

## Pressed and Seized in Gethsemane

- Mark 14:32-52
- As I said a few weeks ago, chapter 14 of Mark is about the complete abandonment of Jesus. It culminates in the garden of Gethsemane, as Mark writes, “And they all left him and fled.” But the decision of the disciples to flee from Jesus at his greatest hour of need pales in comparison to the crucible that Gethsemane was for the Lord. Mark simply states that they went to a place called Gethsemane, as if they could have just as easily chosen to go to Bethany or Bethsaida. But there was purpose for this to happen in Gethsemane, which means “oil press.” It was a garden at the foot of the Mt. of Olives, in the midst of an olive grove, and a place where olives were pressed so that oil could be produced. It was here, in this garden, where Jesus’ was put under the greatest pressure of his life, so great that Luke tells us he sweated blood, and where the final decision to submit to the Father’s will was made. Remember Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34) The cross is decided in the heart before it is a matter of the hands and feet. It is a submission of the will before it is a commission of the body. The physical suffering on the cross was preceded by unimaginable internal suffering for Jesus in Gethsemane, as we will see. Let’s look at this passage under two main points: Pressed by sorrow, Seized by enemies.
- **Pressed by sorrow (verses 32-42)**
- We rarely hear Jesus talk about his feelings in the Gospels. We see the result of his emotions many times. We see him weep at Lazarus’ tomb as he enters the grief of his dear friends, Mary and Martha. We see him angry in his Father’s house at those who had turned it into a circus and a marketplace. We see his compassion for the lost, the lame, the leper many times as he embraces them and heals them. But here we see and hear Jesus like we have not seen him before. Mark says he began to be “greatly distressed and troubled.” Then Jesus says, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” James Edwards writes, “Nothing in all the Bible compares to Jesus’ agony and anguish in Gethsemane—neither the laments of the Psalms, nor the broken heart of Abraham as he prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, nor David’s grief at the death of his son Absalom.” Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane made an impression on the early church, as the writer of Hebrews attests when he wrote, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” (Hebrews 5:7) Why was Jesus’ soul sorrowful even to death? Was it because he knew he was going to die? No! He was not afraid to be pierced by the nails and slowly lose his lifeblood in excruciating agony. His sorrow was because he was facing much more than death. He would be “pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.” (Isaiah 53) The abandonment of Jesus was of cosmic proportions. To identify with sinners so completely that he would become the object of God’s wrath against sin overwhelmed Jesus’ soul, and he cried out, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.”
- Only in Mark’s Gospel does Jesus call his Father, “Abba,” a name that connotes intimacy and trust and affection. A child in pain or in great fear might cry, “Daddy, Daddy, I need

you!" The Son of God, the one who had authority over the wind and the waves, over the demons and even over death, cries out, "Daddy, remove this cup from me." It is the hour of Jesus' greatest temptation, as he lies on the ground in abject humility and brokenness before the Father, telling God that all things are possible for him, and asking him if there is another way. "Please, Daddy, do not strike the shepherd! Remove this cup." Have you ever experienced such pain that you cried out to God to remove it from you? I know many of you have, and at some point, all of us will. I remember my eye surgery in 2014, when a silicone band was put around my right eye in hopes that it would push the eyeball against the retina that had become detached. That band is still there, always will be. It didn't work, there was still part of my retina that was detached, and the doctor told me I had to stay in a position where my head was like this (hanging down), 24 hours a day for a week, to see if the retina would reattach in that one place. At one point after three days of this, knowing I had 4 more to go, I began to cry, and almost to panic, telling God, "I can't do this! Please help me., I am not going to be able to do this." He did help me, but the plan didn't work, and the retina was still not attached. The doctor had me hang upside down out of the chair in his office, while he sat on the floor and freehanded with his laser gun, shooting the laser into my eyeball to tack the retina back in place. For 45 minutes, every time he pulled the trigger in the gun, it felt like someone was stabbing an icepick into my eye. Again, I cried out to God to help me. When it was over, I cried tears of joy that the laser had done its job and I would not lose my sight. That was one of the greatest trials of my life, but Jesus' sorrow in the garden was infinitely greater. He asked the Father, for whom all things are possible, to take away the cross...

- And then, the words that sounded our redemption! "Yet not what I will, but what you will." Oh, saints! The will of Jesus to obey the Father was stronger than his desire to serve himself. And in Christ, we can do the same. We can, by God's grace, say no to our desires and yes to God's will. I heard a man say recently that he overcame his habits of lust as a young man by memorizing Romans 6:1-2 and quoting them when he was tempted. "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" He said it became such a part of him that whenever he began to entertain lustful thoughts before he even knew he was doing it, his mind would automatically go to Romans 6. He learned to say no to his desires and yes to God's will. And we can all do that because Jesus said yes to the cross. Because Jesus drank the bitter cup of God's wrath, we can drink from the cup of redemption, restoration, and life! Because we are children of God, we are able to do hard things, trusting in the goodness of Christ.
- Back to the garden, we see the disciples struggling with their own flesh, and failing. Their temptation was to give in to their flesh, their desire for rest, their need for sleep, and they did just that. They saw the suffering of Christ, they saw his sorrow, they even saw the blood oozing through his pores because of his distress. Jesus asked them to watch, which means, "keep awake." The first time he returned, and finds them sleeping, he calls Peter by his old name, saying, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?" Simon, you remember, means, "reed," a plant that is weak and easily bent or blown over. "Peter" means rock, something strong and dependable, which Peter was not at this moment. He says to all three, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into

temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Saints, this is a watchword for our lives, isn't it? Most of the time when we find ourselves giving into temptation, it is because we are not watching and praying, and because we think we are strong. "Other people are weak, but not me!"

- After the third time finding the three asleep, Jesus says, "Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." The time of prayer in the garden were Jesus' final moments of freedom and represent his resolve, again, to give himself fully to the Father and to the cross. Edwards writes, "What profound irony Gethsemane conceals, for when Jesus feels most excluded from God's presence, he is in fact closest to God's will!"
- **Seized by enemies (verses 43-52)**
- Verse 43, "And immediately." That's one of Mark's favorite words, remember? While Jesus was still speaking about what was about to happen, it happened. The rest of this passage could have a steady drum beat underneath it as the Lord is delivered into the hands of men, just as he told the disciples three times in Mark 8, 9, and 10. The drum beat pounds three times with the word, "Seize." It is a word that means take hold of, to grasp, to bring a person wholly under your power. You see this kind of actions in movies, where the cops are staking out a house where the suspected criminal is, and as soon as he walks out his front door, they seize him, take him down, and cuff him. You see this word first in verse 44, in what Judas had told those who came with him to the garden, that the one he will kiss is the man. "Seize him and lead him away under guard." Then in verse 46, "And they laid hands on him and seized him." And in verse 49, Jesus asks why they would come against him like he is a robber, since he was teaching in broad daylight day after day in the temple, and they did not seize him there. But then he says what only the sovereign Lord would say: "But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." Isaiah 53:12 says of Jesus that he is "numbered with the transgressors."
- The anticlimax for this band of combatants who had come armed to the teeth, expecting a rebellion, must have been quite a let-down for them. But it speaks to the truth that they didn't understand who Jesus was then, as most in the world do not understand who Jesus is now, nor do they understand his followers. I like to have fun with this every now and then, when I am sending a Bible to someone in the mail, or a copy of a good Christian book. And they ask me at the post office the list of questions, you know the ones? ("Anything liquid, hazardous, perishable..." in this box?) I'll say with a straight face, "No, but there is something revolutionary in there that can lead to death...and then resurrected life!"
- The betrayal kiss of Judas is curious since there is no other time in the Gospels when Jesus is greeted by a disciple with a kiss. And when a kiss was used as a greeting in Israel, it was a sign of respect or friendship. When Simon the Pharisee had Jesus over for dinner in Luke 7, he was offended when a woman he considered a sinner came in and wept so that her tears hit Jesus' feet and she wiped them with her hair and even kissed Jesus' feet. So, Jesus, knowing what Simon was thinking, told him a parable to teach him, and us, that the greater we see the sin in our own heart that was forgiven by God, the greater our love will be for God. And for others. He says to Simon, "When I came in, you gave me no kiss." No *philema* (from *phileo*, "friend"), a kiss of friendship. But "she has not ceased to *kataphileo* my feet," or "kiss eagerly, affectionately,

repeatedly.” When Judas kissed Jesus, the word Mark used in the Greek is *kataphileo*. He kissed Jesus with a great show of affection and did so repeatedly. He called him Rabbi, a title you would only give to someone you honored and gave him a kiss that you would only give to someone you deeply love. Why? Because Jesus would not only be abandoned in chapter 14, but he would be mocked in chapter 15, and this is the first example of that mockery. Which is why Jesus said, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48)

- The kiss signals the arrest so the crowd carrying swords and clubs moves in and Mark, the first Gospel writer, keeps the details simple. Someone standing by swung his sword and took an ear off the high priest’s servant. No more details, but the other Gospels, written later, add to the story.
- The spiritual climax of the Gethsemane scene is found in verse 50: “And they all left him and fled.” As we have seen before, they all drank the cup, they all promised to die with him, if need be, and they all fled. Just as he told them they would.
- The final story Mark adds is only found in his account, and we really do not know the significance of it. It is the first recorded streaking event in history, though certainly it was not the young man’s choice to do so. Some believe this was Mark self-identifying, but there’s no evidence to support it. Mark doesn’t tell us who it is, and it really does not matter. James Edwards writes, “The young man represents all who fled in desperation when mayhem broke out in the arrest of Jesus. His lack of identity also invites readers to examine their own readiness to abandon Jesus.”
- What is the final significance of Gethsemane? If you heard Micah’s sermon last week, you know he did an excellent job explaining from Philippians 4 that it is God’s purpose for us to learn to trust him and even rejoice in him through trials, of which there are many in our lives. God could have ordained that Jesus left the upper room with his disciples and was immediately arrested. He would not have had to face the agony of Gethsemane, sweating blood, wrestling in prayer, asking the Father to take the trial from him that he was about to suffer. But Gethsemane is there for us, to help us see clearly that Jesus chose the cross. He chose to accept God’s will over his own desires. For the Father. And for you and me. Some have said that hell came to Jesus in Gethsemane and, on the cross, he descended into it.
- Prayer