

When God's Will Brings Sorrow

The Passion of Christ – Part I

Mark 14:32-42

Introduction - Gethsemane

We will begin today, a study of the life and the passion of Jesus Christ as He enters that weekend that is unforgettable and stands as the hinge of history. For the next three discussions, as we move in climactic form toward Easter Sunday, we are going to take a look at what I am entitling, "The Passion of Jesus Christ".

We will look today, at the Gethsemane hour. It is a misunderstood passage; a romanticized passage; a passage that is often overlooked, yet one that is filled with incredible agony.

It is in this garden, ladies and gentlemen, that I believe the battle was fought and won. It is on the cross that this victory is exemplified. And although it is on the cross that we see the victory, it is in the garden that Jesus' will aligned with the will of the Father – with great struggle.

Now, you know as well as I that the scriptures are filled with people who had tremendous sorrow in their lives. Look, for example, at the Old Testament and study the life of a man named Hosea. He was told by God to be an illustration for the adulterous Israelite nation that would never follow Him faithfully.

God told Hosea to go and choose a wife. Hosea probably thought, "Great! It's about time I got married." God said, "I want you to go to Ninth Street and choose a wife from among the prostitutes who walk the streets at night." (Hosea 1)

Hosea was probably questioning the sovereign plan of God, yet he obeyed and went and chose a wife named Gomer. She was, as you may remember, unfaithful to him, and finally, abandoned him.

God spoke to Hosea again, and we would expect Him to say, "You have done your job. You have now illustrated My love, undying as it is, for the nation Israel. However, I want you to go back and find Gomer. Take her off the streets again."

Hosea goes and finds Gomer being auctioned off to the highest bidder. He pays the price and brings her back to his home again. (Hosea 3)

Hosea experienced incredible sorrow.

You have also, I am sure, read the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a man so overcome with his mission for God that he was known as the "Weeping Prophet". His ministry was filled with the flow of tears for the nation to which he preached and who would not hear.

Paul is, of course, an example of sorrow as he went through life with the thorn that God would not remove. (II Corinthians 12:7) He was a man who ended up in Rome and, according to church tradition, found himself at the block of Nero's prison and lost his head.

These men, and many others, experienced tremendous sorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is hard for us to understand that God's plan can and does involve sorrow. We are going to view today, the God-man, Jesus Christ, who endured unbelievable sorrow and suffering that makes these men's sorrow, and ours, pale in comparison. Let us view the Lord in Gethsemane.

The Setting of Christ's Sorrow

We will begin by setting the context of this unforgettable weekend. Turn to Mark chapter 14 and let us start with verse 32.

The context

You probably remember, if you stayed awake in Sunday school as you were growing up, this is the Passover weekend. It is not coincidental that Jesus Christ will be crucified as the Lamb of God on the very weekend that the high priest will be offering the lamb for the sins of the Israelite nation.

The thing that overwhelms me with God's design is that on the very weekend that the nation Israel, through their high priest, goes before God in atonement for their sins over the previous year, Jesus Christ, the Paschal Lamb, will be crucified for the sins

of not only Israel, but for the entire world. This is the weekend we are studying.

The place

The place is Gethsemane. Look at Mark 14:32.

They came to a place named Gethsemane . . .

This was a garden. Jerusalem, within the city proper, was so densely populated that they were not allowed to have gardens. In fact, there were written city laws that have been discovered that they were not allowed to have gardens because the manure would create such a stench to their neighbors who lived so closely to them.

In the city of Jerusalem then, there were no gardens. It was only outside the city walls and for a person of incredible wealth that little pieces of land were owned where they could have gardens.

We know from studying the life of Christ that He went often in retreat to the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed at this garden on occasion. There was some nameless person, who was a follower of Jesus Christ, who gave his wealth and possessions to the benefit of Christ. And Jesus now retreats to this familiar place, owned by someone the scriptures do not name, the Garden of Gethsemane.

The time

We know from the study of the four Gospels that the time is about midnight.

The Observer's of Christ's Sorrow

Now look at the last part of Mark 14:32.

. . . He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed."

