

## **In the Garden - Matthew 26:36-46**

**Introduction:** We talked about Forrest Gump this morning. Here's another one. Forrest Gump died and went to heaven. When he got to the Pearly Gates, Saint Peter told him that new rules were in effect due to the advances in education on earth. In order to gain admittance, he must answer three questions:

1. Name two days of the week that begin with "T."
2. How many seconds are in a year?
3. What is God's first name?

Forrest thought for a few minutes and answered .....

"1. The two days of the week that begin with "T" are Today and Tomorrow."

"2. There are 12 seconds in a year."

"3. God first name is Andy."

Saint Peter said, "OK, I'll buy Today and Tomorrow, even though it's not the answer I expected, so your answer is correct. But how did you get 12 seconds in a year and why did you ever think that God's first name was Andy?"

Forrest responded, "Well, January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd, etc." "OK, I give," said Saint Peter, "but what about the God's first name stuff?"

Forrest said, "Well, the song says, Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me I am his own."

Tonight we continue our study of Matthew and we come to one of the most important parts of the book. From Matthew 26:36 through the rest of the book, we will see Matthew's account of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection.

As we follow Christ's steps toward His own death, we see that it was probably near midnight on the Thursday of Passover week. Jesus' three year ministry was drawing to a close. He had preached his last public sermon. He had performed His last miracle. He had celebrated His last Passover meal and instituted a new memorial to Himself in the process. But infinitely more than that, Jesus had come to be the last and ultimate Passover Lamb – the perfect and only sacrifice for the sins of the world.

As we look further into these last events in our Lord's earthly life, I hope we will be able to grasp their sacredness; their significance, and their sanctity. As we go through these events, we will be approaching the Christmas season, but in reality, these events will lead us to the meaning of Easter. I pray that we will have a better understanding of the significance of Easter and the resurrection of Jesus Christ when we reach the end of this book.

The resurrection of Christ is the pivotal point of Christianity; the benchmark on which all theology, doctrine, and Christian beliefs rests. But understanding the crucifixion of Christ and all the events surrounding it are essential to understanding the impact and significance of the resurrection.

Tonight, we will look at what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before the crucifixion.

First, let's see:

## 1. The Agony of Jesus (36-39)

Before we talk about Jesus' agony, we need to remember that before the agony, there was great joy.

Several years ago during the 2002 Winter Olympics, in the short track speed skating event, there was one race that, toward the end, several skaters were bunched up together trying to maneuver their way toward the lead. As they flew around the track, the crowd was cheering wildly, waving their flags and getting excited for their fellow countrymen. Well, as they bunched up even closer, two skaters wiped out as they rounded a curve. One of them hit the wall and it snapped his head back violently. All of a sudden, the crowd went deathly silent and as they all feared the worst. You could tell that the mood in that arena went from great joy to extreme agony in a matter of seconds.

In the verses leading up to vs. 36, you'll notice the same shift in mood. Jesus and the disciples had been in the upper room celebrating Passover – that most monumental and significant event in Jewish history commemorating the exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt. In this celebration, there was always feasting, fellowship, and singing. This was the case as Jesus and His disciples celebrated this event. Except for Jesus' announcement of His betrayal, everything was fairly upbeat.

After the Passover meal, Jesus and His disciples went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. It was there His mood and demeanor changed from joy to agony as He knew the time of His betrayal, arrest, trial, beating, and death was approaching.

Jesus instructed eight of His disciples to sit in a certain place, and took Peter, James, and John further into the garden, and instructed them to keep watch with Him there and to pray. Then He shared something very significant with them when He said, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"* (v. 38 NIV).

Why would Jesus experience this sudden distress? After all, He knew this was coming. He had even warned the disciples of it. Was He afraid to die? Was He thinking about being separated from His friends and family? Was He upset because He knew all his disciples would desert Him? Was He dreading the pain? Well, some of those things might have crossed His mind, but I believe it was something more than those things. I believe that He was more deeply distressed at the thought that, for the first time ever, He would be separated from His Heavenly Father.

You see, in another garden, many years earlier, in the Garden of Eden, Adam was tempted, but he said, *"Not **Thy** will but **mine** be done,"* And Adam became a sinner, and was temporarily separated from God's presence in the Garden of Eden. But more severely, the physical death sentence was placed on mankind. The Bible says *"The wages of sin is death."* That means to be separated eternally from God. That's what we deserve.

But in God's eternal plan of salvation, He sent Jesus, the last Adam to another garden called Gethsemane, which in Hebrew means *"oil press."* Adam's rebellion in the Garden of Eden brought Jesus Christ to this garden

of Gethsemane to be pressed. Having instructed the disciples to watch and pray, He went farther into the garden to be alone, where He fell with his face to the ground.

