

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
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Mark 14:32-42 “Agony in Gethsemane”

Intro. In the ministry of Jesus thousands heard His marvelous teachings and witnessed His amazing miracles. He had other times of great victory, as when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He also had times of disappointment. But perhaps the most distressing time of His earthly life was this particular evening when He went into the Garden of Gethsemane. Only with the aid of the Spirit of God can we gain a better understanding of what was going through the mind and heart of Jesus at that time. As we follow Him into the garden, I want you to realize that we are treading upon holy ground. We should consider this event with reverence and awe and wonder.

On that very night Jesus and His disciples left the upper room where they shared their last supper, and they departed the city. Since it was the Passover, it was a full moon. They crossed a brook that flowed with the blood of animals sacrificed at the nearby temple, and Jesus must have thought how His own blood would pour on the ground before another day ended. Somewhere near the foot of the Mount of Olives was a grove of olive trees called Gethsemane, because it evidently also had an “oil-press.” It probably was surrounded by a hedge fence. Jesus frequently went there when He came to Jerusalem.¹ In this garden a tremendous struggle took place.

I think it is interesting that this struggle took place in a garden. The Garden of Gethsemane contrasts graphically with the Garden of Eden. In the first garden, Adam faced the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and surrendered to the plot of Satan. In this garden, the “last Adam” faced the looming tree of Calvary and yielded to the plan of God. The first Adam asserted his own will to the ruin of the human race, and Jesus abandoned His own will for the redemption of the human race.

As we reflect upon what Jesus endured for you and for me, I hope we will love Him more. And I want you to not only love Him, but also learn to imitate Him, so that, when *you* face temptation or some trial of suffering, may you seek the Lord in prayer and come forth from your conflict with victory as He came forth from His. To set the stage as to why the prayer of Jesus was so intense, let us see first of all:

I. THE AGONY OF JESUS

As Jesus went further into the Garden, a great change came over Him. In v.33 we read that Jesus “began to be troubled and deeply distressed.” The word translated “troubled” (*ekthambeo*) means “to be alarmed,” or even “terrified.” The word translated “deeply distressed” (*ademoneo*) means “to be in anxiety, distressed, troubled.” Though He knew that He had come to die (10:33), He began to be horrified and distressed as the hour drew so near. Luke used the word “agony” to describe the experience of our Lord. That Greek word describes an intense struggle or conflict, as in the Greek athletic games. So a battle raged in the heart and mind of Jesus that night.

V.34 gives Jesus own words to describe how He felt at that moment. He said, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death....” That literally means “to be encircled with sorrow” (*perilupos*) and thus it means “to be overwhelmed with grief.” His sorrow was so intense that He

¹ Perhaps He knew the owner, who welcomed such use. Nevertheless, Jesus is the Creator and owner of everything.

felt like He was dying.² His heart was pounding and perhaps he felt chest pains. Furthermore, the struggle was so great, that according to Luke, His sweat was falling audibly and heavily while Christ prayed. It sounded like slow blood-drops from a wound.³ All of these expressions are quite sufficient to show that the emotional distress of the Savior was of the most extraordinary character.

What could have caused such sorrow and distress? Well, let's consider together:

A. The Reasons for His Agony - Our Lord's struggle in the Garden can be understood only in the light of what was *about* to happen to Him. Jesus compares that experience to drinking a cup (v.36). What was in that cup that caused Jesus such deep distress?

1. Anticipation of Physical Pain - The human nature of Jesus must have been troubled to some degree regarding the physical suffering and death He was about to face. He no doubt witnessed the crucifixion of others and heard their cries of agony. Every one of us would be in anguish over the prospect of being whipped 39 times or more, and crucified in our hands and feet. Why, some hyperventilate at the thought of having their finger pricked for blood! Yet Jesus was about to experience something far worse.

But that certainly would not explain the *intensity* of anguish that Jesus experienced. Of course, there was even more to face besides physical suffering. He was also suffering from the:

2. Anticipation of Emotional Pain - He knew that the prophecy of Isa. 53 was about to be fulfilled, "He was despised and rejected of men." He knew that one of his own disciples was about to betray him. How *that* must have grieved His heart! He predicted that He would be forsaken by His disciples (v.27). He knew He would be rejected by His own people, the Jews, who would cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" He knew He would face the utter shame and rejection of the mock-trials, as well as the mockings, spitings and beatings by the temple police and soldiers. He knew of the crown of thorns they would mockingly put on His brow. He knew He would face the shame of having His clothes taken off and lifted up on a cross as a spectacle for all to see.

If you have been rejected or forsaken, Jesus knows what it feels like. We can pray to one who can sympathize with our suffering (cf. Heb. 4:15).

