

Text: Matthew 26:36-46

Title: Agonizing Prayer

Truth: The Lord Jesus confirms His commitment to the Father's will.

Date/Location: Wednesday November 16, 2022 at FBC

Introduction

Dinner has ended. The disciples are processing the bad news of Judas's betrayal, Peter's denial, and all the disciples fleeing. They were on the way to the Mount of Olives.

I. Setting, v. 36-38

- A. The Lord took the disciples to a piece of land (often just translated as *place*) called Gethsemane. It was a cultivated garden east of Jerusalem at the foot of the Mt. of Olives. It may have been enclosed because John 18:1 says they "entered" it, but some sources indicate it was not enclosed, and that is not necessary for someone to "enter" the garden. It was a place where the disciples commonly went with Jesus (John 18:2). To get there from the upper room, the group had to cross the Kidron Valley and the water brook or stream. They were crossing down into and up again the banks of a ravine called Kidron. There are olive trees there today.
- B. The etymology of the name Gethsemane is "Gat (press) Shemanim (oils)" or "oil press." Tradition has it that the olives were pressed four times:
 1. First press, "extra virgin olive oil" for use in the temple. (Today, "Olive oil is considered extra virgin if it has a free fatty acid level of 0.8 percent or lower. Virgin olive oil has a fatty acid level of between 0.8 percent and 2.0 percent."¹)
 2. Second press, for cooking.
 3. Third press, for lighting.
 4. Fourth press, for cleaning.

¹ <https://brightland.co/blogs/field-notes/virgin-vs-extra-virgin-olive-oil>

- C. The process of pressing oil reminds us of the extreme spiritual and physical pressure that was upon our Lord in the garden.
- D. He directed the eight disciples to sit in a certain place while He went a little farther on to pray. But he took with him three—Peter, James, and John.
- E. Then Jesus went yet a little farther and prayed.

II. The Mindset of the Lord, v. 37-38

He told his disciples that He was feeling very badly.

- A. Began to be sorrowful. He was distressed, grieved.
- B. Deeply distressed. Troubled.
- C. Exceedingly sorrowful. Very sad.
- D. His feelings were near to death itself. Note that the Lord was not only anticipating physical agony. He knew He would be somehow cut off from communion with the Father because of the judgment that was to be poured out upon Him for the sins of the world. In bearing our sins, He became a true substitute and “as if” He had sinned. He was “made” sin for us, meaning He was constituted as sin so that He could also take the punishment we deserved. He had never experienced this sort of thing before, but He would in the upcoming hours. This is the kind of spiritual suffering that would drive someone to die physically just in anticipation of it.

III. Three Rounds of Prayer, v. 39-45

- A. What do you do when you are deeply troubled? The right answer is: PRAY, like Jesus did. Train yourself that this is the proper response of a godly person. Make it part of your “muscle memory” so that when under stress, you will go back to the basic training of prayer.
- B. Round 1: God the Son prays to God the Father, v. 39-41. Each round begins with the Lord’s agonized prayer and ends with him coming to the disciples and finding them asleep.
 - 1. Prayer. “If it is possible, let this cup pass...not as I will, but as You will.” This shows the truly human side of Jesus. He is not a weird

human being who loves suffering. He is normal in that sense—physical suffering is not welcomed. Nor is spiritual suffering. That is His genuine feeling on the matter. But this does not mean that He is in some unresolvable conflict in His mind. All that notwithstanding, He recognizes that the divine plan has to go forward for the Scripture to be fulfilled.

2. Disciples. Peter is the focal point, but James and John also, if not the other eight disciples, were all asleep. It was evidently very late at night, they had a long day, a large meal, bad news to process, etc. They were unable to stay awake for a “sweet hour of prayer.” But they had to get into prayer to protect them from the temptations of the flesh. They were about to face a test that would send them fleeing from the Lord (see 26:31). They wanted to succeed in not falling prey to sin and temptation. Their spirit was willing. I hope we are like that. But the human spirit is attached to human flesh, and the latter weakens the resolve of the former. One lesson for sure: if you want to beat back temptation, you need to pray.

C. Round 2: Repeat, v. 42-43

1. Prayer. The flavor of the prayer is the same as the first round, but there is an addition: “unless I drink it.” The cup is a common metaphor for the experience of something, in this case, the experience of suffering. The cup cannot pass from Him unless He drinks it, after which time it will be past and done. He emphasizes that His ultimate desire is for God’s will to be accomplished. He knows that the only way around it is through it. Sometimes our own trials are like that.
2. Disciples. They were asleep a second time, because their eyes were heavy. The flesh was overcome with sleep and the more necessary work at that time was left undone.

D. Round 3: Repeat, v. 44-45

1. Prayer. The text simply says that the Lord prayed the same words. It is like Paul, who prayed three times for the thorn to be removed, but God’s answer was “No” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Daniel also prayed three times a day. Psalm 55:17 reminds us

that the Psalmist prayed at evening, morning, and noon, again three times. If there was to be salvation for sinners; if the Scriptures were to be fulfilled; if God's will were to be done, Jesus *had* to go through the physical pain and spiritual devastation of the cross. The Father's answer *had* to be "No" and thanks be to Him that it was "No" in this situation. We are saved by that "No."

2. Disciples. They were asleep for the third time. The Lord had returned three times, but it appears they were only initially aware of two of those times, the first and last. The Lord simply let them rest on his second visit back to them.

His prayers were not five minutes each. The Lord Jesus was pleading with the Father in view of what He knew to be coming. I expect that each round took quite a few minutes (one whole hour?). The words of His prayers reported in the text are a summary. During that time, the disciples fell asleep yet again. This was only because they did not understand the full gravity of the situation. They were not the ones about to die, and I do not believe they fully understood what was going on. But Jesus did. There was no trouble for him to stay awake. We might say that he was "wired" because of the difficulties about to be faced. "The hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed..." right now!

Conclusion, v. 46

The final round of prayer ended when Judas and the authorities came to arrest Jesus. Jesus directed the disciples that it was time for all of them to be going. Of course, He knew that He would not get away from the authorities. However, the other disciples would not want to be arrested. Nor did Jesus permit them to be persecuted at this time. He protected them to the end (John 17:12).

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