

Our Fleshly Weakness (Mark 14:32-42)

He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:3)

Those are the words of the prophet Isaiah describing our Lord as a man of sorrows. Jesus was well-acquainted with the grief of human existence. He experienced everything we experience.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

I find it incredibly poignant that when Jesus encountered the grief of Lazarus' friends and family, John writes: *Jesus wept. (John 11:35)* And as He came to the tomb where they had buried His friend, He groaned within Himself. He experienced profound anguish, despite the fact that He knew Lazarus would emerge alive from that grave.

Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and we humans cannot possibly comprehend the depth of His grief because in our foolish rebellion, we hide our faces from Him.

In anticipation of Resurrection Sunday, for a number of weeks, we have been looking at snapshots of what is called Passion Week. We've looked at some of the things Jesus did and said during the week leading up to the cross. This morning, we come to Gethsemane. Gethsemane was a garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It was a large place, a place where Jesus often took His disciples. Judas, the betrayer, knew Jesus would be there.

It is Thursday night, maybe even after midnight on Friday morning. The Last Supper has taken place. Jesus has given his final discourse to His disciples. He has prayed the High Priestly prayer we find in John chapter 17. And now, there is nothing to be done except to look forward to His arrest. Jesus would spend this time in prayer.

This week as I studied for this sermon, I found myself deeply moved. I cannot begin to fathom the anguish Jesus experienced in the garden as He prayed. No other human being has experienced such anguish and the only thing worse than this would be having God the Father pour out His wrath on Jesus as He hung on the cross. The anticipation of what He was to face had to be beyond horrible. Luke tells us that He prayed so hard He sweat drops of blood. He was under so much stress that capillaries under His skin burst. Blood, mingled with sweat ran down his face, soaked His clothing.

Only God the Son could survive something like that and The Father had to send an angel to minister to Him in His anguish.

He went through all He went through because our flesh is weak. We simply do not have it in ourselves to resist the power of evil. We cannot stand up to Satan on our own. We cannot even resist the corruption of our own flesh. We are incapable of righteousness. We cannot atone for our own sin, so Jesus did it for us.

Read Mark 14:32-42

As they came to the garden, Jesus told all the disciples to wait while He prayed, but He took three of them, Peter, James and John, with Him as He made His way deeper into

the garden. Why did He do that? I know a lot of folks believe that Jesus wanted companionship while He prayed. I don't know about that. He left them behind in the midst of the garden and went a little farther. Luke says it was about a stone's throw. How far can you throw a rock? If you want companionship, you're not going to drift that far away from your friends.

Jesus wanted to pray alone. He needed to pray alone, but He wanted these three to witness what was happening. They certainly were among the closest of His disciples. Peter was the acknowledged leader of the band. James and Mark were the Sons of Thunder. They are the ones who wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village and they were presumptuous enough to try to finagle seats of honor – one at Jesus' left hand and one at Jesus right – after the kingdom would be established. But I think Jesus took them because they needed to learn a valuable lesson. It is a lesson for us as well.

Right before Jesus retired to pray, He told the disciples something they must have found shocking.

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I WILL STRIKE THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP WILL BE SCATTERED.'" (Mark 14:27)

Do you remember how the disciples responded? "No, not me," they cried.

Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble." (Matthew 26:33)

Jesus said Pete, Pete, you're going to deny even knowing me three times before the rooster wakes everyone up tomorrow morning.

Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And so said all the disciples. (Matthew 26:35)

Do you think they were lying about that? No, they really believed what they said. They loved Jesus. They were loyal to Him but they did not have it in themselves to follow Jesus to the cross. None of us do.

It was a lesson they needed to learn. It is a lesson we need to learn, so Jesus took Peter, James and John deeper into the garden.

Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. (Mark 14:34-35)

Exceedingly sorrowful – *perilupos* (περίλυπος) in the Greek – literally, grieved all around. It is a word used to describe the absolute depths of grief and sorrow. I've already described, using Luke's words, how intense this time of prayer was. He was on His face, according to Matthew. The stress was making Him bleed.

