

# Prayer on the Mount of Olives

Luke 22: 39 – 46

July 4, 2010

## I. Introduction

- A. Mountaintop experiences, at least in our common lingo, are supposed to be wonderful
  - 1. Uplifting, glorious, exhilarating, life-giving times in our faith journey
- A. I wonder, would we describe Jesus' experience on the Mount of Olives in that way
  - 1. Granted, Mount Olivet, as it was also known, was not an exceedingly high mountain
    - a. Although its peak dominates the skyline if one were looking
      - (1) From Jerusalem to the northeast, across the Kidron Valley
- A. And we don't know that Jesus went to the top of the mountain to pray
  - 1. In fact, the Garden of Gethsemane, that Matthew and Mark record
    - a. As the place where Jesus took his disciples on that fateful night
  - 2. Is named for an olive press that was probably located on the lower slopes of the mountain
- A. Praying in a garden near an olive press - seems appropriate in a way, doesn't it
  - 1. When you think about the intense pressure of the heavy stones
    - a. That crushed and squeezed the ripened olives so that the oil flowed out
  - 2. Oil for cooking, for producing light, and for the healing of all manner of injuries/wounds
- A. Perhaps Jesus even thought of the similarities
  - 1. In how he was about to face the grinding pressure of his arrest, torture and death
    - a. So that his life-blood flowed out, bringing light and healing to the world
- A. No, this wasn't a mountaintop experience in the way that we normally think of it
  - 1. Certainly not the glorious, thrilling event that we looked at in last Sunday's scripture
    - a. When Jesus was transfigured or revealed in his heavenly glory
      - (1) And encouraged by conversing with Moses and Elijah on Mount Hermon
  - 2. And yet, it was truly a momentous occasion in Jesus' life
    - a. And it was a decisive moment in God's sovereign plan of salvation
- A. Think back for a moment if you would, to the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry
  - 1. To the struggle that began when Jesus was led out into the wilderness for 40 days
    - a. To be tempted by the devil – to control the world by deception and force
      - (1) Or to follow God's plan of loving servant-hood
  - 2. I believe we see some of that same struggle here in the mountain garden

- a. As Jesus faces the suffering and pain that lay ahead of him
    - 3. And this time, victory comes in the strangest of ways, by submission
      - a. Not by giving in to the temptation to escape suffering
        - (1) But through a complete surrender to the power and authority
          - (a) And infinite love of his heavenly Father
  - A. We do not often think of achieving victory through surrender
    - 1. It's not the normal human way of accomplishing great things
      - a. But it is the way of love, and it is God's way of saving the world
- II. Well, this is the Fourth of July, Independence Day in the United States
  - A. The date when we celebrate the birth of our nation
    - 1. And the proclamation of our independence from the British Empire
  - A. I find it interesting to think about how people in this newly settled country
    - 1. Felt the urge to be separated from Great Britain back in 1776
      - a. Despite the high risk and tremendous cost in terms of lives lost
  - A. And how in recent years, the British government has become one of our closest allies
    - 1. At least when it comes to confronting nations that are perceived to be
      - a. Common enemies in our world today
    - 2. I guess it shows that time really does have a way of changing things
  - A. Perhaps it is fitting then, that on this day celebrating independence
    - 1. We have a scripture text that highlights a sense of total dependence
  - A. Jesus, who has already demonstrated God's power at work
    - 1. Through amazing miracles of healing, calming the storm, feeding the multitudes
      - a. And even restoring life to a dead child and a close personal friend
    - 2. Finds it necessary to get down on his knees and cry out to God –
      - a. Father, if there is any other way to accomplish your will...
        - (1) Any other way to achieve the purpose for which I came to earth...
        - b. Yet, not my will, but your will be done!
  - A. An incredible prayer, and we want to look at it in more detail in a minute
    - 1. But first, a broader look at prayer in general
- III. There are many different kinds of prayer modeled in scripture
  - A. We spoke a couple of weeks ago about the prophet Elijah
    - 1. And his fervent prayers on Mount Carmel
      - a. First for God to send down fire from heaven to burn his sacrifice

- (1) As a way of demonstrating absolute power and control over creation
  - b. And then an equally fervent prayer for God to send down rain
    - (1) To end the years of drought and suffering in the land of Israel
- 2. We think of those prayers as an example of Elijah's faith, and they are
  - a. But weren't they also prayers that demonstrate
    - (1) Our absolute dependence on the power and presence of God
      - (a) To protect us and provide for our physical needs
- 3. I've never experienced weather-related suffering like some people have
  - a. But I am reminded from time to time how many ways our lives can be affected
    - (1) By what we sometimes refer to as "Mother Nature"
- 4. In fact, the "laws of nature" are just another way of recognizing the authority of God
  - a. Who created our world out of chaos and continues to exercise control over it
- 5. And prayer can be an acknowledgment that we are dependent on God's power
  - a. For our very existence in a world that we cannot control
- A. Another type of prayer that we see often in the Bible, is the prayer of repentance
  - 1. I think of King David, after he selfishly caused the death of a soldier in his army
    - a. So that he could take the man's wife to be his own
  - 2. Psalm 51 is considered to be David's prayer, admitting his guilt
    - a. Retelling the suffering of his conscience, and then rejoicing in God's grace
  - 3. Or I think of Peter, after his denial three times that he was a follower of Jesus
    - a. We don't have the actual words of his prayer recorded
      - (1) But his tears of repentance tell us all we need to know
  - 4. We can make excuses for our actions, when we recognize that we have done wrong
    - a. But the prayer of true repentance requires us to come to the place
      - (1) Of admitting that we are helpless when it comes to dealing with sin
  - 5. There may be ways that we can try to right the wrongs we have done
    - a. Against another person or persons
  - 6. But our sin against God has only one solution, and it's nothing we can do
    - a. Except to ask for God's forgiveness
  - 7. And we are totally dependent on the grace and love of God
    - a. To act on our behalf, and take away our guilt, otherwise we are eternally doomed
- A. And then there are the prayers of thanksgiving, and intercession
  - 1. Someone once asked how an atheist celebrates Thanksgiving

