

Jason Upchurch - Mark 14:32-42 - The Good News of Jesus's Determination to Save

Last week we saw that in the final hours of the life of the Lord Jesus he would be abandoned by all those who were closest to him. Not just Judas, but all the disciples would be scattered. Jesus walked through the final hours of his life of suffering by himself, all alone, with resolute determination to bring about the salvation for his people.

This morning we come to the Garden of Gethsemane - a very well known passage. And I'll be honest I struggled with how to capture everything going on in this little section. It is incredibly profound on so many levels.

Let me just give you some themes we see in this passage and then knowing those themes we'll just walk through this amazing passage together.

1) Suffering. This is the beginning of the suffering proper of Jesus. He is in the Garden and his soul is troubled unto death. He is greatly distressed. Luke mentions the intensity of what he is about to face is so great that he is sweating drops of blood.

From here to the end of his life, he is like a lamb led to the slaughter. The time has come, the inevitable is upon Jesus. And there might be some inclination for us to think that since Jesus knows all things he shouldn't be any more worried now than a year before. But that belittles the suffering. He can now see the tidal wave of the wrath of God coming.

2) Prayer. Throughout this section we see the Lord Jesus in prayer, over and over. Diligent, earnest prayer. There are few places in the NT where we get glimpses of the conversation from Jesus to the Father. Those places are amazing because us a glimpse into the inner life of the Trinity. They help us understand who God is - a sneak peak into the divine life.

And here we see at the most intense moment of life, Jesus - the Son of God - flees to the Father in prayer.

I don't know about you, but many times the hardest times of life come or are coming and we flee to anything else: books, games, hobbies, sins, all kinds of things. But here we see Jesus modeling for us what we should do as well. When we're about to go through the valley of the shadow of death we should go earnestly to the Father.

3) Prayerlessness. The sad contrast to the theme of Jesus in prayer, is the theme of the prayerlessness of the disciples. And especially the prayerlessness of his closest disciples. His friends. They may not understand fully about what's to happen, but they have been told by their friend and Lord that they should stay awake praying.

And what do they do? They fall asleep. Over and over they are asleep at the time when Jesus has personally told them to stay vigilant.

And how often do we take prayer lightly? We know we should be watchful in prayer, we know we need it to avoid temptation and to petition the God of the universe to pour out grace and yet we become sleepy. It's easy to feel guilty about prayerlessness - and we should pray more - but the determination of Jesus to save his prayerlessness companions is the same as it has always been.

4) Humanity of Jesus. We see Jesus at his most human in this passage. In fact, some of the this passage can be difficult for us to understand: how can Jesus be asking God to change the plan of his substitutionary death mere hours before it happens? Jesus is asking to not die? What's going on here?

What's going on is Jesus is going to bear our sins **in his body** on the tree. This is the Son learning obedience, as Hebrews says, through the suffering he is about to endure. He's not learning information, but he is experiencing in his human body obedience that can only happen through experience.

I can tell you all I want about a root canal. But it's only once the dentist is putting that drill in your mouth that you'll understand the true state of things.

In a similar way, it's only when Jesus actually experiences that he can truly learn - experientially - full obedience to the Father.

Suffering, Prayer, Prayerlessness, Humanity.

5) Obedience. Despite the intense suffering Jesus is already experiencing and his heartfelt prayer to let this cup pass, the remarkable thing is that Jesus willingly goes to the cross.

He goes down from Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, to the Garden. He could have run away. He could have hid in Jerusalem - the place was packed. This is why the religious rulers needed Judas. They needed an insider who knew where Jesus would be because it would have been impossible for them to find Jesus on their own.

John 18:2 says that Judas knew this Garden because Jesus often met there with the disciples.

Remember last we saw Judas he was at the Last Supper, Jesus told him to go do what he was going to do. No one understood what that meant except Judas and Jesus. So Judas goes to the religious leaders and says "I've got him!" They get a band of guys together to go get Jesus. That may have taken a little bit of time.

We don't know this, but it seems likely they went back to the Upper Room to see if Jesus was there. He wasn't, he had left. So the search began to find Jesus. Judas knew all the usual spots around Jerusalem where Jesus hung out.

