

# The Garden. Our hope in the agony of Jesus

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Isaiah, again, this time in Isaiah 51. And at verse 17 down to 52 and verse 3, we're thinking about the cup.

One of the images that we find in the Garden of Gethsemane where we're going to be today is the idea of the cup. And we'll hear it here in verse 17 and verse 22. So let's hear God's word.

Awake, awake, rise up, Jerusalem. You have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath. You have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger.

Among all the children she bore, there was none to guide her. Among all the children she brought up, there was none to take her by the hand. These double calamities have come upon you. Who can comfort you?

Ruin and destruction, famine and sword. Who can console you? Your children have fainted. They lie at every street corner like antelope caught in a net.

[ 1 : 08 ] They are filled with the wrath of the Lord, with the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk but not with wine. This is what your sovereign Lord says, your God who defends his people.

See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger. From that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. I will put it into the hands of your tormentors who said to you, fall prostrate that we may walk on you.

And you made your back like the ground, like a street to be walked on. Awake, awake, Zion. Clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendour. Jerusalem, the holy city.

The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust. Rise up. Sit enthroned, Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck. Daughter Zion, now a captive.

For this is what the Lord says, you were sold for nothing. And without money, you will be redeemed. Now let's turn now in our Bibles to Matthew 26.

[ 2 : 14 ] And we'll read from verse 36 to verse 46. 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.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, my father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will.

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour, he asked Peter. Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. 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.

[ 3 : 23 ] When he came back, he again found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

Rise, let us go. Here comes my betrayer. Amen. This is God's word. So we're going to spend the next three Sundays in the run-up to Easter thinking about the hope that Jesus brings.

So Matthew 26, 27, 28. We're going to go today from the garden, next week to the cross, and then Matthew 28 to think about the empty tomb. And today we're thinking about our hope in the agony of Jesus that we read about.

We know that this past year has been one that for the majority of people has been one of heightened fear of the loss of hope and where our foundations have been shaken.

[ 4 : 36 ] And it might be fair to say that in the lives of some economic recovery will come sooner than mental and emotional recovery. It has been a hard year. We have, as a society, placed our hope in progress and that technology and advancements will lead to life being better and better.

And in a sense, once again, that dream has been shattered. The pandemic has cut right across that. And in fact, we think about globalisation being part of our progress, but that's also a big reason why we have a global pandemic.

And so when our hope is in progress, our hope is being shaken. Many people, we have placed our hope in comfort. We don't really think about eternity.

All I have is now. And what's happening then, if we have no eternal hope beyond, if all that we have is life to enjoy now, then this year may have been profoundly disturbing, as we have found so little that we have been able to enjoy.

And perhaps you may have been reminded, maybe for the first time, of your mortality. As we have experienced collective suffering and loss and restriction, I wonder if for you, as it has for many, it's presented important questions.

[ 5 : 58 ] Questions like, what is life all about, really? What really matters in life? Have you found yourself reflecting and making changes? Maybe you've asked yourself, what happens when we die?

If you have been shaken, and if you're looking for solid answers and solid hope, that's our focus in the run-up to Easter, both our Sunday services and those videos that will be coming out, the hope of Jesus.

And today we think about hope in the suffering of Jesus. C.S. Lewis once said that suffering is God's megaphone. C.S. Lewis.

Perhaps our suffering means we have a greater openness to the reality of God and his truth. Well, may God's truth and may the hope of Jesus speak into our suffering, speak into our fear and our uncertainty today.

So we'll be at three locations over three Sundays. Today, the Garden of Gethsemane. Next week, the cross and then the empty tomb. Today, we look at Jesus' agony in Gethsemane as he enters, as it were, the heart of darkness.

[ 7 : 11 ] The heart of darkness we can scarcely imagine. And one English writer, William Law, says, It's as if the sorrows of a lost soul in hell were opening up in the soul of the Redeemer.

But there is hope for us in this. That because of the agony that Jesus endured as the Saviour, we can find hope in our fear and darkness so that we are able to worship with joy.

So I want to look at three different aspects of this agony of Jesus in the garden. First of all, to think about his emotional life.

In verses 36 to 38, B.B. Warfield wrote a classic study called *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*, where he went to great lengths to demonstrate the extent to which Jesus, the Son of God, took on full humanity and as such was subject to all sinless emotions.

We say sinless because Jesus didn't ever experience the emotion of guilt because of a guilty conscience or because of sin.

[ 8 : 26 ] And Warfield recognises that there are two errors to avoid when we think about the emotional life of Jesus. On the one hand, we can underplay those emotions, and then we can be left with a cold and remote and distant, unsympathetic Jesus.

But on the other hand, we can overstate them to the extent that all we see is the humanity of Jesus, and we neglect the fact that he is also, at one and the same time, God. So we need to have balance.

Well, here in the Garden of Gethsemane, we find Jesus in the depths of grief. Let's look at the language. Verse 38, He said to them, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Verse 37, He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. There is sorrow, this idea of deep grief.

