

AGONY 2

A. The Setting

The Passover supper has been eaten. Jesus has concluded His “*upper room discourse*,” as recorded in St John’s gospel, including the high priestly prayer of Jesus for His disciples, in Chapter 17. Jesus and the disciples have sung a hymn, they have left the upper room, and they have crossed the Kedron to the Mount of Olives, and specifically to the Garden of Gethsemane. St Luke mentions only that the party went to the Mount of Olives, for his Gentile readers would not have known the precise location that some of the Jewish readers of other gospels would have recognized.

The Cross now looms large on the horizon. Jesus will pray in the Garden, returning twice to His disciples only to find them sleeping. He will urge them to pray that they enter not into temptation, and then He will return to His own agonizing prayer. The arrest of Jesus would lead to His trials and then to His crucifixion. The cross was not only near in time, it was also heavy on the mind of the Savior.

B. The Text

One can quickly see that St Luke’s account of the agony of our Lord in Gethsemane is considerably shorter than those of St Matthew and St Mark. St Luke, for example, does not set the three disciples (Peter, James, and John) apart from the other eight, even though these three were taken by our Lord to “*watch*” with Him at a closer distance. Neither does St Luke focus on Peter, although in the other accounts, Jesus specifically urged Peter to watch and pray. While St Matthew and St Mark indicate three different times of prayer, with our Lord returning twice to awaken His disciples and urge them to pray, St Luke refers to only two.

The unique contribution of St Luke to the account of the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane is to be found in verses 43 and 44. These verses have been omitted by a very few manuscripts, which has caused some to question their originality. However, these verses are not only original, but they are the unique contribution of St Luke to the gospel narratives of the event. It is much easier to see how a copyist could have left them out than to comprehend how they could have been added.

C. The superhuman suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ in Gethsemane, Lk 22

Jesus was pressing on to His own cross, even while in the Garden of Gethsemane. St Luke tells us that Jesus “*went out as usual to the Mount of Olives*” (39). Furthermore, we are told that the Savior and the disciples “*reached the place*” (40). This was all a part of the plan. While our Lord had deliberately been secretive about the location of the place where the Passover meal was to be celebrated, He was completely open and predictable about the place where He would be on that fateful night. He followed His custom, He acted according to a very predictable pattern. Judas would know exactly where to lead the arresting officers, at “*the place*” where they had stayed every night. There is no

elusiveness here, for it was our Lord's time to be betrayed. He will be taken, but it is not by surprise. Everything is proceeding according to the plan and according to His predictions.

On reaching "*the place*" Jesus instructed His disciples to pray. There was a specific purpose, "*that you will not fall into temptation*" (40). Notice that Jesus did not conduct a prayer meeting as we sometimes have. He left the disciples in one place while He went off, by Himself, to another.

Neither does St Luke or any of the other writers tell us that our Lord prayed for His disciples as He did in John 17. Furthermore, Jesus did not ask His disciples to pray for Him as though He might succumb to temptation. It was the disciples who were in danger of failing, not Jesus. Nowhere in this text (or its parallels) do we see any reference to the Lord being in danger of forsaking His path to the Cross.

Three times, Jesus urged His disciples to "*pray that they would not fall into temptation*". The temptation is specific, not general, and it can be known from the context of our Lord's words. The temptation was based upon the disciples' predisposition to view their circumstances in the light of their own ambition and desires and their own distorted view of how and when the kingdom would come.

Early on, Peter had attempted to rebuke the Lord for speaking of His own death (Mt 16:21-23). In the immediate context of St Luke's gospel we find the disciples debating among themselves as to who was perceived to be the greatest. We also find Peter boldly assuring our Lord of his faithfulness. The danger is that the disciples would attempt to resist our Lord's sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary, even as was the case when Peter drew the sword in an attempt to resist His arrest (Lk 22:49-51). To put the matter briefly, the disciples were going to be tempted to resist the will of God for the Savior and for themselves rather than to submit to it.

Having charged His disciples with their duty to pray for themselves, Jesus went off from them and began to pray Himself. Our Lord's prayer could be summed up in these words, "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done*" (Lk 22:42).

Our Lord's submission to the Father's will is never a matter that is in question. He is asking the Father whether or not there is any other way for the sins of men to be forgiven. The answer is obvious, for the purpose and plan of God stands and is faithfully pursued by the Lord Jesus.

There was no other way for men to be saved than through the innocent and substitutionary suffering of Christ our Lord. Our Lord the way, the truth and the life. No man could come to the Father except through Him and His Sacrifice. The prayer of our Lord in the garden underscores the truth of the New Testament that there is but one way, and that way is the shed blood of the sinless Savior shed for sinners.

Our Lord Jesus Christ greatly dreaded "*the cup*" and that it was this "*cup*" that He was asking be removed, if possible. Why is "*the cup*" such a dreaded thing? What is "*the cup*" to which Jesus the Lord Jesus is referring?

The answer is in our next Instruction on Agony.