweat great drops of blood requiring that the Father intervene to keep him alive by sending him an angel to strengthen him. So he

²⁰ Matthew 26:38.

²¹ Ibid.

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is saying, basically, “Guys, I need your support here. I need you to watch with me.” He knew that Judas had already gone, that that mob would soon be coming after him.

So in verse 39 it says:

“And He went a little beyond them.”²²

Luke adds that he went a stone’s throw. So it would have been, what, 30 yards, 40 yards, however far you could throw a stone. Obviously he knew that the great business he had to do with the Father had to be done alone in private. No one else could possibly intervene in such a time of need, such a time of anguish.

Dear friends, I would submit to you that great suffering and anguish of soul will always be done in loneliness. And the reason for that is so that our attention will be fixed exclusively upon the lover of our soul.

The text says:

“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.’”²³

In other words, “ If there is any other way to accomplish this great work, let this cup pass from me.” Cup being an expression of the force of divine fury that would soon be poured out upon him and that temporary separation he would experience.

Now he was not asking the Father to abandon his plan of redemption and violate the covenants. In fact he said in John 12:27:

“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.”²⁴

So he was not saying he no longer wanted to save sinners. That is not the issue here. But, rather, he was asking if there could possibly be another way. I mean, he could have walked away from the whole ordeal. He had told the Jewish leaders earlier in John 10 beginning in verse 17:

“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”²⁵

²² Matthew 26:39.

²³ Matthew 26:39.

²⁴ John 12:27.

²⁵ John 10:17.

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So you must understand the Father did not force the Son to endure the cross against his will, but rather Jesus was willing. He was... he did this voluntarily and the Father sent him to do what Jesus voluntarily chose to do. Nevertheless, although Jesus was sinless, in fact, Hebrews 7:26 tells us that he wasn't even able to sin.

Here, my friend, we see that he truly is battling against real temptation. And we have seen this before. Remember in Matthew chapter 4:1-11, that whole section where Satan tempts him in his state of physical weakness in the wilderness, where Satan tempts him to somehow abandon this divine plan of redemption and reinstate his powers that he had set aside in his humiliation, the humiliation of the incarnation.

Now Scripture doesn't tell us here how Satan was tempting him. That is a mystery to us. All we know is that he did and it had to have been fierce.

It is also important for you to understand that although Jesus was, according to Hebrews 4:15:

“...tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”²⁶

Satan was not appealing to his sin nature, because Jesus didn't have a sin nature. Satan knows all about our sin nature. He knows all about our fallen flesh. He knows how to appeal to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life. He knows how we function. These impulses are innate within us. But not so with Christ.

You see, Satan did not target Jesus' flesh because it was totally holy. Instead, he was targeting Jesus' holiness. Now please understand this. He is saying, “Jesus, stay holy, whatever you do. Don't allow yourself to be tainted by sin. You don't want to do that. You know how exceedingly vile and toxic sin is. You are the thrice holy God. You don't want anything to do with that.”

You know, this was the same kind of strategy that Satan used against him in the wilderness, remember, in Matthew four? He is basically saying, “Retain your holiness. Retain your glory. You don't deserve to be famished to the point of death. Remember that? You are the Son of God. Command these stones to become bread. Obviously the Father has forsaken you. So you need to do something here. Put your Father's love to the test. Why don't you and throw your self off of the pinnacle of the temple? Let the angels come rescue you. Look at all the kingdoms of the world out there in all of their glory. Do you know what? If you will worship me, I will give all these things to you.”

So Jesus' struggle, my friends, was the exact opposite of ours. If I can put it simply, our great battle is to forsake sin and embrace holiness. Jesus' great battle was to forsake holiness and embrace sin.

²⁶ Hebrews 4:15.

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So with his heart breaking Jesus falls on his face and prays and Luke says that he kneeled. When you piece the two together you see that he first knelt and then eventually he falls on his face pleading with his Father for help saying at the end of verse 39:

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”²⁷

In Hebrews chapter five verse seven we have even more commentary on what was happening there with Jesus. The writer there gives us further insight. He says:

“In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death.”²⁸

So, beloved, here we see that the Savior was literally crying out at the top of his lungs for help from the Father.

And this brings us to the second great lesson on how to gain victory and eventual joy in suffering temptation and that is the priority of submission. Here we see the heart of the Savior, don't we? He came to earth to do the will of the Father, not to do his own will. This is why he went to the Father in prayer.

You know, it is easy to do our own will, isn't it? It just comes automatically. We don't have to think about it. Anything that appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, boy, it just comes naturally. But to do God's will is something different. And to do God's will requires God's power, because the temptation to do otherwise is so strong. And in his humanity Jesus now is contemplating the horrors that await him. So he is appealing to the Father's omnipotence knowing full well that he has the power to accomplish his purpose in another way and also the power, obviously, to give him the strength to be victorious over Satan's temptations.

But Jesus also knows that not all things that are possible are part of the Father's will. And, above all else, he wants to fully and joyfully comply with his Father's will and not allow his own desires to take precedence.

Dear Christian, we must learn this lesson. Christ is our supreme example. There will be times in our life where God requires us to drink a bitter cup. And many times when he places it in our hands we have no idea why he is doing this. And although our nature pleads for another way, by grace our hearts must submit knowing that in time the reward will be far greater than the pain, that somehow in the infinite purposes of God to glorify himself and, yea, bring joy to us, this is what must happen. And that was Jesus' heart.

