

Gethsemane // Mark 14:22–32

(*Cancer sucks; Christ is better.* What a beautiful statement of Christian hope in the mouth of an American teenager.)

- Cancer with Christ is better than health without him; *any kind of suffering with Christ is better than any kind of prosperity without him.*
- *The one who has cancer and Christ has all things; the one who has all things without Christ really has nothing.*

I want to walk you through the G of G (it's **the passage I preached at his funeral**) for two reasons: 1. **This weekend begins Passion week**, leading up to Easter, and I can't think of a better intro than this passage.

2. **Our lives are filled with a lot of pain...** Many of us have walked, or are now walking, through dark valleys. Some so dark they are hard even to speak about.

I want to explain the hope that someone who loves and trusts Jesus can have going through one of those valleys...

- **If you are not a Christian**, I want to ask you to **consider what I am about to say today very carefully**, and I want you to ask yourself whether you have this kind of hope, or what will happen when you walk through one of these valleys...
- Because, **of course, you will...** I heard someone say it is very rare to make it through **10 years** without going through some life crisis. ***There's nothing like death, or crisis, that makes us see life clearly.***

Mark 14:32–42

(For those of you who say, "*What happened to going through Acts?*")
Well, we got through where I wanted to: Acts 12. Next week we're

starting a series on the difficult sayings of Jesus. And then we'll be finishing up Acts in the summer.)

I will confess to you that where we are about to go this weekend is a **deeply mysterious place**—one of the most mysterious places in all of Scripture.

It's a **holy place**.

- I get the sense that this is the kind of place I really ought to come into only **on my knees**, and that anything I can say or do here will **fall so far short** of what is actually happening.

The Apostle Paul called these things we're about to look into the unsearchable riches of Christ;

It's what he said **Moses saw** that made his face glow.

The Apostle Peter said the angels long to look into the gospel... The angels, who see the glory of God every day, long to look into scenes like this one, and when they do they cover their faces and say "Holy, Holy, Holy."

I want us to pray before we get started, because the things we are going to look into this weekend are only spiritually discerned.

- Sometimes when I speak I feel like I have **a concept to communicate**, or points to make... things for you **to do... funny stories...** I don't really have any of those in this message.
- This is one of those messages where the **power of it is only in the seeing**, and ***if the Spirit of God doesn't grant us the ability*** to see it, you and I can stand up here and talk all day long and you can sit out there and listen all day long and it won't do either of us any good.

(Prayer). **Not explanation, but revelation.** These things are so great they are unsearchable. As we enter this holy place, let us not only understand them, let us feel them.

Mark 14:32–42

Mk14:32 And they (the disciples and Jesus) went to a place called Gethsemane. And Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” **33** And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. **34** And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.” **35** And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. **36** And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” **37** And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? **38** Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” **39** And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. **40** And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. **41** And he came the third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. **42** Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

And they lift up their eyes and there is Judas, and the Temple guards, coming to take away Jesus to the crucifixion...

Now, one of the first things we have to notice is that Jesus does not go to his death with the defiance and bravery that we’d expect.

He appears weak, here—almost scared.

- And that’s confusing because **most of the world’s great heroes have died** with their fist in the face of the evil empire (think Braveheart, Gladiator). Dying defiantly, saying, “You don’t scare

me; I’ll never back down; and I will have my vengeance in this life or the next.”

- **Jewish heroes**
- Plato says that **Socrates**, when he was executed, was cool and stoic... when he was given the hemlock to drink he was calm, his color didn’t change, and he even cracked a few jokes before his death. Defiance.
- **Jesus’ followers** would die defiantly like that. **Polycarp**, the student of the Apostle John. When they came to take him he went calmly, when asked what he’d like to say before being burned at the stake, he said, (PARAPHRASE: YOU THINK I’M AFRAID OF THIS FIRE? IT BURNS FOR JUST A MINUTE AND IS GONE. YOU SHOULD BE AFRAID OF THE FIRES OF HELL. I’M NOT SCARED OF THESE TEMPORARY FLAMES. COME ON BOYS, BRING ON THE FIRE.)¹

But that’s not how Jesus goes to his death. He’s trembling; he seems weak and scared.

