

Lent 2, 2021: A Journey to Gethsemane

Sermon of 2021-02-28

By Major Brian Coles

[slide 1] Welcome to week 2 in our journey through Lent. The word Lent signifies a period of 40 days before Easter

that traditionally involves fasting, praying, and giving to others.

That's why we run our Partners in Mission campaign, also known as Self-Denial, during the Lenten season,

so that we can think about what we can give to our mission work overseas.

Deb helped us begin our Lenten journey last week looking at the story of the Last Supper.

[slide 2] This week we continue our Lenten journey focusing our attention on the garden of Gethsemane.

Let's read our scripture for today from Matthew's accounting of events, beginning at v.36 of chapter 26.

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ Going 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."

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

⁴¹ “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting?”

Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners.

⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Let’s pray. Teach me, Lord, that I may teach the precious things that you impart; and wing my words, that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart. Amen.

[slide 3, blank] That evening, after their last Passover meal together, Jesus and his disciples wend their way through the streets of Jerusalem,

out through one of the city gates, across the southern steps of Herod’s temple, down into the Kidron Valley
and on toward the foot of the Mount of Olives where they arrive at a dark and silent grove of olive trees [slide 4] called Gethsemane.

It is here Jesus pours out his heart to God, his Father, in prayer.

It is here Jesus experiences his own personal horror and agony as he wrestles with what God is asking him to do.

It is here that Jesus, in quiet resolve, surrenders his will to God's will for his life.

This morning we're going to follow Matthew's account of what took place in Gethsemane.

As we do we will make five observations about Gethsemane.

Once we've made our 5 observations about Gethsemane we will then discover 4 stages God takes us through

to bring us to the place of releasing our wills to his will.

Follow along with me in your bible. As we begin with Matthews account of what took place in Gethsemane,

the first observation we can make is that... [slide 5] **Gethsemane was a place of privacy.**

As they headed out from the upper room, Matthew tells us in v.36 that

"Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Jesus separated himself from his disciples for some privacy in prayer.

Gethsemane was not an unfamiliar place to Jesus.

We learn from Luke's gospel, in 5.16 and 22.39, that Jesus frequented Gethsemane to be alone to pray.

[slide 6, blank] We can pray anywhere, but it's helpful to have a private place where we can be alone and uninterrupted.

It might be your living room at home in the mornings, your kitchen table at lunch, or in your car in the evening.

Wherever your private place of prayer is is not as important as having a place where you can pray privately.

On entering Gethsemane Jesus was able to pray privately. In v.37, Jesus left 8 of his disciples at the gate of the garden

and took 3 of them, Peter, James and John, into the inner most part of the garden.

Then, going on about a stones throw from them, v.39, he was alone, he had privacy, and poured out his heart to God his Father.

Group prayer has its benefits, but effective praying can be done in privacy as well.

When praying privately, you don't have to worry about what other people may think about what or how you pray.

As we continue in Matthew's account, the 2nd observation we can make is that... [slide 7] **Gethsemane was a place of agony.**

In the last half of v.37 we read that Jesus *"began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to [his disciples],*

"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

[slide 8, blank] Gethsemane is a word of Aramaic origin and means "oil press."

There must have been oil presses in the vicinity where olives were pressed or crushed for their oil from the olive trees that grew there.

It was here, in Gethsemane, that Jesus experienced the most crushing of experiences.

Luke, perhaps because of his training as a medical physician, records a detail Matthew does not.

In Lk. 22.44 we read, “... *being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*”

[slide 9] The medical term for this condition is “hema-tid-rosis.” It comes from the Greek *haíma*, meaning blood, and *hidrós*, meaning sweat.

Around the sweat glands, there are multiple blood vessels in a net-like shape.

When under the pressure of great stress the vessels constrict.

Then, as the anxiety passes, the blood vessels dilate to the point of rupture. The blood then goes into the sweat glands.

As the sweat glands are producing a lot of sweat, it pushes the blood to the surface, coming out as droplets of blood mixed with sweat.

[slide 10] No artist or movie maker can fully portray the anguish Jesus experienced that night.

Words also fail to describe the full extent of his anguish.

The Greek words translated “sorrowful and troubled” in the NIV, literally mean, “to be struck with fear and dread.”

That “fear and dread overwhelmed esus” is perhaps a better reading of the text.

[slide 11, blank] Maybe you’ve never prayed with that same degree of intensity. I know I haven’t.

But you've probably prayed when feeling troubled and overwhelmed with sorrow.

Think back a moment to a time in your own life: Maybe it was when you lost a close friend or relative.

Maybe it was during a long struggle with an addiction that tormented you.

Maybe it was when your husband had a heart attack, or your child was injured in an automobile accident.

Those are times when our prayers get more intense.

Gethsemane was a place of intense agony for Jesus.

It was, as one writer put it, "as if death had wrapped its fingers around his shoulders."

The 3rd observation we can make about Gethsemane from Matthew's account is that... [slide 12] **Gethsemane was a place of submission.**

v.39: Jesus "... 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.""

Both of these verbs, 'fell' and 'prayed' at the beginning of the verse, are, in the Greek language, describing a continual action.

So it could actually read like this: "He began falling to the ground and praying, and then falling to the ground and praying, and then falling and praying."

Artists and movie makers miss this picture when they portray Jesus quietly kneeling by a rock in the moonlight,

praying with hands folded and a serene expression on his face.

That's not the way it happened. [slide 13] Jesus fell to the ground and prayed, then got up, walked a little further, and once again fell to the ground and prayed.

He repeated this over and over while under such intense anguish as he continued to cry out, *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me."*

[slide 14, blank] While Greek was the common written language of the 1st century, Aramaic was the common spoken language.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. So when he prayed, "My Father," the Aramaic word for father is "Abba."

"Abba," used by Mark in his gospel, and by Paul in his letter to the Galatians and Romans,

is an intimate word describing the close r'ship between a child and a parent. The best English equivalent is the word "Daddy."

Jesus is crying out to his daddy saying, "If it is possible,... let this cup be taken from me."

This was the cup he had mentioned to James and John, the cup the prophets had spoken of.

This was the cup of suffering and death on a cross. This was the cup of God's wrath against the sin of all peoples. And he didn't want to drink it.

As N.T. Wright says, "Jesus, at this point, is no hero-figure, marching boldly towards his oncoming fate.

He was not Socrates, drinking poison and telling his friends to stop crying because he was going to a much better place.

He was a man in melt-down mode. He had looked into the darkness and seen the grinning faces of all the demons in the world looking back at him.

And he begged his Father not to bring him to the point of going through with it.”

If anyone would question how Jesus could be truly and properly God and truly and properly man, [slide 15]

look at this scene in Gethsemane where the crushing agony he experienced is being pressed out like oil from the heavy stone of the olive press.

At this moment the totally innocent, sinless Son of God, faces the sheer horror of accepting the cup of God’s wrath for bearing the sin of all peoples.

Then he prays those familiar words, *“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*

Jesus affirms his desire to do God’s will by submitting his will to his Father’s.

[slide 16, blank] How many times have we uttered those same words? “Lord, these are my desires, and as best as I can discern,

I believe this is your will for me, but it may not be. Nevertheless, I want your will to be done.”

Country and Western singer Garth Brooks sang a song entitled, “Thank God for unanswered prayer.”

I think he was talking about going to a high school reunion after many years of absence
and seeing a girl he dated in high school that he had wanted to marry so badly.

But she didn’t look the way he remembered her, so he sings, “Thank God for unanswered prayer.”

When we pray, understand that God's will is what is best for me and for you.

Therefore we can have confidence in submitting or surrendering our wills to his.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, "God is too wise to be mistaken. Too good to be unkind.

So when you don't understand, when you don't see his plan, when you can't trace his hand, trust his heart. His way is best."

The 4th observation we can make about Gethsemane, as we continue in Matthew's account, is that... [slide 17] **Gethsemane was a place of warning.**

V.40: Jesus *"returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.*

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

The disciples had eaten a big meal. It was now well after midnight. They wanted to stay awake but just couldn't.

[slide 18, blank] Have you ever prayed and while praying drifted off to sleep? Have you ever had a hard time staying awake in church?

You've probably heard all kinds of stories about people falling asleep in church –

how some get the nods and nearly fall out of their pew, or fall asleep and drool on their Bible.

One of my favourite stories is when a man who fell asleep in church had his wife nudged him with her elbow to wake him up.

He woke up alright. In fact he stood up and began to sing the benediction... right in the middle of the sermon!

The disciples tried to stay awake and pray but they just couldn't.

[slide 19] Why then, did Jesus say to his disciples, "*Watch and pray?*"

Jesus gives us the answer in the last half of the verse: "*So that you will not fall into temptation.*"

What was the temptation? To fall asleep again? I think it was more than just that.

I think it was the temptation they would fall into during the next few hours: the temptation to defect; to desert Jesus.

Now is the time for the disciples to strengthen themselves. Now is the time to watch and pray while there was no betrayer present,

because when the betrayer, Judas, comes with a large crowd armed with clubs and swords, the temptation will be to defect, to desert, to abandon Jesus.