He is troubled. There is deep distress in his heart and mind. He feels overwhelmed. Again, a deep disturbance.

[ 9 : 37 ] Similar to the refrain of Psalm 42 that we'll sing at the end. He feels at the point of death. Here is a sorrow so deep, it almost kills him.

See this in distinction from the presentation we often find in the four Gospels of Jesus as profoundly brave.

Brave as he confronts the forces of evil. Brave as he stands up to opponents and injustice. Brave as he stands up to the point of grandfather.

It seems different, doesn't it? The sorrow that he feels now is so different from that bravery. and consider too maybe you've read stories of those who have been martyred who've been killed for their faith and if you look through church history you find accounts of that and you find some singing praise praying sharing the gospel as they die and it makes us ask the question why is Jesus now overcome with deep sorrow as he approaches his death why is he now so fearful and sorrowful well it's not the simple matter of Jesus being afraid of death what we have is Jesus grief at the kind of death he will endure he will die for sinners as a sacrifice he will become one with sinners and take the death that we are due he will take on his sinless shoulders the responsibility for our human evil so as Michael Green puts it it was the sin bearing that was so terrifying here is Jesus looking ahead and he is anticipating the judgment of God his father falling on him he recognizes that he will feel abandoned by his father because God is holy and Jesus will be considered as if he was unholy as he takes on sin and so the jaws of hell are opening in front of Jesus hell is separation from God and his goodness and that agony almost crushes Jesus what does that reveal and how does that offer us hope well one thing it certainly reveals is a stark reminder as Hebrews 3 says there is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God

Jesus knows the penalty for sin and it causes him deep grief sin matters judgment is real as Jesus feels sorrow to the point of death at taking sin and its punishment let's recognize the urgency for us of being right with God of seeking forgiveness and peace with God through the sacrifice of Jesus we also have here a beautiful picture of Jesus humble service the love of Jesus in becoming one of us he did not need to experience this agony and this fear that was not part of his experience in the glory of heaven it's only as he came to be one of us only in his mission as the savior does he know this agony here we see the nature of God's love revealed in Jesus as Jesus will walk into the deepest darkness so that we might live in the light we also learn here too about the sympathy of Jesus we know don't we how support groups work they work because there is a group of fellow sufferers who are able to say

[14:00] I understand I've been there I know what it feels like and you recognize that whatever we are going through Jesus says that to us Jesus entered all the way into our human experience and our suffering he did that for us to be our sympathetic and loving savior Jesus has suffered indeed beyond our imagination he knew how much he would lose as his father turned away from him Jesus is our sympathetic high priest he both understands our fear and our misery and he took it on himself and as such he can offer us hope and comfort one of the images of in a sense of of redemption and salvation we find in the old testament is that of the kinsman redeemer most famously in the story of Ruth with Boaz the kinsman redeemer a family member who could pay off your debt who could secure your release from slavery

Jesus is fully God and Jesus becomes one with the human family Jesus is the only way of rescue from our guilt our sin our fear of death he has come to be that redeemer that rescuer to pay the price do you see the loving cost of our salvation that it cost the life of Jesus how do we respond may we run to him may we bring our tears to him and may we find eternal hope from him as we see the agony of his emotional life let's move from there to think about the agony of Jesus as he seeks companions in suffering here's another aspect of Jesus true humanity that in deepest needs he sought out friends who would stand with him so in verse 36 we discover that he comes with the remaining disciples by this point Judas has betrayed him and eight are told sit here while I go over there and pray but then in verse 37 he brings his inner three

Peter and James and John to come along with him that they would be close enough to him for prayer and for support and he invites them into his experience he said to them my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death stay here and keep watch with me he shares his agony with them and invites them to support him the gospel writers emphasize that Jesus stands suffers and dies alone and we begin to see it here in the garden as his friends fail him what do we see the friends these three friends they knew Jesus to stress they heard him ask for help they could hear his agonized praying and yet in verse 40 Jesus returned his disciples and found them sleeping verse 41 he asked Peter he said to Peter watch and pray so you will not fall into temptation the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak here does Jesus beginning his descent into his personal hell and he goes there knowing loneliness will experience loss the only one who doesn't deserve it will suffer immensely for us he will walk that road and he will walk it alone

Wendy Alsup wrote a book last year last year called Companions in Suffering and she shares powerfully of her story she writes of divorce of having to reallocate to a different part of the country and of battling with cancer and she observes perhaps we know this to be true in our own experience that suffering has an isolating fact we discover that many friends can't or won't enter in many friends struggle to stay the course as suffering goes for a long time whether that's grief or whether that's long term illness and so Wendy Alsup she talked about the strength for her in having a trusted group of fellow sufferers not that they shared the exact same experience but they knew what pain was and they knew what loss was so they were able to emphasise so that they could share the journey together it gets to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 1

