

Luke 22:39-54

The Lessons of Bloody Sweat

...and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground – v. 44

This is one of those scenes in the gospels that should make the reader of the Bible aware that he's standing on holy ground. You and I are taken by the Spirit of God through the word of God to a scene that not even the disciples themselves witnessed because they were overcome with the sleep that results from sorrow (v. 45).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke each make a contribution to the picture of Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Matthew tells us in Mt. 26:37 that Jesus *began to be sorrowful and very heavy*. Mark tells us in his gospel 14:33 that Jesus began to be *sore amazed*. Matthew and Mark both record the words of Christ to his disciples – and these words defy comprehension when you consider that they're coming from Christ, the Son of God and Son of man. They both report Christ testifying to his disciples *My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death* (Mt. 26:38; Mk. 14:34).

What incredible words of grief coming from One who wasn't given to exaggeration. You and I may say at times that some small task we face is heavy enough to kill us but all we're doing is using hyperbole to try to move others to feel as sorry for us as we feel sorry for ourselves – not so with Christ. The burden he faced in Gethsemane was indeed a crushing burden that his human nature found extremely difficult to bear.

Luke tells us in his account that an angel was sent to strengthen him (v. 43) but not even the strengthening help of an angel could erase the experience of Christ that is given to us in the very next verse, coming as it does on the heels of that strengthening help. We read in v. 44: *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Some commentators suggest that this specific revelation of Christ would have been of peculiar interest to Luke since he was a physician and we do know that medical explanations have been given for this kind of phenomenon and in those explanations there is a definite connection to stress. What an incredible revelation of Christ, then, do we find as we behold him in the garden of Gethsemane.

The One who had not long earlier said to his disciples *Let not your heart be troubled* finds his own heart exceeding sorrowful and sore amazed to the point of death. We know of course that the whole reason we can escape having our hearts troubled is because he subjected himself to such a heart crushing burden.

If Mark's gospel tells us that he was sore amazed, how amazed should we be as we behold him in deep agony? The bread and the cup bring to our remembrance that agony this morning. And in the words of our text we find both elements represented. It is as a man that Christ bears this agony and prays earnestly. This is what the bread tells us. And the cup reminds us that it was in the context of this agony during his time in prayer that we read of great drops of blood falling to the ground.

This verse is therefore theologically rich in bringing two ideas together that we often think about around the Lord's table – the ideas of intercession and blood atonement and their close connection to each other. What I'd like to focus on this morning, however, is this bloody sweat that in great drops falls to the ground.

I can remember many years ago in a homiletics class being taught that in the study of Scripture you should always look first and foremost for the Divine intention behind any given passage. In other words you're asking yourself not how does this apply to me but rather – why has God revealed this truth or given us this view of Christ.

And so we do well to raise that question with this specific text in mind – what is the Divine intention behind this revelation of Christ? Why does God see fit to bring us into the garden of Gethsemane to behold Christ in such deep agony? I think we can answer that question in three ways this morning and in answering that question what we'll really be drawing from the text amounts to this:

The Lessons Learned from Bloody Sweat

And that's what I'd like you to consider this morning in preparation for our time around the Lord's table – the lessons learned from bloody sweat. Consider with me first of all that one very important lesson we learn from bloody sweat is that:

I. The Way of the Cross was Hard

We know from the context of our text that there's a close connection between the agony of Christ and the cup that he was at that moment having to deal with. Note the words of his petition in v. 42 *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

Various explanations have been given for the cup that Christ is here referring to. Recently I came across the words of Jonathan Edwards on this text. Listen to what he says: *Thus this was not the first time that Christ had this bitter cup in his view. On the contrary, he seems always to have had it in view. But it seems that at this time God gave him an extraordinary view of it. A sense of that wrath that was to be poured out upon him, and of those amazing sufferings that he was to undergo was strongly impressed on his mind by the immediate power of God; so that he had far more full and lively apprehensions of the bitterness of the cup which he was to drink than he ever had before, and these apprehensions were so terrible, that his feeble human nature shrunk at the sight, and was ready to sink.*

A little later in that same sermon Jonathan Edwards give an explanation as to the design of God in subjecting his only begotten Son to the agony of Gethsemane . *Christ was going to be cast into a dreadful furnace of wrath, and it was not proper that he should plunge himself into it blindfold, as not knowing how dreadful the furnace was. Therefore that he might not do so, God first brought him and set him at the mouth of the furnace, that he might look in, and stand and view its fierce and racing flames, and might see where he was*

going, and might voluntarily enter into it and bear it for sinners, as knowing what it was. This view Christ had in his agony. Then God brought the cup that he was to drink, and set it down before him, that he might have a full view of it, and see what it was before he took it and drank it.

If you've ever had to take medicine that was bitter tasting then you know that the best way to take it is not to stare at the bottle that contains the medicine and then slowly pour it into a tiny measuring cup and then hold it up and think on how awful it's going to taste. You instead try to do everything in one quick motion before your mind can dwell on it. You take it quickly so as to get it over with quickly. This was the very thing that Christ was not allowed to do. He must, as part of the process of atoning for sins, contemplate that cup. He must know full well what he's about to embark on and what he must bear.

And while Jonathan Edwards seems to focus on the punishment aspect of that cup, I think there was yet even more to that cup than the wrath that Christ would soon bear. I think another bitter ingredient to that cup would have been the sense of defilement that Christ would undergo.

After all our sins would be imputed to him and while this transaction of imputation would not alter his character so as to make him morally sinful, still he would be very much aware of the guilt and defilement and filth and rebellion – things that were foreign to him and repugnant to him would now be charged to him. We love to think on the text of Isa 61:10 with regard to our justification: *I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh [himself] with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth [herself] with her jewels.*

What blessed truths to contemplate – how we are spiritually dressed with the garments of salvation – how we are specifically covered with the robe of righteousness. But in contrast to such blessings that we gain Christ must, in the garden of Gethsemane, contemplate the garments he's about to be dressed with and the robe that he's to be covered with. He's to be decked not with ornaments as a bridegroom or jewels as a bride – he's to be covered instead with the filthy rags of our righteousnesses. Can you picture yourself taking a tattered and torn and filthy robe out of sewage type filth and dressing yourself in it? This was what Christ would have to do spiritually speaking.

Is it any wonder, then, that he was sore amazed, that he was exceeding sorrowful even unto death? He must have our sins imputed to him and he must bear the penalty that those sins deserve and his knowledge of what would be charged to him and what he must bear would so press upon him mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally that it would lead to bloody sweat.

I downloaded a book this past week that took me to the cross of Christ that even though it was making a different application of the cross than what we're now considering, I think can still help us to understand in even greater vividness the ingredients of that cup. This is from Thomas Brooks' *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. Listen to how he

describes the cross of Christ and think of these things in terms of the cup that was before Christ. It's quite possible that Christ's own thoughts would have been something like what Thomas Brooks writes. He writes: *that HEAD, before which the angels do cast down their crowns, should be crowned with thorns, and those EYES, purer than the sun, put out by the darkness of death; those EARS, which hear nothing but hallelujahs of saints and angels, to hear the blasphemies of the multitude; that FACE, which was fairer than the sons of men, to be spit on by those beastly wretched Jews; that MOUTH and TONGUE, which spoke as never man spoke, accused for blasphemy; those HANDS, which freely swayed the scepter of heaven, nailed to the cross; those FEET, "like unto fine brass," nailed to the cross for man's sins; each sense pained with a spear and nails; his SMELL, with stinking odor, being crucified on Golgotha, the place of skulls; his TASTE, with vinegar and gall; his HEARING, with reproaches, and SIGHT of his mother and disciples bemoaning him; his SOUL, comfortless and forsaken; and all this for those very sins that Satan paints and puts fine colors upon!*

When you think of the impact that sin had upon Christ in terms of his being charged with sin and his being penalized for sin – when you see how such a weight pressed our Savior to the point of squeezing blood out of him, as it were – shouldn't that govern the way you and I strive to view sin? – you and I who find it so easy to treat sin so casually as to think that sin is a matter of so little consequence? Christ's agony in the garden certainly shows us very vividly the impact that bearing our sins and being judged for our sins had upon Christ.

And the garden of Gethsemane certainly shows us that the way of the cross was hard. We refer to salvation often, as well we should, as full and free. And there's a sense in which for us is easy. Psalm 116 makes reference to a cup that belongs to you and me and it's a cup that shows the ease with which we appropriate salvation. Ps 116:13 *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.*

Here's a cup that is rich with blessing that is ours simply for the taking – it's a receiving act of faith. It's an act that we will engage in this morning as we partake of the these communion elements. Let's not forget the difficulty of the cup that Christ had to drink as we take our cup of salvation this morning.

So bloody sweat teaches us that the way of the cross was hard. But would you consider with me next that bloody sweat also teaches us that:

II. The Love of Christ was Strong

We have account in the portion we've read in Lk. 22 of Christ being apprehended. Judas and his band of soldiers show up at the garden of Gethsemane and Judas betrays Christ with a kiss. And then in vv. 49,50 we read *When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.*

It is at this point in the narrative that John gives us a detail in his gospel that we don't find in Luke's gospel. I reference this statement in John's gospel because it also makes reference to the cup that Christ had been agonizing over. In Jn. 18:11 we read: *Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

The implication of course, is that Christ will drink that cup. He will go forward. The matter is resolved in his heart and as hard and as deep as his agony has been, he will see it through. Think of this statement from Jn. 18:11, now, in the context of the agony of Gethsemane. Christ has been agonizing over that cup – sorrowing over that cup – sore amazed over that cup – praying over that cup that if it were possible the cup would be removed from him. His contemplation of the bitter ingredients of that cup had pressed him so sorely that he sweat great drops of blood but now in this statement in John's gospel we see how the matter is resolved for Christ. He will take that cup – he will drink that cup – he will go forward to the fulfillment of everything represented by that cup. And we go on to read the beginning of the very process of Christ drinking that cup when we read in Jn. 18:12,13 *Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, And led him away...*

I don't know what kind of view the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven would have had as these events in the garden of Gethsemane transpired on earth. We do know that Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ in the mount of transfiguration and that they spoke with him concerning his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). I don't think it's unreasonable to think, then, that they would have been aware of Christ's agony and spiritual warfare in the garden of Gethsemane.

