

The Dark Hour of Gethsemene

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2020

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

[0 : 00] Let us begin our service by singing to God's praise from Psalm 40, reading at verse 6.

No sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire. Mine ears thou bored, sin offering thou, and burnt it's not required.

Then to the Lord these were my words, I come, behold, and see. Within the volume of the book it written is of me. To do thy will I take delight, O thou my God that art.

Yea, that most holy law of thine I have within my heart. Within the congregation great I righteousness did preach. Lo, thou dost know, O Lord, that I refrained not my speech.

I never did within my heart conceal thy righteousness. I thy salvation have declared and shown thy faithfulness.

[1 : 08] Thy kindness which most loving is concealed have not I, nor from the congregation great have hid thy verity.

And so on. These verses to God's praise. From verse 6 of Psalm 40.

No sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire. O sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire.

O sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire. My nearer's thy voice shall not be found. O sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire.

O sacrifice nor offering didst thou at all desire. Then to the Lord these were my words, whose NRS give us to everyone.

[2 : 18] And my heart I can behold and see Within the heart of the world Come back the prayers of me To do thy will, thy take delight O thou, thy God, the dark In a tall, tall, tall, tall O thou, thy God, within thy heart

Within the congregation gate I rise and stand with me No matter the soul, O Lord O thou, thy every faith And on thy feet I never give within my heart Conceive my children I, thy son, may I

Be there and show Thy faithful rest Thy kindness Christ most loving is Conceive it Come, O thy Come, O thy Nor come the Come, the Come, the Come, the Come, the Come, the Come, the Come, the God Let us call on the name of God in prayer Eternal Eternal And ever-blessed God As we continue before you in prayer

We would seek your face And your guiding hand upon us As we solicit your help That we would ask for the things that we ought to ask for And that you would keep us from asking amiss For often we may well be in that very situation When we should be seeking from your hand something completely different to that which we come and desire in your presence No matter how heartfelt, no matter how earnest, no matter how focused we are on bringing our concerns before you You are a wise God We give thanks that you are a God of mercy And yet we know that we should seek your help in order that when we come seeking from you what is for our good

That we would ask as we are led by your spirit for the things that you see that are most appropriate for us And to that end we would ask that the eyes of our understanding be opened Even as we approach our throne of grace We bless you that you are a God who is high and lifted up And that is something that means to us that you are far removed from us In the sense in which we think of you as a God to whom we come and to whom we speak We would be dumbfounded or struck by your presence if it were fully realised Even though we believe that we are in your presence Even though we believe that we are in your presence

[7 : 40] We know from your word that there are occasions recorded where the saints of old came And they were in awe of the God that you are A God who is an all-consuming fire A God who is surrounded by the myriad host of angels And a God who sits between the cherubims And we give thanks that the truth declares to us something of that glory We pray that the day would come when that glory would be revealed even in this world We know that you have revealed it in the passion of your Son Who is the one through whom you are revealed And that is something that we delight in knowing

That he did come into the world And that he presented to us through the ministration of his own spoken word The truth concerning his heavenly Father And we give thanks that those who heard from him the truth concerning who you are That they were in awe of the truth as it is spoken We give thanks that we have it in your word And that we can read it and reflect upon it And we would pray that even today as many people are gathered throughout the world Around your word In their own homes and in places appointed for their gatherings That they would know the blessing of the Most High God upon their hearts and upon their minds And that they would be edified through the truth

For your word is truth We pray that you would bless the households of faith That you would bless those who are within their homes Perhaps sitting by their fireside Alone And perhaps overcome by the thought of their aloneness May that thought be brought captive to the truth That is That is That is That is Declaring to us The The majesty That belongs to the God who is Omnipresent Just as they sit before A throne of grace in their own home So do they gather with others Who are in a like situation And collectively Collectively they are many But they are not limited to the solitary individuals who meet like that There are families who meet

There are households who meet There are congregations that meet in villages, in towns, in cities And cities Not only throughout our nation But throughout the world We give thanks for that And may we have A measure of appreciation for what that means No matter how we decry The backslidden condition of the church here in this nation No matter how we decry the The secularization of our society These things are ever the same There has never been an occasion in this world's history Where the God of Heaven has been given the place That you are worthy of receiving For we are wavered and negligent and forgetful

And that has been seen throughout the centuries And we give thanks that nevertheless You have sustained a witness to yourself Even that which is considered by you The little flock that bears your name And it has ever been thus So we pray for your people And ask your blessing to be their portion today Remembering any amongst us who may be unwell We pray for those confined to their homes Those who are under your hand in sickness Whether it is in hospital or care homes Even in hospices where they are under sentence of death As far as a man can see We give thanks that your people being numbered Amongst those you have promised to take to yourself

[12 : 51] That they will not suffer loss because of their experience of death or dying in the world That they will enter into the fullness of the expression of life without end As they are in Christ We remember before you this world At this time and pray for those who are suffering because of Covid And we pray that you would remember the governments and the circumstances that prevail amongst us at this time And we pray for your blessing and the world We pray for your blessing upon the nations of the earth With all the different situations that we find within the world We pray for your blessing upon the nations of the earth Grant to us your healing hand to be upon us And may the enlightenment that comes from knowing God be given to us, notwithstanding the unwillingness there is to yield to such a God.

