

Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, the Cry, and the Cross (Part 2)

Introduction

The Text

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Luke 22:39–46)

Part 2: The Cry

- A. I’ve been titling my sermons on this great text: Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, the Cry, and the Cross. And I said last time we were really just going to take those three bits outlined in the title there and consider them one by one for three sermons (or so!).
1. Last time, if you were here, we focused in on The Cup and the fact that Jesus is in agony there in Gethsemane particularly because of what He’s being asked to drink down, as it were: namely, the wrath of God against the sins of all mankind.
 2. But this morning we are now ready to move on to that second piece in the title: The Cry.
 - a. And by this, of course, I have in view the blood-earnest prayers of our Savior here in Gethsemane as He processes and works through with His Father all that’s impending, all that He must face in the next few dreaded hours.
 - a. The darkness is so thick now you can almost feel it—like a suffocating blanket of black. The Light of the world is as a candle flickering. Death is at His ankles. So what does He do? He cries out to His Father . . . He prays!
- B. And so I’ve got three things for us to consider on this. Truth be told, we’re only going to get to the first two, and we’ll wrap around next time and pick up the third. But here they are: (1) That He Prayed; (2) Why He Prayed; and (3) How He Prayed.

(1) That He Prayed

When under Pressure . . .

- A. With this I simply want to bring attention to the fact that Jesus prayed at all. But in order to get at what I'm after here, let me begin with a question for your own personal reflection . . .
1. I want you to think for a moment: When you're under pressure, when you're in trial, when you're struggling and suffering . . . how do you handle it? When the world shakes you to the core . . . what comes out of your heart? How do you react? What do you do?
- B. You probably don't have to work too hard to come up with an answer here. No doubt, this last year has been a year of significant testing and hardship for all of us. So how did you respond in it all?
1. Is your impulse to bear up under the weight of it, tough it out, grin and bear it . . . that sort of thing? You'll fix it, you'll get through it?
 2. Or, if you're honest, are you more likely to grumble and complain and tantrum? Do you throw fits and spill out venom onto those closest to you in your life?
 3. Perhaps you respond by receding inward, isolating, closing off from the world. You pull away and spiral down. Anxiety, fear, depression. You just get in your bed and pull the covers over top.
 4. Maybe you're the type that escapes into things like TV or food or Facebook: "What problem? I don't see a problem?" You try to barrage your senses with pleasure as an attempt to distract or numb the pangs in your heart.
- C. You see, there's a whole array of possible responses and some we'll each be more prone to than others—depending on our personality and temperament.

As Was His Custom

- A. But here, in our text, we see how Jesus responds when the water starts to boil. He prays. And I mean He really prays. That's what's going on here, is it not? These verses really are just a vivid description of our Lord's prayer life.
- B. And there's a little detail there at the beginning of [v. 39](#) that stood out to me, and really it's this that inspired this first point. I want you to see it. We read: "[And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.](#)"
1. Now, it was that phrase "[as was his custom](#)" that so arrested me. "[Custom](#)" there in the Greek is the word [ethos](#) and it means "[habit](#)."
- C. So evidently, it seems that Jesus—during this last week of His life, and most likely during previous visits to Jerusalem and things—made a habit of spending his evenings on the slopes of this mount just outside the city.
1. So we read in [Luke 21:37](#) for example: "[And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged \[likely 'bivouacked'\] on the mount called Olivet.](#)"
 - a. The idea seems to be (and we see this sort of thing elsewhere in Luke's descriptions of Jesus' customs and habits) that He would preach the gospel and minister to the

masses during the day, but then He would pull away a bit in the evenings and spend time with His disciples, no doubt, but especially with His Father, enjoying times of more intimate communion, resting and refreshing in fellowship and in prayer. This is how He stayed close to His Father's heart in the midst of the crazy and chaos of the day to day.

- i. So [Luke 6:12](#) for example: “[In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.](#)” Clearly this is one of the customs or habits He'd built into His life from the start.

- D. And here's where I'm going with all this: Because He had so devoted Himself to such a habit all along, He was primed and ready to respond appropriately when the heat was really turned up to hellish temps.
 1. You don't see Him lashing out in frustration. You don't see Him throwing a pity party. You don't see Him escaping into pleasures or any of these sorts of things.
 2. You see Him doing just what we all should be doing when under pressure, He's praying, He's throwing Himself into the arms of His Father, crying out to Him, relying upon Him.
 - a. And He does this, brothers and sisters, because it had been His developed custom all along. It was His habit, to delight Himself in the Father's presence, to unburden Himself every day in prayer to the God who hears and cares and who alone can truly provide help in time of need. That's the point to bring out here.

Auditing Our Habits

- A. And that's the thing for us to consider personally as well. How are your customs, your habits, spiritually speaking? We all have them in one way or another, whether self-consciously or not. We all have certain rhythms, and rituals, and routines.
 1. And the question of the utmost importance here is this: Are these customs we have preparing us for times of hardship, or are they going to prove liabilities in the end? Are we developing habits, in other words, that will be there for us in the day of trouble?
- A. I think it's time that we audit our habits and really consider these things seriously. We cannot expect that we shall respond properly in temptation and trial if we are not readying ourselves for those things now. If I could put it this way: We lay the groundwork for tomorrow's faithfulness with the habits we develop today.
 1. We cannot, we must not, expect, “Oh I'll get serious about God and prayer and things, when life gets tough, when I really need Him, but now things are going well, and I just want to enjoy it, live it up.”
- B. Listen, if you operate like that, when the day of trouble comes, you'll be where these disciples are here in our text. Did you notice? Jesus says: “Stay awake, keep watch, [‘pray that you may not enter into temptation’ \(vv. 40, 46\)](#)” And, when He comes back to them, what are they doing? They're sleeping.

1. The other gospel writers tell us this happened three times. “Stay awake and pray!” . . . and they’re sleeping. “Stay awake and pray!” . . . and they’re sleeping. “Stay awake and pray!” . . . and they’re sleeping.
 - a. These guys don’t have it. They aren’t ready. The habits weren’t in place before and so they are left unprepared and unfit when it all comes down.

We Get This . . . But We Don’t

A. We get this principle elsewhere in our lives. This isn’t that complex.

1. We understand that financially, for example, if you are not putting away money now, you can’t expect that when it comes time to retire or when there’s an emergency or something, that you’ll have anything there for you.
 - a. That’s one of the things I’m working on now with money—and Bob Durstenfeld is trying to coach me through it. I don’t have these sorts of habits yet that will set me up for success in the future. And I need that. I know that if I’m not investing and things today, it won’t be there for me tomorrow. These are customs or habits that I need to develop now with a view to what’s coming later.
2. Or, as another example, we understand this physically as well, do we not? If you were wanting to run a marathon or something, no one would think you could just kind of train the week of the race and be ready for that.
 - a. You object, “But I was an athlete in high school. I used to run all the time!” Well that’s great, but brother your almost 40 years old now. That was like two decades ago. That’s not how this works. You have to develop habits of training and diet and things and then when the time of testing comes, when the gun is fired, well you’ll be ready. But if your diet consists of pizza and beer, and your idea of exercise is getting up to grab another cold one from the fridge or stretching for the remote on the coffee table, well my friend that race is going to be an embarrassment. You’re going to be throwing up pepperoni and Budweiser all over the track.

B. So we get how this works in the other areas of our lives. We know we have to develop good habits and things. But for some reason we just kind of think spiritual stuff is different. We think that when things get hard we’ll be able to shift gears and really rely on God and resist temptation and get through firm in the faith and things.

1. Perhaps this is because we know we’re saved by grace and stuff so we don’t take it all that seriously. But we forget that the point of grace is to absolve us of all responsibility. It’s to forgive us our sin, certainly, but then it helps us grow in the ways of Jesus, and what does Jesus do? He develops good, holy habits.

C. So I beg you once more, audit your habits, especially with concern for this spiritual readiness. Are you developing customs during peacetime that will be there for you when the war breaks out?