- a. With no one to give thanks to – makes you think, doesn't it
- A. Gratitude is an expression of appreciation for something that is done for us
  - 1. Whether to God, or to another person, it is a recognition
    - a. That we need someone else to care for us and about us
  - 2. A life without love would be a pretty worthless existence
    - a. And the primary source of all love is the love God has for each one of us
      - (1) Whether we think about it or not, our life depends on God's love
- A. And when we love as God loves, Jesus taught and modeled that we pray for others
  - 1. The classic example is in Jesus' prayer over the city of Jerusalem
    - a. Longing for the people to accept his love
      - (1) Expressing the desire to gather them under his protective shelter
    - b. As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings
  - 2. Jesus also prayed for his disciples, and all those who would become his followers
    - a. We are blessed by Jesus' prayer for us even today
  - 3. And we have the privilege of acknowledging our dependence on God
    - a. By praying prayers of intercession for the needs of people far and near
- A. There is, of course, a difference between declaring political independence
  - 1. And understanding that we are, every person, tribe or nation
    - a. Dependent on a sovereign God for our life, health and well-being
  - 2. But it can be easy for us to blur the distinction between those two sometimes
- A. Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane doesn't really fit
  - 1. In any of the categories of prayer that we've mentioned so far
    - a. It wasn't a prayer for God's providence or protection in the normal sense
      - (1) It was certainly not a prayer of repentance, or thanksgiving
    - b. It might be considered an intercessory prayer on his own behalf
  - 2. But primarily, I see it as a prayer of surrender
- A. Recognizing that the way ahead would be terribly difficult
  - 1. Acknowledging his desire to avoid suffering and pain
    - a. Jesus comes to the end of his solitude and prayer with a clear mind
  - 2. Whatever lay ahead, it was the only way he could go
    - a. Because he was determined to follow God's will above all else
- A. That conviction of heart and mind, I believe
  - 1. Is one of the hardest things we humans have to do

- a. We may sometimes think that living the Christian life is difficult
  - (1) And it certainly can be at times
- b. But how often do we blame our struggles on the circumstances of our life
  - (1) When we should be looking for the real problem within
- 2. The victory over temptation may be found where Jesus found it
  - a. Taking time away from the busyness of life to talk with God
    - (1) Being honest and upfront about our fears
    - (2) Looking for help and strength and encouragement from heaven
      - (a) Because that's where our help truly comes from
- A. And when we come from those times of solitude and prayer
  - 1. With the renewed commitment to follow Jesus no matter where it takes us
    - a. The road ahead may still be just a hard and troubling
  - 2. But we can move forward with confidence as Jesus did
    - a. Because we are convinced that if we are walking in God's will and not our own
      - (1) The end result will be for the best even though we may suffer getting there
- A. There is another part of this text that speaks about prayer as well
  - 1. And it follows along the same lines
    - a. When Jesus tells his disciples to pray that they do not come into the time of trial
- A. It reminds me of the part of the model prayer that Jesus taught his disciples earlier
  - 1. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil
- A. And you remember the line that comes next –
  - 1. For yours, God, is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory
- A. We live in a world where the devil has been allowed have
  - 1. A great deal of power and influence
    - a. But for the believer, it is still God's kingdom that we are living in
  - 2. As we allow God to rule in our hearts and lives
    - a. It is God's power that reigns supreme
      - (1) Even when our circumstances might seem otherwise
- A. And when we seek God's will and follow it
  - 1. It is for God's glory, not for our own benefit or gain
    - a. Even though Jesus made it clear that gaining the whole world
      - (1) Is not worth the cost of losing our eternal soul
- A. So, in the end, God's will is the best course for our lives

1. Even when it involves suffering and loss

a. Because the eternal reward is far greater than anything we might lose here

IV. That is what I want to take from this scripture text this morning

A. Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives was followed by a time of suffering

1. That was ended only when he took his last breath

A. We might look at that and ask – well then, what good did it do him to pray?

1. But suffering and death was not the end of the story

a. Jesus' resurrection to new life was all the more glorious

(1) Because, in God's plan, it provides salvation for the whole world

A. Not my will, but yours be done

1. It's such a simple prayer, but in our own strength it's nearly impossible

a. In fact, I believe it is only with God's help that we can pray it with meaning

2. Like everything else of real importance in this life

a. If we try to go it on our own, we most likely will end up a failure

3. But by depending solely on God

a. And the grace and strength God is willing and eager to supply for us

(1) If we only ask for it

b. We can be successful, just as Jesus was

A. So, maybe Jesus' time of prayer in the Garden was truly a mountaintop experience

1. And maybe our prayer times, whether they are prayers for God's providence

a. Or prayers of repentance, thanksgiving, intercession or submission

(1) Can be a real mountaintop experience for us, too