

Palm Sunday April 1, 2007 Matthew 26:36-46

Alright good morning. I'm glad you are here on this special Sunday. Go ahead and be getting your Bibles out. We are going to take a break from our study of James for the next couple of weeks since we finished through chapter 2 verse 13 about favoritism. For those of you who are memorizing James as we study through it, you can catch up if you've fallen behind and for those of you who are focusing on just the key verses through each chapter to memorize, let me have you focus on verse 1 and 10 out of the first 13.

But this morning, open your Bibles to the gospel of Matthew. Chapter 26. Many of you have taken the 40 day challenge and we are down to the last 7 days of that. Hopefully all of us have spent some good time preparing our hearts for next Sunday – for Easter – to worship the Lord in spirit and truth.

Hopefully the video we saw a moment ago is a wake up call for us to realize this week you will be surrounded by people – many of whom have no clue what Easter is all about. Historically, this week is the anniversary of the last week of Jesus' life before the crucifixion so I want us to take a look at part of that today. In Matthew 25 beginning in verse 36 we see the account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane – a story that most of you know all too well, but I want us to realize today just how crucial this moment in Jesus' life is – for him and for us.

Let's begin in verse 36 and read Matthew's account.

It's amazing to think not just a few days before this, Jesus came into Jerusalem to the praise and adoration and celebration of throngs of people heralding him as the king of the Jews – as God's prophet – as the one who would change all of their lives. That's what today – Palm Sunday – is all about.

But what I want us to understand today is that they heralded his victory on Palm Sunday – most of us – most of the church today looking backwards is under the impression that his victory happened at the cross or at the tomb 3 days later when he came back to life. And though we want in no way to diminish the triumph of the cross or the glory of the empty tomb, I want us to see today that battle was fought in Gethsemane, not on Golgotha. The victory was won in the garden, not on the cross. In fact **the cross and even the empty tomb were made POSSIBLE by the victory in the GARDEN.**

Let me remind you of what Paul teaches us in **Ephesians 6:12**

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And that was never more true for us than it was for Jesus in the garden. Jesus – more than anyone else who has ever walked the earth – lived constantly in awareness of the spiritual world we all exist in.

As soon as he began his public ministry, instantly he was confronted by Satan himself and in Matthew 4:1-11 we get a glimpse inside that battle as Satan tried all he could to get Jesus to do things his way instead of God the Father's. And now, as that plan, as that purpose starts coming to a climax, you shouldn't doubt that Satan again will do all he can to derail Jesus. And that's what we see in the garden.

In No Wonder They call Him Savior, Max Lucado writes of this encounter: Look closely through the shadowy foliage of the garden. See that person? See that solitary figure? What's he doing? Flat on the ground. Face stained with dirt and tears. Fists pounding the hard earth. Eyes wide with a stupor of fear. Hair matted with salty sweat. Is that blood on his forehead? That's Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Maybe you've seen the classic portrait of Christ in the garden. Kneeling beside a big

rock. Snow white robe. Hands peacefully folded in prayer. A look of serenity on his face. Halo over his head. A spotlight from heaven illuminating his golden brown hair. Max says – Now I'm not artist, but I can tell you one thing. The man who painted that picture didn't use the gospels as a pattern

Look back at verses 36-38.

At this point I believe Jesus sees the enemy waiting for him – in force – surrounded and backed up by his legions of demons. This isn't an accidental stroll in the garden; this is the appointment that was established the first time Satan tempted Jesus all by himself. And now Jesus begins to glimpse the reality of what he's walking into – the choice he has to make – the temptation he has to face – the very sin of the world he has to bear – and it – is – overwhelming!

And in **verse 39**, the battle begins. Look at it again.

Jesus falls with his face to the ground and we see the nature of the battle – the temptation that Satan and all his hordes are hurling at Jesus – to abandon God's plan – to skip the crucifixion – to find some other way that avoids the mock trials, the beating, the lashings, the nails, the thorns, the dying – but most of all, to find some way that avoids him having to bear your sin and my sin and the sin of the whole world. **The temptation that Satan was hurling at Jesus was to ABANDON God's plan, to skip the crucifixion, to find a way to avoid having to bear our SINS.**

And at the end of verse 39 we see the 1st knock down blow. "Yet not as I will, but as you will." Bam – Satan gets knocked away. And Jesus gets up – to go check on those he brought with him to help him – to stand by him. **Look at verses 40 & 41.**

You ever wonder why Jesus does that? Why he comes back to ask for help – to ask them to pray? At least one reason is because as this battle goes on, when Jesus must choose between God's will and his will – between God's glory and Satan's victory – between your eternity in heaven and your eternity in hell – He knows if his disciples will just pray, they can make the weight a little lighter. Because as they pray, at least some of the forces of the enemy will have to be diverted off of Christ and onto his disciples.

