

## Garden of Gethsemane

*Last 24 Hours of Christ*

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This morning as we celebrate that love divine of Jesus Christ, let me encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, chapter 26, and if you're a guest or visitor with us this morning, let me welcome you to a brand new kind of journey within our family of faith as we're walking through the gospels, not seeing the similarities and differences of the respective four accounts that we have but really concentrating on what the gospels spend the majority of their time speaking about. When you think about it, the gospels are not that lengthy to read through, they can be done so in a simple sitting, however they spend an inordinate amount of time, rightfully so, not just on the last week of Jesus Christ's life and ministry but particularly the last 24 hours. Today as we turn to Matthew 26, we continue on this journey through this last day, this momentous occasion as he makes his way toward Calvary.

Today we find ourselves in what we know as the garden of Gethsemane. Now oftentimes when we take biblical stories and we put them to film or we give them some type of dramatic account, we take liberty with those accounts that are not necessarily found in scripture. In just a moment, we're going to read about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and I'm sure that by this time most of you, if not all of you, have seen a very major theatrical presentation of the passion of Christ that came out some years ago, and I hate to inform you though metaphorically it is true, there is no biblical account of Jesus stomping on a snake in the garden of Gethsemane which is how that movie began. But metaphorically speaking, rightfully so we find ourselves in the still of the night, we find ourselves there with this anguish, in fact, he says, "My soul is almost unto death." Why? Because it was his love divine that he was about to pour out for all of humanity.

Beginning in verse 36 of Matthew 26, it says,

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. 37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I

will, but as thou wilt. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. 45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

As we walk through this strategic 24 hour time period in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, one of the things I want to do is just kind of walk through some very strategic concerns and questions and we always need to begin with the when. When does this account take place? When does this story happen in the chronology of things? And today in particular we're going to discover this is very strategic. You see, the last major event was what we know as the Last Supper. We addressed that last time we walked through this series where Jesus knelt down after the meal and he washed their feet with a towel. We know that he commissioned them to go and do likewise. The event that we'll deal with next week is the man who would betray him, we will deal with that person of Judas who, by the way, was not present in the garden when he was praying. But one of the things that we need to somewhat discover today is that those are the two major events on either side, the Last Supper and the betrayal, but there is an incredible amount of biblical material about what happened between "supper and this prayer meeting."

The gospel of John, in fact, we've labeled it the farewell discourse, gives us all the details. Remember chapter 13 of John? He kneels down. He washes their feet. They get up. They rise and for the next three chapters the gospel of John gives us the story of about a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk. Now think about that. Let me do the math for you:  $\frac{1}{7}$  of the gospel of John records the conversation on a walk from downtown Jerusalem to the garden of Gethsemane. There in chapter 14, remember what Jesus taught them? That no matter what happens in life, the Holy Spirit is going to come. He is going to empower you to do things even greater than I. He will be a comforter to you. He will fill you. He will move in power through you. Then in chapter 15, very famous section, where Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Apart from me you can do nothing." Do you see how prophetic that is? "Apart from me." In just a few moments after this story, what's about to happen? They're going to depart from him and then in chapter 16, he says, "It is expedient that I depart from you," ascend on high after his resurrection, "for how else can the comforter come, the Spirit of truth, and guide you in all things?" You talk about bad short-term memory, these guys are suffering terribly from it.

It was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile. Due to the rocky terrain, it might have taken 15-30 minutes as Jesus was teaching and talking and, by the way, the Bible also says they sang a hymn along the way. They get to the garden and we get to the "who." Who is present? This is

critical to our understanding of what's happening here because he does something that is well-known in scripture but maybe more rare than you think. He takes the disciples, now there are 11 of them with him because Judas has gone his way to gather the band of soldiers, but when he does so, what does he do at the very beginning in verse 26? He says, "You guys stay here. I'm going to go pray." And then we discover that Peter, James and John, what I like to call the Big 3, have been brought to that inner part of the garden with him.

Now not only has Jesus been teaching them for, say, 30 minutes after he washed their feet, the very fact that he would separate them in the garden should have sent off alarms internally that something significant is happening. Why? Because he only separated them on rare occasions for significant events such as a little girl being raised from the dead. I think that's a pretty significant event. The community was mocking, making fun of it. What did Jesus do? He said, "You three come with me and this little girl is going to breathe again." What we know as the Mount of Transfiguration, I mean, he's going to do an introductory meeting to Moses, Elijah, and all things known as the Second Coming. Who does he separate? Peter, James and John. And yes, back in Matthew 24 when he discusses all things known to the Second Coming, Andrew is there as well, but suffice it to say that when Jesus Christ says, "All right, guys, I'm about to go pray and you three need to come with me," what should have happened is they should have woken up and said, "Uh-oh, this is big." They should have kind of sprung to their feet and said, "Man, I know the food was heavy, I know my eyes are tired." But he doesn't do this often and if he's doing this now, there must be something of great significance.

So again, it wasn't just a casual happenstance stroll on the eastern side of Jerusalem; strategic, prefaced with great teaching in this separation. So where does it take place? Well, the garden is called Gethsemane. If you've never had the privilege of being there physically, hopefully you've seen pictures, movies and such, it's just on the eastern side of what you and I know as the Temple Mount. It's really not a garden by Western terminology, not necessarily well-manicured, it doesn't have a mulch and pine straw and the flowers of the season; you should really think more like a grove. If you've ever had the opportunity particularly going east of here in the state of Georgia to see these peach tree groves that are just miles and miles of just rows of perfectly placed trees, the only difference is these are what we know as olive trees, old, ancient trees. In fact, today if you have the privilege of walking those grounds, there are trees that would have been there the night Jesus prayed his prayer. They are that old.

It's an olive grove which is pretty purposeful. Why? Because what do we do to olives to get the juice? We put them under pressure. We press them. Do you know what the word Gethsemane means? To be pressured; to be pressed; or let me put it in Southernese, to be squeezed out. And yet today if you were to participate or utilize the fruit of the olive for cooking and other things that it is useful for, did you know that we actually grade the purity of the olive oil based on the number of times it's been squeezed. Do you know how many times we squeeze an olive? It's not hard to find out: three. How many times did Jesus go to that place of prayer and allow himself to be squeezed out? You guessed it: three. In other words, though he says, "Father, not my will but yours be done," by the

time it had been three times, everything that was within him had been "squeezed out of him."

But it's more than just the pressure, it's more than just the squeezing, if we were to take a bird's eye view, or in today's language if we were to get out Google maps and you were to look down upon the garden of Gethsemane, yes, it's on the eastern side of the Temple Mount but can I share with you where it is most strategically placed? You see, on the western side of the garden of Gethsemane is the very place where Jesus Christ will be crucified. That is the place where he will bear the nails in his hands. That is the place he will wear the crown of thorns. That is the place he will be mocked, he will be made fun of. Do you know where on the eastern side is? The eastern side, aptly spoken, is the Mount of Olives. Do you know what Jesus spoke of the last time he was on the Mount of Olives? His Second Coming, his coming in power, his coming in authority, his coming to reign forever.

Do you see how strategic this is? Here is Jesus in the middle of the night all alone in the garden of Gethsemane, and on one side of him is the place where he will pour himself out in just a few hours, and on the other side is where he will come back in glory in a couple thousand years. And there he is with a very simple request, "Can you not watch and pray? Can you not just stay awake?" Let's talk about the "what." What takes place in this garden? We pretty much know the story but let's kind of peel the layers away and the first thing we discover is this: it's an incredible picture of anguish. Notice what it says in verse 38. It says he said unto them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me." You go on to verse 39, again, you get this idea of the physical anguish alongside the emotional, the mental, the spiritual. In fact, in the gospel of Luke 22, it makes sense that the Lord would inspire and preserve through a medical physician. We don't have the account of three separate incidences, of course, he would use an accountant to tell us this, but in Luke 22 the physician, Luke, tells us that the pressure, the extreme emotion was more than could even be imagined. In fact, the Bible says in verse 44 of Luke 22 that he was sweating as blood.

