

Mar 16, 2019

Luke 22:39-46

The Certain Gospel: Meditations on Gethsemane

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Meditation #1 - *Prayer defeats temptation by connecting us with Christ and each other.* (Luke 22:39-41, 45-46)

Tonight I have three meditations on Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion (Matt 26:36; Mark 14:32). After each meditation you will have a chance to pray and reflect and respond in song. We're doing this with the hopes that this passage will sink in deeper and be more life-changing.¹ We don't want to come to church and go home unchanged. We don't want to observe Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection like a detached observer in an operating room who doesn't know the name of the person on the table. No, we want Jesus to do open-heart surgery on us. We want to walk away changed by the cross and all Jesus gave for us. Let me pray.

Last week in Luke 19:28-44 Jesus paraded into Jerusalem at the Triumphant Entry. Immediately upon entering into Jerusalem he cleared out the temple of those selling and declared "My house will be a house of prayer but you have made it a den of robbers." (Luke 19:46) When the chief priests and teachers and leaders saw this it just made them want to kill Jesus all the more. Jesus was in Jerusalem for Passover. During the week leading up to it they tried to catch him in traps as he taught in the temple courts (Luke 20:1, 19-20, 27). But they failed over and over again. So they try a different approach. They hire his disciple Judas to hand Jesus over when the crowds aren't present (Luke 22:1-6).

The night before Jesus' crucifixion he and his disciples celebrate Passover, the same meal the Hebrew slaves in Egypt ate the night God rescued them from captivity. During this meal Jesus says, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15b) The disciples know something is coming but they don't get it. It's like they have earplugs in. As they eat they argue over who is going to be the greatest in his kingdom (Luke 22:24). They still think Jesus has come to overthrow the Romans and set up an earthly rule. They even offer him their swords, but Jesus doesn't want that (Luke 22:38).

It's easy to judge the disciples but what they're thinking and experiencing may not be so different from us. They were just thinking about their plans, and that's what we do. We get wrapped up with building our own kingdoms when Christ is doing something so much better. Sometimes we don't get it or understand. Tonight, Jesus is inviting us like he did the disciples to just be with him, to resist the temptation of all those other things and just be present with him. Don't worry. Just be with him.

Would you do that? Would you just be with Jesus tonight as we sing and worship and pray? Don't be with your plans. Don't be with your busy life. Don't be with your kingdom. Be with Jesus right here, right now. I believe Jesus has something to say to you tonight through his Word but you have to be present to hear it.

Jesus leads his disciples out of Jerusalem to the garden of Gethsemane at the base of the Mount of Olives. When Jesus gets there he turns to them and says, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." (Luke 22:40) And then he goes a little way away from them, kneels down, and begins to pray.

What does Jesus mean when he says, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation"? He means that *prayer defeats temptation*... *Prayer defeats temptation!* Jesus is looking into the future to what they are about to face — Judas' betrayal and his trial and crucifixion. They need to pray so that when it happens they stay strong.

They seem to grasp that something bad is about to happen because it says they were “exhausted from sorrow” in verse 45, but still they sleep. They don’t understand.

Have you ever faced a trial or temptation or test that you didn’t understand? “Why God are you putting me through this? Why are you letting Satan do this to me?” When this happens we can either withdraw from God or press into God. Prayer is pressing into God. Prayer is going towards Christ instead of away from him. We can draw near to Jesus through prayer or push him away with silence.

Why do you think God tests us? Why do you think God allows us to be tempted? He already knows what’s inside us. He can see exactly who we are and our hearts without testing us. God tests us so that we will know what is in our own hearts. God allows for temptation so that we will draw near to him. We can try to face temptation on our own, but we’re simply not strong enough. We need God’s power. That’s why we pray. *Prayer defeats temptation with Christ’s presence.*

Earlier in Luke Jesus tells the parable of the sower throwing the gospel message on different types of soil—which are people and how they respond. Jesus says this about one of the soils, “Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.” (Luke 8:13) We need to pray so that when we face temptation and trials and tests we will not fall away. *Prayer defeats temptation.* Prayer helps us pass whatever God may test us with. Prayer gives us strong roots.

