

A Tribute to the Lamb – Gethsemane!

The Passion of Christ – Part III

John 18:1, Matt. 26:36-46

Introduction

I would invite you to open your Bible to the book of Hebrews, chapter 5. We are discussing a series that we are calling, “A Tribute to the Lamb”.

We entered the garden, in John, chapter 18, just as Judas was hurrying up the hillside toward Gethsemane with six hundred armed Roman soldiers, the temple police, and a mob of others who had come in the night to arrest the Lord.

We find the Lord ready and waiting for them – composed, submissive, even helpful to His would-be captors. How could He, though God and yet, one hundred percent man, be so composed in the garden?

We studied, in our last discussion, the answer. His composure was a result of His perspective – that the cup He would drink had come from the hand of His Father.

I want to ask another question – how did He gain such perspective? And, since He is to be our example, what resource did He rely upon in the garden to handle the loneliest, most difficult moments in His life?

These hours were where, as Doughty wrote in his volume, *Union With Christ*, “Christ’s human nature and His human will struggled with divine will.”

Hebrews, chapter 5, verses 7 through 8, says it all.

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

I do not believe you can appreciate this story unless you understand that we are going to view Jesus, the man, struggling in the garden, as you would have struggled and as you struggle in your Gethsemanes. Through the lens of Scripture, we see the Son of Man, tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. We look and learn and then, worship and marvel at this

tribute to the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world.

I have read that in the 1991 Iran/Iraq war, on the Thursday before the battle began, the Iraqi soldiers dug forty thousand graves in the lonely desert sands. They did not dig these graves for the enemies they hoped to kill, but for themselves. Those graves were testimonials to their willingness to die.

I want to return to the lonely garden and show you what John did not record of the hours just prior to the arrival of Judas. These are shocking hours that are difficult for us to even comprehend. They are hours where Jesus Christ, in effect, dug His grave, signifying His willingness to die.

You will find the amplified account of those lonely hours in Gethsemane in Matthew’s gospel account, chapter 26. Let us begin at verse 36.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

Now, you need to get a picture in your mind – in Jerusalem itself, there were no gardens. The city was too crowded and also, there was a law that the city’s sacred soil should not be polluted with manure for the gardens. I am sure the people, in general, because of the cramped, crowded conditions, probably appreciated this anti-manure law!

However, some of the richest residents owned private gardens out on the Mount of Olives. They built beautiful stone walls around their private acres, where they would rest and relax. Evidently, Jesus had a wealthy friend who had offered Him a place to rest and pray.

The Inner Recesses – Three Friends

Continue to verse 37.

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed.

Why were friends invited?

Now why did He take these three and station them nearby? Why have Peter, James, and John follow Him into the recesses of the garden?

Let me give you three suggestions as to why Jesus invited these friends.

To protect His privacy?

1. To protect His privacy? He knew no one would disturb Him.

To provide companionship?

2. To provide companionship? They did not provide it; in fact, notice verses 43 through 45a.

And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? . . ."

To instruct them?

3. I frankly believe the reason He took them with Him was not for protection or companionship, but to instruct them. Before nodding off to sleep, they would see and hear what, I am sure, would come back to remind them later.

This is how you handle Gethsemanes! This is how you prepare for wooden crosses. This is what you do when you are surrounded by sorrow; when you are overwhelmed by distress! And, more than likely, your closest friends will not be able to understand your deepest feelings and they also may sleep soundly through the night, while you agonize with sorrow.

The Agonizing Prayer – Three Aspects

Let me point out to you, two key words that reveal the emotion of the man, Christ Jesus.

- The first word is in verse 37b, which tells us, ". . . [He] began to be *grieved* . . .". The word "grieved," or "sorrowful" in the King

James and the New International Versions, is a word that could be rendered "troubled". It implied a shrinking from trouble or thought of trouble, which nevertheless cannot be escaped.

Do not ever forget, Jesus Christ is not an actor trying to feel the part; trying to feel what a human being would feel at this moment. While He is one hundred percent divine, He is one hundred percent human.

- The second word is also in verse 37b, which continues and tells us, ". . . [He] began to be *grieved and distressed*." The word "distressed," or "heavy" in the King James Version, and "troubled" in the New International Version, literally means to be overwhelmed with distress. It can be translated, "surrounded by sorrow".

Why such agony? Look again at verse 38.

