



# PRAYER OF AGONY

*SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE*

Luke 22:39–46

78th Message

Jerry Tu

February 1, 2015

In our journey through Luke's Gospel, we have seen many different sides of Jesus, our Lord. We saw a majestic heavenly Jesus in the Transfiguration. We saw a compassionate Jesus healing the sick and resurrecting the dead. We saw the incredible power Jesus has over nature, calming the seas and walking across water. We witnessed his spiritual power over the dark forces, confronting and driving out demons. We have seen the full-divinity of the Son of God: glory, majesty, and power embodied in one person. Today, we come to a passage that depicts Jesus in a different light—in his most human, most fragile, most vulnerable form. It is my prayer that this view of Jesus will cause us to see him more clearly and love him more deeply.

Today, we come to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus in His full humanity faces profound anguish, utter isolation, struggling with the most human desire to avoid pain. And from his prayer of agony, Jesus emerges obedient, resolute and victorious. We get a glimpse into the anguish of Jesus' soul and we understand the weight of our own sins and the magnitude of grace that comes from his sacrifice. Our passage begins in Luke chapter 22, verse 39.

**And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."**

**And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**

**45 And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:39–46 ESV)**

Going to the Mount of Olives and spending time in prayer was customary for Jesus (Luke 21:37). Jesus knew that he needed to spend time in communion with the Father to be strengthened and recharged for each day. If he as the omnipotent Son of God needed this prayer time, how much more must we spend time in the discipline of prayer? Martin Luther once said, "I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer."

The disciples followed Him to "the place", which Matthew and Mark identify as the Garden of Gethsemane. There, Jesus instructs them briefly. He said, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." He repeats these words in verse 46. Why did Jesus exhort them in this way? He is warning the disciples about human nature. He warns them about temptation.

## Temptation

Temptation is an enticement to sin, to disobey God, and to worship anything or anyone other than the Creator. Temptation entices us to live selfish or self-destructive lives. Where does temptation come from? We are tempted by 3 sources: our flesh, the world, and the devil.

The flesh, or our old nature, works against the Spirit and seeks only selfish gain and indulgence. Paul describes this in Gal 5:16–17 "the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit...to keep you from doing the things you want to do." The world entices us to look outward towards worldly pleasures and follow man-made standards. The apostle John describes the influence of the world and of the flesh in 1 John 2:15–16

**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.**

And finally the devil himself uses all the evil powers at his disposal to lure us away from God to worship him instead. So Paul warns us in Eph 6:12

**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**

The disciples—and all of us by extension—face temptation to:

- Deny Jesus, to not associate with Him when it's inconvenient or embarrassing
- Fall away from faith when persecutions come and when times are tough
- Seek glory and riches for self rather than for God
- Back slide into complacency, or, even worse, into sin while least expecting it.

Temptation can appear anywhere, any time. Satan can insidiously slip temptation into every aspect of our lives; even the strongest of Christians can at times be deceived. Temptation by itself is not sin; it's how we respond to temptation that determines whether or not we sin. Do not think that we can handle temptation in our own strength. In the parallel Gethsemane passage in Matthew and Mark, Jesus remarks, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak..." (Matt 26:41, Mark 14:38). But the Holy Spirit is strong! Each Christian is given the gift and power of the Holy Spirit, and by it, we have the power to choose obedience and to resist the temptation of the flesh, world, and the devil. The key to accessing the Spirit and resisting temptation is, as Jesus taught: prayer.

Talk with him, listen to him, be with him! Sense the presence of God in your life; communicate with him especially when you can sense temptation coming. For many in the valley, the times of

temptation come when on a business trip, thousands of miles away from family in a foreign hotel. I know this is when my flesh is weak, and this is when I need to pray the most. So, as often as I can in the hotel room, I read Scripture, write down my thoughts, and spend time with God. Just last week, I was on a business trip to Asia. Each night, I prayed and studied Scripture to prepare to preach on this very passage! Intentionally spending that time with God allowed me to resist the temptations of the TV remote control and internet.

Jesus demonstrates the power of prayer as He enters into the most agonizing struggle of his human life prior to the Cross.

**And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." . . . And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**

There in the Garden of Gethsemane, alone and in anguish, Jesus saw the suffering set before him. He saw the very Scriptures about the Suffering Servant from Isaiah that were to be fulfilled in him. He is tempted to take another way out, to avoid the suffering and death, and he prays honestly and openly to God, "remove this cup from me."

What is this cup? It is the cup of God's wrath to be given to sinners. Isaiah describes it as "the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering" (Isaiah 51:17).

And the apostle John says that the one who denies God and worships the beast, "he will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur" (Rev 14:10).

This cup of God's wrath is more than human suffering, humiliation, and pain. Even excruciating death on the cross does not fully capture the depth of suffering of this cup. This cup represents the most concentrated form of suffering that Jesus could experience, the agony of separation from the Heavenly Father, his soul bereft of God, abandoned by him. Just envisioning this abandonment was so extreme that Jesus sweat blood, a medical condition called hematomidrosis, the actual mingling of sweat and blood in cases of extreme anguish or strain. To understand the depth of this agony and its implication on our lives will be discussed more in depth later in the applications section.

For now, realize that at this moment Jesus was tempted to forgo this path and take the easy way out. To resist this temptation, he comes to the Father in prayer openly, expectantly, with dependence on God. Heaven listens; God answers his prayer. He doesn't deliver Jesus from death, but sends an angel to strengthen Jesus. This strength enabled Jesus to accept the cup and submit to God's will. The conflict raging within Jesus' soul is over as when Jesus conforms his will to the will of the Father and takes the next step bringing him ever closer toward the Cross.

The internal battle being won, the agony having been experienced and defeated, Jesus returns to the disciples who have fallen asleep, physically and emotionally exhausted. Jesus wakes them and repeats the exhortation to pray against entering into temptation. He finally prepares to face his betrayal and arrest as God's plan of redemption for humanity inexorably unfolds. We'll explore that part of the narrative next week.

This concludes the text we have for today. Now I'd like to share some reflections and applications we can take away.

## Reflections on Prayer

The first lesson for us is the importance of prayer. Note that Jesus never taught the disciples how to make an exegetical outline, or prepare a sermon and preach. He taught them how to pray! In this passage, Jesus twice exhorts the disciples to pray. These two exhortations frame Jesus' own two prayers of anguish, which in turn frame God's answer to prayer, strength to persevere. Prayer—when, how, and what to pray for—is our first application.

### When to Pray

First, we should learn to pray without ceasing, so that it becomes as natural as breathing. We should not reserve prayer only for special occasions or mealtimes or for the greater stresses of life. Instead, we are to commune with God as often as possible, from small tasks to large decisions. If we weave prayer into every aspect of our daily life, we may find our day becomes less stressful; our common tasks become less common, our daily meetings become holy appointments.

### Claim our Identity

Jesus begins his prayer by addressing God as "Father". Through his sacrifice on the Cross, we too can claim this relationship as adopted sons and daughters. We can call upon God as "Abba, Father, Daddy" one who loves us more dearly than our earthly fathers ever could. Calling him "Father" is like the password that unlocks our account, allows us access into heaven, giving us the privilege to claim our intimate relationship to the Creator God. So step up with holy boldness into this child relationship with the living, loving heavenly Father. Bold we approach the eternal throne and claim our identity as children of God through Christ our own.

### Attitude

Words of a prayer are important, but equally important is the attitude of the praying heart. In Luke 18 Jesus contrasted the long, wordy, self-important prayer of the Pharisee with the brief but repentant words of the sinful tax-collector. The Pharisee's attitude was self-righteous, proud, making his long prayer worthless. The tax-collector, on the other hand, has a contrite heart which cries out for mercy and pardon. His prayer is short, but his attitude is correct.

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, recorded for us by Luke, is a similarly short, 2-sentence prayer, but it is imbued with the proper attitude of obedience and submission to God. That is the right attitude: we are helpless, but God is sufficient. We are weak, but God will strengthen us. We are broken, but God can redeem. Ray Stedman once said "true prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and an acknowledgement of divine adequacy."

### What do we pray for?

We can and should pray for our personal needs, both physical and spiritual. Our Father does want to hear us pour out our needs before him. However, our personal needs must be laid into the larger, deeper request.

When Jesus requests for the removal of the cup, it is a personal request. And he lays it within a larger, deeper prayer, that "not my will, but yours, be done." Jesus never seeks to bend the Father's will, but rather He seeks, at whatever the cost, to configure his own will to match that of the Father. Then God's answer to Jesus was not to remove the cup, but rather to give him strength to accept this cup obediently. And by that obedience, God's plan of redemption for mankind can be fulfilled.

This is a model for our prayers.

Our personal needs ought to fit like a mosaic into the grander scheme of God's plan, which is that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As we pray for the grander plan, we are strengthened and are able to accept God's answer to our personal requests more readily, especially if his answer seems contrary to what we asked for.

In our smaller lives, we will encounter times of distress: financial loss, broken relationships, dark times of our soul. We will face cups of sorrow, loss, or pain which we don't want to drink. We ask to be exempt from the challenge, to have the cup withdrawn from us. However, let us not stop there, let us not pray exclusively just that the ordeal be removed from us. Instead, let's further pray for strength for ourselves to submit to the will of God and conform all of our desires and our prayers to his will. Perhaps our cup of sorrow may be transformed in the future into a cup of God's blessing, filled to the brim with the wine of the new kingdom.

### Reflections on the Cup

Let's reflect now on the cup of God's wrath that Jesus begged to be removed from him. How can we imagine the meaning of this cup and the suffering it represents? The cup before Jesus was not just the suffering of whipping, already pain beyond anything we can imagine. It was more than the humiliation and disgrace. It was more than the despair as all his followers abandoned him, more than even the excruciating death by asphyxiation on the cross.

The cup of God's wrath is the consequence of sin of all humanity laid upon one single sinless man. It is all the sin across all time, history, and space, concentrated into one singularity laid upon Jesus. With this sin comes the worst possible suffering—complete separation from God the Father, who had turned his back on the Beloved Son and utterly abandoned him. Drinking the cup of God's wrath would banish Jesus from the presence of God. For the only time in all of eternity, since the beginning of time itself, Jesus was to be separated from the Father. Jesus had to face the powers of darkness, even entering into hell itself on his own. By identifying himself with all sin, Jesus felt its very deepest consequences, the awful solitude and unutterable anguish of a soul without hope and forsaken by God (Matt 27:46).

This was the only way. This had been the plan since the fall of humanity in the Garden of Eden, resolved here in the Garden of Gethsemane. In obedience, Jesus was made a sin-offering, and he died in our place, on our account. This suffering, abandonment, and hopelessness was ours to bear, but he took it, so that we are spared. He transformed our cup of God's wrath into the cup of the New Covenant. Grasping the magnitude of this abandonment, isolation, and separation from God gives us an understanding of our indebtedness to him. Who are we to be beneficiaries of his sacrifice?

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain—  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
—“And Can It Be” by Charles Wesley, 1783

It is fitting for us to take holy communion today. As we do so, let's meditate on the magnitude of Jesus' suffering, the awful cup of wrath, and the ultimate sacrifice He endured to redeem us.

During this night before the agony in Gethsemane, Jesus transformed the Passover Meal into a new sacrament: the first Lord's Supper. The broken bread became the symbol of Jesus' broken body, and the wine became the blood of the New Testament, shed for you and me. Let us take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him. Sharing the Lord's Supper turns our focus on Jesus' sacrifice, so it is fitting that we close this service with a doxology for the Lamb of God from Revelation 5:12–13,

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise forever and ever. Amen.

© 2015 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino

