

# The Prayer in the Garden

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew 26, and from verse 36 to 46, Gethsemane. On a hill overlooking the city of Jerusalem lies an olive grove called Gethsemane.

Scientists have established that three of the trees in this olive grove are nearly 1,000 years old. And yet, a further 1,000 years before these particular trees were but seedlings in the ground, Gethsemane was still populated by olive trees, no doubt genetic ancestors of the trees growing there today.

The name Gethsemane means oil press, where oil was squeezed from the olives growing on the trees. Yes, residents of Jerusalem would enjoy olive oil with their meals, perhaps also with some basil produced from Gethsemane's olive trees.

And so a Jewish father would say to his children, here, dip your bread into this olive oil. It is the best olive oil in all Jerusalem. But on this hill just outside Jerusalem, famous for its olive oil, a far greater was being crushed than any fruit.

Jesus Christ himself, the one and only Son of God, was squeezed tight and made ready to drink the cup of God's judgment against our sin.

[ 1 : 38 ] On this hill just outside Jerusalem, famous for its olive oil, a greater was being poured out, and greater good was bestowed by his suffering and death than any oil.

Gethsemane may have been known by the residents of Jerusalem for its olive trees, but it's better known by Christians today for what Jesus experienced there.

Here in Matthew 26, 36 through 46, we learn four things about this Gethsemane experience. Each of which gives us powerful insights into the Jesus who in just a few short hours from this point will shed his blood on the cross and give up his life for us.

Grief and ground, company and call, surrender and suffering, betrayal and bravery. Nearly 150 years ago now, the great American theologian B.B. Warfield wrote a seminal article entitled The Emotional Life of Jesus.

You can look it up on the internet and you'll find it. The Emotional Life of Jesus. It is here in Gethsemane. The heart of our gracious Lord is revealed to us and our salvation is secured.

[ 3 : 10 ] First of all then, we have grief and ground. Grief and ground. The prophet Isaiah tells us of Jesus that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Never did the sorrow and grief of Jesus darken the scene of human history more than they do at Gethsemane. Many of you, I'm sure, will have visited the ancient battlefield of Culloden just outside Inverness where thousands of our ancestors were killed and are buried today.

There is an eerie silence about Culloden. Such grief and pain was experienced here that it would seem most terribly out of place to laugh or joke at the fate of the Highlanders.

But Gethsemane, all the more. It's here that we read Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. Having left the upper room, made now his way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus takes with him Peter, James and John to Gethsemane's garden. And as he walks his way through these olive trees, his closest friends can see an obvious change in Jesus' demeanor.

[ 4 : 33 ] He begins to be sorrowful and troubled. This word sorrow is used in our Bibles. It's translated variously throughout the whole Bible.

It's translated in some places as hurt. Hurt. Paul sometimes wrote things to churches which hurt them because he was confronting immorality among them.

And so here in Matthew 26, we find the source of all heavenly joy beginning to express feelings of hurt. Sometimes also this word is translated as grief.

For example, it's used to describe the grief of someone whose loved one has died. A few emotions are as painful as grief. It gnaws upon every faculty of your knowing and thinking and doing.

Just think about that for a second. The Lord of life grieving in the garden. In a way he had never done before.

[ 5 : 41 ] As Jesus made his way into Gethsemane, he did so hurt and grieving, deeply sorrowful. But then we read that he also began to be, as our versions call it, troubled.

Or as the older versions, which you might have at hand, would call deeply distressed. It's a Greek word which comes very close to what we might call anxiety.

Here is the Lord of heavenly peace and heavenly joy. Here he is, he's drawing apart in this picturesque garden of olives. And he's hurt. And he's grieving.

And even worse, he is anxious. How great the task which must lie before him if such a one as he could express himself in such a way.

Many years ago, someone criticized Jesus on the basis that many men, being confronted with their own executions, have faced them with greater courage than Jesus ever did.

[ 6 : 56 ] They met their doom with a defiant smile, not with sorrow, not with grief, and not with anxiety. The answer to such criticism, of course, is never was a man faced with the death Jesus had to die.

A death not merely physically painful, but spiritually tortuous. He would go from this garden outside Jerusalem to a hill outside the other part of Jerusalem, where he would there be crushed under the condemnation of the sins of the whole world.

