

April 30, 2023

THE HUMANITY OF JESUS AND OTHER BASIC REMINDERS

Luke 22:39-53

*(10 of 16 in a series through Luke 16-24)*

Have you ever had a moment where you look into the details of something that you regularly ignore or take for granted, and when you do, you're amazed? I had a moment like that a year or so ago with combines—those machines which harvest corn. I've seen them for much of my life. I grew up surrounded by farmland and live now in an area where farm land is all around us. But I never stopped to consider what a combine did until about a year ago. One of our former interns spent a day alongside a farmer who took him for a ride on a combine and explained the process to him, who, in turn, explained it to me.

As you drive the machine through the rows of corn, a row divider picks up the stalks of corn and shoves them through a small space so that the corn cobs and most of the husks are removed and what you don't want is discarded back onto the ground. Then, the corn goes into a cylinder where it is spun and the kernels are loosened from the cob and sifted through a sieve so that then they are channeled into a bin while all else is left onto the ground to nourish the soil. I think it's amazing. And it's crazy to me that you can just drive a machine through a field of corn and it shoots whole kernels of corn into a bin on that machine as you drive? Before looking into the details, I would've said, "Yeah, yeah, combines harvest corn." But once I considered the detail, I was amazed.

I think Luke 22:39-53 invites you to do the same thing. From a distance, this text is about all things you're familiar with. Jesus prays and struggles in the garden before going to the cross, the disciples are told to pray but struggle, and Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested. Again, none of these things are moments in Jesus' ministry that are new to us. Most of us, I assume, are quite familiar with these things. But—like that combine—when you start to consider more closely all that's going on, it causes us to be amazed, overwhelmed, and helped in our walk with the Lord.

So that's what I want to do this morning. I want to bring us in to consider some of the elements that we see in this text a little more closely and in greater detail. And the first of these that I want us to consider is the humanity of Jesus.

### **The humanity of Jesus**

When I teach theology, one thing I say to the students is that if we've spent much of our life in church, hearing about Jesus being fully God and fully man, the part we may find ourselves stumbling over is not Jesus' divinity but his humanity. Sometimes it's hard for us to fathom that Jesus really was human. He had a human soul, with a human mind and human will, as well as a human body. Therefore he really did experience every human emotion without sin. He was

happy, angry, sad, and on and on. But the place where we see his fully humanity on display most clearly is in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus goes to pray right before he is arrested.

Luke tells us that his custom was to go each night to the Mount of Olives, and he went there again this night with his disciples. And after telling them to pray, he withdrew from them “about a stone’s throw” (v. 41), and there he knelt and prayed. But it’s here that we see Jesus’ humanity in a way that we’ve not seen it before. First, we see it in the content of Jesus’ prayer. He prays, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (v. 42).

Now, here is where the Old Testament helps us understand the nature of Jesus’ prayer. Multiple times the image of a cup is used in the Old Testament to represent God’s wrath. So, for example, in Psalm 75:8 we read, “For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.” And again, in Isaiah 51:17: “Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.” And we could note many others, but suffice it to say that the image of the cup in the Old Testament served to represent God’s wrath.

This gives us insight as to what happened at the cross. At the cross Jesus bore the wrath of God for us. The wrath of God that should have been poured out on us was instead poured out on him, who died in our place. That’s why we refer to Jesus’ death at times as an act of penal substitution. He dies as our substitute, bearing the penalty for our sins, which is nothing less than the wrath of God itself.

But it also gives us insight into what Jesus is requesting here. He is asking his Father not to require him to go this route of suffering on the cross, dying, and bearing divine wrath for sinners. He genuinely does not want to do this. Nevertheless, Jesus assures his Father, he’ll ultimately do not what Jesus wills but what the Father wills. But what do we do with that? Can’t this entire prayer make us uncomfortable?

Well, we need to recognize that Jesus is, yes, fully God, but he’s fully human as well. What this means is that though the Son was/is always divine, at the incarnation he also assumes a fully human nature so that he has a human will in addition to his divine will. And as a human—as a man—he recoils at the idea of suffering, dying, and bearing divine wrath. This is his sinless and “natural fear of death and aversion to pain and suffering that is quite proper for a human facing crucifixion.”<sup>1</sup> It would be unnatural *not* to shrink from such intense suffering that awaited him. In his human will, he naturally does not want this. Who would? It’s almost unbearable to consider. But he shows us his sinless nature by submitting to his Father’s will, saying, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (v. 42).

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 216.

And yet we shouldn't skip over the difficulty and strain of this moment Jesus faces as a man. Luke tells us in verse 44, "And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Other gospel writers record Jesus expressing that he is sorrowful to the point of death. That is, his sorrow was so overwhelming as he considered the cross that he thought it was going to kill him.