Redwood trees are very old and are the tallest trees on earth. Some of them are 2,000 years old and can grow over 300 feet high. You would think that in order to grow that high and live that long those trees must have pushed away other trees so that they have plenty of sunlight and water. You would think that they have really deep roots and are really strong on their own. But actually, “their roots grow horizontally instead of vertically and intertwine with one another.”² A 300 foot tree will only have roots that only go down 6-12 feet but go outward several hundred feet wrapping around other roots and other redwoods. “Even if a tree has been logged or fallen, its root system is still alive and it will keep supporting the other trees.” Even when Jack is feeling down he can pray for Greg and be an encouragement to him. If one tree doesn’t have what it needs to survive another tree can give it to it through its root system. The redwoods form a strong interconnected community through their roots. Through praying together Jack and Greg connect with and support each other and also connect spiritually with Christ. We can support and encourage one another. When we’re at our lowest we can together become strong. Prayer connects us to God and to each other.

Jesus doesn’t ask his disciples or us to pray by ourselves, but to pray together. The other gospel accounts tell us he’s speaking to Peter, James, and John. These are his inner core, his closest companions. When you suffer who do you want at your side? Your closest friends, your family. That’s when we need love and support the most. Jack and Greg need each other’s strength. But Jesus suffers alone because his closest loved ones sleep. They’re not praying and they should be. When we pray together we can defeat isolationism. Prayer can build community. Prayer can help us love and take care of each other. Praying together can defeat alienation and disunity. Praying together can unify and build up our church family.

As a church we need to be rooted in prayer that holds each other up. I want you to think of someone you can pray with this week. Maybe you’re thinking of your Community Group or a friend you can call. Get together with them this week and pray with them. As a church we’re going through our 40 days of prayer and fasting. Let’s get together in groups and pray for the items on the list. *Prayer defeats temptation by connecting us with Christ and each other.*

I’d like to now invite anyone who wants to pray in response to this meditation to come on up to the microphone and prayer, or if you feel more comfortable you can pray from where you’re seated.

Meditation #2 - Pray for our Father's will above our own. (Luke 22:41-42)

Luke 22:41-42 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

What Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane reminds us of what he taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. Matthew 6:9b-10 says, "'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'" Right now Jesus is once again modeling how to pray. *Pray for our Father's will above our own.*

I want us to think about Christ's posture in this moment. He's kneeling. He's taking a posture of submission and humility. He's lowering himself into the dirt. Matthew gospel says Jesus "fell with his face to the ground and prayed" (Matt 26:39; Mark 14:35). Jesus knows what is coming, the cup of God's wrath. The Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) speaks over and over again of the cup of God's wrath.

Jeremiah 25:15-16 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." (NIV®)

Psalm 75:7-8

7 It is God who judges:

He brings one down, he exalts another.

8 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. (NIV®) (See also Ezekiel 23:31-34)

Maybe some of you love Harry Potter, and maybe some of you hate it or have never read the books. Either way, just bear with me for a moment. The author J.K. Rowling must have gotten her imagery from the Bible because there's a scene in one of the books when Professor Albus Dumbledore, the lovable and wise Headmaster, knowingly drinks a curse called "the drink of despair" out of a cup in order to end the Dark Lord. It's an awful scene. He drinks and screams and drinks some more and goes out of his mind. It weakens him and leads to his death. But that doesn't even begin to compare to the cup Jesus drank.

In the garden Jesus was preparing to drink our curse upon himself. He was preparing to drink the cup of God's wrath towards sin and all that's broken in the world. For the first time in all eternity Jesus was going to feel completely abandoned, not just by Peter, James, and John, but by his Heavenly Father. He will for the first time ever feel completely isolated, alone, and condemned. He'd known the Father's love forever. His Father's love is what sustained him throughout his earthly ministry. He often went away to pray and spend time with the Father. But the Father is about to forsake Jesus and pour out his anger and judgment upon him. Jesus is about to drink a very bitter cup—the drink of despair.

As Jesus faces all of this what does he pray? "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Even now he humbles himself and submits to his Father's will. Jesus is modeling for us what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Christ. He asks his Father for another way, but when the Father says no, he accepts his decision and even prays for it. So when we pray we should always pray first for God's will to be done. We should also pray what we desire, but always with a spirit of "not my will, but yours be done." *Pray for our Father's will above our own.*

- "Father I really want this promotion or vacation or fill in the blank, but if it's not in your will, give me what you want instead. Don't let me get my way if it's not what you want."