Now I want you to think about that for a moment. Sweating. If you've never been to the Middle East in the springtime at night, it's cold. In fact, it's not like what Mark Twain said about San Francisco, for those of you that don't know, he said that the coldest winter he ever experienced was the summer he spent in San Francisco. But it's cold in the Middle East. I don't know about you, but I don't sweat a whole lot when it's cold. That's one of the reasons I like it to cool off. But it says that Jesus is sweating even though it's in the dead of the night, even though it is cold outside. He is sweating so extremely that according to the gospel of Luke it's as blood. There is a medical condition where the stress and the strain of that which carries the blood through our body can become so much that it begins to exit through the pores of our body. It's a picture not just of the extreme pressure and squeezing but I don't know about you, but that's what I call love divine. Only the intensity of love can cause somebody to walk through this experience on behalf of somebody else.

It's also powerful. Notice what he says in verse 39, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup." In fact, you go over to verse 42, "O my Father, if this cup." Now there's been a lot of discussion, there's been a lot of debate on "what is the cup that he is referring to," because just a few minutes earlier he raised up that cup of wine and he said, "This cup is the blood of the new covenant, my blood shed for you." And there's been many who have said, "Oh, the anguish, he did not want to go through the 'physical extremities of the cross.'" I would beg to differ with that one because in the gospel of John 10, Jesus made this statement, "Nobody takes my life from me lest I give it." He willingly went through what he was about to go through yet he says, "O Father, let this cup pass." What is the cup referring to? I'm of the belief biblically that what he's speaking about is the wrath of God. You see, what we often forget as we celebrate our faith, as we talk about Christianity, we forget that we celebrate the empty tomb not just because Jesus rose but because the wrath of God was finally satisfied for the sins of humanity. Somebody had to be willing, somebody had to be qualified to actually take the punishment for the sins of humanity.

Now there's a big fancy biblical word, it's called propitiation. I know it's hard to spell but you're going to want to know what it means. It's found in Romans 3, it's found in 1 John 2, that says Jesus Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the world. Literally it means one who took the punishment of; one who took the beating for; one who allowed the wrath of God to be poured out on him. Can I remind you that that wrath, that justice for sin, in Matthew 25 speaking of his "Second Coming," Jesus said, "Those who are on my left hand, go to the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels." You see, the sin that we committed in the garden, the sins that you and I commit on a regular basis deserve one and only one thing and that is the wrath and the judgment of God. And what was he saying? That he was the only one who could and was qualified to bear its price. Now do you understand why 2 Corinthians 5 says, "He who knew no sin became sin for us"?

But it's also very prophetic. Notice what it says in verse 42, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me," I love this statement, "except I drink it." What was Jesus Christ saying? He was saying there is nobody else qualified to do this. Now if we were to go back to the book of Genesis 3, we know the story well. Humanity falls into sin. The Lord begins to distribute the consequences, the punishments therein, and in verse 15 of Genesis 3, he's speaking to the serpent, he says, "The seed of the woman will crush your head." That's that picture that was given in that movie at the beginning of this scene. What was the Lord saying? That there will come a Messiah, there will come a Redeemer, there will come one who will rectify, restore, and redeem the mess that we started in the garden. The very next chapter, Adam and Eve give birth to a child. You may not have noticed the description that Eve gives him. She says, "The Lord has given me a manchild." Well, it's a description of his gender, I understand, but could it be she was thinking maybe this one, maybe this one who didn't do what we did, maybe this one will raise up and get us back to what we have left. You know the rest of the story. It didn't work with Cain. It didn't even work with Abel. It didn't work with Abraham. It didn't work with David. It didn't work with Solomon. It didn't matter who tried, what their qualifications were or what they desired to do, nobody was found capable.

He says, "except I drink it." He was the one prophesied. He was the one spoken of. He was the one that for thousands of years they'd been waiting for, anticipating and desiring. Just a few steps away there are 500 soldiers and a man by the name of Judas who with the act of a kiss will turn the stillness of this garden into the chaos of the night. So why, why is this so important for us to understand what was taking place whether it's the location it took place, whether it's the order of events that happened, why is this so important? 1. Because it's a picture of you and I. The garden of Gethsemane is the picture of humanity. Notice what Jesus says in verse 40, "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" It's a picture of our incapability. It is our picture of consistent fickleness. We constantly and consistently have the desires, the intents, and the "want-to" but what does Jesus say? "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." In other words, it's a picture that no matter how hard we try to "make things right," we can't do it. No matter how religious we get, how faithful we get, no matter how many times we say, "I'll never do that again."

