

24 Hours - Garden of Gethsemane

24 Hours

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Matthew 26:36-46

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If you are a first time guest or visitor with us, we continue this week in a sermon series entitled “24 Hours that changed the World.”

You will see a statement all over our campus, “Change the world, start here.”

There can be no change in this world if it does not go according to the only one who can change the world and that is Jesus Christ. And the events that changed the world for all of eternity was one 24 hour period in the midst of 2.5 million days, a period that is so critical and so important to the gospel writers as you study Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. You will see that they allude almost half of their material to the last week of Jesus’ life and ministry. The gospel of John in particular, five chapters on the last 24 hours.

Today we come to Matthew chapter 26. If you were with us last week, we were in the gospel of John. And in the course of the coming weeks, we are going to be in Mark and in Luke, as well, as we take these four gospels that come from different perspectives. They come from different angles, but they are leading us to one solitary direction, the fact that the Son of God, Jesus Christ would go to the cross to die and suffer for the sins of all humanity.

Today we find ourselves in a place known as the Garden of Gethsemane in Matthew chapter 26. We find ourselves on the heels of last week, the heels of what we know as the last supper, the Passover meal. And as Jesus led the disciples out, one of the chronological things that is interesting in this passage is that the walkway, the pathway from the last supper to the Garden of Gethsemane might have been about a half to maybe three quarters of a mile. It was not a long distance at all. What is unique, though, is that the gospel of John gives us three chapters about that walk which we know as John chapter 14, John chapter 15 and John chapter 16 are the messages, the words that Jesus gives these men as they walk to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Now just to kind of give you a refresher course, John chapter 14 is primarily about how the Holy Spirit moves and works in our lives. John chapter 15 is that the is the vine and we are to be the branches and John 16, again, reinforces the role of the Holy Spirit and that sin ultimately is to be judged by God himself. That sets up Matthew chapter 26. When we get to Matthew chapter 26 in the garden of Gethsemane, we begin in verse 36.

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful,

even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.¹

One of the most significant cinema events in recent decades was a movie that caused great controversy. It was a movie that caused great excitement. It was entitled *Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ*. And if you have never seen that movie, it begins in the Garden of Gethsemane. It begins with Jesus falling on his face. It begins showing us this dark, deep struggle between Jesus doing the will of the Father and the devil desiring him just to excuse humanity off and not to be willing to save us. That is how important the Garden of Gethsemane is to the study of 24 hours that changed the world, that that movie that was so controversial began with that scene in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As we are going to see in a moment, though, it was more as a grove than it was a garden, but that is beside the point.

Two simple things for us to really grasp what took place in these verses. I think you and I need to understand the details of the Garden of Gethsemane and I think we need to discuss a few key points that happen and if we would hear and listen to what is in these simple verses, it will be absolutely life and eternally changing.

A couple of details about this passage that I think will give insight and light. And the first one is this, the initiation of the Garden of Gethsemane. Notice what it begins with.

“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane.”²

Now the reason that this is critical, as I mentioned last week, what we know as the last supper was really the calm before the storm. Chaos is about to ensue. Next week when you come back we are going to study the character of Judas. We are going to see what happens when 500 men come with swords to take Jesus by force, what happens when he says one phrase and they all fall backwards, what happens when Peter takes his sword and cuts off the ear of a man by the name of Malchus.

¹ Mathew 26:36-46

² Matthew 26:36.

Up to this point it was a Passover meal. Up to this point it was a gentle stroll into a place called Gethsemane. But beginning next week the chaos begins. What is important to note as one of the details is this. The Garden of Gethsemane is where Judas would betray the Lord. The Garden of Gethsemane is where he would be taken in cuffs. The Garden of Gethsemane is where the disciples would betray him. The Garden of Gethsemane is where everything would go nuts and crazy and chaotic.

The disciples didn't push him to go. Judas did not say, "Hey, Jesus, let's meet up here tonight." It said that Jesus took them and they came to Gethsemane.

Everything that we study today, understand, nobody coerced Jesus, nobody convinced Jesus, nobody persuaded him that this would be a good idea. After the Passover meal, after they, quote, sang a hymn, as they began that journey down the hill, Jesus went to the garden where he would be betrayed. He initiated it. Jesus went to the place where his disciples would flee. He initiated it. Jesus went, but for the last time he would be without being, quote, handcuffed and in prison. He initiated this event. That is critical, because earlier in the gospel of John the disciples were telling Jesus, "Nobody is going to hurt you. We are not going to let anybody get to you."

And Jesus made this statement, "Nobody takes my life from me, less I give it."

So there is no coercion here. There is no conspiracy here. Jesus initiates what we know as the, quote, Garden of Gethsemane, which leads to this second point, the identification of or the identity of this place. It says:

"...a place called Gethsemane."³

Now we call it the Garden of Gethsemane, but I want you to dismiss what you have got in your backyard. That is not the Garden of Gethsemane. It is not a nice neat structured set of rows of corn or tomatoes or whatever it is that you do. Nor is it like the prayer gardens that we have in our culture or all the neat things that we have in the public arena. This is not a place where one would stroll through maybe on the potential of proposing to their bride, as often times happens in a sweet nice story. This is a place where they grew olive trees. In fact, it really could be more described as a grove.

Now those of you—and I know you are more familiar probably than I am—I have been to south Georgia and I have seen the grove of trees down there and you just drive for miles and miles and miles. It is just tree after tree after tree.

Now Gethsemane is not a large place, because Jerusalem is not a large place, but understand that this was on the hillside kind of in a valley, so to speak, kind of a hybrid thing. It was an area. It was a field of olive trees.

Now this is why the identification of Gethsemane is so important. Jesus knew this is

³ Ibid.

where he would be betrayed. Jesus knew his disciples would flee. He is going to pray. Could he not have prayed anywhere? He could have gone anywhere. He could have gone to a house they were familiar with. He could have gone to the place where they rolled somebody through the roof. He could have gone next door to Bethlehem. It is not that far away, guys. He could have gone anywhere. He initiated and purposefully went to a place that we identify as Gethsemane.

Now here is what is interesting. The word Gethsemane literally means to be pressed out, to be squeezed out. Is that not exactly what is going to happen in the next 24 hours? Is he not going to be pressed? Is his blood not going to be squeezed?

When we identify Gethsemane, understand this is a place where they grew olives. What do we do to olives to make olive oil? We squeeze them. We press them. Under pressure they produce something that is wonderful. And as we are going to see as we go through these verses, the pressure intensifies, but that word means “squeeze” and I think it is more relevant than even just the olives that they would grow in those groves. In fact, if you were to look at this geographically, the place of what we know as Gethsemane, as I mentioned, kind of on a hillside, slash valley. It was actually squeezed between two very important places. On one side it was the Mount of Olives. On the other side would be the place where he would be crucified.

Now you talk about a place of being squeezed. There he was praying to the Father on one side just a couple of days earlier. He prophesied that the temple that had been built in 40 years would one day fall apart, but he would rebuild it in three days. And the gospels say he was speaking of his body. It was on the Mount of Olives that he said, “There will be many who will come and claim to be Christ, but they are false Christs.” It was on the Mount of Olives where he said, “There is going to come a day one day when the trumpet will sound and there will be two in bed. One shall remain and one shall be taken.” A dramatic picture of the end time events, a dramatic picture of him coming with force and with rule.

But on the other side of the garden there would be a place where they would take and they would put him upon pieces of wood and they would nail his feet and his hands and they would put a crown of thorns upon his head and he would sacrifice himself for the sins of all humanity, literally squeezed between his second coming and his first, squeezed between being a King one day and a Savior in just a few hours.

So when it says, “And they came Gethsemane...”

But then there was a time period of isolation. You know, one of the longest passages of Scripture that we have in regards to the prayer life of Jesus is in John chapter 17. And as we work through the details of this passage, let me give you a little bit more in depth chronology. When the disciples—and by the way, that is Jesus and the 11, minus Judas who we will talk about next week—they come to this grove. They come to this garden that we know as Gethsemane. The picture that we get specifically in the Bible is that

Jesus prayed John 17 with them. Then he goes off and according to this passage, he took Peter and the sons of Zebedee, that is James and John, and he went a little further.

Now this was not uncommon in the life of Jesus. On the Mount of Transfiguration he didn't take them all. He took Peter, James and John. When there was a little girl who had died and needed to be raised from the dead, he took Peter, James and John. This was not strange. This was not unusual at all for him to behave in this manner. He takes these men a little further, but look at what he does. He says, "Stay here. I am going alone."

Isolation. And when he prays he does not pray as he taught the disciples, "When you pray our Father which art in heaven..."

How does he pray? "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass. Not my will, but yours."

