

One of the blessings I have had over the years I've been in ministry is the opportunity, on occasion, to interact on a deep level with people of great faith. People who are going through difficult circumstances. I am able to see that their faith is strong and that the difficult circumstances didn't weaken their souls but revealed steel in their souls. It is so encouraging to experience that. It's inspiring to see those who have been walking down such a hard path but have such a strong faith.

I got an email from a friend this week whose family member has been walking down a very hard path health-wise for a long time, and they wrote this: "Lord willing, this is a temporary setback. Our times are in his hands. Thank you for your prayers, for God's healing touch." When I see them, what sets them apart to me is the joy they have in the Lord, despite the struggle, and the strong faith they have that God is good and they can trust him.

This week, I was reading about Christian martyrs throughout history who were killed because of their faith in Christ. You know, men and women who were brave and courageous and faithful in those last days of their lives, never recanting their confession of faith in Christ. In the second century, a church leader named Polycarp, who was Bishop of Smyrna, was told to recant Jesus as Lord and confess Caesar as Lord, or he would be burned. He's recorded in history as saying,

**You threatened with fire that burns for a short time and is soon quenched. You don't know about the fire of the coming judgment and eternal punishment that awaits the wicked. But why are you waiting? Come do what you will. Polycarp**

Such strength, courage, and peace, and thousands of Christians have gone to their deaths with such resolve in those circumstances. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, at the time that was taking shape in England, there were these famous last words of a Christian reformer named Hugh Latimer. He and his friend Nicholas Ridley were church leaders in Oxford. They refused to recant their reformed beliefs, so they were sentenced to death. I've heard there's a cross that's a monument to their martyrdom right there

in Oxford where Latimer and Ridley were burned to death.

Maybe you've heard these famous words that Latimer said to Ridley just before being burned at the stake. "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle in England, as I hope, by God's grace, shall never be put out." Such an inner peace, tranquility, and poise right before their deaths. You'd say these martyrs had souls of steel.

So what about Jesus? From what we read, the last night of his life was far from tranquil and peaceful. How could Christian martyrs like Polycarp, Ridley, and Latimer exude such peace while Jesus exuded such stress? It's puzzling, but the today's passage helps us understand what our Lord went through and know that nobody ever has or ever will face the death that Jesus faced.

We pick up Mark's gospel account later that night. Jesus and the eleven disciples (Judas is gone at that point.) leave the upper room and exit the city of Jerusalem. They go out the East Gate and descend down into the Kidron Valley. There's a little brook in the Kidron Valley that they could basically step over, and then they began their ascent up Mount Olive, the mountain that overlooked the city of Jerusalem. It's not a long hike, but it's a steep one, and it's late, and they were full of food and wine from their supper. I'm pretty sure the disciples thought they were headed back to the little town of Bethany in order to spend the night with friends.

But partway up the hill, they come to this large fenced-in orchard of olive trees. Its name is Gethsemane. "They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray'" (Mark 14:32). Gethsemane means oil press. Scholars believed that the olives were crushed at this place to make oil.

Luke's account tells us that Gethsemane was a place that Jesus and his disciples visited frequently, so they were familiar with it. Judas was also familiar with it. We need to know that as Jesus' suffering begins. What we see here in verse 32 is that he wants his friends close. We don't think much about the Son of God needing friends or our fellowship, but would the

Son of God really need anything to help him or have his needs provided for here on earth?

I tried to sort this out in my head, and the best I could really make sense of is that we are all created, and Jesus, in his humanity, was created to be with others. We especially need others when we're suffering. When someone is suffering, we are to come alongside. It doesn't mean we have to necessarily have something profound to say. We just need to be present. Maybe we say nothing at all, but we're present. It's a ministry of presence that can provide comfort and relief, and we have many here at CPC who have that gift.

*"He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled"* (v. 33). So he takes the inner three deeper into the garden. Mark shows us that Jesus invites Peter, James, and John into three different sacred spaces throughout the Gospel of Mark. Back in chapter five, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the house to see Jesus raise Jairus' young daughter from the dead. Then, back in chapter 9, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to the top of Mount Hermon, where they saw Jesus transfigured, and they saw what Jesus would look like after he was glorified after his resurrection and ascension.

Here in Gethsemane, Jesus is wrestling with his own death. Jesus wanted to teach these future leaders something about his death, resurrection, glory, suffering, and prayer. The word "began" is the Greek word *arkhe*. It means the state of initiating an action or process, and in this conjunction between distressed and trouble shows that the distress and trouble were increasing in intensity. He was walking along, and what he was about to go through was starting.

Two rare Greek words are used here, translated as distressed. It means to be deeply troubled and greatly overwhelmed with emotion. Another picture here is one of surprise, or maybe even better astonishment. It was so powerful, so dark, so horrible that he was surprised, astonished at what was happening and what he was experiencing. He had never experienced it before. *Ademoneo*, translated as troubled, describes a person so subject to extreme mental or spiritual anguish and so overcome with emotion that they lose their composure.

So what's going on here? Jesus knew that he was going to suffer and die. Many have lived years knowing that one day they will likely suffer and die a horrible and painful death. It's awkward for me to compare Jesus to any other human. It's a hard question to ask, but I'm going to ask it. "Why is Jesus not responding to

his imminent death like Polycarp, Latimer, or Ridley responded to theirs?"

Peter, James, and John are still near in proximity to Jesus here in that garden. They hear these words from Jesus. *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch"* (v. 34). It's a command Jesus gives them. "Stay here" means to stay present, to stay alert, alert to what I'm doing, alert to where Satan is attacking, and alert to where the flesh is weak. Passover has a theme. One of the many themes in Passover is the theme of staying awake at night and watching and waiting for deliverance. In other words, don't fall asleep.

"Overwhelmed with sorrow" is from the Greek root word *perilupos*. It's where we get the word periphery. From this, it means to be surrounded or overwhelmed by sorrow, crushed and squeezed from all sides like an olive in an olive press to the point of death. Here in the garden, Jesus literally thought the trauma he was experiencing was going to kill him, that he might die before the whippings, spears, and nails. I don't recall ever reading in scripture where Jesus was prone to exaggerate his feelings. So what was happening? Jesus is horrified by what is about to come. We are about to see why no other man before him and no person after him will ever suffer and die the way our Lord suffered and died.

**Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." vv. 35-36**

So he fell to the ground and prayed. He collapsed, face down in the dirt, and he prayed. His prayers came out as wailing, "If possible that this hour might pass." What hour? Jesus is referring to the hour of betrayal, arrest, and execution as a criminal. And in the midst of his agony, he calls out to his heavenly Father—he calls him daddy, which was not used in that culture at all to talk about Yahweh—everything is possible for you. Yes, everything is possible for you. God can do anything he wants. And then he prays this request: "Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will."

Yes, our Heavenly Father can do anything theoretically, but not everything actually. To our holy God that we sang to this morning, sin has consequences. Justice must be served. There's a penalty that is to be paid. Sin cannot be ignored. Creation cannot be restored without the power of death and sin being

broken. And it's hard to understand that an infinite God would allow his beloved Son to be killed, and it would be even his will that it would happen.

Jesus is about to take the cup of divine wrath. Jesus is about to take the cup that will show him the wrath of God against Rome. He's about to take the cup of wrath that will go out against the sins of a rebellious Israel. He'll take the wrath of every human sin against God from Adam down to us. He is about to take the wrath of a broken creation that is living under the curse of sin. The cup is the key for us to understand that nobody will ever face a death that Jesus faced throughout the Old Testament scriptures. The cup is a reference to divine wrath, and in the garden, Jesus is peering into that cup of wrath.

And yes, he saw his own suffering and death. But that wasn't the reason for his agony. He looked into that cup, and he saw hell itself. Our perfect, loving, holy Jesus saw the horror of hell. Every vile and violent sin you can imagine Jesus saw when he peered into that cup. He saw Satan and his demons. He saw the spiritual battle between principalities and powers. He saw murder; he saw abuse; he saw addiction. Jesus was tasting hell in the garden of Gethsemane, and it was a taste of the hell he would experience on the cross, and it staggered him.

Then he saw that all of the punishment for these sins when he peered into that cup were to be laid on him. The justice our Holy God requires was to be carried out through Jesus' sacrifice. Isaiah 53:6 says, *"The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."* This is a picture of atonement. As used in the scripture, to atone is to suffer the penalty for sins, and that removes the effects of sin for repentant sinners who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Through atonement, believers are reconciled to God. As Jesus peered into that cup of wrath, he saw that he was the only one capable of carrying out this atonement for all of mankind.

As he looked deeper into that cup, he saw sacrifice. Earlier that evening, at Passover, when Jesus and the eleven disciples descended down the Kidron Valley and crossed that little brook, which was actually a drainage ditch that was coming out of the temple in Israel, they were stepping over bloody water that was bloody because of the sacrifice of lambs that was occurring because it was Passover. The brook was red with blood, and Jesus knew that in a few hours, he was going to be slain as the final sacrificial lamb of God. His own blood would be what atones for our sins and meets the demands for justice for all eternity.

And as he continues to look into the cup, there's something he doesn't see. I think this may have astonished him most of all. He didn't see his Father. He and his Father had been together from the beginning of time. He has always had an intimate relationship with his Father, and along with the Holy Spirit, Father, and Son, they made up the Trinity. There was unity of love, unity of purpose, and joyful fellowship, and he'd never been apart from that. That was about to break. I think that's what terrified him most. We can understand when Jesus cried out from the cross, *"Father, why have you forsaken me?"*

Someone described hell this way. It's the absence of God. Hell is what Jesus was experiencing. Jesus was built, and we are built for a deep connection with God. When it boils down to the temptation of sin, we are deceived, or we give into our flesh and think we would be happier without God in our lives. Hell is when God says, "Okay if you want to be away from me, you can be away from me." And I think there was something more that he saw at the very bottom of that cup after he had taken in all of it; at the very bottom of that cup was something sweet. It was salvation. Jesus knew that in order to save us from our sins, he had to drink all the way to the bottom of that cup to give his life as a ransom for many, the scripture says. God promised, back in Isaiah, that the cup of wrath would be taken from the people, the sinners.

**"This is what your Sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends his people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again." Isaiah 51:22**

So Jesus became our substitute to take that wrath that we deserved. Some of us might be thinking, "Man, this is really, really heavy. I don't believe in a God of wrath. I believe in a God of love." But unless we understand a God of wrath, we will never fully understand the God of love. Only a God of love would be willing to come and drink of this cup himself. Our God is infinitely angry at sin. And to understand God's infinite love, we need to understand that he absorbed that penalty himself. There are many gods that we can bow down to in our culture. Gods that promise us all kinds of things if we bow down. But what does it cost those gods in our culture to love you? It doesn't cost them anything. But for our God, it's plain to see that it costs something.

Jesus Christ, our Messiah, the Savior of Israel, the Savior of the world, didn't just say he loved us; he did

something. There's something about the timing of all of this with Jesus in Gethsemane. We need to know that what Jesus was about to do was radically voluntary. He volunteered.

Have you ever done something? I'm sure most of us can think of something we've done, something that we knew would be hard if we committed to it. You volunteered, but you realize once you got in, it was a lot harder than you thought it would be.

I was trying to think of a good example of this. And according to my wife, it's giving birth and raising a child! Next weekend Julie and I are going to Roseville. We're going to see our newest granddaughter, a cute little petite four-month-old. Our daughter Holly and my son-in-law Nick committed to having a baby. They knew it would be hard, but they were committed. No one forced them to expand their family. They voluntarily did it, and once they committed, they knew it was too late to go back. They knew it would be hard, but they didn't know how hard it would be until they were in it, until they experienced it. But now they know! Pregnancy, birth, caring for a baby—to quote my daughter, “It's the hardest thing we've ever done!” And they really didn't know it until they entered that process.

