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Passion Scenes: Jesus' Prayer of Agony

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TEXT: Mark 14:27-42,50 (NASB1995)

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee." But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not." And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also.

They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"

And they all left Him and fled.

I'd like to begin today's message by asking you a rather sobering question: if you discovered today that you were going to die tomorrow, how would you feel? What thoughts would flood your consciousness? Would you be overwhelmed with sadness, afraid? Would you be under a sense of dread? You wish you could run away and escape the truth of the news? To be human is to have moments where we experience agony or fear or dread.

And as we explore together today this powerful story of Jesus praying to His father in the Garden of Gethsemane, in a place called the Mount of Olives, some people call it the Mount of Agony because this is where Jesus prayed in His agony. In the intimate prayer with his father, Jesus asked, "Can you take it away? Do I have to do this?" In this prayer, we see Jesus' humanness, but we also see His Majesty and the glory and beauty of His heart for us. That Mount Olivet it is a sacred ground where there was this holy, divine encounter between the Father and the Son.

As we explore together, the first thing I want us to wrestle with is the Lord Jesus' agony. He knew what awaited Him. He had foreknowledge. He could tell the future – though He was a man, He was also God. So in His foreknowledge, Jesus knew all the physical suffering that He was about to endure. He knew that the soldiers would blindfold and beat Him. He knew that He was going to be whipped – 39 lashes – where His back was going to be ripped open and raw in pain. He knew that they were going to take a crown of thorns and press it down on His forehead. He knew that He was going to drag the wooden cross down the Via Dolorosa to the mountain called Calvary. He knew that they were going to drive spikes through His hands and feet. He knew that He was going to be crucified, suspended between Heaven and Earth outside the gates of Jerusalem.

He also wrestled with the agony of the emotional and relational suffering of that moment. He knew the betrayal that was going to happen. He knew that these men that He had poured His heart out to for three years of ministry around the shores of Galilee were all going to fall away. They were all going to run for their lives. They were going to abandon Him. He knew that Peter would deny Him. He knew the rejection of all His own people, who now were going to scream for His head. In the powerful truth of that short phrase, He knew that all would leave Him.

Jesus also knew spiritually, that though He was perfect, He was going to be arrested, tried and convicted under false witness. And He knew that, as was prophesied in Isaiah 53, that the Lord God laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Jesus knew that He would become sin for us – that the guilt and shame of everyone who had ever lived in all time of all history, that the sins of all people would all fall upon Him, not only those who had lived and those who are living, but those who ever would live. Jesus was aware that he was going to receive the judgment for the world's evil; divine judgment.

No wonder He had dread. No wonder he had agony. He knew that He was going to be crushed under the load of sin's guilt and shame. No wonder He sweat drops of blood – where physicians tell us that the capillaries can become engorged with blood, with extreme emotional stress, they can burst. And they trickle down Jesus' cheeks as He prayed.

What was it that He prayed? It was absolutely beautiful. Let's unpack it a little bit. Jesus first said, “Abba.” A term of endearment, words of affection: Papa, Daddy. It's an intimate calling out. Then He said, “All things are possible for you,” and He knows that's true. Then He boldly says, “Can you remove this cup from me?” The word “cup” throughout the Old Testament is a reference to drinking the cup of divine judgment. He's saying to His Father, “Can you take it away? I don't want to suffer and die. I don't want to go through all of this. Is there any other way? Can this pass from me?” Our hearts are gripped with Jesus' emotion. We understand His feelings. Haven't we pleaded with God in prayer in the tragic moments of life – in our grief, in moments of agony, in a sense of dread, facing death? “Lord, deliver me. Save me. Give me out of here, Lord, take this away.”

But here's the truth in the moment of Jesus prayer: though it is true that with God all things are possible, yet God could not spare his son and atone for the sins of the world and save us and reconcile us. Which leads to his last phrase, a sweet surrender: “Not my will, but yours.” Or maybe you could say, “Your will is my will.” From the moment Jesus left Heaven, emptying Himself of His power and glory, He knew that His mission would lead Him to this very moment. When He was 12 years old in the temple, He told the religious leaders, “I must be about my father's business.” And in Luke 9:51, it says Jesus set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem. His heart was permeated with determined resolve. Now, in His humanness in the garden of Gethsemane, as He prays, pouring out His heart to the Father, the threshold of all that is about to unfold in its fervor and

intensity leads Him to say, “Can you take it all away, Abba?” We remember how, in John's Gospel, the 12th chapter, Jesus said this: “The hour has come. What can I say? ‘Save me from this hour’? No, this is the very reason I came. Father, glorify your name.”