But Jesus doesn't run away. He goes to a place where he often goes, knowing that Judas is leading a manhunt for him. Jesus is obedient to go to the Garden.

He's obedient to pray. He's also obedient when he sees Judas coming to rise up and meet Judas. He doesn't run. He doesn't hide. There's no pulling Jesus out of an olive tree or dragging him kicking and screaming to the trial. He willingly meets the traitor.

Everything about Jesus is obedience. And this is important because in this dark hour Jesus is 100% obedient to the Father. This is the amazing thing.

When we have a bad day or things are rough we often justify our disobedience because things are difficult. We "cut ourselves some slack" or "let loose" a little or whatever. We think we owe it to ourselves to be less obedient in hard times.

Not so for Jesus, he is obedient to the end and this is essential for our salvation.

Scholars often make a distinction between what is called the passive obedience of Jesus and the active obedience of Jesus.

The passive obedience of Jesus is the obedience of Jesus as he hangs on the cross suffering for our sins. It's called passive because he is simply enduring the full force of the Father's wrath. Our sins were placed on him and he is taking the punishment we deserve.

It's like when a child gets spanked, they are simply enduring the discipline as the strokes hit their bottom.

The passive obedience of Jesus is crucial in our salvation and it's usually what we think of when we think of Jesus earning our salvation. Jesus obediently died on the cross, in our place, for our sins.

But there is another obedience just as important: the active obedience of Jesus. What is that? The active obedience of Jesus is the reality that Jesus actively obeyed the Father in every possible way for our righteousness. This is every time Jesus is obedient to the Father leading up to the cross.

See, it's not enough that Jesus simply took our sins. That would leave us with basically a blank slate, spiritually speaking. No, Jesus also earned a righteousness in his body through his obedience, for our righteousness.

He obeyed his parents on our behalf.

He obeyed every jot and tittle of the Mosaic Law on our behalf.

He obeyed governing authorities on our behalf.

He did all the things that the Father told him to do on our behalf.

So that when someone repents from their sin and trusts in Christ there is what we call double imputation. There's two transactions happening when someone is saved.

First, our sins and all the wrath they deserve are placed on Jesus. Second, all the obedience that Jesus earned is placed on our account.

Phil 3:9: [Paul says he does] not have a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ.

We stand before God righteous because of Jesus.

John 17:4: Jesus says to the Father: I have brought you glory by finishing the work you gave me to do.

Jesus had a massive list of things the Father had given him to do. To fail at any of those would have been sin and our salvation would not have been accomplished. Instead Jesus finished all the work the Father gave him.

Romans 5:19: For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] many will be made righteous.

Adam's disobedience made us sinners. We sin because we are sinners; Adam's sin was imputed to our account. But it's Jesus's obedience all the way through his life culminating on the cross that we are made righteous.

This is the active obedience of Jesus and we see that even in this dark hour.

These are all themes we could spend a lot of time on and we'll touch more on them.

As I mentioned before, I struggle with how to approach this whole passage. I was writing down a outline this week and I realized I had a 10 point outline, which is really just a way of saying I have no outline. So walk with me through this. **Read 32**

Jesus goes to a place called Gethsemane. It's just a few hundred yards from the walls of Jerusalem near the bottom of the Kidron Valley. The place has long been a grove for olive trees, and also nearby is the massive graveyard, which serves as an appropriate location for Jesus's final hours.

The fact that Jesus is in this Garden named Gethsemane is something of a parable for what's about to happen. Gethsemane means olive press. Most families had a Gethsemane in their town or village. It was where you took the olive crop once a year to harvest.

And how olives are pressed is an apt metaphor for what Jesus is going to endure. The way we get olive oil is basically that the olives are crushed over and over again. The initial process is to put olives in a bag that's made out of netting and run a millstone over the olives to break them down. A millstone is a 1,000 pound round rock.

Then there are 3 presses. These bags of crushed olives are placed under a massive wooden beam that is raised up and then lowered onto the olives 3 times. The first press is the extra virgin press - it's the best oil. Then they change the pivot point of the beam to apply even more pressure and crush the olives again for the second press.