1. Are you daily meeting with God in His word and in prayer?

2. Are you gathering with the saints on a regular basis for worship and submitting yourself to spiritual authority?
3. Are you running with other believers throughout the week—people who know you for real and are praying for you and holding you accountable and things?
4. Are you fasting from time to time and getting used to telling your flesh “No” for the sake of God’s kingdom? That’s training in many ways. If all you do is say, “Yes!” “Yes!” “Yes!” to your bodily appetites and urges, of course you’re going to say, “Yes!” when the devil comes with forbidden fruit. You’re not ready to resist.

A Couple Examples

- A. Let me give just a couple examples on this point before we move on . . .
- B. The first is just with regard to Home Groups. Think about all that happened this last year with the pandemic and things. If you were a committed part of a Home Group before, if that was your custom, how helpful it was, right?! You were sustained in those relationships. You already had that habit going. You had people in your corner caring for you.
 1. But if you didn’t, man, I know some just spiraled further out into isolation and things . . . and your spiritual life just tanked. Sometimes you can pivot and make those changes on the fly, but often we can’t.
- C. The second example is something that’s affected me personally. Many of you probably heard about the late Ravi Zacarias and the things that have only recently come out about his lifestyle and things. He was a world-renowned apologist—very charismatic, very influential for many in the faith.
 1. And then, after he died, little by little, stuff started coming out. There were all these women who came forward discussing the shameful things that this man would have them do sexually and all this. I can’t even repeat it. And it’s been verified.
 - a. The man was twisted up and two-faced. “Ministry life is hard. I deserve this. I need this. God would understand.” These are the things He would say—the way He would excuse himself in his wretchedness.
- D. Now, as a minister myself, there are at least two ways I could respond to this sort of thing . . .
 1. I could look down my nose in judgment: “How could he? What a monster! What a blemish on the great gospel he claimed to defend! I could never see myself doing such a thing. It’s unthinkable!”
 2. Or I could see myself in his sin, I could recognize my own reflection in the frailty of his flesh, and instead of looking down my nose in judgment upon him I could say: “Wow, this could be me! But I don’t want it to be. What can I learn from this?”
- E. And I’ll tell you, as I read more about the situation, I realized that he didn’t have accountability, he wasn’t a regular member of a local church because he travelled so much, he didn’t have habits in place to safeguard him and stabilize him when temptation came. And so I thought, “My goodness! What habits can I set in place now that will protect me from that later?”

1. Now, I've not quite finished it yet, but, in response to this, I began putting together a simple little survey that our Elders will need to fill out every month prior to our Elders' meetings and the questions will be those sorts of things that get at the heart of this: "How are you doing with the Elder qualifications in general and this issue of sexual purity in particular?"
 - a. If you don't open the door for support and accountability now, you won't go looking for it when you're giving way to the dark. I need guys who are used to coming through that door, so if, God forbid, I ever try to close it, they come knocking—they're going to break that door down before I get sucked into all this nonsense.
 - i. You see what I mean? We need that. I need that.
- F. So get your daily devotions going. Go for prayer walks in the morning. Join a Home Group. Reach out to us about starting up a DNA Group, we're happy to help. Sign up for the ladies Bible study, who cares that you're a couple weeks behind. Do something!
 1. Audit your habits and start cutting out those things that aren't helpful, and start adding those things that will keep you spiritually healthy and strong . . . even in the midst of great pressure and pain.
- G. "And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives . . ." (v. 39).
 1. Jesus had already run this track countless times, so it was just customary, habitual, second-nature, to run towards His Father and cry out to Him there on the Mount of Olives on this the most devastating night of His life.

