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# Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42;  
Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1

*"Then Jesus came . . . to a place called Gethsemane . . ."*  
(Matthew 26:36).

Before going to the cross, Jesus went to Gethsemane, a garden near Jerusalem, to pray about the sacrifice He would make for us. "Gethsemane" simply means "oil press." This garden, across the brook from Jerusalem on Mt. Olivet, was Jesus' "prayer closet" when He was in Jerusalem (John 18:1, 2). The story of His time there is poignant, precious, profound, and priceless!

*A time of prayer!* It was going to be a long night, and Friday was going to be a long day of agony. He left eight of the apostles at the garden gate, taking Peter, James, and John deeper into the garden. He left these three with the command to "keep watching and praying" as He went on alone (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38).

Jesus fully knew His "hour" had come. His metaphorical word for this time was "cup" (see Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). What was this "cup"? The battle of all eternity was being fought between God and Satan. The winner would take all. Humanity was at stake. Jesus

fought to conquer Satan, sin, death, and hell . . . alone! On the cross He would cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). (1) He would be made what God hates—sin. (2) The eternal wrath of God was about to be poured out upon Him. (3) For the only time in all eternity, God the Father and Christ the Son would be separated. Horror of horrors! Nevertheless, Jesus did not want out of this arrangement to save mankind. He was never arrogant in His humanity.

Jesus had already prophesied His imminent betrayal. How disappointed, hurt, and rejected He must have been! Judas would betray Him; Peter would deny Him. Only one of the twelve apostles (John) would even be at the cross. Israel, God's chosen people, would reject Him in favor of a common criminal (Barabbas).

The most dominant ministry of Christ was prayer. If Jesus needed prayer, how much more do we? He invited Peter, James, and John to watch with Him—but they slept. He knelt and then fell face down. As He prayed, He became more and more intense in His appeal to God.

Prayer is not a guarantee that God will grant every wish. Our prayers are always under the will of God. Jesus reminded God that He was the God of the impossible!

Eternal decisions can only be made in prayer. Nothing can be settled until prayer settles it. Jesus had to wrestle in prayer to yield His heart to the sacrifice demanded by God. The prayer He prayed is the most difficult one ever prayed. This was the "Holy of Holies" in the life of Christ. His final teachings were given through these prayers.

God answered Jesus' prayer immediately. An angel came to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). One angel? *One?* God sent two angels to Mary Magdalene and the women at the empty tomb (Luke 24:1–10; John 20:11, 12). Jesus

could have called for twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53), but He got *one*? A supernatural miracle could not substitute for human responsibility. No man knew better than Jesus that “. . . the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38). Only in humanity could sinful man be saved. Jesus, as man, did what no man could do: “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety” (Hebrews 5:7).

Even the cross did not have the anxiety of Gethsemane. The only time in Scripture Jesus called God “Abba” (Aramaic for something similar to “Daddy”) was in that garden (Mark 14:36). In Gethsemane Jesus did not hide, run, or even fight . . . He prayed.

*A time of decision!* Critics suggest a lack of courage on Jesus’ part—perhaps even cowardice. This would contradict everything Jesus *is*! Jesus was not a coward. He was not afraid of death, pain, or the cross. He was not asking God to abort the cross. This cross was God’s eternal purpose. As the divine Son of God, He was willing to be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins; yet, as a man, He longed for another way. This is part of the mystery of the cross.

Jesus’ battle to submit to God’s will was won in Gethsemane, before He reached Golgotha.<sup>1</sup> In this garden God said no and Jesus said yes. Jesus accepted the divine judgment and punishment that sin deserves. “It is finished!” was said on the cross, but His decision to submit to God’s plan was made in Gethsemane. Jesus gave His soul in the garden and His body on the cross.

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<sup>1</sup>Golgotha (see John 19:17) is also called “Calvary” (Luke 23:33; KJV), from a Latin word (*calvaria*) which means “skull.”

In athletics the game is won through preparation, decision, and commitment. Jesus won the battle in Gethsemane. *Make the big decision before the cross. Don't wait until you are on a cross to decide what you are going to do.*

*A time of pain!* There must have been more agony in Gethsemane than at Calvary. No man ever suffered as Jesus suffered then. The Scriptures say more about His suffering in Gethsemane than on the cross.

Under severe duress, the "sweat became like drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). He was in an agony unto death. His sweat *did* drop like blood. Such is a rare phenomenon (called hematidrosis or hemohidrosis). He prayed this way not just once, but three times! He prayed, "May this cup pass from Me." His critics were right: "He saved others; He cannot save Himself" (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31; see Luke 23:35). God did answer Jesus' prayer! He did not spare Jesus, but He did save us! Jesus could not save Himself and still be our Savior. *There was no way but the cross!*

This God-forsaken Son is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. Do not minimize the physical pain Jesus endured on the cross. It was horrible! However, the Bible refers only sparingly to the pain He suffered. Jesus did not "sweat blood" on the cross. He did in Gethsemane. God sent an angel to the garden to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). No angel was sent to the cross.

*The cross . . .  
there is no other way!*