

Jesus' Last Unshackled Prayer

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As they gathered at the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper, Jesus foresaw what would happen that fateful Thursday evening. He promised his disciples that, following his arrest and execution, he would meet them again in Galilee (Matt 26:32) after his resurrection.

Jesus then led his disciples to the Mount of Olives, to a remote garden known as Gethsemane. He told all those present to sit on the periphery of the garden and wait while he went further into the garden to pray. Jesus then asked Peter, James and John to pray nearby. These three had witnessed what was once shared with John the Baptist: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." They were then tasked to "listen to him," that is, to follow what Jesus asked of them. The Bible says that, as he parted ways with the other disciples at the edge of the garden, Jesus became "sorrowful and troubled (Matt 26:37)." He described the state of his soul to Peter, James, and John, saying that it was "very sorrowful, even to death." He petitioned the three to remain and "to watch" with him (Matt 26:38)."

Jesus entered into a deeper recess of the garden where he "fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt 26:39).'" Luke tells us, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground (Luke 22:44)."

In his moment of anguish, Jesus returned to Peter, James, and John. They neither understood nor shared his state of desperation. Luke says that the disciples had fallen "asleep, exhausted from sorrow (Luke 22:45)."

Jesus prayed, knowing that the odds were against him. Still he was pleading with God for his life, that "this cup pass from" (Matt 26:39) him. Jesus wanted to find a way to complete his Messianic mission. The hope to extend his life to further the mission remained with him.

Jesus then spoke to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? He exhorted Peter to "watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." After another hour of desperate prayer, Jesus returned to his disciples and again found them asleep. Matthew goes on to recount that, for a third time, Jesus returned to his place of prayer and again cried out to God in desperation (Matt 26:44). When he returned to his disciples, he lamented:

Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand (Matt 26:45-46).