He prayed: "*My Father, if it is possible;*" if it is consistent with Your nature and Your plan of redemption, and Your will, Father, then: "*may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*" Jesus knew what drinking of the cup of God's wrath meant: that He would become sin, cursed, and forsaken by His Father. He was asking God if there was an alternative. Wouldn't you?

You bet we would. Every Spring as I look out over my yard, I see something that brings me great joy and great distress at the same time. I see these little blades of grass shooting up from the ground. And then it hits me, I'm going to have to mow all that! And there are thousand other things I'd rather do than mow the yard. It causes be great distress, and I'll do just about anything to get out of it.

But here, Jesus was facing death! How stressful was that? It was an agonizing, painful, and dreadful experience. Luke wrote that Jesus' sweat became as drops of blood as He prayed. We don't know exactly what that means; but it shows the intensity of Christ's agony. God was offering the cup of His wrath. Satan was offering a cup of temptation. Which would He take - the hard one or the easy one? It was a time of extreme agony. Next, I want us to notice:

## **2. The Appeal of Jesus (40-41)**

After an hour of prayer, Jesus went back and found the three disciples sleeping. They couldn't even pray even for one hour, even though Jesus had told them of His intense distress.

Jesus woke them up, and made this appeal to them as He repeated His instructions: "*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation...*" (vs. 41 NIV). Jesus had just experienced one of the most stressful and painful hours of His life. He was locked in a spiritual battle of enormous proportions being waged between God and Satan, and the fate of mankind hung in the balance. Jesus was appealing to His disciples to watch out, or you're going to be run over by the enemy!

Those were simple instructions, but apparently they were hard to carry out. Ask David. He was watching Bathsheba, and not praying. And because he was not spiritually alert, he fell into temptation.

Ask Balaam. He was praying, but not watching when God spoke to Him through the donkey, trying to get his attention. And because he was not spiritually alert, He missed God's warning.

Ask yourself how many times you slipped up or missed an opportunity all because you weren't paying attention. And it's all because you weren't watching and praying.

Jesus is says to us, "*Watch and pray. Pray and watch.*" We've got to be spiritually alert. Satan's trying to trip us up and trick us. We won't be able to resist him, if we're not watching and praying. Jesus knows that we're just like the disciples. We're too busy doing everything except what Jesus told us to do. Next, I want us to notice:

## **3. The Action of Jesus (42-46)**

After Jesus prayed again, He came back to find them still sleeping. But by this time, Jesus had accepted God's cup of wrath. There was no avoiding what He came to do. It was time to submit to "*Your will be done.*" It was time for action.

There's a great lesson for the church here. Jesus is always ready for action, but most of the time, the church is asleep. God is always at work around us. He's bringing revival to this corner of the world, but these over here are not paying attention. He's softening the heart of that co-worker, but you are not even aware of it, and you miss the opportunity to lead them to Christ. You've prayed for a miracle, but when God sends it, you don't recognize it as coming from God.

God wants to bless us. He's left us with some simple instructions: **Watch and Pray! Wake up! Watch out! Pray! Be Prepared!**

A.W. Tozer once said, "*The neglected heart will soon be a heart overrun with worldly thoughts; the neglected life will soon become a moral chaos; the church that is not jealously protected by a mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspecting corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray.*"

As you Pastor, I'm telling you to watch and pray church. Let's not let our guard down for one minute. That is long enough for trouble to brew and the "*creeping wilderness*" of Satan's influence to trickle in. We need to be prepared and stay prepared because the Bible says Satan is prowling about like a roaring lion seeking some Christian, some church, or some church leader to devour.

Jesus was prepared but when trouble came, the disciples were not. Peter took a sword and cut off the ear of a servant. Later he denied Christ 3 times. Later, all the disciples scattered when Jesus was crucified. Why? They had failed to heed Jesus' repeated command: "*Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.*"

There's one more action of Jesus I want us to see. When Jesus submitted to the will of the Father, He reached out and took our cup. He took the cup of God's wrath that we deserved.

You see, it wasn't Jesus who sinned or rebelled. It was our sin and rebellion that caused the wrath of God. We deserved to be eternally separated from God. All of that was in the cup, and God gave it to his Son, who took it from the hand of God Himself because He loved us.

He drank of this cup of God's wrath so that He could offer us the cup of salvation. What a deal! Punishment for reward! Death for life. Curse for blessing. Separation for salvation.

And this is the cup of salvation Christ offers to us. It's already been paid for. It's freely given to all who will receive it. And when it is accepted, it makes all the difference between life and death.