

Easter Sunday is in two weeks, and so during this week and next, we will be looking at some of the final events of Jesus' life. This week we will look at Matthew 26:20-50, focusing particularly on Jesus' time in the Garden of Gethsemane. Before we read, I would ask you to take to heart these words of A.W. Tozer in his book "God Tells the Man who Cares": "*The Bible was written in tears and to tears it will yield its best treasure. God has nothing to say to the frivolous man.*"

**Matthew 26:20-50** - *When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.* <sup>21</sup> *And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."* <sup>22</sup> *They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"* <sup>23</sup> *Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.* <sup>24</sup> *The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."* <sup>25</sup> *Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"* *Jesus answered, "Yes, it is you."* <sup>26</sup> *While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."* <sup>27</sup> *Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.* <sup>28</sup> *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* <sup>29</sup> *I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."* <sup>30</sup> *When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* <sup>31</sup> *Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."* <sup>32</sup> *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."* <sup>33</sup> *Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."* <sup>34</sup> *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."* <sup>35</sup> *But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.* <sup>36</sup> *Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."* <sup>37</sup> *He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.* <sup>38</sup> *Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."* <sup>39</sup> *Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* <sup>40</sup> *Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.* <sup>41</sup> *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."* <sup>42</sup> *He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be*

done." <sup>43</sup> When he came back, he again found them sleeping, **because their eyes were heavy.** <sup>44</sup> So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. <sup>45</sup> Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" <sup>47</sup> While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. <sup>48</sup> Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; **arrest him.**" <sup>49</sup> Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. <sup>50</sup> Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

After one final meal with his disciples, Jesus goes to pray in a garden called Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. He asks Peter, James and John, his three closest earthly friends, to stay nearby while he goes to pray to His Father. There are many things worth noticing in this passage, but one of the more striking is just **how human Jesus is.** We believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man, and he is never more human than he is here in Gethsemane. In His moment of trial, He asks his friends to keep watch with him, he is clearly in deep agony at what is to come, and he asks the Father to not bring the suffering that is going to happen if there is any other way to accomplish what he has come to do. Yet in the end, we see saying to His Father, "not my will but yours be done."

However, while you may find Jesus' struggle encouraging in some ways, **it might also be disturbing to see how badly Jesus is handling this ordeal.** Listen to verses 37-39 again:

**Matthew 26:37-39** - *He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

And in Luke's account of Gethsemane, we find this:

**Luke 22:42-44** - *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup> An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup> And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and **his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.***

Jesus is “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”, as he puts it. The phrase “overwhelmed with sorrow” comes from a Greek word which is used to denote the most extreme anguish which the soul can feel—excruciating anxiety and torture of spirit. And Jesus is in such agony that he is sweating blood, a phenomenon called hematidrosis that only happens under extreme stress and anguish. Why is Jesus experiencing such sorrow, such anguish, such torture in His spirit? **What could this mean?**

**Well, you say, Jesus is obviously in agony because he knows he is about to experience a very painful death.** But Jesus knew he was going to die. Three times he mentioned this to his disciples. For example:

*Mark 10:33-34 - "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, <sup>34</sup> who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."*

**Jesus knew he was going to die. Not only that, he knew he was going to rise again!** He knows that there will be a happy ending. If I knew I would rise again, I don't think I would be sweating blood over my death. So why is he in such agony? He knows what is to come, and he knows how it will turn out. What could overwhelm him with sorrow to the point of death?

**I believe that the answer to that question is found in what he prays.** Listen again to v. 39: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” He asks the Father to take away from him “the cup.” At first glance, that phrase may seem to simply refer to a difficult ordeal. But when you look back through the Bible, you discover that the cup has a more precise meaning:

*Psalm 75:7-8 - But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another. 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.*

*Isaiah 51:17 - Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.*

*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."*

***Ezekiel 23:33-34*** - *You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, the cup of ruin and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria. You will drink it and drain it dry; you will dash it to pieces and tear your breasts.*

***Revelation 14:9-10*** - *A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb*

**Are you getting the picture? The cup is more than just a simple metaphor for a difficult ordeal. The cup is a metaphor for God's wrath, God's righteous judgment on human sin, God's punishment for evil and wickedness.** It causes men to stagger, to beat their breast, to go mad. When Jesus asks the Father to remove the cup from him, if at all possible, he is asking the Father if there is any other way to save us that would not involve having to bear the wrath of the Father on human sin. Can you understand why Jesus might have been sweating blood?

Now, I know that just mentioning the word "wrath" stirs up all sorts of reactions in people, who may see the concept of the wrath of God as something primitive and out of line with a God of love. Many people like the idea of a God of love, but don't like the wrath part. But his wrath towards sin and evil comes precisely out of His love and His holiness. If we love something, then we hate that which destroys or threatens it. God loves His people, and hates the evil that is done to them. And like any good judge, he must punish evil. A judge who will not punish evil but lets those who do evil off the hook every time is not a good judge but a wicked judge.

So, because God is holy, he can not tolerate sin. He has a holy hatred for it. And because he is loving, he must punish evil. But there is a dilemma with that. The dilemma is that, as read in **Romans 3:23**, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The line through good and evil cuts through every human heart. And therefore, if God were to destroy evil, we would all be destroyed, for we all deserve judgment, and we all deserve punishment. But because God loves us, he does not leave us without hope in our sinful condition, but takes the punishment on Himself, as God the Son comes and willingly drinks the cup of wrath full strength as our substitute, our Savior.

***Romans 6:23** - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Can you understand now why Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death? It wasn't that he was about to die physically, or even that his friends were abandoning him. It was that as he came to the garden and turned to the Father in prayer, the Father was already beginning to pull away from Him. He was beginning to experience the absence of the Father. Jesus knew everything, but he had never known separation from the Father, let alone the full wrath of God on human sin.

Some of you know that pain of being left and abandoned. When a friend does it, it hurts; when a spouse does it, or a parent, it's much worse. But this is way beyond that – this is abandonment of the Son by the Father, with whom He had shared intimacy for all eternity. That was sorrow to the point of death. And it would continue all the way to the cross, where Jesus would cry out before his death, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death because in the garden, he began to experience the Cup – the wrath of God, separation from the Father. And it caused him to stagger, to sweat blood. In Gethsemane, the Father gave Jesus the choice. This is just a taste of what you will experience on the cross – do you still want to do this? Will you still do it? Will you love me even though I will crush you?

And Jesus says, “Not my will but yours be done.” And He drinks the cup of God's wrath for us.

***Hebrews 2:9** - But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we see a very human Jesus choosing obedience to the Father, out of love for us, despite the immense cost and terrible suffering He will endure. In the Garden of Gethsemane, God is essentially asking Jesus, are you willing to go through with this, to drink the cup of my wrath? And just to make it more painfully clear what he has to do and who he has to do this for, look at his disciples. Judas betrays him with a kiss. The other disciples fall asleep, and then when they wake up, they don't understand what is happening and try to fight his captors with swords. And Peter, possibly Jesus' closest earthly friend, denies even

knowing Jesus three times when asked if he knows him. It's as if the Father is saying, "THIS IS WHO YOU ARE DYING FOR!" Miserable human beings who betray you, deny you, fall asleep on you, don't understand you. Will you still drink the cup of God's wrath for them?

And in the Garden, Jesus says, "if there is any other way, please, Lord, let's do that. But if not, then yes. I will drink the cup for them."

What does this mean for you?

### 1) Someone – either you or Jesus – must drink the cup

You have sinned against a holy God. You have fallen short of His perfect standard. And there must be payment for that sin. His justice must be met. Someone must drink the cup. It's either going to be you, or it's going to be Jesus.

**John 3:16-18** – *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*

**John 3:35-36** - *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*

Again, I understand that in your mind or spirit, you may recoil against this concept. But listen to the words of Jesus and take them seriously. If God is holy and if we are rebels, then we are in a dangerous predicament. And as much as you may want to believe that as long as you live a good life, do good works, or try your best to be a spiritual person, that this will make you right with God, that is a lie.

**Romans 3:19-24** - *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and*

*fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Someone must drink the cup. This morning, it is your choice. You can reject God, and you can continue to live for yourself, as your own God, choosing to do your own thing and trusting that this will save you. But your sin will remain on you, and you will still be under His condemnation. Or you can repent, confess your sins, turn to Jesus as your Savior and Lord and watch Him drink the cup for you so that you might go free and have eternal life.

And the more you understand the depth of your sin and what you deserve, the more you will be transformed by what Christ did for you, by the depth of His love, into a person of gratitude, joy, and love.

## 2) You can trust God's will

Look at Jesus pouring out his heart to the Father, asking that if there be any other way to save us, that God would do that, but in the end trusting his Father. I tell you that there will be many times in your life when you find yourself in tears, like Jesus, crying out "if there is any other way, God...", or like Jesus on the cross, feeling forsaken by God. In this last week of Jesus' life, we see him experiencing the worst possible punishment for sins, sins that he did not commit, but he is able to say out of his trust in the Father, "not my will but yours be done." He trusted that this great evil and suffering was going to be the very means by which God would save the world. He knew that if God allowed suffering, it would be for the purpose of salvation.

When you find yourself in this place, plead with God to deliver you, to open any other door. It is right to contend with God for what is on your heart. But it is also right to end by saying "not my will but yours be done," to leave His presence having reaffirmed your trust in Him as your good and loving Father. Prayer is not so much about changing God's mind as it is about aligning ourselves with God's will.

## 3) There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ

**Romans 8:1-4** - *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness*

*of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

God's justice must be met. But when Jesus drank the cup, he drank it to the bottom. There is no condemnation left for you. Only love and acceptance and forgiveness.

Have you ever felt like “there is no way God could love me or forgive me for what I've done”? **Do you know that every time you sin, there is a battle over your soul?** In Luke's account of the Last Supper, there is an amazing and bone-chilling passage: **Luke 22:31-32** - "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*" You don't need to understand farming to understand what is going on. Peter will deny Jesus, and **Satan** wants to take that opportunity to disqualify Peter from service. But Jesus tells Peter that he has prayed for him that his faith may not fail. The same battle is going on over you. When you fail God, Satan wants to sift you like wheat. He wants to convince you that you are no good, and that you can't go back to God. Brothers and sisters, in Jesus' name, don't listen to him!

Look at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane! If he was willing to drink the Cup, how could anything you do lead Him to say, “That is too much – I can't love you anymore”? There is no condemnation left for you! Nothing can ever separate you from his love!

#### 4) We owe everything to Jesus

Look at what He did for you. Do you really think what He asks for in return is to set aside an hour a week to sit through church? How can you see Jesus sweating blood for you in the Garden and not be moved?

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15** - For **Christ's love** compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

This is no Barney the Purple Dinosaur love. This is no Mr. Rogers' love. This is a costly love, a love willing to undergo the greatest possible suffering in order to rescue you, restore you to God, give you eternal life. The cup is more than just a

metaphor for the wrath of God; it is a symbol of how deeply you are loved, that Jesus would drink it down to the bottom in order to save you and restore you to a right relationship to Him. You owe Him everything. All your worship, your devotion, your allegiance, your life. Give Him the honor that He is due! And then, as His Spirit strengthens you, go and follow in His footsteps, being willing to love others with a costly love, being willing to sacrifice yourself and lay down your life in order to bring others to Him.