

## 8. Gethsemane and Jesus Arrested

John 18:1-14

Jesus' Final Days on Earth

### Gethsemane: The Place of the Olive Press

As we begin chapter eighteen of John's Gospel, let us picture the scene. Jesus finished His prayer in John 17 and crossed the Kidron Valley between the Temple and Mount of Olives. The Jewish historian Josephus writes of 256,500 lambs sacrificed in the Temple during Passover in one year between 66-70 C.E. (Jewish Wars 6.9.3). The blood from the animals sacrificed in the temple was channeled down to the Kidron Valley to the east of the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. During the Feast of Passover, thoughts about sacrifice and redemption would have filled the minds of the Jewish people. Israel kept a lunar calendar, so Passover was celebrated during the full moon, thus helping Jesus and the eleven to see as they made their ascent up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The Apostle John writes that Jesus entered a garden (v. 1), but only Matthew and Mark mention the name of the garden: *Gethsemane*. R. Kent Hughes has made some interesting comparisons between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane:

- The first Adam began life in a garden. Christ, the last Adam, came to a garden at the end of His life.
- In Eden, Adam sinned. In Gethsemane, the Savior overcame sin.
- In Eden, Adam fell. In Gethsemane, Jesus conquered.
- In Eden, Adam hid himself. In Gethsemane, our Lord boldly presented Himself.
- In Eden, the sword was drawn (Genesis 3:24). In Gethsemane, it was sheathed.<sup>1</sup>

At this garden, Jesus often stayed overnight with His disciples and taught early in the morning at the Temple courts (John 18:2). Some people wonder why He didn't stay with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha on the other side of the Mount of Olives in Bethany? After all, we know that they were close personal friends of Jesus. It could be that Christ sought to protect them from the judgment of the religious leaders. Jesus already drew the attention and disapproval of the Pharisees, and anyone seen associating with Jesus risked paying a high price, even to the point of being put out of the synagogue (John 9:22).

The Mount of Olives was so named because of the many Olive trees that grew then and now on the side of the mountain. *Gethsemane* means the place of the olive press and was likely a private garden with a wall around it, and the owner, perhaps, was in the business of pressing the oil from the olives. We don't know how far up the Mount of Olives the garden was, but the smoke rising from the evening sacrifice on the sacrificial altar, eight or nine hundred yards away on the Temple Mount, could be seen anywhere on the slopes of the mountain.

John doesn't tell us anything about the wrestling in prayer that Jesus experienced, so to get a complete picture of the Gethsemane details, we have to turn to the Gospel of Luke and return to John's narrative for the arrest.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes. *John, That You May Believe. Preaching the Word Series*. Published by Crossway, page 414.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup>On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." <sup>41</sup>He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup>"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." <sup>43</sup>An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. <sup>44</sup>And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. <sup>45</sup>When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. <sup>46</sup>"Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:39-46).

In the Garden, we glimpse the state of our Savior's mind and heart in those final hours of His mortal life on earth. The spiritual stress He was under was so intense that He needed an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43).

How much do you think Jesus knew about what was **going** to happen? He knew that "His hour had come," but do you think He knew everything that would happen? We can only speculate.

His arrest was no surprise to Jesus; He knew how much time He had to pray and had no thought of escape or avoiding what was coming, knowing that His hour to glorify the Father had come (John 17:1). In this close and personal view of our Savior here in the garden, we see His extreme anguish as evidenced by His sweat, like drops of blood (v. 44). He was preparing Himself, as well as His disciples, for His final hours. Jesus intentionally chose this place; it was not by accident that He came to this garden, so let's consider the significance of the location. Olive oil was used for lamp lighting. It seems significant that the Light of the World would go through a crushing and pressing experience there in Gethsemane.