- And **what is really strange about this** is that everywhere else Jesus shows unflinching courage in the face of danger. Right before this, Jesus’ disciples are telling him he’s crazy for going to Jerusalem, because he’s sure to be in danger. Mark says he set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem. Jesus has always been the bold, brave one.
- And it’s not like he’s withering in the face of pain, either, because the first aspect of torture has yet to begin.

In verses 33–34 there’s a very **strange** phrase, it says, “**he began to be astonished and troubled.**”

In Greek, literally, it says ‘**suddenly**’ he began to be astonished. **All at once.** In other words, Jesus saw something in vs. 33, all at once, that wasn’t there in vs. 32.

¹ Actual: “The fire you threaten lasts only an hour and is quenched with just a little, but what do you know of the fires of judgment? So come on boys, bring on the fire.”

The text says he was “troubled” by it. The word “**TROUBLED**” is a very strong Greek word that means *overcome with shocking horror*.²

- Scholars say it indicates the kind of the feeling you’d have if you came home one evening and found your family murdered, mutilated and hung up on the wall.

What Jesus saw was so overwhelming that Jesus **almost died** from it—see:

34 *And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.*

Jesus is not one to exaggerate. What he saw almost killed him.

Luke says he was under such strain that he began to sweat great drops of blood.

- **Hematridosis**... under such distress that your capillaries burst.
- **Finding child on the bottom of the pool**: He asked the doctor about them, and the doctor said that right before his son had lost consciousness at the bottom of the pool, he had been crying so forcefully for his father that the capillaries in his face burst.

And here is Jesus—who **spoke the worlds into existence**, who walked on top of **angry waves**, calmed the **fiercest storms**, cast out **demons**, healed **diseases** and brought **life back to the dead**—so horrified at something that he sees that his capillaries burst, crying out in agony for his father, nearly causing his death.

What had he seen?

Notice, what he prays: **36** *“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. He calls God, Abba... the term of closest intimacy with God.*

...But there is no response.

- You see, up until this point he has enjoyed an intimacy with the Father. **He often withdrew to be alone with God to draw strength....** The Father had always **radiated with openness** to him... sometimes even affirming him publicly...
- **Yet now, only silence.**

And so he stumbles back to his disciples looking, almost, for some kind of comfort... and they are **asleep**. He wakes them up, and says, “Guys, I need you to be up with me.”

Weak? Tender?

He needed somebody. But they are asleep. And so, vs. 39 he goes back again to the Father and says the exact same thing. And again, only silence.

What is happening here? William Lane, NT scholar, says that the only explanation is that **God has already begun to turn his face away**. The crucifixion has **already started**. Before the first nail was driven into his body, Jesus’ soul had been abandoned by God.

Jesus had lived his life, you see, for the **approval of the Father**, and now, in the **moment Jesus needed** his Father most, God turned his face away.

And **Jesus staggered under the weight** of it, almost to the point of death.

William Lane says, *“This is the horror of one who lived wholly for the father, who came to be with his Father for a brief interlude before his death and found hell, rather than heaven, open before him.”*

- **Utter aloneness.** *Have you ever felt alone? A trusted friend turns on you. Someone you cared about betrayed you. Your parents fail you. Your kids refuse to let you see your grandkids. Jesus felt that.*

² Leon Morris, *The Cross*, 74, fn. 19.

- Not just aloneness, but **the pain of rejection**. *Have you ever been really rejected?* It's what Jesus went through.
 - I think about what it would be like to **do this to one of my children**—to have them look to me in a moment of pain, or weakness, and me not only not help them but to turn away from them, in scorn, and rejection, and say, essentially “You are not my child” in the moment they most needed me.
 - My **children have only known me** for a few years, and I'm not a perfect father, by any means. But *what was it like to lose the infinite love of the Father that you've known from all eternity?*
- **Is there even an analogy for this?** There's really nothing to which I can compare it; nothing that can make us really understand.
- **Anything human we come up** with really only takes away from the bitterness and tragedy of this moment.

Somehow in that one moment Jesus experienced the equivalent of an eternity in hell for us.

And in that moment all of heaven heaven fell silent, unable to comprehend what exactly what was happening.

Hymnwriters, sensing the majesty of the moment, say things like:

'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies!
 Who can explore his strange design?
 In vain the firstborn seraph tries
 To sound the depths of love divine.

Or a more recent worship song we used to sing here: “I'll never know how much it cost.” Probably nothing we ever sing that has more truth.

“From what he endured at Gethsemane and upon the cross, we learn the meaning of that awful sentence, ‘The soul that sinneth shall die.’”

John Newton

In Gethsemane, Jesus stared into the horror of hell... and almost died from it, and then voluntarily went into it for us.

- That's what hell is, you see: **complete abandonment by God**.
- **You see, I always thought** that what made Jesus' death so bad were the **physical horrors**... and they were terrible...
 - **Cicero** said that one of the Roman's goals in the cross was **utter humiliation**... A **public place** like the mall... because the **cross was so painful** men would weep, vomit, urinate all over themselves
 - They beat them until they were **barely recognizable**... **PASSION** movie
 - **Cicero said that** it was not uncommon in the scourging to see a **rib** go flying off the frame); we are almost certain he was at least partially **disemboweled**
 - The prophet Isaiah said he was beaten to a point he didn't look like a man—**unrecognizable**
 - Cicero said that sometimes Romans would **crucify women when they really wanted to make a point** but they would do it backwards because they couldn't stand to see the anguish on a woman's face
 - He was **nailed up on a cross, naked, in a public place** in the full light of day...

So yes, the physical horrors were terrible... but (listen) that's not, IN GETHSEMANE, what made Jesus stagger... It was the abandonment by God he faced. That was the horror of the cross for him.

In Gethsemane, Jesus looked full into the cup of God's wrath, and it overwhelmed him so badly that **it almost killed him**.

Isa 51:17 describes God's wrath for our sin is like a toxic poison kept in a cup. As that cup was offered to us, Jesus stepped in the way, and drank it for us, to the dregs.

- I think it was Jonathan Edwards compared it to a **dam breaking loose**... Imagine you were standing before a huge dam... and right before the wave hits you the ground opens up and swallows the

torrent of water so that not a drop touches you. Jesus swallowed up the wrath of God so that not a drop would touch us.

- **He drank the cup of God's wrath** to the dregs, turned it over and said, "It is finished."

BTW, Would you **really entertain the idea** there are multiple ways to God? What **greater insult** to Jesus? **TWICE** Jesus asks if there is another way; twice the Father says no, when there was another way?

- **God had determined to save us, and this was the only way.**
- If I could have been there and tried to stop Jesus he would have said, "No! This cup is your cup."

The gospel, at its core, is substitution: **Jesus in My Place!**

- Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath to its very dregs so that not a drop would be left for your or me, and all that would be left for me is the cup of joy.
- *Oh well of joy, is mine to drink, for my Lord has conquered death; victorious, forevermore, my ancient foe is laid to rest!*
- **Substitution:** Jesus in my place. **Offered to you as a gift.** Have you received that personally, as your own?

(What It Means For You)

That's what Gethsemane means for you and your salvation. Let me tell you what it means for you as you walk through dark valleys of pain and loneliness...

You should (and I'm going to borrow the words of C.J. Mahaney)...³

1. Stand amazed at his love for you in HIS darkest hour

The cross, Paul says, puts on display the love of God for us...

- **Jonathan Edwards** asked the question: why did God let Jesus see this before the cross? If anything, wasn't that kind of dangerous?

³ I am deeply indebted in my approach to this passage to sermons I heard Tim Keller and CJ Mahaney preach on the passage. A few of the quotes and some of the commentary work

Why didn't God wait until Jesus was secured to the cross to show Him this... Why did God show it to him now? **"It was so we could see Jesus go to the cross voluntarily knowing full well what he was about to experience, so that his love for us would be put on display even more."** **Jonathan Edwards**

The circumstances of the cross were designed to put God's love for us on display. God turned his back on his most beloved Son, because *God so loved the world* (you!) and this was the only way to save it.

The Gospel of Luke says that right toward the end of this an angel came to minister to him (Luke 22:43)... I've wondered... what did the angel say? How did he minister to him? Give him a John Piper book about having joy in suffering?

- We don't know, it doesn't say... but maybe **Hebrews 12:2** gives us an answer... "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross."

Maybe the angel said something that helped give Jesus joy as he went into the cross.

