

Jesus Arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane

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[0 : 00] Testament and from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 14. And we'll read from verse 17 to verse 42.

This is describing the events of the night before Jesus was crucified and he had just instituted the Lord's Supper with his disciples.

And we'll pick up the reading at verse 17. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

They were saddened and one by one they said to him, surely not I. It is one of the twelve, he replied, one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man.

It would be better for him if he had not been born. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, Take it, this is my body.

[1 : 12] Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, he said to them. I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. You will all fall away, Jesus told them, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee. Peter declared, even if all fall away, I will not. I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, today, yes, tonight, before the cock crows twice, you yourself will disown me three times.

But Peter insisted emphatically, even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you. And all the others said the same. They went to a place called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray.

He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them. Stay here and keep watch.

[2 : 22] Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him. Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you.

Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. Simon, he said to Peter, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?

Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Once more, he went away and prayed the same thing. And when he came back again, he found them sleeping because their eyes were heavy.

They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, are you still sleeping and resting? Enough. The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Rise. Let us go. Here comes my betray. Very often in life, when we see people accomplishing great things, it can look from a distance like these great achievements are easy.

[3 : 31] And so there's lots of different examples. I think a great example is a musical instrument. When you see somebody who's really accomplished at playing an instrument, it looks so easy.

So you watch somebody play the piano and you think, oh, that looks so easy. Then you go to a piano yourself and it's like, oh, this is so much harder than it looks. Same with a sport. I was actually, there was a church planting conference at St. Columbus yesterday.

I was at the rugby. It was prior arranged. I didn't know there was a church planting conference on. So I was at the rugby. And you watch it. And they make it look so easy.

They ping the ball across the line and they fly it back. It looks so easy. Then you go home and you get the rugby ball and you try it and it's so much harder. Things can look easy from a distance. And, of course, what happens is we look at great achievements and we think, oh, that looks so easy.

It looks effortless for the person. And what we forget is that behind the wonderful playing of music or the great skill in sport lies a huge amount of effort, an enormous amount of practice.

[4 : 41] And they've gone through a great journey to reach that point. So we can look at a great achievement and we can think that looks easy. But, of course, the real story and the whole story is that it's not easy at all.

It's taken a huge amount out of the person in order to reach that point. And so sometimes we have to remember that if we just knew the whole story, we would realize how much was involved in the great achievements of people.

The greatest achievement of all human history is the work of Jesus Christ. And in the Gospels, we have a selection of events recorded for us which present to us key aspects of that work that Jesus undertook.

Although they record Jesus' life, they don't record absolutely everything. So when you're reading the Gospels, it's not like a full biography.

It's actually quite a specific selection of key events in the life of Jesus. And that's for a reason. That's because as we read the Gospels, like the Gospel of Mark before us, their aim is to teach us about Jesus.

[6 : 04] And whenever you read from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, it's always good to ask the question, what is this teaching me about Jesus? Specific events were selected by people like Mark under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to teach us about Jesus.

These events have been selected and they provide key important bits of information. Now, as we come to Mark 14, we are being given certain key bits of information about a crucial moment in the life and work of Jesus.

And to start with, what I want you to do is to imagine that a chunk of this chapter was missing. And the chunk that I have in mind is from halfway through verse 32 to halfway through verse 43.

I want you to imagine that that was just not there. And we'll read the passage as if it wasn't there because it would work. The historical narrative would be fine. It would say, then they went to a place called Gethsemane and Judas, one of the twelve, appeared.

With him was that crowd and with souls and clubs and so on and so on. The historical narrative would flow perfectly, wouldn't it? And you'd still have a perfect grasp of what would happen.

[7 : 19] But if we did that, then in many ways we would have a picture of Jesus as one who is strong, courageous and unfaltering as he faces arrest.

So, in the previous verses, just before verse 32, he said to Peter, you're going to betray me. Jesus gives this warning. And then from verse 43 onwards, Jesus stands there and he takes the arrest and abuse of the soldiers who have come to him.

And you could easily, if that chunk was cut out, you could easily think, well, Jesus is fearless. He's unmoved and he's strong. But of course, that's not the whole story, is it?

And this section between verse 32 and verse 42 is so important because they tell us what it was really like for Jesus.

And they're astonishing verses because they reveal to us not just what Jesus did, but in many ways they reveal how Jesus felt. And it's an incredibly moving insight into the experience of our Lord Jesus.