So think about this. Jesus had to enter into the process, and he entered into it here in this garden. It wouldn't have been proper to have Jesus go into this furnace of wrath, not knowing how horrible it was going to be. He needed to see where he was headed. He needed to volunteer and go willingly. And if Jesus had not known what was ahead, it wouldn't have properly been his own act as a man. Knowing what he did, knowing what he was about to experience, he voluntarily went anyway, and that shows us how infinite his love is and how wonderful his commitment is to us.

The first Adam was placed in the garden, and there was a tree, and God placed the tree in the middle of the garden. He said to Adam, “Don't eat from the fruit of this tree, and you will live, and I will be with you.” But we know that Adam disobeyed God. He ate and sin and death entered the world and remained in the world. Adam would not live forever.

Paul refers to Jesus as the second Adam. He's also in a garden, and God shows him another tree. But this tree is a cross, and as the Father and Son connect in prayer, his Father reminds Jesus the second time, “If you obey me, you'll die, and I will abandon you. But because of your death, others will live. So, out of all the modern

martyrs throughout history, only Jesus is told, “Obey me, and I will abandon you” from God. Jesus obeyed, and just as his love for us is infinitely wonderful, so is his obedience infinitely wonderful and perfect.

N.T. Wright says this,

**Jesus, the innocent one, was drawing onto himself the holy wrath of God against human sin in general so that human sinners, like you and me, can find, as we look at the cross, that the load of sin and guilt we have been carrying is taken away from us. Jesus takes it on himself and somehow absorbs it so that when we look back, there is nothing there. Our sins have been dealt with, and we need never carry their burden again. N.T. Wright**

Someone might say, “I really sinned in a bad way. I just don't know that Jesus loves me.” After looking at this passage, I hope you can see that if facing hell didn't break his love for you, do you think a little flub up or a big flub up would ever break his love for you? Of course not! There's no greater love that we've ever wanted, and we pursue a lot of it. We pursue married love, child love, and professional acclaim, but nothing else will give us what God's love gives to us.

And yes, we see here that Jesus struggled with his mission. How could he do this? I think there's a lesson for us here. In all the darkness and all the sleepiness, Jesus could have run off. He could have escaped into the darkness. But what do we see here? Perfect integrity. Jesus is the same in public as he was in private. He was the same in the light as he was in the darkness. And in the darkness, when no one is looking, is when temptations to run from God's will are the strongest. It's when we're struggling that God reveals, “Man, we need to confess this. Our hearts are divided.”

Our culture gives us two choices when we're pressed in from all sides, as Jesus was in the garden. We can turn tail and run from trouble and hope that God follows us, or we can stay put and shut down to those issues around us. But in doing so, we shut down to God himself. That's what our culture offers.

Jesus truly did wrestle with his mission, but he resolved his issue through dependent prayer. Jesus modeled dependent prayer for us. So, what do we see from Jesus's prayers here? We see that he was absolutely locked into the emotional and spiritual reality that he was in. At that point, he was locked into that, but he didn't run. He didn't become stoic. He was completely honest about his needs. “Father, I think

I'm going to die right now." We see that the purpose of our prayers is not to bend God's will to fit our will, but as he modeled, to submit to God so that we will accept his will and align with it.

Jesus is showing us that dependent prayer also has a cosmic impact. When we pray, do we expect cosmic impact? We should. Do you ever say, "Well, I can't do anything else, so I guess I can just pray." Don't say that kind of stuff! We learn from Jesus that being spiritually awake and in dependent prayer is the only adequate help for a true crisis. Watch and pray; that's the instruction that he gives. I feel like I do a lot of watching but less praying. I don't know if you can relate to that.

**"Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." vv. 37-38**

Jesus calls Peter Simon when Peter acts like his old self. "Simon, you still have your old nature." So, a question for us. Is it easy for you to pray? I love hanging out with people where prayer is easy for them. I'm so inspired. I learn, I grow. Does your mind wander when you pray? I know we can all be lazy, sleepy, and uncommitted. But we have to understand that Satan is strategizing to get us to pray less, to get us to be distracted by other things. Don't underestimate when you go into prayer the spiritual warfare that's at work. There are strategy sessions in hell that go on when we pray, where Satan and the demons are trying to figure out what can get us off track, what can get us discouraged, and while the disciples are sleeping, the enemies of Jesus are plotting. In a literal sense, that's what's going on back in Jerusalem.