Even still, there must be more to it than that. Though the dread of physical and emotional pain was likely present, the *main* reason for the intense agony in the soul of Jesus was:

3. Anticipation of Spiritual Pain - You see, what lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was to atone for a world's sin. Jesus could see spiritual agony in that cup He was to drink. The holy soul of Christ was facing the reality of bearing the full weight of the world's sin. He knew the prophecy of Isaiah 53, that "The Lord would lay on Him the iniquity of us all." He could see the cross as an altar, and He Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He knew that He would bear the penalty of our sin, suffering the holy wrath of God against sin. He would bear the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). Not only was He to bear our sin, but in some sense He was to "be made sin for us" according to 2 Cor. 5:21. Christ would suffer as though He were a vile sinner. He would be regarded as a murderer, a thief, an adulterer, a liar, and much more in the eyes of God as He bore our sin. How His perfect, holy nature must have been shocked and repulsed at such close association with sin and iniquity! Furthermore, He would be forsaken of God, as well as man. He would soon cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And yet, He knew that He would have to disarm death by receiving its dagger into His own heart.

² In fact, Heb. 5:7 can be interpreted to mean that the agony and distress was so great, that only prayer and the strengthening of the angel (Luke) prevented a premature death! His heart must have pounded heavily, perhaps with chest pain.

³ Many commentators assume that Christ sweat literal blood, but the text does not actually say that. Also, Luke's account of the angel & sweat drops may not be in the original

We ought to see in our Lord's agony in Gethsemane the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Many make light of sin but let not the believer do so. See how sin caused Jesus to suffer so. We ought to abhor sin as Jesus does. Sin turned angels into demons. Sin has wrecked many a home. Sin has ruined the life of many a young person. Let the recollection of Gethsemane have a sanctifying effect on us.

So we have reflected on the reasons for His intense agony. Now notice with me:

B. His Companions in Agony – In v.33 we read, “And He took Peter, James, and John with Him...” further into the garden. One reason He took them was so that they might bear witness to this event. But I think He also desired their company during this difficult time. His human soul craved for the presence of those who stood nearest Him and loved Him best.

Even so, when you go through difficulties and trouble, do not try to go alone (cf. Gen. 2:18). If Jesus sought the comfort of companionship during trouble, how much more do we need such companionship? Don't face your troubles alone!

And when we are called upon to be a companion to someone in their time of trouble, I hope we will do better than Peter, James, and John did! Surely they knew how distressed He was. They turned out to be poor companions for Jesus during His distress. Oh, what a prayer meeting they *might* have had, gathered around Jesus, praying for their dear Lord! But they kept falling asleep!⁴ Sure it was late, and they were naturally exhausted from a busy week. But if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them open. Let us all resolve to be better companions to others in time of trouble! You don't have to say much. Just being there says a lot. Say a prayer for them and with them. Perhaps there is someone in distress that you need to visit this afternoon.

When Cheryl was in the hospital for over 30 days without a diagnosis of the cause of her inflammation and kidney failure, her nurse practitioner convinced the surgeon that she could be having an overreaction to the metal clips that were used in her gallbladder surgery. So they scheduled surgery to remove them. A deacon and longtime friend drove up to Richmond to stay with me in the surgical waiting room during the entire four-hour surgery! During that same time period Cheryl's sister flew in from Dallas, Texas for a week to help me care for Cheryl. *Those* of the type of companions you want when you're going through great difficulty!

So after reading of the agony of Jesus, we are not surprised to read of:

II. THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Jesus was facing the greatest difficulty of His life. Yet He was not just in great distress and agony as He anticipated His great suffering. He was also being tempted to forego the cross. He pointed out in v.38 that “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Here the word “flesh” is a reference to human nature in its frailty and needs. Evidently, Jesus experienced the weakness of His own human nature. His humanity was resisting the overwhelming suffering He would face.

Facing such strong temptation and distress, Jesus turned to His Heavenly Father in prayer, as He had so often done before. He was following His own advice in v.38, “Watch and pray,⁵ lest you enter into temptation.” So He went to one of His customary places to pray.⁶ Twice we are told that when His heart was exceeding sorrowful, he “prayed” (verses 35 and 39).

⁴ For most of us, the best time to pray is in the morning after we are well awake, not late at night.

⁵ “Watch and pray” is an admonition that is often repeated in Scripture (Neh. 4:9; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2).

⁶ Add to Point II: “The Place of His Prayer?” - Add in notes from Spurgeon, p.248. It was an ideal place for solitude.

Even so, when we face temptations, trials, and difficulties, we should heed the advice and example of Jesus. We are to watch out for temptation and other spiritual dangers. We must watch like soldiers on picket duty. After all, this world is enemy territory. The Bible says that Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. If you do not maintain a watchful attitude, you can be deceived by Satan and yield to temptation.

