
CHAPTER 9

PREPARING TO DIE

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:39-42).

With His disciples Jesus slowly made His way to Gethsemane. The moon on that Passover evening shone from a cloudless sky. The tents of all the pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the feast were silent.

Earlier Jesus had been in intense conversation with His disciples, but as they neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He often came to this place for meditation and prayer, but never before had He come with a heart as troubled as on this night. He seemed to have lost His Father's support as He came to the moment when He would bear the sins of the world. The disciples couldn't help noticing the great change that had come over their Master.

Near the entrance to the garden Jesus left most of the disciples, asking them to pray for Him and for themselves. Then, accompanied by Peter, James, and John, He went further into the garden, where He asked them also to pray. He stumbled on a few more steps, still within their sight and

hearing, and collapsed on the ground. As a human being He began to suffer the results of humanity's sin.⁶⁶

Jesus and Satan had met in deadly conflict in the wilderness three years before at the beginning of His earthly ministry, and there He overcame. Now the tempter comes for one final, fearful assault. Everything is at stake for him. If he fails this time, his hope of becoming the master of the world will be gone. In His agony Jesus clings to the cool ground as if to stop Himself from being drawn any farther from the Father, and from His lips comes the cry, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:39).

Every human being desires sympathy in times of suffering. Jesus longed for sympathy too. In His time of ultimate agony, He came to His disciples for their comfort. He had always supported them in their troubles, and He longed to know they were praying for Him. He staggered over to the place where He had left them, only to find all three of them asleep. Earlier, as Jesus warned them of the coming conflict, they had all assured Him they would willingly face prison or death on His behalf. Peter had added that even if all the rest of them failed, he would not.⁶⁷

With incredible sadness Jesus awakened His sleeping disciples. Addressing Peter, Jesus asked, "Couldn't you support me for just one hour? You are so willing, but also so weak." Sorrowfully, Jesus turned aside to struggle on alone, and there He sweat drops of blood that fell to the ground to mingle with the dew.

"Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done'" (Matthew 26:42). The first reaction of the three disciples was to rush to His side, but they concluded they should do what He had asked them to do. So they prayed, then gradually slipped back to sleep. Later Jesus approached

them for a second time and found them sleeping. They stirred when He came to them, but they found themselves speechless in His presence. At the sight of His blood-streaked brow they were overwhelmed with fear, unable to understand what was going on.⁶⁸

Returning to His place of anguish, Jesus again prayed for His own tempted, agonized soul. What an awesome moment! The destiny of the world was about to be decided. The future of humanity hung in the balance. Even at this moment Jesus could have declined to take the place of guilty humanity. It was not too late to put this all aside. He could leave the world in its sinfulness and return to His Father in heaven. But again, and then again—yes, three times—He prayed to the Father: “Not my will but yours be done.”⁶⁹

Angels were watching Jesus’ agony. They saw the legions of satanic forces around Him. Heaven was silent; no music could be played at this profound moment. They watched the Father separating His love from His beloved Son. Unfallen worlds watched with the most intense interest as the conflict on earth drew to its climax.

Some time later, even as Christ’s agony continued, His deep depression and discouragement left Him and calmly, with peace written on His bloodstained face, He rose to face Calvary.

As He walked back to the place where all the disciples slept, Jesus was conscious of the approaching mob and woke His associates by announcing the arrival of His betrayer. Standing in front of the disciples, Jesus faced the mob and asked, “Whom do you seek?” When they replied, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus answered, “I am He.”

As He spoke an angel stood between Him and the mob. A divine light illuminated Jesus’ face, and a dovelike form cast its shadow. At that sight the murderous thugs staggered back. Priests, elders, soldiers—even Judas—fell to the ground.

At that moment Jesus could easily have escaped, but He stood His ground even as His accusers lay at His feet. The disciples looked on the scene in silence and awe.

Then the scene quickly changed. As the angel withdrew, its glory fading into the night, soldiers, priests, and Judas stood up and faced Jesus. Ashamed of their weakness and afraid that Jesus might escape, they again said they wanted Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go" (John 18:8). That evening He had seen abundant evidence of His friends' weak faith, and He wanted to protect them from further temptation and trial.

"Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him'" (Matthew 26:48). For a moment Judas pretends he has no association with the mob. Stepping up to Jesus, he takes His hand and says, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kisses him repeatedly, pretending that he is crying in sympathy with Jesus' peril. But Jesus responds, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (Luke 22:48). If anything could have, this should have stirred Judas' conscience. Sadly, he remained defiant, showing no sign of repentance for this horrible betrayal.⁷⁰

"Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!'" (verses 52, 53).

The disciples were terrified as they saw Jesus allow Himself to be taken and bound. They couldn't understand it, and blamed Him for submitting to the mob. In that moment of great fear, Peter proposed that they should save themselves. Following his suggestion, "all the disciples deserted him, and fled" (Matthew 26:56).⁷¹