We need to engage in spiritual battle. We need to pull out the big guns. I was thinking about the original Raiders of the Lost Ark. He's in this town, Cairo, Egypt, and he's looking for Marian, and it's a stressful time. All of a sudden, out of this crowd of screaming people, the swordsman comes out and starts swinging a sword at him. He looks at him, pulls out his revolver, and shoots him, and the guy goes down. That's one of the most iconic scenes in that movie, in my mind, anyway!

We need to remember that when we pray, we're bringing a loaded gun into a knife fight. We have the advantage. Jesus could stand up to anything because he had knelt down before the Father in prayer. He had

a gun, and he knew the enemy only had a knife. And we know that too when we go into prayer. We need to remember that promise.

There's another profound truth here. In the midst of all of this, Jesus is concerned for these guys. In the middle of this cosmic struggle over the fate of world history, Jesus is concerned about them personally. It's a beautiful reminder that Jesus in heaven is thinking about us, interceding for us, and never forgets about us. No matter what big things are happening around him, we matter.

**Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. vv. 39-40**

So, the disciples were learning from their failures, and we will learn from our failures as well. Some things I see in Jesus here are an example of dependent prayer. He looked for the support of others. He poured out his sorrows. In prayer, he sought solitude for prayer. He struggled with God openly and honestly. He submitted to his will. He fought off sleepiness, and then he found strength. It's a model for us.

The writer of Hebrews summarizes Jesus' prayer life.

**During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Hebrews 5:7**

A big idea here is dependent prayer is the way to handle the hardest paths. We need to learn dependent prayer. Prayer doesn't just happen. We need to fight to make time for prayer. There are times when prayer is more important than sleep. We need to find a way to stay focused in prayer instead of falling asleep, like taking a prayer walk would be an example, journaling your prayers, or speaking out loud your prayers as the Lord did before his Father in the garden. How about this? Find a group that will pray for you. Being a part of a group that prays together will help us and encourage us to find the discipline, the time, the focus, and the accountability that we all need. We need other prayer warriors around us. So check out what happens next as we end this section.

**Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of**

**sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" vv. 41-42**

What we're seeing here is that Jesus is strengthened through this dependent prayer in the garden. He's strengthened, and he's resolved to pray. He's resolved to obey God. His soul is steel. The struggle is finished. The mission is clear. He sees this mob coming with torches up the hill out of Jerusalem, and right now, it's Satan's hour. And because sinners are his agents, we recognize that all the powers of darkness are at work here against the mission of God.

That's exactly how it was prophesied in scripture. At the front of this mob, Jesus sees Judas guiding them to this place of prayer. The religious authorities are there, the Sanhedrin, who were upset and wanted Jesus dead. The Roman soldiers are there. One commentator I read said maybe an entire cohort of Roman soldiers. Gentiles, who were searching for purpose in their political and military power and in their pleasure in ruling over the weak, were there. And they would look at this and say, "Let's crush this Jew like a bug so we can send a message to the masses to stay in line." There could have been a thousand there.

And then there's you and me. We might as well be in the mob. Maybe for some of us here today, we know that our world is broken. We know that our systems are broken, but we are mostly aware of our own brokenness. And we ask, "Is there really any good news from God? Is there really any truth from God? Is there really hope? Is there really salvation for me?" And I want to say, "Yes, there is," because of Jesus's commitment and his resolve to do what he needed to do to save us. And if we follow Jesus, we seek him out. If we open up and read about him in our Bibles, you'll find that the voice of Jesus is not like any other voice you've heard. Pastor Max Lucado puts it this way.

**The battle is won. You may have thought it was won at Golgotha. It wasn't. You may have thought that the sign of victory is the empty tomb. It isn't. The final battle was won at Gethsemane. And the sign of conquest is Jesus at peace in the olive trees. For it was in the garden that he made his decision...He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you. Max Lucado**

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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