

Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, the Cry, and the Cross (Part 4)

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 4: The Cross

- A. As we find ourselves beginning to celebrate now Holy Week, the last week in Jesus’ earthly life, today being Palm Sunday in particular, it’s fitting, that by God’s providence, we find ourselves in this text that takes place on Thursday night of this week. And it prepares us, of course, to appreciate all the more Good Friday and Easter Sunday.
- B. So we come now to the last message on this text, part 4 of the little mini-series we’ve been calling Agony in Gethsemane: The Cup, the Cry, and the Cross. It’s that last piece there that we’ll be taking up this morning: namely, the Cross.
 - 1. Now, for this we’ll be looking in particular at the uniqueness of Jesus—what He’s being called to do at Calvary for our sake and why we so desperately and profoundly need it.
- C. I’ve got three headings for us to consider here: (1) The Only One; (2) The Only Way; and (3) The Only Hope. Let’s take them now one at a time.

(1) The Only One

Luke the Painter

- A. Luke, it seems to me, orders his recounting of the story here in such a way so as to emphasize and accent the uniqueness of Jesus as the only truly faithful One. I wonder if you noticed the structure of the narrative here?
 - 1. On the front end there in v. 40 Jesus issues His disciples a command: “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.”

2. And then on the back end of this text we see there in [vv. 45-46](#) that that these men were woefully insufficient for the task: “^{45b} [H]e came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow,⁴⁶ and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? [And then He repeats the previous instructions . . .] Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”
- B. So on the one end, we are confronted with what we ought to be doing. And then on the other end, we are confronted with the harsh truth that we simply have not the strength in ourselves to do it.
1. And then, situated there in the middle of this text, at the heart of the passage, front and center, between this sad reminder of our own frailty and faithlessness, is Jesus, our Savior, our High Priest, praying, earnestly, passionately, faithfully—for Himself, no doubt, but for us as well.
 - a. The message is clear: He is the only truly faithful One.
- C. It’s as if Luke has taken up the brush of a painter here, and His goal is to showcase on the canvas the unique glory of Jesus our Lord and Savior, and so, in an effort to make the colors really pop, He puts a dark frame around it, the contrast is unmistakable. Everyone’s eyes are drawn to the God-Man situated at the center.
1. As one commentator remarks: “Jesus’ twice-repeated command to “pray not to fall into temptation” frames his own prayer in the middle of the account . . . [H]is faithfulness stands in stark contrast to the disciples’ lethargy” (PNTC).
- D. And all of this really only gets more pronounced when once we consider from where we just came in Luke’s gospel. You remember, of course, the loud boasts of Peter (and all the disciples really): “We will never fall away!” (cf. [Luke 22:33](#); [Matt. 26:35](#); [Mark 14:31](#)).
1. Matthew and Mark, in their gospels, locate that conversation happening along the way to the Gethsemane, literally just moments before this scene in our text.
 - a. These guys are so confident in their own strength and ability, and, yet, when it comes down to it, they have nothing of what’s required. Not only will they soon flee for fear from the approaching Jews and the Romans, they can’t even stay awake and pray.

Three Things Learned

A. Three quick things we learn about Jesus as “The Only One” here . . .

(1) We Learn Something of His Unique Strength

- A. In [Gen 3](#), we see how the first Adam there in Eden, in a garden, gives way to temptation leading to condemnation and the fall of the human race.
1. But now here in [Luke 22](#), we see how Jesus, whom the Scriptures refer to as the second and last Adam, in Gethsemane, in yet another garden, is standing firm. And His successful

resistance will lead not to condemnation but salvation, not to the fall of the human race but to the redeeming and uplifting of it!

- B. You see, all in the first Adam, you and I included, are there with these disciples in Gethsemane . . . sleeping. We are unable in ourselves to keep covenant with God, to resist temptation, to atone for our sin, to merit our salvation, and things like this.
 - 1. Our frailty and even depravity are utterly exposed here. How many times has Christ stayed up late with His disciples, caring for, tending to, their needs and worries and fears. And yet here when our Savior says, “Stay awake with Me” our eyelids grow heavy with self-concern and self-pity.
- C. We fall asleep with the first Adam. While, Christ, the second and last Adam, the headwaters of a new humanity, is awake, praying, interceding, resolving to go to the cross . . . alone.