²⁷ Matthew 26:39.

²⁸ Hebrews 5:7.

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Again, remember. We exist for God. He does not exist for us. We are his creatures, twice born as new creatures in Christ. And we exist solely for the purpose of bringing glory to his name. Even though we may seldom understand his perfect plan, we know that ultimately it will bring inexpressible joy to us and unimaginable glory to him.

Charles Spurgeon said it so well.

“The Christian can say, ‘Nothing can happen to me that is contrary to the will of God and if it be his will it is my will, too. If it pleases God, it pleases me.’”

Don’t you love that? He goes on to say, “God has been pleased to give me part of his will so I am satisfied with whatever he sends. Man is, after all, only the second cause of our sorrows. A persecutor says, perhaps to a child of God, ‘I can afflict thee.’ And nay, thou canst not. For thou art dependent on the first great cause and he and I are agreed. Ah, dear friends,” he says, “there is nothing that makes men such cowards as having wills contrary to the will of God. But when we resign ourselves wholly into the hands of God, what have we to fear?”

So Jesus teaches his disciples how to deal with suffering, how to deal with temptation. He shows them that they must take full advantage of the privilege of prayer and now he demonstrates the priority of submitting to the Father’s will regardless of how painful that might be temporarily.

Luke’s account gives us further insight into what happened. If you would like to turn there, Luke chapter 22. In verse 42 we read that he said:

“Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.”²⁹

Then he says in verse 43, the next verse:

“Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.”³⁰

My, how attentive the Father is to those who need.

By the way, this is now the second time that an angel has come to minister to the Lord Jesus. The first time was during the first great temptation in the wilderness. And now the second time the great satanic temptation in the garden. Verse 44 tells us how difficult this was.

“And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.”³¹

²⁹ Luke 22:42.

³⁰ Luke 22:43.

Lessons from Gethsemane - Part 1

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Matthew 26:36-50

Preached on: Sunday, April 1, 2012

My friends, this is one of the most stunning scenes in all of Scripture. Here we see the profound humiliation of the God man Jesus. He is in such agony that he requires assistance from his Father that he is given through an angel to sustain his life. And, no doubt, Jesus cried out to the Father for this help.

Imagine the scene. His enemies are awake and his friends are asleep. Isn't that how it typically is? They are exhausted in body and Spirit, knowing that they are about to say farewell to their master. They don't understand it all. They refuse to believe it all. They are consumed with fear and confusion. They feel like somehow all that they were hoping for with the kingdom is over. So there is no help from them.

Beloved, in times of great stress you will find no help even in your closest friend or companion. You will find it only in the Lord.

This is the hour that he anticipated with such horror and this is why he prayed in the upper room according to John 17 verse four. He says to the Father:

I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.³²

In other words, "Father, help me retain my absolute holiness, even though now you are about to make me who knew no sin to be sin on behalf of all you have given me, that they might become the righteousness of God in me. Father, help me not to yield to temptation, not to flee from this very thing that I must defeat."

The physician Luke gives us some medical insight into what Jesus experienced. We read that Jesus is in agony. He is praying fervently, which, by the way, was a medical term used to describe muscles being stretched to the max of their capability. He is on the brink of death due to the torture of his temptation to forsake his holiness and become sin for us, to endure the wrath of the Father, be separated from him. And Luke says that his sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground.

This is a fascinating thing. Medically this is a rare condition known as hematidrosis where in times of extreme stress and physical pain, tiny blood vessels can dilate to the point of rupturing and then merge with the sweat and then come out of the sweat glands resulting in droplets of blood being mixed with sweat appearing on the skin.

Dear friends, go with me to the scene. Can you imagine this? Our creator God, the lover of our souls stretched out upon the ground, face down, his body covered with the crimson

³¹ Luke 22:44.

³² John 17:4-5.

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stain of blood and sweat. It is on his skin. It is on his clothes. What a lesson in how to face trials.

What do you do? You go to the Father in prayer and you go to him with a willing spirit to submit to his will come what may.

Are you willing to suffer in obedience to God and not lose heart?

The writer of Hebrews comments on this in chapter 12 verse three. He says:

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.³³

Well, what happens next is one of the most profound and fascinating lessons that you will find in all of Scripture and it has to do with the power of obedience and we will look at that next week. But may I encourage you this morning as we come to the conclusion of our study. My friends, may I encourage you to examine your heart in light of these profound lessons from Gethsemane. Too often our lives mirror the proud, overconfident and yet defeated disciples rather than our humble Savior. Because our spirit is willing we fail to see the weakness of our flesh. And we need to learn to anticipate our need for God's help in temptation and to be ready, to be awake, to be alert.

Too often we fail to take advantage of the privilege of prayer. We fail to commit ourselves to the priority of submission to God's will preferring our own and, as we will see, because of this we very often fail to experience the power, the supernatural power that is available to us when we are obedient with all of our heart.

Fathers, may I encourage you? Teach these things to your children. But, first, make sure they are the habit of your life so that you will not teach them in hypocrisy.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed when we contemplate these amazing truths, the scene, Lord, Jesus, of you suffering on our behalf. Lord, may we learn well the lessons that you have for us that come from the garden and, Lord, we pray that if there be anyone who does not confess you as Savior and Lord that today you will be merciful to them. Overwhelm them with conviction that today will be the day that they repent, that they believe and experience the miracle of the new birth. We ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus, our glorious Savior. Amen.

³³ Hebrews 12:3-4.

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