

## Gethsemane

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Matthew 26:30-46 and Luke 22:39-53

Gethsemane is a Greek name transliterated from the Aramaic, "gat shemen" which means "olive press"<sup>1</sup>. Scripture tells us that after the Passover dinner Jesus shared with his disciples, they walked to the Mount of Olives which stands across the Kidron Valley east of Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is an orchard (or garden) of olive trees also containing an olive press; and is the back ground for Jesus' night of suffering and prayer.

Read both scripture passages, and as we will be going back and forth between the two passages in today's lesson it might be helpful if you have something to use as a book mark to hold your place as we flip back and forth. Matthew 26:30 picks up at the end of the Last Supper. Jesus had just taken the third cup, the cup of Redemption and gave it a new meaning: it was his blood that now would be poured out for the forgiveness of sin. He was to be the Lamb of this Passover. After dinner they depart singing a hymn, they were singing Psalm 118, the traditional hymn sung at the end of Passover.

John tells us that Jesus and his disciples went to a place he visited often<sup>2</sup>, an olive grove on the other side of the Kidron Valley. It was a place Jesus must have liked, he frequented it often, and it is where he went to pray. Luke 21:37 tells us: *"Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives."* He went there again this night. He prayed in agony and obedience. It was also a place where he knew Judas would find him.

*"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.'*" Jesus instructs his disciples to pray. As we learned in our homework, Jesus had informed them that they would face Satan's sifting. In fact Matthew and Mark both record Jesus' quoting Zechariah saying *"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered"* (Matt 26:31, Mark 27) prophesying that the disciples all will desert him. He is reminding them to turn to the Father for the strength to withstand Satan's testing of their faith. The temptation would be to run away and deny ever knowing Jesus. In the coming day they would see Jesus die and might decide that the cost to follow Jesus is too high. They needed to be down on their knees praying for the strength and resolve to stand against whatever means Satan would bring to shake the very foundation of their faith in Jesus. Jesus had used the metaphor of wheat sifting to

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<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary – New Testament*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1993), WORDsearch

<sup>2</sup> John 18:1-3

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describe the events the disciples would go through in the coming days. There appears to be some significance of Jesus' night in Gethsemane. Just as the disciples will be sifted by the coming events, Jesus will be crushed and pressed like olives in a press.

Jesus tells them to watch and pray. What are they to watch for? Watch means to be on guard against what ways temptation can come against you. In what ways are you most weak to temptation. How has temptation gotten the best of you in the past? It means to be watchful of the subtle ways of temptation. Temptation is not always bold and out right, in fact the most common and insidious form temptation can take is the slippery slope of compromise, the relaxing of values and morals to accommodate others out of fear of offending or hurting them. Or it's the "I'll just do it once, no one will know", and then it comes up again and we think to ourselves, "it was so bad compromising a little the first time, I'll just do it again, no one got hurt, it makes things easier all around." It's the subtle undermining of values and faith against which we have to be on guard. We also have to remember that temptation is hardest to withstand alone. We are at our most vulnerable when we are alone and Satan will use that against us. If we are steadfast in prayer we know we are not alone, we have the strength of Almighty God on our side.

In Matthew Jesus beseeches Peter, James, and John to stand watch and pray with him three times. We see that Jesus is greatly distressed and full of sorrow. He tells them repeatedly to pray. He says it first in Matt v.38, again in v.41. The third time (in v.43) he comes back to them he sees they are sleeping, exhausted from the sorrow brought on by Jesus' words of his imminent death. He leaves them to their rest. They don't have the strength to sit and pray with him. Had they known what was coming they would have been on their knees and not falling off to sleep. They have no idea how soon Jesus' hour would come upon them. They underestimated his danger, their own danger, and the immediacy of that danger. In fact, I wonder how much of Peter's inability to stand up and proclaim knowing Jesus stems from the inability to pray effectively at this time.

In sharp contrast with the disciples' inability to pray we see Jesus fervently praying. We are reminded that Jesus' suffering was due to God's plan. Jesus while clearly not wanting to go forward with what he knew was soon to come was at the same time obedient in submitting to God's will. Let us take a close look at Jesus' prayer. In Luke 22:42-43 Jesus repeatedly tells his disciples: "pray so you will not fall into temptation". The entire episode in the garden of Gethsemane is a spiritual battle being waged against temptation; and Jesus is going it alone. The human side of Jesus' nature struggled with what lay ahead. Jesus, fully human yet fully divine, knew the physical pain and torture of crucifixion that lay ahead, as well as, the spiritual burden of carrying the sins of the world upon his death. The human aspect of Jesus would be filled with fear and dread making room for the temptation to walk away from what was required of him. What is the temptation that Jesus faced? Choosing not to submit to the authority of his Father. The temptation was the cross-less kingdom, a kingdom that would not require him to go through the agony of the crucifixion. Not only would he endure the horrific physical pain of the crucifixion, but the emotional/spiritual agony of complete separation from God required in order for his death to atone for the sins of the world. Could there be any other

way? According to Matthew, Jesus goes back to his Father in prayer three times: Matt 26:44: *"So he left them [sleeping] and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing."* He stays on his knees until he can say "your will, Father, not mine."

Only Luke records that his time of prayer was a time of extreme anguish, his sweat even resembling blood. The Bible Knowledge Commentary<sup>3</sup> describes Jesus' night of prayer as he wrestled with submitting to his Father's plan as being "buffeted by temptation". It is a battle in the darkest hours of the night when Satan's power is at its strongest, and Jesus, alone stands against the crushing weight of temptation. Yet he does not give in, he does not give up and walk away. Instead he prays on his knees seeking strength from his Father to have the courage to walk obediently the path set before him. His Father hears his prayers and answers. An Angel comes and ministers to him and strengthens his resolve.

How do we prepare ourselves for the times of sifting of our faith? What can we do to prepare ourselves against the onslaught of circumstances designed to rock our faith to the very core? The purpose of sifting is to test and refine our faith. Satan's desire is to shake our faith to its very foundations in an attempt to cause us to abandon it. He wants us to turn away from God making us believe God demands too much. That is apostasy. According to the Holman Bible Dictionary, apostasy "is the act of rebelling against, forsaking, abandoning, or falling away from what one has believed." Peter and the disciples give us a clear example of what a sifting looks like, but Satan's attempts failed. In our own lives we will experience sifting. While Satan's attempts are to bring us to disaster, God uses sifting as a means of refining and strengthening our faith. But how do we hold on to faith in the midst of the sifting? We need the strength of knowing God's presence through prayer. Only he can strengthen our spirit to withstand the attack. Spending time in prayer with God and time in the Word of God will teach us how to stand against the enemy's weapons of doubt, fear, and dread.

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<sup>3</sup> John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, ed., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 1985), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "b. Jesus on the Mount of Olives (22:39-46)".