And then they change the angle again for further pressure, and crush it a third time for the final press. Each time is heavier and heavier.

Commentators throughout the ages have noticed the parallels between the 3 crushing of the olive press and the 3 times Jesus goes to pray and how the intensity of each time seems to increase. In any case, it is a fitting metaphor for what Jesus is experiencing in the Garden while he is praying to the Father.

We also see the intensity of this suffering. **Read 32-34**

It's during the prayer that the intensity of the distress hits full force. He is beginning to bear the incredible sense of dread of the cross. Just the agony knowing what he's about to endure is enough to take the life out of him. **Read 34a**

He is sorrowful even to death. There are some animals and even cases of people, who are so filled with dread and sorrow that they just die. Their body can no longer take the stress and sorrow and burden of their situation and they just die.

Here, the intensity is now crushing the life out of Jesus. And it's here that he asks his disciples to pray. **Read 34**

They're called to watch. The idea is not to look out. Jesus doesn't need a patrol to make sure Judas doesn't come. He knows Judas is coming.

The word "watch" is a word used in the Bible occasionally for prayer.

Col. 4:2: Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it, with thanksgiving.

And because Jesus admonishes the disciples several time to pray, it makes sense that that's what he's saying here.

Jesus calls these men to be diligent to pray earnestly in his final hours. To be watchful like a watchman on the wall looking out for enemies who might attack when least expected. This is all Jesus asks from them.

Something to keep in mind is that prayer does not often come naturally. It's not something that we often delight in doing. It's something we very much to determine to do: to be watchful in it. And especially when the situation we're in is a difficult one.

Why be watchful in prayer? Because the intensity of suffering is already enormous. So enormous we see one of the most unusual statements Jesus ever makes in the next two verses. **Read 35-36a**

Jesus prays that this hour might pass. Not pass, like come to pass quickly. No; pass like "please don't make me go through this." What's going on here?

What's going on is the reality of Jesus in all his humanity knowing what he's about to experience. He's not undermining the Father. He's not disobeying the Father in any way.

But in his humanity he is experiencing dread and suffering the likes of which we can't imagine. And I think this is an incredibly honest prayer and one that exposes to us the intensity of what Jesus endured for our salvation.

In his humanity, Jesus does not want to endure this pain and suffer. The cup he mentions is the cup of the wrath of God. That metaphor of a cup of wrath is used often in the OT when God makes his enemies - forces them - to drink to cup of the his own wrath.

Psalms 75:8 For in the hand of Yahweh there is a cup, with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

The wicked will drink down every last drop, even the particulate of the wrath of God.

Isa. 51:17: Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of Yahweh the cup of his wrath who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.

When Jerusalem was disobedient they drank the wrath of God.

God pours out his wrath on his enemies and he forces them to drink it to the dregs. That's what's happening to Jesus. Jesus - the Son of God - is treated by his Father as the eternal enemy who is forced to drink the wrath of the Father for sins he never committed. He's drinking in the wrath of my sins and your sins.

And it is an awful cup to drink.

And part of it is awful because this is the cup he is drinking from is from **his Father**. He refers to the Father as Abba. Some scholars have said that means "Daddy" like what a young child would say. But it's not. It's probably closer to "dad" or "pop" and intimate and close term that even adult Jews would use with their fathers.

What makes this so bitter is that God the Son is now enduring the wrath of God the Father. His Father. Father in a way we only mirror in this life and will never understand the depths of.

Jesus asks, in the fullness of his humanity, that this cup would pass. By the way, this is one way we know Jesus isn't just a spirit of some kind. A spirit wouldn't feel the effects of crucifixion. But his human body will feel the weight.

And in the midst of that plea we also see the amazing determination to obey the Father. **Read 36**

Jesus wants the cup to pass. But he wants something more: he wants the Father's will accomplished in his life.

There was a song back in the early 2000s, by Michael W Smith called Above All and one of the lines was this:

Like a rose, trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me above all.

Is that what Jesus was thinking about above all? Was that his greatest concern?

