

Sunday, April 3, 2022 | The Road to Easter

Mark 14:32-42 | “The Garden Path”

The story of Jesus's path to the cross is vital for all people to consider—especially followers of Christ. This series is framed around roads Jesus took en route to Calvary. Each road points to the essential purpose of Jesus's journey and what we must learn from it to fully appreciate the significance of the cross and the resurrection.

Last week, we began our series with Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, often referred to as “The Triumphal Entry.” And unlike the Roman version, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was marked by controversy and sadness. Instead of it being one of overwhelming joy for everyone, we found Jesus weeping for his city because they would rather choose war over peace. Thus, we learned that while joy is assured for those who hail Christ as King, sorrow is just as guaranteed for those who dismiss the Lord altogether.

Today, we will look at the path Jesus took through the Garden of Gethsemane.

How many of us can recall a time when someone we looked up to, possibly a parent, friend, or mentor, broke down?¹ To see someone we once thought impervious to the world's attack buckle under pressure can be disheartening. Children, for instance, have to come to grips with this as they watch their parents grow old and their bodies begin to deteriorate. Though Dad seemed to be the strongest person in all the world when you were a kid, now he can hardly get up the stairs because his knees have all but given out. Or, when you were a child, Mom's eyesight was so keen that nothing seemed to escape her perception, but now her eyes have begun to fail her, and she can barely see what's on the TV.

Now, imagine this same scenario, but instead of a parent, it's Jesus. The disciples had walked with him for years. And while they knew him to be a man with emotions, they had never seen anything like what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, they had come to this particular spot many times before (cf. Lu. 22:39; Jn. 18:2).² But never had they seen Jesus in such a state.

READ: Mark 14:32-42 (ESV)

¹ Wright, N.T., *Mark For Everyone*, (Louisville, KY; Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 197.

² Stein, Robert H., *Mark*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 659-660.

³² And they went to a place called **Gethsemane**. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be **greatly distressed** and **troubled**. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is **very sorrowful**, even to **death**. Remain here and watch." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he **fell on the ground** and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷ And he came and found them **sleeping**, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray **that you may not enter into temptation**. The spirit indeed is **willing**, but the flesh is **weak**." ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and **they did not know what to answer him**. ⁴¹ And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; **the hour has come**. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² **Rise**, let us be **going**; see, my betrayer is at hand."

I want you to notice **three** things:

i. **Jesus' sorrow at God's will.**

The emotion of Jesus is expressed in five ways. Mark explains that Jesus was not only "greatly distressed" but also "troubled" (14:33). The repetition serves to underline Jesus' emotions. Further, Jesus also gives voice to his sadness when he says, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Which was to say that the "grief Jesus was experiencing was almost killing him."³ And rather than pray standing, as was customary back then, Mark tells us that Jesus fell to the ground. And lastly, we see the sorrow expressed in the very place where Jesus prayed. Gethsemane is the Hebrew term that means "olive press."⁴

Jesus' sorrowful expressions are not theatrics. This was no drama. He was not putting on some show. After all, we know from Luke's account that Jesus even sweats "great drops of blood" (cf. Lu. 22:44). Under the weight of what was to come, Jesus felt genuine anguish. And just as olives were pressed in that very spot, so, too, was the Son of God pressed in Gethsemane.

ii. **Jesus' grappling with God's will.**

Let me be clear. Jesus's confidence in the Father is without exception. When I say "grappling," I am not saying that Jesus was wavering between whether or not to obey his Father's will. No.

³ Stein (2008), p. 660.

⁴ Lane, William L., *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 1974), p. 515.

Jesus' obedience was never in question. What I am saying, though, is that in his humanity, Jesus had to come to grips with what lay ahead of him. He's known the final destination for some time. But this last leg of the journey is the worst, and we see him emotionally distraught as he enters the homestretch.

But why was Jesus so upset? Was he in opposition to his Father's will? No. Was it because he was facing the horrors of the crucifixion. No, I don't think so. He was in anguish because he was about to take the chalice of God's wrath, and while the cross was part of that, it was not the whole of it. Jesus did not fear physical harm but separation from God and being the recipient of God's wrath (cf. Isa. 51:17). As the writer of Hebrews says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living" (Heb. 10:31). Who would know that better than God's own Son?

Never before had the Son and Father ever been at odds. But when Jesus willingly took upon himself our sin, God himself turned his back on Jesus Christ. This is why, later in Mark 15:34, Jesus will cry out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" On his shoulders rested the totality of man's sin past, present, and future (cf. Isa. 53:6). Jesus suffered for every person's sin. It separated him from the Father. This was more painful than the beatings, the nails of the cross, or the crown of thorns.

