

A PLACE CALLED GETHSEMANE (Matthew 26:36-46)

A herd of buffalo were grazing in a protected wildlife reserve. Even though they were safe from hunters, one of the buffalo confessed to another, “I don’t know what’s wrong with me, but I’m just so tense. I’m nervous and anxious all the time, but I’ve made a decision. I’m going to go to the ranger station.”

That other buffalo asked, “What for?”

The worrisome buffalo answered, “Well, I’m hoping they will shoot me with a tranquilizer dart.”

You and I live in anxious times.

- We worry about the pandemic.
- We worry about the economy.
- We worry about the political landscape and the election?
- We worry about the church’s lack of growth and the lessening of its influence in our culture.
- We worry about dangers seen and unseen.
- We worry about dangers real and unreal.

How do we deal with our fears and worries? Instead of going to a ranger station, some go to the doctor’s office. We hope he will prescribe a tranquilizer. Others turn to a bottle, or they throw themselves into their work, or they develop an eating disorder, or they rely on something else that they think will numb the pain and soothe their nerves.

All the while, we fail to remember what Jesus promised: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

We need rest for our bodies and rest for our souls. But at times we need more than just rest because there are occasions when we face more than just worry, more than just fear, and more than just uneasiness. Sometimes we face real pain, and there are moments when we encounter sheer terror over what the future holds. What do we do then?

You might find it hard to believe, but there was a time when Jesus faced just such an agonizing moment. We will look at that today and discover what Jesus did. When and where did this happen? It happened shortly after Jesus and His disciples observed their last Passover meal together. It happened at a place called *Gethsemane*.

Look with me at Matthew 26:36-46. As we make our way through this passage, we are going to learn what Gethsemane was, but we also focus on the fact that all of us will spend some time at our own Gethsemanes, and we will discover how we can emerge from those times better and stronger.

We often talk about the Garden of Gethsemane, but I find it interesting that such a phrase is never used in the Bible.

- **Matthew** tells us in v. 36 that Jesus and the disciples went to a place called Gethsemane.

- **Mark** uses that same phrase “a place called Gethsemane” in Mark 14:32 of his gospel account.
- **Luke** does not mention Gethsemane at all. Instead, we read in Luke 22:39 that Jesus “went, as was His custom, to the Mount of Olives.”
- **John** also omits the name Gethsemane and tells us instead that Jesus and the disciples went “across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden” (18:1).

Just to the east of the Jerusalem and the temple is the Kidron Valley. Once you crossed the small brook or stream, you could climb a hill. Up the hill was what we call the Mount of Olives. There was no place in the City of Jerusalem for people to grow a garden. Wealthy families bought land just east of Jerusalem up into the hills. This was not public land in Jesus’ day; it was private land. Some of the people planted olive trees. There are olive trees there to this day.

Somewhere across the Kidron up into the Mount of Olives, there was place known as *Gethsemane*, but the name *Gethsemane* suggests there was something there more than just olive trees. *Gethsemane* comes from two Aramaic words: *gat* and *shemen*. *Gat* was the word for *press*, and *shemen* was the word for *oil* (olive oil). A *gatshemen* or a *gethsemane* was an oil press where olives would be crushed so that the oil from those olives could be extracted and stored into containers, so that the oil could either be used or sold. This gethsemane would have been housed in a protected enclosure to ensure the safety of both the press and the oil.

Adjacent to the press was a cultivated field, a garden, and in this case, it would have been an olive grove. The owner of the olive grove would have been able to harvest his olives, and then crush and press them without having to transport his olives from one place to another. It would have saved him both time and money. By extracting the oil from his own olives, he would have increased his profit margin.

The gospel accounts teach us that during Passion Week, Jesus and His disciples spent their nights somewhere other than Jerusalem, but we are not told exactly where. Bible teacher, Ray Vander Laan, believes that Jesus and His disciples slept in the comfortable enclosure than housed the gethsemane. His theory is that Jesus knew the owner of the press and the garden. This resident of Jerusalem may have been a follower of Jesus, and he told Jesus, “Hey, whenever you are in town, you and your disciples can sleep at my gethsemane. Make yourselves at home.

Luke tells us that Jesus went there “as was His custom.” How did Judas know where Jesus was going to be? Just maybe Judas knew because he had stayed there with Jesus and the disciples every night that week. Judas knew where Jesus would be, and Jesus knew that Judas knew; yet, He went there anyway because He had a job to do—the Father’s will. He came to do the work of the Father.

Jesus went there willingly, but He also went there with a great heaviness of heart. At the place where olives were crushed and pressed under great weight, Jesus was being crushed and pressed under the weight of what would happen soon happen—His suffering and death for the sins of many.

Jesus had His Gethsemane, and you will have yours. You will not suffer and die for

the salvation of others, but make no mistake, you will be crushed and pressed by the heaviness of this life, by the trials and the tribulations that are common to followers of Jesus.

I want you to notice three things.

Gethsemane Is a Place That Calls for Sorrowful Prayer

When Jesus and the Twelve minus Judas arrive at the gethsemane, Jesus left eight where they had been spending the night, then He went out to the olive grove taking Peter, James, and John with Him. Look at v. 37.

The New Living Translation says that Jesus was “filled with anguish and deep distress.” According to Vander Laan, those words convey the idea of, “sudden, shocking aware-ness.” Now, of what did Jesus become suddenly, shockingly aware? I believe it is far more than the fact He was going to be mocked, spit upon, beaten, whipped, and crucified. This was no surprise to Him. He had announced on multiple occasions that this would happen. That is why He had come to Jerusalem. That is why He had come into the world.

I believe that what filled Jesus with such great sorrow and inward pain is His realization that by dying for the sin of all who would trust Him, He would not only carry their sin, but he would become sin, and His Father was going to pour His wrath upon Him.

Jesus had always known the Father’s love. He had always enjoyed the Father’s presence. Even when He stepped out of heaven and took upon Himself human flesh, He and His Father were still one. He became shockingly aware that as He became a sin offering, this oneness would be severed. The Father would turn away from the Son. Instead of knowing the fellowship of the Father, the Father would forsake His Son. Up until then Jesus did not know what it was to be God-forsaken.

In the next chapter of Matthew, Jesus is on the cross, and He cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (27:46).

Look at what Jesus said to the three in v. 38. Again, the NLT renders Jesus’ statement, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death.”

What would physically happen to the olives at the press is happening to Jesus spiritually and emotionally. His heart and soul are being crushed under the weight of what is coming.

To help lighten the load, Jesus calls His prayer partners into action. He wants them to watch. He was not asking them to be security guards. By *watch*, He is telling them to pray.

We are meant to be burden bearers for our brothers and sisters. When we are burdened, when we are grieving, when we are hurting, we need to pray for ourselves, but also need to enlist the help of some prayer warriors who will pray for us.

Jesus left that little prayer huddle. He went further into the garden to pray privately. Look at what He prays in v. 39. Basically, He is saying, “God, if there is any other way to

bring about the salvation of those who belong to You, let's do that instead. I don't want to do this God. Come up with a Plan B because I don't like Plan A."

Has God ever told you to do something that you didn't want to do? Have you ever said or simply thought, "Lord, I don't want to give that money because I could really use that on this over here which I would much prefer"?

You have probably said, "Lord, I don't want to talk to that person about You. He looks scary. He's got bad B.O. He probably would be interested anyway."

I am sure that somewhere along the way you have said, "Lord, I don't want to teach that class. I don't want to get involved in that ministry. I don't want to use this gift You've given me."

We read in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but One who in every respect had been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Jesus knows exactly what it is like to be given a job, an assignment by God, and not wanting to do it. He understands what you are feeling, but we need to follow His example and do the hard thing anyway. It is enough to know that He understands. What He does not condone is disobedience because He never did that.

Jesus used the word *cup* in v. 39. He wanted this cup to pass from Him. Less than an hour before, Jesus had been observing the Passover meal with His disciples. There are four cups in that celebration corresponding to the four promises of Exodus 6:6-7, (I will bring you out; I will deliver you; I will redeem you; I will take you to be My people). They are: the cup of sanctification, the cup of praise, the cup of redemption, and the cup of acceptance.

According to Vander Laan, for many years the Jewish teachers argued whether or not there should be a fifth cup. The Scriptures talk about the cup of God's wrath that will be poured out on the nations. Some felt they should include a fifth cup, but they argued and debated, and there was no clear winner. They decided that when Elijah came, Elijah would decide for them. To this day, observant Jews include a cup for Elijah, but they have lost the meaning as to why it is there, and nothing is said about it in the observance of the meal.

In the garden next to the olive press, Jesus spoke of another cup, a cup He did not want to drink. It was the cup of God's wrath against sin. Jesus cried out, "No, I don't want to drink it." Then, He admitted, "It's not about what I want; it's about what You want."

That brings us to the next thought.

Gethsemane Is a Place That Calls for Surrender in Prayer

Jesus went and checked on His prayer partners. He discovered they were having a quiet time, a real, quiet time. They were fast asleep.

Trying to pray at night when you are tired is like my wife trying to watch a movie at night. It's not going to happen. Just a few minutes in, the eyes close, and the head either

falls forward or leans back, and she's out.

Peter, James, and John experienced something similar. Jesus had called them to watch, but that is hard to do with your eyes closed.

Somewhere along the way, we got the idea that you are supposed to close your eyes when you pray. I don't know where that came from because the Bible doesn't teach that we are supposed to close our eyes when we pray. Maybe the thought is that by closing our eyes, we will close out the distractions that might vie for our attention. Maybe.

I have found that when I get still and close my eyes, I'll likely do what my wife does and fall asleep. I think it is better to keep your eyes open and just converse with God.

Jesus taught His disciples an important principle: The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. You see, the flesh wants what the flesh wants. When the flesh is tired, it wants to sleep. It doesn't care whether or not it is time to pray. When the flesh is hungry, it wants food. It doesn't care whether that inconveniences anyone. The flesh wants what the flesh wants. We need to muzzle the flesh, and seek what God wants.

I read a sermon by Ray Stedman on this passage. He said, "The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is ready for the weekend." He went on to say, "The spirit that is confident it can carry through on the basis of sheer determination is going to fail. The arm of flesh will fail you."

Did you notice that while all three were asleep, Jesus chose to address Peter specifically? Jesus calls him out by name. Why? I think, Peter more than any of the disciples, needed to hear what Jesus had to say about trusting the flesh.

Wiersbe points out that Peter boasted when he should have listened. He slept when he should have prayed. In the verses that follow, we will see that he fought when he should have surrendered. He denied Jesus when he should have confessed him. But praise God, he wept tears of remorse when he recognized it was time to repent.

Instead of surrendering to the flesh, we need to surrender to God who can conquer our flesh. **It is far better to go with God in your weakness than to go it alone in your strength.** It is when we admit our weakness that God can act strongly on our behalf.

Jesus returned to prayer in v. 42. This time, Jesus does not ask God to remove the cup. Instead, He vows to drink whatever it is that God sets before Him. He is intent on doing God's will, not His own.

Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath on our behalf. Because He did so, we will never have to do so. He drank the cup of God's wrath. He drank all of it. Now, our cup overflows. That is what David wrote in Psalm 23: "My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (vv. 5-6).

John Powell is a Catholic priest and a professor of theology at Loyola University in Chicago. He preached a sermon on prayer in which he said, "Our relationship with God is about as good as our communication with God, and this communication is called prayer." He went on to claim that the main condition for successful praying is that we seek God's plans rather than our own.

As an illustration, Powell said:

I have a sign on the mirror of my room that I see every morning in my groggy condition, when I first wake up: WHAT HAVE YOU GOT GOING TODAY, GOD? I'D LIKE TO BE A PART OF IT. THANKS FOR LOVING ME.

If you want to grow in prayer and to be used by God to accomplish His purposes, ask Him to reveal what He's got going on, and let Him know that you want to be part of it.

Gethsemane Is a Place That Calls for Sustained Prayer

After praying a second time, Jesus returned to the disciples a second time. He found them in the same condition as the first time. They were asleep. Their eyelids were as heavy as Jesus' heart. He returned to pray a third time. Look at v. 44.

As far as I can tell, the Bible does not teach that we are to pray for something once and then just go our way.

We are not to be like the farmer whose wife asked him, "How come you never tell me you love me?" He answered, "I told that you that I loved you when we got married. If I ever change my mind, I'll let you know."

No. Don't be like that. We let God know we are serious when we pray again and again and again for the same thing. We are to keep on praying until God either releases that burden from us or until He answers our prayer.

Jesus taught us to keep on asking, to keep on seeking, and to keep on knocking in prayer.

In Luke 11, Jesus told a story about a man who went to his friend's house at midnight, knocked on the door, and asked his friend to loan him three loaves of bread. The friend tried to send him away saying that his children were in bed and the door was locked. He said he was not going to get up to give him bread, but the man kept knocking. Jesus said, "Because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

Keep knocking on heaven's door. When we sustain in prayer, we will be sustained by prayer.

When Jesus rose that third time from prayer, He was not the same man who fell down on His face the first time. Now, He was assured. Now, He was confident. Now, He was more than ever determined to move forward with God's plan and God's mission for Him.

He went back to Peter, James, and John for the third time. Basically, He says, "Get up guys. You can sleep later. My betrayer is here. Let's go meet him."

You will be ready to meet any hardship and face any difficulty if you will give yourself to God in prayer.

A week from yesterday will be October 31st. That date is not just Halloween. It is the anniversary of one of the most momentous events of history. On October 31, 1517 (503 years ago), a Catholic monk turned university professor posted on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, what is known as Martin's Luther's 95 Theses. You might think of it as his 95 complaints against the Catholic Church. Someone took those 95 complaints, printed them, and they spread throughout Europe. That began what we call the Protestant

Reformation.

What Luther did created a firestorm and earned Luther the ire and condemnation of the Catholic authorities. In April of 1521, Luther stood before a council that included Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who ruled most of Europe at that time. When Luther arrived, there was a table filled with books that Luther had written. He was asked if he were the author of those books. When the titles were read to him, he confessed they were his.

When he was asked to recant what he had written, he asked for time to consider his answer. He was given 24 hours. He spent much of that night in prayer. He had his own Gethsemane experience. When he stood before the counsel the next day, they asked Luther for his answer. He gave them a speech. At some point they interrupted him and demanded an answer as to whether he would recant what he had written. History records that Luther said:

I stand convicted by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word. I cannot and will not recant anything. For to act contrary to our conscience is neither right nor safe. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me.

And God did. And God will help you, and God will help me when go to Him in prayer seeking His help. He will help us to take our stand for Him.