The joy of what? What was the joy set before him? Well, what would Jesus obtain through the cross that he didn't have before? *What would he have on this side of the cross that he didn't have on that side?*

- The approval of God? Already had that.
- The kingship of the universe? Already his.
- What is the one thing he would have after the cross that he didn't have before it?

You. He was doing this to save *you* and me.

come from them. Particularly the language about confidence of Jesus in your darkest hour because of his commitment to you in your darkest hour is from him.

Isaiah (43) says he went to the cross because we were his “precious” in his sight. **Precious: means you’d give up anything!** Isaiah 43:4, God says, “I gave up the world for you!”

1 John 3:1, “Behold...”

- I can’t explain; I just behold!

And can it be, that I should gain, An interest in my Savior’s blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain, to me, who him to death pursued...
Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God?

An older hymn: “Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made, were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.”

Kids at beach: how deep! How high, how wide!

So, #1, Stand amazed by his love for you in his darkest hour...

2. Believe in his love for you in YOUR darkest hour

Because Jesus faced utter aloneness, rejection by God, in my place, I never have to fear really being forsaken by God.

SUBSTITUTION: He took **my place**; any **condemnation**; any **rejection**; any **aloneness I deserved**, he took it, so that I could now say, “There is **no condemnation...**” and “**When I walk through the valley** of the shadow of death, I won’t fear any evil... **because you are with me** (and you took the evil in my place); and goodness and mercy will follow me... goodness and mercy because he took all the evil and wrath.

I know **many of you have gone through** some tremendously terrible things. And it **felt like God has abandoned you...** Like you were alone. You weren’t. This shows it...

- It’s even popular among some Christians to say, “**I’m going through my Gethsemane.**”
- I don’t mean to minimize your pain, but no you are not. **You will never have a Gethsemane.** Jesus went through the only one.
- **You will never be forsaken.** Jesus was forsaken so you would never be.

So when you say, “Where is God? Why doesn’t he stop this? Why doesn’t he do something?” (convo this week!)

- Gethsemane helps you see that the **one thing you never need to doubt** is his love.
- **John Owen** said that in light of the cross the greatest unkindness you could do to God is to doubt his love for you.

We don’t understand all that God is doing in our darkest hour, any more than the disciples understood what was happening here... but we can never, must never doubt his love.

- **While we slept in sin, he entered hell itself for us.**
- **Do you ever feel like God is sleeping? No, when you were sleeping, he was working.**

So when you feel alone, like no one cares, like you are forgotten, look to Gethsemane:

- If God didn’t abandon you at this point, when **hell was literally squeezing** the life out of him, why would he abandon you now?

If you feel abandoned by God, you’re wrong. You have to be.

Isaiah asks this: **“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast or have no compassion on the child she has borne?”** (Is that even possible?)

Though she may forget, (I guess it’s possible. YET I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. (Isaiah 49:15–16)

See, **maybe you have been forgotten or forsaken by the most intimate human relationships**—by your parents; by someone close to

you... a spouse who divorced you; a friend who betrayed you, children who rejected you; but **your God, your Father, this Savior** cannot and will not.

- He **went through Gethsemane**, hell, to rescue you! **He's literally engraved you** on the palms of his hands!

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did ere such love and sorrow meet, or joy compose so rich a crown?

- I can never be forgotten. My name is written on his hands!

And so when you are discouraged, or you feel alone or abandoned or depressed, you have to come here, to this Garden of Gethsemane, and preach the gospel presented here to yourself.

You have to tell yourself: I feel abandoned but I am not! Gethsemane proves it.

David models this in Psalm 103—"Bless the Lord, o my soul! And forget not all his benefits." **Some psalms are written to God**; some to others; **Who is one written to?**

- "Bless the Lord, oh my *soul*." He's preaching the gospel to his own soul.
- That's what you have to do. You have to tell yourself:
 - Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and don't you forget all his benefits—like **when I was dead in sin**, you came to earth to save me; and when I was **asleep in my sin**, you joyfully went to the cross to wake me up!
 - And he that **did not withhold his own Son** for me, will he not freely now also give me all things? Will he **withhold any good thing**? Can anything **separate me** from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus?
- *You need to preach the gospel to your despondent self.*

- *You need to stop **listening to your fearful, doubting heart** and **start preaching the gospel** to it.*

- And **don't mumble**. And be **long-winded** if you have to.
- **Defy those feelings** of despondency with faith in the gospel of Gethsemane.⁴

On a sunny hillside: our Father who art in heaven... in a dark garden called Gethsemane...

And then you can say, with Paul, in pain, that though the **outward man is dying**, the inward man is renewed in Christ day by day. Though **I am poor**, yet, in Christ, I am rich. Though **I have nothing**, yet in him I possess all things (2 Cor 6:10)

3. We must read the Great Commission through the lens of Gethsemane

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations... and I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18–20)

Why I wanted to preach it to you this weekend before Easter

The God who tells us to, "Go," is the Savior of Gethsemane.

- **Is he not worth giving up everything for?** Is it not **urgent that everyone** in your community, your family, know about him?
- **Shouldn't they know about what he's done, and give him glory for it?** Isn't he **worthy** to be worshipped?
- And do realize what Gethsemane tells about his willingness to save sinners?
 - Is there anything too great to ask him? Is there any request that would exhaust the limits of his love?
 - I've told you before about... Alexander the Great.

⁴ Adapted from Jared Wilson, *Gospel Wakefulness*, 157.

- John Newton: *Thou art coming to a King, so with thee large petitions bring, for his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.*

Isa 53:11, God says, “I will see the suffering of his soul and be satisfied.”

- **Do you realize how satisfied God is with Jesus?**
- Is there anything God will not give for the sake of Jesus?
 - Illus: Praying in the name of a martyr.
 - **Isa 53:11...** There is One who already died for this group and it’s impossible to hold up any sacrifice more pleasing to the Father than that one. **He is *satisfied* in the sacrifice of his son.**
- **So, “ask,” he says.** Ask me to do great things in the life of your friends, your family, your college campus, in unreached people groups I have put before you around the world!

Conclusion (Music)

Summit, that’s why our dreams for our church are so big! Because I believe in the vision of God I see here in Gethsemane!

- ***You see, he didn’t die so you and I could just sit in here and play church; huddle up and talk about how “bad” it is getting out there.***
- **He died to bring the nations to worship.**
- He died to turn Saul’s into Paul’s and transform haters into white-hot worshippers.

So here’s my question:

Do the size of your prayers match the size of his sacrifice? (Don’t insult his sacrifice through small dreams and weak expectations. That’s not what he died for.)

Is what you are pursuing with your life worthy of his sacrifice? Jesus didn’t die so we could just get rich and live an easy life.

Why I hate prosperity gospel

That’s not what Gethsemane is about... We are dealing here with eternity—something so important Jesus went through Gethsemane and the cross to keep me from.

- ***If Gethsemane is true, then my priorities have to be different. I have to devote myself to helping people come to know this measureless love and the only salvation from sin.***
- ***Is what you are pursuing with your life worthy of his sacrifice? OR, maybe better: Is what you’re living for worth him dying for?***
- ***“Were the whole realm...”***
 - **MORAVIAN missionaries:** I remember hearing the story years ago... **“May the Lamb that was slain...”**
 - As with most good preacher stories, this story is partially true: In There were two Moravians—John Leonard Dober and David Nitschmann... who tried to sell themselves into slavery. 1731
 - J. E. Hutton’s *History of the Moravian Church*, **“For 50 years the Moravian Brethren labored in the West Indies without any aid from any other religious denomination. DIFFICULTIES ON EVERY HAND. They established churches in St. Thomas, in St. Croix, in St. John’s, in Jamaica, in Antigua, in Barbados, and in St. Kitts. They had 13,000 baptized converts before a missionary from any other Church arrived on the scene.”⁵**
 - **Are you willing to press on with people who keep refusing to listen, for 50 years, because you believe the Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive the reward of his suffering?**

Most importantly: Have you personally trusted Jesus? This is an offer, a gift, and it has to be received personally, in faith.

PRAYER and COMMUNION

- *Need to receive Christ? Don’t take elements. You ask him.*
- *Believers, you remember: Stand amazed by his love for you in his darkest hour; believe in his love for you in your darkest hour; think about your world through the lens of Gethsemane.*
- **Why so callous?**

Campus Pastors:

- Lead in actual taking of elements

⁵ Material taken from J. E. Hutton’s *History of the Moravian Church*, Chapter 6

- Lead in time of praying for people who need to hear about God's love this Easter