### **Not My Will but Yours**

Jesus told us that, as Christians, we are the lights of the world just as Christ is the Light of the World (Matthew 5:14). If you want to shine brightly for God, be aware that you may have to endure the darkness of a Gethsemane experience. In that time of darkness, there may be spiritual choices you have to make, whether to relinquish your will to Christ or choose self-preservation. If we say, as Jesus did, "**Not my will but yours be done,**" then we must trust God with the journey and the outcome. In this experience of pressure and brokenness, you will be tempted to surrender to your flesh nature instead of yielding your will to Christ. Although the Way of the Cross is hard and will sometimes bring pain, it brings forth much fruit. It is also the road to great joy and triumph, as Jesus demonstrated.

We may assume that the closer we get to spiritual maturity (adulthood) in our Christian lives, the easier it is to hear the voice of the Spirit. Although, for the most part, I believe that to be true, there are times when God leaves a mature believer to make spiritually minded choices under the watchful eye of the One who is pleased by faith. The Lord often leaves us to make a choice instead of telling us what to do. Why does God leave the decision with us? Have you ever wished God would make things crystal clear? Many of us can relate to the disciple Thomas. When he was told of the resurrection of Christ, Thomas could not believe it until he had proof. To him, seeing was believing. Unless he saw the nail marks in Jesus' hands and put his finger where the nails were and put his

hand into His side, Thomas would not believe (John 20:25). The Lord was very gracious to him and presented Himself in bodily form for him to do just that. Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 22:29).

In our human experience, we want evidence to base our faith on, i.e., sense evidence, something we see or experience. We are used to this way of interpreting truth, but the Lord wants to sharpen our spiritual senses so that we learn to make decisions based on faith. This kind of faith pleases God, i.e., a faith that hasn't seen evidence but still wholeheartedly trusts. In His humanity and with all the unseen forces of evil seeking to influence His choices, Jesus made a choice: “Yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

### Christ Overwhelmed with Sorrow to the Point of Death

When they arrived in Gethsemane, he went a stone's throw distance from them and began to pray on His knees (Luke 22:41). Matthew writes that, at times, His posture was one of lying down with His face to the ground in fervent prayer:

<sup>37</sup>He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup>Then he said to them, "My soul is *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. Stay here and keep watch with me." <sup>39</sup>Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, *if it is possible*, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:37-39, Emphasis mine).

The phrase, “overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death” (v. 38) describes the most profound emotional state a living soul can endure. Mark portrays Jesus as “deeply distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33). The Lord asked His disciples to keep watch with Him.

Why couldn't Jesus' disciples stay awake to keep watch? What factors contributed to the disciples' falling asleep when He needed them to pray? Have you gone through a painful Gethsemane experience in your life? What positive results came from that time?

For Jesus, this was a time of spiritual warfare and significant physical distress. The disciples could not stay awake, perhaps, because they were also going through spiritual warfare as well as being exhausted and emotionally drained and did not want to face what was happening.

Luke described Jesus as “being in *anguish*, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). The Greek word translated *anguish* is where we get our English word *agony*. This word is used for someone fighting a battle with sheer fear.<sup>2</sup>

Jim Bishop, in his book, *The Day Christ Died*, comments on His sweat being like drops of blood:

Medically, this is called *haematidrosis*. It occurs when fear is piled upon fear, when an agony of suffering is laid upon an older suffering until the highly sensitized person can no longer sustain the pain. At that moment, the patient ordinarily loses consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay. *The Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke*. Saint Andrew Press Publishers, page 271.

When that does not happen, the subcutaneous capillaries sometimes dilate so broadly that, when they come into contact with the sweat glands the little capillaries burst. The blood is exuded with the perspiration and, usually, this occurs all over the body.<sup>3</sup>

I read of a similar situation during the Second World War when German aircraft bombed London night after night in what became known as the Blitz. The daily pressure of the German bombing every night brought several cases of *haematidrosis* to the population of London forced to live in the underground rail stations as they listened to the bombs falling above them and the ground shaking. The stress of fear caused some people to sweat blood.

Some believe that Luke's words, "His sweat was like drops of blood," don't mean that Jesus bled through the sweat glands. They think that there were just large drops of sweat. With this line of reasoning, they say that the proper interpretation is that His stress caused Him to sweat more than usual, but if that is so, why is blood mentioned? It wasn't the hot temperature causing Christ to sweat because a few hours later that night, it was so cold that Peter warmed himself by the fire among Jesus' captors in the courtyard of Caiaphas.

Jesus was not sweating because He was hot, but he was sweating from the energy of His fervent praying or even fear or stress. If He was sweating blood in the moonlight, it could have been seen on His tunic when He came near the disciples. I leave you to decide which interpretation you find most believable. I think the Scriptures mention blood drops because He was sweating blood.

Matthew wrote about a cup that Christ needed to drink: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

What is meant by the words of Jesus, "May this cup be taken from me?" (Luke 22:42). What did the cup represent, and why did the Lord want it to pass by Him?

Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger (Isaiah 51:17).

The cup was symbolic of the wrath of God poured out upon sin. In the Garden of Eden, a curse fell on the human race when the first man, Adam, sinned. We deserve spiritual death and separation from God because of our sin, rebellion, and the wrong choices we have all made. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam that when he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. Adam did not die physically the day he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, but he was spiritually separated from God, and a barrier between God and man existed, i.e., a state of death in the eyes of God. The prophet Ezekiel spoke about this punishment due to sin when he said, "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

If there had been any other way of redemption, the Father would have chosen it. There was no way other than God's beloved Son was to be sacrificed in humiliation, extreme physical and emotional pain, and the torturous death of being crucified. There was no alternate solution for God's justice and His love. Christianity is unique in this way, for we see a display of God's grace in no other

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Bishop. *The Day Christ Died*. Harper San Francisco Publishers, Page 169.

religion. There was only **ONE WAY**, and it involved God Himself becoming the substitute. A perfect sacrifice had to be made. Jesus was the only sacrifice that would be sufficient for our atonement. In all other religions, man has to keep a set of rules to satisfy his god's demands, but no rule-keeping can fill the inner void of man's heart for forgiveness.

Here we see the love of God revealed, for it was the Lord who planned Operation Redemption—in the person of His Son, God Himself paid the substitution ransom, the sacrificial price of death for sin. The price is free for us but not cheap. Our deliverance from sin cost God His Son. He took man's place. The judgment was firm and just. The soul that sins shall die, but Jesus, the Son of God, would take our place, i.e., the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).**

The love of God said "no" to Jesus' prayer for the cup to pass from Him; this was the only time a prayer of Christ was refused. There was no other way than that He should take the cup and drink it to the dregs.

**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).**

When we genuinely understand all God has done for us, the only response is love for the One who has made our freedom and deliverance from sin possible.

**Is There Another Way?** (Matthew 26:39).

**What was it that Christ loathed so much that He would ask the Father if there was another way?**

I believe the reason was more than the Son of God's humiliation at the hands of evil men and more than the pain He would endure through crucifixion. What was distinctly different was that Christ was stained with your sin and mine. When we struggle against sin, we seek holiness and deliverance from sinful thoughts and actions. As Christians, our fight is against sin on three different battlefields, all simultaneously, i.e., the world system in which we live, our sinful nature, and our adversary, the devil, and his demons. The writer to the Hebrews spoke of the temptation that we all face, saying that, however hard we fight, it is nowhere near the unseen fight that Jesus faced that night. **"In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood"** (Hebrews 12:4).

We struggle to be holy when our natural tendency, our default nature, is toward sin. It was totally different, though, for our Lord Jesus. He had never known sin and was always Holy, being born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit. Christ was not conceived in the usual way; therefore, He did not take on a sinful nature. Jesus remained free from sin all His life so that He would die as an innocent Lamb for us and as us. The Apostle Peter was with Jesus for more than three years, and he said about Christ: **"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth"** (1 Peter 2:22). As a Holy being, Christ's struggle that day in the garden was to put on sin and be the living embodiment of sin. His striving was not against sin, but to be sin when every fiber of His Holy being cried out

against sin. “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13).