It was a time period of isolation. So not only did Jesus purposely take them to a place that means squeezing out, not only did he initiate this event, not only was this a place that would be the place of his betrayal and the place where his disciples would flee, it would be a place where he would literally be on his face all alone. Why is that so critical to us? Understand that there are many people in our world and in our society who believe that you can get to God through another human being and you can't. You can't get to him through Peter. You can't get to him through James, through John, a prophet or a priest. The only person who said, "Not my will, but yours," was Jesus Christ alone.

And I believe the reason Jesus went alone, the reason he fell on his face alone is because only he can do what we are about to talk about. Only Jesus can bear what we are about to speak of. Only Jesus is capable of offering himself for sinful humanity.

It was a time of isolation, all by himself, which leads us to the second part. Now we have talked about some of the details. That kind of sets the tone. Now I want to discuss some of the things that take place in this passage and it is really going to center around this one key aspect. What did Jesus pray for?

There was a specific item. Notice he did not pray for the disciples. He did not pray for us. That is in John chapter 17, by the way. He says, "There is this one thing that, Lord, if it be possible, may you allow it to pass from me?"

Verse 39.

"And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup..."⁴

Verse 42.

"He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup..."⁵

⁴ Mathew 26:39.

⁵ Mathew 26:42.

Now as you study the last 24 hours of the life of Jesus, there are three references to the opportunity to drink something or to take a cup. Just a few moments earlier, as he is at the Passover meal, the last supper, at the conclusion he takes a glass of wine and he says, "This is my blood. This is the new testament that is shed for you."

Here in the garden he says, "Father, if there is anyway possible, let this cup pass."

And in a few weeks we are going to study as he was on the cross there was a beverage given to him in the form of a sponge where he had the opportunity to drink. What we will notice is that every one of these, quote, cups is very different. A couple of minutes ago when he is at the last supper he says to his disciples, "I will not drink of this cup again until I come in my Father's kingdom." And, a few minutes later he says, "Father if this cup shall pass..."

So what we need to understand is the item that Jesus is praying about is not the thing he spoke of a few minutes earlier at the last supper. He is not speaking of the fact of blood being shed. He is not speaking of the fact of a new testament. He is not speaking of that. So what is he talking about that he is so desperately says, "If it be possible, let this pass"?

You know, one of the common thoughts regarding this passage is that the thought of being crucified on a Roman cross was so physically demanding and so, just so grave of an image that Jesus was somehow praying, "God if there is any other way that we can do this other than going on a cross, I would like to choose any other way."

There is a problem with taking that thought. See, in Hebrews chapter 12 the statement is made that Jesus I the author and the finisher of our faith and for the joy that was set before him, went to the cross.

Jesus spoke about going to the cross numerous times to his disciples, yet I can find no places where he says, "God, one day I am going to go to the cross and raise three days later and, boy, I just really don't want to do this."

You don't see it anywhere. So what is this item? What is it that he says, "Father, this cup if there is any possible way..."?

What could he be so, quote, desperate about that he would want it to pass?

My personal opinion is that the one thing that he was about endure, the one thing that he was about to experience was the one thing that had never occurred in his existence.

Do you know that that only thing that Jesus Christ to this point had never experienced, one thing that he had never known was is? And according to the Bible in 2 Corinthians chapter five verse 21, he who knew no sin, Jesus Christ, became sin for us. And there is this big theological term I want to teach you today. It is called propitiation.

Now you can spell that in scrabble and get a bunch of points, ok? Propitiation. 1 John chapter two verses one and two says that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. What that means is this. That we can be sorrowful for our sins, we can be repentful for our sins, but it does us no good if there is no one to take the punishment for it. And so when Jesus says, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me," what Jesus was about to experience was something he had never personally...

He had experienced cold. He had experienced hot. He had experienced betrayal. He had experienced temptation, but he had never experienced the knowing knowledge of sin. And yet it had to be paid for. It had to be taken care of. It had to have a substitute and he was preparing to be a substitute for us and what was about to take place is what you and I deserve he was willing to take.

But I want you to take even a further scope into this. He was about to experience something he had no understand of but was willing to do so.

I don't even know how to really compare this, so let me use a very frivolous analogy. Ten years ago next week my wife and I found ourselves in a position that we were completely educated for. We were completely prepared for, but didn't have a clue how to do it. It is called being a parent. My wife has a degree in early childhood education. So I thought having a child, this ought to be a no brainer. She knows what she is doing.