(2) We Learn Something of His Unique Heart

- A. I had said in Part 2, I believe it was, that Jesus had to be fully human because of the nature of the covenant God made with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
 - 1. Human beings sinned and rebelled against God deserving death, and therefore, if they are to be saved, a human being would have to die in their place.
- B. But there is another reason we are told in the Scriptures that Jesus had to be fully man, and it has to do with the type of ongoing ministry He would have to us—it has to do with His being made our merciful and faithful High Priest.
 - 1. With this of course of those wonderful texts in Hebrews where the idea is most clearly delineated. Let me give you a couple of them:
 - a. [Heb. 2:17-18](#): “¹⁷ [H]e had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”
 - b. [Heb. 4:14-16](#): “¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.”
- C. It’s this very thing that’s already foreshadowed here in Gethsemane, is it not? What does Jesus do with these faltering and slumbering disciples?
 - 1. I tell you what I’d want to do. I’d want to slap them on the backside of the head. “You’re ‘[sleeping for sorrow](#)’ ([Luke 22:45](#)), are you kidding me? You’re not having to deal with even the smallest fraction of what I’m having to take on. How pathetic.”

2. But that's not how He responds, is it? There's no frustration, there's no irritability, there's no judgment nor condemnation . . . there's only mercy and grace for their time of need.
 - a. He knows what it's like to be human and tempted, through and through, and when He sees us in the thick of it, His heart wells with compassion and He draws near to help.
 - i. Contrary to the popular creed, Jesus doesn't help those who help themselves, He helps those who are helpless. That's why He's come!
- D. And that's why I say we learn something here of His unique heart. Jesus doesn't flaunt His power in the way we would. He doesn't mock us from His place of superiority. "I made it through temptation, why can't you?!" No!
 1. Jesus doesn't use His strength to strut over and against us. He uses it to serve us.
- E. And some of you really need to hear this. You're trying to climb that ladder back to God. You're trying to prove your worth, earn your keep. And you feel like a failure. You feel like a drowsy disciple, slumbering and stumbling when you should be so much more.
 1. And if that's you, let the vision of Christ here penetrate your heart. He doesn't close off from these disciples. He's merciful and faithful to them. And He will be to you as well.

(3) We Learn Something of His Unique Death

- A. With this scene in Gethsemane I'm reminded of the way God initially made covenant with Abraham. I've referenced it before.
 1. God had promised Abraham seemingly impossible things—a child, descendants like the stars, a land, a nation in which all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, and all of this.
 2. And Abraham said, "Well and good God but how can I really know you are going to do all this?"
 3. And so God responded in typical fashion for the time by "cutting a covenant" with him. You would cut these animals in two and lay them on either side and then the two parties entering into covenant together would walk through as if to say: "If we don't keep our side of the deal let us become as these animals here" (cf. [Jer. 34:18-19](#)). Pretty brutal, I know. But you certainly get the idea that your "Yes" should be "Yes." This is how they did things in the ancient world.
 4. Only God, this time, throws in a twist. Instead of both parties walking through, in [Gen. 15:12](#) we're told that "[a]s the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram." And then, while Abraham sleeps, God alone walks through the pieces.

5. What is He doing here? What is He saying with this? He's saying, "Abram, here's how you can know all these things for certain: I Myself will keep both sides of this deal on pain of death! If you fail on your side, still I Myself will pay for it!"
- B. And this is why Jesus is here in agony in Gethsemane preparing to die while His disciples are yet once more, just like Abram, sleeping.
1. God has upheld His end of the deal as always, and yet now the time has come for Him to pay for our utter neglect of it. He will make good on His promise of grace and ultimate blessing, even though we are utterly undeserving. Jesus will be cut in two for our violation.
- C. God alone is upholding the covenant for our redemption. Make no mistake, we can take no credit for what is about to happen. We do not bring anything to this equation but our sin and frailty. We are not participants in earning our salvation. It is not a little bit of Jesus' strength and righteousness and a little bit of ours. It is Jesus alone who can do what must be done . . . while we sleep.
1. O weary Christian, behold your unslumbering Savior! It's not on you to pull yourself up to salvation. He's taken it on Himself, He's taken you on His back.
- D. And all this leads now to the second heading . . .

(2) The Only Way

"If You Are Willing . . ."

- A. I've not yet brought out a very important implication that can be drawn from Jesus' prayer here in Gethsemane and God's response to it all.
1. In [v. 42](#), Luke records Jesus as saying: "[Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. . .](#)"
 2. But God doesn't remove the cup from Him, His Father isn't willing.
 - a. Jesus rises up from His knees with the shadow of the cross still thick upon Him. In the dark distance He hears the footsteps of Judas getting louder with every moment.
- B. "If you are willing, remove it!" But the Father isn't willing. Why? Why not spare His only beloved Son from this horrendous experience? Why make Him drink down the full and foaming cup of His wrath against the sins of mankind when He Himself had done no wrong? Why?!
1. Answer: It is not possible for you and I to be saved any other way.
- C. You see, in Matthew's gospel, we're given another angle on Jesus' prayer, [Matt. 26:39](#): "[And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. . .'](#)"
1. Now is it possible for the Father to let the cup pass from His Son?

