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Sermon: August 8, 2010  
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“WALKING IN GETHSEMANE”**

**Matthew 26:36-46**

☑ When was the last time you were in that awkward position of knowing what God required – but not wanting to do it?

Maybe it was saying “yes” to the one thing you had been so certain God would not demand (for example, serving overseas as a short-term missionary).

Maybe it was accepting a less profitable offer while passing up a highly lucrative one.

Maybe it was “tying the knot” with the kind of person you said you would never marry (a pastor, for instance).

Maybe it was breaking off a sinful relationship, or taking the initiative to restore a broken one.

Maybe it was coming clean about your addiction and asking for help.

Maybe it was getting out of bed and coming to church.

What did you do? *Did you go your own way? Or did you walk with Jesus?*

Please turn with me to Matthew 26.

- Jesus understands the difficulty of obedience. To be sure, Jesus never disregarded or disobeyed his Father’s will; yet his submission was not robotic. Hebrews 5:8 reveals that, **“Son though he was, he *learned* obedience from what he suffered.”**

- And so in Matthew 26:39 Jesus cries out, **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from**

**me.”** (That word “**cup**” symbolizes the deep sorrow and intense anguish of his impending betrayal, arrest, denial, torture and execution.) In verses 42 and 44, he makes the same basic plea a 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time.

**“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”** Jesus is not play-acting; he really does not want to suffer the physical pain, emotional grief, and spiritual agony of coming under divine judgment by bearing the ugliness and horror and guilt of human sin.

- The author of Hebrews reminds us that {Heb 5:7} **“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.”** And in his Gethsemane account Luke adds that, **“being in anguish, [Jesus] prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground”** (Luke 22:44).

- The Son knew what his Father required – only, he did not want to do it. He did it anyway ~ Matthew 26:39: **“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will”**; verse 42: **“He went away a second time and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done’”**; and in verse 44 **“he... prayed the third time, saying the same thing.”**

*How can we walk with Jesus in our Gethsemanes, bringing ourselves under God’s perfect will when we do not feel like it? Let’s look at what Jesus does.*

☐ 1<sup>st</sup>, in verse 36 “**Jesus [goes] with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane**”, which is a grove of trees on the Mount of Olives just east of Jerusalem.

- He choose Gethsemane, in part, it’s because he has routinely gone there to commune with God. Luke puts it like this: {Lk 22:39} “**Jesus went out *as usual* to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.**” This has always been a place for receiving guidance, strength and comfort from his Father.

Where do you go to meet God face-to-face? Maybe it is a definite physical space: a quiet corner of your home, a spot in the yard or a park bench. Maybe it is a spiritual space that is created when you kneel, or use a devotional book, or go for a walk.

- ★ In times of struggle and crucial decision, it is easier to walk with Jesus and choose God’s way if we are already in the habit of meeting him in a familiar physical or spiritual place.

☐ 2<sup>nd</sup>, in verse 37 Jesus takes Peter, James and John “**along with him**” as he goes farther into Gethsemane.

- In his struggle the Lord stays connected with his best friends. {Ecc 4:9, 10, 12}: “**Two are better than one...: If they fall down, they can help each other up.... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**”

☑ No one can fight your spiritual battles for you; but they can watch your back. As Bonhoeffer {Life Together} cautioned:

***Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. Into the community you were called, the call was not meant for you alone; in the community of the called you bear your cross, you struggle, you pray. You are not alone, even in death, and on the Last Day you will be only one member of the great congregation of Jesus Christ. If you scorn the fellowship... you reject the call of ...Christ, and... your solitude can only be hurtful to you.***

- ★ In times of struggle and crucial decision, it is easier to walk with Jesus and choose God’s way if we have a network of Christian friends to whom we can turn for counsel and strength.

☐ 3<sup>rd</sup>, in verse 38 Jesus freely says, “**My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.**”

It is hard to be so candid, especially for us guys. Sometimes we don’t know what we are feeling; sometimes we do, but we don’t want to admit it.

In the world it is OK for a man to admit his anger; but fear or tenderness? That’s “weakness.” In the Church it is acceptable to express passion for God; but uncertainty or depression? That’s “unspiritual.” Yet Jesus says: I am “**overwhelmed with sorrow...**”

- The take-away is not that we should be touchy-feely navel-gazers who vent their feelings to everyone (that can veer into self-centered sentimentality); rather, the goal is to be authentic disciples who, {Eph 4:15}

“speaking the truth in love,” acknowledge their need and abundance, failures and successes. In this way “**we will in all things grow up into... Christ**” *together*.

★ In times of struggle and crucial decision, it is easier to walk with Jesus and choose God’s way if we already cultivate vulnerable sincerity with a core group of trustworthy Christ Followers.

□ 4<sup>th</sup>, in verse 39 Jesus casts himself on the ground and prays, and then again in verses 42 and 44.

○ Jesus has “**often [withdrawn] to lonely places and prayed**” (Luke 5:16). And based on specific Gospel incidents – {Lk 3:21} at his baptism, {Lk 6:12} when he chose the Twelve apostles, {Jn 11:38-44} the day he raised Lazarus from the dead, and so forth – prayer is not Christ’s last alternative; it is his first resort, his middle resort and his last resort.

○ His prayers are not a matter of sedate, polite ceremony; they are vigorous, mutual dialogue between him and Father God. They are full of: speaking and listening; reverence and honesty; assertion and submission; adoration; thanksgiving, lament, supplication and surrender. In Gethsemane Jesus cries out in protest, “**My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me**” – yet, in the next breath he says “**Yet not as I will, but as you will.**”

★ In times of struggle and crucial decision, it is easier to walk with Jesus and choose God’s way if we have an active, Christ-like prayer life.

□ Finally, in verses 40-41 Jesus returns to the disciples, finds them asleep and warns them to “**Watch**

**and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”**

Isn’t Jesus amazing! He knows what is about to happen. He’s been wrestling with his mission, and it is becoming clear that his Father is not going to give him a break. He does not want to suffer all that physical, emotional and spiritual agony.

This won’t be easy for the disciples, either; yet their ordeal is going to be light and comfortable compared to his – and still he is concerned about them. He foresees their struggles and is well aware of their weaknesses and does what he can for them in the moment.

Of all the times Jesus could be excused for thinking only of himself, this is it; but the Messiah does not fall into self-absorption. He expends precious energy ministering to Peter, James and John.

★ In times of struggle and crucial decision, it is easier to walk with Jesus and choose God’s way if we avoid self-centeredness and extend agape love to others.

□ Verses 45 and 46 reveal the outcome. Jesus returns a third time to his disciples, wakes them, and says: “**Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!**” The Lord does not wait passively for his arrest, much less walk away from it; he runs toward it!

Meeting his Father in a familiar place, relying on a network of like-hearted friends, speaking with vulnerable sincerity, turning to God in prayer, and loving others has equipped him for courageous and active obedience. They can do the same for us.

☑ We don't have to die for the sins of the world. For us the challenge will be {Gaddy, Soul Geography} to **“kill a personal prejudice that”** makes it hard to love others, or to **“[speak out against] an immoral national policy,”** or to **“[serve] as an agent of reconciliation among rival political factions”** or to **“[stand] up for what is right”** in the workplace, or to **“[live] as an advocate for grace among...people who are more comfortable with judgment.”** Obedience to God in these things **“can be like sweating blood.”**

What will we do in our Gethsemane? *Will we go your own way? Or will we walk with Jesus?*