His default nature, i.e., every impulse of His divine being, was to hate sin, yet He had to put on sin to make us holy. How beautiful is His love! “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The temptation He faced was to abandon the Father’s plan and to escape from “drinking the cup.” With every part of His holy being abhorring sin, He had to embrace sin, i.e., all sin of all time and for the whole human race. Sins of the worst sort would be placed on Him as the atoning Lamb of God, just as the high priest on the Day of Atonement laid his hands on the animal to be sacrificed for the sins of the nation, so the Father’s plan was for Jesus to “carry” every sin that you and I have ever committed, not only sins committed in the present but also those of the past and future. That is why Christ cried out from the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Through all this, Jesus did not waver in obedience to the Father. What seemed to be a defeat in the eyes of men and even among His closest loved ones on earth, the victory over sin and death was the most significant ever won. Paul Billheimer, in his excellent book, *Destined for the Throne*, writes:

In his effort to compel Jesus to rebel against His heavenly Father and transfer His allegiance to himself, Satan pushed Jesus clear up to death, “even the death of the cross.” When at last Jesus bowed His head in mortal agony and dismissed His spirit without once failing in His submission to His heavenly Father, Satan was vanquished. Because Satan’s great purpose in all that he did was to produce one small thought of rebellion against the Father, when Jesus did not yield to that pressure, He conquered—although in doing so, He died.

When the results of Calvary are adequately appraised, it appears for what it is: *the triumph of the ages*. When Jesus died without failing in the smallest detail, His death resulted not only in defeating Satan’s purpose to obtain a claim on Him—it also canceled all of Satan’s legal claims upon the earth and the whole human race. Under universal jurisprudence, when a man commits murder, he becomes subject to the death penalty. A convicted murderer forfeits his own life. He destroys himself. When Satan secured the death of Jesus, he became, for the first time in his age-long history, a murderer.

He who had “the power of death” had slain his millions with impunity since the fall of Adam because he had a legal right to do so. As a slave owner, Satan had legal title to Adam and his offspring. He could do with them what he chose. But he “who had the power of death” and had exercised it on countless millions with full immunity now committed the most colossal blunder of all his diabolical career...he brought upon himself the sentence of death.<sup>4</sup>

Have you ever laid down your will to God? Is your will in your hands or the Lord’s? The famous English cricketer, C.T. Studd, was born into wealth and luxury in the 1870s. He received the finest education money could buy, attending Cambridge University, where he became

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<sup>4</sup> Paul E. Billheimer, *Destined For The Throne*, Bethany House Publishers, Revised Edition 1996, Page 80-81.

captain of the English national cricket team. C.T. Studd was considered England's greatest cricketer. He had everything going for him, e.g., a considerable fortune laid at his feet at his father's death. However, God had a different plan for him than wealth in this world. He went to hear D.L. Moody speak about Christ and gave his life to the Lord. He chose to give up his estate and fortune and give all to mission work by even going to China, India, and Africa. To many, that decision was a rash move and an enormous waste of intellect and ability. However, to Studd and the six others who went, it was using their talents to the fullest. They laid down their will to God's call and purposes. "Yet not my will but yours be done." C. T. Studd once said:

If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.

At different times when I have been near death, I have realized that I am not in control of the day of my death, but Jesus is! Christ could have chosen the easy way out by calling on His angels to help Him, but He did not. He accepted the cup of wrath deserved by us.

### **Jesus Arrested**

With a complete picture of what happened in Gethsemane, let us now read John's account of Christ's arrest.

<sup>1</sup>When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. <sup>2</sup>Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. <sup>3</sup>So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. <sup>4</sup>Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" <sup>5</sup>"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) <sup>6</sup>When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. <sup>7</sup>Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. <sup>8</sup>Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." <sup>9</sup>This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." <sup>10</sup>Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) <sup>11</sup>Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" <sup>12</sup>Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him <sup>13</sup>and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. <sup>14</sup>Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people (John 18:1-14).