Then, like Jesus, we must pray. Follow His example. Pray for wisdom to flee temptation or for strength to overcome. The disciples were tempted that very night to be untrue to Him. They needed to pray that night. We need to pray. In fact, the first person we should turn to in our trouble is God. The advice of James is wise and weighty: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray” (James 5:13). Prayer is needed because the flesh is weak. Those who know their own weakness, and knowing it both watch and pray, are those who will be upheld and not allowed to fall. If we do not watch and pray, we are self-confident and conceited. We are depending on the flesh instead of God. We know that the three did not watch and pray, and therefore they, especially Peter, succumbed to temptation.

So when we follow the example of Jesus, let us do so in this way:

A. Follow the Characteristics of His Prayer – First, Christ practiced:

1. Humble Prayer - Instead of standing or kneeling, v.35 says that Jesus “fell on the ground.” Matthew 26:39 indicates that He also “fell on his face.” No doubt He fell prostrate before God. The imperfect tense pictures this happening more than once. What an extraordinary sight! The eternal and exalted Son of God had taken upon Himself our nature, and there He lay as low as the very dust out of which our nature was originally formed. Humility gives us a good foothold in prayer.

Have you ever been in such distress that you have fallen upon your face in prayer? James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” So let us pray with humility. Furthermore, we should pray a:

2. Filial Prayer – In v.36 Mark quotes Jesus as addressing God as “Abba, Father.” “Abba” was Aramaic for “Father.”⁷ That was His mother tongue. This was a very affectionate way to address God the Father, similar to saying, “Daddy.” In the midst of all the sorrow, His sense of relation was unbroken.

Christian, when you pray, make your request remembering that you are a child of God, and God is your Heavenly Father. Plead as a child to a loving Father. You are not a mere slave with no hope of favor or access to the Lord of the universe. I am a father. I know how much I love my 2 sons, and how much I have done to help my sons, especially when they ask. That should encourage me to pray, for God certainly loves me even more!

3. Persevering Prayer - He prayed *three* times, using the same or similar words. After the first and even second time, Jesus must not have felt that He had complete victory over the spiritual struggle He was facing, so He kept on praying.⁸

We must pray without ceasing, regularly, habitually, and at stated times. My friend, when you face temptation, don’t stop when you *think* you have victory, but keep praying until you are *sure* you have victory. Be not content until you prevail over temptation and the enemy through prayer.

⁷ Brooks says, “So precious was the word that it was preserved and used by the Greek speaking, Gentile churches (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6), p.234.

⁸ The imperfect tense is used in v.35, picturing ongoing prayer.

4. Earnest Prayer - The earnestness of His prayer is obvious and needs no proof. Again, Luke says that as Jesus prayed His sweat was as great drops of blood. Casual prayer is not enough. James 5:16 says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." If you really want to get things done in prayer, you need to put your heart, soul, mind, and strength into your prayer.

B. Like Jesus, Make Your Requests to God – Phil. 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God." Well, as Jesus felt that His soul was troubled, He lifted up His request to His Father. What was His request? In v.36 He prayed, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me...." In the idiom of the Old Testament, "drinking a cup," i.e. its contents, means fully undergoing this or that experience, whether favorable (Psa. 16:5; 23:5; 116:18; Jer. 16:7) or unfavorable (Psa. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17,22; etc.).⁹ He knew the wrath of God would break upon Him when He took on Himself the sins of the world. His manhood would not have been like ours if He had not shrunk back from such a "cup." So He asked that the cup could pass from Him.

If Jesus felt the need to pray, how much more should we should bring our petitions to God in prayer. Don't worry about your problems. Pray to the Lord about them. Pour out your heart to the Lord. Boldly bring your requests to God. After all, God is omnipotent. Nothing is impossible for Him.

C. Yet Yield to the Will of God – In the last of v.36 Jesus said, "nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." The "I" here is emphatic. Notice that Jesus renounced His own will even as He expressed His revulsion against the cup of sin and its accompanying wrath. So Jesus did not tell the Father what to do. He only made such a request with an understanding that "all things are possible for You." Yet Jesus knew that divine power is limited by what is morally right and the sovereign purposes of God. So He was asking if there was any way man could be saved and the justice of God satisfied apart from the cross that loomed before Him (cf. Rom. 3:25-26). But in every prayer He was perfectly resigned to the will of God. There was no rebellion in His heart against the will of the Father to whom He had so completely subjected Himself. He was an obedient Son who always did the will of His Father.

So let us follow the example of our Lord and remember to pray according to the will of God, just as 1 Jn. 5:14¹⁰ says. If we insist upon our own will in our petition, it is *not* an acceptable prayer. That is presumption and rebellion, and not the cry of a true child of God. We are only going to walk the path of victory if we renounce our own will. We must die to self.