[8 : 33] And if you ever thought that the cross was an easy thing for Jesus, then these verses are telling you the real story.

Sometimes when we read the Bible, we discover things that just thrill our hearts with joy and that are just amazing in the wonder and peace and beauty that they proclaim to us.

Sometimes reading the Bible is an incredibly joy-inspiring experience. But there's some passages of the Bible that kind of make us stop and think and they're quite moving and quite solemn.

And this is one of them. And that's a good thing as well. It's good to spend time in these passages too. And so we're going to look at this wee section, especially the bits just from verse 32 to verse 36.

And to do it, we're going to just ask three simple questions. We're going to ask, what does this teach us about Jesus? What does this teach us about God the Father? And what does this teach us about ourselves?

[9 : 44] So question number one, what does this teach us about Jesus? We're focusing especially on the verses 32 to 36. They went to a place called Gethsemane and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray.

He took Peter, James and John along with him and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, he said to them. Stay here and keep watch.

Going a little further, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible, the hour might pass from him. Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

These verses give us a profound insight into the personal experience of Jesus Christ as he approached the cross. And in order to examine these verses, I want to do something maybe a wee bit strange.

But I want us just to look at the verbs that appear in verse 33 and verse 34. Because there's seven verbs in that.

[10 : 55] Well, there is seven verbs. I think it's probably more obvious in the original language, but they are there translated into the English as well. And we're going to look at these together because they teach us many things.

So, where's the first verb? Verse number 33, it says, he took Peter, James, and John along with him.

Now, the words took along with him, although they're split up in English, they're actually one big long word in Greek. And so, they're basically a word that means to take to yourself or to take with you.

And so, we have a very simple but beautiful picture here. Jesus, as he goes into the garden, he's bringing three of his closest companions with him.

And so, it's a picture of friendship and companionship as he selects these three to come along. But I think that there's a hint of vulnerability there as well.

[12 : 03] Because Jesus is being very deliberate in what he does. The other disciples are told to wait, as we saw in verse 32.

But he wants these three with him. It's as though Jesus is saying, I don't want to be alone. The second verb is still in verse 33.

It says, he began. Now, that can look really simple. It's the kind of word that you can just whiz through as you're reading. But it's actually really significant.

Because when Jesus went into Gethsemane, there was a change. Began tells us that he wasn't feeling like this before.

And there's a wave of realization that's coming over him. Jesus knew what lay ahead. He's known for a long time that this is the destiny that he has in serving the Father's purpose.

[13 : 04] But as it came closer, he began to feel like he had never felt before. And I think probably all of us can relate to how that feels.

You might know that something is coming. So you're expecting something. Maybe you're expecting a medical procedure. Or maybe you're expecting a new job. Or maybe you're expecting to move house.

Or you're expecting something to happen. And you're aware that it's coming. But when that moment comes, you begin to feel pain or fear or sorrow in a way that you didn't before.

So you can know in your head that something's coming. But it's often only when it arrives that it starts to affect your heart. And as Jesus stepped forward with Peter, James, and John, he was hit with the horror of what lay ahead.

And that reminds us that it really is an absolute uniqueness to Gethsemane. When we read about what happened in this garden, it's a unique event in the experience of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 15] Here there is a whole new depth of feeling for our Savior. Here, as he stepped into that garden, he began to experience something he hadn't felt before.

And what he felt and what he experienced is described in the next two verbs. He began to be deeply distressed and he began to be troubled.

They're both still in verse 33. So verb number three is a verb in Greek, to be greatly distressed. And the word there basically means to be amazed or to be alarmed.

So it's the same word that gets used at the end of Mark's Gospel in chapter 16 when the woman entered the tomb. It says they saw a young man sitting on the right-hand side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed.

Same word. And it conveys a sense of shock, something astounding, something alarming is taking place. It's the woman when they went into the tomb. It was as though they were saying, what is going on here?

[15 : 20] And it's very, very strong language that's being used. It's not just the idea of being upset about something or a wee bit disappointed about something. It's much, much stronger. It's like being hit.

Being hit with an overwhelming sense of realization and alarm. Jesus is being confronted by something new, by something shocking.

He began to be alarmed, to be greatly distressed. The fourth verb is straight after. He began also to be troubled.

