

Gethsemane

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[0 : 00] Now the passion of our Lord, that is the sufferings that he endured, is something we tend to associate mostly and understandably with the cross itself.

Or perhaps beginning with his sufferings at the hands of the Roman soldiers when they scourged him and crowned him with thorns. But the intensity of his suffering and trial and temptation on behalf of his people begins earlier than the Roman soldiers gathered in Pilate's palace or in his barracks or whatever it might be.

It begins actually here in Gethsemane. The passion of our Lord really begins here with this agony in the garden. And here is the deliberate and pre-planned intention to be found that night by Judas and his mob and to die in accordance with the eternal plan of salvation.

Jesus knows exactly what he is doing that night. You know, in John 18, we read it in verse 2, Judas also which betrayed him knew the place, for Jesus oft times resorted further with his disciples.

So he knows he's going somewhere where he is going to be found. That has been a suggestion, and probably rightly so, by commentators that the Jewish liturgy for that night, the prayer book, the cedar as it's called, that they used, had for that night the reading from 1 Kings in chapter 2 where the man Shimei, who had previously cursed Solomon's father David, and who had been under threat that if he ever left the city, that would be the death of him.

[1 : 49] So in 1 Kings 2, we read verses 36 and 37. The king sent and called for Shimei and said unto him, Build ye a house in Jerusalem and dwell there, and go down forth thence anywhither.

For it shall be that on the day thou goest out and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die.

Thy blood shall be upon thine own head. And of course we read in John 18 verses 1 and 2. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where was Agarim, into the which he entered, and his disciples.

And again, the Judas knew the place, and so on. So it's almost like tying in deliberately with the readings for that night that Jesus intends to be a living fulfillment of that which is written and that which would be read in Jewish households everywhere that evening.

He went over the brook Kidron. Because only John really puts it that way and spells out exactly what he's doing and where he's going. So in verse 36 we read a place called Gethsemane.

[3 : 01] Now as I'm sure some of you already know, Gethsemane literally means olive press. And obviously with it being in the Mount of Olives, with it being so many olive trees and so on, it would have the same function as a wine press.

You know, you'd put the olives in, and you'd pressurize them down. A little of weight would be brought onto it, and the oil would flow out and would be gathered. And it's located exactly where you would expect one to be, an olive press or a place named for an olive press at the fruit of the Mount of Olives.

We don't know whether there was a press within that particular area. And bearing in mind that where it says that there was a place called Gethsemane, and that's where he went to, the disciples. It's elsewhere described as a garden. And I think it's John that describes it in that way. Where was a garden into which he entered and his disciples. Now, garden in those days didn't mean set of roses and plants and flowers.

It meant a place that was particularly cultivated. That it was tended, that it was protected, probably especially watered and looked after. And almost certainly fenced about with a wall, probably to stop animals wandering in and out and trampling it or eating the stuff that was there.

[4 : 19] So it would be walled, probably. However big the area that was walled, it would be tended. It would be especially water. And as a result, it would probably be more shaded and protected.

A pleasant place in which to be. So it's a place that Jesus went to regularly. So it's not a garden as we would understand it, but just a walled, cultivated area.

And so that's where Jesus goes, enclosed from the protection of animals and so on. But, of course, by this time, Judas has already gone. If we were to go back again to John's account of the Gospel, we'd see at chapter 13, verse 30, that after Jesus had given him the salt, Judas went out and it was night.

That's a deep phrase there. You know, he sums it all up. The betrayal is underway and it is night. You know, the power of darkness. And so then, he's gone.

So Jesus goes with the 11 others. And each of them, he leaves at a particular spot and he takes the three, Peter, James and John, both of them, a little bit further. Again, this is pre-planned.

[5 : 28] And however deliberate it may be, he is still heavy with the sorrow of it. And so the suffering, the very passion of our Lord itself begins here.

My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. The weight of the sorrow is crushing him. Tarry you here and watch with me.

And it is these three witnesses of his transfiguration. Those who have been up the mountain with him when he was transfigured before them. When Moses and Elijah appeared with him and were talking with them, Luke tells us, of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

That those who have witnessed his glory are now to be witnesses, as it were, of his agony. And it seems that being fully human, as he was, the company and fellowship of his three closest disciples was, at least intended to be, indeed a comfort.

You know, watch with me. It's not witness with me or witness for me, but rather just keep me company. You know, verse 38. Watch. Daddy, you're here. And watch with me.

[6 : 43] Just keep me company. Just be here with me. My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. It describes not simply or wholly the sense of his approaching death.

Because we know that he laid down his life willingly. Again, John tells us in chapter 10, verses 17 and 18. You know, I lay it down on myself. I have power to lay it down.

I have power to take it up. Nobody takes it from me. He lays it down willingly. So it's not that he's being forced, but rather it's the sense of the wrath of God, which was due to man for sin, which he was now called upon to bear.

The agony of which had now begun. The sense of that gathering wrath, ready to be poured out upon this one sacrificial victim, which is essentially what he was.

You know, the Old Testament is full of, you know, buying the sacrifice to the horns of the altar and the lamb is silent before the sacrifice. And so likewise, whether they use the goats or oxen or whatever it was, these beasts didn't have a choice.

[7 : 54] They were laid upon the altar willingly or unwillingly. Jesus willingly raised down his life. But it is a thought, a fearful thought, that the gathering gloom and the gathering wrath of God against sin that is going to be poured out on this one sacrificial victim is to be directed there precisely so that it will not be directed anywhere else.

It will not be directed against the sinners whom it ought to be targeted. Now, you and me and others who believe and trust in Christ, the reason we can be free before God is because Christ has taken that wrath upon himself.

The grief, the very intensity of sorrow, we can barely conceive of. He is ready to die from the sheer weight of sorrow.

My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death. And in verse 39 there, we read of him going on saying, Oh my father, if it be possible, let this cross pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou will. Here we see a struggle. Not between a reluctant will on the one hand and a compliant will on the other, but rather the same solemn undertaking viewed from two different perspectives, what we might call subjectively and objectively.

[9 : 24] Subjectively as viewed by one who will be the subject of such fearful, intense, and degrading, painful suffering.

The prospect before him is of itself utterly repugnant. It's so totally revolting that only its being the father's will would ever induce him to taste of such a cup.

Now that's just as it should be. There would be something a bit wrong, something a bit fake, if Jesus was saying, yep, the cross, bring it on, the nails, the scourging, the suffering, that's okay, I'm up for this.

I know what I'm doing, come on, bring it on, let me have it. No, he is absolutely, if we can say it reverently, humanly speaking, he is absolutely terrified at this prospect.

Humanly speaking, that of whom which is wholly human is not only terrified, but repelled by the idea. It is revolting, it is repugnant to him, subjectively viewed.

[10 : 33] But recognising objectively that this through which he must pass was the sure and guaranteed way, indeed, the only way of purchasing salvation and the forgiveness of sin for all the Lord's people in every age, that it was the father's will to save them, and this was the way that it had to be done.

Viewed in such a light, his passion and cross were a welcome undertaking. By revealing to us how Christ clearly felt in the one view, the gospel shows to us his beautiful oneness with ourselves in nature and feeling.

He is holy man. By revealing how he regards it in the other view, we likewise have revealed to us his absolute obedience and subjection to the father's will.

Because he is absolutely one with the father. I and my father are one, he says, John chapter 10, verse 30. So that he is holy God. So we see, even in these very verses, the evidence that Christ is holy man and holy God.

This prospect before him is both repulsive in the sense that he is repelled by it, and it is also welcome in the sense that he delights to do his father's will.

[12 : 02] He desires the salvation of his children. He is holy man and he is holy God. And if we look then at verses 42 and 44, working through this episode in Gethsemane, we see the struggle is still going on.

The agony is intense. Luke 22, verse 44 tells us, of course, his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Now that's not just sort of, you know, flowery poetic language. It's a condition known as hematomatosis. And it is, it has been observed in extreme cases, rare, but extreme cases of intense stress and suffering, that people have literally sweated blood out through their pores.

And so it has been observed, but it takes great intensity of suffering for it. So the shedding of his blood, albeit through the sweat pores, literally begins in Gethsemane.

But we see in this how the will is winning. He left them, verse 44, and went away again and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

[13 : 16] What are the same words? Verse 42, O my father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. The will is winning. The human flesh is being conquered, and the turmoil within is easing.

As one commentator puts it, he has anticipated and rehearsed his final conflict on the stage and the battleground of an invincible will.

Just as later on it will be acted out in practice on the stage of Golgotha and the cross. Thy will be done.

This divine willingness to suffer and the final and fruitful result of Gethsemane, whilst it is finished, we might say, is the shout of victory that bursts from the cross.

The will without the deed would have been vain and empty. He's simply saying, okay, Lord, I'm willing to do your will. Thy will be done. If he hadn't followed through with the deed on the cross, that would have meant nothing.

[14 : 26] But his work was consummated when the resolved will was carried on into the palpable deed. And both will and deed combine to effect our salvation.

Just as we read in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 10, by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

There is the will and there is the offering of the body. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. Now, perhaps by way of our perfect Calvinist illustration that Christ does it all.

And the all two fleshly disciples do nothing. They don't even witness this struggle of Jesus. They are out of it. They are fast asleep.

They are hopeless. And it's not irrelevant to say it. For this purpose, they are useless. They might as well not be there. They are of no use to their Savior. They are not watching with him.

[15 : 30] They are not praying. They are falling asleep. They are hopeless. And they are useless. Sorrow, indeed, is a massive drainer of strength and alertness.

Sorrow, when it overpowers us, it makes us useless. It drains our energy. And, you know, Luke tells us that when Jesus came to him, verse 45 of chapter 22, he says, When he rose up from prayer and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow.

Sorrow does drain your energy. But it's not an apt illustration of our own part in the work of redemption. What do we do in the work of redemption as the followers of Jesus?

The answer is nothing. Absolutely nothing at all. We're not even spectators. We are totally passive, helpless. So we might ask, well, verse 44, Who knows then what Jesus was saying when he goes away the third time and prays, saying the same words?

He says, well, as we've probably mentioned on occasions in the past, it's probably Mark, John Mark, who, in his account of the gospel alone, has this curious account of the young man wrapped in the linen garment, verses 51 and 52 of Mark 14.

[16:48] There followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body. And the young men, that is the mob of Judas, laid hold on him. And he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked.

Somebody's not asleep. Somebody's watching. Somebody's hearing everything Jesus prays. He's seeing the fact that the disciples are asleep. This is perhaps the solitary witness to what Jesus is actually doing and the words he is actually praying.

Mark, for it is almost certainly he, hears and sees and records that which takes place. This is the witness to an almost certain night.

Nevertheless, to come back for a moment to this encounter with the disciples, we see there at verse 40, he says, What could you not watch with me one hour? Was Jesus away for a few hours, 60 minutes?

We don't know, of course. We don't know how long each of the occasions was. Was it an hour each time that he was away? Or was it one big long time while he was wrestling with it? And then a shorter time so he could come back and check on the disciples again?

[17:58] And then perhaps a longer time again? And we cannot say, of course. But what we can say with certainty is that when one is in prayer taken up with the Lord and completely absorbed in that relationship with the Lord, with that time in prayer and with speaking to the Lord and listening and receiving from Him, times of prayer that are sweet and that are deep or even that are dark and intense like this one, time melts away as nothing.

Time begins to just pass like you wouldn't believe the amount of time that can just pass without us even realizing it. Was he a fool three hours in Gethsemane or more?

It's entirely possible. He was as much or more than that. But what we can see here is God's great providence and love for the Son who is called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice.

His Father, notice, will not allow Him to be disturbed at all before the internal battle of the will has been won and settled in peace.

Then He cometh, verse 45, to His disciples and said, Sleep on that and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

[19:21] And then, however much longer it is after that, He says, Rise, let us be going. Behold, He is at hand that doth betray me. We say, a while after that, we don't know how long it was.

It's almost certainly not immediate like it seems to be here between verses 45 and 46.

Nevertheless, it will be the case that whilst the Lord will not allow His Son to be disturbed before He is ready and before the internal battle has been won, once the victory has been secured and Jesus is completely, as it were, at peace with what must happen and He has won the internal battle, He has banished the devil's temptations and He's ready for this.

The Father is not going to leave Him hours and hours waiting and biting His nails, as it were, and for the devil's temptations to return again and the temptations that have already been overcome will come back again like the waves in the sea coming back in again.

He's not going to allow that to happen. Once the victory has been won, once Christ is, if you can say it reverently, ready, then the Father is not going to allow Him to have to wait ages for this to happen.

Then they will come and then they will arrive because whatever is required of us to overcome our temptations, as Paul tells the Corinthians, you know, there's no temptation taking me, but such is His common command.

[20:46] That's not the same for Jesus, of course. His was unique, but for us, the temptations we face are fairly common, fairly standard. You know, He'll not allow you to be tempted above like

you're able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it. But when you overcome your temptations, He's not going to leave you again so that you get weakened by it. He's going to enable you to overcome, if you have a will, to do it.

And so we wait, rise, let us be going, he that does betray me is at hand. Let's face the coming onslaught now with wakeful dignity. Now when we see Judas come with the mob here, we see the shamelessness of this vile deed of betrayal and the case that betrays our Lord.

It shows how completely Judas had now become dead to all sense of scruple or dignity. But there's nothing gullible or weak about Jesus here. He is not, you know, just meekly submitting or pretending everything is okay at verse 50, you know, friend, wherefore art thou come?

It doesn't really come out in translation, but there are different terms for the word friend in the original Greek in which the New Testament is written.

[22 : 08] You know, the term used here is not a term of endearment. You know, it's not like in John 15, for example, where we read verse 15, henceforth I call you not servants for the servant will not what his Lord do, but I have called you friends.

That's a term of love, the term of endearment. Likewise, you know, Jesus says in John 21, Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? And he says, Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you, but the word that he uses for love, that Peter uses for love, is the word for friendship, brotherly friendship.

You know, you know that I am your friend. It's a term of great love, but it is friendship love. So he's saying, you know that I am your friend. That's a term, loving friendship.

That's not what Jesus is using here. What he's using here is a term of, sort of, you know, curt, sharp, formal courtesy. Rather like, you know, in the parable of the wedding feast, when the king comes in, he sees the guy without the wedding garment, says, friend, how cameest thou with the other without a wedding garment?

But it's a kind of formal, sharp, kind of, almost critical, formal address. Likewise, in the parable of the laborers in the vinyon, and the ones that have been laboring all day, they think they'll get more than a penny, says, friend, I do thee no wrong.

[23 : 31] You know, did I not agree with you for a penny of thee? Take what I need. But he's using the word friend, but it's in a formal, curt, kind of formal, curtsey way.

It's almost like a rebuke here. And that's what Jesus is using here when he addresses Judas.

Friend, wherefore art thou come? It's not a time of love and endearment in that sense.

Now, of course, the account of what happens here, John gives a fuller account about who are you looking for? Jesus of Nazareth. And then they all fall backwards. And then he asks them again and they all fall back again.

He also gives the more precise account that it's Peter who draws his sword and who smites off the servant's ear. And he gave the servant's name, Malchus.

And Luke tells us that Jesus specifically heals Malchus' ear. But the point here is that Jesus says, you know, put the sword away.

[24 : 28] It's not going to do you any good. Those who take the sword will perish with the sword. This is not a physical, carnal, fleshly battle. Don't you think I could even now have asked my father for more than 12 legions of angels.

Now, why does he ask for 12 or might he ask for 12? Possibly because of the 11 disciples plus himself makes 12. They could have a legion each.

Now, a Roman legion at its full strength was approximately 6,000 men. So, if there was 12, you're looking at 72,000 angels he could summon up just by asking.

I could have 72,000 angels at the drop of a hat. All I have to do is say, you know, if I wanted to put away your silly sword. You know, that's not going to be any protection.

This is a spiritual battle. This is a war. Then I must fight myself in these spiritual conditions. And of course, then we have the disciples having made their one gesture.

[25 : 33] Then they believe in their conscience there's nothing more they could do and their will to continue simply disappears. Verse 56. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

When the honour and dignity of our Lord or his word is under attack, we will always have that choice. I'll say that again. When the honour and dignity of our Lord or his word is under attack, we will always have that choice to follow or to flee.

To follow or to flee. Usually, what breaks our courage is not the subject itself, but rather the whisper of Satan. There's nothing you can do anyway.

It's not going to change what turns out. Whether you do it or not, it's not going to alter the way things are going. You might as well look after number one. You might as well just do this. You might as well just get away.

Do your own thing because it's not going to make a difference. You can't change the way that this is going to pan out. So either you just go down with him or you run and you save and you save your own skin.

[26 : 42] There's nothing you can do anyway. It's not like you could stop from being arrested. All it means is they'll take you too. What's the point in that? You can't help him now. You can't help him if you arrest him.

You can't change the way things are turning out. You must look to yourself now. And the whisper of Satan will do that time and time again. When we are tempted to some particular sin.

When we know what we ought to do in obedience to the Lord. When it is something that the world made you perfectly naturally. And we are tempted to go along with the flow of the world.

And the devil will say, what's the difference? You're not going to change the flow of the world just because you don't get on board. You'll be standing apart from everybody else. They'll still go their own way.

You're not going to change it. You might as well just get on board. You might as well just fit it. No point sticking out like a sore bum. You can't change it. No, you can't change what they do. You can change what you do.

[27 : 40] You can change the witnessing answer that you give. You can give and change the testimony that you may be unable to give depending on whether we follow or flee.

Just by way of speculation, what verdict do you think Christian history would have given of the one disciple, if there had been even one who had stayed with Jesus and stood with him and been arrested along with him and been condemned along with him.

Well, probably it's a good thing they didn't because such a saint would almost certainly have been venerated away up there with Christ as the one worthy disciple and shrines would have been built to him and even prayed to.

I mean, we see the tendency for idolatry that there is anyway in the human mind. So it's probably a good thing that they all forsook him and fled and that salvation was seen to be not the work of Jesus and his disciples but the work of Christ alone.

Even this forsaking and fleeing by them all is under God's providence designed for his glory.

Nevertheless, over the years and over the centuries, there are many who have remained faithful to the Lord.

[29 : 04] A last century professor of divinity in Glasgow wrote these words. He said, For the power of his cross in the history of the world since he came, for all who have taken up their own crosses and have followed him, for the noble army of martyrs and for all who are willing to die that others may live, for all suffering freely chosen for noble ends, for pain bravely endured, for temporal songs that have been used for the building up of eternal joys, I praise and bless thy holy name.

For those who have been faithful, it is an inspiration to others. The devil will always tell you to flee, but Jesus will always call you to follow.

The devil will tell you that what you do doesn't make a difference, Christ will always tell you that what you do matters because you matter. Now of course I pray to the disciples, most of them did end up dying for their faithfulness to Christ, but just not that night.

This wasn't their time. As Jesus said to his captors, this is your hour and the power of darkness, but it is precisely in the hour of darkness that he calls us to be the light of the world.

But for the disciples, their time would come. Let's not be too harsh on the disciples. Their time for witness, their time for martyrdom would come. And our time will come.

[30 : 39] You know, perhaps not as martyrs, perhaps not to be called upon to die for him, but even to live for him and to start, you know, unless the Lord comes back first, we're all going to die of something.

And if not for him, then what? What are we going to die for? How are we going to take our leave of this world? You know, as has been said in a more worldly context, every man dies.

Not every man truly dies. But if we are in Christ, and we do truly live to the full, and you can start living for Jesus, you can start afresh to determine to commit your life, your love, your heart, every day from this day forward, to live for Jesus.

And if you do, and keep on living for him, then I guarantee you, that by the time you get to the dying part, there will cease to be a problem long and long.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.