We pray for your blessing upon the nations of the earth, with all the different situations that we find within the world. Lord, grant to us your healing hand to be upon us. Continue with us, watching over us this day, cleansing from sin. In Jesus' precious name we would ask it. Amen.

We are going to read from the scriptures of the New Testament. And we are reading from the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Mark.

And we can read from chapter 14 and at verse 12. On the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, Jesus' disciples said unto him, Where will you that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?

And he senteth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him.

[14 : 56] Whatsoever he shall go in, say ye to the good man of the house, the master saith, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?

And he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared, there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them, and they made ready the Passover.

And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat unto thee, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him, One by one is a die, and another said is a die. And he answered and said unto them, One of the twelve that dipped with me in the dish.

The Son of Man indeed goeth, as it is written of him. But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. Good were it for that man if he had never been born.

[16 : 13] And as they did eat, Jesus took bread and blessed and break it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it.

And he said unto them, This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

But after that I am risen. I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

[17 : 32] But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.

Likewise also said they all. And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, Sit ye here while I shall pray.

And he taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.

Tarry ye here and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed, that if it were possible the old might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee.

Take away this cup from me. Nevertheless, not that I will, but what thou wilt. And he cometh, and findeth him sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou?

[18 : 42] Couldst not thou watch one hour? Watch ye, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again. For their eyes were heavy, neither wist thee what to answer him.

And he cometh a third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take a rest to do sin of. The hour is come, behold, a son of man is betrayed.

Into the hands of sinners, rise up, let us go. Lo, he that betrayeth me, is at hand. And so on.

May the Lord add his blessing to a reading of his word, and to his name be the praise. I want us to turn now to the passage that we have read there.

[19 : 48] The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Mark, chapter 14. And reading, looking again at verses 32 to 41, which is where we have the account of Jesus and the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane.

When I went to school as a boy, one of the daily parts of the school curriculum was religious instruction.

We would be expected to recite the Lord's Prayer. And sometimes we would have to learn passages from the Bible or shorter catechism.

And sometimes there would be a Bible story. And one of our teachers, Miss Maclean, often spoke about her favourite disciple, the Apostle Peter.

And while much of what we were taught is long forgotten, I remember the solemnity with which she treated the Garden of Gethsemane, because of the wrestlings of the Lord in that place.

[21 : 08] It is truly remarkable that we are given an account of what took place there, if for no other reason than at this impressed upon us, the sheer horror that filled the Lord's heart as he anticipated the cross.

On Thursday evenings we are looking at the prayer recorded for us in John 17. which is itself a most certain access to the intimacy that the Lord Jesus enjoyed with his Heavenly Father.

Here, however, there is a unique darkness in the dialogue that he engages in with the heavens. Jesus' prayer is indeed a solemn event or a solemn occasion, but Gethsemane introduces us to something that is barely conceivable by the finite mind.

There are three things we can think of very briefly. We have a place of prayer. We have the struggle of prayer.

And we have the burden of prayer. The place of prayer. The place itself is described to us by name.

[22 : 30] In verse 32 it is a place named Gethsemane. It is also identified by name by Matthew. It is, we are told, by John located beyond the brook Ketron.

Again by John, a place familiar to the Lord and his disciples, because he took them there to pray. We are told that Judas knew the place, because doubtless he would have been with them there.

Just think of that. A prayer meeting with the Lord present. And yet we know it meant so little to him. It was a worthless exercise, as his willingness to betray him shows.

Some preachers reckon that it was on the Mount of Folliffs, while others say it lay beyond, just outside the gates of the city. The actual name, which means oil press, is suggestive of it being on the Mount itself.

But one thing is certain. This place was ordained by the Lord. A place prophesied by Scripture. A place, according to Hugh Martin, that he went to, to ward, willingly, to do the will of his Heavenly Father.

[23 : 56] And something which he delighted in doing. A garden may suggest many things to us, but it was at night, and it was in the shadow of Calvary.

He had company, but they were all equipped to share his burden. Peter, James and John were invited to be with him, apart from the rest.

Sit here, he says to the disciples, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him the three aforementioned. What did they think then?

Did they think it was something of significance that was going to take place by the reminder of a previous occasion when, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the glory of that revelation, was imprinted upon their memories?

Jesus almost immediately commences to pray in that place and asks them to sit there a while, while he does.

[25 : 05] What do we make of this prayer? The disciples had received instruction in prayer at their own request. They were present on numerous occasions when Jesus prayed.

But I doubt if this was like any of these times. It's hard for us to understand where Jesus was emotionally and even spiritually at this moment.

He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Sore, amazed and very heavy. Jesus knew how this would appear to the disciples.

He counsels them, Pray that you enter not into temptation. Principal Donald MacLeod writes about the Lord. The gradually dawning realisation of what was involved in his messianic destiny finally becomes almost total clarity and the burden of knowledge and foreboding suddenly becomes overwhelming.

The last thing we should be, as we study the words of description, is of the opinion that because this was the Lord, that what was before him left him unmoved.

[26 : 30] Indeed, the exact opposite is true. It is because he is the Lord that what lies before him fills him with dread. As Donald MacLeod goes on to say, In Gethsemane, Jesus knew that he was face to face with the unconditionally holy.

That absolutely overwhelming might that condones nothing, cannot look on impurity and cannot be diverted from its purpose.

How he prays is an indication to us of the solemn occasion, his posture, and the content of the prayer.

He prostrates himself on the ground and his words are as if they are torn from his very soul. My soul, he says, is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.

He was not prone to exaggeration. Jesus is at prayer, and his prayer is one that has never been duplicated, notwithstanding the intensity of grief that any may have endured, because always there will be the element of the unknown, and with the unknown even the vague hope that relief will come.

[27 : 53] Jesus had the perfect insight of the Messiah, knowing that for this hour he was in the world, and the perfect vision of a God intent on dealing with the sins of the world, even when born by his Son.

According to Professor Finlison, there appears to be a progressive deterioration in his condition, which was the result of a realisation, in ever deepening consciousness, what it was to have a world's sin laid to his charge.

If we focus for a moment on the disciples, Jesus separated out, first of all, the three from the remaining eight, and yet, these favoured three he finds asleep, not once or twice.

The darkness of the hour, as well as the oppressive nature of the spiritual darkness, according to Finlison, Jesus willed that there should be distance between them and him, between them and the place of his agony, but they made the distance greater by falling asleep.

We speak of the prayer of John 17 being holy ground. More so this, we cannot see what Jesus saw, but we are in awe of the effect it had upon him.

[29 : 20] Let us look briefly at the burden of his prayer. What is Jesus praying for? He prayed that if it were possible, the hour would pass from him.

Again he prays to the Father, take away this cup from me. At that moment, what the hour contained, as well as the cup, was before his eyes, and it filled his heart with horror.

We do well to dwell on this if we are of the habit of making light of our sins. And who of us is not guilty of that very thing?

Jesus was approaching the place where he was facing the awful reality of God's just condemnation. We are taught every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God, not just in aggregate, but any individual sin, because God is a holy God.

We are often comparing ourselves to others and making, willing at times to make excuse for our sins or acknowledge our sins but with the caveat at least they are not as bad as the sins of others.

[30 : 43] What does the Apostle James write? Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. Where does that leave you?

We should be of the same mind as the Lord himself who knew the greatness of God and the offence that sin caused to so great a God, however small.

I must emphasise this because it is no small sin. Jesus the Lord is dealing with the sins of the Lord's elect.

The Divines emphasise the fear that filled the heart of the Lord as he faced such a prospect, but insists that the existence of fear does not in any way undermine the quality of the obedience.

He was obedient unto death, even the cursed death of the cross. Donald MacLeod goes so far as to say there is dread and bewilderment and awe and self-doubt and fear.

[31 : 54] Scripture says who in the days of his flesh when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death and was heard in that he feared.

The Puritan John Owen interprets these words in part as indicating that he was wholly pressed by an agony that is a strong and vehement conflict of mind in and about things dreadful and terrible.

He prayed more earnestly with more vehement intense tension of mind, body and spirit, another token of that wonderful conflict wherein he was engaged which no heart can conceive nor tongue express.

Similarly, a few Martin adds, did he not speak as one whose faith was shaken, as one whose fear was awakened? As one whose fear was awakened, yes, but not as one whose faith was shaken.

Why? For in the very agony of his sorrow, when he groaned in spirit, he groaned in the spirit of the sun crying, Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass.

[33 : 14] Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done. His will may tremble because he trembles, but it will never yield because it perfectly conforms to the will of the Father who sent him.

We pray whatever we pray for. Christ Jesus prayed for the glory of his Father, for the redemption of his people.

Yes, he shuddered as he gazed upon the cost to him, but he could not shun it. The disciples could not endure the hour. Brave Peter, who promised to die with him, slept.

Do you condemn Peter? If you do, then I can only imagine that your life of prayer is constantly earnest and never distracted. I find that so difficult to believe because we are easily distracted.

Remember, Jesus had a sharp focus. Isaiah said of him, and the Lord laid upon him the iniquity of us all, and he could not forget that fact, even in the intensity of his wrestlings.

[34 : 31] Praise be to God that he persevered. We know that the scripture here reminds us of this dark old. It tells us about this awful, awful night, a dark night of the soul, as he looked upon what was in the cup, and yet while he spoke with his father concerning it, he still went forward to that cross on our behalf.

We give thanks that the scripture records for us such wrestlings, and reminds us that the one who had to endure such persevered to the end.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us to believe your word concerning your son, that he was indeed someone who knew what was in the cup, and he drank of it to the last bitter dregs.

We give thanks that your people look to such an occasion as this with awe and wonder, but are thankful that it is there for them, to bolster their faith, and to encourage them, to persevere even in prayer.

Continue with us, we ask, cleansing from sin and now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always.

[36 : 11] Amen. Amen.