

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 3/10/02 Brad Brandt

Matthew 26:36-46 "The Agony of Gethsemane"*

Main Idea: In order to appreciate more fully the agony Jesus endured for us at Gethsemane, we will consider three things about Jesus addressed in Matthew 26:36-46.

The Setting for Gethsemane (Matthew 26):

- A. Jesus foretold His crucifixion (1-5).
- B. Jesus was anointed for burial at Bethany (6-13).
- C. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (17-30).
- D. Jesus revealed two heart-sinking predictions:
 1. One would betray him (21).
 2. All would deny him, including Peter (31-35).
- I. We must consider what Jesus *did* at Gethsemane (36-38).
 - A. He prepared Himself.
 1. He was about to experience His greatest agony.
 2. He did experience great distress.
 - B. He prepared His disciples.
 1. He helped them face the hour of sorrow.
 2. He helped them to interpret the hour of sorrow.
- II. We must consider what Jesus *said* at Gethsemane (39-46).
 - A. He prayed to His Father (39).
 1. His words indicate intimacy.
 2. His words indicate dread.
 3. His words indicate submission.
 - B. He taught the disciples (40-41).
 - C. He prayed two more times to His Father (42-44).
 1. Prayer involves seeking the Father's will.
 2. Prayer involves accepting the Father's will.
 - D. He expressed His resolve (45-46).
 1. He who sleeps, slips.
 2. He who prays, perseveres.
- III. We must consider what Jesus *deserves* because of Gethsemane.
 - A. We must believe.
 - B. We must worship.

There are many wonderful titles used in the Bible to depict Jesus Christ. He is the Light of the world, the Bread of Life, the Son of God, the King of kings, the Prince of peace, the Lily of the valley, the Rose of Sharon, and the great I AM. But one of the most moving, mind-boggling titles is the one revealed in Isaiah 53:3. Jesus is the *Man of sorrows*.

Philip P. Bliss penned these penetrating words, "Man of Sorrows, what a name for the Son of God, who came ruined sinners to reclaim! Hallelujah, what a Savior! Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned He stood--sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah, what a Savior! Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He; Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior! Lifted up was He to die, 'It is finished!' was His cry; Now in heaven exalted high; Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

This morning, we are going to tread on holy ground. Our aim is to get to know better the Man of Sorrows. Frankly, sorrow is not a popular topic in our day. Today's gospel is far more often presented in terms like

this, "Come to Jesus, and He'll make you feel better about yourself." We have ignored to a great degree the fact that Jesus was the Suffering Servant, the Man of Sorrows. The message this morning (and next Sunday morning) is designed to help us understand and appreciate more fully the sorrow our Savior endured for us.

We're going to travel to Gethsemane. *Gethsemane*. The word itself brings vivid images to mind. Perhaps other than the Cross itself, no other event in the life of the Man of Sorrows reveals the agony He endured more vividly than Gethsemane. Jesus suffered for us beyond what our finite minds can fathom. So great was His pain there that Luke's gospel records that He sweat as it were drops of blood (Luke 22:44).

What really happened at Gethsemane? Once we grasp the answer, we'll never be the same again. In order to appreciate more fully the agony Jesus endured for us at Gethsemane, we must consider three things about Jesus addressed in Matthew 26:36-46.

I must warn you. We ought never to learn the Word of God for the sake of mere intellectual stimulation, that is, to stuff our heads with knowledge we have no intent on using. This is especially the case this morning. In our attempt to fathom the sorrows our Savior endured, our aim is to learn so as to worship. Frankly, if this is not your desire, it would be better to leave at this point. The event we will consider is sacred. One commentator has written, "This is a passage we almost fear to read, for it seems to intrude into the private agony of Jesus."

The Setting for Gethsemane (Matthew 26):

It's significant that each of the four gospel writers mention that Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane. John does not tell us what happened there, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke do. Let's sketch the backdrop as revealed in Matthew's account. Several key events preface Gethsemane (which we'll see in Matthew 26).

Jesus' final week of earthly ministry began with the triumphal entry on Sunday (Matt 21). On Monday He cleansed the temple. The religious leaders challenged Him on Tuesday. As He was leaving the temple, the disciples called attention to the massive structure of Herod's temple (Matt. 24:1). In response Jesus delivered what we commonly call the "Olivet Discourse," which occupies Matthew 24-25.

The time sequence of the events that followed is not easy to reconstruct. According to the first verses of Matthew 26, two days prior to Passover the chief priests and scribes made a decision to kill Jesus when a suitable time came. But never assume that Jesus' death was a quirk of fate. It wasn't.

A. Jesus foretold His crucifixion (1-5). "The Passover is two days away," He told His disciples, "and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified (2)." The Cross was coming. Jesus died because He chose to die. We see this in His response to being anointed by Mary of Bethany.

