

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Mark 14:32-42 “Agony in Gethsemane”

Intro. For over a year now many of us have been following Mark’s account of the life of Jesus. We have heard His teachings and we have witnessed the accounts of His great miracles. He had times of great victory, as when He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He also had times of disappointment. But perhaps the most distressing time of His earthly life was this particular evening when He went into the Garden of Gethsemane. Only with the aid of the Spirit of God can we gain something of an understanding of what was going through the mind and heart of Jesus at that time. And as we contemplate that sacred hour together this morning, I want you to realize that we are treading upon holy ground. We should consider this event with reverence and awe and wonder.

On that very night Jesus and His disciples left the upper room where they shared their last supper, and they departed the city. Since it was the Passover, it was a full moon. They crossed a brook that flowed with the blood of animals sacrificed at the temple, and Jesus must have thought how His own blood would pour on the ground before another day ended. Somewhere near the foot of the Mount of Olives was a grove of olive trees called Gethsemane, in all probability meaning “oil-press.” It probably was surrounded by a hedge fence. Jesus frequently went there when He came to Jerusalem. In this garden a tremendous struggle took place.

I think it is interesting that this struggle took place in a garden. The Garden of Gethsemane contrasts graphically with the Garden of Eden. In the first garden, Adam faced the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and surrendered to the plot of Satan. In this garden, the “last Adam” faced the looming tree of Calvary and yielded to the plan of God. The first Adam asserted his own will to the ruin of the human race, and Jesus abandoned His own will for the redemption of the human race.

As we reflect upon what Jesus endured for you and for me, I hope we will love Him more. And I want you to not only love Him, but also learn to imitate Him, so that, when you are called to suffer, or when you face some other trial, you may come forth from your conflict with victory as He came forth from His. So notice first of all:

### I. THE AGONY OF JESUS

In v.33 we read that Jesus “began to be troubled and deeply distressed.” The word translated “troubled” (*ekthambeo*) means “to be amazed, alarmed,” or even “terrified.” The word translated “deeply distressed” (*ademoneo*) means “to be in anxiety, distressed, uncomfortable, troubled.” Though He knew that He had come to die, He became alarmed & distressed as the hour drew so near. Luke used the word “agony” to describe the experience of our Lord. That Greek word describes an intense struggle or conflict, as in the Greek athletic games.

V.34 gives Jesus own words to describe how He felt at that moment. He said, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death....” The word translated “exceedingly sorrowful” (*perilupos*) literally means “to be encircled with sorrow,” & thus it means “to be overwhelmed with grief.” It

was so intense that He felt like He was dying.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the struggle was so great, that according to Luke, His sweat was falling audibly and heavily while Christ prayed. It sounded like slow blood-drops from a wound.<sup>2</sup> All of these expressions are quite sufficient to show that the emotional distress of the Savior was of the most extraordinary character.

What could have caused such sorrow and distress? Well let's consider together:

A. The Reasons for His Agony - Our Lord's struggle in the Garden can be understood only in the light of what was about to happen to Him. Jesus compares that experience to drinking a cup. What was in that cup that caused Jesus such distress, sorrow, and alarm?

1. Anticipation of Physical Pain - The human nature of Jesus must have been troubled to some degree about physical suffering and death. Every one of us would be in anguish over the prospect of being whipped 39 times or more, and crucified in our hands and feet. Why, some hyperventilate at the thought of having their finger pricked for blood!

But that certainly would not explain the intensity of anguish that Jesus experienced. Of course, there was even more to face besides physical suffering. He would suffer:

2. Anticipation of Emotional Pain - He knew that the prophecy of Isa. 53 was about to be fulfilled, "He was despised and rejected of men." He could see the traitor Judas coming. How that must have grieved His heart! He knew He would be forsaken by His disciples. He knew He would be rejected by His own people, the Jews. He knew He would face the utter shame and rejection of the mock-trials, as well as the mockings, spitings and beatings by the temple police & soldiers. He knew of the crown of thorns they would mockingly put on His brow. He knew He would face the shame of having His clothes taken off, and lifted up on a cross as a spectacle for all to see. He would suffer utter loneliness.

If you are lonely, Jesus knows what it feels like. If you are suffering from rejection, Jesus knows what that feels like. We can pray to one who can sympathize with our suffering.

Even still, there must be more to it than that. Though the dread of physical and emotional pain was likely present, the main reason for the intense agony in the soul of Jesus was:

3. Anticipation of Spiritual Pain - You see, what lay before Him was not merely death, but the death which was to atone for a world's sin. Jesus could see spiritual agony in that cup He was to drink. The holy soul of Christ was facing the reality of bearing the full weight of the world's sin. He knew the prophecy of Isaiah 53, that "The Lord would lay on Him the iniquity of us all." He could see the cross as an altar, & He Himself as the sacrifice for sin. He knew that He would bear the penalty of our sin, bearing our guilt and death, suffering the holy wrath of God against sin. He would bear the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13). Not only was He to bear our sin, but in some sense He was to "be made sin for us" according to 2 Cor. 5:21. Christ would suffer as though He were a vile sinner. He would be regarded as a murderer, a thief, an adulterer, a liar, and much more in the eyes of God as He bore our sin. How His perfect nature must have been shocked and repulsed at such close association with sin and iniquity! Furthermore, He would be forsaken of God, as well as man. He would soon cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" And yet, He knew that He would have to disarm death by receiving its dagger into His own heart.

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Heb. 5:7 can be interpreted to mean that the agony and distress was so great, that only prayer and the strengthening of the angel (Luke) prevented a premature death!

<sup>2</sup> Many commentators assume that Christ sweat literal blood, but the text does not actually say that. Also, Luke's account of the angel & sweat drops may not be in the original

We ought to see in our Lord's agony in Gethsemane the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The careless, light way in which such sins as swearing, lying and the like are often spoken of is a painful evidence of the low condition of our moral feelings. We make light of sin, but let not the believer do so. See how sin caused Jesus to suffer so. We ought to abhor sin as Jesus does. Sin turned angels into demons. Sin makes man live hardly better than animals. Sin has wrecked many a home. Sin has ruined the life of many a young person. Let the recollection of Gethsemane have a sanctifying effect on us.

So we have reflected on the reasons for His agony. Now notice with me:

B. His Companions in Agony – In v.33 we read, “And He took Peter, James, and John with Him....” One reason He took them was so that they might bear witness to this event. But I think He also desired their company during this difficult time. In that last contest His human soul craved for the presence of those who stood nearest Him and loved Him best.

Even so, when you go through difficulties and trouble, do not try to go alone. If Jesus sought the comfort of companionship during trouble, how much more do we need such companionship? Don't face your troubles alone!

And when we are called upon to be a companion to someone in their time of trouble, I hope we will do better than Peter, James, and John did! They turned out to be poor companions for Jesus during His distress. Oh, what a prayer meeting they *might* have had, gathered around Jesus, praying for their dear Lord! But they kept falling asleep! Sure it was late, and they were naturally exhausted from a busy week. But if weariness had weighed down their eyelids, love should have kept them open. Let us all resolve to be better companions to others in time of trouble!

So after reading of the agony of Jesus, we are not surprised to read of:

## II. THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Jesus was facing the greatest difficulty of His life. Yet He was not just in great distress & agony as He anticipated physical, emotional, & spiritual suffering. He was also being tempted to forego the cross. He pointed out in v.38 that “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Here the word “flesh” is a reference to human nature in its frailty and needs. Evidently, Jesus experienced the weakness of His own human nature.

Furthermore, this temptation could have also come from Satan. He had tempted Him to bypass the cross on previous occasions (Mt. 4 & 16). I can imagine that Satan was tempting Him with questions like, “Why would you die for people like Peter, James, and John? They won't even stay awake with you. Your own people will reject you. Your disciples will forsake you. You're foolish to die for them! You can create saints out of these stones! Why go to the cross? Why subject your dear mother to such brokenheartedness?”

Facing such strong temptation & distress, Jesus turned to His Heavenly Father in prayer. He was following His own advice in v.38, “Watch and pray,<sup>3</sup> lest you enter into temptation.” So He went to one of His customary places to pray.<sup>4</sup> Twice we are told that when His heart was exceeding sorrowful, he “prayed” (verses 35 and 39).

Even so, when we face temptations, trials, and difficulties, we should heed to advice of Jesus. We are to watch out for temptation & other spiritual dangers. We must watch like soldiers—we are in enemy territory. The Bible says that Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may

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<sup>3</sup> “Watch and pray” is an admonition that is often repeated in Scripture (Neh. 4:9; Mark 13:33; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2).

<sup>4</sup> Add to Point II: “The Place of His Prayer? - Add in notes from Spurgeon, p.248. It was an ideal place for solitude.

devour. If you do not maintain a watchful attitude, you can be deceived by Satan & yield to temptation. Then, like Jesus, we must pray. Pray for wisdom to flee temptation, or for strength to overcome. The disciples were tempted that very night to be untrue to Him. They needed to pray that night. We need to pray. In fact, the first person we should turn to in our trouble is God. The advice of James is wise and weighty: “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray” (James 5:13). Prayer is needed because the flesh is weak. Those who know their own weakness, and knowing it both watch and pray, are those who will be upheld and not allowed to fall. If we do not watch & pray, we are self-confident and conceited. We are depending on the flesh instead of God. We know that the three did not watch and pray, and therefore they, especially Peter, succumbed to temptation.

So when we follow the example of Jesus, let us do so in this way:

A. Follow the Characteristics of His Prayer – First, Christ practiced:

1. Humble Prayer - Instead of standing or kneeling, v.35 says that Jesus “fell on the ground.” Matthew 26:39 indicates that He also “fell on his face.” No doubt He fell prostrate before God in helpless appeal. The imperfect tense pictures this happening more than once. What an extraordinary sight! The eternal Son of God had taken upon Himself our nature, and there He lay as low as the very dust out of which our nature was originally formed. Humility gives us a good foothold in prayer.

Have you ever been in such distress that you have fallen upon your face in prayer? James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

2. Filial Prayer – In v.36 Mark quotes Jesus as addressing God as “Abba, Father.” “Abba” was Aramaic for “Father.” That was His mother tongue. This was a very close, affectionate way to address God the Father. It is similar to saying, “Daddy.” In the midst of all the sorrow, His sense of relation was unbroken.

Christian, when you pray, make your request remembering that you are a child of God, and God is your Heavenly Father. Plead as a child to a loving Father. You are not a mere slave with no hope of favor or access to the Lord of the universe. I am a father. I know how much I love my 2 sons. That should encourage me to pray, for God certainly loves me even more!

3. Persevering Prayer - He prayed three times, using the same or similar words. After the first and even second time, Jesus must not have felt that He had complete victory over the spiritual struggle He was facing, so He kept on praying.<sup>5</sup>

We must pray without ceasing, regularly, habitually, carefully and at stated times. My friend, when you face temptation, don’t stop when you *think* you have victory, but keep praying until you are *sure* you have victory. Be not content until you prevail over temptation and the enemy through prayer.

4. Earnest Prayer - The earnestness of His prayer is obvious, and needs no proof. Casual prayer is not enough. James 5:16 says, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” If you really want to get things done in prayer, you need to put your heart, soul, mind, and strength into your prayer.

B. Like Jesus, Make Your Requests to God – Phil. 4:6 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.” Well, as Jesus felt that His soul was troubled, He lifted up His request to His Father. What was His request? In v.36 He prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me...”

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<sup>5</sup> The imperfect tense is used in v.35, picturing ongoing prayer.

Jesus refers to a cup that He was to drink. In the idiom of the Old Testament, “drinking a cup,” i.e. its contents, means fully undergoing this or that experience, whether favorable (Psa. 16:5; 23:5; 116:18; Jer. 16:7) or unfavorable (Psa. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17,22; etc.).<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, the cup of wrath upon sin awaited Him. He knew the wrath of God would break upon Him when He took on Himself the sins of the world. His manhood would not have been like ours if He had not shrunk back from such a “cup.” He also knew that drinking the cup involved a time of separation from His Father. So He asked that the cup could pass from Him.

Even so, we should bring our petitions to God in prayer. Don’t worry about your problems. Pray to the Lord about them. Pour out your heart to the Lord.

C. Yet Yield to the Will of God – In the last of v.36 Jesus said, “nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.” Notice that Jesus renounced His own will even as He expressed His revulsion against the cup of sin and its accompanying wrath. So Jesus did not tell the Father what to do. He only made such a request with an understanding that “all things are possible for You.” Yet Jesus knew that divine power is limited by what is morally right. So He was asking if there was any way man could be saved and the righteousness of God satisfied apart from the cross that loomed before Him. But in every prayer He was perfectly resigned to the will of God. There was no rebellion in His heart against the will of the Father to whom He had so completely subjected Himself.

Satan did just the opposite. In Isa. 14 we read the arrogant “I will’s” of Satan’s rebellion against God. The essence of sin is to assert our own selfish will. The root of sin is self-will. But Jesus prayed, “Not my will.”

So let us follow the example of our Lord, and remember to pray according to the will of God. If we insist upon our own will in our petition, it is not an acceptable prayer. That is presumption and rebellion, and not the cry of a true child of God. We are only going to walk the path of victory if we renounce our own will. We must die to self.

Are you willing to pray with Jesus, “not what I will?” As you face temptation, will you pray for deliverance & say, “Not my will?” If God is calling you to take a new job, will you say, “Not my will?” If God is calling you to get out of a spiritually unhealthy relationship, will you say, “Not my will?” If God is calling you to the mission field, will you say, “Not my will?” We never come to the place of full usefulness as a Christian until we have a “Gethsemane” where we humbly say, “Lord, not as I will.” As you pray, don’t make demands upon God. Make your requests, but yield to the will of God. Jesus taught that we are to deny self (Mt. 16:24) before we can follow Him. If Jesus was willing to deny self resulting in a cross, we should be willing to deny self, which will result in far less of a sacrifice. So let us pray daily and endeavor to put to death our self-will. God had a plan for Jesus, and God has a plan for your life. Though we have our own plans, we need to understand that God’s plan is what is best. In fact, Romans 12:2 says that God’s will is “good and acceptable and perfect.”

So we have seen the agony of Jesus, & the prayer of Jesus. Now because of the way He prayed, we also see in our text of Scripture:

### III. THE VICTORY OF JESUS

It was a terrible battle that was waged in Gethsemane, but it was a battle that He won, a conflict that ended in complete victory for Him. By the time Jesus was through praying, He had a

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Mt. 20:22; Rev. 14:10; 16:10; 17:4; 18:6.

completely different frame of mind. He was no longer distressed. Something happened in that garden that changed the frame of mind of Jesus.

Notice the victory seen in v.41, "Then 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.'" Christ came forth triumphant after 3 battles in prayer. No longer did He bid His disciples to watch & pray with Him. Matthew indicates that Jesus told them to sleep on. The victory had already been won. Christ prayed His way to perfect calm and peace, which is always the companion of perfect self-surrender to God.

But the sleep turns out to be very brief, for in v.42 Jesus calls them to rise, and join Him in meeting the traitor. Here we see another aspect of His victory. He does not run away into the darkness, seeking some hiding place, which would have been easy to obtain. But He boldly, and bravely goes and joins the other 8 disciples to await Judas and the band of soldiers. Now because Jesus was willing to renounce His own will in Gethsemane, He faces the cross with calm resolve. There He would win the victory over death, and accomplish our salvation. This was one of the greatest victories that our Lord experienced.

The events that followed confirmed the victory that Jesus gained in the Garden. Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be bound by the soldiers. His hands were not really bound by those chains or ropes, but by His love for you and for me. And when they arrested Him, Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to resist with the sword, explaining that only by submitting to their evil plans would prophecy be fulfilled (Matthew 26:51-54). Then as Jesus faced each mock trial, and as He faced Pilate Himself, He maintained an utter calmness, strangely unwilling to defend Himself against their false charges. Not once did their terrible sin against Him cause Him to respond in like manner. Instead, He even prayed from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What victory Jesus gained in that Garden! Jesus did not go to the Garden to hide from the cross; He went to the Garden to get the strength to face the cross for you and for me!

I remember my own experience of surrender to God. It was the summer before my senior year in high school. It was at the Hargis Christian retreat in Alabama. Toward the end of that week of youth camp, while other youth spent the afternoon swimming and playing ball, I went off into the woods to be alone with God. You see, I had been a typical teenager, tasting the fruits of sin. But God was convicting me of my sin, and I was struggling with a decision to surrender my life totally to God. And I was beginning to sense that God was calling me to preach. I knew there were sins in my life that I needed to forsake. Well I found the little chapel in the woods that I had been told about. It was only big enough for a few people. And there was a prayer altar there. And only when you knelt there, could you see a cross on a hill across a valley, reminding everyone that Jesus was willing to die to self, and die for our sin. I must have spent much of the afternoon struggling with God. But I finally surrendered to God in prayer. My life was never the same after that youth camp.

Well now, if the Lord shall bring us into deep waters and cause us to pass through fiery trials, if His Spirit shall enable us to pray as Jesus did, we shall see something like the same result in our own experience. We shall rise up from our knees strengthened for all that lies before us, and fitted to bear the cross that our Lord may have ordained for us.

Conclusion: Have you had your Gethsemane? Have you come to that place in your life where you have prayed, and yielded your will and life to God?

A combination lock is built so that when you get all of the pieces of the mechanism in line, the lock opens. And when all of the pieces of my will align with the will of God, the door of peace

& victory opens for me. That is the personal meaning of Gethsemane. When you go there, Jesus will be with you to lead you through to victory.

What is God's will for your life this morning? 1 Tim. 2:4 says that God wills for all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth. When you face death, or one of the great struggles of life, will you face it alone, or will you trust Christ as your Savior, and know that He will be with you each and every day? I know that repenting of your sins and giving your life to Christ publicly is not easy. But now is the time for your Gethsemane. Will you be victorious, or will you allow Satan to have the victory over your life?

We probably have some believers here today who have been struggling with God's will for your life. Well during the invitation the prayer altar is available for you to come & pray, and say with Jesus, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Sources: William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 245-253; Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 5/27/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). See also sources for Mt. 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46.

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