Are you willing to pray with Jesus, "not what I will?" As you face temptation, will you pray for deliverance and say, "Not my will?" If God is calling you to take a new job, will you say, "Not my will?" If God is calling you to get out of a spiritually unhealthy relationship, will you say, "Not my will?" If God is calling you to the mission field, will you say, "Not my will?" We never come to the place of full usefulness as a Christian until we have a "Gethsemane" where we humbly say, "Lord, not as I will." As you pray, don't make demands upon God. Make your requests, but yield to the will of God. Jesus taught that we are to deny self (Mt. 16:24) before we can follow Him. If Jesus was willing to deny self, resulting in a cross, we should be willing to deny self, which will result in far less of a sacrifice. So let us pray daily and endeavor to put to death our self-will. God

⁹ Cf. also Mt. 20:22; Rev. 14:10; 16:10; 17:4; 18:6.

¹⁰ 1 Jn. 5:14-15 says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

had a plan for Jesus, and God has a plan for your life which is best. In fact, Romans 12:2 says that God's will is "good and acceptable and perfect."

So we have seen the agony of Jesus, and the prayer of Jesus. Now because of the way He prayed, we also see in our text of Scripture:

III. THE VICTORY OF JESUS

It was a terrible battle that was waged in Gethsemane, but it was a battle that He won, a conflict that ended in complete victory for Him. By the time Jesus was through praying, He had a completely different frame of mind. He was no longer deeply distressed or troubled.

Notice the victory seen in v.41, "Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough!¹¹ The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.'" Christ came forth triumphant after 3 battles in prayer. No longer did He bid His disciples to watch and pray with Him. The victory had already been won. Christ prayed His way to perfect calm and peace, which is always the companion of self-surrender to God.

So in v.42 Jesus calls them to rise, and join Him in meeting the traitor. Here we see another aspect of His victory. He does not run away into the darkness, seeking some hiding place, which would have been easy to obtain in the darkness and cover of trees and large rocks. But He boldly, and bravely goes and joins the other 8 disciples to await Judas and the band of soldiers. Now because Jesus was willing to renounce His own will in Gethsemane, He faces the cross with calm resolve. There He would win the victory over sin and death and accomplish our salvation.

The events that followed confirmed the victory that Jesus gained in the Garden. Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be bound by the soldiers. His hands were not really bound by those chains or ropes, but by His love for you and for me. And when they arrested Him, Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to resist with the sword, explaining that only by submitting to their evil plans would prophecy be fulfilled (Matthew 26:51-54). Then as Jesus faced each mock trial, and as He faced Pilate Himself, He maintained an utter calmness, strangely unwilling to defend Himself against their false charges. Not once did their terrible sin against Him cause Him to respond in like manner. Instead, He even prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What victory Jesus gained in that Garden! Jesus did not go to the Garden to hide from the cross; He went to the Garden to get the strength *to face* the cross for you and for me!

I remember my own experience of surrender to God. It was the summer before my senior year in high school. Our youth group went to Hargis Christian retreat in Alabama. Toward the end of that week of youth camp, while other youth spent the afternoon swimming and playing ball, I went off into the woods to be alone with God. You see, I had been a typical teenager, tasting the fruits of sin. But God was convicting me of my sin, and I was struggling with a decision to surrender my life totally to God. I was beginning to sense that God was calling me to preach. Well, I found the little chapel in the woods that I had been told about. It was only big enough for a few people. And there was a prayer altar there. And only when you knelt there, could you see a cross on a hill across a valley, reminding everyone that Jesus was willing to die to self, and die for our sin. I must have spent much of the afternoon struggling with God. But I finally surrendered to God in prayer. My life was never the same after that youth camp. As a result, I have been preaching the gospel for almost 50 years.

¹¹ "It is enough" is likely a reference to the disciples sleeping. They had slept enough. It's time to be going (v.42; Mt. 26:45).

Conclusion: Have you had *your* Gethsemane? Have you come to that place in your life where you have prayed, and yielded your will and life to God?

A combination lock is built so that when you get all of the pieces of the mechanism in line, the lock opens. And when all of the pieces of my will align with the will of God, the door of peace and victory opens for me. That is the personal meaning of Gethsemane.

What is God's will for your life this morning? 1 Tim. 2:4 says that God wills for all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Have you surrendered to God's will. I know that repenting of your sins and giving your life to Christ publicly is not easy. But now is the time for your Gethsemane. Will you be victorious, or will you allow Satan to have the victory over your life?

We probably have some believers here today who have been struggling with God's will for your life. Well during the invitation the prayer altar is available for you to come and pray, and say with Jesus, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: Mark* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956); James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2024; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 245-253; Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of this text dated 5/27/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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