What happened? In fact, I wasn't there obviously that night, but if I was I just imagine Jesus waking them up the first time. They kind of wake up from their slumber and I don't know which of the three it would have been but if I were to guess it probably would have been John. John would have said, "Hey, guys, we can't let that happen again. We're going to stay up for this one." What happened? They fell asleep again. When he came the second time, I bet they said, "You know what? Phew, we're getting a pattern going here. Let's really mean it, all right, guys, come on, we really mean it this time. All right, let's wake up, do some calisthenics, walk around the olive grove a little bit. We got this." And what happens? Jesus comes back the third time and again not only does it demonstrate but it pictures for us our absolute incapability of being holy, righteous and faithful to the things of God.

But it's also very powerful. You say, "What do you mean it's powerful?" You know, the word "power" in the Bible means to either remove an obstruction to make way for or to place an obstruction to cease movement of. In other words, when we talk about something has power, something has that ability, it is able to either make or break the way that is desired. And I want you to notice the power of these individuals. Now I realize that we have a sovereign, all-powerful, omnipotent God that we have sung to, we have prayed to, and we talk about today, but can I share with you the power of humanity? You have the right and the ability to tell God no. Now there's some people that would argue with me about that but they've never raised a preschooler. You think about that for just a moment. A preschooler is very similar to you as we are to God because that preschooler would not eat if it were not for you, they would not have a diet if it were not for you, they would not be clothed if it were not for you, they would not be clean if it were not for you. They could not survive without you and yet what do preschoolers do? They say, "No. I got this." They may not use articulate words but their facial expressions say everything, do they not? They throw tantrums. They throw themselves on the floor and they say, "I'm not gonna do it." Isn't that what we do to God? God says, "Could you not just do this one thing?" No! "It's just one hour." Don't care, I'm tired.

We do the exact same thing. You see, it not only shows the picture of our incapability, it shows the power of humanity to so – listen – to so believe the lie that the serpent told us

in the garden. What did he say? "Surely God doesn't know what he's doing. Surely you know better." Here are these men, they've heard the sermon, they've sung the song, they've been separated for a special reason. Earlier it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, raised a little girl from the dead, surely the light bulb would have come on and they said, "Nope, don't want to do it." I think oftentimes we forget how powerful the lie is that we've listened to.

Finally, it's prophetic. Now when I speak about prophetic it's not only true in nature but it is foretelling, speaking to the events of day future. Now there's a parallel passage to Matthew 26. In John 17, we call it the high priestly prayer of Jesus; we have the longest recorded prayer of Jesus there in John 17 and it's really interesting that there in John 17 for the first few verses Jesus Christ prays for himself, then in the middle section of the prayer he prays for the men that are in the garden with him, and then at the very end, guess who he prays for? Us. He prays for the future believers. He prays for the future disciples, that they will be found faithful, that they will be unified. We could go through all of that. Why is that important? Because when Jesus Christ was in the garden praying, "Not my will but yours be done," it wasn't just about the next 18 hours of what was going to happen, it wasn't just about the 11 men and in particular the three that were sleeping, it was also being very prophetic about the body of Christ, very prophetic about the church of Jesus Christ. You say, "Why?" Because we're in the same position he was that night. You say, "What do you mean we're in the same position?" You and I right now, it doesn't matter where you're located, you could be on the other side of planet earth, it doesn't matter what time you're watching the service if you're not live with us, every single one of us is strategically placed right between the First and the Second Coming just like he was. And guess what's happening? We're getting squeezed, are we not? We're getting squeezed right now and if you're going to be faithful to the things of God, it's going to break you out in a sweat and you're going to be almost as blood because you realize that what lies ahead of us is not pleasing compared to what lies behind us.