[slide 20, blank] We can capitalize on times of prayer; using those moments to strengthen ourselves so that we won't yield to temptation when life gets hard.

At this very moment you may be experiencing times of peace. Life is good today. Tomorrow looks bright.

If so, you are in a perfect place to prepare yourself through prayer; to equip yourself for life's inevitable struggles and hardships.

That's why Jesus warns his disciples saying, "Watch and pray."

By the way, both those verbs are present tense imperatives in Greek so can be read, "Keep watching and keep praying."

Corrie ten Boom asks, “Is prayer your spare tire or your steering wheel?” There’s a big difference.

God wants prayer to be the guiding force in your life, not part of a contingency plan for emergency use only.

The habit of daily prayer will strengthen you so that you will be able to endure life’s hard times, more often than it will exempt us from life’s hard times.

The 5th observation we can make about Gethsemane is that... [**slide 21**] **Gethsemane was a place of repetition.**

v.42: Jesus “went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.””

Jesus didn’t just bow his head once for a brief prayer in the garden and then go out to face his crucifixion.

He prayed, went back to his disciples, then returned to prayer, then again went back to his disciples.

Three times he went back to pray to his Father, “not my will but your will be done.”

[**slide 22, blank**] Earlier in Mt., Jesus warns against vain repetition when praying. There’s really no value in going through rote prayers again and again.

On the other hand, the Bible does tell us to keep on asking, to keep on seeking God in prayer.

There's something about intense repetition that underscores our desire and puts us in a position where we can resolve to submit our wills to God's will.

C.S. Lewis made this insightful comment about prayer in *The World's Last Night, and other essays*. He said,

"In Gethsemane the holiest of all petitioners prayed three times a certain cup might pass from him. It did not.

After that the idea that prayer is recommended to us as a sort of infallible gimmick may be dismissed."

Prayer helps us to come to a place of submission; a place where we can affirm our desire to do God's will.

Jesus has gone to his Father in prayer. He requests another alternative, if that were possible. It is not.

He sees that the only way through is the way of the cross, and he resolves within himself to go that way.

Then Jesus is led away by a hostile mob and begins the next stage of his journey to the cross. This is God's plan and he follows it.

Perhaps you are in a time of deep, searching struggle within your own soul.

God has made it clear to you what he wants of you; what his will for your life is.

But maybe it involves giving up certain rights you enjoy, certain desires that are important to you.

Letting God have his way can be a very uncomfortable, even agonizing experience.

Maybe you've found yourself face to face with a situation that, a year ago, you would have never dreamt could happen... but now it has.

God is pressing you in the midst of your own Gethsemane, saying, "I want to have my will done in your life.

I want you to release your rights. I want you to be willing to accept my will... regardless. I want you to stop wrestling with me."

God may be pinpointing something that should no longer have any place in your life.

Maybe you're in a r'ship that you know isn't right in God's sight. Maybe it's your unfair treatment of another person.

Maybe it's an attitude of prejudice or anger you have toward someone.

Whatever it is, you're in the garden, facing a tough decision, wrestling with God's will for your life.

It's time that you walked, in a very real sense, where our Saviour walked and knelt with him in Gethsemane.

Use this time to search your own soul so that you can come to the place where you say to the Lord, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Having made those 5 observations about Gethsemane, here are 4 stages the Lord takes us through

in the process of bringing us to the place of full surrender; to the place where we can say, "Not as I will, but as you will."

[slide 23] Stage 1: We will all journey through the darkness of our own Gethsemane.

Just as Jesus arrived at that place, so will we.

[slide 24] Stage 2: While in that place, we will suffer through our own agony.

No one can go through the process for you. Like our Lord, you pray, you sweat, and you wait it out... often alone.

[slide 25] Stage 3: In our agony, we can release our will to God's.

In this time of decision, it is primarily a battle of two wills: our and God's.

We may plead and bargain, but ultimately, if we are to emerge victorious, we must release control of our life to him.

It is at that point when the agony subsides and a breakthrough occurs. The struggle ends and a quiet resolve emerges.

[slide 26] Stage 4: Having accepted God's will over our own, we are now ready to face our own Calvary.

In other words, taking up our cross and following Jesus is possible now that we have passed through our Gethsemane experience.

It's just as Jesus taught earlier in Matthew's gospel when he said in 16.24:

"If anyone would come after me (to model the life I lived),

he must deny himself (that's Gethsemane),

and take up his cross and follow me." (that's Calvary).

The crucial question for us to answer is: "Do I really want to follow Jesus and fulfill God's will for my life?" What will your decision be?

Song OSB 978 Take up thy cross P