And this is still very, very strong language. Sometimes maybe in English we're not so good at really getting across the strength of language. This word, it speaks of deep, deep distress.

And I was looking up what the word, you can get lots of different dictionaries that tell you what these words mean. And I looked up one, and it was really interesting because it said that this word is often used to convey the idea of being away from home.

[16 : 24] Being separated from home. Longing to be there, but not being there. And I think that's very, very moving, and I'm sure that's something that we can relate to.

And it's pointing us to the sense of isolation that Jesus was beginning to feel. A sense of being alone. That's no wonder he wanted his three friends to come with him.

And sometimes these things can hit you incredibly hard. I remember as a young child, I think in about P6 or P7, I went on a school trip, and I thought, this is going to be brilliant.

And I'm going to love this school trip, and we were going to do loads and loads of fun stuff. And we went to this outdoor center on the far side of the Isle of Lewis, in a place called Valthos. And we thought, this will be great.

And all day long I loved it, had a great time. We went to the beach, it was wonderful. And then at night I was hit by this overwhelming feeling that I just wanted to go home.

[17 : 29] And it was horrible. It was a different feeling to anything else. It was in a way something that I couldn't in any way control. It was just like a wave of discomfort that came over me.

And maybe you felt like that yourself. As Jesus stepped further into this garden, he began to be deeply, deeply troubled. He was being hit with emotional anguish like never before.

The next verb is really interesting. It's halfway through verse 34. It says, he said. And here we see a remarkable thing.

The fact that Jesus opened up to his disciples. All of this was going on inside him. But he didn't hide that weakness and that struggle.

So all of that, being deeply distressed, being troubled, all of that's internal. And yet Jesus, instead of hiding that like we often do, instead of trying to conceal his weakness, he opened up to his disciples and told them what was going on.

[18 : 35] And he said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. And the word that's used for overwhelmed with sorrow is a really interesting word as well.

Because it literally means to be surrounded by grief or encompassed by grief. In other words, it's a bit like there's a perimeter of grief all around Jesus.

The word speaks in that kind of perimeter kind of way. And if you think about that just logically, if there's a perimeter of something around you, then you can't get away from it.

Wherever you turn, it's there. And so it's no wonder that Jesus says, my soul is sorrowful even to the point of death.

Literally that, to the point of death, literally it says as far as death. There's sorrow all around Jesus and it's taking him to the brink of survival. It's a burden that is life-threatening.

[19 : 43] And so the language here is really, really intense. Got five verbs there. Speaking of Jesus' sense of isolation, the fact that he's overwhelmed, he's sorrowful, he's alarmed, he's surrounded by anguish, so it's no surprise what the next verb is.

Verse 35. He fell. Going a little further, he fell. We can so easily think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, just sort of gently walking ahead of the disciples and calmly moving into a little space on his own and serenely getting down onto his knees and praying.

That's the image that I have often put into my head, but I don't think it was like that at all. Because Jesus fell to the ground. And we can picture him slumping to his knees and putting his face down to the earth.

He didn't get very far away from the disciples. Luke's record tells us that he was just a stone's throw away and there he fell. It's an incredibly moving description.

It's like the burden on Jesus has become so heavy that he's falling under the weight of it. I'm sure you'll remember that way back at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist saw him and said, Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[21 : 22] That word, takes away, basically means the same as to carry away. The same word means the same thing. Jesus, as he goes to the cross, is carrying our sin.

He's carrying your sin, carrying the sins of all his people. You can ask yourself, what's it like to carry sin? What is that burden like for Jesus?

Well, Gethsemane is telling us what that is really like. Gethsemane is telling us just how heavy it really is. And Jesus crumbles under the weight of it.

And so the verbs are presenting a very vivid picture of burden and pressure and anguish in the experience of Jesus. It's as though he is being crushed. He's got nothing left.

But there's one more verb that's really, really important. He fell to the ground and he prayed.

[22 : 28] And that's a beautiful picture. And a great lesson to us that no matter how heavy the burden is, no matter how overwhelmed we feel, we can pray.

And this is maybe being a little bit overly literal in my interpretation, but you can just bear with me for a minute. Because if you think about it, we said that there's a perimeter of grief all around Jesus.

And just at a basic logical level, if there's a perimeter around you, there's only one way you can go. And that's up. And in many ways for Jesus, the only way he could go was to upward to God in prayer.

