

## LESSON 2

*“Then Jesus came . . . to a place called Gethsemane . . .” (Matthew 26:36).*

### GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42;  
Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1, 2

Before going to the cross for us, Jesus went to a garden called Gethsemane to pray about the sacrifice that He would make. Gethsemane was Jesus’ garden of prayer! The story of His time there is poignant, precious, profound, and priceless!

“Gethsemane” simply means “oil press.” This garden, across the brook from Jerusalem on Mt. Olivet, was Jesus’ “prayer closet” when He was in Jerusalem (John 18:1, 2). Judas knew where Jesus would be, and he told the Jewish leaders that he would lead them to Him. He knew that Jesus would be praying—but he did not know Jesus!

We know about Jesus, but do we really know Him? How could Judas not know Jesus? How can we not know Jesus?

Among the disciples, Jesus had a Judas. Can there be a “Judas” lurking in all of us? We must read Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18 more closely.

**Prayer time!** Jesus fully knew His “hour” had come. His metaphorical word for this time was “cup” (see Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). The weight of every sin was upon His back. He had already instituted the Lord’s Supper. He had already prophesied His imminent betrayal. How disappointed, hurt, and rejected He must have been! Judas would betray Him; Peter would deny Him. Only one of the twelve (John) would even be at the cross. Israel would reject Him in favor of a common criminal (Barabbas). Jerusalem would gladly crucify Him! To make matters worse, His disciples were busy debating which of them was the greatest. Led by Peter, all the disciples vowed to be dependable. All failed. Jesus told Peter he would deny Him three times before the crowing of a rooster.

It was time to pray! The most dominant ministry of Christ was prayer. He had prayed before, during, and after great events. If Jesus needed prayer, how much more do we? He knelt and then fell face down. There is no contradiction here. As He prayed, He became more and more intense in His appeal to God. He invited Peter, James, and John to watch with Him—but they slept.

Prayer is not a guarantee that God will grant every wish. Our prayers are always under the will of God. Jesus reminded the Father that He was the God of the impossible!

Under severe duress, the “sweat became like drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). Have you ever prayed like that? He prayed this way not just once, but three times! He prayed, “May this cup pass from Me.” His critics were right: “He saved others; He cannot save Himself” (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31; see Luke 23:35). God did answer Jesus’ prayer! He did not spare Jesus, but He did save us! Jesus could not save Himself and still be our Savior. He prayed in mental anguish with a broken heart. Still, God said no. There was no way but the cross!

**Decision time!** The battle of all time and eternity was fought in Gethsemane . . . in prayer. Eternal decisions can only be made in prayer. Nothing can be settled until prayer settles it. God (the Father) said no three times; God (the Son) said yes once. Jesus accepted the divine judgment and punishment that sin deserves. Jesus had to wrestle in prayer to yield His heart to the sacrifice demanded by God. “It is finished!” was said on the cross, but it was decided in Gethsemane. Jesus gave His soul in Gethsemane; He gave His body at Golgotha.

**Pain time!** The Scriptures say more about suffering in Gethsemane than on the cross. In joy Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:1, 2). God hates sin; Jesus was made to be what God hates. The Christ touched sin to remove it. When Jesus became sin for us, God separated Himself from Him. This was the only time in all eternity when God the Father abandoned God the Son (Matthew 27:46). This was the “cup” which could not be passed!

This God-forsaken Son is the centerpiece of the Christian faith. Do not minimize the physical pain Jesus endured on the cross. It was horrible! However, the writers of the Gospels refer only sparingly to the physical pain that He suffered. Jesus did not “sweat blood” on the cross. He did in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). God sent an angel to the garden to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43). No angel was sent to Calvary.

Jesus’ night in Gethsemane was one long, hard, cold night!

*“For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent” (Mark 14:56).*

## **THE TRIALS OF JESUS**

Matthew 26:57-68; 27:1, 2, 11-25;  
Mark 14:53-65; 15:1-15; Luke 22:63—23:25;  
John 18:2—19:16

The crucifixion of Christ is so horrible that we tend to overlook or forget other shameless events leading up to it. The trials that Jesus went through were unfair from beginning to end! Jesus was treated so grossly and wickedly that Satan must have blushed! Not even Satan can control sin!

This time of His trials has to be the lowest point in all history. Judas betrayed, Peter denied, ten apostles ran for cover, four puppet rulers—Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod—judged the “Judge,” and the deeply respected Sanhedrin became a lynch mob. The holiest city (Jerusalem) and the city of law (Rome) united to produce the greatest legal farce in history.

The only one in control was Jesus (John 10:17, 18; 19:10, 11). He had deliberately chosen to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). His “hour” had come (John 17). He forced His enemies to take action by both provoking and facilitating His own arrest. Can we see this?

We have reduced Christ to a dear, soft, nice Jesus. No! He was a Man among men, not a glorified weakling. He took on Satan, Judaism, and the whole world—and won. He never retreated from anybody!

**Judaism** (Jerusalem) was morally and spiritually bankrupt. As we see man at his worst, we see also God in His perfection. This is the glory of grace. Jesus did not sneak into town or hide in a closet. He publicly cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15–18). The Jews were so steeped in corruption that they had turned the temple into a cattle auction. Jesus, alone, stopped that (Mark 11:16). What courage! What strength! Within the city of Jerusalem He taught “judgment parables.” There is no neutrality with Jesus—you either accept Him or put Him on a cross! His enemies never said, “Rebuke Him.” They said, “Kill Him!”

**The religious leaders** were “scared out of their wits” by Jesus! His miracles could not be dismissed. Jerusalem was always hostile and unsympathetic to the truth about Jesus. Religious leaders had no control over Him or His ministry.

Neither the Jews nor Pilate wanted a riot during the Passover. If the Jews had intended to kill Jesus during the feast, they would have made plans and not waited until Thursday night to implement them. This is where Judas entered the scene. Having been with Jesus and listened to His teachings in Jerusalem, he had heard Jesus announce His death. Judas thought that he would make merchandise out of it.

In one sense, Jesus’ announcement of His approaching death was good news to His enemies, but the uncertainty that it created during the feast panicked them. They had no fear of the fishermen and others who were His disciples, but they did not underestimate Jesus. The Pharisees said, “Look, the world has gone after Him” (John 12:19b). In the eyes of the unbelieving Jews, the resurrection of Lazarus necessitated the death of Christ (John 11). They thought that Jesus would convince the whole world!

Such truth as Jesus had given and such miracles as He had worked should terrify sinners! God gave the people of Jerusalem every opportunity to repent, but they refused the evidence. Because of Jesus, the religious leaders were going to lose not only their religious positions, but also their source of monetary gain (John 11:47, 48). No wonder Caiaphas announced that Jesus must die (John 11:49–53)! “But the Jews were looking for a Messiah,” you may say. Yes and no. They talked about it; they exploited it . . . but the last thing the religious leaders wanted was the kind of Messiah that God sent. They knew He would put them “out of business.” Pride, with power, does damnable things. Men with pride cannot give up power. They can only reject truth, fight truth, and try to destroy truth. The Jews, out of control, branded Jesus as being “guilty.” Pilate pronounced Him “not guilty” (Matthew 27:22, 23).

Among the most obvious irregularities in the trials of Jesus are these:

- The decision of His guilt was made before the trial began.
- Officials had no authority to make an arrest at night unless someone was caught in the act of a crime. Judges were not to be part of an arrest.
- Capital trials could not be held at night. A criminal could not be acquitted in one day; a guilty verdict also demanded a night to think about it.
- Crucifixion was unknown to Jewish law.
- The judges were to be defenders as well as accusers.
- Hearsay evidence was inadmissible under Hebrew law.
- Circumstantial evidence was discredited; Hebrew law was based upon two or three witnesses. False witnesses were sought to testify against Jesus (Matthew 26:59–61).
- The youngest members of the Sanhedrin were to vote first.

- A member of the Sanhedrin was to be assigned to defend the accused.
- The Sanhedrin had no authority to originate charges . . . only to try them.
- Court sessions were forbidden on feast days and the eve of the Sabbath.
- The accused could not testify against himself.
- In trying capital crimes, the Sanhedrin was to meet only in the Hall of Hewn Stones.
- A high priest was not to rend his clothes.

Those who were the worst supposed themselves to be the best. It is terrifying to think how monstrous men in sin can be!

## **The Jewish Trials**

Had it not been so contemptible, the arrest of Jesus would have been comical. The enemies of Jesus believed more in the power of Jesus than the disciples did. They sent a lynch mob (estimated at 600 or more men) to arrest one man! Jesus, in plain view, had to help them to arrest Him.

He was first taken to Annas. This high priest had been ordained for life, but his corruption had ousted him. He was still the man with power even though he did not have the title. Jesus was bounced back and forth like a Ping Pong ball between the supreme judges.

Annas sent Him to Caiaphas. This shows that Jesus was not on trial for religious reasons, but for the purposes of corrupt politics. Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, was the high priest that year. It is humorous that Jesus' enemies could not even find paid false witnesses who could agree! Annas was powerful, feared, and hated. Caiaphas was but his "errand boy." Read Matthew 27:1, 2, 11; Mark 15:1, 2; Luke 23:1-3; John 18:29-33.

These men were unanimously behind the one question that Pilate asked Jesus: "Are You the King of the Jews?" If a charge had not already been made, how did Pilate know what to ask? This suggests that someone had contacted Pilate earlier that night. Who could have gained access to Pilate that night? Probably, only the high priest, Caiaphas, could have done it. Again, how could the tormenting dream of Pilate's wife make sense (Matthew 27:19)? This explains why the Jewish leaders were insulted when Pilate reopened the case. The Jews thought a deal had been made!

The Jewish leaders were proud, haughty, and conceited beyond words. They lost their composure. Barbarically, they spat on Jesus, slapped Him, punched Him, cursed Him, and taunted Him to prophesy blindfolded (Matthew 26:66-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65). We can endure curses and slaps maybe, but spit? Who can tolerate spit? How did God? Jesus prophesied spit (Mark 10:34; Luke 18:32). His prediction came true. Jewish leaders spat in His face, and Roman soldiers spat on Him (Matthew 26:67; 27:30; Mark 15:19). Disgusting! God's grace can even endure spit!

The Jewish supreme court was once praised as the Great Sanhedrin. It was made up of seventy-one august members. Their illustrious position ended that day. Caiaphas, in desperation, forced Jesus to testify against Himself under oath (Matthew 26:62-64). Jesus not only accepted their accusation, but He even gave them further evidence to use against Him: "Nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). With that, the Jews sent Him to Pilate!

## **The Roman Trials**

Pontius Pilate hated the Jews, and they hated him. They were stuck with each other, and each would do anything to win an argument between them. With his record of past mistakes, Pilate had to be very careful. The Jews wanted blood; Pilate wanted to save his political position.

The Jews exchanged the charge of blasphemy for one of political treason. Pilate tried to avoid being part of this travesty, yet he could not. He wanted others to judge, and they refused. He repeatedly declared Jesus "not guilty." In desperation, he sent Jesus to Herod.

Jesus did not acknowledge Herod's request for a magic show. All he could do with Jesus was to send him back to Pilate. The only thing achieved by this process was that Pilate and Herod became friends (Luke 23:12).

Pilate marveled at the quiet composure of Jesus. Using Barabbas, he attempted to do a favor for the Jews. They rejected it. They chose Barabbas, a common thug! People will always choose a Barabbas.

The Jews won yet lost. They declared, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). They renounced God for Caesar. They bowed to that which they hated, even shouting, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25).

Then Pilate had the "not guilty" Jesus crucified! Pilate washed his hands; Jesus washed others' feet. What a difference!

Pilate yielded to the will of the Jews. This was the crime of crimes! Do not be prejudiced like the Jews, amused like Herod, or spineless like Pilate. The historian Eusebius said that Pilate committed suicide (**Eusebius Ecclesiastical History 2.7**). God wiped out Jerusalem (using Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 67-70). Do not mess with God!

*The cross . . .  
there is no other way!*