I read a commentator this week who implied that this event revealed cowardice of Jesus' humanity. How dare he! He has no clue what our Lord went through in the garden. Neither do I and neither do you. Jesus lived the only perfectly sinless human life.

We all sin;

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (Romans 3:23)

And the wages of our sin is death ... (Romans 6:23) Eternal death in the Lake of Fire. The penalty for even the most trivial of your sins is an eternity of suffering. Jesus knew He was going to bear that penalty Himself.

The righteous wrath of God that is owed to me is terrifying.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:31)

Multiply that by every Christian who ever lived and will ever live. Jesus was preparing to accept the wrath reserved for billions of sinners – billions of eternities in hell focused on those few hours of the cross. No wonder He fell on His face to pray!

And He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." (Mark 14:36)

That prayer is many things, but it certainly is not cowardly. Nobody in their right mind would look forward to bearing the wrath of Almighty God. Do you think Jesus was looking forward to taking my sin upon Himself? He certainly did not want to go through what He knew He had to go through so He prayed that He might be spared. But at the end of His prayer came submission. He would submit to the Father's will. He would be perfectly obedient and in fact, from His divine nature, it was His will too. Jesus would voluntarily lay down His life.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Then He came and found them sleeping, (Mark 14:37a)

While Jesus was going through His agony, Peter, James and John had fallen asleep. Okay, it's not surprising that they were exhausted. It had been a long day. It had been an emotional, stressful day. Jesus told them He was going to be killed. I know that revelation brought some serious sorrow. I don't think Jesus was at all surprised at their slumber.

Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:37-38)

There, I believe, is the lesson He wanted his friends to learn. Your spirit might be willing, but you are still lugging that body of death around with you. Your flesh is weak. No matter how much you want to, you cannot remain faithful to Jesus Christ in your own power. You will yield to the temptation of the flesh. You will fail. So watch and pray. Keep watching. Keep praying. It is your only chance. You need to engage God the Holy Spirit if you are to walk worthy of your Lord.

Can you imagine how Peter must have felt? From the bold statement: *"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"* To the Bitter reality: *Could you not watch one hour?* I can imagine how Peter felt. I fail all the time but I'm actually in pretty good company. Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans?

I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:21-24)

Who will deliver us from our bodies of death? Paul answers his question:

I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:25)

Jesus will deliver you from your body of death. Jesus understands your weakness and He loves you anyway. Jesus will deliver you from your fleshly weakness. All you have to do is trust Him. Confess Him as Lord of your life indeed. Remember that He was raised from the dead. That's what saves you: your faith given by the grace of God. Embrace your faith in Jesus! Watch and pray!

Jesus wasn't finished praying.

Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. (Mark 14:39-40)

I really feel badly for those guys. How could they answer Jesus? Their failure was obvious. It could not have been good for their self-esteem. Sometimes, we need to be reminded of just how helpless we are.

But Jesus triumphed through His time of prayer.

Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. (Mark 14:41)

Judas had arrived. He brought with him a huge cohort of armed men. Some scholars think it could have been as many as 1000 Temple guards. They were accompanied by the chief priests, scribes and elders, all of them rolling through the gates of Gethsemane. I want you to notice that there was no attempt to escape. Jesus didn't try to sneak out the back gate.

Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." (Mark 14:42)

What Jesus meant was "Let's go meet them." In John's account, we see something really remarkable.

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:4-6)

This massive cohort of armed men cowered at the sight of the Son of Man. They fell down backwards. They should have fallen forward in humble worship.

Jesus had to practically beg to be arrested.

Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none." (John 18:7-9)

Of course Peter found a bit of misplaced courage and whacked off Malchus' ear. By the way, I don't think he was going for the ear. You probably shouldn't let a fisherman handle the sword. But the point is, Jesus wrestled in anguish with His flesh, shrinking

from the horrible prospect of becoming sin for us, yet strengthened by the Spirit, He stepped boldly. Jesus volunteered to go to the cross!

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." (John 10:14-18)

He did so because He loves you. He does not want you to endure the punishment for your sins. How can you possibly reject a salvation so rich and free? Jesus is the only answer to our fleshly weakness.