And so although he slumps to the ground, in doing so, he prays. And look at what he says in his prayer in verse 36.

Abba, Father, he said, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will. He cries out to his father.

[23 : 35] He uses that beautiful word, Abba, which is just the Aramaic term for my father. Really not that different to the expression that we would use, dad, something like that. Just that personal term for a child speaking to their father.

And we have to remember that here he is experiencing anguish like never before. He feels isolated. He feels far from home. There's grief at every turn. He can't bear to be alone.

And he prays, Abba, my father. And if ever a son needed a father, it was now.

And here is where we get a bit of insight into the sheer desperation of what the cross means for Jesus. Because the sorrow that Jesus felt, I don't think was primarily due to the pain that he was going to suffer.

Or the abuse that he was going to get. Or even the betrayal that he would experience from his friend. Or even the reality of physical death.

[24 : 43] I think above all else, Christ's agony came from the fact that going to the cross meant separation from his father. Jesus on the cross uses the words that we sang from Psalm 22 to express what's happened.

That sense of being forsaken by his father as he carries and bears the punishment of sin.

And the thought of that for Jesus is utterly overwhelming. And the only one who he can go to for help is his father. But that means that Jesus is hanging on to the very thing that he's about to lose.

It's like Jesus is saying to his father, I need you because I'm going to lose you. It's a desperate situation. And it's no wonder that his sweat was like drops of blood.

And no wonder that he asked that his cup might be removed from him. And the words of Jesus' prayer are so significant. Jesus asks that this cup would be removed from him.

[25 : 55] He wishes that in any way possible he would not have to face this separation from his father. And for the wrath of God to be poured out upon him. And that tells you and me just how much Jesus had to go through.

And it's possibly easy to think it would have been better if Jesus hadn't prayed that prayer. And Jesus hadn't sought a way out of the cross. But is it true that it would be better if Jesus hadn't sought a way out of the cross?

I don't think it is. Because without this prayer I don't think we'd ever really realize how much Jesus endured for us.

So, was the cross easy for Jesus? Well, no. These verses tell us what it was really like.

Jesus was at his very limit when he carried our sins. And so these seven verbs are very helpful, very powerful, very moving. Because they tell us the real story of how Jesus felt.

[27 : 04] But these verses are also telling us something about God the Father as well. And we'll look just briefly at that. And the last point is very brief. So, we won't be as long as the first one.

What does this teach us about God the Father? Well, these verses, particularly verse 36, the prayer of Jesus, brings out before us a very interesting contrast between what God can do and what God wants to do.

Look at it again. Read it again. It says, Abba Father, he said, Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will.

So, Jesus starts by saying, All things are possible for you. So, here in many ways, he's referring to what God is capable of. But that's not simply to present an encouragement statement that sometimes we see that great statement, All things are possible.

And it's kind of like a, yes, God can do it kind of encouragement, which is a great thing. But I don't think that's what Jesus is doing in this sense. I think that when Jesus says, All things are possible for you, I think he is saying, I know that you can remove this cup.

[28 : 24] And I think that's incredibly important because the word possible, all things are possible, is related to the word power. It's speaking of the idea of capability. And I want us to ask the question, what is possible and what is impossible for God in this verse?

Okay? So, you're looking at that verse and you think, okay, what's impossible? What's possible? Well, it's impossible for God not to punish sin.

Because God is constrained to punish sin. His holiness and his righteousness require that. That's what makes him God. That's what makes him righteous. He must be true to his nature and he would cease to be God if he did not punish sin.

It's impossible for God not to punish sin. But he is not constrained as to whom that punishment falls upon.

Because notice, Jesus doesn't say, remove this cup as though it would just disappear. Because Jesus knows it can't just disappear. He says, remove this cup.

[29 : 35] What does it say? Look in the verse. From me. The cup of God's wrath has to be poured out. But it doesn't have to be poured out on Jesus.

It could have been poured out on the ones who actually provoked God's wrath in the first place. Which is us.

And Jesus knows that. And so this verse tells of the reality of the possibility of God punishing sinners instead of his son.

We must never forget that. God is not constrained by us. God does not depend on us. God cannot say to Jesus, I'm being forced against my will because of the power that the human race has over me.

This human race has got me constrained so I have to punish you. God cannot say that. And we cannot say to God, you must punish your son instead of us. Verse 36 is telling us it was possible for God not to do this.

