

The Passion

*And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.”
(Luke 23:3 ESV)*

*Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And
having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23:46 ESV)*

The Mount Of Olives

March 19th, 2023

Luke 22:39-46

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 22.

In our text for this morning, we are stepping onto truly sacred ground. We are about to witness a startling scene. We have not yet seen Jesus in a state like this. In these verses, he looks and sounds distressed. And that is not an adjective that would fit Jesus in any other passage but this one.

In every verse that follows, we will see an unflinching, unwavering, unmovable Jesus who is determined to bear our cross. He will not resist the forces that arise against him. He will rebuke Peter for drawing his sword against the guards. He will silently endure his trial and he will raise no defence against the false accusations. Then he will die on our cross.

But before Jesus would fix his gaze on calvary and before he would step into our suffering – before the resolve of Good Friday – we find the distressed prayer of maundy Thursday. Which is why I tend to agree with commentator Leon Morris who observes:

The real battle was fought here.¹

Here, in this moment, Jesus has one last opportunity to turn away from the plan and to leave us in our sin. Here, in this agonizing prayer, Jesus is fighting one final battle before the cross.

¹ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 329.

Look with me now to Luke 22, verses 39-46. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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 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 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We so often fall into the trap of reading the Bible as if it is merely an exercise in academics. Can we work to engage our hearts this morning? Try to visualize this scene in your mind.

Jesus is so full of dread at what is about to take place that his profuse sweat resembles blood pouring out of him. His disciples – his best friends whom he asked to pray for him – are fast asleep. One friend, Judas, is on his way with a company of guards to betray him.

He is alone.

And he sees what the next day will bring. He sees the hatred, and the darkness, and the agony, and the suffering, and the wrath, and the hell of it all, and he is broken. The Father sees him alone in his distress and sends an angel to console him. Can you picture that? Jesus, on his knees, weeping in the garden, with an angel draped over his shoulder?

Jesus is preparing to go to the cross. For you. He is preparing to experience hell itself. For you.

Soften, you stony heart! Wake up, you slothful spirit! This passage demands our full attention.

As we consider what lies before us, I want to move from the lesser to the greater; from the practical to the profound.

Here, we have the blessed privilege of listening to Jesus in prayer. I think we would be remiss if we listened to our Lord and Saviour pray without taking the time to learn from his example. But then, having learned from his example, we are going to conclude our time reflecting on the agony of this prayer. So, let's begin with the practical, and let's consider:

The Example In This Prayer

First, we learn in these verses that:

1. Prayer is our spiritual weapon

Do you remember what Gary shared with us last Sunday about the passage immediately before this? Jesus has just finished warning his disciples that the devil is coming for them! He is coming to sift and to tempt them. Jesus told his disciples to arm themselves, and here, he elaborates on what it looks like to wield the sword of faith. He says:

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Luke 22:40b ESV)

Trouble is near. The devil would have you. Temptation is knocking on your doorstep. Pray. Martin Luther was no stranger to spiritual warfare, and he says here:

This we must know, that all our safety and protection consists in prayer alone.²

Let me ask you this morning: What are you trusting in? When temptation overwhelms you; when you are being baited into that same old argument; when fear and despair wash over you; when anger and resentment bubble up inside of you; what is the weapon that you turn to in your fight against temptation? Many of us in this room have memorized 1 Corinthians 10:13. If you haven't, I would commend it to you. There, the Apostle Paul writes:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV)

² Martin Luther as quoted in Graham A. Cole, *Against The Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 241.

That is a beautiful promise! But what is the way of escape that Paul refers to here? How do we stand when temptation has ensnared us? Jesus teaches us here:

“Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Luke 22:40b ESV)

The thief runs and hides when you enter into the King’s chamber. The accuser buries his head and bites his tongue in the presence of the Judge.

In our passage this morning, as Jesus stares down the barrel of Good Friday – as he waits for the cup of wrath to be placed into his hand – he bows his knee, he lowers his head, and he prays.

And yet, even though Jesus has set a perfect example for us to follow, we often resemble the disciples instead, don’t we? Verses 45-46 describe a scene in the garden, but it is also a scene that often plays itself out in our lives. We read:

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 22:45-46 ESV)

Luke is the only gospel writer who gives an explanation for the disciples’ inability to stay awake. He tells us that they were “sleeping for sorrow.” They were spiritually weary.

And rather than bringing that grief to the Lord in prayer, their grief drove them into *hibernation*. I wonder if that sounds familiar to anyone in this room. How often do we retreat in our weariness? How often do we escape to the covers? Or to food? Or to entertainment? Or to sin? How often do we allow ourselves to “sleep for the sorrow” that we feel in our hearts?

Brothers and sisters, there IS a sorrow that makes prayer feel like an uphill battle. Perhaps you are living in that sorrow even this morning. But Jesus teaches us here that when we think that we’re too weary to pray, we are too weary NOT to pray. The Devil is a roaring lion seeking people to devour. When we are weak, we need all the more to wield the spiritual weapon of prayer.

And that leads naturally to the second lesson we learn here, which is that:

2. Prayer can be hard spiritual work

Look again at verse 44:

And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44 ESV)

Jesus *agonized* in prayer.

Too often, we fail to pray because we assume that prayer will only and always be *easy*. We assume that prayer is a time for receiving – for feeling warm feelings and having our spiritual tank filled. And, to be clear, prayer is often like that. But prayer is *broader* than that.

Sometimes our prayer is simply adoration and worship. It's the prayer we pray as we walk through the woods, or as our hearts are stirred by something that we have read. It is prayer that refreshes us – prayer that is as natural as breathing. Prayer as *input*.

But other times, our prayer is *output*! It is intercession. It is a battle! It is focus and effort. I think of the example that we find in Colossians 4 where Paul writes:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, **always struggling on your behalf in his prayers**, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that **he has worked hard for you** and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. (Colossians 4:12-13 ESV)

Do you have a category for that kind of prayer? Have you ever engaged in that kind of prayer? Have you ever struggled and worked hard in prayer on behalf of your brothers and sisters?

The disciples are weary, and their weariness drives them to sleep. Jesus is weary, and his weariness drives him to fight on his knees with sweat pouring from his brow!

As I was talking through this sermon with Gary, he mentioned that it might be helpful to say a word about what this big idea of “struggling in prayer” might look like.

It might look like setting the alarm 30 minutes earlier and scheduling time in your life to plead with God. It might look like writing down some of the spiritual battles you are facing and making a plan to pray for them regularly. It might look like disciplining yourself to focus and to fight distractions during the pastoral prayer or while the person next to you in your prayer group prays. It might look like starting a prayer group. It might look like opening the Bible and praying the promises of God. It might look like interceding for your friend in crisis or pleading every week for the salvation of your unbelieving neighbour.

We catch a glimpse of a church that prays like this in Acts 12:12. Late in the night, Peter was sleeping in prison. Suddenly, an angel awoke him and opened the prison doors and led him out to the street. When Peter made his way back to the house where the church frequently gathered – again, this was late at night – we read:

When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where **many were gathered together and were praying.** (Acts 12:12 ESV)

O that we would increasingly become a church that is willing to struggle in prayer. Lord, teach us to pray!

Third, and finally, we learn from this passage that:

3. Prayer aligns us with the will of God

Look again at verse 42. Jesus prays:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, **not my will, but yours, be done.**” (Luke 22:42 ESV)

There is a profound mystery in this prayer. Jesus knew that there was no other way. He came to the earth with a full understanding of what he came to do and how much it would cost.

And yet, in this final moment, Jesus requests that – if the Father is willing – he might be spared from the cup of wrath. But, as he makes this final request, he includes this important qualifier:

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42b ESV)

I have heard it said that Christians should not attach such qualifiers to their prayers – that we should claim what we desire in prayer with complete assurance because God has promised to answer our requests. They remind us that Jesus promised:

For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20b-21 ESV)

And, of course, Jesus DID say that, and we SHOULD pray with faith!

But Jesus also modeled for us that we should always acknowledge that what we want most foundationally is for God’s will to be accomplished. Jesus taught us to pray:

Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10 ESV)

Prayer is a place where we bring our needs, and our requests, and our best plans, and we submit them to the will of our heavenly Father. Prayer is the place where we ask for what we THINK is best, with faith that God will respond with what He KNOWS is best. As one pastor notes:

True prayer is not bringing God in line with our plans but rather submitting our plans to the Lord’s designs.³

Because none of us knows what is best. We have ideas, to be sure. But we don’t know. We see through a glass dimly. The Apostle Paul asked that God would take away the “thorn in his flesh” – the affliction that left him feeling weak and dependent – but that was not God’s will. We read:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9b ESV)

³ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus In Luke* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 331.

Paul asked, “Heal me!” and God replied: “No. This is for your good.” As we learn to be a people of prayer, we NEED to have this category in our minds. If Jesus – the second Person of the Trinity – possessed the humility to say, “Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done” then surely none of us in this room are exempt! I agree wholeheartedly with one author who observes:

I will be frank to confess, if I really thought I could change the mind of God by praying, I would abstain. Because I would have to say, “How can I presume, with the limitations of my own mind and the corruptions of my own heart – how can I presume to interfere in the councils of the Almighty?”⁴

God has promised to answer the prayer of faith. But He will always answer that prayer of faith in accordance with His will. Sometimes, the answer will be “yes”. Other times, the answer will be “wait.” And other times, as we see here, the answer will be “no”. But *every time*, the answer will be exactly what we ultimately need.

Jesus prayed:

Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. (Luke 22:42a ESV)

The answer to that prayer was “no”.

There was no other way. And in that “no”, God opened the door of salvation wide to the world. If you have been hearing a “no” in your prayer time, you can rest assured that every “no” leads to a greater “yes”! We learn that here in our text.

I’m sure that there are more lessons that could be drawn from this prayer, but time demands that we move ahead. As we conclude this morning, I want to draw your attention to the agony of this prayer:

The Agony of This Prayer

⁴ Roger Nicole as quoted by G.K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 242.

As I mentioned earlier, we are meant to be taken aback by this scene. The one who silences storms with a word is distressed. The one who calls dead men out of their tombs is sweating drops of blood. What is happening here? What caused this deep and sorrowful dread?

If we want to understand the agony of this prayer, we need to understand verse 42. Look there with me:

“Father, if you are willing, **remove this cup from me**. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42 ESV)

The source of Jesus’ agony is the “cup.” That begs the question, what is the cup?

In the Old Testament, the “cup” can refer to one of three things. It can refer to a physical cup, it can refer to the cup of God’s blessing, or it can refer to the cup of God’s wrath.⁵ Clearly, Jesus is here referring to the cup of God’s wrath. He is dreading the cup of Psalm 75:8:

⁸ For in the hand of the Lord 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. (Psalm 75:8 ESV)

Let’s use the language of the text to illustrate this lesson. Imagine that every time you sin, God’s righteous anger against that sin is poured into a cup. Each and every person since the creation of the world has such a cup. I have one. You have one. Every human being who has ever existed has one. Psalm 75 is telling us that, on the day of judgement, we will all pick up the cup of wrath that we have accumulated, and we will drink it to the dregs. In the final Book of the Bible – Revelation – we catch a terrifying glimpse of this scene. Revelation 14:9-10 says:

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,¹⁰ he also will **drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger**, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. (Revelation 14:9-10 ESV)

⁵ “Fifteen times the cup is used in the Old Testament as a symbol of the wrath of God, that is, of the condemnatory judgment of the holy and righteous God upon sin.” Christianity Today, *What Was The Cup That Jesus Had To Drink?* July 17, 1970. Accessed March 7, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1970/july-17/what-was-cup-that-jesus-had-to-drink.html>

At the final judgement, God's holy wrath will blaze against and consume every sin that has ever been committed. That is what it means to "drink the cup."

There are literally BILLIONS of cups that have accumulated – each of them filled to the brim with evil that warrants the wrath of God – each of them... except for one.

Amidst billions of wrath-filled cups, one sits empty.

Jesus never sinned. Therefore, there was no wrath in his cup. It was undefiled. Pure. Holy.

Why, then, did he dread the cup if his cup was empty? This brings us to the scandal of the gospel. God took the cups of every single one of His people who ever *has* lived and ever *will* live and He emptied our cups into one, massive chalice. God's wrath against seemingly infinite sin – the sin of the WORLD – was poured into one cup.

Jesus' cup.

In this prayer, Jesus is bracing himself to feel guilt and shame for the first and the only time in his eternal existence. Jesus is preparing to feel God's holy displeasure against a million affairs and a billion lies. He is preparing to feel God's hatred for the holocaust and the slave trade. He is preparing to suffer God's righteous and undiluted wrath against child pornography, and child abuse, and abortion, and all the other wicked things that humanity has done to the least of these. That addiction you keep going back to – that bitterness you refuse to let go of – the careless words that you have inflicted on others – everything you have ever done that has left you reeling with a guilty conscience – EVERY SINGLE SIN! All of it, poured into Jesus' cup.

When Jesus drank the cup, he bore in his humanity a guilt and a shame and a wrath and an abandonment that we will never ever understand. He BECAME sin!

For our sake **he made him to be sin** who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV)

He BECAME a curse!

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by **becoming a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Galatians 3:13 ESV)

It was not hyperbole when he cried out from the cross:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46b ESV)

As we prepare our hearts for Good Friday – as we look to his body broken and bleeding on the tree – we need to remember that the deepest pain that he endured for us was the spiritual pain – the cup of wrath – that he drank to the dregs on our behalf. As we celebrate the Lord’s Supper on that day, let us be careful to understand that we are able to drink *that* cup because Jesus drank *this* cup.

Some of you walked in this morning carrying the weight of your sin and shame. Right now, there is a “cup” prepared for you – a cup of wrath and justice and holiness – and that cup is waiting for you at the judgement seat. You have sinned. You are guilty. And, as hard as you try to suppress this truth, deep in your soul you *feel* it. The day of reckoning is drawing near.

But there is a way of escape from the wrath to come! There is mercy for sinners and grace for rebels! John 3:16 says:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 ESV)

Do you know what happened after this agonizing prayer? Jesus stood up, and he walked to his trial, and he picked up your cross, and he bore your shame, and he drank your cup, and endured God’s wrath against your sin, and he paid your debt, and he died your death, and then he marched out of that tomb and declared, “Come to me and LIVE!”

Do you see this glass? This represents someone in this room. But this morning, Jesus is inviting you to give him your cup. You’ve spurned his grace for too long. You’ve allowed yourself to dangle over the pit of hell for too long. Why would you die when life has been purchased for you? As a great puritan preacher once wrote:

This will be the hell of hell, when men shall think that they have loved their sins more than their souls; when they shall think what love and mercy has been almost enforced upon them, and yet they would perish... Then they shall acknowledge Christ to be without any blame, themselves without any excuse.⁶

Confess your sin. Believe that Jesus is Lord, and that he died for your sins. And live.

Let's pray together.

⁶ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1630, 1998), 77.