



HORTVS GETHSEMANI

Mark 14:32–34

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.

34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

Reflection

It's almost midnight. The Passover meal has finished. Jesus has eaten his Last Supper and is on his way to the Mount of Olives with his disciples. Jesus' disciples are distraught at the news that he is leaving them, betrayed into the hands of the chief priests, teachers of the Law and the Romans by one of their very own. And they don't even know who it is. What's more, they've just learnt, as they've travelled across the Kidron valley that separates Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives that Peter, their courageous leader, the one who'd fearlessly walked a few steps on water out to meet Jesus (Matt 14:29), will disown him, not once but three times, and that before dawn. Jesus has just told them that they'll be scattered, all of them

will fall away before morning – what is about to happen?

It's late, dark and their emotions are in turmoil as they arrive in our passage at a place called Gethsemane. John refers to it as the garden of Gethsemane. The name means 'olive press'. It was a garden or wooded area on the western slopes of the hillside known as the Mount of Olives, an area filled with groves of olive trees, many of them owned by well-to-do citizens of Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples went there often, that's how Judas would know where to find them. The Mount of Olives is also the place that Zechariah, especially, associated with the last things. In yesterday's passage, Jesus had quoted Zechariah when he said in verse 27,

“for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’

Zechariah’s words will come true, this very night, on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane. The disciples don’t know when or how, but Jesus does, in brutal detail; he has barely an hour left before his arrest.

Jesus’ disciples are distressed and distraught, they’re almost overcome by emotion at the shock and sadness of what Jesus has told them. It’s late and they’re not coping. But what they are going through pales in comparison to what our passage reveals about the state of Jesus’ heart. On arriving at Gethsemane Jesus instructs the nine to wait at a distance, taking his inner

circle, his closest friends, Peter, James and John, to be with him as he prays. We read in verses 33 and 34,

33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.
34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

The English lets us down. In the original language, these words have the sense of ‘terrible distress and misery’ as one ‘crushed with anguish’, suffers from a sorrow so deep that it almost kills. In perhaps his most human moment in the gospels, Jesus is almost entirely overcome by what the next day holds. Previously he’s been

so composed, so purposeful, he's spoken about his death with such strength, with such settled resolve. But here, in this, his most human moment, the unbearable emotional toll comes to the surface. Jesus is reeling, he's recoiling at the horror of what awaits him. The Son of God, fully human, is suffering like no human before or since, and he's asked his closest friends to be there with him because he needs their support. Not to do anything, not to say anything, just be there with him. They can't fix it, he's not asking them to, he just needs them.

34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Jesus' suffering from sorrow is so deep that it almost kills. He's about to be separated from his Father, he's about to be beaten, humiliated and tortured. He's about to die, giving his life as a ransom for many, bearing their sins, receiving their punishment, for the 'Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa 53:6). But who could bear the wrath of God for the world? Nowhere in the gospels do we see Jesus more pressed down, more human, he's asking his closest friends just to stand there and be with him, to support him in his darkest hour.

They're coming to take him, a whole party armed with swords and clubs are on their way. This is the final hour. Jesus is living a waking nightmare that is threatening to crush him. What to do? How to prepare? As we'll see over the coming days, Jesus

prays. Not once, but three times, and God answers his prayers. These powerful emotions subside, and Jesus is able to look his betrayer and his accusers directly in the eyes, as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords walks triumphantly to his death, and to the salvation of the world.

But for now we're in Gethsemane experiencing the deepest depths of emotional turmoil alongside our Lord. How do we respond to it? Don Carson suggests,

‘As his death is unique, so also was his anguish; and our best response to it is hushed worship.’

Think

Spend some time in hushed worship of

Jesus today. Do you see him there ‘overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’ asking his dearest friends just to stand by him for emotional support as he prays? ‘Overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death’, suffering terrible distress and misery, crushed by anguish, suffering so much physical and emotional agony that he is described by Luke, the doctor, as sweating blood. For you. For me. Spend some time in hushed worship.

Pray

And then pray. As he prayed. Earnestly. Desperately. Dependently. Perhaps you too are suffering in this moment. Perhaps you’re feeling to some degree the pain that Jesus is going through. You may be asking, ‘Why?’ Praying that it wouldn’t be

so. Trying to come to terms with how on earth God's good and perfect plan could include what is happening to you. If this is you right now then pray like Jesus. God will answer your prayers just as he answers those of Jesus.

And if this isn't your situation today, then pray for your brothers and sisters at church and around the world who are experiencing similar emotions to Jesus anguish in our passage today. Be Peter and James and John to them. Through prayer; but also practically. Who do you know who is suffering that you can go and stand alongside? Who can you offer emotional and practical support to in their dark hour of need? If Jesus needed this kind of companionship in his suffering, then how much more do they?

Pray about this today and then do something tangible about it if you can. A text message, a phone call, popping over and visiting them, in hushed worship of our Lord.