- a. Well, technically, I suppose it is.
 - b. But it is not possible for the Father to let the cup pass by the Son if the Father also wants to save you and I from our sin. No! There is no other way.
 - i. That's the implication: "If I could, I would Son, but this is the only option we've got!"
- D. Here in Gethsemane then we have clearly implied what Jesus Himself stated explicitly earlier in His ministry, [John 14:6](#): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- 1. Or as Peter, after Pentecost, would later boldly declare before the Sanhedrin: "¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" ([Acts 4:11–12](#)).

One Way Among Many?

- A. He's the only way, out of your sin, back to God. The cross of Christ, that's it. Here is the uniqueness of the Christian offer.
- 1. It is not just one religion among many. There are not various paths up the mountain to God and you can take the Buddhist way or the Hindu way or the Muslim way or the Jewish way or whatever.
 - a. There is only one way and it leads through Christ and His cross.
 - i. That's why He's turned down in the garden, though the Father no doubt rent out His own heart in the process. He held firm the cup to His Son's lips because it was the only way to save me and to save you!
- B. And now I beg you, please, we must not think that to claim Jesus as the only way to God is an arrogant or intolerant or self-righteous thing. No! Quite the opposite. It is fundamentally a gracious thing. That is what sets Christianity apart!
- 1. It sounds humble and nice, perhaps, to say that there are other paths up the mountain, but all these other paths are fundamentally at odds with the Christian path, precisely because they are built upon the arrogance and self-righteousness of man.
 - a. They are all essentially paths of human works and human merit, whereas only Christianity presents a path of grace.
 - i. Men cannot make their way up the mountain. Only Christ has done it and by His grace alone through faith in Him alone . . . we can as well.
- C. I love how author Philip Yancey records an old story from the life C.S. Lewis: "[During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world were discussing whether any](#)

one belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions. In his forthright manner Lewis responded, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree. The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eightfold path, the Hindu doctrine of karma, the Jewish covenant [i.e. keeping the commandments], and the Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditional."

1. And it's made unconditional for us because radical, inflexible, unforgiving conditions were placed upon Jesus. He fulfilled the conditions positive and negative to make possible the way of salvation for us.
 - a. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.
 - b. And when He rises again from the dead and pours out His Spirit upon us, by virtue of our now union with Him all that is rightly His is now truly ours as well.
- D. He is the only way. All the other religions give you good advice, some things you can do to try to get up there. But only Christianity gives you good news, the gospel, the message that Jesus has already done it!
 1. Here is why we send our missionaries wherever Christ is not named.
 2. Here is why we preach the gospel here every week and call people to repentance and faith in Christ and His grace.
 3. Here is why I beg you even now to consider where you stand in relation with Jesus. Are you just seeing Him as a good teacher, a notable guy, a religious sage who can offer some sound spiritual advice, or are you seeing Him as your Savior, as the only way for you to get back to God?
- E. And, of course, this leads to the third and final heading . . .

(3) The Only Hope

Circling Back to Part 1

- A. For this I want to circle back on some things we had looked at all the way back in Part 1 of these sermons.
- B. At the time I was trying to answer the question: Why the agony for Jesus here? What's the big deal? Why's He so worked up and stressed, right?
 1. And I said there were certain hints in the text as to why this might be and one of those hints was this mount that Jesus is on at this point, ["the Mount of Olives" \(Luke 22:39\)](#).

- a. We located three different places in the OT where this mount is featured and I showed you the negative connotations of each.
 - i. But I pulled up short on every one of them. And now I want to bring in the full story. I want to show you how it all ends on a high note. I want you to see how Jesus, even by way of these OT texts, is held up as our only hope.

C. Let me walk as back through those OT appearances . . .

Appearance #1: 2 Samuel 15:30 - The Hope of Pardon

- A. In [2 Sam. 15:30](#) we saw that King David walks up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he goes, we're told, with some of his closest associates, leaving Jerusalem and his house there, because Absalom, his own flesh and blood, had made a run on his throne and many in Israel had gone along with him.
 - 1. And we said it's a story of rejection. And it foreshadows what Jesus is experiencing here in a much greater degree. He is God's anointed King of kings, and He's here on the same mount, looking out over the city that has rejected Him, with a band of his closest disciples beside him, weeping, sorrowful unto death.
- B. This is a part of David's story there in [2 Samuel](#), but it's not where it ends. I read through this and all the parallels struck me afresh. But here's what I want to bring out.
 - 1. As David is leaving the city, ascending this mount and things, he comes later to meet a man by the name of Shimei, and we're told that he curses David continually and throws stones at him and is flinging dust at them as they walk.
 - 2. And one from David's inner circle wants to take his head off and do away with him, but David stops him and says: "Leave him be, it may be that the LORD will overturn all his cursing and work it for my good" (cf. [2 Sam. 16:11-12](#)).
 - 3. And you know, in time, that's just what happens, and David is restored to the throne. And this man Shimei comes back, worried, concerned, saying "[I have sinned](#)" (19:20). And again, Abishai says, "Let's kill him!"
 - 4. But the King says, "No." And he pardons.
- C. And I thought: This is where Gethsemane is going! This connection with the Mount of Olives, and King David, it's not just foreshadowing Christ's rejection, it's an anticipation of the forgiveness He will offer to all the guilty when once He's restored in the resurrection.
 - 1. That's why, after His vindication and resurrection, He says to His disciples in [Luke 24:47](#): "[\[R\]epentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in \[My\] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.](#)"
 - a. Not: "Skip Jerusalem because they rejected Me."
 - b. But "Start there, especially there, because I've come to make way for the forgiveness of sinners!"
- D. Jesus is our only hope of pardon. You feel guilty? You feel dirty? He'll forgive. He'll wash. Come!

Appearance #2: 2 Kings 23:13 – The Hope of Triumph

- A. In [2 Kings 23:13](#) I showed you how this mount came to be known not just as the Mount of Olives but also as “the Mount of Corruption” because of Solomon’s idolatry and things. He’d set up places for worshipping other gods in and around this place.
1. And Jesus is here, aware that He is being asked to pay for these sins, to drink down the wrath of God due them in our stead. Oh what a horrid thought.
- B. But that’s not where the story ends. This is not what this mount shall be known for when the story’s done. No! You see, the Mount of Corruption once Jesus gets ahold of it will become the Mount of Ascension.
1. I wonder if you ever noticed, Luke tells us Jesus didn’t just agonize there in the dirt on the Mount of Olives.
 2. He also, after His resurrection, leads His disciples back to this same mount and ascends to His Father from it in ultimate triumph (cf. [Luke 24:50](#); [Acts 1:12](#)).
 - a. The place of agony becomes the place of victory. The place where He once writhed in the dirt is the place He later rises to sky. The Mount of Corruption, by way of the cross, becomes the Mount of Ascension.
- C. Listen, your sin, brothers and sisters, your corruption, will not have the last word in this story. Jesus’ death and resurrection, His mercy and His grace . . . will! He is able to take broken, nasty stuff about you, that you don’t want anyone to know about, and turn it to triumph because of the cross.

Appearance #3: Ezekiel 11:23 – The Hope of Glory

- A. In [Ezekiel 11:23](#) I showed you how God’s glory, in judgment on Judah because of their sin, was leaving the temple there. And Ezekiel talks about this vision where he sees the glory cloud of God’s presence departing and it goes out towards the East and lingers on the Mount of Olives there before finally carrying off and away.
1. And so, as Jesus prayed here on this same mount, He was, no doubt, freshly reminded that this was the last stop God’s glory-presence made before it abandoned Judah altogether. He knew what was coming for Him. He would experience exile from God’s presence, abandonment there on the cross, judgement—not for His own sin, but for ours.
- B. And yet again this is not the end of the story. In many ways, this scene in [Ezek. 11](#) sets up the tension in this book that is not resolved until last chapters of the book, where suddenly, amazingly, the glory-presence of the Lord returns—re-tracing the very same route it once took when departing. It comes back in from the east, and this time everything, instead of being left to destruction, it’s being made new.
1. Listen to this, [Ezek. 43:1-5](#): “¹Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing east. ²And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. ³And the vision I saw was

just like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and just like the vision that I had seen by the Chebar canal. And I fell on my face.⁴ As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east,⁵ the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.”

2. And the whole vision comes to this climax point in [Ezek. 47](#) where the prophet is given dramatic vision of living water flowing out from under the temple. It begins as a trickle and then becomes a deep and impassable river. It flows out to the Dead Sea and makes it alive. And, of its banks, Ezekiel writes this: “[O]n both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing” (v. 12).
 3. And the whole vision and book ends on this marvelous note with the closing line, [Ezek. 48:35](#): “And the name of the city from that time on shall be, **The LORD Is There.**” He’s not going to leave you ever again. Your personal history will be an ever-deepening intimacy, an eternal journey and adventure further into the heart of God . . . forever!
- C. The book of [Revelation](#) picks up all of this imagery and says it’s all fulfilled in Jesus (cf. [Rev. 22:1-5](#)).
1. Why is a river of life flowing out from the under the temple? Because Jesus the Lamb of God was slain there on the altar, as it were.
 2. Why is the name of the city “**The LORD is There**”? Because Jesus has made a full end of our sin and now God can and will dwell with His people forever.
- D. It begins now, with the Spirit of Christ in us. Rivers of living water flow within. But it will climax in a whole world and universe of glory—the new heavens and new earth, the new Jerusalem.
1. This is why Paul writes in [Col. 1:27](#): “**Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory.**”
 - a. That’s what He’s doing in Gethsemane. That’s where this is going. Through the cross . . . to glory forever!
- E. Jesus is The Only One, The Only Way, and The Only Hope!