

"The Temptation: Friday: 10 PM-3AM "

Mark 14:32-42

The Book of Genesis teaches that one day God commanded Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Issac, whom you love, and go the land of Moriah, and offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." So, Abraham arose with his son, his only son whom he loved, Issac, two servants and loaded a donkey with wood.

They journeyed for three days into the wilderness to the place the Lord had shown him. The servants and the donkey stayed behind, as Abraham and Isaac journeyed the last leg up the hill alone—Isaac carrying the wood on his back, not fully understanding.

They reached the place of the sacrifice at the top of a hill called Moriah and Abraham laid his son on the wood and pulled out his knife to slay him by the command of God.

Then God called out: "Abraham stop!"

Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

Genesis 22:12

And Abraham looked up and in the thicket was a ram, whose horns were caught. Abraham sacrificed him instead on the altar he had built atop Mount Moriah.

More than 1000 years later, on the mountain where Abraham's hand was stayed by God, the Jerusalem Temple was built—where God's people, the Jewish people, believed God lived and the place of sacrifice for the sin of His people.

2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us as much:

Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.

Nearly 2,000 years passed since Abraham traveled into the wilderness of Moriah to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved, at the command of God. One Passover night, just across the valley from the Temple, across from Mount Moriah, another son plead for his life.

But this time no ram would do because God was preparing to provide the perfect sacrifice—once for all.

That Passover night a full moon illuminated the way for Jesus and His eleven remaining disciples as they walked about a mile from the southern part of Jerusalem where the Last Supper was held to the northeast corner of the city where the Garden of Gethsemane lay just outside the massive limestone city wall at the base of the Mount of Olives, just across from the mountain where the

Temple sat. **(insert picture)**

Gethsemane was an olive tree grove and a place where Jesus and his disciples often stayed when they visited Jerusalem. In Gethsemane to this day there is a cave. **(insert cave pic)** Today that cave is a chapel, a holy site. But in Jesus' day that cave housed an olive press and was likely where Jesus and the disciples slept during their stays rather than out in the open.

Gethsemane is the Greek word for olive press. **(insert Gethsemani pic)**

Jesus and His disciples arrived Sunday amid the swelling crowds for Passover—where the population of the city tripled from around 80,000 to a quarter million

And now it was Thursday night. They had stayed there the entire week .

There is a grove of olive trees there to this day--some more than a thousand years old. **(insert olive trees)** The trees, its location outside the city walls, down in a deep valley made it isolated and remote. It was a good place for Jesus to get away from the crowd and avoid the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, Pharisees and Priests who were seeking to arrest Him and take his life.

On just the day before, Wednesday, Judas had met with those leaders and asked them what will you give me to betray to him. And they agreed on thirty pieces of silver.

Under those old, gnarled trees, in the light of the full Passover Moon, Jesus waited for His betrayer to arrive.

The Olive trees were a reminder to Jesus. Throughout God's Word olive trees are symbols of prosperity, power and strength.

Psalm 52:8-9 is one image:

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly.

Gethsemane was a place of testing for Jesus. It represented a midpoint between two stark choices as He held the fate of the world in His soon to be nail-scarred hand.

Gethsemane sits at the base of the Mount of Olives—to the east of Jerusalem. It would have been so very easy for Jesus to walk the mile up to the top of the mountain, cross over to other side, and disappear in the wilderness, making His way back to far away Galilee and leaving behind the life of teacher, healer and wonder-worker. No one would have stopped Him. Jesus could have easily slipped over the Mount of Olives returned the family business in Nazareth—which his family wanted Him to do—raised a family of His own and lived a normal life.

To the east over the Mount of Olives was temptation.

To the west of Gethsemane up the mountain called Moriah sat the Jerusalem Temple—for more than 2,000 years a place of sacrifice. In fact, Gethsemane is the closest point outside the city to view the Temple—sitting only about 1,100 feet away from the temple mount wall. **(insert picture)**

Did Jesus look at the temple, the place where God's people made sacrifice and atoned for their sins, knowing that He would be the sacrifice once and for all, for the sin of all the world?

Did Jesus look at the temple, the place where sat the throne of God, the presence of the Almighty, veiled in splendor of gold and cedar as He the Maker of the cosmos, slept in a cave, with a rock for a pillow and long for the glory He had with His Father?

Did Jesus dwell in the Garden of Gethsemane and look upon that place where God stayed Abraham's hand from sacrificing his son—knowing that He Himself was God's provision—that He God's sacrifice—and hope His Father would provide in some other way?

To the west lay destiny in a tomb.

To the east was temptation.

And in the middle, in Gethsemane, was Jesus' trial

It was cool, moonlit night as Judas approached with a small army of men with swords, spears and torches. Jesus left eight of the disciples behind at the cave and took the three closest to him, Peter, James and John—the same these three who just weeks earlier went with Jesus to the top of a mountain where Moses and Elijah appeared and Jesus was transformed, made glorious right there before their eyes!

The appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.

Luke 9:29

There was very little glorious about Gethsemane. Jesus robes were dirty and dusty from His long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem and Jesus prayed desperately, with his face in the ground.

He asked Peter, James and John to stay with Him and pray—to not leave Him alone.

"My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

Mark 14:34

They did not.

Three times these three fell asleep and Jesus had to wake them. Walking with Jesus is not always exciting. Walking with Jesus is not always what we would immediately call glorious. Walking with Jesus is sometimes about tedium and trial and tests. Sometimes our job as someone walking with Jesus is simply to watch. Watch and wait in expectant hope for Him to act.

Psalms 130:5-7 proclaims:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. Do not fall asleep on Jesus. His glorious love is absolutely steadfast and He will act in His good name.

Waiting on the Lord through trials, through tedium, even through seeking the strength to overcome temptation is part of what mean to follow Jesus—but we can be assured that through it all, God is with us, there is nothing we have experienced to which Jesus cannot relate because the Word of God became flesh.

Gethsemane shows us that.

Mark 14:35-36 tells us:

And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 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."

If there is any other way, Jesus prayed, please Father, do it. We don't know Abraham's prayer for his son Isaac, but we can imagine it sounded the same.

"Isn't there some other way, Lord?"

God answered Abraham's prayer but this time, the heavens were silent.

Matthew tells us that Jesus prayed a second time in the Gethsemane:

"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

Matthew 26:42

Still no response fell from the moonlit night.

Jesus prayed a third time

Luke teaches us:

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling on the ground.

Luke 22:44

There is picture of Jesus praying in Gethsemane that hangs on many a wall. It is a fine picture, a wonderful picture. But it does not convey the urgency and the brokenness of Jesus' prayer. He looks serene and even a little hopeful. That does not align well with the sense of Scripture. **(insert picture)**

Jesus was in agony. Next to Gethsemane today is beautiful church building commemorating Jesus' trial there. On its side is a relief carving just a few feet from the place where tradition says Jesus prayed that night. **(insert picture)**

He is collapsed on a stone, face down, His Divine head buried in His robes, hands clenched, pleading, His body unnaturally curved. This is a man in distress at what He knows is coming, at the pain He must endure—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Remember Mark teaches us that He fell on the ground. Luke tells us that He was in agony. The only other time the word agony, **agonia** in the Greek, is used in the New Testament is to describe people in Hell.

Jesus, plead to be spared—but the definite plan of the Father was already in motion and it had been before the foundation of the world was laid. Before Adam and Eve sinned, before the serpent slithered up the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Lamb of God was slain.

Luke adds some extra, vivid detail—that Jesus' sweat became "like great drops of blood falling to the ground."

Some read this little detail as a simple simile. But I believe Luke, who was a physician, shared this as more than a metaphor.

There is a well-documented, but extremely rare, physical condition called hematidrosis. Many doctors have observed that under extreme, life-threatening stress, the body's fight or flight system kicks into high gear, so much so that the sweat glands rupture and blood leaks through the pores of the skin, forming drops of blood.

Hematidrosis also has the extra effect of making the skin particularly sensitive, tender and fragile. This would soon factor in terribly for Jesus. Luke provides us with a further detail that as Jesus finished praying that an angel came from heaven and stood at His side supporting Him—letting Him know His Father was with Him

This is sometimes how God answers prayer. He does not grant our wish or meet our appeal, but He does meet our need. He does not answer positively, but He positively lets us know that He will be with us.

God sometimes leads us into trials. Following Jesus sometimes leads us into the Valley of the Shadow of Death into distress, even affliction, anguish and agony. And we may plead for release. We may appeal for any other means. God does not promise that His way is easy— but He does promise that He will be with you every step of the way.

25 years after Jesus prayed if there was any other way, a man named Paul shared a similar prayer.

A thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave

me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

I do not know all the mysteries of prayer. I don't fully understand how the passion of our prayer impacts God. However, I do know that every time prayer changes us. So, by all means wrestle with God with until the morning breaks, but know that the morning may find you, once broken, and now made new.

Given new strength, Jesus stood up and went back again to the slumbering Peter, James and John.

And He found them asleep the third and final time.

"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. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Matthew 26:45-46

"See, my betrayer is at hand."

Notice what Jesus does not say here. All four Gospels tell us that a crowd came that night to drag Jesus away, a group of soldiers, Romans and Jewish Temple guards, and others as well carrying torches and lanterns, swords and clubs and other weapons. John's Gospel suggests the mob numbered in the hundreds.

But it was Judas who was on Jesus' mind that night.

"My betrayer is at hand," he said. Jesus does not fear the mob, the pretenders to the throne of power clutching in their hands their crude weapons of war. But He is grieved by even one who falls away, a prodigal son, the wayward sinner. This was His heart that night even as the mob surrounded Him. The shepherd didn't care as much about the 99 as He did the one lost sheep.

We have seen a rash of Judas apologists in the last 40 years. They argue that Judas Iscariot was not so bad, he was just mis-intentioned, mistaken and misunderstood.

A lot of noble motivations for Judas' betrayal have been suggested:

--Judas was trying to force a confrontation between Jesus and the corrupt temple

--Judas was angry Jesus scolded him for saying that the spikenard used to anoint him a couple days earlier was 'wasted.'

--Judas was a member of a radical Jewish sect called the 'Sicarius' which made him impatient with Jesus.

--Judas was deceived, thinking the high priest only wanted to question Jesus

Judas may have had something other than evil intentions at some point. He may have been, at the outset, mistaken or misunderstood. However, the Bible is clear that Judas had evil designs in betraying Jesus. The Bible tells us twice that Satan entered Judas.

Know this. Satan loves to use good intentions devoid Godly wisdom. God has the ability to take something intended for evil and use it for good, but Satan has the ambition to good intentions turn them evil. All he needs is a little sliver of disobedience. All he needs is for us is to not follow God's good plan and instead rely on our own goodness. There is such a thing as good intentioned sin because sin is simply non-conformity with God. And the terrible thing about sin is that sin always takes us further than we want to go.

A white lie becomes a dark deception.

A flirtatious text becomes a lunch you can't share with your wife.

Changing one line to reconcile the ledger becomes fraud.

Sharing a rumor becomes a falsehood that costs a relationship or a job.

As Judas stood there with that mob, carrying their torches and weapons, did he begin to despair at how far this sin had carried him? If Judas had repented, at even this late hour, Jesus would have welcomed him with open arms and rejoiced—like the father welcoming back the Prodigal Son.

But that did not happen.

Even before Jesus was convicted, early that next morning, Judas asked the Chief Priests to take back their thirty pieces of silver. They mocked him and Judas in his despair hung himself. Judas was dead before Jesus.

That night in Gethsemane, a dead man placed a kiss on the cheek of another dead man.

And the mob seized Jesus.

Peter, now fully awake, but not yet quite fully aware, grabbed a sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, a man named Malchus. Jesus picked up the lopped off ear from the ground, cupped it in his hand and against the wound, healing it back in place. Even in the midst of the mob, Jesus could not be moved from His mission of healing humanity. Biblical historians also tell us that people whose names are mentioned in the Gospel—like Malchus--became believers and part of the Christian community because their names were known. They were eyewitnesses to the Gospel. Malchus went from serving the high priest to following Jesus. And God's gospel call began with his ear laying on the ground.

Just as the Father called out to Abraham 17 centuries before telling him to stop, Jesus told Peter, "Stop! God is providing His long- promised sacrifice."

Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than

twelve legions of angels But how then the Scriptures must be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

Matthew 26:52-54

Those Scriptures that Jesus sought to fulfill told of Moriah—of a Father commanded by God do the unthinkable, to sacrifice his only son, on a pile of sticks atop a mountain. But upon Moriah we are told that God Himself will provide the sacrifice.

And He did. His Son, His only Son, died upon a tree for you and me.

If God will give His only Son for our sin, will not, also, with Him, graciously give us all things?

Would He allow you and me to go without?

The mob led Jesus, bound hand and foot to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest—a man whose ambition was exceeded only by his pride.

And Jesus, the Judge of all the world, every woman, man and child was Himself about to be judged by sinful men in a kangaroo court.