He was headed from this hill into hell. No wonder then the sorrow and the grief and the anxiety, for no man has ever faced such a death as Jesus died.

His mind and heart are breaking under the strain of what lies before him. And having gone a little further into the garden, but not so far that the three disciples couldn't hear him or see him.

We read, he fell with his face to the ground. The grief of all he had to endure drove him under its great weight. He tasted the dirt of the ground as the weight of what he would have to endure drove his shoulders downward in trouble and sorrow.

[ 8 : 22 ] The son of God, who in Isaiah 6 is pictured as high and lifted up, exalted above the heavens, is now lying face down and who knows, trembling with anxiety and sorrow.

Such a contrast between the Christ of the transfiguration and the Christ of Gethsemane, the same Christ, glorified then, humiliated now.

Many brave or drunk men have walked confidently to the gallows to be hanged. They have even walked with a swagger in their step and with great bravado laughed at the executioners.

But not Jesus. He is filled with grief and his face is driven into the dirt. See how low the son of God was willing to go in order to save you from your sins.

How being in very nature God yet he emptied himself and made himself nothing for you. Does this not at least fill us with exceeding praise for the exceedingly great grace of God toward us?

[ 9 : 54 ] Secondly, we have in our passage company and call. Company and call. these three men, Peter, James, and John were Jesus' closest friends.

He had his 12 disciples. He loved them all dearly. But for these three, Peter, James, and John, he deserved a special place in his heart. They had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration.

They had seen him transformed into glory. They had seen the moment of his great exaltation when together with Moses and Elijah, he appeared in majesty and his face was shining like the sun.

Now he takes them with him in his hour of greatest humiliation where alone he will fall with his face to the ground and he'll be contorted in sorrow and grief.

We can speculate as to why he took them with him but I rather think it all boils down to this. He wanted them there. He wanted them there.

[ 11 : 04 ] His heart was shaking within him at the great weight of what lay before him and he wanted the companionship of his closest friends. He needed to know that though he was going to go through this experience alone, there were others who would support him and encourage him and so while he prays they'll watch.

You know, there are certain of my friends I have never seen vulnerable, weak or sorrowful. It's not something which men in our society so easily expose to one another.

we like to pretend that we are strong and that we have it all together but you know, real friends don't just laugh together.

They cry together. They weep and they grieve together. They sorrow together. If you are never willing to expose your heart to another person at this level then be sure your friendships are no

friendships at all.

Here we have a Jesus who walked on water and by the power of his word cast forth demons and rebuked the armies of hell but now he's sorrowing and grieving and he needs his friends around him.

[12:30] Far from being the strong and silent type as we may call it, Jesus was a real man in this. He shared the highs and he shared the lows of his life with his friends and he gave them unrestricted access into his mind and his heart and his emotions.

For those of us who perhaps call ourselves alpha males, this is what true masculinity consists in. Jesus taking his three closest friends into the garden with him that they may be with him in his grief. And he calls upon them to keep watch.

Keep your eyes open. Carefully watch out for all potential threats. But more than anything else, I would suggest he's calling upon them to watch over him.

And that watch is what we'll later discover in verse 41, is the watch of prayer. Watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation. just like when Israel was at war and Moses held the staff up in his arms, supported on one side by Aaron and the other side by her.

[13:49] So Jesus calls upon his disciples to hold up his arms in prayer, to call upon God to strengthen his Messiah against all that would come against him.

what an opportunity for these three men, an opportunity like no other, to pray for Jesus. The opposite is always the case, but not here.

He is so weakened by sorrow and by the grief and the weight of sin that he calls upon his disciples, pray for me, bear up my arms in prayer, even as I fall to the ground.

And yet such was their exhaustion that though their spirits were willing, their bodies were weak and they fell asleep. They should be watching and praying, but they're sleeping. I don't detect, maybe you do, annoyance or even irritation in Jesus' voice when he speaks to them.

Understanding perhaps, pity maybe, but not anger, not annoyance, just a sober recognition of the limitations of his three closest friends.

[15:04] They're sleeping while they should be praying. What Jesus did by taking Peter, James and John with him into the garden shows just how great the pressure he was under.

A pressure he was under because he is soon to bear the sin of the world onto the cross and die for us there. By calling upon them to watch and pray, Jesus is asking for their help.

But eventually, you know, the result is the same as every other result. The strength of great men fail people.

And they cannot, through their sin and weakness, walk the extra mile with Jesus. Only he, Jesus, is going to win through to Gethsemane and then to Golgotha.

Only he will die to take our sins away. Company and call. Third, we have surrender and suffering.

[16:14] Surrender and suffering. We know that all scripture is inspired, but there are certain passages of scripture which force us to our knees in reverence, to take off our shoes, for this is holy ground.

This is one such, the greatest prayer ever heard by God. Again and again, Jesus prayed at these prayers, wrestling with God even as his ancestor Jacob had wrestled with the angel over a thousand years previous.

The greatest prayers in all of history were not delivered by an aged bishop in a great cathedral, but by a broken man with his face to the ground in an olive garden just outside Jerusalem.

My father, if it is at all possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not my will but yours be done.

My father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.

Jesus is fully aware of the suffering which will come upon him, the so-called cup, the cup of God's wrath against human sin, the cup which Jesus will drink to its very dregs.

[17:37] he knows that it contains poison, but he'll drink it for us anyway, because it's the only way that his people can be redeemed from sin and death.

We've talked about it before, but we'll keep on talking about it. The suffering of the passion on the cross, his descent into hell for those three hours of darkness, his holy soul being infinitely punished on account of our sin.

It's the cup of our poison. He must drink it if we are to be saved. And everything in him wants to save his people, but could it be, even for just one second, that this cup could be taken from him, that there could be another way whereby God's justice could be satisfied and God's love

demonstrated?

Is there another way other than by drinking of the cup of the cross? And enduring the wrath of an angry God against our sin? And the answer returns, no, my son, there is no other way.

You must drink this cup, all of it. The greatest suffering ever endured must be born onto the cross, lest the people of God should be condemned to eternal destruction.

[ 19 : 05 ] Now, there are so many aspects of this prayer that we could focus our attention upon. Let me focus ourselves just on two. First of all, notice how Jesus repeatedly refers to God as my father, my father.

Let's never mechanize what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. Rather, let's view it from the perspective of a loving son conversing with his loving father.

father. He is desperate and he calls out to his father. Jesus, the son, calls out to his heavenly father, my father, my father, my father.

He calls out three times. Who else do my children go when they're in trouble but to me and to their mother?

And yet, such is the torment Jesus is enduring that though he now enjoys the father's loving presence, he will in a few hours' time experience the father's infinite wrath.

[ 20 : 13 ] Here, then, is the matter of the greatest pain, the very heart of the suffering of the atonement. Perhaps we don't appreciate it as such when it really is.

But the son who had only ever experienced the intimate love of his father would for those three hours experience the infinite wrath of his father. You know that Stuart Townend hymn that we sing which has the line, the father turns his face away.

You know, that's only half right. The face of God the father was not turned away from Jesus on the cross. the face of God the father was turned against Jesus when he was on the cross.

Here, then, we have the greatest of all mysteries and miseries. Jesus forsaken and abandoned by his father on Golgotha. Father turns from son.

God from God. God. Well, anyhow, you say to me, isn't this just so much speculative theology? This has no relevance for me today, Colin.

[ 21 : 30 ] No, you're wrong to think that way. You're wrong. The greatest power in the universe is the love of God the father for God the son. It is a greater power than any nuclear fission or the energy of a black hole.

And it was for us, the son was forgiven. For forsaken, rather. And he knew it. It was for my sin, my lack of love for God, my lack of love for others, my lack of love for self, that Jesus was willingly crushed.

Does that mean nothing to you at all? Or does it not provoke within your heart such feelings of gratitude that you would hold out your hand to the risen Jesus and say, well, here I am.

Take me. But I want you also to notice about this prayer, how willingly Jesus submitted to the will of his father, how willingly Jesus submitted to the will of his father.

What makes these prayers of Jesus the greatest of all prayers is his complete dedication to the will of his father. He says, yet not as I will, but yours be done.

[ 22 : 45 ] And again, may your will be done. You know, at the beginning of the service, we all prayed in the Lord's prayer, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. It's easy to pray that, right?

Very difficult to pray that when we are dangerously threatened. In those situations, do we not know best, so we think?