I think of the old hymn: “He could have called ten thousand angels to destroy the world and set Him free. He could have called ten thousand angels, but He died alone for you and me.” This prayer that we hear Jesus share with His Father gives us insight into Jesus’ humanness, but also His Majesty and the glory of His heart. Because of Jesus’ sweet surrender and His determination to follow through and go all the way to the cross and the grave, then it becomes true that we also have an Abba in Heaven. In the name of Jesus, we can call our Father, the Creator, our “Daddy.” We can trust Him. We can love Him.

My dad's name was Oscar. He was 5’9”, but strong as a bull. He'd make big biceps with his arm, and when I was a little boy I'd jump up and grab his arm and hang on him like a tree limb. He taught me how to swim, throw a baseball and football, how to shoot a basketball. He would pull me by hours on water skis behind our little boat. He came in support of all my games and concerts, and in worship every Sunday, when I saw him rise to the pulpit and preach about the word of God, and especially about Jesus. Because of it all, I was so proud to call him my dad. Do you think in light of that, that I had any fear to talk to him about anything, or to share my heart, or to seek his advice? No, I loved him. There was total trust. He was my “Abba.” In the name of Jesus, every one of you can come to God in prayer and call on your Abba. You can totally trust our Father in Heaven. Because of Jesus’ sweet surrender, we also know that we can share our hearts with God. We can be honest about our fears, our failures, or the things that frustrate us. No need for secrets, nothing held back. We can even confess when we are powerless. We can share with God honestly about our apprehensions or the ways that we might be reluctant to obey Him. We can tell Him our struggles. We can ask God for His deliverance. We can ask Him anything. We can trust that our Heavenly Father's wisdom and love, as our Abba, will sort through it all and do what is best. Like it says in 1 John 5, we can ask God for anything in Jesus’ name, according to His will, and we know that He hears us. Jesus also encourages us to be vigilant in prayer as we battle temptation. Because isn't it true: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. If Jesus had to be vigilant in prayer to battle temptation, how much more do we need to be vigilant in prayer to do battle?

But lastly, it's important for every one of us to come to that point in our prayer life where we, in sweet surrender, say to God, "Not my will, but yours." Actually, that we would say, "Your will is my will. My desire, God, is to live pleasing you. My heart wants what your heart wants." I think of the quote of Mother Teresa when she said, "It is not our wishes, but God's promises that we seek to fulfill."

So the beauty of this is that Jesus' faithfulness, in His sweet surrender that took Him all the way to the cross and the grave, and then God raising Him from the dead, shows us clearly that Jesus alone is our agent of salvation. Jesus is the savior of the world. Jesus is our dear savior. Jesus has atoned for our sins and the sins of all the people who have ever lived or ever will live. That's an astounding truth. But also that we have the promise in 1 John 1:9: that "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Because of Jesus' sweet surrender and faithfulness to go to the cross, we know that Jesus has reconciled us into the love of God in His family, and that we're born again of the Spirit. We know that because Jesus, in sweet surrender, was faithful to go to the cross, that He embraces each one of us in forgiving love and gives to us eternal life.

Why would Jesus do it? Why would he speak this sweet surrender: "Your will is my will"? Why was Jesus willing to go to the cross? First, because Jesus was perfectly obedient to His Father's will and His Father's mission. He finished the task. Secondly, though, He surrendered sweetly in faithfulness to go to the cross because of His love for us. Though we are broken and often unfaithful, nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. And third, Jesus had this moment of sweet surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane that propelled Him in determination to go all the way to the cross because He believed that the Father would raise him from the dead. He believed that God, the Father, would vindicate Him in victory. Jesus would have known well the words of David in Psalm 16: "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life, and in your presence is fullness of joy." Ultimately, Jesus was praying to the one that He knew would save Him from death. And when we pray, we can know that, too. Jesus faced His moment of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and went all the way to the cross for us because it was His joy to rescue us in love. What a savior! Thank you, Jesus.

Amen.