

March 1, 2020

“Go to Dark Gethsemane”
Matthew 26:31-46

FCF: Our struggles with the very fundamentals of prayer
PROPOSITION: (anchor) As we go to dark Gethsemane,
 (magnet) we learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It’s common to see soccer teams on the practice fields this time of year. Which makes me think of my years coaching our son’s teams. Young players need to focus on the fundamentals - dribbling, passing, trapping, and shooting. Not so much strategies but the basics of the game.

It’s something like that for Christians and prayer but far more so. We need to focus not just on the fundamentals but the *very* fundamentals of prayer. If we were talking soccer it would be “This is a ball. It rolls when you touch it. Those are cleats. They go on your feet.” That kind of basic. In prayer, we need to keep coming back to such essentials. And Jesus gives us those.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 26:31-46](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

After the Last Supper, Jesus and the eleven left Jerusalem, went down a flight of steps into the Kidron Valley, and up the western slope of the Mount of Olives. There they stopped in a place called Gethsemane. What is this place? It was a walled olive garden with a press. In fact, “Gethsemane” is Aramaic for “oil press.” Olive oil production was a major industry in that time so such presses were common. Archeologists have found several. It’s worth knowing how it worked. A large vertical stone wheel was rolled over the olives spread out on a flat horizontal stone, grooved to let the oil trickle into a basin. This place where olives were grown and crushed was an appropriate setting. For that was what was about to happen to Jesus in a terrible way.

Over these last few days, the title of a song from the 19th century by John Montgomery has stayed with me, “Go to Dark Gethsemane.” Listen to the first stanza ([READ quote](#)):

Go to dark Gethsemane, You who feel the tempter's pow'r;
 Your Redeemer's conflict see; Watch with Him one bitter hour;
 Turn not from His griefs away; Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

There’s great wisdom in that. And it fits our text. For as we go to dark Gethsemane, we learn of Jesus Christ to pray. Again, as we go to dark Gethsemane, we learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

How so? First, in Jesus’ words to His disciples. And, second, in His words to His Father.

I. HIS WORDS TO HIS DISCIPLES

Let’s start with Jesus’ words to His disciples. Why should we pray? A good question.

A) A Clear Prediction

1. Jesus’ words

Jesus gives a clear prediction of what is coming. His words would have been hard to take. He has already said one of them was a traitor. Now He says that all of them would abandon Him.

2. Their response

The disciples then respond with foolish boasting. Which shows a naive blindness to their need.

B) A Dark Prophecy

1. Ancient words

After the prediction there is mention of a prophecy (**READ Matthew 26:31-32**). This is calling back to words of Zechariah, a priest from 500 years before, words which were being fulfilled.

2. Divine power

The fulfilling of these ancient words makes plain a divine power. All of this was foreseen for it was all foreordained. All these events may seem chaotic but it was all under the Lord's control.

C) A Stern Warning

There's more. Jesus gives a stern warning to His disciples (**READ Matthew 26:40-41**).

1. Mindful of their need

He is mindful of their need. Despite this terrible trial He was going through, despite their terrible failure already in that trial, He is mindful of their need in the coming hours and days. Think of it.

2. Giving an assurance

He is mindful of their need and goes even further to give them an assurance. "You will abandon me but I will not abandon you. I'm going to return to you." Such is Jesus' concern for them.

Why should we pray? Listen to Jesus' words to His disciples there in dark Gethsemane.

Application:

There are many reasons people fall into sin - curiosity, pragmatics, habit, or malice. With these men, we see weakness, ignorance, and just overconfidence. Such were their tendencies and ours. They are us. Jesus knows that. What do we learn here? We need to go to Jesus in prayer. And, as we do, we go to One who can help and who cares. So we need to go to Him and we can.

We need to and we can. As we go to dark Gethsemane, we learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

II. HIS WORDS TO HIS FATHER

Moving from Jesus' words to His disciples, we hear His words to His Father. And in that, we see not only why we should pray but the One to whom we pray (**READ Matthew 26:36-44**).

A) His Deep Anguish

1. The desire for companionship

Jesus is in deep anguish and distress, longing for companionship. He brings the three with Him. He wants them to be near. Why? "My soul is swallowed up in sorrow to the point of death."

2. The source of His distress

But why? What is the source of this distress? The cup. This is far beyond the coming agony of the scourging and the crucifixion. "So many others have faced death far more bravely. Why is Jesus falling apart? Why now?" It's not just death He's facing. The cup was an Old Testament image for God's wrath. Jesus has come to be the ransom, to save. And this was the only way.

Illustration:

In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy come through a wardrobe to the land of Narnia where, because of a witch, it is always winter and never Christmas. Of the four, Edmund is the most proud and quarrelsome. The witch ensnares and captures him. The others are torn in their anger and love. When they meet the great lion, Aslan, Lucy asks ([READ quote](#)), "Please - Aslan, can anything be done to save Edmund?"

"All shall be done," said Aslan. "But it may be harder than you think." Which, if you have read the story, you know that proves to be quite true - especially for Aslan himself.

B) This Wondrous Prayer

1. He could have refused

Which brings us to this wondrous prayer. Understand that Jesus could have refused this. He could have taken a stand and started a rebellion. Or fled the garden and gone out into the desert.

2. But He chose to yield

He could have refused but He chose to yield to His Father. Note the humility of His posture, the trust in the address. And the request, "Is there another way?" He gives Himself to His Father.

C) That Awful Cross

1. The great exchange

This wondrous prayer then leads to that awful cross. There the great exchange took place - His taking all our sin and guilt upon Himself. And His perfect record was then placed upon us.

2. That awful silence

And then came the wall, an awful silence. "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?"

Who are we praying to? The One who underwent all that for us. For you and for me.

Application:

He knows the worst of us. And endured the worst for us. Which means He knows, He can sympathize. Friends, He knows what it means to be betrayed, to be falsely accused, unjustly treated, misunderstood, and abused. He knows. He infinitely endured it all for us, you and me.

That is who we pray to. As we go to dark Gethsemane, we learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

CONCLUSION:

Think of bookends - not the kind that prop up your books but a plot device in some of the best stories. Here's how they work, according to a web site I found last week ([READ quote](#)):

Two of the most critical points in your story are the beginning and the ending, so why not have them work together? One of the best ways to do that is to "bookend" your story by taking something from the beginning and echoing it at the end. That something can be an image, a line of dialogue, a prop, the specific setting, or even a character that hasn't appeared since the start of the story. "Echo" doesn't necessarily mean to just repeat, although that can be effective as well. Ideally, the repetition at the end highlights a change in the character or helps illuminate the meaning of the story.

Well, that's what you see with the biblical narrative. This is not the first garden to be mentioned. Think back to Eden where it all came apart with Adam's Fall. And now here at Gethsemane, it all starts to come back together. Which is absolutely amazing. Think of it from a literary view.

These are separate books written over several centuries by dozens of different authors. And yet we see this bookending. But beyond the literary view, take an historical view. This isn't fiction. This is how it happened, how God wrote the story of reality - bookended. And in that context, we see the commitment of Jesus - the commitment of Jesus to His Father. And then to us as well.

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