

Luke 22:39-53: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Luke chapter 22 verses 39 to 53. He prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow. And he said to them, Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation. While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.

He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him, Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword?

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, No more of this. And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come out against him, 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. Moving into the latter part of Luke chapter 22, Jesus goes out to the Mount of Olives.

[1 : 38] Once again, this continues Jesus' pattern of movement between the temple mount of the city and the Mount of Olives. This recalls also David leaving Jerusalem during the coup of Absalom in 2 Samuel chapter 15 to 16.

Now Jesus is departing Jerusalem like David. In 2 Samuel chapter 15 to 16, we can see some of these verses that remind us of the story of Christ.

Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, Arise and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly, and bring down ruin on us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword.

And the king went out, and all the people after him, and they halted at the last house. And all the land wept aloud, as all the people passed by. And the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.

But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went.

[2 : 44] And it was told David, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. As it was for David his father, the Mount of Olives is a place of mourning, weeping and agony for Jesus.

His trusted friend Judas is conspiring with his enemies, as David's friend Ahithophel conspired with his. When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine.

And the king said to Ziba, Why have you brought these? Ziba answered, The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.

Like David was ministered to by Ziba, Jesus is ministered to by the angel. When King David came to Behurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gerah.

And as he came, he cursed continually, and he threw stones at David, and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.

[3 : 57] David was assaulted by Shimei, and a crowd led by the traitor Judas comes out to assault Jesus. Shimei throws stones, and Jesus prays at a stone's throw away from the disciples.

Then Abishai, the son of Zerariah, said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head. But the king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zerariah?

If he is cursing because the lord has said to him, Curse David, who then shall say, Why have you done so? And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, Behold, my own son seeks my life. How much more may this Benjaminite? Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the lord has told him to. David's right hand man, Abishai, wants to strike Shimei, but David prevents him.

Like David, Jesus prevents his disciples from striking out at the crowd. In John's Gospel, we learn that the one who strikes out at the ear of the high priest's servant was Peter. Jesus warns the disciples to pray that they might not enter into temptation.

[4 : 59] This is one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In Luke chapter 4, Jesus was led by the Spirit into temptation, into the testing of the wilderness. Temptation is the place where people are tested to their limits, and maybe beyond.

The time of temptation is the time when Satan, for instance, will try to sift Peter like wheat. Jesus has not long before delivered the Olivet Discourse, where he warned the disciples of a time of great testing that was coming in that generation, and of the imperative of keeping awake.

In this story, the expected time of testing is coming in a more immediate and concentrated form, with Jesus taking the time of testing upon himself, so that his disciples do not.

This is one of the ways in which the story of the Gospels can be seen as a story of substitutionary atonement. Jesus is the shepherd who takes the blows upon himself, while the sheep are scattered, but saved from destruction.

The time of temptation is coming, but Jesus bears it instead of the disciples, while interceding for them that they be protected from it. He warns them that they would be delivered up by friends and relatives in the coming testing that would come upon the land, and he is about to be delivered up by his close friend.

[6 : 13] He prays for the removal of the cup, that if possible there be some way that he should be saved his fate. However, he submits to the will of the Lord. The cup is an image of divine judgment that we encounter on several occasions in the Old Testament.

Isaiah chapter 51 verse 17 Jeremiah chapter 25 verse 15 to 18 Thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me, Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them. So I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me drink it. Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a desolation and a waste, a hissing and a curse, as at this day.

Ezekiel chapter 23 verses 31 to 34 You have gone the way of your sister, therefore I will give her cup into your hand. Thus says the Lord God, you shall drink your sister's cup that is deep and large. You shall be laughed at and held in derision, for it contains much. You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, a cup of horror and desolation, the cup of your sister Samaria.

[7 : 36] You shall drink it and drain it out, and gnaw its shards, and tear your breasts. For I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Habakkuk chapter 2 verse 16 You will have your fill of shame instead of glory.

Drink yourself, and show your uncircumcision. The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory. Zechariah chapter 12 verse 2 Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples.

The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. In the book of Revelation, cup imagery reappears. Jerusalem and the worshippers of the beast will be made to drink the cup for their sins. Revelation chapter 14 verses 9 to 11 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead, or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. And they have no rest, day or night, these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name. Chapter 16 verse 19 And chapter 18 verse 6 At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, being presented with the decision to stick to the course that his father had set for him, and to which he had committed himself, the course all his human instinct would recall from, or to abandon it for the easy route that Satan placed before him.

[9 : 34] Here again he submits himself to the will of his father, rather than the inclinations of his human nature. Here he provides an example of faithful prayer for those who face such temptation.

He is ministered to by an angel, as he was after his temptation in Mark's account. He struggles in prayer, in great agony. It might be worth observing that Luke describes much more the agony of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane than he does the agony of the crucifixion.

This in many ways is the heart of the struggle, the place where the battle is most pitched. This is where the power of Satan's case is being pressed upon him, and where he must wrestle against it with every single sinew of his being.

His sweat becomes like great drops of blood, the agony of one in the most extreme exertion, one wrestling in the darkness, and faithfully submitting himself to the terrible will of God.

By contrast, the disciples have fallen asleep, failing in the basic charge of wakefulness that he gave in the Olivet Discourse. Soon after, Judas arrives with the mob.

[10 : 41] Judas is one of the twelve, a fact that is stressed, even though we already knew it, we are to feel the sting of betrayal once more. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss, much as Joab, the son of Zeruijah, did in 2 Samuel 20, verses 9-10.

And Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand.

So Joab struck him with it in the stomach, and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.

If Peter is like Abishai the son of Zeruijah, Judas is like Joab the son of Zeruijah, one of those who was with Jesus, identified as Peter elsewhere, strikes the high priest's servant's ear.

But Jesus heals the servant. Even when Jesus is most under assault, he expresses his grace and his compassion. Jesus points out to those who take him that they could have taken him any time in the temple, but this serves their need to arrest him by stealth, to ensure that the crowds don't get worked up.

[11 : 51] The scriptures also must be fulfilled in this way. Remember the reference to Isaiah chapter 53 verse 12 in the instruction that Jesus gave to his disciples to bring swords with them.

That verse declares, Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors. Being taken by a mob, as if he were with a group of bandits, Jesus is numbered with the transgressors.

A question to consider. Luke's gospel foregrounds the theme of prayer and presents us in an especially pronounced way with Jesus as a man of prayer. How does Jesus' prayer in the garden connect with his earlier teaching upon prayer, and how does it develop from it?