- “Father, if it’s your will please protect our church and our ministries as we serve you here and abroad, but if it’s your will for us to undergo hardship for your name’s sake may that happen.”
- “Father, please cure me of my physical illness or my mental illness or the thorn in my flesh... unless it’s your will for me to have those things so that I can glorify you through my weakness.”

Are we willing to pray like Jesus prayed? It may not seem safe but the safest place to be is in relationship with our Heavenly Father. In Mark’s gospel Jesus cries out in the garden “Abba, Father!” (Mark 14:36) Abba is like calling out “Dad!” It’s personal and relational. We’re teaching my son to say “Dada.” Even though Jesus knows his Dad is going to turn his back on him Jesus still trusts that his Dad is still good and loves him and so can we. We can trust that as our Heavenly Dada loves us and knows what’s best for us. Cry out in prayer to your Dada, to your Father. He loves you and wants to hear your prayers. *Pray for our Father’s will above our own.*

Meditation #3 - *It matters that Jesus shed his blood for you. (Luke 22:43-44)*

Luke 22:43-44 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (NIV®)

Although Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ sorrow, even to the point of death, neither of them record the angel appearing or Jesus sweating (Matt 26:37; Mark 14:33-34). These two verses show us Jesus may be God but he’s also human. He’s not superman. He can suffer and hurt. The sweat shows his humanity, “and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” It is possible to be under so much stress you actually sweat blood. Doctors call it “hematidrosis.” It’s when “extreme anguish or physical strain causes [your] capillary blood vessels to dilate and burst, mixing sweat and blood.”³ Whether or not that happened or it was “like” blood the point is that Jesus was under such stress and pressure that he was in complete “agony.” He knew what was coming and although he was willing to submit, it devastated him emotionally, psychologically, and physically. The mix of the cross, a barbaric trauma, and being forsaken by his Father, was more than anyone else but him could bear. This is why he prayed, so that as the weight of God’s wrath pressed down on him like a steel compactor he would not bend or break. He stood strong to win our eternal life at the cost of his own blood. The book of Leviticus says this about the blood of sacrifices.

Leviticus 17:11 For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. (NIV®)

There’s life in the blood. I once donated my blood to the Red Cross. I did it because they were giving away coupons for tax season. I gave my blood for selfish reasons but Christ gave his for selfless reasons. One of the things they asked me when I donated blood was if I’d come in contact with anyone else’s blood. Our blood carries disease and sickness. Our blood is unclean. But Christ’s blood is different. It’s human just like ours but it doesn’t carry sin and death, but eternal life. We need a spiritual blood transfusion from Christ. And that’s just what he did.

Colossians 1:19-20 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (NIV®) (see also Hebrews 10:19, 13:12)

It matters that Jesus shed his blood for you. Have you received his blood as payment for your sins? If you haven’t can I encourage you to repent of your sins tonight and put your faith in Christ Jesus? He will come and wash away all of your sins. He will give you the ability to withstand temptation through prayer. He will walk with you through life and give you a church family to walk with you too. And I promise you that once you enter into relationship with him you will discover he has so much good in store for you. You can not

only trust his will above your own, you'll begin to want his will above your own. You can pray for his will because you will know that his will is good. It's like he is the open-heart surgeon operating on you and also the blood donor who is keeping your heart pumping. *It matters that Jesus shed his blood for you.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes further endnotes and references. Click to listen to sermons or to read our story.⁴

¹ Henderson, Daniel. *Blended, Biblical, Beautiful Worship*. Published 2015. Strategic Renewal. <http://www.strategicrenewal.com/2015/04/12/blended-biblical-beautiful-worship/> Accessed 3/12/2019.

² Jani, Darshan. Five amazing learnings from world's tallest and oldest tree species. My Story. Published 4/27/2017. <https://yourstory.com/mystory/666c051761-5-amazing-learnings-from-world-s-tallest-and-oldest-tree-species> Accessed 3/12/2019.

³ Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 287400-287402). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

⁴ All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.