



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
12500 E. 183rd St., Cerritos, CA 90703
(Enter at Bloomfield, across Heritage Park)

Mailing Address : 11428 E. Artesia Blvd. # 4 ; Artesia, CA 90701
562-924-5051

Website : www.sp-ecc.org

April 26, 2009

Theme: Gethsemane

Text: Matthew 26:36-45

Gethsemane was probably a garden area among the olive trees that grew on the Mount of Olives. The name means "oil press." Archeologists have discovered evidence which suggests that the Garden may have been a place where olive oil was made. Jesus prayer in this garden reveals is full humanity. Jesus struggled with the will of God just as we often do. In his humanity, Jesus did not want to die on a cross. It was through prayer that Jesus found the courage to die on a cross and so bring about the salvation of the human race. Jesus was a teacher to the end. He uses even this severe temptation to teach his disciples about facing temptation and severe trial. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prepares his followers for the crosses that they too will have to bear.

Jesus did not go to the garden to pray alone. He went with his disciples. Luke says that at the Last Supper he had said to the apostles, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials." Jesus looked to their presence to help him in this time of struggle with the will of God. God, of course, was the one who was of primary importance in His time of need. Still, even Jesus needed human companionship in his time of need. We know from the story that Jesus was to be disappointed in his desire to have the support of his disciples, just as we are sometimes disappointed when we look to other Christians for leadership, encouragement, and support.

According to Isaiah, the Suffering Servant of God would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with suffering and grief. It is in the garden that we get a real picture of the depth of Jesus sorrow and grief. Matthew tells us that Jesus became "sorrowful and troubled." These two words mean just about the same thing. The second word makes the first one more intense. We get a sense of the depth of Jesus sorrow when he says to the apostles, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Jesus completely enters into the human experience not only physically, but emotionally as well. He was indeed fully human.

Ancient and modern skeptics have pointed to this scene in the garden of Gethsemane as a sign of Jesus' weakness. One of the words that Mark uses to describe Jesus emotional condition describes a person who has become helpless, disoriented, agitated, and anguished over some event that is approaching him. The NEB describes Jesus' condition well when it says, "...horror came over him." But those skeptics fail to understand three things: (1) Jesus full humanity. (2) The horror of the physical suffering that Jesus was about to face. (3) The fact that Jesus was going to bear the wrath of God on behalf of all humanity. It is this last reality that caused the deepest anguish and mental suffering for him. Jesus mental anguish is so great that He is barely able to bear it.



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Jesus begins his prayer with the words, "My Father..." According to Mark, he said, "Abba! Father!" even in his suffering Jesus maintained his intimate relationship with his Father in heaven. Jesus prays, "If it is possible, take this cup from me..." Jesus meant that if it was possible to bring about salvation for human beings in any other way, He wanted His Father to take this "cup" away from Him. The cup to which he refers is the cup of God's judgment which would be poured out on Him as he hung on the cross. But it was not possible for people to be saved any other way. Scripture says "The wages of sin is death..." Sin requires the death penalty.

In the Torah, God had commanded the people of Israel to observe a complex system of sacrifices. These sacrifices were symbolic of the price that had to be paid for people to be forgiven of their sins. Death was required. The sacrificial system of the people of Israel pointed forward to an ultimate Sacrifice who would pay for the sins of humanity once and for all. Because all other human beings have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, only the Sinless one could make the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the human race. When Jesus asks for this "cup" to be taken from him, he is asking that he would not have to experience God's wrath for human sin. Still, Jesus prays as he has taught his disciples to pray, "Yet, not as I will, but as you will." In a very real way, our salvation was made secure when Jesus surrendered His will to the will of His Father.

When he returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping. He instructs them to be alert and pray because, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." The flesh in this instance probably does not refer to the human body. Instead it refers to that human part of us that can be tempted to sin. Jesus' disciples have been overcome by the temptation not to stay alert and pray. We must listen to this instruction as well. We must understand that on this occasion, the disciples did not give in to some horrible sin. They simply fell asleep when they could have had the privilege of supporting their Master in his darkest hour so far.

Jesus prays his prayer three times. He now knows that the time is near for him to be arrested and crucified. But He is now in control. His prayers had strengthened his resolve to walk to the cross. Rather than fleeing to hide from those who would arrest him, Jesus says, "Get up! We must go! The one who hands me over is near." Even though this is the hour of the power of darkness God is still sovereign over the events that are about to take place.