

Prayer in Gethsemane

Mark 14:32-52

Justin Deeter – September 24, 2017



Have you ever felt totally alone? Have you ever felt abandoned in your time of need? In your moment of crises, have your friends abandoned you, leaving you in the lurch? Loneliness can be a common experience for us. In fact, it has become an epidemic in our culture. Though we live in the most interconnected age in the history of humanity, thousands struggle with an aching sense of loneliness. Often times we feel as if no one cares about us, and we go through moments where our closest friends and family let us down, and are blind to our suffering.

If you've ever been in a situation like that, then you can feel a small part of what Jesus felt in the night of his arrest. Jesus just celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. At that meal, he instituted the Lord's Supper. In this meal he helped his disciples understand the purpose of his upcoming death. His body would be broken, just like this bread for the forgiveness of our sins. His blood would be poured out on the cross instituting a new covenant written in Christ's blood. The disciples, largely oblivious of the seriousness of what's about to occur, accompany Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. He takes with him his closest three friends, the inner circle of the disciples, Peter, James, and John. Before his friends, Jesus opens up to them and expresses his sorrow. However, Jesus largely suffers alone in prayer with his Father as his closest friends fall asleep. Jesus' arrest is coming! The moment of suffering will soon arrive in just a few hours! The redemption of humanity is at stake, and here Jesus' disciples let their master down in his time of need.

In Mark 14:32-51, we will see the lonely suffering of Jesus expressed in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Here Jesus enters into divine council with his father, deciding once and for all to go through with their plan to redeem

humanity through his death. In this sermon this morning, I want to walk through the passage and help you feel the weight of Jesus' anxiety and loneliness in the garden of Gethsemane, and feel the isolation that he suffered. Upon working through the text, I want to leave you with a comforting truth: Jesus was abandoned so that you would never be. Jesus was lonely so you don't have to be. Through the lonely sufferings of the Son of God, you are given the love and intimacy of a relationship with God.

However, before we discover this truth, let us first unpack what occurred in that garden.

Abandonment in Gethsemane

Gethsemane literally means "place where olives are pressed." In this garden, Jesus would be squeezed by sorrow and anxiety beyond understanding. Tonight was the night of decision. Would Jesus go through with the plan that required his body to be pierced with nails? Would he go through the excruciating pain and the humiliating mockery? Would he condescend himself so low? Would he become a servant to us even unto death? Would his zeal for his Father's glory and his love for humanity sustain him to endure his sufferings unto completion?

These questions squeezed Jesus, pressing him into anguish. He took his closest friends and disciples—Peter, James, and John—with him, instructing them to sit while he goes and prays. His demeanor began to alter visibly before them. Mark, who recorded Peter's eyewitness testimony, tells us that he "began to be greatly distressed and trouble." Then Jesus opens up to his closest friends about his trouble: "My soul is sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." In his desperate hour he asks for their support and watchfulness. The disciples, never seeing their rabbi so unsettled, watched as Jesus walked further into the garden to pray.

There Jesus falls on the ground and pleads with his Father, that the hour of suffering might pass from him. With great sorrow over his upcoming task, he also displays unrelenting confidence. Though he prays for the cup to pass from him, he prays "Not what I will, but what you will." What is this cup that terrified

Jesus? The cup was a common image used to describe the reception of wrath. To pour out the cup on someone, was to pour out wrath and indignation.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had always displayed great confidence. He boldly confronted the religious leaders with no fear of his own reputation or safety. We've never seen Jesus shrink back in terror or display an ounce of reservation. But here, in Gethsemane, the place where olives are squeezed, the pressure of Jesus' mission begins to overwhelm him. He is sorrowful unto death. The trembling terror of Jesus anxiety is sourced in his upcoming death. Yes, death by crucifixion was horrific. As we will soon see, the flogged body of Jesus was forced to carry the cross up to Golgotha's hill. Yet he was so tortured he had not the strength to carry the cross without help. At the cross they pierced his hands and feet along the center of his nerve to maximize the pain. Upon that cross Jesus' back, marred with festered wounds, rubbed against the splintered wood just so he could gain a short gasp of air. Gurgling in his own blood, Jesus suffered the horrors of death by crucifixion. However, in Gethsemane, we see that Jesus' greatest reservation wasn't sourced in the physical torment, but in the spiritual torment of bearing the full weight of God's wrath for sinners. Jesus anguished over bearing the sin of the whole world, and receiving the full weight of God's just wrath towards us. The cup of his Father's judgment seemed to much to bear!

After all, Jesus had lived for eternity in relationship with the Father and Spirit as the one and only triune God. From eternity past, Jesus had enjoyed the sweet communion of fellowship within the Godhead. Jesus enjoyed the sweet love of this divine and holy harmony. Yet, before the foundations of the earth, God planned to bring himself glory through the creation and redemption of sinful human beings. The plan of the Father unfolded exactly as he decided it would, including sending the Son to become the man Jesus Christ. Jesus, fully God and fully man, had accomplished his mission thus far. He lived a life of moral righteousness and reflection. He perfectly upholds the Law of God, obeying it in letter and in spirit. He boldly declared the arrival of the kingdom of God, and taught others the way into that kingdom. Yet, now the hour has come where that kingdom needed to be established, and the founding stone laid. The creation of a new humanity required the sacrifice of the Son of the passover lamb. In order to redeem human beings, they needed atonement. In order to preserve the justice and righteousness of God, sin had to be paid for by someone. Yet, in zeal for his own glory and in love for his church, God decided to provide a substitute for

sinner. Enter Jesus. This is his ultimate mission. It's the reason why he came into the world. Now in the garden of Gethsemane as the Father prepares to pour the cup of wrath upon his head, Jesus is overwhelmed. Upon the cross, Jesus would endure abandonment from his Father. Just as the prophet Isaiah predicted, he would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted. In his garden prayer, we get a glimpse of Jesus' anguish and loneliness over his upcoming death.

In this great moment of anguish, Jesus returns to his closest friends and finds them sleeping! Jesus had confided in them and asked them for their support in his sorrow, but they drift off to sleep! Just when he needed them most, his disciples let them down even though he prepares to die for their sin. Jesus mourns, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Remember, as they are going into the garden, Jesus foretells Peter of his upcoming denial "this very night." Peter in great confidence rejected Jesus' prediction. Now moments later, he's sleeping in the garden. Rather than remaining vigilant and on guard in prayer the next few hours to ensure that Jesus' prediction would not come true, Peter falls asleep!

The disciples failure to pray occurs three different times as Jesus comes back and finds them sleeping yet again. At the third occurrence, the time of prayer is over. The hour has now come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. At those words, Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples, comes with a crowd of swords and clubs, sent on behalf of the chief priests and scribes. Judas identified Jesus by a kiss, and with that sign the small militia seized Jesus. At that moment, one of the disciples takes to arm at Jesus' defense and cuts off a man's ear! From the other Gospel accounts we know this man to be Peter! Yet, Jesus decries the fact they came to get him with swords and clubs saying, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled."

At his arrest we receive a sober summary in verse 50, "And they all left him and fled." The shepherd was struck, and the sheep scattered. How quickly they abandoned Jesus! How quickly they left him when their own lives were at risk. These closest friends and companions turn and ran, leaving their rabbi behind to suffer alone. The disciples who Jesus personally called to follow him, deserted him in his last hour.

In v. 51-52, we get this strange account of this young man, who followed after Jesus, only to be seized by the soldiers. The man left his cloth behind and ran off naked and humiliated. Who is this strange streaker running through the garden of Gethsemane? Well most scholars agree, that this naked man is most likely Mark himself, the author of this Gospel. It's an autobiographical inclusion of the authors own failure.

It's easy for us to chastise these disciples for abandoning their teacher, leaving him all alone to face the sufferings that awaited him. However, you and I have done the same. How often are we caught up in our own safety to obey the command of the master? How frequently do we put ourselves above Jesus? You and I have abandoned Jesus more times than we can count. We are filled with sin and selfishness. Yet, despite our wretchedness, Jesus joyfully goes alone to the cross for you and me.

Abandoned for Us

I've gone to great lengths to help you feel the weight of isolation and loneliness Jesus endured in the hours leading up to his crucifixion. He was betrayed by his disciple, abandoned by his friends, and forsaken by the Father. He endured loneliness as no one ever had. I press into the sorrow of our saviors heart in that garden to help you grip an important truth: Jesus was abandoned so that you wouldn't have to be. He was lonely so that you can have fellowship with God. He was rejected by the Father, so that you can be accepted by the Father.

I think everyone of us goes through seasons of great loneliness, where we feel completely abandoned, neglected by the ones we thought loved us. The teenager experiences the social alienation that comes from navigating the treacherous waters of the social hierarchy in their school's cafeteria. College students struggle to find their purpose and identity, meanwhile struggling to build meaningful friendships. The single man or woman who desires marriage can feel the aching emptiness of not yet finding someone to spend the rest of their life with. The busy mom lives in isolation with her time monopolized by the exhausting demands of her children. The stressed workman shackles himself to

his work, severing his connection with his wife and children. The empty nesters experience the haunting isolation of life without children, living in the house with a spouse who, in the last decades, has become a stranger. The widow or widower lacks companionship, who grieves the loss of their spouse and is ignored by well meaning, but busy children and grandchildren. You see, in every stage of life, people can experience crippling loneliness.

Loneliness is a symptom of living in a fallen world, tainted by sin. Sin brings disruption to fellowship with God and with one another. Isolation reminds us of the brokenness of this world. We see that Jesus understands what it feels like to be abandoned. In the garden that night, Jesus prayed to his Father as he prepares to go alone to the cross. His closest disciples abandoned him at his most desperate hour. He goes to the cross and is forsaken by God. Yet, why does Jesus do this? We are told elsewhere, that if Jesus had wanted to, he could have called down a legion of angels to protect him. At any moment, Jesus could have hit the eject button on his mission, and called off the whole plan of redemption. However, Jesus endured the isolation. He endured the suffering and shame. He endured the derision of the mocking crowds and the humiliation of his death.

Jesus goes to the cross so that you can have a relationship with God. By his death, Jesus makes peace, reconciling the relationship between God and man. His death draws us out of isolation into fellowship with the living God. Through his sufferings, we are reminded that there is someone who loves us—the Father in heaven. We know and experience the love of God as we watch Christ upon the cross, because he goes there for us. What amazing love and grace, that Christ would die for us? Jesus suffers crippling loneliness and abandonment as he goes to the cross, so that you wouldn't have to and so that you could be made a son or daughter of God.

When you enter into a season of loneliness and depression, you must remember what Christ has done for you. You must preach the Gospel to yourself again, reminding that Jesus has brought you into fellowship with God. Though our earthly relationships with one another still suffer the taint of sin, your relationship to God in Christ is secured. In those moments, remember the sorrow of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Remember his sufferings for you. Press into the relationship you have with God, access that Christ has given to you by his death.

People will often fail you and disappoint you. Relationships, sadly, come and go. Even our own family can let us down. Yet, the Christian looks in hope to the work of Christ on the cross. Through the cross we are not only reconciled to God, but reconciled to one another. God draws us out of loneliness into the community of his people called the Church.

Final Thoughts

I'm not sure what troubles your soul today, but contemplate the work of Christ! He was squeezed and pressed in anxiety and loneliness in that garden. He struggled with the cup he had to drink. Yet, he would arise from the garden ground in prayer to accomplish his mission. He courageously went to the cross for us, giving no resistance. He suffered for you and for me.

Perhaps today, you feel the crippling weight of loneliness because you do not have a relationship with God. The emptiness your soul feels will not go away until you are brought into relationship with your maker. Thankfully, Jesus came for that explicit purpose! Turn from your sin and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin. Put your faith in him, and be brought into relationship with God.

Perhaps today you know the Lord, but you've forgotten what he's done. Today, you need to be reminded of the Gospel and the relationship you have with God in Christ. You never graduate from the Gospel. We need to be reminded of God's grace in Christ often. When our soul is troubled, we need to apply the sweet ointment of the Gospel to comfort us. As we remember the sufferings of Christ and the loneliness of abandonment he felt, we comfort ourselves with the gift he's given us. By the grace of God, you do not suffer alone, and you have not been abandoned. Praise be to God, that Christ walked the lonely way of suffering and judgement, so that we would be forgiven and brought into community.

