

MIDWEEK OF LENT 2: LEADER
 WEEK 3: WEEK OF MARCH 17
GETHSEMANE
Luke 22:39–46

OPENING

Go to dark Gethsemane,
 All who feel the tempter's power;
 Your Redeemer's conflict see,
 Watch with Him one bitter hour;
 Turn not from His griefs away;
 Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

—“Go to Dark Gethsemane” (*LSB* 436, v. 1)

INTRODUCTION

In this section of the Passion Narrative (Luke 22:39–46), Luke takes us to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prays to His heavenly Father and submits Himself to His Father's will. At the heart of this scene is the humble obedience of Christ to His Father's will for our salvation.

Surrounding this scene, however, is a picture of disciples who are struggling to pray and in need of encouragement from their Lord. Their sorrow overwhelms them, and Jesus not only encourages them to take solace in prayer, but He also gives Himself to suffering for our salvation that He might open to us the gift of prayer.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Luke's Passion Narrative simplifies the story of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Read the Passion accounts of Matthew (26:36–46) and Mark (14:32–42) and identify the ways in which Luke's account differs from theirs. What does Luke accomplish by relating the event in this way?

Whereas Matthew and Mark relate Jesus praying and returning to His disciples three times, Luke creates a very simple frame of the event: the disciples are instructed to pray (22:39–40); Jesus prays (vv. 41–44); and then the disciples are awakened and instructed to pray (vv. 45–46). Within this frame, Luke offers a fuller and richer description of the sorrow of Jesus.

Luke also simplifies the words of Jesus to the disciples. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus engages in a progression of dialogue with three of His disciples: He reveals to them His sorrow and encourages them to watch with Him, He highlights the human struggle of flesh and spirit and encourages them to pray, and He identifies for them that the time is now at hand. In Luke,

Jesus speaks the same words to the disciples before and after His prayer, encouraging them to pray that they not fall into temptation.

The framing device and the simplification of the dialogue highlight the contrast between the struggles the disciples have in prayer and the struggle that Jesus has. Whereas the disciples fall asleep in sorrow under the burden of the night (v. 45), Jesus endures His sorrow for them (vv. 43–44).

2. Jesus encourages His disciples to “pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40, 46). What are possible temptations that could have assaulted the disciples?

If one reads this account in light of the accounts in Matthew and Mark, the temptation would be to fall asleep rather than watch with Jesus. Since Luke does not record the command that they watch, however, we might look to the larger narrative to see other temptations to which they could have fallen.

In reading the larger narrative, we recognize a great many temptations that surround the disciples. Judas was tempted to betray Jesus (Luke 22:21), the disciples were tempted to argue about their greatness (v. 24), the disciples may have been tempted to abandon Jesus in His trials (v. 28), Satan demanded to have all of the disciples that he might sift them like wheat (v. 31, note the use of the plural “you”) and thus they could fall under his sifting, Peter would be tempted to deny Jesus (vv. 31–34), and the disciples may have been tempted to defend themselves and Jesus against attack (v. 38). In addition, Luke tells us that the disciples slept “for sorrow” (v. 45), and therefore the predictions of the Passion and fear of losing Jesus may have been tempting them to despair.

3. Why is prayer a good response to temptation?

In prayer, we turn away from ourselves and our strength and turn to God and His strength. By ourselves, we will not be able to overcome temptation, so we turn from ourselves to God and entrust ourselves to His care. Also, we have received many great and precious promises from God, and prayer arises from these promises and lives in relationship to God in light of them. For example, the promise that God will hear us and answer us in time of prayer (Luke 11:5–13) and the promise that God will provide us a way of escape in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

4. Though the disciples fall asleep in the midst of their suffering, Jesus prays in the midst of His suffering. What does Jesus mean when He asks His Father to “remove this cup from Me”? (cf. Isaiah 51:17–23; Jeremiah 25:15–29).

In prophetic language, the cup was a metaphor for the cup of God’s wrath. As noted in the passages from Isaiah and Jeremiah, God’s cup of wrath could be poured out on His own people (as in Isaiah) or upon the nations (as in Jeremiah), for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Jesus, however, was without sin and therefore did not deserve to drink the cup of God’s wrath. God’s will, however, was to provide a Savior for His people, one who would rescue them from His wrath; Jesus becomes that Savior by willingly bearing the wrath of God for all people. He takes God’s wrath upon Himself in order that all people might experience God’s mercy and the cup of His blessing. In asking His Father to take this cup from Him, Jesus is expressing the deeply human struggle of bearing the eternal wrath of God for the sins of the world.

5. Why is the fact that Jesus submits to His Father’s will good news for the disciples and for us?

In this prayer, Jesus humbly submits Himself to His Father’s will of salvation for all nations and opens the kingdom of heaven to His disciples and to us.

Because Jesus submits to His Father’s will, we have a Savior from sin. He is the one who takes all of God’s judgment for our sins upon Himself that we might be forgiven and declared to be the children of God. This moment takes us back to the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Luke’s Gospel: Jesus proclaims “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19) because He has taken the day of God’s vengeance (Isaiah 61:2) upon Himself.

This prayer, then, offers encouragement to the disciples and to God’s people. In the midst of our temptations, it reminds us of the power and the grace of God in Jesus. The good news that Jesus has opened the kingdom of heaven to us by suffering the wrath of God for us encourages us to pray to our heavenly Father, who desires to hear and delights to answer our prayers.

CONCLUSION

Luke places the willing obedience of Jesus to His Father's will in the context of the disciples, who are struggling to pray in the midst of temptation. This stark contrast reveals the wonder of God sending us a Savior from sin. Although we are weak and unable to pray in the midst of temptation, there is one who is strong and endures the wrath of God for us. By grace through Him and faith in Him, we are encouraged to pray.

As the writer to the Hebrews reminded the early Christians, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15–16).

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, You sent Your Son to accomplish Your desire for our salvation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He humbly submitted to Your will and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Send us Your Holy Spirit and inspire our prayers. In times of temptation, turn us to You. Teach us to see Jesus, who accomplished Your will for us, that by His grace and through His Spirit, we might accomplish Your will in the world.

Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.