[30 : 38] God had the capability to remove the cup from Jesus, but he didn't. Why didn't he? Because of his will.

So in other words, God did not pour out his wrath on his son because he had no choice. He did it because it was his choice.

And here's where we see the amazing contrast in verse 36 between God's capability and God's will. And Jesus is aware of that.

That's why he prays these words of beautiful obedience and submission. He says, yet not what I will, but what you will. Jesus knows the most important thing is not what God can do, but what God wants to do.

And that tells you something absolutely amazing about God the Father. He has accomplished this amazing work of atonement. He's put together a perfect plan from the very beginning, which has been executed across the ages of redemptive history, that great history of salvation.

[31 : 44] He's pieced everything together in the Old Testament, pointing towards his ultimate goal. When the time came, he sent his son. And in the miracle of the incarnation, God became man.

In obedience to the Father, Jesus lived his life in perfect conformity to the will of God and the law of God. And in obedience, he went to the cross, he died, and on the third day, he was raised by God.

Now he's exalted at the right hand of the Father. It's an amazing, amazing accomplishment. It shows incredible generosity. It's an astounding sacrifice. As we say, it is amazing grace.

But over all of this, over all of that great theology, lies an amazing truth. God didn't do it because he had to.

He did it because he wanted to. Now that's remarkable because you would think that we would have to persuade God to help us.

[32 : 47] You think of the fact that humanity was created by God, created to serve him, created to bear his image. And we've pushed God away and we've rebelled against him. And you would think that in our realization of the mistake that we've made, we would be trying and trying and trying to persuade God to help us.

And that we would need to convince him that for some reason, he should not feed us as our sins deserve, but he should actually show us kindness. You would think that we would have to persuade God to help us.

But that is not how it is. You don't need to persuade God to help you. You don't need to persuade God to love you.

Because he already does. And he has always wanted to save you. And here we see the amazing commitment that God has to save his people.

And as a result, Jesus Christ is willing to put his own anguish to one side. And he's able to willingly submit to his Father. And it's really interesting because I think that we are deliberately given an indication that God very clearly answered Jesus' prayer.

[33 : 58] We have this prayer in verse 36. Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.

And you see in the verse before that he said he prayed that the hour might pass from him. I think we're given an indication later on in verse 41 that God answered his prayer.

Because he prayed that the hour would pass. And yet in verse 41, and he stands up, he comes to his disciples and he says, The hour has come. And he has a renewed sense of realization that this is what God wants.

And for that reason, he's completely willing to obey. So we learn a lot about Jesus in this passage. We learn a lot about God the Father.

But last of all, and very briefly, what does it tell us about us? We've seen the real story about the depth of Jesus' anguish. We've seen the incredible truth of just how all of this was what God wanted.

[35 : 01] But what do we learn about ourselves? What has this got to do with you or me? Well, the truth is, we are the silent party in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Because yes, these verses are an insight into the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. They're an insight into the will and purposes of God.

But you are in this garden as well. Because when God the Father heard his son pray this prayer, he was being faced with the question of what he wanted.

And I want you just to use the eye of your imagination for a moment. We read of Jesus praying this prayer.

I want you just to imagine God the Father hearing that prayer. And looking on and seeing the agony that Jesus was in.

[36 : 00] Imagine that you were there watching. And imagine that you could just pause at that moment. You know the way we're watching films, we press pause. Imagine you could just press pause right now.

God sees Jesus slumped in the ground. God the Father hears his own son's desperate prayer. Imagine that as you press pause, you could go up to God the Father and say, is this really what you want?

And God looks into the garden. God looks at his son. God sees Judas and the soldier approaching from a distance.

God the Father looks over at Golgotha. God sees Jesus. God sees you. God sees you. God sees you. And then he thinks about you. And he says, yes.

This is what I want. Because all of this took place so that you could be saved. All of this took place so that these sleepy disciples could be saved.

[37 : 15] All of this took place so that the message of salvation can be proclaimed to every person in the world. all of this took place so that you can be God's precious child.

You are in Gethsemane because you're the reason for Gethsemane. And so these verses are telling you the whole story. They're telling you the whole story of how hard it was for Jesus.

But they're telling you the whole story of how much God wants you. And I don't have the words to describe how amazing that is.

When you read the passage in the Garden of Gethsemane, you have to know that God wanted this because God wants you. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray.