

INTRODUCTION

In the last two messages, we've been exposed to how Satan attempted to disrupt God's plan of redemption. Judas Iscariot surrendered to Satan's control and negotiated a contract with the Jewish religious leaders to betray Jesus. Last week we saw how Satan sifted Simon Peter. Although Peter failed, and denied Jesus, his faith did not fail, and he got back on track. After Jesus was baptized at the beginning of His ministry, Satan followed Him into the wilderness to tempt Him. Jesus resisted Satan's temptation by quoting scripture. He finally told the devil, "Get behind me Satan!" When we are sifted by Satan we need to say the same thing.

I heard about a poor preacher and his wife having a heated discussion about how much money she was spending on clothes. She brought home a new dress and he said, "How could you?" She said, "I don't know. I looked at the dress and the next thing I knew I was trying it on. It was like the devil saying to me, 'You look great in that dress.'" Her husband said, "Well, you know what to say to the devil. Tell him to get behind you." She said, "I did. I said, 'Get behind me, Satan.'" and he said, 'It looks good from back here, too.' So I bought it!"

Today, we will examine another temptation Jesus faced—the temptation to avoid the cross. I believe the real battle was fought here in the Garden. Jesus could have said, "No, Father, no cross—these sinful creatures aren't worth this suffering." But instead He endured the cross despising its shame, so we could be redeemed. When we come to this passage, I feel as if we are on Holy Ground and should remove our shoes. Let's read about it beginning in Luke 22:39:

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" He asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

I've been to the site of the Garden of Gethsemane many times and there are several old Olive trees growing there. The roots of these Olive trees are believed to have been the very same when Jesus prayed there 2,000 years ago. A church has been built on the site and inside the church is a place called the Rock of Agony. I have knelt there many times and thanked God for the sacrifice of Jesus. Mark and Matthew tell us Jesus took Peter, James, and Andrew with Him and told them to watch and pray, and then He went a little further and threw Himself down on the ground and prayed.

In His prayer, Jesus spoke of a cup before Him. He asked the Father to take it away from Him, if He was willing. Matthew and Mark tell us Jesus prayed this same prayer three times: "Father, take this cup away from me, but not my will, but yours be done." There was something about this cup that caused Jesus to dread it. Verse 44 says Jesus was "in anguish." The word there is *agonia* from which our word "agony" is derived. There was something Jesus saw in this cup that

caused his nerves to be as tight as piano wire and His blood to freeze. What was it about this cup that caused Jesus such agony?

Jesus spoke of this cup earlier when He asked His disciples, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink and to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:38) He was speaking of the baptism of suffering and the cup of God's judgement.

In Psalms 75 we find a prophetic reference to the cup of judgement. "It is God who judges: In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs." (Psalm 75:8) Although Jesus was pure and sinless, He chose to drink this cup of judgement for us. In this lesson I want to suggest three things Jesus saw in this cup of judgement. When He looked at these three elements, He shuddered with repulsion.

1. EMOTIONAL PAIN: BEING LEFT ALONE

Jesus looked into the cup and saw He was going to be forsaken by all His friends. John the Baptist was a recluse who lived in the desert, but Jesus was a people-person. He enjoyed people and people enjoyed Him. When the Pharisees were looking for reasons to condemn Him they said, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." He was labeled a "glutton and a wine bibber" and the Bible says the common people heard Him gladly. He liked people.

Do you remember when Jesus was busy and some parents wanted to bring their children to Jesus? The disciples told the parents Jesus was too busy. But Jesus rebuked His disciples and welcomed those children into His arms where He lovingly hugged them and blessed them. To God one of the most important words in the human language is relationship. Isn't it wonderful to know the God of Creation wants to have a relationship with you? What a friend we have in Jesus!

The closer Jesus got to the cross, the more rejection He experienced. Early in His ministry multitudes of people followed Jesus. But many of them were just after a free meal or a quick healing. When Jesus started talking about denying self, and carrying a cross, the crowds left Him. Then there were 12. One left, then there were 11; then Jesus took three with Him to pray, and soon *all* of the disciples left Him.

Not only did people forsake Him, but many despised Him. The prophet Isaiah wrote about Jesus 750 years earlier: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53:3)

Have you ever been rejected or forsaken? It's a terrible experience. But imagine how the Creator must have felt to be forsaken and rejected by His Creation. One of the first things God said about mankind was "it is not good for man to be alone." Fish swim in schools, sheep graze in flocks, and geese fly in gaggles. People hang out in crowds—we need to be with other people.

Philip Yancey writes: "By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in any great moment of crisis. We need the reassuring touch of human presence—solitary confinement is the worst punishment our species has devised. I detect in the Gospels' account of Gethsemane a profound depth of loneliness that Jesus had never before encountered." (*The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 194-195)

Jesus saw loneliness in that cup. He would be arrested, tried, tortured, and crucified all alone. After hanging on the cross He would look into heaven and say, "My God, my God why have YOU forsaken me?" When Jesus saw the isolation and loneliness in the cup, He cried, "Father take this cup from me! But not my will but yours be done."

