

Theme: The Actions of Christ's Passion – “Distressed”

Text: Mark 14:32-42

32 Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. 34 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch." 35 He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. 36 And He said, "Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*." 37 Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? 38 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." 39 Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. 40 And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. 41 Then He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

"I am so stressed!" Does that phrase describe you? "Stress" is usually our modern-day word of choice to describe the daily pressures and strains that life can bring our way. But, I wonder, how many of you have recently used this phrase to describe your situation: "Man, am I *distressed*!" Although "stress" and "distress" are related words with the same root, we understand that when someone is experiencing great **distress** it is more than just the feeling of pressure and strain on a person's emotions or mind. The dictionary defines being "**distressed**" as *having great pain, sorrow, or anxiety*. This is the word that our English translators chose to use to describe the mental, emotional, and spiritual agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As we consider all that weighed upon Christ as He and His three closest disciples went into the garden on that Maundy Thursday night, it would hardly seem fitting to describe Christ's agony with the phrase, "Man, was He stressed!" Therefore, the first "**Action of Christ's Passion**" that we will consider during this Lenten season is that Jesus was "**Distressed**."

Our text gets even more descriptive of Christ's agony: **v. 33 "He began to be troubled and deeply distressed."** This agony ran so deep that the evangelist **Luke**, who was a doctor, tells us, "**Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground**" (**Luke 22:44**). We even hear Christ tell His disciples in our text, "**My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death**" (**v. 34**). The **distress** that Christ felt in His soul on that night was so great it brought Him to the brink of death itself. Has anyone in history ever experienced such anguish, such "**distress**"? No. Christ's agony in the garden was the very definition of "**distress**" itself.

What was the cause of this incredible anguish and deep "**distress**" which gripped the soul of Jesus? What could possibly have been so horrifying that it drove the Son of God to fall "**on the ground, and [pray] that if it were possible, the hour [of suffering] might pass from Him**" (**v. 35**)? To answer this question we must first remember that although Jesus was fully God, at the same time He was also fully human; subject to the same emotions, stresses, and **distresses** that we are, yet He was without sin. Here in Gethsemane we see one of the most vivid reminders of Jesus' true humanity.

While we will never, in this life, be able to fully grasp the agony Christ experienced in the garden, we can realize that there were some very important reasons why the human soul of Christ was so "**distressed**" at the thought of His upcoming suffering and death:

- First of all, death was absolutely foreign to Him who was eternal God—no beginning, and no end. Jesus had just described Himself to His disciples as being "**life**" itself (**John 14:6**). How could someone who is true, eternal God, and the essence of life itself possibly be anything but repulsed and **distressed** over the thought of death? We sinful mortal human beings are also often distressed over the thought of death, but death is not a foreign concept to us. It is all around us. It has become a part of our fallen nature. As one Bible scholar once wrote, "Man is born with the taste of death in his soul."

- Secondly, Jesus' death by crucifixion—as horrific as that thought was—paled in comparison to the thought of the sinless Son of God becoming sin itself in order to take upon Himself the sins of every human being, ever (cf. **2 Corinthians 5:21**)! In His death Christ would feel the full weight of God's wrath over mankind's sin. He would experience "God-forsakenness." He would experience the full intensity of eternal punishment in hell so that we, His brothers and sisters, wouldn't have to.
- Finally, this was the hour that the devil assaulted Him with one of His greatest temptations—not to tempt Him to pray to His Father, that if it be His will, He would take this cup of suffering from Him. There was no sin in that request, only submissive obedience—no, the devil's temptation was to convince Christ to ditch His monumental responsibility altogether. Jesus knew what was about to happen. He told His three disciples, "**The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand**" (v. 41-42). He willingly walked right into Judas' death trap. He could have run. He could have used His infinite power to escape. He could have buckled under the oppressive weight of the fact that the eternity of all humanity rested on His actions over the next four days, but He didn't. He overcame the deep "**distress**" of His soul to give us eternal comfort and peace in ours.

All of us, usually on a daily basis, feel the pressure of life's stresses and strains. Some of us can even say that we've experienced emotional and mental anguish that we'd put on the level of "**distress**." Whenever these troubles come our way we need to look to Jesus. In Jesus we have seen the ultimate "**distress**." In Jesus we also see the ultimate way to "**de-stress**." What did the sinless Son of God do when He was "**troubled and deeply distressed**" (v. 33).

1) He prayed! He didn't turn to His heavenly Father as a "last resort" after every other effort had failed. Instead, He went to the One source of help for His soul that could actually help His soul.

2) He prayed, "Thy will be done." The words of Jesus' prayer in the garden have often troubled many Christians, "**Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will**" (v. 36). People have seen in these words a sign that Jesus had faltered and was unwilling to endure the torment and death that awaited Him. Nothing could be further from the truth! If anything, Jesus' prayer shows His great willingness to do what the Father had laid out for Him from eternity. He submitted Himself physically by "**[falling] on the ground,**" (v. 35) and submitted Himself spiritually by praying, "**nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will**" (v. 36b). In His prayer Jesus acknowledges that it is not beyond God's power to rescue Him from this "**cup**" of suffering that He was about to drink to the last drop. He says, "**all things are possible for You.**" (v. 36a). God was indeed very capable of sparing Jesus. He could have used some other way to save mankind from their sins, but He didn't. This was the plan and the method He had chosen from eternity and the actions of salvation that He had prophesied for thousands of years through the mouths of His prophets. God the Father heard Jesus' prayer, and Jesus accepted His Father's answer.

3) He prayed repeatedly. We are told that Jesus prayed the same prayer three times. **Luke** even tells us that the third time, "**He prayed more earnestly**" (**Luke 22:44**). Jesus battled His soul's **distress** with repeated and intense prayer, and we are told, once again in **Luke**, that God answered His prayer with comfort, "**Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him**" (**Luke 22:43**).

How many "stresses" and "**distresses**" in our lives would be lifted away if we would learn from Jesus and cast them in submissive, repeated prayer upon our Heavenly Father's waiting ears? Too often we are like Peter, James, and John, aren't we? When the sorrows and troubles of this life overwhelm us, we look for a false, or a temporary solution, or a lesser solution. We take the "easy road" of escapism, which actually solves nothing, and usually makes the problem worse. We are often guilty of "falling asleep," in a sense, instead of "**watching and praying**" (v. 38) as Christ instructs us. Even the best remedies, cures, and solutions this world has to offer—even our closest family and friends—are unreliable at times as Jesus learned in the garden. Only God Himself can, and always will, respond with His true help and true comfort. Christ has taken care of our deepest "**distress**" over our sins, by overcoming His "**distress**" in the Garden of Gethsemane and willingly making Himself the full payment for our sins. Jesus knew that this end result, our salvation, would be greater than His great "**distress**." That is why we can "**[look] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God**" (**Hebrews 12:2**). Thanks be to Jesus, that because of His "**distress**" our lives have been eternally "**de-stressed**." Amen.