(2) Why He Prayed

Backing into the Question

- A. But now we come to the second heading: namely, Why He Prayed. Now I'm going to try to back us into this one for a moment here . . .
- B. At first read, Jesus' crying out in Gethsemane seems a little odd, doesn't it—at least if you've been following along with Him in this gospel to this point? I guess what I mean is this: This isn't news to Jesus—that He's going to suffer and die for the sins of many, is it?
 1. Certainly not! He's been talking about it all along. He's been unmistakably explicit about the matter since at least all the way back in [Luke 9:22](#) where He pulls His disciples aside and He says: "[The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.](#)"
 - a. He knows what He's come to do. He knows what Good Friday will mean for Him. He knows that He's headed for the cross.

2. I mean, after all, He just got done saying a few verses prior in [Luke 22:37](#): “For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’ [referring to the Suffering Servant of Isa. 53]. For what is written about me has its fulfillment.”
 - a. Again, it “must” happen. It will be fulfilled. He knows it’s a part of the plan—the centermost part, the most essential part—of that plan . . . the plan of redemption.
 3. He even talked explicitly about this “cup” previously with James and John and their mother. Do you remember this? [Mark 10:38](#): “Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink . . . ?’”
 4. And in [John 12:27-28a](#), right before the Last Supper, when Jesus knows the end is drawing near, what does He say? “²⁷ Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.^{28a} Father, glorify your name.”
 - a. Did you hear that? Isn’t this like the anti-Gethsemane prayer? He doesn’t say, “Father, save Me.” He doesn’t say, “Father, remove the cup.”
 - b. No! Quite the opposite. He says, “This is what it’s all been about. This is what it’s all been moving towards. This is why I’m here. Father, as I lay My life down in love for sinners, glorify Your Name!”
- C. But then, fast forward a little bit, and here He is in Gethsemane, on His face, sweating blood, pleading with His Father, [Luke 22:42](#): “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. . . .”

Why?!

- A. And now here we’re ready to ask the question: Why?! Why does He pray such a thing as He does here—if He’s been moving towards this all along? What are we supposed to make of it?
1. I’ve got two reasons for us to consider . . .

Reason #1: Because Jesus Is Truly Human

- A. Now, to be sure, we are running straight up against the mystery of the incarnation here—that Christ, while fully God, is also fully man. And these verses in Luke—by my read, and the read of many commentators as well—are here to accent for us the authenticity of His humanity.
1. One commentator writes: “[This] prayer is intensely human. ‘Take this cup from me’ is a window of crystal clarity into the soul of Jesus, in whom every human being recognizes his own soul” (PNTC).
 2. Another commentator writes: “Nowhere else in the gospel tradition is the humanity of Jesus so evident as here” (TAB).
- B. It’s interesting. There’s been a bit of controversy over the years, regarding the validity of some of these verses—[vv. 43-44](#) in particular. Your English translations may even mention in the footnotes that some of the manuscripts we have omit these two verses. And scholars have wrestled as to why this would be and what we should do about it.

1. But one of the arguments that seems to have held sway in defense of the authenticity of these verses is that it seems far more likely that the early church, rather than putting these verses in where they weren't before, actually removed them from where they were previously.
 - a. "Why?" you ask. Well, as the reasoning goes, because they present Jesus as too human, and in so doing seem to compromise His deity. And so some in the early church, fighting for the divinity of Jesus, saw these verses as a liability, and they therefore tried to strike them out of the copies and things.

- C. It's certainly plausible. Look at vv. 43-44 again and you'll perhaps see their concern: " ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."
 1. Do you see Him there? So helpless that He needs an angel's strength. So anxious that He's sweating blood. So weak and frail that He's fallen on the ground. So human, right? Almost . . . too human.
 - a. And there it was. We can't have a Savior like this, can we?
 - a. Indeed, I tell you, friends, according to the Bible, we not only can . . . we must!

- D. For this we have to remember what I would call the covenantal substructure of the gospel. You say, what in the world does that mean? Let me explain it as simply as I can.
 1. In Gen. 1-2, God enters into covenant with humanity, with Adam and Eve, and it centers on this tree there which is given as a way of testing man's heart and ultimate allegiance. And God says: " ^{16b} You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16b-17). It's a world of "Yes!" and a single tree of "No."
 - a. But still humanity rebels. They will eat of that tree regardless of any command, without concern for any consequence, in spite of the covenant.

- E. And now here's what we must see. Though they eat of it, in that day they did not surely die, did they? Oh sure, spiritually it could be said that they died, but they did not die in full. The ground should have opened up and swallowed them whole right then and there. But it doesn't. Why?
 1. Is God a liar? Certainly not. They are not put to death here because God is untrue or deceptive or something like this. They are not put to death here because He's gracious. And instead of coming in wrath, which they would have deserved, He comes in mercy.
 - a. He still curses, there are still consequences, but He also makes them one all-important promise. It's the promise of a coming One, an offspring of the woman, a human being, who will die in full in their place and, hence, overturn the curse.

- a. It is human beings who break covenant with God and are deserving of death. Therefore it is a human being alone who can rightly pay what is owed.

- F. What is happening to Jesus on the cross? God is coming to demand from Him, what He held off in demanding from Adam and Eve and you and I and the entire human race. Do you see?
 - 1. At Calvary, the ground that should have opened up to swallow us is opening up to swallow Him. As the old hymn goes: “In my place condemned He stood” . . . as a man, as a truly and fully human being.
 - a. Which is why Paul would make such a big deal of it later in Gal 4:4-5: “⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

- G. If He’s not fully human, then we’re not fully redeemed. That’s what we come to understand. And that’s what Gregory of Nazianzus, back in the 4th century A.D., now so famously wrote: “[T]hat which [Christ] has not assumed [or taken on and into Himself] He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. Let them not, then, begrudge us our complete salvation . . .” (Ep. Cl.).
 - 1. Jesus is truly man, or I am not truly saved.

Reason #2: Because God’s Wrath Is Truly Horrifying

- A. And all of this really leads us to the second reason I’d propose as to why Jesus is suddenly and somewhat surprisingly recoiling here in the final hours—why He’s crying out, pleading for His Father’s intervention here in Gethsemane . . .
 - 1. The first: Because Jesus Is Truly Human.
 - 2. The second now: Because God’s Wrath Is Truly Horrifying.

- B. The distressed cries of our Savior in Gethsemane not only accent His true humanity they also and especially accent the true horror of what He would soon experience on the cross, what He would experience in our place.
 - 1. With this we are simply reminded of all that I spoke of last time with regard to the cup—what is in it, what He’s being asked to drink.
 - a. I certainly can’t go into all of that again, but suffice it to say, of course Jesus knew all along that He had come to take upon Himself the wrath of God due our sins, but when it finally came time, when He actually peered into the cup, as it were, there in Gethsemane . . . everything in Him reeled back with horror. “No! I can’t drink it! Father is there any other way?!”

- C. I'll let Dane Ortlund take us by the hand and lead us home on this. Let me read his words here and then I'll draw things to a close: "[Jesus'] ministry to this point has been utterly demanding—he has been tired and hungry, physically; misunderstood and mistreated by his friends and family, relationally; cornered and accused by the religious elite, publicly. But what is all this compared to what now lay before him? What is a cold drizzle compared to drowning? What is a shouted insult when you are on your way to the guillotine?

For consider exactly what was impending. Jesus had done his Father's will unwaveringly. But throughout it all, he knew he had the pleasure and favor of his Father. It had been pronounced over him (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Now his worst nightmare as about to wash over him. Hell itself—not metaphorically, but in actuality, the horror of condemnation and darkness and death—was opening its jaws" (Gentle and Lowly, 199).

- D. Brothers and sisters, that's why He prays, that's why He pleads, that's why He cries out with such depth of feeling.

1. He's truly human. And the contents of this cup are truly horrifying.

a. But, and here's the thing we must remember as we close, He drank it down anyway . . . in love for you and for me.

- E. So the call today is to come to Him, to believe on Him, to put your trust in Him and His finished work at Calvary, and let Him forgive you, let Him wash you, and let Him start to rebuild you, to rework your customs and habits and way of life, so it starts to look more like His, and you start to find yourself more stable, and more free.

1. We just watched Him engaging His Father in prayer, let's do the same now!