Judas knew where Jesus often slept through the night, so he brought a detachment of Roman soldiers and officials from the religious leadership. The Greek word *speira*, translated as "detachment," is a term for a specific subgroup of Roman soldiers sent from the Antonia Fortress on the northwest side of the Temple Mount, where Pilate had his residence and the Roman garrison. This subgroup consisted of 450 fighting men, in addition to the temple guard sent by the Chief

Priests and Pharisees. Some have estimated that there may have been as many as six hundred soldiers.

Why so many? It was likely that they were expecting a fight and that there might be more of Christ's disciples in the garden with Him. They brought lanterns, perhaps, because they were expecting Jesus to hide. The Lord didn't wait for them to come looking for Him. He took the initiative; He went out of the garden to them (John 18:4). His concern was for His disciples so that His prayer of protection in John 17 would be answered during the arrest. He was in control of the whole situation. He asked them, **“Who is it you want?”** **<sup>5</sup>‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)** **<sup>6</sup>When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground”** (John 18:4-6).

These soldiers came with swords and clubs at the ready in case of a fight. Roman soldiers were not known to be fearful about anything and were not known to fall easily to the ground. Imagine the scene as this large group fell to the ground under the heavy presence of the Lord. When Jesus uttered the Greek form of the name of God, **“I AM”** (*egō eimi*), the Roman soldiers fell to the ground. (The word “He” is absent from the original Greek text and added by the translators to make the statement more natural to understand in English.)

Again and again through the Book of John, we have seen Jesus adding the name of God to different aspects of His character, e.g., "I am the Gate," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the Light of the World," "I am the Way," etc. This was a display of supernatural power before these soldiers. Jesus was letting the soldiers know He was willingly giving Himself into their hands and was not captured. What a picture it must have been, i.e., hundreds of men terrified of one Man and His eleven disciples, and only one of them using a sword in defense. Twice Jesus asked them: **“Who is it you want?”** (vv. 4-7) before winning the release of His disciples. John tells us that at this point, Peter lashed out with his short sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant.

**<sup>10</sup>Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) <sup>11</sup>Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"** (John 18:10-11).

In his usual rash behavior, Peter slashed at the high priest's servant Malchus with his sword, severing the servant's ear. Why didn't the 450 men attack Peter and the disciples after Peter's rash act? Although the Scriptures are not clear on this point, it seems that the presence of the Lord unsettled the soldiers. Again, the Lord Jesus was in complete control of the situation, reminding Peter that it must be this way (v. 11), that there is the cup of suffering that He must drink to put away sin for all men. The healing of Malchus' ear was instantaneous. There was no hunting around for the ear with the lanterns and no bandages. Luke tells us that Jesus put His hand to Malchus' ear and miraculously sprouted another ear: **“He touched the man's ear and healed him”** (Luke 22:51). I wonder if Malchus found his severed ear in the dirt after Jesus was led away.

Matthew wrote that Jesus said that it must be this way:

**<sup>53</sup>Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? <sup>54</sup>But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?** (Matthew 26:53-54).

Christ didn't run away but was in control at every point by confronting the armed soldiers. It was the power of God that put the soldiers on the ground. We can also trust that supernatural power will be unleashed on our behalf when we say, "Not my will, but yours be done." God can move when He gets the glory!

Have you ever been in a life-threatening situation? How did you handle it, and how did it change your perspective on life?

We don't know where the road will take us when we respond to situations with words such as "Your will be done." Replying in such a way can be challenging because one never knows how God will lead us or where He will take us as believers, but there is peace that passes all understanding when our lives and will are given into His hands.

Many of you are at the crossroads of Gethsemane. The big question is submitting to God's will: Will you lay down your will and place your life into His hands? God's Word tells us,

*Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).*

Prayer: Thank You for the choice You made in Gethsemane, Lord. You looked forward and saw each of us, and joy came to Your heart, which strengthened You for what You endured. Help us place our will and lives into Your hands and trust You. Amen.

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