

Luke 22:39-46 3-28-10

BLOOD, SWEAT AND PRAYERS

(Luke 22) We are one week away from our great celebration of the Lord's resurrection, and it should be very good. But today we look at one of the narratives from that fateful week just preceding the death and rising of our Lord. 39-46

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. 40 When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." 41 And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, 42 saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." 43 Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. 45 When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, 46 and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

What we learn here of the night of Christ's betrayal is that after they had taken the Passover together, Jesus and the disciples went out to what is called here the Mount of Olives. Matthew and Mark tell us more specifically that they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Some of our number were just there, outside Jerusalem, and it is a very special place. Apparently, it was the custom of Jesus to go there during the evenings He spent near Jerusalem, very likely I think, in order to pray. Luke tells us that at some point Jesus instructed the disciples to stop and pray while He went on further to pray by Himself. Luke's account here does not give us certain facts granted by the other gospel writers. For example, we read elsewhere that it was not once but three times that Jesus came back to his disciples to find them sleeping. We also know from Mark that the length of Jesus' prayer was about one hour since Jesus rebuked his drowsy disciples by saying, "Could you not keep watch for one hour?" And furthermore, we find in Matthew and in Mark direct statements from Jesus about the torment of his soul at this point in the evening. Both of those gospels tell us that Jesus said, "*My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death.*" That is a pretty heavy remark. The disciples obviously knew that something very serious was about to happen and they were entering into the sorrow of their Master. It was at that point that Jesus told them to pray, while He went off to pray as well.

Question: what do you do when pressures mount up on you? What do you do when life seems more than you can handle? Are you like Cathy in the comic strip who said that there is no problem so big that a hot-fudge sundae won't help? Some people deal with their problems by increasing their

indulgence which, of course, also increases the problem doesn't it? Other folks tend to deal with their problems by greater hustle. This comes from the attitude that I can overcome anything if I try hard enough. This approach as well can lead to disaster. Now look at Jesus! Look at what He did at the point of His greatest crisis. He went off to meet with His Father in prayer, and he exhorted his followers to do the same. It was in prayer that He found comfort, it was in prayer that He found strength, it was in prayer that He found direction. And if you aren't retreating to pray its no wonder you are anxious and weak and confused. If Jesus had to pray to cope - who are you that you can do without it? Here is Jesus, in the shadow of the cross, making what is arguably the greatest decision ever made by a man and he wrestled thru it, not in a smoke filled room but in tear-filled solitude with His Father. In private prayer and wrestlings of spirit -this is where the greatest battles are fought. This is where the devil knows his greatest defeats.

So, Jesus told his disciples to pray 40c "*Pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" And in 46 "*Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation.*" One writer noted that Jesus said to **rise** and pray. If you are having trouble staying awake you may find it helpful to stand as you pray which would make falling asleep a little more dangerous but a lot more difficult for most of us. I prefer prayer-walking to prayer-standing but the point is the same. The main thing I would have you notice about the exhortations of Jesus in our text is what He tells His men to pray for. Pray that you not enter temptation. This is a prayer of preparation which is always wise. Jesus saw temptation and trouble ahead and so warned them to stay alert in prayer. The wise Christian makes a habit of this. He looks down the road, takes notice of the places and times when Satan can get at him and he prepares in secret petition. I try to do this but oh how I need to do it more and my guess is that you do too. Be alert to what temptations are likely to come in a given day or week and prepare with prayer. Will today bring temptations for gluttony? Will it bring temptations for laziness, or worry, or lust, or angry words, or boasting? When I go on family trips I pray for patience. When I go to Presbytery meetings I pray for a humble heart, when I go to work on Monday I pray for diligence. That is the kind of thing Jesus would have us to do. Prepare with prayer to deal with what Satan is likely to bring your way.

In my studies I was intrigued by a point made by J.C. Ryle in his expository thoughts on the gospels. Ryle made a distinction between encountering temptation and entering into it, the latter of which would involve yielding to the temptation in some degree. Ryle got me thinking and I

concluded that he was right. Encountering temptation seems to be inevitable. Jesus assumed that Satan was coming after the disciples. He knew they would encounter temptation so their prayer was to be firm not to enter it, not to give way to it. You see that? The point can still be made that you are to avoid temptation, don't go looking for trouble, but still you must be ready when it comes looking for you and the primary way to prepare is with prayer. So Jesus tells us and so He exemplifies. James Montgomery in one of his hymns writes, *“Go to dark Gethsemane, ye that feel the tempter’s power. Your Redeemer’s conflict see. Watch with Him one bitter hour. Turn not from His griefs away. Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.”*

And now we shall do just that as we turn our attention for the remainder of the morning to the praying of our Lord; and I must share with you as I get into it what a rich and blessed time I had this week meditating on this. When we look into what happened that night in Gethsemane I must warn you that we approach holy ground. This is heavy, mind-boggling stuff, immense in weight and significance. All week long as I prepared I felt a sense of awe and wonder at what I was reading. I desire that I might speak words worthy of this text and not obstruct for you any of its glory but draw you into what is recorded here for our benefit. There are four things that marked the praying of Jesus that I would like you to seriously ponder. The first of those marks is anguish, serious, deep, holy but wrenching anguish. Jesus said, "I am deeply grieved to the point of death." And then we read this incredible statement in 44 *And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.* Commentators disagree as to the meaning of the blood reference. Some argue that under intense strain subcutaneous capillaries can burst and literally mingle blood with your perspiration. Maybe that is what happened here. Others would say that the sweat of Jesus was so profuse that it seemed like blood flowing off his body. Others would say that this is just an expression describing the intensity of His feelings and had nothing to do with the physical manifestations. But whatever exactly happened, this point can't be lost on us - this description by Luke is meant to dramatize the intensity of His agony of soul. We speak of nervous people sweating bullets, but Luke says Jesus was under such strain that He was sweating blood.

For anyone who has read a description of the horrors of Roman crucifixion it is not hard to understand that Jesus would be uptight. A sinful nature is not needed to fear dying like that and to revolt against such an experience. How many of you have read Foxe's Book of Martyrs? That book

gives story after story of the most horrible pains endured by believers throughout the ages, and I found myself unable to read more than a few pages at a time. I would get squeamish thinking about that stuff. So you can relate to a little trepidation in the shadow of the cross but I'm convinced that alone cannot explain what we read of here. It does not explain grieving unto death, it does not explain sweating blood, not Jesus. If His death was just the death of a martyr, even a death by crucifixion this would make no sense. Lesser men than Jesus have gone to deaths just as cruel with a song on their lips, and lightness of soul. To understand what's happening with Jesus you have to take a look into His cup. 42 *"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."* "This cup" is clearly a metaphor for his impending suffering. It refers especially to the infliction of punishment associated with the wrath of God. In Ezekiel for instance when speaking of the wrath to come on Judah the prophet says 23:32-34a. *Thus says the Lord God, 'You will drink your sister's cup, Which is deep and wide. You will be laughed at and held in derision; It contains much. 33 'You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, The cup of horror and desolation, The cup of your sister Samaria 34 'You will drink it and drain it. Then you will gnaw its fragments And tear your breasts; for I have spoken,' declares the Lord God.* Jeremiah 25:15 *For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. God speaks of the cup of the wine of wrath. Isaiah 51:17ab Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk from the Lord's hand the cup of His anger.* This is the cup that Jesus was to drink as He took upon Himself all the righteous fury of God against sin. The cup into which Jesus looked on this fateful night was filled with the sights of hell itself. Psalm 11:6 *Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.* And that was the cup of Jesus as well because He was to become the sin-bearer. The cup which he was to drink was full of murder and adultery and lies and blasphemies. And it was full of God's wrath against those sins. What was happening in the garden was that Jesus looked more fully than ever at his role as the lamb. He pondered what it would mean to bear God's judgment on our sin. And this is what horrified Him. His cup was more than just physical pain. It was sin itself. He who knew no sin would become sin for us. As a result his cup was also full of hell and divine abandonment. You will recall how Jesus said on the cross, "My God, my God why has thou forsaken Me?" Jesus was literally forsaken by His holy Father because at that moment He was the greatest sinner who ever lived. He was my

substitute, your substitute, bearing the wrath that is rightfully ours. And if you would understand Christ's fear of death you must understand the substitutionary nature of his death. As Luther said, "no man ever feared death like this Man" because no man ever died a death like this Man. Here was the Perfect, sinless Master, to whom sin was more vile than you can imagine, looking into a horrible cup of sin and wrath. Can you appreciate, in some small way, why Jesus would be in agony? He had no sin nature about Him to rebel against God but He had a human nature, and a holy nature that would certainly revolt at such a command and recoil at such a cup as this.

One of the impressions I come away with from this passage is that of the exceeding hideousness of sin. We write it off so easily. "Sure, I'm a sinner. Everybody is a sinner." But when Jesus contemplated becoming a sinner, when Jesus prepared to take our guilt on Him He sweated blood. We so underrate the vileness of our sin. We so underrate the punishments of hell. And as a result we so underrate the love and the work of Jesus for us. JC Ryle asks, "*Would we see the sinfulness of sin in its true colors? Would we learn to hate sin with a godly hatred? Would we know something of the intense misery of souls in hell? Would we understand something of the unspeakable love of Christ? Would we comprehend Christ's ability to sympathize with those who are in trouble? Then let the agony in the garden come often into our minds. The depth of that agony may give us some idea of our debt to Christ.* (Ryle p.423-)

I have one other brief impression about this to share with you. If Jesus agonized so over bearing my sin - what reason do I have to agonize over my sin? What need is there for me to fear the wrath of God? I can see from what I read that my sin should make me weep, that God's wrath should terrify me; but I read as well that Jesus wept for my sin, that Jesus trembled at God's wrath, for me, yea, even that Jesus experienced God's wrath for me. If indeed Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath for my sin and experienced my hell what cause is there for me to fear? I have none. What I read in Luke 22 and 23 is Jesus standing in my place, Jesus being punished for my sin and I have this confidence that God won't punish my sin twice. "*I need no other argument; I need no other plea; it is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me.*" (prayer of confession and thanks)

So, the first thing that marked the prayer of Jesus was anguish. The second thing that marked his prayer was fervency and passion. 44a *And being in agony He was praying very fervently* That is not hard to imagine is it? So fervent was Jesus that His sweat was like drops of blood. I remember reading of David Brainerd who was a missionary to the American Indians 200 years ago

how He would go out to pray in the snow and so fervently would He pray that he would melt the snow all about him. Do you know anything of praying like that? Probably not. Not many I know have much of an intensity about their religion, especially about their praying. How I long to see us demonstrate some fervency in our prayers, some passion, some urgency and feeling before God! The word in verse 44 translated as *fervently* has its root in the word "*stretch*." Literally it means that Jesus prayed *stretchingly*, and I would challenge you to start praying that way. Stretch yourself in prayer, to pray longer, to pray more passionately, to pray more purely, to pray fervently as Jesus did.

The third thing that marked the prayers of Jesus was frankness or honesty. I see Jesus coming to His Father unafraid to be human as He was. He feels free to say, "*Father, please remove this cup. Don't require me to go thru with this if there is any other way.*" We need to learn Philippians 4 where we are invited to bring our petitions to God. We are free to ask God for anything that is lawful. And we need to be frank about how we feel. When you are troubled of spirit over something God has told you to do, let him know. Say, "Lord, I don't want to witness to Charlie. I don't want to give this money away." Talk to the Father about how you feel. Frankness should mark your prayers.

But so must one other thing - your prayers must be marked by submission to the will of God (R). This is the most impressive thing about this prayer isn't it? 42 "*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.*" I've known some in the church who feel that every time they ask God for something they must utter the formula "if it be thy will." I've also heard certain self-styled "faith-teachers" scoff at such a phrase as being an expression of doubt. That the expression is good is proven by our Lord's usage. The arrogance of the name-it and claim it crowd is rebuked by the humility of biblical prayers, but I also must add that this phrase need not be used habitually. The words "if it be Thy will" are not needed, but the attitude is. To pray as Jesus prayed we must have spirits that are fully subjected to the Father's will. We must be able to say "not my will, but thine be done." And there is in that expression a recognition that my desires are not always going to be God's desires are they? Are they? That's a fact. I have to recognize it. The more we grow in grace the more we will think God's thoughts after Him but as long as we are in this mortal flesh there will be a conflict of interest. In glory, when we have new bodies and purified hearts our will will be God's will but until then there will be some conflict no matter how

sanctified you become. That is why the wise child of God prays "thy will be done" recognizing that my desires may not be in line with God's and ultimately I want what God wants. So, even the very godly do not always get what they ask for but they always get what they want, which is the will of God. But can you say that? Can you sincerely say, "not my will, but Thine be done?" That is easy to say, but hard to mean. It requires a dying to self, a subjugation of my will to God's will, so that, in a sense I no longer have a will of my own. I like that hymn by Edwin Hatch that says "*Breathe on me Breath of God, until my heart is pure, until my will is one with Thine, to do and to endure.*". And to have a will that is one with God's we must die as Jesus died, not as He died at Calvary but as He died in Gethsemane. I speak of a death to self, and self-will which surely marked the prayers of Jesus in this critical hour.

