

Scripture: Mark 14:32-42

Jesus' Agony in Gethsemane

Beloved in Christ, why, we may ask, was Jesus so overwhelmed by the prospect of death? Why was He so exceedingly sorrowful over it, even to the point of death?

Some say, 'Surely, we all know of individuals who faced death with greater calm and courage than does Jesus!'

As the divine Son of God, Jesus foresaw His death. He foretold His death to His disciples in detail (Mark 14:32-34). He set His face resolutely towards Jerusalem to meet it 'head on'. He will hand Himself over to His enemies in order to accomplish what the Father gave Him to do.

So why does Jesus now tremble before it? Reading this passage, Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, was moved to say, 'No man feared death like this man.' So why? What is the explanation for this? We will come to hear in a moment.

From Mark 14:32-42, we hear that Jesus Agonizes Alone in Gethsemane Over the Prospect of His Death. We see

1. Jesus staggers in His agony
2. Jesus perseveres in His agony
3. Jesus triumphs in His agony

1. Jesus staggers in His agony (vv.32-36)

Having left the Upper Room, Jesus and His disciples now reach the Garden of Gethsemane. It was an Olive Grove, a quiet spot for resting; like a garden. Gethsemane means "an oil press". This garden likely had an olive press.

At the entrance, Jesus says to His disciples, "*Sit here while I pray*" (v.32). Eight of His disciples remain at the entrance. He walks a little further into the garden, taking Peter, James and John along with Him. "*And He began to be troubled and deeply distressed*" (v.33). The sense here is that He began to be filled with terror and anguish. These emotions flood His soul!

Before He prays to the Father, He shares His innermost heart with His three disciples, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, even to the point of death. Stay here and watch*" (v.34).

Being also truly human, Jesus knows human weakness. He knows us, better than we know ourselves. The Bible says that He "*can sympathize with our weaknesses . . . in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15).

Jesus is fully aware of what is going on. But He is also concerned for His disciples. "*Stay here and watch.*" Be alert. Beware of spiritual dangers. More than that He needs them, they need Him! He had just warned them that they all would be made to stumble because of Him (14:27). The cross will offend them. They will desert Him, though Peter insists that he will not (14:29,31).

In response to His earlier question in Mark 10, "*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink . . . ?*" James and John said to Him, "*We are able*" (10:38-39). His disciples are not aware of the work the Father gave Him to do.

They are not understanding Him. They don't get it. They are with Him physically, but they are not really with Him in His suffering! Perhaps His agonizing prayer will awaken them!

So why this terror and anguish? Why His agony? Is it because Judas is approaching to betray Him? Is it because all His disciples will desert Him, and Peter will deny Him? Is it that the Sanhedrin will condemn Him and Pilate sentence Him? Or that the enemies will ridicule Him and the soldiers crucify Him?

No doubt all this is included in His agony. But there is more to His agony. This comes out in verses 35-36. Jesus goes a little further (about a stone's throw – Luke 22:41) and He collapses on the ground *"and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'"* Nothing in the Bible compares to Jesus's anguish and agony in Gethsemane. It is something more than simply His own physical death.

Why this agony? It is the 'cup' which the Father put into Jesus' hands. We use the word 'cup', at times, to describe certain experiences in life. The 'cup' can be one of joy or adversity. In several occasions in the Old Testament, the 'cup' refers to the judgment of God on sinners.

In Psalm 75:8, we read, for example, *"For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup . . . and He pours it out. Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drink and drain down."* In Jeremiah 25:15f, the Lord instructs Jeremiah, *"Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger"* Beloved, Jesus is drinking the cup of God's wrath! It causes Him to stagger. He collapses under its weight. The weight of your sin, my sin is laid on Him.

It's this that overwhelms Jesus' soul to the point of death. He staggers under this load, soon to crush Him. The weight of the sin of the world is on Him, who knew no sin. He was being made "a curse for us." If we are to be saved, reconciled to God, He must be willing to be alienated from God, and to die and suffer the punishment of hell in the place of sinners. His atoning sacrifice is sufficient to atone for the sin of the whole world, but it is efficient for His elect, who will believe in Him for salvation.

He must bear it all alone! See here the exceeding sinfulness of your sin. Jesus, staggering under its weight!

He prays, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will."* If there is any other way for sins to be forgiven . . . no, there is no other way! Only He, being truly God and truly man, is able to secure forgiveness for you through His perfect life and death- that is, for all who believe in Him!

The temptation of Satan is real: avoid the cross! His struggle is real: will He obey His Father? Yet He prays, *"not what I will, but what You will."* See His intense struggle with the frightful reality of God's will and what it means for Him to fully submit to it! Will He persevere?

2. Jesus perseveres in His agony (vv.37-40)

In the garden of Eden, our first parent, Adam, enjoyed communion, fellowship with God. He was tempted. He did not persevere in his love and obedience. He fell through His disobedience. Sin came into the world and death through sin.

In this garden, the garden of Gethsemane, Christ, the Second Adam, endures isolation, carrying the sin of the world on His back. The Father gives this cup to Him in hand. How is He able to persevere with the weight of the sin of the world on His back? No doubt, “by the power of His divinity, He bears in His humanity the weight of God’s wrath, and earns for us and restores to us righteousness and life” (QA 17).

But He is also truly human. As the Bible says, “*in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*” (Hebrews 4:15). Yet He perseveres by prayer, by depending on His Father who gave Him the strength to endure all this agony! Three times He prayed (vv.36, 39, 41). He learned obedience. His obedience to the Father would only be complete, if it was unto death.

The words of Hebrews 5:7-9 bring out Jesus’ experience in Gethsemane, “*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the One who could save Him from death, and He was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though He was, He learned obedience from what He suffered, and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him*” (NIV).

Knowing the spiritual dangers surrounding them, you might think the disciples are praying too. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more we! But are they awake and alert? Are they praying? No. They are sleeping. See verses 37-38, “*Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.”*”

This is no way for them to guard themselves from the dangers at hand and their faith to fail! Peter, who boasts a moment ago that he is ready to die with Jesus is found sleeping. Notice, Jesus calls Peter by his old name ‘Simon’. “*Simon, are you sleeping?*” At this point, he is not Peter. He has not lived up to his name, ‘the rock.’

“*The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Our spirit is eager to do what is right and remain on guard against temptation. But our flesh, because of weakness and frailty, easily gives in to Satan’s desires. How much more we need to be spiritually awake and pray. If Jesus needed strength to obey and endure, we all the more! ‘Sin and the devil will always find helpers in our hearts’ (Ryle)

After the second and third time, drowsiness still wins over their desire to stay awake -- even after Jesus repeatedly rebukes them. See verses 39,40, “*Again He went away and prayed and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him. Then He came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting?’”*

What about the church today? Is she sleeping or awake today? Do we show our love and devotion to Christ as we should, to Him who gave His life for us? It’s far easier to furnish our homes than to fight for His kingdom, to have courage to stand for the truth of God’s Word and to teach our children to fight temptation.

As we see from our passage, trusting and obeying as Jesus’ disciples does not come automatically to us. The call to watch and pray reminds us of our own ongoing struggles and weakness. As JC Ryle says, ‘we must watch like soldiers – we are on the enemy’s ground. We must always be on guard. We must fight a daily fight, and war a daily warfare. Our rest is yet to come.’ God’s call is clear in Ephesians 5, “*Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light*” (5:14).

Jesus knows your weakness and frailty. He loves you. He gave His life for you. Trust Him. He also rebukes us so that we may be alert and pray and not fall. Today, our Savior, the Lord Jesus, is risen from the dead; we have His Holy Spirit who gives us strength and we have our Bibles to see clearly. We have more today than His disciples did. You are far richer.

How good God is to us! Look at His grace toward us in Christ! For His sleeping disciples, Jesus obeys the Father to the full, that He may awaken them spiritually and live the new life.

3. Jesus triumphs in His agony (vv.41-42)

Jesus says, *"It is enough! The hour has come: behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."*

The Gethsemane struggle is over for Jesus. The victory has been won! Jesus willingly and lovingly submits to the Father in complete obedience. See here, first of all, His love for the Father, and second, His love for us!

To be sure, the three disciples failed Jesus, but never, no never, will His love fail them. "It is enough!" He says, "Get up! Let's be going!" Go where? Away as far as possible from the approaching soldiers? No! The very opposite! Jesus is going forward to meet those who are to arrest Him; yes, to meet them, even His betrayer Judas. In obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus surrenders His life over to these wicked men for your salvation.

Beloved, rebellion in a garden brought death. Death reigns over all. But submission in Gethsemane reversed that pattern of rebellion. Jesus came to defeat Death itself on the cross. He arose from the dead to bring life, to all who repent and believe in Him! By His Spirit's work in you, He also gives you the strength in your intense struggle to submit to Him and obey His will! How rich and glorious He is!

His cup of suffering and agony is for all who trust in Him the cup of joy! *"I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord"* (Psalm 116:13). Amen.