Continue to Mark 14:33.

. . . He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled.

Jesus and His disciples have just had their Passover supper in the Upper Room and have exited out the southern part of the city. They have gone through the eastern gate, around the eastern side of the city and up the western slope of the Mount of Olives and find themselves at the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus tells most of the disciples to stay at the entrance of this garden that may have been walled.

However, after Jesus has seated the disciples, He says to Peter, James, and John, "I want you to come in with Me to the inner recesses of the garden."

Why did Jesus choose these three disciples? We cannot be certain, but let me give some suggestions that will help understand the events that will occur.

Why did Jesus take Peter, James and John?

1. First, Jesus took these three disciples to protect His privacy.

In the inner recesses of the garden, Jesus Christ would do incredible battle with the forces of Satan and the underworld. He wants these men to insure that no one interrupts as He does battle, so He brings these closest companions.

This leads to a second reason.

2. Secondly, Jesus took Peter, James, and John to provide companionship.

It is a tremendous thought that Jesus, being one hundred percent God, was in fact, one hundred percent man. In the hour of His greatest loneliness; His deepest distress, He does not keep His friends away, as we often do, He invites His closest companions in.

However, I think Jesus took these three for more than just companionship.

3. Thirdly, Jesus took these three disciples to produce instruction.

Jesus is going to tell Peter, James, and John the theme we will center on today. He is going to tell these three disciples, by way of illustration with His own life, how to handle sorrow. In other words, when suffering strikes, this is the way we are to respond.

Now, this is not suffering because of sin that we have done; because of our own foolishness. This is suffering that comes our way through the hand of our almighty God to shape us and to mold us and to make us.

Jesus Christ is going to reveal to His three closest disciples, because they can go and teach the others, how to handle the will of God, even when it brings sorrow. So He invites these three in.

The Essence of Christ's Sorrow

Notice some of the key words in this text that reveal Christ's sorrow.

Distressed

Mark 14:32 says Jesus,

... began to be very distressed . . .

This could be translated that Jesus was “in the grip of horror”.

This word was used by the Greek writers of someone who knew some kind of tragedy or difficulty was pending and they were gripped in horror. This is the way Jesus Christ is feeling.

Troubled

Mark 14:32 also says Jesus,

... began to be very . . . troubled.

This is deep anguish.

Grieved

In Mark 14:34, Jesus says to His disciples,

... My soul is deeply grieved . . .

The word “grieved” is a compound word that could be translated to mean, “I am surrounded by sorrows.”

So Jesus Christ – who is all-God, but yet all-man – is experiencing great distress. He is horror filled. He is in deep anguish, surrounded by sorrow.

Now, there the three disciples sit. Watch what happens in the beginning.

Jesus says to these disciples in Mark 14:34b,

... remain here and keep watch.

The word “watch” is a significant word. I will show in a moment, where it appears again in the New Testament.

There are several words in the original language translated “watch,” and they all mean many things. The English language is so crude that there is only one word for this.

There can be a “watch” that means, “watch your convictions”. In other words, build a wall around that which you believe to be true.

The word “watch,” in this verse, means, “be alert – temptation is coming; watch out – Satan approaches”.

This is the word Jesus uses when He says to these three disciples,

... remain here and keep watch.

Continue to Mark 14:35,

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.

Why was Jesus in such agony?

Why was there such agony in the life of Christ? Let me give several reasons. This is not a complete list, but let me give these reasons as to why Christ was feeling such agony.

1. First, Jesus felt agony, obviously, because of the betrayal of Judas.

This is heinous in itself. Judas would betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.

In that day, a slave was sold for thirty pieces of silver. Not only a slave, but from historical context we discover that it was the maimed slave that was sold for this amount; it was the slave that had been, “gored by an ox”. (Exodus 21:32) In other words, this is the price not only of a slave, but of a crippled slave. This was the lowest rung of slave that could be purchased to do labor.

For thirty pieces of silver, Judas would betray Jesus.

2. Secondly, Jesus was also grieving and suffering because of the desertion of the eleven disciples.

Imagine pouring your life into twelve men and then having them all desert you in your most agonizing hour.

