

“The Path to the Cross: Gethsemane”

Matthew 26:36-46

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Main Idea: *“Make me understand it. / Help me take it in. / What it meant to thee, the Holy One, / To bear away my sin.”* What did Gethsemane mean to Jesus? It meant resolving to endure God’s righteous wrath for our sin through the crucible of human weakness.

Key Points:

What did Gethsemane mean to Jesus?

1. It meant relational abandonment. Jesus walked the road from Gethsemane to the cross ... alone. He did not just “feel” alone. He was alone. He suffered alone for sinners like us.
 - a. Matthew 26:31 *“You will all fall away”.* (Jesus predicted the disciples’ abandonment).
 - b. Matthew 26:40 *“Could you not watch with me one hour?”* (The disciples slept while Jesus prayed in anguish).
 - c. Matthew 26:56b *“Then all the disciples left him and fled.”* (The disciples physically abandoned Him.)
2. It meant distress of soul.
 - a. Up to this point in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus was healing, forgiving, teaching with authority, delivering people from demonic forces, calming storms, multiplying bread and fish, walking on water, standing boldly against the religious leaders, and being transfigured into radiant glory.
 - b. Now a dramatic change occurred. Jesus is overwhelmed with grief and sorrow, coming to the very threshold of death, itself. Luke tells us, *“being in ... agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”* His anguish of soul was so great that Luke also tells us *“there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.”*
 - c. So why the shuddering terror and overwhelming sorrow? As Jesus looked into the cup of God’s justice and wrath, He was beginning to experience, in the weakness of His humanity, what it meant to be our substitute, our sin-bearer. As He looked into the cup, he was confronted with what it meant to bear the full fury of God’s righteous and holy justice against our sin. As William Lane writes, *“The dreadful sorrow and anxiety, then, out of which the prayer for the passing of the cup springs, is not an expression of fear before a dark destiny, nor a shrinking from the prospect of physical suffering and death. It is rather the horror of the one*

who lives wholly for the Father at the prospect of the alienation from God which is entailed in the judgment upon sin which Jesus assumes. This horror thus anticipates the cry of dereliction ... Jesus came to be with the Father for an interlude before his betrayal, but found hell rather than heaven opened before him, and he staggered."

3. It meant obedient resolve.

- a. The prospect of being the sin bearer was so horrific, that Jesus could not stay standing. He fell on the ground and cried out to His Father, "*Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" To His prayer, God was silent. Jesus appealed a second time. God was silent. Jesus appealed a third time. And for the third time, God was silent. Why was He silent in His Son's darkest hour? John 3:16 tells us, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son ...*"
- b. There was only one way to resolve God's holy hostility toward us in our sin. There was only one way to reconcile us in our wickedness to a Holy God. There was no alternative for the Son. And Jesus embraced the Father's will, "*not as I will, but as you will.*" (verses 39, 42) When Jesus, from the cross, cried out, "*It is finished*", the last drop of God's wrath against our sin was spent and exhausted. The cup was dry.

What does Gethsemane mean for us?

1. Recognize His love for you in His darkest hour.

- a. We cannot mediate on Gethsemane without being reminded of the seriousness, the blackness, and the appalling nature of our sin. The cup that Jesus drank was our cup, not the cup of the Innocent One. He took our cup, drank it dry and placed in our hands the cup of salvation.
- b. Out of love for us, Jesus embraced and obeyed the judgment that our sin required. Out of love for us, Jesus embraced the Father's will to drink the cup God put in His hands. Out of His love for us, Jesus chose to be our substitute, to be our sin-bearer; He willingly chose to absorb every ounce of God's wrath.

"If I understand Gethsemane at all, it means that Jesus loves me even more than I can imagine. It is not just that he died for me, but that he died this horrible, damnable, God-forsaken death that no one would ever want to die. He died this death because there was no other way for sinners to be saved, no easier road to redemption, no alternative to the cross. Jesus thus volunteered to do what the Father willed, choosing to do the one thing that would bring the most suffering to his body and soul. 'The wonder of the love of Christ for his people, writes Donald Macleod, 'is not that for their sake he faced death without fear, but that for their sake he faced it, terrified. Terrified by what he knew, and terrified by what he did not know, he took damnation lovingly.' This must always be the main lesson we learn whenever we go to the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew does not show us the agony of Jesus to arouse our pity, primarily, or simply to remind us of our

Savior's humanity, but to help us see again the love that Jesus has for us in dying for our sins. We will never have to suffer what our Savior suffered in Gethsemane, or at Calvary, for the very reason that everything he suffered there was in our place, on our behalf." – Philip Ryken

2. Receive His care for you in your darkest hour.

- a. The Garden of Gethsemane was proof-positive that Jesus was fully human. His anguish, overwhelming sorrow and gripping terror were very real. His prayers were the cry of weak humanity. His submission and obedience was as a flesh and blood man. In His darkest hour, Jesus resolved to drink the cup of God's wrath for our sins through the experience of human weakness.
- b. And because He suffered as a man, He understands our human weakness in our darkest hours. As it says in Hebrews 4:15-16 *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

Fellowship Starters:

1. In Gethsemane Jesus experienced the difficulties of relational abandonment from the disciples as well as distress of soul regarding the wrath he was about to endure. How does Jesus' experience deepen your gratefulness for your Savior?
2. Three times Jesus appealed for an alternative to drinking the cup of God's wrath; three times the Father was silent. How does the Father's silence demonstrate His deepest love for you? (See John 3:16)
3. William Lane writes that Jesus looked into the cup and *"found hell rather than heaven opened before him, and he staggered."* How does Jesus' resolve to drink this cup demonstrate His amazing love for you?
4. C.J. reminded us that the cup of wrath that Jesus drank was our cup. He took it from our hands and gave us the cup of salvation. How does a reflection on this truth assure you of God's love for you?
5. How can Jesus' weakness and suffering as a man in Gethsemane provide comfort through your darkest and severest trials? (See Hebrews 4:15-16)