But he finds them sleeping. In his greatest hour of need, he finds them snoozing. So he asks again for help and then returns to the battle. **Look at verse 42.**

Please God – anything else- I don't want to do this. And the intensity of that battle – the weight of that burden – is so excruciating that Luke says while he was praying, he literally sweats drops of blood. Then bam. The 2nd knock down. If this is the only way, then your will be done. Again, Satan is knocked back and Jesus again comes to ask for help from his boys. **Look at verses 43 & 44.**

His guys are asleep, but Jesus knows it doesn't matter now. They can't help him now any more than they can help him walk out of the tomb in 3 days, so he leaves them as they are and stumbles back into the garden – back into the battle.

And Matthew says that again – one last time – he returns alone to finish the fight and again says the same thing. Not my will, but yours. And this third blow is the end of the battle.

And folks **when Jesus returns after this third prayer, he returns in VICTORY. The battle is decided, the question is over, the debate is ended. JESUS is the victor.** And as you look at verses 45 and 46, you can see and almost hear a whole change in tone. Read them with me.

When compared to verse 37 & 38 where Matthew explains that Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled and he said “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” Now he says, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

He knows he has won. He’s ready to finish it. So with confidence he says let’s go *meet* my betrayer.

Folks that’s the reason why in verse 50 he can say to Judas, do what you came for.

That’s the reason in verse 53 he doesn’t call a legion of angels to rescue him though he could in the blink of an eye.

That’s the reason why in verse 63 he is silent in the face of false witnesses, that’s why in 27:14 he makes no reply to the trumped up charges against him to the amazement of the governor.

It’s because the battle was won in the garden. He has no need to defend himself because he had submitted himself to the Father’s will in the garden.

And Satan knows it too. All the taunts we see in chapter 27 – in verse **39 & 40** (TEXT)
In **verses 42-44** (TEXT)

All of those were Satan’s last ditch efforts to get Jesus to change his mind – to give up – to give in – to not die on the cross. Because he knew the empty tomb was a forgone conclusion. If Jesus died, he would come back. The cross would cement the victory of the garden.

But it didn’t work. The battle was decided. There was no turning back. And our lives are possible because of it.

Now what do we do with all this? There are so many practical applications out of this episode of Jesus’ life. Let me share a few **principles** with you.

- 1) The difficulties of life are won and lost BEFORE you ever face them when you decide whose will you will live by. The battle is won in PRAYER before there is ever any action.**

Andrew Murray wrote in The Life of Obedience – It is in the place of quiet where we are alone with God that our spiritual life is both tested and strengthened. There is the battlefield where it is decided every day whether God will have all of us and whether our life will be one of absolute obedience. If we truly conquer there, committing ourselves into the hands of our Lord and finding refuge in Him, the victory during the day is certain.

- 2) The enemy is REAL and will do whatever he can to keep you from PRAYER and to tempt you to change your mind once you’ve chosen God’s will.**
- 3) We need people – there’s no doubt about that – but they can’t MAKE the decisions for you or FIGHT the battles in your place.**

Following God’s will is a decision you have to make for you. You have to decide if you honestly believe that God’s way is best and if that is what you want.

I’m sure there are a ton of other practical applications or lessons for us from this episode in Jesus’ life. And all that is true and good and important, but what I want us to see is that the horror of the

cross – the battle of the cross – wasn't just the physical torture. **The battle in the garden was the emotional and spiritual battle of the HUMANITY of Christ submitting to the DIVINE calling of his Father.** It was the horror and torture of him who knew no sin – who had never been or done or said anything apart from his father becoming sin for us. As Oswald Chambers put it, "His agony was the basis for the simplicity of our salvation."

Satan didn't kill Jesus. You did. And I did. And what we see in the garden is that we didn't do it against his will. He chose it. In **John 10:17-18**, Jesus says, "I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

There is no Golgotha – the hill where Jesus DIED – without Gethsemane – the garden where Jesus SUBMITTED.

This week, as you prepare to praise and worship Jesus for the glory of coming back to life from death. Spend some time thanking him for facing the battle in the garden. And winning the victory for you.