And if they were able to follow these events as they transpired then they certainly would have had cause as we have cause now to shout hallelujah! – when we read that Christ would indeed drink the cup that his Father had given him. His willingness to drink that cup, you see, secured your salvation. Those spirits of just men made perfect in heaven would have seen that heaven was secured for them and they would have known that apart from Christ drinking that cup heaven would not and could not be their home.

We do well to ask – why? Why would Christ drink that bitter cup? Why would he not instead flee the scene of Gethsemane? Why would he not call upon those legions of angels that he could have called upon had he chosen to do so? The answer is found in the most familiar verse in all the Bible – *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

And now all of a sudden when Christ announces that he'll drink the cup that his Father has given him – we, in turn, can now view the difficulty of the challenge of Gethsemane in a different light. We can view Christ's agony from the perspective of his love for sinners and we can view it and should view from the perspective of his love for his Father.

It was after all his love for his Father that compelled him to say *nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.* And why would his Father will that he drink that bitter cup? After all

here was his Son deferring to his Father out of love for his Father, why would his Father, then, not defer back to his Son and spare him from that bitter cup?

The answer has to be found in the covenant that both the Father and the Son entered into – a covenant that was designed to bring glory to God by magnifying his grace in the demonstration of their love for poor, vile, guilty, hopeless sinners such as you and me. Do you begin to see, then, the lessons of bloody sweat that teach us that though the way of the cross was hard the love of Christ was strong? And the more we are able to comprehend the depth of Christ's agony in the garden the more we are able to measure his love for us. His love, you see, was stronger than the difficulties.

I love the way this truth is expressed in the words of a hymn in our hymnbook. The second stanza of hymn #147 O Christ, What Burdens Bowed Thy Head – reads like this: *Death and the curse were in our cup: O Christ, 'twas full for Thee! But Thou hast drained the last dark drop, 'Tis empty now for me: That bitter cup, love drank it up; Now blessing's draught for me.*

What are the lessons, then, of bloody sweat? There's the lesson that the way of the cross was hard – there's the lesson that the love of Christ was strong. And then finally there's the lesson that:

III. The Accomplishment of Christ was Extensive

Being the Calvinists that we are we believe that Christ's atoning death accomplished all that it was designed to accomplish. We believe in a definite atonement not a hypothetical one. I made reference in my introduction to the theological truth that is brought to our minds by the blood of Christ in our text and the intercession of Christ also found in our text.

His blood is the grounds for his intercession and his intercession pertains to all that was gained through the shedding of his blood. So we read in Isa. 53:12 *he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

So he definitely redeemed all for whom he shed his blood and he definitely redeemed all for whom he made intercession. And the ones for whom he made intercession were the ones that his Father gave him. *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them* (Jn. 17:9,10).

I know that what I'm now describing only has a remote connection to our text – that's why I said the verse brings these things to mind. Our text also brings something else to mind by one of the details that pertains to Christ's bloody sweat. Would you notice what it says again in v. 44 *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Is there significance to the fact that Christ's blood fell to the ground? I think that when you contemplate the extensive accomplishment of Christ's atoning death then there is

significance to this recorded detail. And the thought that comes readily to my mind is the fact that when Christ purchased his people unto himself he also purchased the blessings that would be given to his people. And among those blessings there comes a new heaven and a new earth.

And so your mind can be drawn to the truth that the blood of Christ is applied to the earth. There is scriptural warrant for this line of thinking. Listen to these words from Rom. 8:18-23 *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

As we partake of communion it is good and proper for us to think on Christ and to think on the blessings won for us by Christ. We are reminded of the blessing of a new heaven and new earth by the words we read each month in 1Cor. 11. Verse 26 says *For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup ye do show the Lord's death, till he come.*

So there is a forward look to the communion table as well as a backwards look into history. What we look forward to, however, must be seen in terms of what we see when we look back. And when we look back we see a Savior who endured great agony who nevertheless went forward to accomplish the work of redemption.

These are some of the lessons, then, from bloody sweat – the cross of Christ was hard, the love of Christ was strong, and the accomplishment of Christ was extensive. May the Lord stamp these lessons on our hearts and enable us to improve upon them in our meditation of Christ around his table.