

GETHSEMANE: Matthew 26:36-46
08-12-18 AM

A garden at the beginning
A garden at the end
A garden in the middle

The story of the Gospel involves ideas that we need to understand in order to make it applicable. The first is the stain of sin. We need to understand that sin, whether great or small, is a stain which corrupts us before God (Isa. 59:1-2). There is nothing we can do to remove that stain; once there, no amount of good works removes it. This was why Jesus died on the cross. His death satisfies the need for propitiation (pay a penalty) according to 1 John 2:2; it satisfies the need for redemption (clean the record) according to Ephesians 1:7; and it satisfies the need for a new covenant (hope with God) according to Hebrews 9:16.

This being the case there must be something about Jesus death that is different than all others in order that it could accomplish something other could not. Was it being on the cross? The cross death is important, as it was symbolic of dying under a curse (Gal. 3:13). But it is not the exclusive reason, since many have died terribly, and many have died on the cross. Was it because Jesus was without sin in death? This too is necessary (Heb. 4:15), but not exclusive to Jesus. What was exclusive to Jesus in His death that might make us understand how His death works for us? The answer is in Gethsemane.

Consider if you would the descriptions of what Jesus experience in the Garden:

“deeply grieved to the point of death”

“very distressed and troubled”

“being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood”

The descriptions of Jesus in the garden before He was murdered give the image of one who was in extreme agony. These terms are not even found in use while He hung on the cross. We stop short of saying that His agony was greater here than there, but not because the text says otherwise. All of the language of the passion of the Christ is in the garden.

Why was this the moment of anguish for Jesus? The answer is that Jesus is God (John 1:1, etc.). As God Jesus knew His purpose and destiny (John 8:14). Consider that Jesus possessed Divine knowledge; we must assume He knew EXACTLY, BLOW BY BLOW, what He was about to suffer. He knew all the humiliation to come; He knew all of the nerves in the hands to be nailed because He was God, and had created these very things. He knew the pain of lacerations, bruises and blows INTIMATELY because He was the designer of the body and knew exactly what this pain would be. Therefore, it was His KNOWLEDGE of what was coming that was unique in Human History. This is why the testing moment was Gethsemane.

Secondly, consider that the Divine Mind was not subject to time (John 8:58). Even on earth Jesus was God, and had the divine mind. That mind is not limited to knowledge based on time. Thus, in some way incomprehensible to us, Jesus might experience at any time those things He experiences on the cross. Consider Job – all of the things he suffered, God determined that his knowing why would have been too much. Even at the end, despite Job’s desire, God would not reveal why. Yet Jesus (as the author of the plan of salvation) knew exactly why He was going to suffer and die. Jesus knew all things, and he knew when his moment had come. Jesus suffered something no other person in history would suffer – complete knowledge

But more than this, Jesus knew exactly what this death would accomplish. He knew that few would accept this price. The bible repeatedly tells us that few will be saved (Luke 13:23). We see comparisons of what few means; for example, Peter compares the few saved to the eight in the ark (1 Peter 3:20) while Paul compares it to the two who entered the promised land (1 Cor. 10:5). Jesus chose to do these even though the **vast** majority of men would despise Him and count His sacrifice as meaningless.

What is remarkable about this experience is that Jesus still did what was required. We ought not see the statements in Gethsemane as Jesus having doubt, but as His expression of what His agony was like for us. Hebrews 5:7 tells us that God heard Jesus in that time; this may refer to His petition in John:

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." John 12:27-28

Jesus NEVER faltered in this moment. At the most, His struggle was between two natures: The Divine and the Human. Any weakness was in the flesh, perhaps seen in His comments to His apostles in Matthew 26:41.

Ultimately, the point is this: the death on the cross made a difference because this was God in the flesh. His experience was unique because of this nature; His agony was unique by this nature too.