

Text: Luke 22:39-46

Title: “Dark Night Praying”

“UPGRADE” VIDEO BUMPER - Let’s open our Bibles to Luke 22:39. Before we get into our text today I want us to pray for the families that have been affected by the school shooting in Parkland FL. Join me as we pray.

Luke 22:39 - Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.

That’s what we’ve been doing during 40 Days of Prayer. We’re doing what the disciples did ... following Jesus into a life of intimacy with the Father. We want to know how, when, where and what Jesus prayed. And there’s no better picture of that than the text we have before us.

I need to tell you upfront that what the disciples witnessed here, and what we’ll witness from the text, was praying like they had never seen or heard Jesus pray before. This will not be a “sweet hour of prayer” as the old hymn says. It would be great if all our praying were that, but it isn’t.

ILLUSTRATION - To put it in human terms there’s an intimacy that a husband and wife enjoy on the honeymoon after their wedding. But that’s different from the intimacy that couple might experience as they cling to each other in the surgery waiting room while their little infant goes through brain surgery. And with God there’s an intimacy we enjoy that really is that “sweet hour of prayer.” It’s a delight. But then there are seasons when our intimacy with God is like we are holding on to Him for dear life. I will say from my own experience that I have grown far more in my faith when I’ve had to cling to God for dear life in what I’m calling today “dark night praying.”

Luke 22:40 - On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.”

Now the other Gospels give more details about this occasion than Luke does. So as I walk through these verses I’ll bring in some of the details included by the other Gospels. The “place” here is Gethsemane, where Jesus often prayed. He loved this place. Gethsemane means “olive press” ... a very appropriate name for what is about to happen here. Olive oil was extracted from olives using a device that squeezed the olives so they would release their precious oil. And in just a short

time the pressure will be applied to Jesus. On this dark night one of Jesus' own disciples Judas will betray Jesus as He leads soldiers into this garden to arrest Him.

So Jesus took His inner circle, Peter, James and John, away from the others a little farther into the garden with Him to pray. This will be a dark night for Jesus, but it will also be a dark night for them. They need to pray so they can face the trouble and pressure that is about to come on them as followers of Jesus.

We know that Jesus became deeply distressed and troubled. A dark dread settled over Him. In the other Gospels Jesus said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." He is completely surrounded by sorrow. So...

Luke 22:41 - He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed,

The full weight of what is about to happen comes crashing in on Jesus like a ton of bricks. He collapses to His knees and then falls flat out face down on the ground as He cries out to His Father.

Luke 22:42 - "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

The "cup" Jesus refers to here connects what's happening that night with what will happen the next day. In about twelve hours He will be hanging on a Roman cross of crucifixion ... just about the cruelest form of execution human have ever devised. So Jesus knows He will face enormous, excruciating physical pain.

But that's not the half of it. The greatest despair will come from the fact that Jesus will have all the sins of all humans of all time heaped upon Him as He becomes our Sin-Bearer. He will absorb the full wrath of God against our sin, as God allows His Son to become the sacrifice for our sins. The Father will heap our sins upon His Son and in that moment, for the first time ever, the Father and the Son will be separated as God judges our sin. And Jesus' greatest dread was being separated from the Father for even a few hours. And yet this was the reason for which Jesus came into this world. Write in your notes:

OUTLINE - JESUS ENDURED THE DARK NIGHT AS OUR SUBSTITUTE.

He is entering into the sufferings of the Cross and enduring the dark night for us.

Luke 22:43 - An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.

Jesus could have easily decided that the price was simply too high to pay. He could have escaped off into the desert and no one would have heard from Him again. So he needed to persevere in His dark night of prayer and an angel comes to support Him.

Luke 22:44 - And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

The mental and emotional distress is so overwhelming, and His prayer becomes so intense, that Jesus begins to sweat. In the season of the year when Jesus was crucified the nights would have been chilly, if not outright cold. So for Jesus to be sweating meant He was really exerting Himself in prayer. The pressure is so intense that drops of blood fall from His forehead to the ground. One commentator wrote, “Jesus broke out into a bloody sweat.” Staggering!

Luke 22:45-46 - When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

The other Gospels tell us that Jesus actually rose from this agonizing prayer three times to go back to check on His disciples only to find them sleeping, exhausted from sorrow. What a contrast between the praying of Jesus and the praying of the disciples. Jesus’ sorrow drove Him to pray; the disciples’ sorrow put them to sleep. They wanted to escape the pain in sleep.

Now let’s push the pause button here for just a minute and turn to Hebrews 5:7 where we actually have a commentary on Jesus’ dark night praying. The writer of Hebrews explains more of what was actually happening here.

Hebrews 5:7a - During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death...

Jesus prayed that He wouldn’t have to drink that cup of suffering. And yet the Father didn’t give His Son what He asked for because the Father had a something better in mind. Jesus wasn’t spared from the suffering of death, but He was saved and rescued from it when the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

Hebrews 5:7b - And he was heard because of his reverent submission.

On one hand Jesus dreaded the suffering He was about to endure, but He had surrendered (submitted) Himself to the Father's will, no matter how painful it would be.

Hebrews 5:8 - Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

In His humanity Jesus had to press through the fear and dread to come to a place where He would reverently obey the Father's will for His life. In His humanity Jesus learned from what He suffered. He grew increasingly more yielded to His Father.

Hebrews 5:9 - and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

This doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't sinlessly perfect from the start. It means that Jesus was now perfectly, completely in the center on the Father's will for His life. So Jesus would walk out of that prayer garden to become the sinless sacrifice for our sins and the source of our eternal salvation for everyone who puts their trust in Christ. If you've never done that turn to Christ today. Repent of your sins and put your life in His hands. Jesus alone is the source of eternal salvation.

So Jesus went deeper into the garden to pray alone because He was facing something that He alone had to face. To become the source of eternal salvation Jesus would drink a cup and pay a price so that we wouldn't have to. Jesus endured the dark night as our substitute. But also...

OUTLINE - JESUS ENDURED THE DARK NIGHT AS OUR COMPANION.

ILLUSTRATION – Unfortunately, life isn't like your DVR at home where you can just fast forward through the scary parts. We have to *live* through them and we have to *pray* through them. Jesus went through the dark night to show us the way through the dark nights of our life.

QUOTE – “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” – “Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge—take it to the Lord

in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He'll take and shield thee. Thou wilt find a solace there."

In the dark nights of life our companion Jesus teaches us to ...

1. PRAY WITH PARTNERS.

Jesus could have gone off to pray by Himself. He often did. But in this hour He wanted and needed His closest friends with Him to pray with Him ... to keep watch with Him.

ILLUSTRATION – I was having coffee with a friend recently and he shared with me that he had been diagnosed with a serious disease. But he asked me not to tell anyone. He didn't want people to look at him differently because he had this disease. I said, "I'll honor your wishes, but let me encourage you to look at it differently. If you share this with others you can have prayer partners. Others can be an encouragement to you. And if others know you're facing this you can be an encouragement to them." We all need partners who will pray with us and for us. Our companion Jesus also teaches us to...

2. PRAY WITH PASSION.

Luke 22:44a - And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly...

Don't be afraid to get emotional with God. Jesus was fully human. He was emotionally overwhelmed just like we are. He experienced physical pain just like we do. There isn't a darkness that we face that He hasn't gone through. He cried out to the Father and so should we.

Perhaps there's no passion in our praying because we haven't let ourselves to be broken by what we are facing. We're still trying to handle it in our own strength.

Jeremiah 29:13 - You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

QUOTE – Rick Warren in last week's 40 Days of Prayer video said, "You can't seek God with all your heart without putting some passion in it." Are you praying with all your heart? Do you mean business with God? Pray with partners. Pray with passion. And...

3. PRAY WITH PURPOSE.

Luke 22:42 - “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

In the dark nights of life our praying needs to be riveted not just to what will get us out of trouble, but what will accomplish the Father’s purposes and will for us. Remember Jesus taught us to pray this way in the Model Prayer: “May your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God knows when we are truly surrendered to His purpose beyond our own desires. Pray for God’s purpose to be done and then...

4. PRAY WITH PERSPECTIVE.

Someone has observed that we are poor judges of what is good for us. We just don’t have the perspective that God does. Jesus didn’t want to go through the pain of the Cross and the agony of being separated from His Father. But Jesus could ultimately leave it to the Father’s goodness to do what was right.

We need the perspective of all God is accomplishing through our sufferings. Jesus could see that God was accomplishing eternal salvation for the world. Unfortunately we can’t always see what God is accomplishing through our dark nights. But our faith in the goodness of God tells us that God is accomplishing something good through our suffering.

We also need the perspective of all God has awaiting us after our sufferings. Even though Jesus didn’t want to go through the sufferings of the Cross, He could say, “Father, Your will be done.” Jesus could endure the sufferings of the crucifixion because He knew that the resurrection was awaiting Him. We may have to go through times of suffering, but there is ultimate relief, healing and deliverance on the other side ... if not in this life, certainly in heaven.

So Jesus is saying to us in the dark nights of life what He said to His sleepy disciples in Luke 22:46: “Get up and pray...” Quit looking for ways to escape the suffering. Quit trying to figure it out yourself. Get up and pray.