Why was it prophetic? Because when you read your Bible, do you know what you discover? As we get closer and closer to the return of Jesus Christ, we see the church of Jesus Christ fall asleep on the hour, things that used to be important to us like speaking to and promoting life is just another issue on a voter's docket, issues that used to be important to us to speak up against about how we orchestrate life in our families and how we identify, we just get tired of it. We're like Peter, James and John who say, "I just need to take a nap." You see, this isn't just about three guys who fell asleep on the watch of Jesus, it's about us too. In fact, do you know what we look a whole lot like collectively? We look a whole lot like that church in Revelation 3 called Laodicea, lukewarm. By the way, I won't spend much time on Laodicea but do you know what the word means? The word means the rights of the people, meaning that the closer we get to Jesus' return, even his own people will be more concerned with their well-being than what God desires in their life. Peter, James and John were more interested in a nap than being called aside for something special.

Now think about the resume. A little girl being raised to life. Moses and Elijah. Don't you think they thought, "Man, it could get good here"? What did they do? Said, "Nah, my

belly is full and I'm tired. I'm just going to sit this one out." You know, one of the things I love to utilize when it comes to Bible teaching and preaching is a little phrase "could it be." Now when I use the phrase "could it be," don't write it in concrete but get out a number 2, okay? You know, when Jesus ascended in Acts 1, do you remember what the angelic being said? That in the manner in which he departed, it'll be the way he returns. Now we know he departed through the skies, we know in Revelation 19 he comes back through the skies but do you remember the scene that was next? 120 individuals and that was it. The few and the faithful fervently praying for what God had next in their life.

The garden of Gethsemane is about sweat as blood, it is about being pressed out, it is about saying, "I will bear the punishment for humanity," but for you and I, it also is a picture prophetically of what not to become, falling asleep, having the First Coming behind us and his soon coming in front of us. Let us not be found sleeping either.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe this morning you're one of those individuals who say, "You know, pastor, I'm not just asleep, it's been my whole life." In fact, maybe today when you hear the story of Jesus Christ bearing the punishment and the pain and the wrath for your sin, you're thinking, "Wow, I've tried my best. I've done everything I know to do." But you know deep down inside it doesn't work. Maybe today is the day where you just do what Romans 10:13 says, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today is your day to call. You don't have to have all your questions answered per se, you don't have to know all the nuances of the faith, all you simply need to recognize is this: you've got a sin problem that only Jesus Christ is qualified to solve.

Today if you're that person whether you're seated here in person, whether you're online, whether you're listening on the radio, would you just do what Romans 10:13 says? You don't have to do so out loud. You don't have to say the same words that I or somebody else would say but maybe your heart's cry would go something like this. "God, today I'm at the end of my rope. I know I've got a sin problem. I know I've done things I shouldn't have done. I know I've been places I shouldn't have been. I know I've said things I shouldn't have said. And God, I've tried to fix it. God, I've tried to clean it up. I've tried to be good. God, I've tried to stop being bad but it hasn't worked. God, today I believe, I understand that the only answer is Jesus Christ. Today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was born on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf, he was willing to be the propitiation and pay the price for my sin on his cross and, God, I believe that three days later miraculously he rose from the dead so I could be forgiven and I could be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to all the struggles and the problems of life but there is one thing I know is I've got a sin problem only Jesus Christ can fix. I'm asking you to save me. I'm asking you to forgive me. The best way I know how, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today who called out to Jesus the first time. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us and we're going to stand and sing. Let me invite you just to step out and step forward. We'd love the privilege of hearing your story, praying with you or praying for you, but maybe today

you say, "You know what, pastor? I had that conversation with the Lord years ago." You know, maybe today it's not about stepping out and stepping forward, maybe today is about leaving this place and waking up. Maybe today is about becoming alert and seeing what is really happening around you and rather than satisfying the desires of the flesh, seeking the things of the Spirit. Maybe today is not about stepping out and stepping forward but for all of us he has called us to walk out of here fully awake.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, thank you that you were willing to bear the wrath, thank you that you were willing to pay the price, thank you that you're willing to call us, to forgive us, and save us. God, today no matter what you spoke through your word, may we simply respond. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*