

To Seek and to Save the Lost

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives

Luke 22:39-46

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

Jesus' last night on earth was spent eating a meal with his twelve apostles. He earnestly desired to eat this meal with them, because he knew that he was about to suffer and die the next day (Luke 22:15).

However, the Last Supper was very disappointing to Jesus. Instead of a significant time with his disciples, the evening quickly degenerated into Judas' deception, the disciples' dissension, Peter's denial, and the disciples' dullness about what was about to happen. Eventually, perhaps around midnight, Jesus and the eleven apostles went to the Mount of Olives where they planned to spend the night. When they arrived, Jesus went further and spent time in prayer before Judas came and betrayed him to the religious authorities.

Let's read about Jesus' praying on the Mount of Olives in Luke 22:39-46:

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." ⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:39-46)

Introduction

Think of the worst time in your life. Think of the worst pain and

anguish, discouragement and despair that you ever experienced. Think of a time when you were lonely and afraid, uncertain of what the future held. Think of the worst suffering you endured, perhaps even thinking you might die. Think of a time when you were lost and did not know where to go.

I still remember the first time I got lost. I was only about six years old. My mother and I went into a convenience store. She needed to buy a few essentials, and I wandered over to the candy isle. After a few minutes I realized that my mother was gone. Frantically, I searched the store and could not find her. I felt lost and alone, and I did not know what to do. Meanwhile, my mother had taken the groceries to the car and drove up to the front door. It was probably only a few minutes that we were apart, but it felt like half a day!

When Jesus went to the Mount of Olives on that Thursday night, Nisan 15, 30 AD, he experienced what some call “the dark night of the soul.” Jesus knew that he was about to experience the worst time in his life. He was going to experience pain, anguish, discouragement, loneliness, and abandonment. He knew that he was about to experience the full force of God’s wrath against sin.

Jesus’ extreme suffering was about to begin as he entered the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives that night. He was about to experience far worse than what any one of us has ever experienced. And he did it all because of his love for his Father and because of his love for us. The great Princeton theologian, B. B. Warfield, wrote an insightful essay on “The Emotional Life of Our Lord.” This is part of what he wrote:

In these supreme moments our Lord sounded the ultimate depths of human anguish. . . . The scope of these sufferings was very broad, embracing that whole series of painful emotions which runs from a consternation that is appalled dismay, through a despondency which is almost despair, to a sense of well-nigh complete desolation. In the presence of this mental anguish the physical tortures of the crucifixion retire into the background, and we may well believe that our Lord, though he died on the cross, yet died not of the cross, but of a

broken heart, that is to say, of the strain of his mental suffering.¹

Lesson

Jesus' praying on the Mount of Olives in Luke 22:39-46 shows us several aspects of Jesus' prayer life.

Let's use the following outline to show the areas of failure:

1. Jesus' Preparation (22:39-40)
2. Jesus' Agony (22:43-44)
3. Jesus' Prayer (22:41-42)
4. Jesus' Direction (22:45-46)

I. Jesus' Preparation (22:39-40)

First, look at Jesus' preparation.

After the conclusion of the last, divinely-sanctioned Passover meal and the first, divinely-sanctioned Lord's Supper, Jesus **came out** from the furnished upper room, somewhere in Jerusalem, **and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him** (22:39). Jerusalem was crowded for the Passover (on Nisan 14) and the Feast of Unleavened bread (Nisan 15-21). There were perhaps as many as 2 million pilgrims in the city and the surrounding areas. Jesus and the twelve apostles had apparently secured a place to stay in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem. Most likely, they had been staying there all week. And that is also why Judas Iscariot, who was to betray him later that night, knew where to find Jesus.

And when he came to the place, Jesus said to the eleven apostles, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation" (22:40). One of the lessons we must learn is that Jesus was in complete control of things. At times it may seem that things are out of control, but they are not. Jesus knew that his beloved band of disciples were also about

¹ Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, "The Emotional Life of Our Lord," in *The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950), 132-33.

to undergo their most severe trial and temptation. On previous occasions, when they ran into difficulty, Jesus was there to help them. But he was going to be taken from them, and he knew that Satan demanded not only to have Peter, but all of them, and to sift them like wheat. So, he urged them **pray that they may not enter into temptation**. That is, they should pray that they would not be tempted to deny Jesus.

It is easy to be a follower of Jesus when all goes well, isn't it? But what do we do when things don't go well for us? Sometimes, we are tempted to question God and ask him why he allows trials and temptations and difficulties to come into our lives. It is especially at those times that we need to cry out to God, asking him for help so that we not fall to the temptation, especially of denying Jesus.

II. Jesus' Agony (22:41a, 43-44)

Second, notice Jesus' agony.

Luke said in verse 41a that Jesus **withdrew from** the disciples **about a stone's throw, and knelt down**. In the parallel passage in Mark's Gospel we read that Jesus "took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch'" (Mark 14:33-34).

When Jesus and the eleven disciples arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane, eight of the disciples stayed at their regular location for the night, while Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him a little further. Then he told them to remain there, watch and pray, while he went another stone's throw away to pray. Luke said that Jesus **knelt down** to pray. What is interesting is that the normal posture for prayer in Jesus' day was standing upright rather than kneeling. However, it is clear that Jesus began to be greatly distressed and troubled. Moreover, Luke said in verse 44 that **being in an agony Jesus prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground**. Jesus' anguish was so great that **there**

appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him (22:43).

Earlier in the evening Jesus eagerly looked forward to that one final meal with his disciples. They would commune with him and with each other in a wonderful and special way. They chatted, laughed, sang, and ate. And they listened to Jesus teaching them. Unfortunately, as the evening wore on things deteriorated. Jesus was aware of Judas' deception and said so, the disciples' discussion degenerated into dissension about which one of them was the greatest, Jesus warned Peter about his imminent denial, and finally the disciples demonstrated massive dullness about Jesus' purpose and mission.

Jesus' heart grew heavier, and by the time he got to praying on the Mount of Olives, he was so greatly distressed and troubled that he could not stand and pray. He fell to his knees in agonizing prayer. Commentator Norval Geldenhuys put it this way, "No man will ever be capable of sounding the depths of what the Savior experienced in Gethsemane when the full reality of his suffering in soul and body penetrated into his immaculate spirit."²

Now, why was Jesus in such agony? Others have faced death rather calmly, almost boldly. Listen to the account of death by execution of Joachim Murat, marshal of France and king of Naples under Napoleon. Here is the account in Kent Hughes' commentary:

On the day of his death he had a shock of his hair cut off and asked one of the officers to enclose it with a letter he had written to his wife, Napoleon's sister, and his children, who were then all living in Trieste. Then Murat took off his watch and gave it to the officer as a gift. But before he parted with the watch he removed from its lid a tiny carnelian on which was carved a portrait of his wife. Murat held this carnelian tightly in the palm of his hand as he followed the soldiers out to the courtyard, where they were preparing to kill him. The sergeant of the firing squad offered Murat a chair, but Murat said he wanted to die standing up. The sergeant offered to cover up his eyes with a cloth,

² Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 574–75.

but Murat said he wanted to die with his eyes open. “I do have one request,” Murat then said. “I have commanded in many battles, and now I would like to give the word of command for the last time.” The sergeant granted his wish. Murat then stood against the wall of the castle and called out in a loud voice: “Soldiers, form line.” Six soldiers drew themselves up to within about ten feet of him. “Prepare arms – present.” The soldiers pointed their muskets at him. “Aim at the heart, save the face,” Murat said, with a little smile.

And then, after he had held up his hand to look for the final time at the carnelian showing the portrait of his wife, he issued his final command – “Fire!”³

Many people have died without fear and distress. So why was Jesus greatly distressed and troubled? Why was he very sorrowful, even to death? I think Kent Hughes gives an excellent answer:

The answer is: 1) Jesus knew that death is the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23) – and that he would pay the total wages in full. 2) He also knew that death is a result of the judgment of God (cf. Romans 5:12) – and that he would bear that judgment. 3) He knew that he would become sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). 4) He knew that death would bring on him the wrath of God (cf. 1 John 2:2) – and that he would propitiate it [and appease God] to the full. That is why Jesus was filled with such unremitting dread. This is why he was so fearful. This is why he could well have died *before* the cross.⁴

It was Jesus’ intense agony that buckled his knees and drove him to the ground and to his heavenly Father in prayer.

III. Jesus’ Prayer (22:41b-42)

Third, observe Jesus’ prayer.

Jesus **prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this**

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 333.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 333.

cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (22:41b-42). Let’s look at Jesus’ prayer by examining each phrase.

A. *“Father”*

Jesus addressed God as **“Father.”** Though Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, he was praying as a man to God, his heavenly Father. He knew that God relates to those who belong to him as a father relates to his beloved children.

So, when Jesus prayed to God as **“Father”** he was drawing “near to God,” as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says, “with all holy reverence and confidence, as [a child] to a father, able and ready to help us.”⁵ In his great agony and in anticipation of the suffering to come Jesus turned to the only One who not only had the ability to help him, but was ready to do so. That is why the Father sent to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him (Luke 22:43).

B. *“If You Are Willing”*

Jesus continued his prayer by saying, **“If you are willing.”** Jesus knew what lay ahead of him. He was enduring great agony in his soul, and he still had to go to the cross to die. He knew that he was going to be cut off from his heavenly Father and that he was going to receive the holy wrath of his Father for all the sin of the elect. Jesus had never ever experienced the slightest loss of fellowship with his Father. He had no human knowledge of what that was like.

And so, in one of the clearest expressions of his humanity, Jesus asked his heavenly Father if there was any other way by which sinners could be saved. As Kent Hughes said, “He was not seeking to disobey the will of God, but in his manhood he desired to not suffer the shame of the cross and all it entailed.”⁶

⁵ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, 335.

C. “Remove This Cup from Me”

Jesus then asked the Father, “**Remove this cup from me.**” Commentator Leon Morris explains that **this cup** “is a metaphor for the impending suffering of Jesus. . . . It refers especially to the infliction of punishment associated with the wrath of God.”⁷ Jesus was about to experience the most awful, dreadful, unbearable, appalling, and horrendous wrath of God. It cannot be imagined by fallen humans. Although Jesus lived in a sinful and fallen world, he himself never sinned. He enjoyed unbroken and unblemished joyful communion with his heavenly Father. But his anticipation of the cross made him cry out to his Father begging for the Father’s wrath not to fall on him.

John Calvin put it this way, “[Jesus’] horror was not, then, at death [simply], as a passage out of the world, but because he had before his eyes the dreadful tribunal of God, and the Judge Himself armed with inconceivable vengeance; it was our sins, the burden of which he had assumed, that pressed him down with their enormous mass. . . [and] tormented him grievously with fear and anguish.”⁸

Jesus’ struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane was immense. The entire fate of the elect hung in the balance. This is how Norval Geldenhuys summarized Jesus’ agonizing struggle that night:

It is impossible for him, in his perfect humanity, not to experience a feeling of opposition to the idea of impending humiliation, suffering and death. And all this is made the more intense through his knowledge that he is not only going to suffer and die, but that he will have to undergo this as the expiatory sacrifice for the sin of guilty mankind. The holy and just wrath of God against sin fell on him in full measure, because he has put himself unreservedly in the place of guilty mankind. The judgment pronounced on sin is death – spiritual as well as physical. And spiritual death means being utterly forsaken

⁷ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 348

⁸ John Calvin, from his comments on Matthew 26:37 in his *Harmony of the Gospels*, as quoted in Warfield, *Person and Work of Christ*, 129.

by God. How dreadful, then, must the idea have been to Christ, who had from eternity lived in the most intimate and unbroken communion with his Father, that he would have to endure all this!⁹

Words fail me to express adequately the agonizing emotion that Jesus experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane as he poured out his heart to God in prayer. And we must never forget that he did not endure all of that agony and suffering because of anything that he had done wrong. No, Jesus endured intense agony and suffering to pay the penalty for your sin and mine.

In a sermon on this passage, Charles Spurgeon said: "Since it would not be possible for any believer, however experienced, to know for himself all that our Lord endured in . . . mental suffering and hellish malice, it is clearly far beyond the preacher's capacity to set it forth to you. Jesus himself must give you access to the wonders of Gethsemane: as for me, I can but invite you to enter the garden."¹⁰

Was Jesus' prayer heard? Yes, God heard his prayer, though his request was denied.

God hears every prayer we pray. But, we must remember that he may sometimes deny our request.

D. "Nevertheless, Not My Will, But Yours, Be Done"

Jesus concluded his prayer by saying, "**Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**" Although Jesus did not want to suffer if there were some other way to save sinners, yet more than anything else he wanted to do his Father's will. This is the prayer that God always answers. All true prayer ends the way Jesus ended his prayer, "**Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**"

Learn to submit every prayer to the will of God. Bishop J. C. Ryle

⁹ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 574.

¹⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, "Gethsemane," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1969), 9:74.

makes the following application:

Submission of will like this is one of the brightest graces which can adorn the Christian character. It is one which a child of God ought to aim at in everything, if he desires to be like Christ. But at no time is such submission of will so needful as in the day of sorrow, and in nothing does it shine so brightly as in a believer's prayers for relief. He who can say from his heart, when a bitter cup is before him, "Not my will, but thine be done," has reached a high position in the school of God.¹¹

IV. Jesus' Direction (22:45-46)

And finally, notice Jesus' direction.

And when Jesus rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (22:45-46). The disciples' failure is staggering. Jesus had told them earlier to pray that they may not enter into temptation (22:40). And here they were sleeping!

We should never forget that we have an "adversary the devil (who) prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). So, let us be on our guard against his temptations by going to the Lord in prayer.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus' praying on the Mount of Olives in Luke 22:39-46, we should pray that we may not enter into temptation.

Jesus could go to his heavenly Father in prayer because he had a relationship with him. Do you have a relationship with God the Father? Believe that Jesus lived and died to pay for your sin, and you will have a relationship with God. Amen.

¹¹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 422.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAYER:

Father, thank you for the account of Jesus' praying on the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane. We learn about his intense agony because of what he was experiencing and about to suffer. And he experienced all of that so that he might save sinners like ourselves. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that we might be reconciled to you. Oh, how we thank you for Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives, and for his sacrifice on the cross.

Father, if there is anyone here today who does not know you savingly, will you grant that person faith in Jesus Christ? Will you open that person's eyes to the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus? And will you enable that person also to repent of sin?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!