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Sermon Notes

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Gethsemane: The Greatest Display of Courage in History

Mark 14:32-42

One sacred day, God spoke to Moses from the flames of a burning bush,

“Take off your shoes, for the ground on which you are standing is holy ground.”

What does this mean? Since God is everywhere all at once, “sacred ground” means that God was about to be revealed in an extraordinary way, and Moses’s knowledge of God was going to be greatly increased by this encounter. Draw near to listen, draw near to fall on the ground in fear and wonder, worship and adoration.

Friends, if that was true at the burning bush, how much more true is it when we come to Gethsemane? Gethsemane is the greatest display of the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ in the Bible. It contains almost incomprehensible mysteries... but also tremendous opportunities to ponder the excellencies of Christ, his glories... the perfection of his character: his courage, his obedience, his trust in his Father, his willingness to suffer for us, his love for us, his reversal of the disobedience of Adam, his frailty and weakness, his mortality, his emotions...

We will spend eternity pondering these themes and others that flow from this account. This morning, we will spend a scant 40 minutes on them.

My goals:

- 1) To exalt Christ our Savior based on this account... that we may worship him with all our hearts for what he did at the cross for us
- 2) To understand more accurately the humanity of Jesus... his emotions, his submission, his mortality and frailty, his temptations,... and yet, his sinlessness
- 3) To understand the power of prayer in facing temptations, in strengthening us to do the will of the Father
- 4) To motivate us to trust in Christ's finished work on the cross more than ever before.
- 5) To help us understand the proper use of the will... to imitate Christ every day in saying, "Not my will but yours be done."

Here we will plumb the depths of the EMOTIONS of Jesus at paying the cost for our salvation... the emotional life of Jesus as a fully human being is clearly on display here

Here we will understand the pressure, the almost incalculable pressure that weighed on him

I. The Facts of Gethsemane

A. All His Life, Jesus Lived Under the Shadow of the Cross

1. B.B. Warfield: "The prospect of his suffering was a perpetual Gethsemane to him."

Luke 12:50 I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!

2. Clear evidence in the Gospels... Jesus knew EXACTLY what was going to happen to him

Mark 9:31 "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."

Now, as Jesus comes to Gethsemane on that fateful night, the time had come to face the cross straight on and make a final decision about what he will do

B. The Lord's Supper is Over...

They have finished the Passover meal, sung a hymn, and had crossed the Kidron Valley into the Garden of Gethsemane

Mark 14:32 They went to a place called Gethsemane

C. What Was "Gethsemane"?

1. A private garden on the Mt. of Olives, probably walled off, owned by some rich friend of Jesus
2. He allowed Jesus and his disciples to frequent the place; it was outside Jerusalem, away from the maddening crush the crowds
3. The word itself means "oil press"; it probably included a press for making olive oil from the harvest of Olives on the mount

The crushing of the olives allowed the reddish, viscous, and precious olive oil to flow into containers for use or sale

4. This becomes a metaphor also for the crushing SPIRITUAL PRESSURE that Jesus would experience... so intense that by the end of the time his blood was flowing like great drops of blood

D. Why Did Jesus Go to Gethsemane?

1. It was a place of refuge and retirement and quiet prayer
2. It was commonly used by Jesus and his disciples... therefore, Judas, who had left to betray him, would know exactly where to bring the soldiers to arrest him... Jesus wanted to be predictable for Judas so he could betray him more easily
3. This was evidence of his willingness to lay down his life for us
4. He was never a victim, trapped in circumstances he couldn't escape

John 10:18 No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself

E. Jesus' Command to His Disciples and His Separation of them

Mark 14:32-33 Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him

1. Luke tells us Jesus separated from his disciples by a distance of a stone's throw... maybe 100 feet away; but he also took his closest disciples with him, simply because he wanted them near
2. Peter, James, and John... the same three who had accompanied him to the summit of the **MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION**... amazing that these same three saw Jesus **at his most glorious**, shining radiantly in glory on the Mount... but they would also see him **at his most humiliated** ... groveling on the ground, begging God to remove the cup, close to death

F. Prayer

1. Jesus has one desire at this moment... to pray to his Father
2. Only prayer would get him through the cross

G. The Awesome Emotional Distress of Jesus

Stated in the ACCOUNTS:

Mark 14:33 he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

Matthew 26:37 he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

Stated plainly also by Jesus:

Mark 14:34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them.