For all of you who are sometimes lonely, and feel isolated, Jesus knows how you feel. He died all alone. There are many lonely people in this world. Someone once said a city is a place where people can be lonely surrounded by other lonely people. There are many people who leave work and go home to an empty apartment or home. Their only companion is a television or a pet. There are precious widows who wake up every morning, and they are all alone, and they may go through an entire day without speaking to a living person. If you are lonely Jesus understands how you feel. As the old song says, "Jesus walked this lonesome valley; he had to walk it by himself; There's no one else could walk it for him, He had to walk it by himself." But you don't have to live alone and die alone, because God's presence is there for you, and God's people are there to be the arms of Christ embracing you and the hands of Christ reaching out to you.

But as we look deeper into this cup we find something else that caused Jesus to recoil in horror:

2. PHYSICAL PAIN: THE CRUCIFIXION

As Jesus looked into the cup of suffering His humanity recoiled at the extreme pain He would experience. No one enjoys pain. In fact, I'm a sissy when it comes to pain. I don't like to go to the dentist or to the doctor because they sometimes give you shot. A couple of years ago, during flu season I was feeling really lousy and I went to the doctor to get a flu shot. He didn't just give me one, he gave me two. I mean, I had to turn the other cheek! You'd think with all the advances in medical technology, they'd come up with some way to inject medicine in a painless way! Nobody looks forward to pain.

If you've ever had surgery, you should be thankful for anesthetics. I've visited patients in the hospital who are recovering from painful surgeries, and they are given pain-killing medication to take the raw edge off their pain. But remember, Jesus was facing severe torture and execution without the benefit of an anesthetic. He was fully God, but He was also fully man. He felt pain exactly the same way we feel pain.

Isaiah had predicted what the Messiah would face in terms of pain when He wrote: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

Jesus wasn't afraid to die—it was the process leading up to His death that caused Him to shudder with horror. In fact, when death finally came, He welcomed it like an old friend. Jesus knew

soon a crown of thorns would puncture His scalp. He realized He would be tied to a post and His bare back would feel the bite of a cat-of-nine tails until it was an ugly mass of bleeding tissue. He could already feel the hands that would pluck the beard out of His face, and the club that would be used to beat Him when He was blindfolded. Jesus was aware huge nails would be driven into His hands and feet, and He would hang on a cross for six hours while His lungs filled with so much fluid He could no longer breathe. He could almost feel the spear that would be thrust into His side violating His internal organs. This is what He saw in the cup.

Dr. Luke is the only writer who informs us Jesus was under such pressure He sweated blood drops. The word Dr. Luke uses to describe the bloody sweat is *thromboi*, which means clots of blood. It appears only once in the entire Bible. Our medical word thrombosis comes from this word found in Luke 22:44.

Dr. David Teraska wrote, “Of medical significance is that Luke mentions Him as having sweat like blood. The medical term for this, “hematidrosis,” has been seen in patients who have experienced extreme stress or shock to their systems. The capillaries around the sweat pores become fragile and leak blood into the sweat.”

This is a medical condition that has been documented in rare cases just before a person died. Charles the IX of France was a horrible king who had killed thousands of Protestants on what is called the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. On his deathbed, it was reported Charles IX was so disturbed in his conscience about the murders that blood literally oozed from his pores and he died in a pool of blood.

It was a totally different experience for Jesus. He was the sinless Son of God who was facing a choice. He didn’t *have* to go to the cross. He told Peter He could call twelve legions of angels to rescue Him. But He didn’t call the angels. He chose to drink the cup of physical suffering that was before Him.

He was in such anguish blood oozed from His head. Can you imagine how He must have looked when they arrested Him? His face was caked with blood and His beard was soaked with blood. But there would be plenty of more blood shed before it was all over.

Let’s look again into the cup. He was in agony when He saw the emotional and physical suffering in the cup. But I believe they were nothing compared to the:

3. SPIRITUAL PAIN: BEARING THE SIN OF THE WORLD

Jesus was the only sinless individual who ever lived. He was tempted in every way we are tempted, yet His soul was never soiled with sin. He never allowed a polluted word to leave his lips. He never let a lewd stare come from His eyes. His soul was as pure and clean as new fallen snow.

But inside that cup, Jesus saw the billions of sins of the billions of people who would live on planet earth. He realized He would bear those sins in His body. 1 Peter 2:24 says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live to righteousness.”

When John the Baptist saw Jesus he pointed at Him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." It is a total mystery beyond our ability to comprehend, but when Jesus died on the cross, He took the punishment for MY sin upon Himself, and if I surrender my life to Him and trust Him for salvation, I can receive His status of righteousness before God. One of the most amazing verses in the Bible says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) You and I stand before God as guilty sinners, who deserve death and hell. But when we turn to Jesus and trust Him, God removes our guilt and allows the death of Jesus, His son, to be the judgement against our sin. Then God looks at us through the filter of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and He says, "You are forgiven."

Paul Billheimer wrote about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "From His tortured face the blood drops oozed and splattered onto the ground. As God, He could have called a multitude of angels to His aid but had He done so, He would not have suffered as a man. The prospect of physical suffering was nothing compared to the torture of His Spirit. It was the anguish of a pure soul who knew no sin facing the prospect of being 'made sin', of being so completely identified with sin as to become the object of His Father's loathing. He suffered the pollution of sin as if He had actually run the entire gamut of human transgression." (*Destined for the Throne*, p. 77)

In Gethsemane, Jesus looked into that cup and saw all my sins and your sins. He was repulsed by the sight. He was sinless, but as God, He understood sin. He had seen sin turn angels into demons. He's seen sin turn humans into animals. He had seen sin wreck paradise and destroy families. He was horrified at the prospect of taking on all that sin. He didn't just drink the cup; He was immersed into the entire sin of the world.

Just imagine you are standing in front of a vile smelling vat of warm, thick ooze bubbling up with a foul stench. The fluid in the vat has been infected with anthrax, smallpox, the SARS virus, the HIV virus, Mad Cow Disease, cancer and other terrible bacteria as well as rotting human flesh and sewage. Now imagine yourself being submerged into that liquid, drinking it, tasting it, and smelling it. It fills your mouth, your nose, your eyes, your ears. Now multiply your revulsion by a factor of 6 billion and you may come close to understanding what it was like for the sinless Son of God to be submerged into the filth of our sin.

Now can you understand why Jesus revolted in horror when He looked into that cup? But still He chose to go to the cross for us. Billheimer continues, "After Gethsemane, what followed was almost anticlimactic—the judgement hall with its scourging and crown of thorns, the tortuous Via Dolorosa leading to Calvary, the actual crucifixion; these were like the calm following the storm, until the actual moment in which God forsook Him. In that one moment—as the hounds of hell were baying for His blood, and as the Father hid His face—the heart that could endure no more sin was broken, and He bowed His head and died." (Billheimer, p. 78)

Maybe you're going through your own personal Gethsemane right now. You may be facing a challenge that is so threatening, you'd love to say, "God, take it away from me!" I want to share with you a three-fold secret of

HOW YOU CAN MOVE FROM AGONY TO VICTORY:

(1) Pray

When the cross was looming, Jesus went to a place where He could get alone with God and He prayed. You need to pray ASAP. That could stand for "As Soon As Possible" or you can remember that it stands for Always Stop And Pray.

Matthew tells us Jesus threw Himself down upon the ground and prostrated Himself and cried out to God. Have you ever been so burdened you stretched out on the floor and cried out to God? I remember once praying in the woods and getting down on my face before God. I even dug a hole in the pine straw to stick my nose in because it didn't seem like I could get low enough to humble myself before God.

Prayer shouldn't be your last resort; it should be your first resort. You say, "Well, I HAVE prayed, but nothing has changed!" That leads to the second secret:

(2) Surrender your will to God's

You may be praying, "God get me out of this mess" which is a modern translation of "take this cup away from me." You may be praying for God to fix the problem when He's more interested in fixing you.

It's okay to ask for what you want, but you must always pray the Jesus-way: "Not my will but your will." The essence of sin is wanting your own way instead of God's way. Do you recall another Garden in the Bible? In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve basically prayed a prayer like this, "We know what your will is about the fruit, God. But not your will, but *ours* be done!" Sin always says, "This is what I want, I don't care what you say, God."

It will be a great day for you when you discover God doesn't exist to make you happy. He exists—period. He is God, and we must always surrender to His will rather than trying to convince Him we know what's best for us.

Jack Taylor used to say, "I was afraid to surrender my life to God's Will because I thought the moment I did, God would make me marry a cross-eyed fat girl and send me to Africa as a missionary." He went on to say, "God's Will is what you and I would choose for our lives if we had enough sense to choose it."

(3) Trust God's plan

After Jesus prayed His prayer three times, God sent an angel and it was obvious Jesus came to a place of acceptance. He went back to the sleeping disciples and said, "Let's go boys, here they come." What did Jesus do? Did He run from His captors? No, He faced them and He went on to the cross. Because He knew in spite of the isolation, in spite of the pain, and in spite of bearing the sin, God's Will was the best.

Next week we're going to see Peter draws His sword and attacks one of those in the mob arresting Jesus. We read Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11) The answer was, "Yes, I shall drink the cup." We should be forever grateful, that He drank the cup for us.

CONCLUSION

Can you say that today about your Gethsemane? "Not MY will, God. But your Will? I will trust your plan." That's what we need to do. If you can come to the place in your prayer life when you say, "God I take my hands off my life. I remove my plans and I'll do what you want me to do" then you'll be able to trust God's plan for your tough circumstance.

If our greatest need had been for information, God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer.
But because our greatest need is forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes