

# Mark - Gethsemane

by J. Glyn Owen

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*Jesus' shuddering in Gethsemane was due to the breaking of the holy wrath of God against the sin of the world, which he bore in his spotless soul.*

**Duration:** 40:51

**Scripture:** Zechariah 13:7, Matthew 26:31-45, Mark 14:32-42

**Topics:** "Gethsemane"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher reflects on the testimony of Helen Rosevir, who endured extreme suffering in the Congo. Despite being mistreated and abused, she found peace in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The preacher emphasizes the importance of not just knowing the facts of the Bible, but also feeling them inwardly and responding to them with faith. The sermon then focuses on the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prepares to bear the sins of the world. The preacher highlights the solemnity and sanctity of this event, as Jesus becomes the sin-bearer for his people, enduring the wrath of God alone.

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## Transcript

Shall we turn prayerfully together for our meditation this morning to Mark chapter 14 and to the passage that was earlier read comprising verses 32 to 42. We are, may I remind friends who may be visiting with us, we are continuing with our studies in the Gospel of Saint Mark and particularly now thinking of some of the precious events, though they may be very excruciating, nevertheless the precious climactic episodes in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ as he comes to bear away the sins of the world. If you have the passage before you, you may find it useful to take a glance now and again at some of the statements here.

We are coming then one step forward toward the sanctum sanctorum, the holy of holies, in which our Lord Jesus Christ is to become, as our fathers so often used to say, the very sin bearer of his people. And I think we need special grace this morning to be able to take in something of the solemnity and something of the sanctity of the occasion that we are going to look at. You remember how the voice from the burning bush said to Moses, take your shoes off, you're treading on holy ground.

I certainly feel that when we come to the garden of Gethsemane we need to take our shoes off and we need to know the cleansing from sin which only the blood of Christ can procure for us. In the enabling of the Holy Spirit that we may think aright and that our attitudes may be right, so that we shall not simply read

these words or know the facts externally, but that we should feel them inwardly and respond to them adequately and live by them as men and women of faith. Now, viewed objectively and superficially, this is a delightful scene.

It's a full moon. The Passover moon is shining brightly. The area was a beautiful area, attractive to the eye, out there on the Mount of Olives.

And the lovely garden of Gethsemane was somehow or rather an attraction for all kinds of people who walked and mingled among the groves in quiet meditation, sometimes in song, or just enjoying the beauty of the general scenery. But there is something quite different about the atmosphere on this particular occasion. Everything about the words, the actions, and attitudes of our Lord here only to heighten the sense of our being summoned to witness something that is rarefied, something that is unique, something that we shall never meet again in this world.

There never was another Gethsemane. There never will be another Gethsemane. It is sheer ignorance on our part to speak of anything that we may have to suffer in terms of its being our Gethsemane.

Gethsemane has no duplicate, no repetition. There was only one, as there was only one Calvary. Now Jesus was familiar with the place.

He had often resorted thither to pray along with his disciples, and therefore you would imagine him becoming quite relaxed and at ease. The world has gone to sleep. The folk in Jerusalem have put out the candles.

Everybody, it would seem, is asleep apart from Jesus and his disciples. Coming out of the upper room after singing that great Hallel hymn from the Psalms, he has then offered the great high priestly prayer of John 17. He has prayed for Peter, and then the affairs that we were considering last Lord's Day morning, and now we are crossing into Gethsemane proper.

But Jesus is most uncomfortable, and he doesn't enter very far into Gethsemane before he tells his disciples that there is something radically wrong. And this is the first thing we look at, the visible commotion with which the scene began. Listen to these words again.

They came to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, sit here while I pray. He took Peter, James, and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. My soul, he said, is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch. Now you notice there is something going on there which is right out of the ordinary. Something which is not met anywhere else in the gospel narratives.

So we are dealing with something which is wholly unique. Notice in the first place that our Lord here seemed to desire the aid of his disciples. This in itself is something very strange.

I don't know whether you have noticed as you've read the Gospels through, there are very few favors that Jesus ever asked of his disciples. Not that he was too proud to receive something. He asked the woman at Sychar's well for a drink of water.

And she wasn't the type of character that you would normally approach and ask for anything, but he did that. It isn't that he was too proud to ask. Some people are.

But he very rarely asked for anything to comfort himself or bring solace to himself. But here, when he has divided the disciples into two groups, left eight of them very near the entrance into the garden, he takes three of them along with him. And the first thing apparently, the first thing he says to them is, or rather they saw it before he spoke, he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

Before he said anything, he began to be deeply distressed and troubled so that they saw something. This is not a day for grammatical excursions, and I shall abstain from that. Nevertheless, it would be wrong of me not to say that those two words are very, very strong.

The word which is translated in the NIV, he began to be deeply distressed, is sometimes translated, filled with horror. There's a terrifying fear that has gripped the fearless Son of God and overwhelmed him with a sudden and totally uncommon dread, something altogether unseen in his life. Jesus had been afraid of no one, afraid of nothing, by day or by night.

But there is a fear, there is a dread that now grips his soul. The second word translated by the NIV, and troubled, has been traced by some scholars to a root meaning to be away from home. This is by no means certain whether it means that.

But if that suggestion is accurate, then we have linked together here the two ideas of a most disturbing dread within, and a sense of being away from anybody that can sympathize, of being on a desert island alone, and there is no one else to whom you can turn. There is no one. The fact of the matter is, of course, that Jesus is at this point entering into a period of inexpressible loneliness, and this is the way into the heart of what he's going to do for men and women on the cross.

Loneliness. Now you have noticed that the whole story of the gospel is the story of Jesus, and I put it at its lowest, making friends, making followers. Wherever he went, his deeds, his actions, his attitudes, his spirit, what he proclaimed and what he was, gathered men around him.

But here the movement is in the opposite direction. He's becoming lonely. A way back at the end of John chapter 6, you saw a vast movement of the crowd away from him.

Some of them gathered again. But then later there is a dispersal, and recently you remember what has happened. Judas has already left the little group of disciples, and he is now striking a deal with the Pharisees and the leaders to betray him for 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus has already announced, as we saw last Lord's Day morning, that the day of the fulfillment of the prophecy has arrived. I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. Each one will go to his own place, or to his own thing, or to his own people, and they will be scattered literally like a crowd of frightened sheep.

And among those that will be scattered will be Simon Peter, who pledged that he would die rather than run away from him. So far they've not been scattered. They're with him physically, but spiritually they're not on the same wavelength.

It is as if he is in one world, they are in another world. Physically they're there with him. There are the eight over there, here are the three here, but he even has to go further forward than the three in the garden.

They can't join in this prayer. They can't enter into this intercession. He has to be alone.

And though this doesn't come exactly into our theme this morning, that loneliness, that outer darkness, that outer pit and experience of loneliness will not have been reached until we hear the cry rung from his soul upon the cross, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And so Jesus desired the companionship of his friends. He wanted them near him. And this shows that there is something different from the usual.

Jesus not only desired the company and aid of his disciples, but he declares to them his inner mind and his inner need. Look at the words that follow, My soul, he says, is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch.

Now, my friends, I don't pretend to be able to expound the depths of these words. The more I have read and studied of this subject, the more do I feel incapable of dealing with them. What really is our Lord saying here? This is so different from our Lord's entire habit up to this point of keeping his own troubles, if he had any, of his own problems to himself and going apart to his heavenly Father on the slope of a mountain or getting up early in the morning and going out, he kept his own troubles between himself and his Father.

He never told his disciples of any problems. But now he tells them, My soul, he says, is overwhelmed with sorrow, I'm at the point of death. Now, what does he mean? There are those who have interpreted Hebrews 5, a passage in Hebrews 5, which says that our Lord Jesus Christ prayed when he was on the point of death and he was heard in that he feared.

Who with strong cryings and tears cried and was heard in that he suffered. Now, there are those who believe that what happened here was this. Just as Satan had tried other ways to keep Jesus from going to the cross to do his work, so here in Gethsemane, there came such a physical pressure upon him that he felt literally at the point of physical death.

Satan was concerned to terminate his physical life before he got to the place where he would literally and specifically bear the sins of men and their judgment and bear them away. I don't know whether that's right. It might very well be true, not everybody agrees with it, but he was heard in that he suffered.

And this makes me believe it might be the answer to this, to give us the understanding of this passage. He felt the pressure to such an extent that he was bowed down. He was almost dying.

He was almost gasping his last breath, but he was heard in that he feared. In that case, the cup was not what he was going to drink on the cross itself, but the cup was this. It was to die a death which was short of the atoning death he had come to die on the cross.

To die prematurely without doing the work that his father gave him to do in the way the father ordained that he should do it. Now, I don't know, but that is one explanation. However, we shall look at the most generally accepted.

Questions have often been asked concerning this overwhelming dread that crept over our Savior's soul. And it has often been brought up against Christian peoples, especially on mission fields, as to why Jesus, whom we exalt to be God and man, so people say to us, how is it that he is afraid of death? Apparently. And then people point out, people who know the history of the church, for example, that many Christians have risen far higher in their fearlessness and in their hope than Jesus was at this particular point in time.

They refer, for example, to the frail women, frail for many reasons, but frail women who queued up outside the amphitheater in Rome and begged the privilege of being thrown to the lions in the name of Jesus because they were sure of a better resurrection. Or the equally strong women in faith, the frail in body, who delighted to be kindled as lights in Nero's garden and burnt as torches in the darkness and provided entertainment for his majesty. And they queued for it.

They asked for it. They begged for it for the honor of their Lord. Well, it's such a contrast to Jesus.

People very often bring the pagan Plato here, Socrates, as described by Plato in his Phaedo. You remember having been condemned by the council on the grounds that he taught atheism to the youth of Athens. He was condemned to drink the fatal potion of hemlock.

And as the cup was being brought and he knew that it was to be fatal, what is the philosopher doing? Wringing his hands? Pining in a corner? Turning his back upon life? Arguing against his enemies? Not at all. He's got a group of young men around him, and you know, he's talking to them about the immortality of the soul. Perfectly calm, perfectly fearless.

And he explains to them that if death is coming his way, there is nothing to worry about because the soul and the body, according to his teaching, are so utterly distinct. And when the soul gets out of the body, it's leaving a prison and it's coming to its own. And so therefore, says Plato, there's nothing to worry about.

Now, you see, to the eyes of some that's far, far superior to the spirit that we have here, of dread and commotion, and Jesus is so pressured, he would even accept some measure of alleviation from his disciples. Can I quote one other illustration, because some of you know it, and I think others of you need to know it. Not all that long ago, it's within the last twelve months, a young lady stood in this pulpit, and she bore testimony.

But she didn't say the half. You know, the people that have most to say, don't always say what they have to say. Blessed is the man who's got more to say than he has ever said.

Knowing Helen Rosevear rather intimately, I listened to see what she was going to say. And I noticed that dear girl did nothing that night here but exalt her, blessed Lord Jesus Christ. But you know, there were months when Helen Rosevear was just a pulp of raw flesh in the Congo.

And do you know that about a hundred and twenty men used her raw body with a skin torn off on parts of her trunk as a football? And they kicked her from place to place, until as she says, into her soul came the peace of God that passes all understanding, and enabled her to see that she was sharing the fellowship of her Lord. Men and women in every age have been able to overcome suffering, overcome death, and yet here is Jesus staggering. Why? Going a little further, he fell to the ground and he prayed, if possible, Abba, Father, he says, everything is possible to you.

Take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. So if it be possible that the hour might pass, let it pass. What was there in that hour? What was there in our Lord's death? Was there some ingredient in his cup that was not in the cup of Socrates? Could there be that there was some ingredient in his cup that was not in the cup of Helen Rosevear? Now you see, this is where we come to the heart of the matter.

The reason why our Lord shudders and quivers, and soon will be sweating great drops of blood that will mark the ground of dark Gethsemane, and will be visible even in the light of the moon. The reason is this, there was an ingredient in his death that has never been known in the death of any other human up until

that moment, and he died in order that you and I should not have that ingredient. What is that ingredient? Now here I must confine myself.

There are many ingredients here, really. There is one which is outstanding, but we can grade them in a sense, and we can see so many things that were painful to him. For example, I personally believe, whether you may agree with this or not, we differ on some things, but I personally believe that our Lord Jesus shuddered from exposing the sins of his disciples, or even his enemies.

Have you noticed that our Lord Jesus Christ never really washed dirty linen in public? Have you noticed that? When he came out from Zacchaeus' home, and my Zacchaeus had some things to confess, and he must have done it, because salvation came into his house, and he was forgiven, and he was a new man. You never find Jesus coming to rake up the pus, and to show it to everybody, and say, this is what this man was. None of that.

Do you remember when they brought that dear woman into the temple, and she had been caught in the very act of adultery, and there she was in the very house of God, before the gaping eyes of a whole crowd of menfolk, who were ready to stone her there and then? Do you remember what Jesus did? Oh, the sweetness of it, the solemnity of it. He didn't set an eye on her. He looked on the ground.

He wouldn't embarrass the woman unduly. Oh, he would. Oh, he is the judge.

Oh, it is appointed that one day the secrets of men must come out, and they will be judged before the bar, but in the proper time. And if he were to expose her sin there and then, it would be in the privacy of a relationship with himself. But he took no delight in exposing the sins of men.

And I believe that there was something in the Savior's soul at this time, which dreaded the thought, if he's going on, you see, if he's going on, then Judas is going to be exposed. Peter is going to be exposed. The eleven are going to be exposed.

They're going to run away like a frightened sheep, despite everything they've said to the contrary. Everybody's going to be exposed. And not only his friends, but his foes.

And I believe that Jesus shuddered from that, because he was the perfect friend in the first place. You know, you and I could do with a little bit of that spirit. A dread to expose anybody else's sin, save in prayer before the throne of God.

But there's something here which is infinitely more than that, and let me come to it, because time does not permit expansion this morning. The ingredient in our Lord's cup, of course, is this, that he was bearing the sin of the world. And not only was he bearing the sin of the world, that only tells us the half.

I sometimes hear some who pretend to be very accurate theologically confining it to that. My friend, it isn't that Jesus simply bore the sin of the world. He did that.

But I tell you, there's something more than that here. You say, what can there be more than that? This, the vials of the holy wrath of God, against the sin of the world, were broken upon his spotless soul, so that he bore the judgment of sin. He tread the winepress of the wrath of God alone.

The metaphor is different, but the underlying truth is the same. He was made, says the apostle Paul, he was made sin for us who knew no sin, in order that we should be made the righteousness of God in him.

Or better still, in his writing to the Galatians, he became a curse for us.

It is cursed, it is written, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. And the wages of sin is death, the death of the curse. He took the curse, he took the death that is the curse of my sin and your sin, he took it there in his own body on the tree.

That was the ingredient. And this is what made him shudder. And well might it.

And my friend, if you could only see what your sin would lead to apart from Jesus Christ, you'd shudder in your seat this morning. Men and women, I speak to you as man to man. If you only knew the reality and the gravity and the heinousness of your sin before God, and what it must inevitably lead to apart from the cross of Christ, you'd shake in your seat.

And the only reason that you and I are so unconcerned is that sin has desensitized us. There's a whole aspect of our being that's not functioning. We are not sensitive to the realities of sin and the curse and judgment of God.

And therefore we get away with it and we have comparative ease of conscience. But you see, he was sensitive to the wrath of God, as sensitive as to the love of God. And aware of what sin was and sin meant, he said, let this cup pass from me.

But now I can't let you go without noticing this. It would be doing a great injustice to our Lord if we did not notice the terms of his prayers. Many have done that.

They've taken one little thread out of this garden episode and they've used it as if nothing else were found here. Don't you do that. I want you to notice how Jesus comes, and even though he's feeling away from home, whatever that meant, he turns up, he turns his face upward and his eyes upward and he says, Abba, Father.

Father. He was still sensitive to the fact that God was his Father and he was his Father's son. And if there was no one around him with whom he could talk and converse and who would understand his need and his experience, he could turn to his Father.

Heavenly Father, Abba, Father, my Father, he says. He doesn't stop there. His view of God in the garden of Gethsemane is something that causes the angels to rejoice, I believe.

The first thing he says about God as Father is, everything is possible for you. God is still almighty. God is still sovereign.

God is still able to do what pleases him. And then he addresses his plea. Take this cup from me.

And then comes out this other element. Yet not what I will, but what you desire or plan or purpose. In other words, God is still the wise God into whose hands he can put the choice.

Jesus says, I shudder from whatever is ahead of me. And if it is possible at all, he says to his holy, heavenly Father, sovereign and wise, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me and later let this night, let this hour pass from me. But you and I know that the answer to that question was no.

Jesus never prayed three times for the same thing and found the answer to be negative, save in Gethsemane. The wise God to whom he prayed, the Father to whom he prayed, the sovereign God to

whom he prayed, said in effect to his well-beloved son, whom he was later to raise from the dead, my son, there is no other way. You know, it's so sad when men and women in our world are still trying to find another way to get rid of their sins.

When God has said so clearly, there is no other way. No other way. No other way.

His son cannot turn back or avoid this cup. He must drink it all if the salvation of the lost is going to be procured. And so Jesus turns to his disciples and he says, right, he says, he returned to them, found them sleeping and spoke to them, but finally he comes to them and says, now look, let us rise, be gone.

The hour has arrived. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners and the one who is betraying me is at hand. Come, let us be gone.

We're ready. The time is over. The mood changes from one of despondency and a brokenness of heart into one of victory, ready for battle.

And he calls them, as it were, with a sound of rebellion, says, men, he says, come on, wake up. You've had enough sleep now. He was ready.

They, of course, would have been far more ready had they prayed and not slept, just as we would be far more ready for some of our problems if we slept a little less and prayed a little more. But our Lord goes forth and there on Calvary's cross he ultimately drinks the cup to the very dregs. As one of the old saints of the fifteenth, sixteenth century said, there on Calvary's cross he brought all the sins of the past and of the future upon his spotless soul and received the flame of Jehovah's holy indignation that burnt them all to a cinder.

And the fumes were such as to cause the darkness out of which he cried, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? He looked back to the sins of Adam and the sins of Abel and the sins of Cain and the sins of the children of Israel and the sins of the judges and the sins of the kings and the sins of the people of the Old Testament. And he looked forward to the end of time and saw the unborn uncommitted sins of his people and he gathered them all there upon his strong arms and shoulders on Calvary's cross and he died for them. And behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

What then as far as we are concerned? We come to the table this morning and we have a cup. The contents of the cup speak to us of what Jesus did the night he took the cup. He shed his blood.

He bore our curse. He died our death. We come as believers and we confess him as our Savior and we trust him as our Lord and looking around at one another we acknowledge every other believer as brother and sister in the faith.

Thus this morning may the Lord give us grace honorably, faithfully, with a whole heart, with an understanding mind to eat of the bread speaking of his broken body, to drink of the cup speaking of his outshed blood and to do so worthily. Let us pray. Shall we spend a moment quietly before God remembering words that were written by someone many years ago concerning this awesome subject.

Wake my soul, he says, the hour is late. Hour of darkness and of fate. Jesus to the garden goes, there to taste sin's bitter woes.

Wake my soul, for it is for thee Jesus seeks Gethsemane. See the Savior prostrate now, sweat of blood upon his brow. Hear my soul, the piercing cry cleaving thrice the silent sky.

Sorer anguish cannot be than thy pains, Gethsemane. Gaze, my soul, with wonder gaze, tis thy Savior weeps and prays, treads the winepress all alone, makes us sharers of his throne, boundless love and all for me, wonderful Gethsemane. Spirit of God, grant us now to commune with you who gave your only Son and with the blessed Son of your love who gave himself and with the Holy Spirit who gave him to us and brought us back to him so that our fellowship may be with the Father and with the Son by the Spirit.

And as we thus commune with you, may all barriers between us and our fellows crumble to ashes of forgetfulness and our peace with heaven be matched by our peace of heart toward our brethren. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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