

**Mark:
Dark Gethsemane**

Mark 14:32-42

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Now turn with me, if you would, in the Gospel of Mark to chapter 14. And I need to explain, in passing over the section from verse 26-31...this is the foretelling by Jesus of Peter's denial. The reason I'm doing that is because I'm going to come back to it later. In chapter 14 Mark has this tendency of sandwiching stories, and we'll be dealing with that section later on in the chapter when in verse 66 Peter actually denies Jesus. So we'll go back and look at those predictive verses at that point.

The section that is before us tonight is a very solemn one. It's the account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and we're going to read from verse 32 to verse 42. But before we do so, let's come before God in prayer.

O Lord our God, we tremble as we come to this passage of Scripture when we read of the horror that overtook our blessed Lord in the Garden and we know that it was for us, for our sins, for our transgressions. Holy Spirit, we pray as we study this passage again this evening, come and give us insight. Cause our minds to understand and our hearts to respond in faith and gratitude. And we pray, O Lord, that You would be glorified for Jesus' sake. Amen.

This is God's holy and inerrant word:

They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. 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. And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying, that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again

He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

Amen. And may God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

According to Luke and John, it had been the custom of Jesus in this final week of ministry in Jerusalem...it had been His custom with His disciples each evening on the way out of Jerusalem and to Bethany that He would spend some time here in this olive garden. No doubt Judas has already taken note of that and has already made his arrangements that Jesus will be betrayed, handed over to the Sanhedrin in the quietness of the darkness of the garden.

"Gethsemane, can I forget,
Or there thy conflict see
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?"

Something terrible happens here in these moments. By way of contrast to the relative calm and serenity and peace of the upper room, here a storm breaks loose. Here in the garden Jesus suddenly becomes troubled and distressed and falls to the ground. Every fiber of His being seems to be wrestling with the unfolding providence of God, realizing now as perhaps never before in His earthly ministry and consciousness the cost of what it means to be the Servant of the Lord who takes away the sins of God's people. This garden is a foretaste of Calvary.

We see several things that come to the surface as we spend a little while in the garden, and I want us to see

I. Gethsemane is a place of prayer.

We read in verse 32, Jesus says, "Sit here until I have prayed."

Now let's think about that for a second. Few things signal our complete and utter dependence upon God than prayer. Prayer is an expression of our inability to accomplish it by ourselves. Prayer is a confession of our weakness, our frailty, our complete dependence upon the sovereignty and provision of Almighty God. We're saying that we need His assistance, we need His strengthening, we need His enabling, we need His power, we need His resources. We cannot so much as lift a finger without the hand of God.

But Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. Jesus is the Lord of glory. Jesus is

the Creator of all that is: by the breath of His mouth the universe came into being. We've seen Him in the pages of the Gospels walking upon the surface of the Sea of Galilee. We've seen Him transforming a few loaves and fishes to feed 12,000 people. We've seen Him heal the sick. We've seen Him claim with absolute assurance His identity as the second person, the Son of God, the Lord of glory. And yet there's another side to Jesus, isn't there, because He is not only the Lord, but He is also the incarnate Son. He's taken on flesh and blood; He is found in weakness now that here in the garden especially we see something of His frailty and His humanity as He prays with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

We've seen it before in the Gospel of Mark. In the very opening chapter we read of Him rising up a great while before day and departing into a solitary place, and there praying to His Father in heaven. It is what the Servant of the Lord had committed Himself to do, of course. In the second Psalm: "Ask of Me and I will give You the uttermost parts of the world for Your inheritance." Every day Jesus had come to His Father and He prayed and He supplicated. He'd ask His Father to help Him; He'd ask His Father to strengthen Him; He'd ask the Holy Spirit to fill Him, so that He might perform His task as the Servant of the Lord; to resist temptation; to lead this glorious and impeccable life; to seek first the kingdom of God; to overcome the wicked one.

And now in the garden, in a way that for thirty years and more He seemingly had not known to this extent — the realization of the cost of it as the overwhelming vision now of what lay before Him in the next 24 hours, as He saw clearer than He had ever seen before what it meant to be the Lord's Servant.

No doubt Gethsemane had witnessed Him praying many times before, but never like this; never with this urgency; never with this turmoil; never with sweat — drops of blood — falling to the ground; never with this turmoil in His psychology, in His emotions, in His very body.

Of course, I have to say it: If Jesus needed to resort to His Father in prayer, how much more do you and I now need to do that?

Gethsemane is a place of prayer.

II. Gethsemane is a place of isolation.

But in the second place, Gethsemane is a place of isolation. It's a curious thing, the way Jesus first of all separates Himself from the eight disciples and then from the three — Peter, James, and John — and then, going a little ways beyond them (in Luke's Gospel, "a stone's throw" — 30, 40 yards away). He's saying several things to us.

On the one hand, He feels the need for the presence of at least some of His disciples. He asks in particular Peter and James and John ...these three that we've seen before, this triumvirate

within the discipleship. We've seen them on the Mount of Transfiguration...this special bond that Jesus had with them. He says to them in particular, He opens up His soul to them: "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and watch," He says to them. That's an incredible thing, isn't it, on the surface, at least? That He would feel the need, the social need, of the companionship of these disciples in His hour of trial.

You know, Mark tells us curiously that when He chose the twelve disciples He chose them "in order that they might be with Him." Just that - that they might be with Him, that they might be His companions in the battle, in the task that lies before Him. He's a man; He's a human being, and He feels the need for human companionship. And in the next 24 hours He will travel a road that leads to utter isolation as one by one these disciples will forsake Him, abandon Him, fail in the meanest of tasks. Isn't it curious that Jesus, in the work of redemption, asks these three to pray for Him, to pray for themselves? Because redemption is at hand! Salvation is at hand! The rescuing of sinners from Adam's fall is now at hand. This is the hour, and it has come.

You remember how many times Jesus had said to them, "The hour is not yet come." But the hour has come now; it is upon them. 'And I want you to pray with Me. I want you to fall down on your knees and beseech our Father in heaven.' And they could not. Those closest to Him, I think, would draw the conclusion that He was letting them down; that in a way, He had betrayed them, and they fall asleep. It's an amazing thing that Jesus wanted the help of these three to pray with Him in redemption's most crucial moment and there's no one there to hold Him up. There's not a one to bear His burden with Him! There's not a one to help Him in the battle, not a one. He has to face it alone. He has to face it absolutely and totally alone.

And in a sense, do you see, it could only be that way. He alone could bear the sins of men; He alone could meet that dreadful wrath. He alone could face that unmitigated anger of God against sin. He alone could endure the pangs of hell. He alone can atone for guilt, because "there is no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only can unlock the gates of heaven, and let us in."

III. Gethsemane is a place of battle.

But thirdly, not only is this a place of prayer and a place of isolation, but thirdly, it is a place of battle. There is a battle going on here, a spiritual battle, a battle of the flesh against the spirit. It's the battle of the world against the kingdom of heaven. It is the battle of Satan against God. It is the grandest, greatest, fiercest

battle that ever was fought, and it takes place here in this garden.

We're already seen how Satan has entered into the heart of Judas, and Jesus' urgent command, "Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation" It's the hour of darkness. It's Satan's hour. What Satan had perhaps seen in mists down through the centuries of the plan and purpose of God, that the seed of a woman would crush his head, and he must have seen it now. It must have dawned upon him now — the battle plan! The cunning of it! The audacity of it! That the Son of God Himself would come to lay down His life! And Satan comes in all his subtlety.

Let's glance at this from a purely human point of view. Our Lord suffered here in the garden an emotional and psychological battle. He had a human psychology. He knew both joy and sorrow. As a perfect human being we may say that His psychology demands our attention here at its most basic level, and we see something of the dark side of it: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He was distressed, do you remember, by human callousness and hardness. He wept in the face of Jerusalem's refusal to bow to Him. At the tomb of His friend, Lazarus, He sheds tears. I think we can say that all of the pent up emotions in the human psychology of Jesus erupt here in Gethsemane. Things that Jesus had alluded to in the past have now come to all of their stark and bitter reality in the garden, and He's sore amazed and very heavy, and exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.

Few have plumbed the depths of this more than B. B. Warfield, who wrote the marvelous, marvelous essay a hundred years ago on *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. This is what he has to say:

"The primary idea of 'troubled' is loathing aversion, perhaps not unmixed with despondency. While Jesus' self-description as overwhelmed with sorrow expresses a sorrow, or perhaps we would be better to say a mental pain, a distress which hems Him in on every side, from which there is therefore no escape."

Mark uses another word of his own: *deeply distressed*, which has been rendered *horror struck*. It's a term which more narrowly defines the distress as consternation; if not exactly dread, yet alarmed dismay.

It's interesting that the word *troubled* actually means *to be away from home*. The choir was singing this morning the words of the Twenty-third Psalm. And do you remember how it ended? With the idea of the child of God being at home in the presence of his heavenly Father. This is not home! There's a chasm that has erupted in this garden, and it's tearing the soul of Jesus apart!

When Moses saw God's glory on Mount Sinai, so terrifying was the sight that he trembled with fear. But, my friends, what Moses saw was God in covenant. What

Moses saw was the grace of God, and it filled him with holy trembling. But what Jesus is seeing here is His Father's hand lifted up with a sword in it, so that Luther can say, "No one feared death so much as this Man." The sight of what lay before Him opened up now as never before, so that He utters almost the unutterable: that the Servant of the Lord Himself should say, "Father..." yes, "Father" here, but not on the cross. On the cross, it will be "My God! My God!" as though the consciousness of His native Sonship will then have altogether been obliterated. Now in the garden He says, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." This cup of wrath, this cup of God's holy anger against sin, this cup which has within it dregs which will drive Him to the very gates of hell, and He asks that it pass away.

How did Satan tempt Jesus here in the garden? What did he do? I want to suggest to you that what he does here is precisely what he always does. It's what he did in the original garden, of Eden. He came to Adam and Eve and he said to them 'If God loves you, He wouldn't ask you to do this.' And that's what he's saying here. He's saying to Jesus 'If Your Father loves You, He wouldn't ask You to do this.' And, my friends, that's what Satan always does. He always wants to rob us of the assurance of the love of God in every providence. He wants us to see the darkness of the providence and draw the conclusion that God doesn't love us.

"If it be possible..." Jesus says. Do you know, at one level that's altogether reassuring, isn't it, for those of us who have discovered providences and trials that are hard, and from which we want to run away: that even our blessed Lord found a providence from which He wanted to run away. He would have given almost anything not to have trodden down this pathway, and yet... and yet... "Not My will, but Thy will be done." He yields Himself absolutely and unreservedly in obedience to the will of His heavenly Father and He drinks of that cup, and He will drink it to its bitter dregs — dregs which will speak of the pains and pangs of hell.

"We may not know, we cannot tell
What pains He had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there."

Calvin says in what is marvelous economy of words,

"It is our wisdom to have a fit sense of how much our salvation cost the Son of God."

But Gethsemane is also a place of resolve, of marvelous resolve, of uncomprehending resolve, as the sinless Lamb of God in the revulsion of His soul as He tastes something of the wrath of His Father — not for His sins, but for the sins of His people. He says to these disciples who on three occasions now

have failed Him - He says to them, "Rise. Let us be going. The one who betrays Me is at hand."

And there's something about the way Jesus had placed the disciples, and something now about the words of resolution and commitment here that signals, does it not, that here is the Captain of our salvation. Here is the One who goes out to meet His foe in battle. He is no victim, but He gives His life. He lays it down of His own volition in obedience to His Father's covenant, and it was for love. It was for love, because He loved us, uncomprehending as that may be, astonishing as that is to the chords of our own hearts that He loved us. He loved us so much that He was prepared to bear the sword of His Father that would plunge Him into the very depth of hell for our sin; for the guilt of our sins; for that which you and I deserve. Here is the last Adam in triumph, in glory, going out to meet His betrayer and His captors and His enemy.

I stand all amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner condemned, unclean.
Oh, how marvelous!
Oh, how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be
Oh, how marvelous!
Oh, how wonderful
Is my Savior's love to me.

Let's pray together.

Father, this is holy ground, and we feel unclean even as we approach it. We're overwhelmed, Lord Jesus, by Your love for us. Teach us what it meaneth, the cross uplifted high, and One, the Man of Sorrows, condemned to bleed and die. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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