Then He said to them "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

Why? Could it be:

- because of betrayal (quite frankly, you and I would have been offended to know we had been sold for the price of a crippled slave)?
- the coming desertion of the eleven?
- the denial of Peter, the man in whom He had invested so much time and energy?
- the rejection by the nation Israel, over whom He had wept bitter tears, and yet, heard them cry, as John, chapter 19, verse 15, records, ". . . crucify Him . . . We have no king but Caesar."?
- the injustice of it all – He, the creator of justice, now the recipient of terrible injustice?
- the coming loss of fellowship and intimacy with the Father, as He will cry, according to Matthew, chapter 27, verse 46, ". . . why hast Thou forsaken Me?" or literally, "Why have You abandoned Me?"
- the horror of the cross?
- the fact that He, who knew no sin, would become sin for us?

Yes, it was all of these and a million times more that overwhelmed His humanity, just as it would have crushed ours!

Turn over to Mark's gospel, chapter 14, verses 34 and 35.

And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." 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.

The words, "... [He] fell to the ground, and began to pray ..." are in the imperfect tense. This denotes action in progress.

Now, I know the famous painting of Jesus praying in the garden has Him kneeling at a stone, with His hands folded, in prayer. If you have that picture hanging on the wall, that is okay – He might have prayed that way at some other time. But this time, in the garden, we read, in verse 35a,

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began to pray . . ."

This is in the imperfect tense. It could be read, "He fell to the ground and prayed; got up, went a little further, and fell down and prayed; picked Himself back up, staggered a few more steps, and fell again and prayed" – and Hebrews, chapter 5, verse 7, adds that He did this "... with loud crying and tears ...".

Look at the God-Man in the garden – staggering, falling, crying; staggering, falling, crying. Can you imagine?!

Luke records, in chapter 22, verse 44,

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

The medical community calls this "hematidrosis" – the bursting of the capillaries underneath the surface of the skin. The clotting blood mixes with the sweat of the person under duress and emerges on the skin, blood red.

When you think about it, Jesus shed some blood in the garden too.

Now, just what did Jesus pray?! All the gospel accounts record the same prayer. Let us go back to Matthew, chapter 26 – this is how you handle Gethsemanes.

Christ's opening statement -

1. The first aspect of this agonizing prayer that I want you to notice is Christ's opening statement.

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, verse 39, and get ready to underline a key phrase.

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

Skip to verse 42.

He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done."

The phrase to underline is, "My Father". Through all of this lonely experience, Christ, the man, never lost the sense of utter dependence upon the Father.

In the Aramaic, "My Father" is literally, "Abba" – "Father". It is a term of possessive endearment. Some have tried to translate it "Daddy," which I find falls far short of its meaning.

"Daddy" is an American expression of the young. In France, I noticed it was "Papa". "Daddy" is not necessarily an intimate term; in fact, my kids call me "Daddy" not necessarily because they are close to me, but because they are young. When they get older, they will call me Dad, not because they love me less, but because it is more fitting. So, to refer to God, the Father, as "Daddy" is not necessarily intimacy; in fact, it would trivialize Him.

The Aramaic expression is precious, simply because it is possessive. Literally translated, it is "**MY FATHER!**"

What is so potent for us to learn from this is the simple fact that Christ's moments in the garden did not drive Him to ask, "Where are You anyway?" or to say, "You must not love Me anymore!"

Our Gethsemanes tend to bring us to the wrong conclusion that God is gone! Pain must mean that God is absent!

The mark of Christlike maturity is, during a Gethsemane experience, being able to still pray, "My Father! I know You're mine! I still trust You as Father. I know You haven't left me alone!"

Christ's honest struggle -

2. A second aspect of this prayer to notice is Christ's honest struggle.

Notice verse 39 again.

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me . . .

Then, notice verse 42 again.

My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Thy will be done.

Remember, "the cup" was the categorical term for Christ's sufferings – His betrayal, crucifixion, death, and His abandonment – that is, God the Father would turn away from God the Son in such a way that intimacy would be severed. No, the trinity would not become, for a split second, reduced to duality, but fellowship would be lost while God the Son became filthy sin.

Do you know what it means "to become sin" or "to bear the penalty of the sins of humanity"? I do not, but a writer, by the name of Mark Mosley, astonished me by capturing a small drop from the ocean of truth that related to Christ becoming sin. I want to quote this and, even though it is long, I think it will astonish you too.

Jesus will bear the sins of the Assyrians, who gloated over their captives that they skinned alive. Jesus will bear the sins of SS troops, machine gunning women and children who ran from burning synagogues with clothing ablaze. Jesus will bear the sins of child molesters, making sure their victims never testify. Jesus will bear the sins of Pharaohs, sacrificing thousands of laborers lives to build themselves a deifying tomb. Jesus took on all of this and more.

He was tossed about in the endless storm of enraged fathers beating toddlers to death; pimps seducing runaways into lives of drugs and prostitution; Canaanites burning their children to Moloch; nice church ladies cannibalizing other nice church ladies over coffee; impoverished parents in China selling their children into slavery. He will bear the sins of Bible believing leaders praying long and loud, while their wives sit in the back pews praying heavy make-up covers their bruises. Jesus will tumble alone.

He will bear the sins of embezzlers, gangsters, bullies, rapists, liars, the indifferent, the sadistic, the self-righteous. It is a scene of unbearable horror and unspeakable madness. He is the accused for us all, bearing the weight of abused children, families destroyed by adultery or apathy, civilizations decaying, wars ravaging, victims. Yet, through it all, deep in the terror of hell, He keeps His eyes wide open.

He is not just a bystander caught in the accident, He has come deliberately. He will accept it all, absorbing the full force of this storm of wrath in His body and mind and heart and soul, until there is nothing left to feel.

Finally, the tumbling will slow a bit; the storm will slacken, and Jesus will lift Himself on His nailed feet to snatch a gasp of air and force His swollen tongue to shout, "It is finished. I've come; I've seen; I've paid for; I've felt."

Is it any wonder that Christ staggered and fell and prayed, "My Father . . ."?

Christ's total submission -

3. The third aspect of this prayer for you to notice is Christ's total submission.

Look at the last part of verse 42.

. . . Thy will be done.

When you pray in your garden, when you are surrounded by sorrow, you are more likely to try to conform God's will to yours. Jesus, the model man, surrenders His agonized will to the will of the Father.

The Experience of Gethsemane – Three Lessons

Based upon what Christ has shown us, what are we to learn about experiencing personal Gethsemanes?

Realize! Gethsemanes are the inevitable experience of those who follow Jesus Christ

1. Realize! Gethsemanes are the inevitable experience of those who follow Jesus Christ. Paul said, in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 10a,

that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings . . .

Hebrews told us already, in chapter 5, verse 8b, that,

. . . [Christ] learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

I believe that Gethsemanes would not be so devastating if we were able to understand and accept that they are chisels in the hand of the Father to sculptor us into the image of the Lamb.

Remember! Intimacy with God does not erase the potential of pain

2. Remember! Intimacy with God does not erase the potential of pain.

Fellowship with the Father does not help us avoid the garden, but it helps us walk through it. In fact, it is intimacy that transforms the garden into a classroom where some of the greatest learning can take place.

Ron Hamilton is a man who lost an eye to cancer and who has become known around the country as the musician, "Patch the Pirate". He wrote, shortly after his ordeal,

*Now I can see, testing comes from above,
God strengthens His children and purges in love;
My Father knows best, and I trust in His care,
Through purging, more fruit I will bear.
Oh rejoice in the Lord, He makes no mistake,
He knoweth the end of each path that I take;
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.*

Recognize! Close friends can be reassuring, but cannot be replacements for the Father.

3. Recognize! When in the garden, close friends can be reassuring, but they cannot be replacements for the Father.

Take another look at Christ's associates; His closest friends on earth.

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, verses 40 and 41.

And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you

men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Skip to verses 43 through 46.

And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more.

Then He came to the disciples, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

As I read this passage over and over, different facets of Gethsemane stood out to me. It was not until late in my studies that this struck me – Jesus specifically asked His closest three friends to pray with Him . . . and certainly for Him! Two times He said, "Men, would you pray too?"

Peter, James, and John slept!

One of the ways you will know that you are experiencing a Gethsemane is the fact that no one, not a husband, wife, father, mother, friend, or associate – no one will understand. And those you specifically ask to bear your burden will not be able to enter into your depth of emotion and struggle.

Except One! Jesus knows what that is like – and His message to you is, "I understand and so does My Father."

So, in the garden, Jesus looked into His grave and saw all of the agony of His cup, and said, "Oh My Father, Thy will be done."

And, just as Isaiah, chapter 53, verse 7, foretold, ". . . He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, . . ." so Christ, from this moment forward, with no sound of recoil or hesitation, walks forward – all the way to the cross. And, in the journey, this Lamb has shown us how to walk through Gethsemane.