I don't think so. While the sentiment there is poetic. The reality is that Jesus's primary thoughts were not on us, but on doing the will of the Father. Pleasing and obeying the Father. In pleasing the Father, he would save his people, and in saving his people bring the Father glory. Were we on his mind? Sure. But it's the Father's will that trumps all other considerations for Jesus.

By the way, I think Jesus's prayer is instructive for us. I think we can be brutally honest with God about the things we want in life. The things we don't want to endure: pain and suffering and sorrow and difficulty. And maybe he takes it away!

But at the end of the day, the real prayer of our heart should echo Jesus: Yet not what I will, but what you will.

God we want your will no matter what because your will is perfect. Whatever comes about, good or bad, difficult or easy, planned or not: your will be done.

And that drive to fulfill the will of God comes despite the fact the the very disciples Jesus is going to save, and the very disciples Jesus has commanded to pray are asleep. **Read**

I mean, here's the Son of God in utter agony and these guys are zonked out. They have absolutely no wherewithal about what's happening. They still don't get the gravity of the situation and they can't stay awake even an hour to pray for their Lord.

And Jesus gives them a specific prayer. And probably not what we'd expect them to pray. You'd think he'd ask for aid or grace or endurance or something. Notice what he tells them to pray for. **Read 38**

Pray that they don't sin. Pray that they don't stumble in the midst of all of this. Jesus says that they need to be praying for their own spiritual well being in the midst of his suffering!

And we know what's about to happen. We know how they will respond to the rabble that shows up to arrest Jesus. Peter is going to take matters into his own hands and try to kill the high priest's servant. Once he's rebuked they will all flee from the scene. Peter will deny Jesus. It's an utter trainwreck.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We've heard that phrase many times and probably even use it occasionally. It means we have good intentions, but actually seeing those good intentions through is another thing altogether.

You place a bowl of ice cream in front of me, and while I might want to watch the calories the flesh is weak and I indulge.

Well, the real issue is sin. The flesh is weak. We might make great claims about putting sin to death and eradicating from our lives. But we're weak. Our flesh is often our own greatest enemy.

And part of the problem is that we're not watching diligently in prayer that we don't enter into temptation. This should be a regular part of our prayer life. In fact, Jesus makes it fundamental to our prayer life when he teaches us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven.
Hallowed be your name
Your Kingdom come
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread and what?
Lead us not into temptation.

The Father would never tempt us to sin. The point is that we're asking the Father to keep us from temptation. To keep us from the sins that trip us up so easily.

They are weak and frail and prayerless like we are often weak and frail and prayerless. It happens 3 more times. **Read 39-41a**

Over and over they are asleep at Jesus's most crucial hour. Remember last week I said that Jesus would be going this road alone? He achieved every bit of our salvation without the help of anyone? Clearly the disciples have all fallen asleep on the job - literally. They are of absolutely no help to Jesus. And yet he marches on.

This pattern of 3 times is one reason why scholars think the Gethsemane - the olive press - is such a great analogy and probably purposeful by God in the life of Jesus. The other gospels seem to indicate that each time Jesus goes back to prayer the suffering is greater and greater. Which makes their failing worse and worse.

Which brings up the last section: the courage of Jesus to confront what God has called him to do. **Read 41-42**

Guys, you're done sleeping. Let's go, the hour has come. Jesus does not run away from his mission to go to the cross. He doesn't hide from Judas. He meets Judas.

Interestingly, from where Jesus was he could have easily seen the crowd of men with torches and weapons coming out of the walled city and down into the Kidron Valley. He would have known that his time was short once he saw the crowd moving toward the Garden because that's exactly where Judas would lead them.

And Jesus faces it head on. Rise up, let's go. My betrayer is coming.

Usually I give you the big picture up front, but here's the big picture: Jesus courageously determines to save us.

He doesn't run. He's not frustrated by the sleeping disciples. He's not intimidated by the soldiers. He's not hiding or sneaking away. As the captain of our salvation he meets his fate head on for our salvation.

He does it all alone. And he does it gladly. He is the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despised the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus saving us isn't a bummer. He's not disappointed that we need saving. He knows what needs to be done and obeys to the end. To him be all the glory.

Pray