What's more, not only was Jesus forsaken by his Father while on the cross, his own disciples abandoned him to sleep while yet in Gethsemane. Mark tells us that Jesus came to check on the disciples only to find them sleeping three separate times. He even rebukes them, saying, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Jesus's words imply that the only way the Spirit overcomes the weakened flesh is through prayer (cf. Mat. 6:3). Yet through Jesus was in his most trying hour, he had concern for the disciples.⁵ He knew what was to come, and he knew they would need to be "prayed up" if they were to make it through the coming trials. But they kept on sleeping. I cannot help but wonder what would've happened if they prayed as Christ asked them to. Would Peter have betrayed Jesus? Would the rest of the disciples have fled into the night?

Anyways, the point is that the reason why Jesus was so upset was that he did not want to drink from the cup of God's wrath. Who would? And so, we find Jesus' grappling with God's will for his life. The very purpose of his coming was to take the penalty of our sin upon himself so that

⁵ Lane (1974), p. 519, "The remarkable element in the scene is that in the midst of an unparalleled agony Jesus twice more came to look after his three vulnerable disciples and to warn them of their danger of failure in the struggle which was about to overwhelm them."

we would not have to drink of that drink. And while he would not disobey God, shirking his responsibilities, the task before Jesus still troubled him.

iii. Jesus' acceptance of God's will.

Though clearly, God's answer to his own Son's request was "no," Jesus' accepted the direction God was leading. And his acceptance of God's will is seen in two ways. First, it was already expressed in the words, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." But it was also confirmed when he came to the disciples and said, "Rise, let us be going." Understand this, we all have free will. We have the freedom to choose our own destinies. This is a fact of reality and scripture that cannot be denied. However, do mistake freedom for the point of free will. Free will finds its greatest expression when submitting itself to the Divine will. The greatest choice you will ever make is choosing the things that God has for you.

Furthermore, courage is often imagined as stoically facing adversity without so much as a moment's hesitation. But, as any soldier will tell you, this is not reality. And this was not Jesus. It took him a night filled with prayer before he could meet the challenge of the cross head-on. Those prayers helped him come to grips with God's will. So much so that he did not cower or run from his betrayer but instead greeted him as he came. "It is not a weak, effeminate Jesus of much Christian art who goes out to meet his enemies but the conquering Son of Man/Son of God! It is the one who is Lord of nature (4:35-41), of the demons (5:1-20), of disease (5:21-24a, 35-43)."⁶

The well of courage is deep for those who make it their habit to pray.

So, what's the takeaway?

Confronting God's will in prayer prepares us to face into trials when our hour comes.

Following God's will for your life is often likened to a blind leap of faith. And while there is some truth to that, it may imply that we shouldn't take time to consider what, exactly, the Lord is asking us to do.

This is not the case.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we find the Son of God in great distress, so much so that he was sweating drops of blood. Why? The passage tells us that he was coming to grips with God's will for his life. And though, yes, he had resigned himself to do whatever God wanted him to do, he

⁶ Stein (2008), p. 665.

still spent hours in prayer asking his Heavenly Father to “let this cup pass from me.” He even prayed so long his own friends kept falling asleep.

God's will might be something we have to grapple with. And that's okay. We ought to do so in prayer and in a community (cf. Gal. 6:2). But God's will should never be something we actively avoid. Eventually, with whatever God has told us to do, may we say, as Jesus said while leaving Gethsemane, "Rise, let us go."

So, what's the takeaway?

Confronting God's will in prayer **prepares** us to face into **trials** when our hour comes.

Video Description

The Road to Easter | Week 2 | "The Garden Path"

TEXT: Mark 14:32-42

Following God's will for your life is often likened to a blind leap of faith. And while there is some truth to that, it may imply that we shouldn't take time to consider what, exactly, the Lord is asking us to do. If the Garden of Gethsemane teaches us anything, it teaches us that coming to grips with God's will takes time. Moreover, it shows us that when we **confront God's will in prayer, that process prepares us to face into trials when our hour comes.**

God's will might be something we have to grapple with. And that's okay. If we must wrestle with God, we ought to (as Jesus did) do so in prayer and in a community. But God's will should never be something we actively avoid. Eventually, with whatever God has told us to do, may we say, as Jesus said while leaving Gethsemane, "Rise, let us go."

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: