

35. Gethsemane and Jesus Arrested

John 18:1-14

The Gospel According to John

Gethsemane: The Place of the Olive Press

As we begin John chapter eighteen, let us picture the scene. Jesus finished His prayer in John 17 and crossed the Kidron Valley between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. The historian Josephus writes of 256,500 lambs sacrificed in the Temple during Passover in one year between 66-70 CE (Jewish Wars 6.9.3). The blood from the animals was channeled down to the Kidron Valley on the east side of the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. During the feast of Passover, thoughts about sacrifice and redemption would have filled the minds of God's people. The blood from the sacrifices would have been visible as they crossed the Kidron Brook in the valley. Israel kept a lunar calendar, so Passover was celebrated during the full moon, thus helping Jesus and the eleven to see as they made their ascent up the Mount of Olives. The Apostle John writes that Jesus entered a garden (v. 1), but only Matthew and Mark mention the name of the garden: *Gethsemane*. R. Kent Hughes has made some interesting comparisons between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane:

- The first Adam began life in a garden. Christ, the last Adam, came at the end of His life to a garden.
- In Eden, Adam sinned. In Gethsemane, the Savior overcame sin.
- In Eden, Adam fell. In Gethsemane, Jesus conquered.
- In Eden, Adam hid himself. In Gethsemane, our Lord boldly presented Himself.
- In Eden, the sword was drawn. In Gethsemane, it was sheathed.¹

It was at this garden that Jesus often stayed overnight with His disciples and taught early in the morning at the Temple courts (John 18:2). Some people wonder as to why He didn't stay with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha on the other side of the Mount of Olives in Bethany? After all, we know that they were close personal friends of Jesus. It could be that Christ sought to protect them from the judgment of the religious leaders. Jesus already drew the attention and disapproval of the Pharisees, and anyone seen associating with Jesus risked paying a high price, even to the point of being put out of the synagogue (John 9:22).

The Mount of Olives was so named because of the many Olive trees that grew on the side of the mountain. It was likely a private garden with a wall around it, and the owner, perhaps, was in the business of pressing the oil from the olives. We don't know how far up the Mount of Olives the garden was, but the smoke rising from the sacrificial altar, which was four or five hundred yards away on the Temple Mount, could be seen anywhere on the slopes of the mountain.

John doesn't tell us anything about the wrestling in prayer that Jesus experienced, so to get a complete picture of the Gethsemane details, we have to turn to the Gospel of Luke and come back to John's narrative for the arrest.

¹ R. Kent Hughes. *John, That You May Believe. Preaching the Word Series*. Published by Crossway, page 414.

³⁹Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. ⁴⁰On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." ⁴¹He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, ⁴²"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." ⁴³An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. ⁴⁴And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. ⁴⁵When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:39-46).

In the Garden, we get a glimpse of the state of our Savior's heart in those final hours of His mortal life on earth. The spiritual stress He was under was so intense that He needed an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

How much do you think Jesus knew about what was about to happen? We can only speculate here, but what do you imagine to be His most significant concerns at this time?

His arrest was no surprise to Jesus; He knew how much time He had to pray and had no thought of escape or avoiding what He knew was coming. The Lord knew that His hour had come (John 17:1). In this close and personal view of our Savior here in the garden, we see His extreme anguish as evidenced by His sweat, like drops of blood (v. 44). He was preparing Himself, as well as His disciples, for His final hours. Jesus intentionally chose this place; it was not by accident that He came to this garden, so let's consider the significance of this place. "Gethsemane" means the place of the olive press. Olive oil was used for lamp lighting. It seems significant that the Light of the World would go through a crushing and pressing experience there in Gethsemane.

Not My Will but Yours

Jesus told us that, as Christians, we also are the lights of the world just as Jesus is the Light of the World (Matthew 5:14). If you want to shine brightly for God, be aware that you may have to endure the darkness of a Gethsemane experience. In that time of darkness, there may be spiritual choices you have to make, whether to relinquish your will to Christ or choose self-preservation. If we say, as Jesus did, "**Not my will but yours be done,**" then we must trust God with the journey and the outcome. In this experience of pressure and brokenness, you will be tempted to surrender to your flesh nature instead of yielding your will to Christ. Although the Way of the Cross is hard and will sometimes bring pain, it brings forth much fruit. It is also the road to great joy and triumphs as Jesus demonstrated for us.