I read all the books she told me to read. We went to all the classes. We saw all the videos. We were completely immersed. If you don't know what that word means, we were baptized in baby knowledge. We knew everything you could possibly know. We were almost 30 years of age, a little bit older than the average couple. So surely we had the maturity, we had the knowledge.

You know the best thing about having a baby in a hospital is for the first two days you can send it back? Now, I mean honest. You bring the baby in and you cuddle it, you wash it, you know, you change its diaper and the kid starts screaming. And you are like, ah, give it to the nurse. It is a great gig.

But after two days the inevitable occurs. And Tracy will tell you. There was that day where we had Marshall our oldest and we had him all set to go and he had, you know, the little going home outfit that you get and everything is...

And I am going to be honest with you. Tracy started crying and I got real quiet, because we realized we didn't know what we were doing. We didn't have a clue what was about to happen, because we had heard everything there was to hear about being a parent. We had read everything there was to read about being a parent and she had even studied everything you could study about raising a child, but we had never experienced it. And on the forefront of that I am going to tell you what. I started sweating. I started getting nervous. She started crying. All these emotions.

Now magnify that a million fold to Jesus in the garden. He had preached. He had taught and he was about to sacrifice himself for humanity as a propitiation to take the punishment of the sin of the world. Yeah, he had never known the true personal magnitude of sin. He had seen the consequences. He had seen the results. He had seen the fall with his own eyes, but he was about to bear the punishment of something he never committed, never did and he never initiated it.

Now can you see the item he is praying for?

“Father, if it be possible, can we let this cup pass? Nevertheless, not my will, but yours.”

Now that is the item that we need to discuss which leads us to the impact that we need to discuss. How did this impact Jesus in what we know as the Garden of Gethsemane? Affecting several ways. The first one is this. It affected him physically.

Now I mentioned when we took our first child home, I mean, I was sweating and quiet and she was crying. According to Luke chapter 22 verse 44 when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed he had sweat as blood. Now they have medically proven with all kinds of scientific stuff that you can get to such a physical turmoil that blood vessels can break and blood can come forth. You can cry blood. You can sweat blood. You can do all those different things. And I am not here to talk medicine here with you. I am here to talk about sin with you because that is what sin did to Jesus in the garden, that physically he was of such a... it says he fell on his face. Find another place in Scripture where he falls on his face. Find another place in Scripture where he comes back to the disciples and says, “Could you not pray for me? Do you not understand the magnitude of this situation?”

Physically speaking it was an unbelievable traumatic experience to the human body. He was sweating as blood. But can you also imagine how it affected him relationally? Can you imagine investing three and a half years of your life into Peter, James and John. One of them confessed you as Messiah and said upon that confession I will build my Church. One of them you called the beloved because he leans against you all the time. Sons of thunder, the rock in the midst of shifting sands. And he comes back and they are asleep next to one of the trees.

Yes, it would be a time of isolation. Yes, he is the only one that could accomplish the propitiation. But literally investing three and a half years and all alone. And it is spiritual.

Realizing, as I have addressed, that he is about to bear the sins of humanity, he is about to be in the stead of those who deserve the punishment.

Now do you see the impact of this cup? Which leads to my final point and this is where we really need to come together, the real issue behind the item.

Why is it that the Garden of Gethsemane was so impactful? Why is it that Jesus needed to pray, "Not my will, but yours"? Why is it that the purposefully he went to a place called Squeeze? Why is it that we need a propitiation? I am going to tell you why. The issue behind all of the Garden of Gethsemane is sin. You can call it whatever you want to call it. You can give it creative terms and write new books about it. The Bible calls it sin.

And one of the things that we have done in our culture is we have dismissed the magnitude of sin. We have lessened the reality of sin. We have glossed over it. We have done as a friend of mine used to say, we have perfumed a pig on this one. We have made sin smell good and look pretty. We think that if we put lipstick on it and a nice dress, it is ok. It is not. We think if we give it a good shower and clean it up... it is not. And what Jesus endured in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he prayed for the cup. Understand the impact of what it took upon his body, his relationship spiritually. I want you to see that the issue behind all of this is your sin and mine. And I want to address those issues. How about the physical issue of sin? Do you realize that the only reason you die is because of sin?

