

The Week That Changed The World

Introduction

Today is Palm Sunday. It's called that because on this day we commemorate Jesus' Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds on that day waved Palm branches and laid them in front of Jesus as He rode into the city. This day would begin a week of events that would include Jesus being hailed as a conquering King, standing in opposition to the religious leaders in Jerusalem, being betrayed by one of His own disciples, being arrested and forced to go through the mockery of a trial, being publically beaten and ridiculed, being crucified and placed in a tomb. Finally it would end with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. One week that changed the world.

But this morning I'd like to take a snapshot from one event during the week. It was one of those moments when the rubber meets the road. What Jesus knew was coming was now upon Him. We're going to look at Mark 14:32-36.

"They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' He took Peter, James, and John along with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' He said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch.' Going a little farther, He fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him. 'Abba, Father,' He said, 'everything is possible for You. Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will.'"

A group of college students asked a preacher if he would like to attend one of their Christian meetings on campus. "you'll like it," they told him. "We have prayer. In fact, it's a prayer meeting." During the course of the hour the students did ask for prayer requests. With all of them coming from rather affluent backgrounds, they had to really dredge the bottom of the barrel to find something to pray about. One of them was going on a trip and needed to pray for some luggage. Another needed a new dress for a school function that was coming up. One girl wanted a boy named Mike to pay some attention to her. Things like that.

When all the requests were in, they wrote the words yes and no on pieces of paper and dropped them into a container and passed it around. Each student pulled out a slip of paper and decided that the word printed there was the answer to their prayer. And they all praised the Lord. Then they asked the preacher if he had anything to say. "Well, yeah," he replied. "It's a pity to me that Jesus didn't understand that this is how it works." And they all looked at each other in amazement. "Why? What do you mean?" He said, "No Gethsemane. You hold a picnic in the olive grove."

Billy Graham wrote, in his book 'Til Armageddon, *"Jesus didn't call us to a picnic, but to a pilgrimage."*

Sometimes life is a lot of fun; we bounce from one event to another with a smile on our face. Sometimes life is routine - a lot of times life is routine. We do the same things day after day; week after week. But then there are the times when life gets difficult; when we wonder if we're ever going to make it through. This is where we find our Saviour on this day in His life.

Jesus, at this point, is reaching the culmination of His earthly ministry. He's now been preaching and teaching for three years, and raising up disciples who would lead His church. He had spent time talking to His disciples about His death many times. He had known for a long time what the Father's plan had in store for Him. In fact, just 4 chapters previous to our text, in Mark 10:45 Jesus said that He had come *"To give His life as a ransom for many."*

He had boldly made this pronouncement many times during His ministry. But now the months and years of preparation were over. There was no more time for teaching. The Cross was about to become a reality, and Jesus needed to talk with His Father, and this time we see so clearly the man Jesus. At this point in time the cross became real and frightening and inescapable. Was Jesus really a man? How did He react when He was faced with difficult situations in His life?

1. He Went Away To Pray

He took His friends to the garden with Him. Why the garden? The garden was a place Jesus often went to pray. It had always been a safe place for Jesus - but it

wasn't safe any more. Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him and He knew that Judas would know that He was there. But the garden was a place where Jesus came to meet with His Father. The garden was a place of prayer.

Then He took His three closest friends a little further into the garden and He shared His heart with them. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, turned to his friends and said, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, stay here and keep watch."* He felt like He was dying and was asking for their help.

Why was He so upset? Hadn't He boldly set His face towards Jerusalem? It was the humanity of Jesus that was showing here. Paris Donehoo said, *"The longest trip one ever takes is from the head to the heart."* Some never make the journey. They are content to keep on being "some day" people. Some day I'll sacrifice for God. Some day I'll serve Him. It's not that difficult to say when someday is always tomorrow. But here we see what happens when someday for Jesus became today. The cost of his commitment was staring Him straight in the face.

2. He Admitted His Pain

The original language is so much stronger than what the English can convey. When it says that He was *"deeply distressed and troubled"* it speaks of being very heavy, to be almost overwhelmed. How many have ever been to the point where there has just been so much pressure, so much stress, that your limbs feel like lead; your emotions are raw. The Greek implies that Jesus was at this point - His grief was overpowering and He was literally shaking from the strain.

What was the strain? It was the knowledge of what He would soon endure. He was God, but He was also a man. He didn't want to face the pain that would come from hours of torture. He didn't want to face the hatred spat at Him from the Sanhedrin. He didn't want to be mocked by soldiers. His heart was breaking to think that the faces who just days ago had cried, *"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"* now cursed Him with *"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"* He didn't want to have your sins placed on Him. He didn't want to carry your burden. He didn't want to look up and see His Father turning His back on Him, because His Father couldn't stand the sin He represented. He didn't want to do it. So He turned to His friends and said *"Pray for me."*

It's one thing to say, "I'll go!" It's entirely another to find yourself shaking when it comes time to take that first step, and you want with all your heart to turn away. You wish you had never opened your mouth, and you know you're doing the right thing but you wonder if there might not be another way.