Luke tells us that Jesus was in agony. He prayed earnestly. And his sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood. Now, I don't think that this means that he began to bleed or that blood seeped into his sweat. Rather, Luke is telling us that Jesus was sweating so profusely that it was falling off of him as if he'd been cut open and blood was pouring from him. In other words, this is intense strain on behalf of Jesus. And under the mental and emotional strain of it all, he's sweating like crazy—as any of us would be.

So, let's pause for a second and take this in. Jesus feels such intense strain and agony that he prays earnestly with sweat pouring off of him while he prays. This is no walk in the park. He knows what's coming, and that doesn't make the agony less but more. At the base level of his human will, he doesn't want to walk through the agony of what's coming. And yet he submits to his Father's will. When Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Jesus was obedient, even to the point of death, this is the scene we should bring to mind. In the first garden, Adam was in paradise and yet chose to sin. In this garden, Jesus is in agony with sweat pouring from him as he faces the path of bearing divine wrath for sinners, and he obeys.

But what do we do with this picture of Jesus in such agony? First, we consider the miracle we're witnessing. This is our God, our creator, who made the world and everything in it and upholds it by the word of his power. And yet, by assuming a fully human nature and becoming a man like you and me, he's suffering agony and sweating like crazy as he faces death for us. When the Scripture tells us that he loved us and gave himself for us, this is what it looks like. How do we see this picture and not worship? Second, we remember that this is our priest. He represents us in heaven, and he's able to sympathize with us in our weakness. When you feel so overwhelmed that you're in agony or sweat is pouring from you as you pray because you're so overcome by the weight of things in your life, your savior knows what you're going through. There's no suffering you can experience in this life where he is unable to look at you and say, "I know what you're going through." This is our Lord. He is the God-man. He is our great high priest. He is our savior. Worship him and know he understands where you are right now. So, first, we see the humanity of Jesus. Second, we see the need to pray.

### **The need to pray**

We see it first in how Jesus addresses his disciples. The section of our text that focuses on Jesus' struggle in the garden is verses 39-46, and note how it begins and ends. First, in verse 40, Jesus says to his disciples, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Then, in verse 46, after he finds the disciples sleeping as they're filled with sorrow, he says to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

The disciples don't know exactly what's coming, but Jesus does. He knows that they're going to be overwhelmed as Jesus is arrested and put through a sham of a trial. He knows that they're going to face intense pressure as they sense their own lives under threat by association with him. And he doesn't instruct them to give themselves pep talks or motivational speeches or work themselves up with anger at all the injustice going on around them. He tells them to pray. Why? It is because prayer is the means God uses to supply us with grace to walk through trials and persevere. And it's not just here that we see Jesus talking this way. He instructs us in the model prayer to pray daily that the Lord would keep us from temptation, that is, keep us from being overcome by temptation, to persevere.

You see, just like the disciples, you and I don't know what the rest of this day or tomorrow holds. And so our Lord tells us to pray, asking God for grace to walk in perseverance and faithfulness and holiness. Again, prayer is his ordained means to supply persevering grace to us.

But it's not just that we see Jesus instruct his disciples to pray in the midst of upcoming temptation, he models it himself. It's not just that Jesus is agonizing and sweating as he faces death. He prays. He prays and asks his Father to remove the cup, and then voices his submission to the Father's will. He'll go to the cross. And so you might think that at this moment that Jesus' prayer is simply about him coming to submission, as if it's only for his own wrestling before God and nothing else. But that's not the case. Notice what happens in verse 43. We're told, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him."

The Father's response to his Son's prayer is not to remove the cross. That's the God-ordained path for our salvation, and the Son willfully goes. But he does send divine assistance in answer to Jesus' prayer as he faces this terrible path of suffering. He sends an angel from heaven to strengthen him.

Isn't this a precious reminder to us of how our Father cares for us and responds to our prayers? Sometimes he hears our pleas and removes the suffering or struggle we're facing. And sometimes, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, he leaves it in order to accomplish his good purposes for us in and through it. But he *always* provides divine assistance. I don't mean it's always an angel—like Jesus sees here in the garden. But he always gives the divine assistance of sufficient grace.

Therefore, let's make sure to make prayer—and prayer for our own perseverance in the face of trials and temptations that most certainly will come—part of our daily practice, understanding it's God's means to pour out his grace to strengthen us for what we'll face. Actually, let's say more. Part of our church covenant says that "we will not neglect to pray for ourselves and one another." Maybe we should make our daily practice as we pray for ourselves to also pray for another church member on the app or to work your way in prayer through your small group. After all, by joining ourselves to one another as a church, we're saying that we're not content just to focus on our own perseverance but that of our brothers and sisters with whom we're in covenant as well. But our text isn't simply about Jesus' prayer in the garden. We also see Jesus' arrest in verses 47-53, and there we see the nature of sin.

## The nature of sin

We're told in verse 47 that as Jesus and his disciples were there, Judas and a crowd came to him. We know from our previous text in Luke that Judas was looking for a place where he could help hand over Jesus apart from the crowds. And since Luke tells us that going to the Mount of Olives was Jesus' custom each day (v. 39), Judas would have known that as well. And so he seizes the moment and brings the authorities to apprehend him.

But everything about this moment is messed up. First, we're told that Judas drew near to kiss Jesus. Now, this would have been a common greeting at the time, but note how odd it is to do this in the act of betraying. It would be like one of us walking up to a brother or sister and hugging them while in the act of destroying them. It is irrational behavior. And Jesus points it out, saying to his disciple, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" (v. 48).

But we also see the cowardice and wickedness of the chief priests, officers, and elders. As they come to arrest Jesus, he asks them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? 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" (vv. 52-53). Jesus is pointing out the absurdity of what they're doing. They've come to arrest Jesus, apparently armed with clubs and swords. Why? Did they think he was a violent criminal? They knew better. If they thought he was a violent criminal they would have apprehended him in the temple as they stood alongside him there day after day. There is simply no answer for why they would bring clubs and swords now. They know Jesus isn't violent. They're simply rationalizing in their own hearts that what they're doing is needed. This is what sin does. We rationalize to ourselves irrational decisions. That's why the Scripture speaks of sin as not only hardening our hearts but deceiving us.

Also, we know why they didn't arrest Jesus in the temple. They were afraid of the crowds. They may be convincing themselves that they're doing what is right, but in their hearts they know better. They're wicked cowards. This is what sin is in our lives. It's irrational, wicked, and goes against what we know to be good and true in our hearts.

And so we must see sin for what it is and turn from it. And it's not that everyone who allows a desire for prestige or power or control to surface, turns into Judas or one of the chief priests. But it is true that the chief priests and Judas wound up where they were that day because they failed to take captive their first urges to prestige, power, and control. We can say the same with adultery. It's not that everyone who lusts or looks at pornography ends up committing adultery, but all who commit adultery first lust. So let us make sure that we're repenting of sin at every point, fighting it, and leaving no place for it in our lives.

But there's one more element in this text I want us to consider more closely, namely, the power of our Lord.

## The power of our Lord

When we talk about the miracles of Jesus we probably think of him turning water into wine, feeding the 5,000, healing the lame, raising the dead, and the like. But I doubt that for most of us our minds move to healing the man's ear here in Luke 22:51, but this is actually Jesus' last miracle recorded in the gospel.

We find the unfolding of this event in verses 49-51. As the chief priests, officers of the temple, elders, and Judas approach Jesus—with clubs and swords—one of the disciples asks Jesus, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (v. 49). But Peter, who seemed to have a propensity for acting first and thinking later didn't wait for Jesus to answer, and we're told that he struck the servant of a high priest and cut off his right ear.

Now, I don't know if that's where he was aiming, and it was a pretty masterful stroke of the sword or if he was aiming for the head and it was a terrible stroke of the sword. But I guess it doesn't really matter. He was obviously trying to do some damage, but Jesus would have none of it, saying, "No more of this!" (v. 51). But we're also told that Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him.

But why point this out? I mean, sure, it's impressive. But we've seen Jesus do more impressive things before. I mean, there's a reason we don't talk about the time he put the servant's ear back on his head. It's easy to let that take a back seat to literally raising a dead person back to life, like Jesus did with Lazarus. But I think there's good reason to think Jesus' power wasn't simply seen in the miracle of healing the man's ear. The reason I say that is because in John's gospel, John also records this event, but he adds a detail. After telling about the Jesus' healing the man's ear, he adds, "The servant's name was Malchus" (John 18:10).

Now think about that for a second. Why would John tell us that? Why would the man's name matter at all? And how would they know it anyway? My guess is—and it's merely a guess—that John says this because Malchus was known in the Christian community. My guess is that he became a believer. We can't be sure, but I think that's a good deduction from John noting just who this servant was to his readers. And isn't that a reminder to us that the one who is powerful enough to put a man's ear back on his head demonstrates his power in an even greater way when he gives us new hearts to believe, and love, and obey our Lord? Let's not miss the power of our Lord in converting people like you and me.

So, this is one of those texts where perhaps we would say, "Yeah, I know that." But by taking a moment to reflect more deeply on Jesus' humanity, the need of prayer, the nature of sin, and the power of our Lord, I pray that we're moved to want to live lives of worshipful obedience to the one who lived, died, and was raised for us. So let's declare that now as we come to the table. Amen.