1. The overpowering EMOTIONS: two of the words (we'll save one for later)
 - a. **"sorrowful"**: root word has to do with grief, sadness of an overwhelming nature, usually associated with death
 - b. **"troubled"**: word usually refers to a distracted, anxious state... like someone consumed with anxiety over an impending event

c. **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow”**

As though Jesus were SURROUNDED by grief, walled in with grief,
no escape from it except death

d. **“to the point of death”**

i) Jesus was actually close to death

Luke 22:43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

What an amazing picture is this of the FRAILITY of the Son of God in his humanity... the angel was created by Jesus, and yet Jesus is so much weaker than the angel.

Luke 22:44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

The internal pressure was SO GREAT that, it seems, the capillaries under the skin of his face were bursting, and blood was flowing down his face... GREAT DROPS of blood

It seems quite likely that, had Jesus not been physically strengthened at that moment, he might have died right there in the Garden.

H. Jesus' Prayer Itself

Mark 14:35-36 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

1. Physical position: falling on his face, prostrate... totally weak, helpless, submissive to God, lowly

[“Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”; Joseph Hart, 1759]

View him groveling in the garden;
Lo! your Maker prostrate lies

2. The request: IF IT IS POSSIBLE

Mark 14:36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.

- a. For any parent of a child, **this prayer is the most heart wrenching you can possibly imagine**
- b. "Abba" = "Daddy"... he's reduced to speaking like a child
- c. I can scarcely imagine what this must have done to the heavenly Father, who loved this perfect Son so completely we cannot even imagine how great that love would be

How much would Jesus' prayer rip the heart of the heavenly Father?!

"Daddy, you can do anything. Please take this cup from me."

- d. Jesus is probing the limits of God's sovereignty... what is POSSIBLE
- e. Later Jesus makes it clear that there is NO OTHER WAY:

Matthew 26:53-54 ... how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?

- f. So, once "It is written," and God has made his commitment, and signed it in the blood of millions of sacrificial animals, and thousands of years of promises spoken to his people through the prophets, there is no other way

3. What is the CUP?

- a. In scripture, the CUP frequently represents God's wrath and judgment, as is spoken of the DAMNED in Revelation 14

Revelation 14:10-11 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. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

4. Jesus is staring into the cup of God's wrath and is understandably shrinking back from it in horror

5. The wrath of God is TERRIFYING... God is a CONSUMING FIRE... the wrath of God is his omnipotence focused like a white-hot laser beam for the destruction of his enemies
6. So, Jesus is shrinking back from drinking the cup of God's wrath in our place
7. We could also imagine he's shrinking back from the defilement of being our sin bearer, like having ten tons of raw sewage poured on him
8. In the atonement, Jesus, the only perfectly holy man that has ever lived would "become sin" for us... he would BEAR the defiling sins of all his people from every generation of history... all the filth and corruption, lust and murder, covetousness and greed... poured onto Jesus as our substitute

I. The Submission of Jesus

Mark 14:36 Yet not what I will, but what you will."

1. This is the centerpiece of this magnificent moment
2. This is the greatest act of submission and courage in the history of the human race
3. More on this in a moment

J. The Admonishment of the Sleeping Disciples

Mark 14:37-38 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? ³⁸Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

[Matthew says Jesus said this to all of them, but Mark focuses on Peter]

1. By contrast with Jesus, the weakness of the disciples is exposed
2. Jesus warns of "falling into temptation"... not merely being tempted, but being ensnared and overcome by temptation

3. He says the remedy is to WATCH AND PRAY
4. He marvels that they were not able to keep watch with him for ONE HOUR
5. Peter should have been getting ready for the most intense spiritual struggle of his life; but instead, he is giving in to the weakness of the flesh
6. Jesus' statement is timeless and famous: better known in the KJV:

the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Amazing also the Shepherd's heart of Jesus... breaking off his prayer with the Father to warn his disciples and protect them from sin

K. Jesus' Second Prayer

Mark 14:39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.

Matthew gives more insight:

Matthew 26:42 "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

L. The Disciples' Second Failure

Mark 14:40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Luke 22:45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

M. Jesus' Final Prayer (assumed in Mark, but stated in Matthew)

Matthew 26:44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

N. The End of the Account: Jesus' Arrest is at Hand

Mark 14:41-43 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 betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" ⁴³ Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of

the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

Jesus has effectively faced his final temptation and conquered it. Now he rises from his moment of greatest weakness and goes forth mightily to conquer sin and death with unflinching courage.

Ok, these are the facts of Gethsemane

II. The Mysteries of Gethsemane

A.W. Tozer: If you have never faced mystery in your study of God, I doubt whether you have ever heard a single word from God at all.

A. The Mystery of Jesus' Incarnation: Weakness, Yet Deity

1. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is perhaps the most profound mystery in the Bible
2. How can Jesus be fully God and fully man?
3. Many have questioned this and sought to deny one or the other
4. Dualistic philosophies and theologies (like the gnostics and the docetists) have denied the humanity of Christ... saying he only SEEMED to be human
5. Gethsemane is a powerful antidote to this heresy; Jesus' humanity is on full display here, especially in his WEAKNESS, his frailty, his wavering, fear, shrinking back
6. Jesus' emotional life is real and full and perfect... he fully displays the reality of the title "MAN OF SORROWS"
7. How then can Christ be omnipotent deity, and yet so weak?
8. Many soldiers, like the Romans, faced death with far more courage than Jesus seems to here

Socrates took the cup of hemlock and drained it without flinching

Martin Luther: "No man ever feared death like this man."

9. How can the infinite Creator of all things, visible and invisible, need help from an angel? How can the omnipotent God need STRENGTHENING?
 10. Clearly the answer to these questions is a mystery... but it shows so clearly the humanity of Christ
- B. The Mystery of Jesus' Amazement: Why Does Mark 14:33 Say Jesus was Amazed?

When Christ entered Gethsemane, he knew exactly what was going to happen **FACTUALLY** – he would most certainly die on the cross as a ransom for sinners. But apparently there was still a dimension of “knowing” that was withheld from him by his loving heavenly Father.

There is a shocking word in Mark's gospel, which the KJV accurately translates: *And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be **sore amazed**, and to be very heavy.* (Mark 14:33, KJV) The word “amazed” stops us in our tracks! In some sense Christ was amazed at the cross in Gethsemane. The same word is used of crowd reaction to Jesus' ministry (Mark 9:15) or to the Apostles' healing of the lame beggar (Acts 3:11). ... It is translated in those places “astonished,” and it implies some sense of wonder, as if seeing something they'd never seen before.

But how does that apply to Jesus in Gethsemane?

I believe when Christ began to pray, God revealed to him in an immeasurably more vivid way what it would be like to die on the cross as a substitute for his people, drinking the cup of God's wrath poured full strength for him. The revelation occurred within Christ himself, within his mind, and it shocked him.

This kind of “showing” from the Father to the Son was essential to Jesus knowing what the Father wanted him to do:

John 5:20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

Supernatural spiritual vision is essential to a prophet's role... God often showed his prophets visions of the future. Though the text doesn't say the Father showed the cup to his Son, it would explain Jesus' AMAZEMENT.

So yes, Jesus knew FACTUALLY what it would be like to die on the cross for our sins... but the Father wanted to show him what it would actually be like.

It was akin to the difference between seeing an old black and white photo of the Grand Canyon and seeing a virtual reality display of a helicopter ride through the Grand Canyon. The impression on the soul is much livelier, causing a much more intense reaction. As Christ began to pray, God turned up the intensity in Christ's mind of what it would be like to drink the cup of his wrath, to absorb the lightning bolt of his indignation, to go through hell in our place, as our substitute. And it literally knocked Jesus to the ground and so increased the pressure in his body that blood began to flow from his sweat pores and fell in great drops to the ground (Luke 22:44).

The Father did this, I believe, to give Christ the ability to make a more informed choice as to whether or not he would go through with their plan. He refrained from doing it sooner, because the level of suffering would have been too great for his human body to bear for any great length of time.

In effect, an infinitely mysterious conversation went like this:

God said, "Son... this is what the CUP OF MY WRATH looks like."

Jesus answered: "Father, IS IT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO SAVE MY PEOPLE WITHOUT DRINKING that terrifying cup?"

God: "Son, no... there is NO OTHER WAY... WILL YOU DO IT ANYWAY?"

Now comes the most heroic moment in human history: "**IF IT IS NOT POSSIBLE, MAY YOUR WILL BE DONE.**"

At this moment, Christ put his own will completely under the will of his Father. At this moment, he overturned the wretched choice Adam made in the Garden of Eden, and all the wretched choices God's people have made in their willful sinning since Adam's first sin. Here Christ showed the proper use of human will: to do the will of the Father.

Bow your head in worship, all generations of Christians! This is the single most courageous decision any human being has ever made!

C. The Mystery of Jesus' Prayer: Is His Will Different Than God's?

1. Some have wondered if the wrestling Jesus displayed in Gethsemane, "If it is possible, take this cup away from me" was indicative that his will was somehow against the Cross... as though he and the Father disagreed about this
2. The mystery of Gethsemane is to treat it like the Holy Ground it is... Jesus' will and that of the Father as perfectly one...

John 10:30 I and the Father are one.

3. He wasn't against the Father's will; rather he delighted in it

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

4. I've often felt before that Isaiah 53:10 implies that the Father wrote the sheet music and Jesus played the piece perfectly, with great joy and delight... he made the music the Father had written
FLOURISH and PROSPER
5. It's just that Gethsemane shows the COST of the will of the Lord... it was INFINITELY DIFFICULT

III. The Glories of Gethsemane

A. The Free Will of Jesus Properly On Display

1. Jesus went to the cross of his own free will
2. He was not coerced... he was not forced against his will
3. Here we have the pinnacle example of human choice, of free will
4. He had no sin nature holding him back, no corruption
5. His will was free... and he used it PERFECTLY... namely, to do the will of his Father
6. Because, the Father has a will too... and Jesus taught us that the best use of human will is to find its perfect consummation in the will of God
7. From this point on, Jesus would only be able to escape death on a cross by using supernatural power to kill the soldiers who were arresting him... this he would not do; this was Jesus' last moment of natural freedom, and he gave Himself up

B. The Choice of Jesus and Romans 3:26

1. Some have blasphemously called the idea of substitutionary atonement "heavenly child abuse"... God the Father beating his cowering Son
2. Rather, in Gethsemane, we have God the Father revealing to the Son as fully as he could have ahead of time, what the cross and the atonement would be like... dying under his wrath
3. He gave Jesus the choice, and Jesus made it: NOT MY WILL BUT YOURS BE DONE
4. This removes the charge of injustice against the Father concerning the Son:

Romans 3:25 God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

The one who would remove his wrath by his sacrificial death.

Romans 3:26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

5. One might think that the cross is a display of INJUSTICE... because Jesus was innocent
6. BUT because Jesus went willingly to the cross, it was not unjust for the Father to transfer our guilt to him

C. The Obedience of Jesus vs. the Disobedience of Adam

1. There is a clear parallel between Christ and Adam set up for us in Romans 5:19

Romans 5:19 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

2. This is the perfect act of obedience by which we are SAVED

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Hebrews 5:8-9 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

3. Adam used his free will to sin, to disobey, to turn away from God
4. Jesus made his choice in Gethsemane to submit perfectly to the will of God

D. The Perfect Love of Jesus... First for God, then for His People

1. In Gethsemane, we see Jesus loving God and us sinners more than he loved Himself
2. It was revulsion of the thing itself that caused Jesus to shrink back
3. But it was LOVE... first and foremost, love for God; secondly, love for us, that caused him to deny Himself

[love for God] *John 14:31 ... the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.*

[love for us] *John 15:13-14 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends*

E. The Courage of Jesus: Perfect Love Drove Out Fear

1. Human history is filled with tales of courage
2. Many people have willingly laid down their lives to save others

Romans 5:7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

3. The United States Government gives out the Congressional Medal of Honor as the highest award for members of its armed services... for conspicuous acts of courage on the battlefield... it specifically singles out the virtue of COURAGE UNDER FIRE to save the lives of others
4. But in all the annals of human achievement, I believe the courage of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane and at Calvary is the greatest

IV. The Application of Gethsemane

- A. Come to Christ
- B. Worship Christ for His Courage, Submission, and Love
- C. Christian Contentment:

“Has Christ, crucified and resurrected, done enough for you to be happy today, or does he need to do a little more?”

- D. America a Nation of Choiceaholics... Beware of Idolizing Human Choice

Jesus shows us what choice is for... doing the will of God.

- E. Imitate Jesus' Pattern for the Rest of Your Life

Jesus 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."