3. Thirdly, Jesus was in agony because of the denial by Peter.

Look at Mark 14:31.

But Peter kept saying insistently, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” And they all were saying the same thing also.

Right after this declaration of faith and trust, “I will follow You to the end,” in just a matter of a few hours, Peter will deny Jesus. Peter, in fact, will swear like a sailor that he does not know the Son of God.

4. Fourthly, Jesus was also in agony because of the rejection of Israel.

This is the city that Jesus has come to and wept over. These are the people that He has come to lead into the Kingdom, but they have changed that by their rejection. The people have rejected the King – no King, no Kingdom.

5. Fifthly, Jesus was grieving, perhaps, because of the injustice He must suffer.

God, the Creator of justice, the One who has not one iota of injustice in His body, will now face a mock trial.

6. Sixthly, Jesus was suffering because of the abandonment of His Father.

God the Father and Jesus have been inseparable. This is the disunifying of the Trinity. This is the breaking up of something that has never been broken before.

7. Jesus was in agony because He faced becoming sin.

I am trying to explain, ladies and gentlemen, something that is absolutely unexplainable. There is no way we can understand or verbalize all that Jesus Christ was agonizing over, yet He was in deep distress. We cannot ever comprehend the agony that Jesus must have felt and knew was coming by being made sin; by taking on Himself the sins of the whole world. We cannot imagine, yet the thrill of it is that it was all for us.

Now, let me take your attention to Mark 14:35a,
And He . . . fell to the ground . . .

This word “fell” is continuous in its tense. Get this image in your mind and never forget it.

I have had the image in my mind that Jesus went to some stump of a tree and knelt down with His hands clasped and was in prayer. You have probably seen pictures like this. However, this word indicates continually falling.

In other words, Jesus Christ walks around the garden and He falls down and He prays. He pulls Himself up and He walks a few more steps and He falls again and He prays. He gets up and He falls again. He does this over and over and over again. He is falling and stumbling about this garden, weeping. Jesus is a man in intense agony and sorrow.

Understand that this is no cosmic actor who is following some script. This is not someone who is saying, “Okay, let’s see, the prophets said I’d be here and I’m supposed to pray. And I want to encourage the saints, so I’m going to have some anguish now.” No, absolutely not. This is real.

Turn to Luke chapter 22 and look at verse 44.

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood . . .

I understand from my studies, that this is a condition known as hematidrosis. It is a condition in which a person is in such great agony that underneath the surface of their skin, the capillaries dilate and burst. If sweating is involved, the blood, before it clots or in the clotting stage, mixes with the sweat and literally comes through the pores. The word for “drops” is literally “clots,” or “thrombos,” from which we get the English word “thrombosis”.

This is telling us that Jesus Christ is in such incredible agony that I believe He could have died here in the garden. It would have been premature. Perhaps that is the reason the gospel writer tells us that an angel came at this point, and ministered to Jesus. (Luke 22:43) I think it was because Jesus could have died then and there of a broken heart because He was in such agony.

The Prayers from Christ’s Sorrow

Now notice the prayers that come from Christ’s sorrow. This is the beautiful part of it all. Look at Mark 14:36 and let me give three points related to these prayers.

1. First, notice Jesus’ strength in His Father.

In Mark 14:36a, we read,

. . . He was saying, “Abba! Father! . . .”

“Abba” is perhaps the most affectionate term relating to a son and a father. It could be translated, as some have suggested, “Daddy”; it could be translated, “my own precious”. In other words, “This is My own precious Father.”

Now let us look at our own lives in the mirror of God’s word. What happens when we are engaged in great sorrow? What happens when trouble comes our way? What do we do to God? Do we accuse Him? Do we say, “Where are You, God?”

Jesus Christ, in the midst of the most incredible suffering possible for any human to endure, is praying, “My precious Father.” He never lost sight that God’s hand was in this suffering. There was still a relationship.

2. Secondly, notice Jesus’ struggle.

Look at the words in Mark 14:36b which are very difficult to understand.

. . . All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me . . .

Jesus had no doubt in what He was saying.

What is the cup? I think it is the culmination of all of the things that we have talked about that would bring sorrow to Jesus Christ.

If you read ten commentators, you will find ten different slants on the meaning of this. I tend to believe that this cup is the sum total of Jesus' agony. It involves everything – from the cross; from death; from estrangement; from rejection; from betrayal; from denial; from desertion – it includes all of this.

Jesus Christ knew, because He was omniscient, what was involved and what would happen. He said, "Take this cup from Me."

I think one of the things that was agonizing to Christ' soul, because He was a perfect person and had never sinned; because His soul and character were spotless, was the fact that He would become sin. This is hard to understand. Let me try to explain it with the words of Mark Moseley, who writes this,

"Jesus knows He will bear the sins of the Assyrians who gloated over the captives they skinned alive. He will bear the sins of SS troops machine gunning women and children who ran from burning synagogues with clothes ablaze. He will bear the sins of child molesters making sure their victims would never testify against them. He will bear the sins of Pharaohs sacrificing thousands of faceless laborers to build for them a deifying tomb.

"Jesus would take on all this and more. He was tossed about in the endless storm of enraged fathers beating toddlers to death; pimps seducing teen runaways into lives of drugs and prostitution; Canaanites burning their children to Molech; physicians aborting the lives of crying children; impoverished parents in China selling their daughters into slavery; Bible-believing men praying long and loud while their wives sit in the back pews hoping heavy make-up covers the bruises.

"Jesus will tumble alone and will bear the sins of embezzlers, gangsters, bullies, rapist, liars, the indifferent, the sadistic, the self-righteous. It is a scene of unbearable horror and unspeakable madness. He is the accused for them all, bearing the weight of abused children scarred for life; families destroyed by adultery or apathy; civilizations decaying; wars ravaging; victims; wasted lives; heartache; monstrous atrocities; petty transgressions.

"Humanity dumps its wreckage on this one spot. That is the cup. And Jesus Christ, in the garden, lifts that cup and says in agony, 'Is there any other way?'"

3. Thirdly, notice Jesus' surrender.

In Mark 14:36c, Jesus says,

. . . yet not what I will, but what You will.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me say that sorrow is not enough to produce this – it is our response to sorrow. It is not enough to go through difficulty.

There are people who have gone through difficult circumstances and when you talk to them, you find incredibly bitter people – people who because of that sorrow, have rejected Jesus. And all of us, because we are human, can understand. We might think, "Well, I would imagine that I would respond that way too."

It is not just sorrow – it is how we respond to the sorrow; it is how we go to God when sorrow comes our way that makes the difference.

My family has some dear friends who have been serving on the mission field for decades. As a little boy, I can remember that we would pray for the Templeton's. In fact, this summer my wife and I will provide music for the wedding of the oldest daughter of the Templeton's. These friends came home for furlough after being in Brazil for over twenty years, and while on furlough, which is when missionaries take a break and come back to the United States, they were in an accident. Mrs. Templeton's father was killed and their second-oldest daughter. This news came to me a couple of months ago, and the first thing that crossed my mind was, "Why? This is a family who has been serving in the trenches so faithfully."

I think of another missionary that I knew who worked with my father's missionary organization to the military and pioneered a work in France. He was an incredible servant of God. He went to France when there was nothing for the military and the government gave him the privilege of being the only religious organization to give gospel tracts to military men. He had an incredible open door. He wrote a Baptist theology in French – there had never been one written up to that point. He wrote a history of the Baptist church in France – nothing like that existed previously. The man was brilliant – fluent in four or five languages. He was an incredible part of Missions to Military in France. While home on furlough, he was hit by a driver out of control – and all of a sudden, there was no more missionary to France.

One of the most difficult things that you and I have to struggle with, ladies and gentlemen, is the same thing that Jesus Christ struggled with in this

garden. However, did you notice that Jesus Christ does not do what I do; He does not stand back and holler, “Why?”

Jesus knows, as He says, “My Father,” and as He says, “I surrender My will to Your will,” that nothing can happen that does not come first, through the hand of God. God’s hand is in affliction and it is designed; it is destined to make us what we should be for Him.

So, when sorrows come, the question is, “What will it make of me? Will it bring about in my life a sensitivity and a surrender to a sovereign God or will it bring about bitterness? Will it cause me to run from Him or will it draw me near to Him?”

Jesus Christ, in His surrender, said the words,
. . . *yet not what I will, but what You will.*

The Disciples During Christ’s Sorrow

Now, where are the disciples in this? We need to look at them because this is where we are. Let me give several lessons we can learn from these disciples.

1. First, the disciples were indifferent.

Look at Mark 14:37.

And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?”

It may sound like I am being a little hard on these disciples to say that they were indifferent, but I want to be realistic as to what happens in my life. If I had been there, I think there would have been indifference. The reason for this is that they had no idea of Christ’s struggle.

In the earlier part of this chapter of Mark, Jesus was talking to the disciples and said in verses 27-28,

. . . it is written, [they] will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

Jesus says to Peter, in Mark 14:30,

. . . Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times.

Yet, here Peter is sleeping! Why? He is indifferent; not understanding the issues at stake.

I think there was a second reason these disciples were asleep.

2. Secondly, the disciples were confident.

Look at Mark 14:38.

Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

In other words, “Peter, I know what you said, in verse 31, ‘Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!’”

This was confidence.

It is the confidence of the disciples that allowed them to sleep. It is the humility of Jesus Christ that leads Him to pray. In His prayers, Jesus overcomes. In their sleeping, the disciples will soon fail.

Confidence – “Lord, deny You? Never!”

3. Thirdly, the disciples were cowards.

Look at Mark 14:50.

And they all left Him and fled.

There was indifference, built on the foundation of confidence that ultimately left room for only one response – and that is cowardice and failure.

Application – Lessons from Christ’s Sorrow

Let me draw the strings of this passage by way of application. Let us look at the way we should respond to sorrow that God brings into our lives from the life of Jesus Christ in the garden where He experienced great sorrow. Let me give three thoughts.

1. Number one, closeness to or intimacy with God does not erase the potential for sorrow.

Now, you and I know this is true, do we not? But, we do not act like it when sorrow comes.

We do not act like we know this is true when sorrow comes to someone else. We ask, “Why? I thought they were a good Christian. I thought they were committed.” We start acting like the counselors of Job and start peeling back the leaves and inspecting the fruit, saying, “There has to be a sin somewhere in here.”

Bad things, from our perspective, may happen even when we are committed to Jesus Christ. From His perspective, these things produce maturity.

2. Number two, when in sorrow, friendships are to be utilized, not ignored.

We build the walls because we have been devastated, abandoned, rejected, overcome with

sorrow. We build walls around our lives and no one can penetrate.

Jesus Christ is a wonderful example that when in deep sorrow, we should not ostracize ourselves from close friends – we should involve them.

Now, like the friends of Jesus, they may fail; they may not know what to say, and that is the reason I end with the third lesson.

3. Number three, our truest and best resources during times of sorrow are God's word and prayer.

It is fascinating that Jesus Christ began His ministry by being tempted. There were three onslaughts; three waves and He responded to each by quoting scripture.

Jesus will finish His ministry prior to going to the cross and He will have three waves of prayer; three sessions of prayer as He is engaged in a struggle with the underworld. Just as He began His ministry, He is now tempted to shortchange; short cut; do something other than drink this cup. He responds with prayer.

Do you think the disciples learned anything? Let me point out one fascinating passage of scripture. Turn to I Peter 5:8.

Peter had denied the Lord. He had been slumbering in the garden. He had failed. He had not recognized the necessity of alertness and watching.

Do you remember the word “watch” that I mentioned earlier in our discussion? This word is used in this passage as well, by Peter.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The word “alert” is the same original word as “watch”.

The devil devours many during times of suffering, ladies and gentlemen, because they abandon God.

Continue to I Peter 5:9.

But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

Note the context of suffering. Continue to I Peter 5:10.

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His

eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Peter then says, in I Peter 5:11,

To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.