God comes to bring his people comfort so that as we know that grace and that comfort in our life we might bring that grace and comfort to others we have collectively at different periods and to different extents lived with enforced isolation and that is suffering in and of itself isn't it many are having to suffer alone to go through huge things in their life and to go through it alone and so as the Christian church there's always that challenge to us can we be that friend who will stay the course can we be that friend who will offer the word of comfort who will offer the shoulder to cry on and then as we think about the garden of Gethsemane where does that give us hope as we suffer think about this why did Jesus go through his fear his sorrow ultimately his death and why did he do that alone he did that the Bible tells us so that he might befriend us he took sin and judgment and hell for us so that he might show us love and welcome us in with the result that as J.C. Ryle puts it no one need ever say

[ 20 : 40 ] I have no friend to turn to so long as Christ is in heaven do we understand and appreciate that even in our isolation if our faith is in Jesus we have his presence and his power and his peace with and for us do you know the comfort and the hope of Jesus take your tears and your fears and your sadness to him you don't need to suffer alone and remember this too that while Jesus' friends failed him Jesus did not fail them in the garden as ultimate darkness was coming upon Jesus Jesus did not abandon us rather Jesus went into the darkness and he died for us and since that is true we can know that he will not abandon or forsake his friends his followers in our suffering in our darkness cling to him even as you take comfort in the fact that he in his powerful loving hands takes hold on you one last thing to consider about the agony of Jesus and that takes us to his prayer as so often we discover in the gospels

Jesus at crucial moments in his life turns towards his father in prayer and of course if Jesus the sinless son of God who enjoyed perfect fellowship with his father of Jesus felt the need to pray how much more is that true for us three details to notice you see he prays three times the words recorded twice let's read again verse 39 my father if it is possible may this cup be taken from me yet not as I will but as you will three details to notice first of all how does he address God he calls him my father and this is the one place that Matthew in his gospel records this warm address Abba the emphasis here is still on that loving relationship that Jesus son enjoys with God the father and that explains the agony for Jesus Jesus who knew the eternal and unbroken sense of his father's love on the cross that love of the father would be intercepted as he became the sin bearer and all Jesus could feel was the weight of judgment what about his request what does

Jesus pray for if it's possible may this cup be taken from let's think first of all what is the cup takes us back to Isaiah 51 verse 17 it says rise up you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath that's what the cup is the wrath of God against sinful rebellious enemies now Jesus is the only one who doesn't deserve to take that cup but he is willing to drink it and he anticipates drinking it to the dregs and that brings the agony and the sorrow and the grief and so there is that searching request is there any other way for your redeeming purpose to be completed is there any alternative to my becoming sin to my becoming a curse to my being the sacrifice three times he prays and the same answer the same silence there is no other way

Jesus has come to be the saviour and the only way the plan of salvation can be carried out if he takes our place takes our sin and takes our punishment the last detail to see is the will of Jesus or indeed the wills of Jesus verse 39 yet not as I will but as you will there is a mystery here the gospels are very clear the new testament is very clear Jesus is the holy and sinless son of God and Jesus is fully human Jesus could be tempted and here as a human being he wanted to avoid being made sin he wanted to avoid feeling forsaken he knew anticipated how deep and distressing that darkness would be it's a sorrow that almost kills him but what we see again in our loving saviour is that in his human will he wrestles to obey and to fully submit and this is our hope that Jesus prayed not my will

but may your will your eternal will to save sinful broken people be done in the intensity of our temptations we feel it in a limited way because we all too quickly fall but Jesus in the story of Jesus the pressure kept building the devil was doing his worst to derail Jesus from the plan of salvation but he never caved in he is like us and that he can be tempted he is unlike us and he never sinned and he is a worthy saviour for us have you ever wrestled with unanswered prayer with pain and with fear that continues Jesus has Jesus understands come to him see remember embrace his love for you he heard God's no for you so that you could hear God's yes when you come to trust in Jesus and remember too that the agony of this garden undoes the agony of another garden remember at the beginning of the Bible the garden of Eden Adam and Eve they say to

[ 27:19 ] God not your will but mine be done and they reach for the forbidden fruit and sin and misery and death has been the outcome but here to undo all that went wrong in that garden Jesus comes as the true and the better Adam and he prays not my will but yours be done and he reaches for the cup to take the penalty for our rebellion he he becomes he becomes to drink agony in our place so that we might again enjoy friendship with God so that we might have access to our father in prayer that we might know unbreakable love that we might have eternal resurrection hope and Jesus having received that answer verse 45 returned to the disciples and said are you still sleeping and resting look the hour has come the son of man is delivered into the hands of sinners rise let us go here comes my betrayer

Christ walks obediently towards his arrest and towards the cross and that's where we'll be next week so here is hope in the agony of Jesus in the garden that he went through that agony for us and for our salvation he went through that that he might be the companion you need in the suffering you face and remember the praying Lord Jesus and recognize that he prays for his people today and he will always pray for us until we are home in perfect joy and peace and love and life with him rest later Because you