We may assume that, the closer we get to spiritual maturity (adulthood) in our Christian lives, the easier it is to hear the voice of the Spirit. Although for the most part, I believe that to be true, there are times when a mature believer is left by God to make spiritually minded choices under the watchful eye of the One who is pleased by faith. The Lord often leaves us to make a choice instead of telling us what to do. Why does God leave the decision with us? Have you ever wished God would make things crystal clear? Many of us can relate with the disciple Thomas. When he was told of the resurrection of Christ, Thomas could not believe until he had proof. To

him, seeing was believing. Unless he saw the nail marks in Jesus' hands and put his finger where the nails were and put his hand into His side, Thomas would not believe (John 20:25). The Lord was very gracious to him and presented Himself in bodily form for him to do just that. Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 22:29).

In our human experience, we want evidence on which to base our faith, i.e., sense evidence, something we see or experience. We are used to this way of interpreting truth, but the Lord wants to sharpen our spiritual senses so that we learn to make decisions based on faith. This kind of faith pleases God, i.e., a faith that hasn't seen evidence yet still wholeheartedly trusts. In His humanity and with all the unseen forces of evil seeking to influence His choices, Jesus made a choice: "Yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Have you gone through a painful Gethsemane experience in your life? What positive results came from that time?

Christ Overwhelmed with Sorrow to the Point of Death

When they arrived in Gethsemane, he went a stone's throw distance from them and began to pray on His knees (Luke 22:41). Matthew writes that, at times, His posture was one of lying down with His face to the ground in fervent prayer:

³⁷He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, "My soul is *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. Stay here and keep watch with me." ³⁹Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:37-39).

The phrase, "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (v. 38), describes the most profound emotional state a living soul can endure. Mark portrays Jesus as being "deeply distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33). The Lord asked His disciples to keep watch with Him.

Why couldn't Jesus' disciples stay awake to keep watch? What factors do you think contributed to the disciples' falling asleep when He needed them?

This writer believes that it was a time of spiritual warfare as well as significant physical distress. It could be that they were exhausted and emotionally drained or that they did not want to face what was happening. In my opinion, it was also because they were all under great spiritual attack.

Luke described Jesus as "being in *anguish*, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). The Greek word translated *anguish* is where we get our English word *agony*. This Greek word is used in terms of someone fighting a battle with sheer fear.²

Jim Bishop, in his book, *The Day Christ Died*, comments on His sweat being like drops of blood:

² William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke*. Saint Andrew Press Publishers, page 271.

Medically, this is called *haematidrosis*. It occurs when fear is piled upon fear, when an agony of suffering is laid upon an older suffering until the highly sensitized person can no longer sustain the pain. At that moment, the patient ordinarily loses consciousness. When that does not happen, the subcutaneous capillaries sometimes dilate so broadly that, when they come into contact with the sweat glands the little capillaries burst. The blood is exuded with the perspiration and, usually, this occurs all over the body.³

I read of a similar situation during the Second World War when German aircraft bombed London in what became known as the Blitz. The daily pressure of the German bombing every night brought several cases of *haematidrosis* to the population of London forced to live in the underground rail stations as they listened to the bombs falling above them and the ground shaking. The stress of fear caused some people to sweat blood.

Some believe that Luke's words, "**His sweat *was like* drops of blood,**" don't mean that Jesus bled through the sweat glands. They think that there were just large drops of sweat. With this line of reasoning, they say that the proper interpretation is that His stress caused Him to sweat more than usual, but if that is so, why is blood mentioned? It wasn't the hot temperature causing Christ to sweat, for a few hours later that night; it was so cold that Peter warmed himself by the fire among Jesus' captors in the courtyard of Caiaphas.

Jesus was not sweating because He was hot, but he was sweating from the energy of His impassioned praying or even fear or stress. If He were, indeed, sweating blood, it would have been evident by the color of His tunic when He came near the disciples. I leave you to decide which interpretation you find to be the most believable. I think that the Scriptures mention drops of blood because He was sweating blood.

What is meant by the words of Jesus, "May this cup be taken from me?" (Luke 22:42). What did the cup represent, and why did the Lord want it to pass by Him?

Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the *cup of his wrath*, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger (Isaiah 51:17).

The cup was symbolic of the wrath of God poured out upon sin. In the Garden of Eden, a curse fell on the human race when the first man, Adam, sinned. We deserve spiritual death because of our sin and rebellion against God and the wrong choices we have all made. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that, when he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. Adam did not die physically the day on which he ate, but he was spiritually separated from God, and a barrier between God and man existed, i.e., a state of death in the eyes of God. The prophet Ezekiel spoke about this punishment due to sin when he said, "**The soul who sins is the one who will die**" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

Matthew adds the words, "**My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will**" (Matthew 26:39).

³ Jim Bishop. *The Day Christ Died*. Harper San Francisco Publishers, page 169.

Why did Christ have to drink this cup of God's wrath? Why was there no other way? Why was it not possible for the cup to pass away from Jesus?

If there had been any other way of redemption, the Father would have chosen it. There was no way other than God's beloved Son was to be sacrificed in humiliation, extreme physical and emotional pain, and the torturous death of being crucified. There was no alternate solution for God's justice and His love. Christianity is unique in this way, for in no other religion do we see a display of God's grace. There was only **ONE WAY**, and it involved God Himself becoming the substitute. A perfect sacrifice had to be made. Jesus was the only sacrifice that would be sufficient for our atonement. In all other religions, man has to keep a set of rules to satisfy his god's demands, but no rule-keeping can fill the inner void of man's heart for forgiveness.

Here we see the love of God revealed, for it was the Lord who planned Operation Redemption. God Himself, in the person of His Son, paid the substitution ransom, the sacrificial price of death for sin. The price is free for us but not cheap. Deliverance from sin cost God His Son. He took man's place. The judgment was firm and just. The soul that sins shall die, but Jesus, the Son of God, would take our place, i.e., the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

The love of God said "no" to Jesus' prayer for the cup to pass from Him; this was the only time a prayer of Christ was refused. There was no other way than that He should take the cup and drink it to the dregs.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

When we truly understand all that God has done for us, the only response is love for the One who has made possible our freedom and deliverance from sin.

Is There Another Way? (Matthew 26:39).

What was it that Christ loathed so much that He would ask the Father if there was another way?

I believe the reason was more than His humiliation at the hands of evil men and more than the pain He would endure through crucifixion. What was distinctly different was that Christ was stained with your sin and mine. When we struggle against sin, the temptation that comes to us is to seek holiness from our sinful thoughts and actions. As Christians, our fight is against sin in three different battlefields all at the same time, i.e., the world system in which we live; our sinful nature, and our adversary, the devil, and his demons. The writer to the Hebrews spoke of the temptation that we all face, saying that, however hard we fight, it is nowhere near the unseen fight that Jesus faced that night. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Hebrews 12:4).

We struggle to be holy when our natural tendency, our default nature, is toward sin. It was totally different, though, for our Lord Jesus. He had never known sin and has always been Holy being born of a virgin and by the Holy Spirit. Christ was not conceived in the usual way; therefore, He did not take on a sinful nature. Jesus remained free from sin all His life so that He would die as an innocent Lamb for us and as us. The Apostle Peter had been with Jesus for more than three years, and he said about Christ: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). As a Holy being, Christ’s struggle that day in the garden was to put on sin and be the living embodiment of sin. His striving was not against sin, but to be sin when every fiber of His Holy being cried out against sin. “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13).

His default nature, i.e., every impulse of His divine being, was to abhor sin, yet He had to put on sin to make us holy. How beautiful is His love! “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The temptation He faced was to abandon His holiness and embrace sin, i.e., all sin of all time and for the whole human race. Sins of the blackest sort would stain his perfect character; every sin that you and I have ever committed was laid on Jesus, i.e., not only sins committed in the present but also those of the past and future. That is why He cried out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Through all of this, Jesus did not waver in obedience to the Father. What seemed to be a defeat in the eyes of men and even among His closest loved ones on earth, the victory over sin and death was the most significant victory ever won.

The famous English cricketer, C.T. Studd, was born into wealth and luxury in the 1870s. He received the finest education that money could buy, attending Cambridge University, where he became captain of the English national cricket team. C.T. Studd was considered England's greatest cricketer. He had everything going for him, e.g., a large fortune laid at his feet at the death of his father. However, God had a different plan for him than wealth in this world. He went to hear D.L. Moody speak about Christ and gave his life to the Lord. He chose to give up his estate and his fortune and give all to mission work by even going himself to China, India, and Africa. To many people, that decision was a rash move and an enormous waste of intellect and ability. However, to Studd and six others who went, it was using their talents to the fullest. They laid down their will to God's call and purposes. "Yet not my will but yours be done." C. T. Studd once said:

If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him (C.T. Studd).

Have you ever laid down your will to God? Is your will in your hands or the Lord’s? At different times when I have been near death, I have realized that I am not in control of the day of my death, but Jesus is! Christ could have chosen the easy way out by calling on His angels to help Him, but He did not. He accepted the cup of wrath deserved by us.

Jesus Arrested

With a complete picture of what happened in Gethsemane, let us now read John's account of Christ's arrest.

¹When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. ⁴Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" ⁵"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. ⁸Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." ⁹This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" ¹²Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people (John 18:1-14).

Judas knew the place where Jesus often slept through the night, so he brought a detachment of Roman soldiers and officials from the religious elite. The Greek word, *speira*, translated as "detachment," is a term to designate a specific subgroup of Roman soldiers sent from the Antonia Fortress situated on the northwest side of the Temple Mount where Pilate had his residence and the Roman garrison. This subgroup consisted of 450 fighting men, in addition to the temple guard sent from the Chief Priests and Pharisees. Some have estimated that there may have been as many as six hundred soldiers.

Why so many? It was likely that they were expecting a fight and that there might be more of Christ's disciples in the garden with Him. They brought lanterns, perhaps, because they were expecting Jesus to hide. Jesus didn't wait for them to come looking for them. He took the initiative; He went out of the garden to them (John 18:4). His concern was for His disciples so that His prayer of protection in John 17 was answered during the arrest. He was in control of the whole situation. He asked them, "Who is it you want?" ⁵"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground" (John 18:4-6).

Why did the soldiers fall to the ground?

These soldiers came with swords and clubs ready for any eventuality. Roman soldiers were not known to be fearful about anything, and they were not known to fall easily on the ground. They were ready for anything as they approached the garden. Imagine the scene as this large group fell to the ground under the heavy presence of the Lord. When Jesus uttered the Greek form of the

name of God, “I AM” (*egō eimi*), the Roman soldiers fell to the ground. (The word “He” is absent from the original Greek text and added by the translators to make the statement more natural to understand in English.)

Again and again through the Book of John, we have seen Jesus adding the name of God to different aspects of His character, e.g., “I am the Gate;” “I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the Light of the World,” “I am the Way,” etc. This was a display of supernatural power before these soldiers. Jesus was letting the soldiers know that He was willingly giving Himself into their hands and was not captured. What a picture it must have been, i.e., hundreds of men terrified of one Man and His eleven disciples, and only one of them is using a sword in defense. Twice Jesus asked them: “Who is it you want?” (verses 4-7), before winning the freedom of His disciples. John tells us that it was at this point that Peter lashed out with his short sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant.

¹⁰Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:10-11).

In his usual rash behavior, Peter slashed at the high priest's servant named Malchus with his sword, severing the soldier's ear. Why didn't the 450 men attack Peter and the disciples after Peter's rash act? Although the Scriptures are not clear on this point, it seems that the presence of the Lord unsettled the soldiers. Again, the Lord Jesus was in complete control of the situation, reminding Peter that it must be this way (v. 11), that there is the cup of suffering that He must drink to put away sin for all men. The healing of Malchus' ear was instantaneous. There was no hunting around for the ear with the lanterns, and there were no bandages. Luke writes us that Jesus put His hand to Malchus' ear, and he miraculously sprouted another ear: “He touched the man's ear and healed him” (Luke 22:51). I wonder if Malchus found his severed ear in the dirt after Jesus was led away.

Matthew wrote that Jesus said that it must be this way:

⁵³Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? (Matthew 26:53-54).

Christ didn't run away but was in control at every point by confronting the armed soldiers. It was the power of God that put the soldiers on the ground. We can also trust that supernatural power will be unleashed on our behalf when we say, “Not my will, but yours be done.” God can move when He gets the glory!

Have you ever been in a life-threatening situation? How did you handle it, and how did it change your perspective on life?

We don't know where the road will take us when we respond to situations with words, such as “Your will be done.” Replying in such a way can be challenging because one never knows how God will lead us or where He will take us as believers, but there is a peace that passes all understanding when our lives and will are given into His hands.

Many of you are at the crossroads of Gethsemane. Submitting to God's will is the big question: Will you lay down your will and place your life into His hands? God's Word tells us,

Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, *who for the joy set before him* endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

Prayer: Thank You for the choice You made in Gethsemane, Lord. You looked forward and saw each of us, and joy came to Your heart, which strengthened You for what You endured. Help each of us to place our will and lives into Your hands and trust You. Amen.

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