Or are we willing to surrender our will to that of our heavenly father, believing and knowing that actually he knows better than we do what is best for us?

Jesus did not merely say the words, not as I will, but as you will, and may your will be done. His whole life was an exposition of the wholehearted desire of a man to pursue the will of God.

And now he's exploring the will of the father. Is it really your will that I suffer so dreadfully, that you crush me under the weight of the penalty of my people's sin?

[ 23 : 50 ] But even though everything within his holy heart recoils the thought of becoming our sin offering, yet he willingly submits to his father. It is one thing to pray for God's will to be done when times are easy for us, but when the chips are down, and when life is tough, or when the lives of our loved ones depend upon it, it's hard not just to say, your will be done, but to really mean it.

But this Jesus did. And he did it for us, for us. There was no other way we could have been redeemed from the slavery of our sin other than his willing, voluntary sacrifice of himself according

to the will of his father.

father. And again, I'm asking, does this mean nothing to you? But though horrified at the thought of being the lamb of God, who by his sacrifice will take away the sins of his people, he willingly surrendered to the will of his father.

How great the suffering that lay before Jesus. But however great it was, greater by far was the surrender of his will to his heavenly father. And for that we shall praise him forever.

And we shall call out with all the heavenly hosts, you are worthy because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God of every tribe and language and people and nation.

[ 25 : 36 ] Well, fourthly and very briefly, betrayal and bravery. Betrayal and bravery. As we close, I want to draw your attention to the incredible courage of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Earlier in the sermon, I made reference to certain criticisms which have been directed toward Jesus, but in the garden of Gethsemane, he is demonstrating cowardice.

great men and women of the past have shown far more courage when facing death than Jesus ever did. They have gone to their deaths with confidence, not flat on their faces, standing tall.

We also answer this criticism by pointing out that the death Jesus was going to die was not natural in any sense of the word. He was to go to the cross where he will drink the cup of God's wrath against our sin to the very dregs.

The Father will not turn his face away from his Son. The Father will turn his face against his Son. He will face the greatest of all mysteries and miseries, the forsakenness of God himself, and the burning infinite experience of hell in our room instead.

[ 27 : 00 ] And now in verse 46, we see Jesus, having been strengthened in his resolution to do the will of God, to drink that cup, he is rising to his feet, and with great courage, he walks toward the cross, knowing full well what that will mean.

He knows that the process by which he will be hung on that cross will involve betrayal at the hand of Judas Iscariot. But rather than run away and hide, climb a tree like Charles II, Jesus now sets his face like flint toward Golgotha's hill.

Gethsemane's past, Golgotha is ahead, and so in the face of the greatest of all betrayals, Jesus shows an even greater bravery.

But you see, this is the point. It's all for us. It is all for us. All of it. On a hill overlooking Jerusalem today, stands an olive grove called Gethsemane.

The name Gethsemane means oil press. The oil was squeezed from olives which grow on the trees. Residents of Jerusalem still enjoy to this very day, eating meals produced from Gethsemane's oil presses.

[ 28 : 30 ] A Jewish father will say to his child this evening over their evening meal, child, dip your bread into this oil. It is the best olive oil in all of Israel.

In the light of Matthew 24, 26 verses 36 through 46, can we not as Christians say one to another, dip your heart today into the oil of Christ's salvation.

By faith and trust, believe that he drank the cup of God's wrath against your sin.

It is the best oil. It is the only oil in all the world. Let us pray. Lord, we bring these things back down to earth by remembering that Gethsemane still exists, that there are still olive trees in the garden of Gethsemane, these olive trees being the genetic ancestors of the olive trees which grew there when Jesus had his face to the ground, praying to you, his father, fully knowing what lay before him and yet with great courage walking toward that fate.

How we thank you for the surrender of Jesus to your will. How we thank you for our salvation purchased with his blood. Lord, from the youngest to the oldest of us here, we pray that rather than walk away from this sermon this morning thinking, oh well, that's nice, these are good words.

[ 30 : 19 ] We ourselves would transport ourselves in mind and thought to that olive grove outside Jerusalem and see Jesus with his face to the ground and hear him pleading with you.

Remember, it was for me. It was all for me. And then, by placing our faith and trust in Jesus, we enjoy the oil of salvation.

In Jesus' name, we pray these things. Amen.