Many years ago, my wife and I accepted an offer to go and help her uncle with his church in Jacksonville, Florida. I was going to be the Youth Pastor. I had moved out of the area before, but mostly had stayed within driving distance. Tony, our oldest, was four, and Levi was just born. I had already been down south to set up and came back to pick up Marnita and the boys.

At the time, we anticipated that we very likely would never move back. There were greater opportunities in the U.S. and there weren't many here for me. It all sounded good when we talked about it, and as we made the plans. But it was all different when it came time to say goodbye. I remember having a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I also remember watching my Dad. Tony was his little buddy. He would take him with him everywhere he went. He took him to get his hair cut or to visit family and friends. That day he carried Tony out of the house, hugging and squeezing him and telling him that he loved him. And as he put him in the car and turned to walk away, I saw my father cry for the first time. That was a very hard day.

I can't imagine how hard it was for Jesus. It's comforting to know that Jesus is aware of what it's like to decide on a certain path and then, when faced with all of the ramifications of that decision to collapse in fear at the prospect. It says He went on a little further into the garden by Himself and fell to the ground. It's also comforting to see Jesus praying at this moment.

3. He Cried Out To His Father

In verse 36 we find it recorded that Jesus cried out, "*Abba, Father.*" This is the first time that this Aramaic word is used in the New Testament. In all of the times the gospels record Jesus praying to His Father He never uses this word until now. What does it mean? It means "*Daddy!*" It's not the formal "*Father*" but "*Daddy*".

This is a cry from the heart. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points just like we are. Well, here Jesus was tempted to get up and run away from His commitment. He prayed like this, *"Daddy, You can do anything, please do this another way."*

What depth of emotion. When I read about Him prostrate on His face in the olive garden asking His Daddy to let this cup pass from Him, I love Him. Is this weakness on His part? No. His next sentence is *"Yet not what I will, but what you will."* In that garden Jesus was the olive, and He was pressed. The oil that comes from His breaking supplies my need. In Luke's account in Luke 22:44 the Word says, *"And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."* Why was His sweat like that?

Medical experts have found that in cases of extreme mental pressures the pores can become so dilated that the blood is allowed out to mingle with sweat. Three times He prayed the same prayer. *"Please, Daddy, let this cup pass from Me."* Three times He concluded with *"Yet not what I will, but what You will."*

What Max Lucado wrote applies here, *"God's purpose is greater than your pain, and He has a greater purpose than your problems. Your crises are not going to slow down the purpose of God - have confidence in that."*

Isaiah prophesied about this very event. It's recorded in Isaiah 53:10. It says, *"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the Lord makes His life a guilt offering, He will see His offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand."*

Why was it God's will to crush Him? Someone had to pay the price. All of humanity was under the curse of sin and death. In Isaiah 59:15-16 it says, *"The Lord looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and He was appalled that there was no one to intercede; so His own arm worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him."*

What does that mean? Very simple... *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

For every prize there is a price. Someone must rise up and take it on their shoulders. Someone has to stand and say, "*Here am I, send me!*"

You can stay outside the garden and be a Christian, but the prize is through the garden. You can know what needs to be done and wander around the outside of the garden, admiring all the nice colours, but the prize, the passion, the living, the cross, is through the garden.

Too many Christians are afraid of the cross - like Peter they follow at a distance. We are all too human sometimes. As spiritual as we would like to think we are, we are often dictated to by our flesh. We don't want to get too close to God because we're afraid of what He might ask us to do. We say all of those nice things with our heads about what we're willing to do but when it comes time for some passion our heart doesn't show up.

What is the garden about? It's all about dying to ourselves. It's all about a surrendering of our wills to the One who knows what's best. Scripture tells us that God is "*the author and the finisher of our faith.*" In the garden we confirm that; we acknowledge that God knows best. It is in the garden when we wrestle with ourselves; our pride, our selfishness, our weakness, our fear. It is in the garden also where we lay all of that down as we follow Jesus' example. It's okay to pray and tell God, "*I don't want to do this, please find someone else.*" As long as we conclude our prayer with, "*Yet, not what I will, but what you will.*"

On the other side of the garden the battles are won. Victory is purchased. The price for our redemption was paid on the other side of the garden. I'm so glad that Jesus didn't pull back from the garden. He pushed through His fear and His doubt and His humanity. At the end of this scene as recorded in Mark 14:42 he says to His disciples "*Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!*" No more fear. It had been decided. He knew what His Father wanted Him to do and He was resolved to follow through - for your sake. He would not stop until He could say, from the cross, "*It is finished!*"

Jesus said in Luke 9:23 "*If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself*

and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”

We are entering one of those most sacred times of the year for Christians, as we commemorate our Lord's death, burial and resurrection - His passion. The question for us to answer is, how's our passion? Are we just a casual bystander as the events of life are played out before us? Do we sit idly by and watch others make a difference for the Kingdom of God? Is there a Gethsemane in our Christian experience or do we choose the easy way? God's way leads through the garden of Gethsemane - the good news is, victory is on the other side.