B. Jesus was anointed for burial at Bethany (6-13). He said in verse 12 that the woman prepared His body for burial. Don't miss the importance of verse 13, for it reveals that Jesus saw beyond His death--the gospel would transform the world.

Judas, incensed by what he considered a waste of money, left at that point (14), and set in motion his wicked plot to betray Jesus.

C. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper (17-30). Afterwards, the group sang a hymn, left the upper room, and headed for the Mount of Olives (30). The mood became very solemn when...

D. Jesus revealed two heart-sinking predictions. The first...

1. *One would betray him (21)*. That, of course, was Judas. The second...

2. *All would deny him, including Peter (31-35).* With those sober predictions in the disciples' ears, the group arrived at Gethsemane. Now we are ready to consider the first of three events associated with Jesus at Gethsemane.

I. We must consider what Jesus *did* at Gethsemane (36-38).

Verse 36 begins, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane." Gethsemane is Hebrew and means "press of oils." It was a garden located somewhere on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives, a hill filled with olive trees and olive presses. It was one of Jesus' favorite spots, a place where He could retreat to be alone with His Father (Luke 22:39).

What happened at Gethsemane that night? In the darkness of the night, a twofold preparation occurred.

A. He prepared Himself. "Prepared Himself for what?" you ask. Please look ahead in the account to verse 39 and you'll see. Notice the words, "May this cup be taken from me." What does Jesus mean by "this cup?" We know the language is symbolic and grows out of the Old Testament. True, it refers to the suffering and death He will face, but it goes beyond that. It refers primarily here to God's wrath. There were two aspects to the suffering for which Jesus prepared Himself in Gethsemane.

1. *He was about to experience His greatest agony.* Take a closer look at the account. Verses 36-38 record, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him [that is, He left the other eight, and took the inner circle of three], and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.³⁸ Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.'"

Those words speak of great, grievous agony. You might wonder, "All throughout His ministry, Jesus calmly said He was going to die. Why now is He greatly amazed, and even depressed [that's the word Schofield uses]? Other martyrs have faced death with great courage. For example, history indicates that Polycarp went to be burned at the stake without flinching. Why does Jesus here seem to dread the thought of death?"

Oh, beloved, it was not death per se over which Jesus agonized. It was something far more horrid. The agony Jesus felt in Gethsemane was not merely the dread of physical suffering and dying—for many men have faced torture and martyrdom. But none have ever drunk the *cup* that was before Him. He knew that in a few hours He would experience the horror of being separated from the Father, that soon He would cry, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" It was for that "cup" that Jesus prepared Himself in Gethsemane, the cup of God's wrath, of hell itself.

Oswald Sanders comments, "We can never fathom the agony in Gethsemane, but at least we need not misunderstand it. It is the agony of God and Man in one, face to face with sin. We know nothing about Gethsemane in personal experience. Gethsemane and Calvary stand for something unique; they are the gateway into Life for us.

"It was not the death on the cross that Jesus feared in Gethsemane; He stated most emphatically that He came on purpose to die. In Gethsemane He feared lest He might not get through as Son of Man. He would get through as Son of God—Satan could not touch Him there; but Satan's onslaught was that He would get through as an isolated Figure only; and that would mean that He could be no Saviour."

Elizabeth Clephane pondered this in the second verse of her well-known hymn, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus." "Upon the cross of Jesus mine eyes at times can see the very dying form of One Who suffered there for me; And from my smitten heart with tears two wonders I confess--the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness."

The following words, attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, likewise contemplate the "cup" our Lord did drink, "O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns Thine only crown; How pale Thou art with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn, how does that visage languish, which once was bright as morn!"

While in Gethsemane, Jesus knew He was about to experience His greatest agony. But that's not all. There was a second aspect to His suffering in Gethsemane, something in the present tense. Indeed, in Gethsemane...

2. *He did experience great distress.* He did—present tense. Listen to what He said in verse 38, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Please don't assume that because Jesus is God, pain didn't affect Him. I remind you that He is God incarnate, and as such He is 100% man. Never forget that. When God the Son became a man, He laid aside the independent exercise of His divine attributes. He chose to feel the full weight of human pain, dread, and agony. The NEB is vivid, "My heart is ready to break with grief."

In verse 37 the text indicates he began to be "sorrowful and troubled." The latter term means "great distress or anguish," even "depressed." In fact, this is the strongest of the three Greek words in the NT for depression.

Let His words sink in. He told His disciples He was "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." I want to suggest to you that Jesus' distress was so great that He nearly died in Gethsemane. Luke's description is heart-wrenching (22:44), "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground." An angel was sent to sustain Him (Luke 22:43).

D. A. Carson makes this observation (543), "Jesus did not suffer martyrdom...Jesus went to his death knowing that it was his Father's will that he face death completely alone as the sacrificial, wrath-averting Passover Lamb. As his death was unique, so was his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship."

Yes, Jesus went to Gethsemane to prepare Himself. We'll see how in a moment. Secondly, in going to Gethsemane...

B. He prepared His disciples. Why did Jesus bring Peter, James, and John with Him to Gethsemane? Why did He tell them to tarry and keep watch? Two key reasons seem likely.

1. *He helped them face the hour of sorrow.* Remember, Jesus has already predicted that His hour of sorrow will be an hour of sorrow for them, too. They will all abandon Him out of fear. He wanted them to be with Him—yes, because He "needed" the encouragement of their presence—but also for their benefit. By allowing them to watch Him, Jesus was helping His followers know how to face their own times of trial that stood before them.

2. *He helped them to interpret the hour of sorrow.* Jesus wanted His disciples to know the truth about what happened to Him in Gethsemane. He did not hide the truth from them. He let them see the anguish He bore. He let them hear the groanings of His soul. Why? For one reason, so they would know the depths of the suffering He was about to endure to redeem His people. For another reason, it was because when He was gone, they would be the instruments He would use to pass the truth on to the world.

What happened at Gethsemane? Jesus prepared Himself and His disciples. That's what He did. But that's not all.

II. We must consider what Jesus *said* at Gethsemane (39-46).

In the Gethsemane experience, we find Jesus speaking to two audiences.

A. He prayed to His Father (39). Verse 39 begins, "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed." The typical posture of prayer for a Jew was standing with arms outstretched. But what was Jesus' position here? The burden and agony was so great, He could not stand up. "Physical position tells spiritual condition." Jesus fell to His face. He took the posture of anguish. And from there He prayed that, if possible, the hour might pass from Him.

Notice the very words He prayed. We can make three observations from them.

1. *His words indicate intimacy.* Jesus began His prayer in verse 39 with these words, "My Father." In the parallel account of Mark 14:36, the text reads "Abba, Father." The word "Abba" is Aramaic, and is an intimate term. The Jews would not use this term to refer to God because they thought it disrespectful. Our word "Daddy" comes close. There was *intimacy* in His words.

2. *His words indicate dread.* He prayed (39), "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." The two most dreadful cries ever to come from our Savior's lips were the cry of the cup, and the cry of dereliction. The first was uttered here at Gethsemane ("Take this cup from Me"), the second at Golgotha ("My God, My God, why?"). Jesus dreaded the cup of judgment He was about to drink.

3. *His words indicate submission.* Verse 39 again, "Yet not as I will, but as you will." Those who preach the health and wealth gospel tell us it's always possible to have bad things removed. Jesus' prayer proves otherwise. He knew the plan of God involved intense suffering. And He chose to submit His will to His Father's will. My friends, He is our example here.

There's a second audience in Gethsemane. First, Jesus prayed to His Father. Then...

B. He taught the disciples (40-41). Here's how (40-41), "Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. ⁴¹ 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.'"

A few years ago I was awakened in the middle of the night by one of our daughters. She was afraid because of a past nightmare and couldn't sleep. I stumbled to her bedside to try to comfort her, but I could hardly keep my eyes open! I thought of the disciples in Gethsemane.

It had been a long, exhausting day for Jesus' followers, and there, in the cool night air, they dozed off. Luke's parallel says they were sleeping from sorrow (Luke 22:45). Then their Master's voice startled them. "Watch and pray," Jesus told Peter. "If you want to overcome temptation, watch and pray."

The same goes for us. Why? "Because the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Listen, if we are serious about overcoming sin, we'd better take heed to Jesus' admonition, "Watch (be alert) and pray." Both verbs are imperatives. No prayer, no victory.

How long did Jesus agonize in prayer? Verse 40 suggests that His first season of prayer lasted about an hour. He prayed two more times as well, as we'll see (verses 42 & 44), and all three times the disciples fell asleep (Mark 14:40 indicates that after the second time the disciples were so embarrassed they didn't know what to say). I would suggest that the disciples learned some amazing lessons that night in Gethsemane—about Jesus, about prayer, and about how to suffer.

Verse 40 indicates that Jesus specifically addressed Peter. Why Peter? Remember Peter's claim back in verse 35? It's as if Jesus is saying, "Peter, you said you wouldn't deny me. But you won't even pray with me!" It takes more than good intentions to overcome temptation.

It's true, my friend. If we're going to overcome temptation, we're going to have to give more than lip-service to prayer. Churches today are filled with weak, powerless, professing followers of Christ. If you compare their lives with their unsaved neighbors, you don't see much difference. Maybe I'm describing you. What's needed? The same thing Jesus said the disciples needed. We need to *watch and pray* as though as lives depended on it—which in fact, they do. You can't give God a token hour a week and expect to be a strong Christian.

Let's keep listening to what Jesus said in Gethsemane. First He prayed to His Father. Then He taught the disciples. Next...

C. He prayed two more times to His Father (42-44). "He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'"⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing."

I see a progression in Jesus' prayers. In His first prayer He said, "If it is possible, may this cup pass from me." In other words, "Is there another way?" The thought of being separated from His Father was unbearable. In His second prayer, however, He said, "If it is *not* possible for this cup to be taken away, may Your will be done." Jesus here models for us two important elements of effective prayer.

1. *Prayer involves seeking the Father's will.* That's what He did in His first prayer. He was *seeking* the Father's will.

2. *Prayer involves accepting the Father's will.* That was His second prayer. Once we discern the Father's will, we must *accept* it. "Thy will be done," Jesus taught us to pray, "on earth as it is in heaven."

It was 1818 in France, and Louis, a boy of 9, was sitting in his father's workshop. The father was a harness-maker and the boy loved to watch his father work the leather. "Someday Father," said Louis, "I want to be a harness-maker, just like you."

"Why not start now?" said the father. He took a piece of leather and drew a design on it. "Now, my son," he said, "take the hole-puncher and a hammer and follow this design, but be careful that you don't hit your hand."

Excited, the boy began to work, but when he hit the hole-puncher, it flew out of his hand and pierced his eye! He lost the sight of that eye immediately. Later, sight in the other eye failed. Louis was now totally blind.

A few years later, Louis was sitting in the family garden when a friend handed him a pine cone. As he ran his sensitive fingers over the cone, an idea came to him. He became enthusiastic and began to create an alphabet of raised dots on paper so that the blind could feel and interpret what was written. Thus, Louis Braille opened up a whole new world for the blind--all because of an accident!

Experiencing contentment involves *seeking* and *accepting* the Father's will.

By the way, keep in mind the fact that Matthew had a purpose in mind for recording this gospel. Matthew wrote this account of Jesus for second generation Christians. He knew many of the Christians in his day were facing martyrdom. He also knew they struggled with how to prepare themselves for their impending execution. So with his pen, Matthew took them to Gethsemane to see how the Master faced His hour of sorrow, and how He helped the three apostles prepare for the same.

It's amazing to me that even in Gethsemane, Jesus took time to teach His disciples. Though in His hour of greatest need, Jesus still thought of His followers. What does that say to us about how much He loves us?

There is no greater love.

It was at this point that Jesus said something else in Gethsemane—in verses 45-46.

D. He expressed His resolve (45-46). "Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!'"

Do you hear the determination in Jesus' final words? It's no longer, "If possible let this cup pass." Now it's, "Let's go!" It wasn't to flee, but to meet the mob. Jesus didn't try to hide or escape. He accepted the Father's plan and now set out to meet His betrayer head-on.

I see a contrast at Gethsemane, a contrast between Jesus and the disciples. And in this contrast I see two lessons portrayed.

1. *He who sleeps, slips.* Which is exactly what the disciples did. Instead of praying, they slept. And then they slipped. They did what they said they'd never do. They deserted their Master (as we'll see next time). They failed to heed the second lesson, the one Jesus modeled...

2. *He who prays, perseveres.* The disciples failed, but Jesus was faithful. He did exactly what His Father gave Him to do. At Gethsemane, Jesus prepared to give Himself both TO sinners, and FOR sinners. Such was His resolve.

And now we enter the picture. We've considered what Jesus *did* at Gethsemane. And what He *said*. Thirdly, and most importantly...

III. We must consider what Jesus *deserves* because of Gethsemane.

We have two responsibilities in light of what He did.

A. *We must believe.* Do you know why Jesus endured Gethsemane? The simple answer is this. *He took our place.* It was our sin that made Gethsemane necessary. It was the cup of wrath due to us into which He looked at Gethsemane.

What should we do then in light of Gethsemane? We must believe that He did it for us. Have you ever prayed to God the following prayer? "Dear Lord, I believe that when You suffered in Gethsemane and on the Cross, You did it to take my place. You took the agony I deserve because I am a sinner. I can never repay You, but today, I choose to believe in You. I believe that You died for my sins and that You conquered the grave. I now receive You as the Savior and Lord of my life."

Have you ever believed in Jesus Christ? Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."

B. *We must worship.* Every one of us ought to respond in humble worship this morning. Our hearts ought to cry out, "Thank You, Lord Jesus, for what You did for us. You are worthy." Let us worship Him with our lips and our lives.

Man of Sorrows,

what a name for the Son of God, who came

ruined sinners to reclaim!

Hallelujah, what a Savior!