Now I know some of you are thinking, well, my dad died because he had heart issues or my so and so died because they had cancer. Now I do not believe that heart, cardiac issues or cancer specifically is necessarily the personal consequence of your personal sin, but collectively if it weren't for sin we wouldn't have them. If there had never been sin we would have never needed a doctor. If there had never been sin we would have never been in our...

The reason you die is because of sin. Listen. Statistically speaking, based on my family heritage with both my mom, my dad and all of my family, now if it is something else that is going to shock everybody, statistically speaking one day I will die of coronary disease. Cardiac issues in my family is just a disaster. I mean, I am a train wreck when I go see the doctor and when it comes to cardiac issues.

But I am going to tell you something. On the day that you put me in a coffin, Jeff Meyers didn't die because of a heart condition one day. We all die because of sin.

According to the Bible, God told Adam before they ever felt a temptation, if you eat of the fruit, you will die. Death never occurred till sin entered.

The Bible says that we must all die and face the judgment. That is how grave sin is. do you realize sin is so bad that it is the cause of all death? Now it has got tentacles and there is disease and there are accidents and I understand that. But the whole concept of death is because of sin.

And let's talk about relationships. Jesus struggled with the disciples there in the Garden of Gethsemane. Do we live in a world with messed up relationships? Sure we do. Let me tell you why they are messed up. Sin. Oh, that is not what the books say. I

understand that. And that is not what the self help books say and that is sometimes, unfortunately, what therapists say. But the problem is sin.

Let me tell you why you have problems friends, why you have problems with spouses, why you have problems with kids, why you have problems with your employer or your employee, sin.

Now it may not be you, but if it is them it affects you. The reason relationships are messed up is because of sin. That is why we fight. That is why we argue. That is why people scream and yell. All the issues that we see in the world.

We have people all over this world right now formally who are fighting one another. Armies fighting other armies because person A can't get along with person B. Why is that occurring? Sin.

Folks, we can call it anything we want to, but we need to understand. The problem in this world is sin. That is why we die. That is why we fight. But most important, on the spiritual side, sin hasn't just caused us to physically die. It hasn't just messed up marriages and kids and siblings and cousins. It has messed up our relationship with God. And when Jesus went into the garden alone, when he went beyond those three, Peter, James and John, one of the things that Jesus was illustrating for us is that there can only be one bridge between a sinless God and sinful humanity. There can only be one entity who can keep us from physically dying for all of eternity. There can only be one entity that can bridge the gap in relationships that have gone bad. There is only person who can fix this mess and his name is Jesus Christ. And yet ye goes alone to solve and become our propitiation.

You know, a lot of times people think, I know that God is upset with me. I know I have done some things God wouldn't want me to do." I think that in order to fix this, I am just going to start going to church regularly.

Now I believe you ought to go to church regularly, but you understand that that doesn't fix the sin problem.

I have people say, "You know what? I know God is upset with me. I have done some things I shouldn't have done. I am going to start tithing even more than I was. I am going to tithe on top of the tithe."

Now we highly encourage that, but do you understand that that doesn't solve the sin problem?

Some people say, "Well, you know, I know God is upset with me. I know I have done some things I shouldn't have done. I tell you what. If there is a place to serve the church, I am going to serve. I am going to serve. I am going to volunteer. I am even going to change diapers in the preschool. I am going to do that."

Do you realize changing diapers in the preschool does not solve your sin problem? We need it, but it doesn't solve your sin problem.

The issue in Matthew 26 wasn't the fact that the disciples fell asleep. The issue wasn't the fact that they were in a place that literally by definition means to be squeezed out. The issue was that your sin and my sin and humanity's sin is so bad Jesus had to sweat as if blood.

Your sin and my sin, the world's sin is so bad, he had to do it alone. Your sin, my sin and the world's sin is so bad that no one else could be a propitiation, no one else could face the consequences. If our sin was going to be forgiven, if our sin was going to be absolved, if we could be guaranteed we would not reside forever in a place the Bible calls hell and on the other side a place the Bible calls heaven, we needed Jesus to go to that garden and take that cup.

John chapter 18. We will study this next week. Chaos ensues. Judas has kissed Jesus. Peter has cut off the ear of a man by the name of the Malchus. Jesus turns to Peter, the same man who was asleep next to an olive tree and says, "My Father gave me this cup. Should I not drink of it?"

He willingly took our sin. He really bore our sin and our sorrow. The question is: Even though you know about it, even though you have heard about it, even though you study it, have you experienced it? That is the challenge.