There is no way that a human could want what awaited our Lord. We see the intensity of his anguish that is overcome by only one thing - His commitment to do the Father's will. Jesus was able to say in John 8:29 "*I always do what is pleasing to my Father.*" And look with me at John 12:27. Here Jesus was not alone with His Father but teaching in a crowd not many days before His death and He said 27 *Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.* Jesus ponders here the cross that awaits Him, speaks of how it troubles His soul but look at what He says in the next verse 28a *Father, glorify Your name.* How do you think Jesus said that? I think He said it with a sigh of trusting resolution. Agony awaited Him but His final thought is, "Father, glorify thy name." As if to say that what happens to me is irrelevant. My purpose, my calling, my reason for being is to bring glory to God my Father - Thy will be done!" (pause) Sometimes, you know, we look at the pleasures we could have if we just disobey our Lord and we are so drawn to them we can hardly stand it. Here Jesus faces certain agony, incalculable torment with a resolve to obey. Do you think that was easy? Bloody sweat tells me different. And I'm reminded of a verse in Hebrews 12:4 *You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.* I think of conversations I've had with men and women in bad marriages. These people want out. Their husbands don't love them; their dreams of a lovely Christian home have been shot full of holes. The thought of living 40 more years with this inconsiderate mate is revolting to them, but they face God's word which says to love unconditionally, to not leave your unbelieving husband or wife and you know what they say to me? "Surely God doesn't want me to be miserable." Listen, you in like predicaments Hebrews 12:3,4

*For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. 4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin. **qualify re abuse*** You single men who think that sexual purity is too much to ask, what do you say in the presence of this Jesus? Sometimes we come up against a command of Scripture that makes us writhe, it makes us groan, and we feel like saying, "Lord I can't do that. I can't witness like you command me to, I can't love that jerk at work, I can't turn off the TV, I can't give up my pleasures, I can't forgive that ex-spouse." Fine, go ahead and say it but then say, "nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." And then too, *help me Lord!* What is it that God is telling you today these days that you aren't doing? Are you shrinking from the cross He has for you? Tell the Lord how you feel. Tell Him, "I don't want to confront Bob. I don't want to get up to pray, I don't want to go on a diet, I don't want to give up my boy- friend." Say it fervently just as you feel it but then add, "nevertheless, not my will (my will is not king), not my will but yours be pre-eminent" and then scream and cry and go out and, with His aid, do what God says to do!

There are those times as well when we must submit to God's decretive will that we learn not from Scripture but from circumstances. Here too we must be given over to God's will. If you are a single person longing to be married you pray for a spouse but then you say, "thy will be done." If you or someone close to you is sick, you pray for healing; you pray consistently and fervently but you also say, "Thy will be done." Maybe you want to have a baby and it looks like it will never happen. Maybe you have some other dream that's been shattered - you have a choice. You can shake your fist at God and curse His name or you can do as Job and say, "As the Lord wills, so let it be." Let it be (R), simple words of wisdom. Let God's will be.

I don't know about you but I'm not the kind to give over control very easily. I am naturally a dominator, a controller, so I struggle in relinquishing control to God. I've had lots of plans for my life that God has wrecked either by His commands or His providences and often I have had these wrestlings of soul that must end, they must end with us saying, "not my will, but thine be done. Father, glorify thy name." Do you know what that is like, to reach the point where you can say that to God and mean it? It's a wonderful thing. There is a blessed, sweet release. It is freeing not to have the pretense of control or to have the lust after control. There is great peace in letting God be God. One song I know calls it a "sweet surrender." And it is sweet because we don't say "Thy Will Be Done" angrily or despairingly. We submit our lives to a God whom it is foolish to oppose. And

do you know why it is foolish to oppose Him? 3 reasons: (1) He is mightier than you and when you oppose Him you bring His power against you. (2) he is wiser than you and knows what you need better than you do. (3) He is also love. When Jesus submits to the will of God He submits to the will of His loving Father and so do we. Our kind Father will never ask us to do what Jesus did. We cannot do what He did but we have confidence that our Father's will is always shaped in love for His children.

The ultimate, greatest choice of your life is the same one faced by Jesus in the garden. You can shake your fist in the face of God and say, "My will be done." Or you can bow in tearful, sweet submission and say, "Thy will be done." The first God promises to crush; the other God promises to save. Let's pray.