



ELMWOOD
MB CHURCH

March 30, 2025
“Is There Any Other Way?”
Matthew 26:36
Pastor Ken Stoesz

We are three weeks away from Easter. And there are a number of memorable scenes in the Gospels that pave the road for us heading to the cross and the empty tomb that we celebrate every year, what we’ve come to call Easter. One question in one scene I want to look at. You’ll find the scene in Matthew 26: Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. I want to read some background that colours the understanding of that prayer in the garden: Isaiah 53, the Suffering Servant.

**Who has believed what he has heard
from us?**

**And to whom has the arm of
the Lord been revealed?**

**² For he grew up before him like a
young plant,**

**and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we
should look at him,**

**and no beauty that we should
desire him.**

**³ He was despised and rejected by
men,**

**a man of sorrows and acquainted
with grief;**

**and as one from whom men hide
their faces**

**he was despised, and we
esteemed him not.**

**⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;**

**yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.**

**⁵ But he was pierced for our
transgressions;**

**he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that
brought us peace,**

**and with his wounds we are
healed.**

**⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his
own way;**

**and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.**

**⁷ He was oppressed, and he was
afflicted,**

**yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the
slaughter,**

**and like a sheep that before its
shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.**

**⁸ By oppression and judgment he
was taken away;**

and as for his generation, who

considered
that he was cut off out of the land of
the living,
stricken for the transgression of
my people?

⁹And they made his grave with the
wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his
mouth.

¹⁰Yet it was the will of the Lord to
crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for
guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall
prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in

Now turn over with me with Matthew 26, starting in verse 36.

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his
disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷And taking with him Peter
and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he
said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here,
and watch with me." ³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed,
saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not
as I will, but as you will."

There are so many passages from the Old Testament that point forward to a
Messiah, a Savior that would come. The nation of Israel was anticipating this Saviour
yet to come, and a passage like Isaiah 53 comes along and is perhaps a bump in the
road or a confusing turn that didn't fit the stereotype of someone who would come
with victory, with power, with might, conquering. Isaiah 53 is painting the picture of
someone who would suffer, die terribly, and it's long and gruesome, the whole
chapter. And then you fast forward to Matthew 26. Jesus is praying in the Garden of

his hand.

¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he
shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous
one, my servant,
make many to be accounted
righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore 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.

Gethsemane and he's looking down the road. He knows Isaiah 53, he knows what's coming, and he prays to His father, "Father, if there is any other way... If it's possible, take this cup from me." Some translations have put it, "If there's another way." I don't know if you've ever asked that question: is there another way? You're about to face some trouble, challenge, suffering of some kind, and you pray, "Lord, is there another way to avoid this? Is there another way?" We've all done that. I recall, many many years ago, serving on a missions team. I was in a foreign country preparing to do missions travel. Being a missionary at twenty years old meant one thing: I was poor. I had really bad dental issues. If you've had this, you know how incredibly debilitating it can be mentally to have your tooth—just a tooth!—drive you crazy. And so, I went to a local dentist there and said, "Look, I'm poor but I'm in a lot of pain. I've got no insurance, nothing. What can you do?" So, he looked at it and checked out a few things and said, "Sorry, you need a root canal. Your tooth is rotten." And he told me what it would cost and it was far beyond anything I could ask or imagine. So I said, "I can't do that!" I said, "Is there another way?" He said, "Well, there is another way. We can do what's called a pulpotomy." (A pulpotomy, just to make it clear, is where they go in and freeze your tooth and cut off the nerve ending in the top, medicate it, put a cap on that and it should be fine.) "It'll cost you 100 bucks and I can do it after work," he said. That's what he offered me. So I took him up on it! I do recall the pain. But I asked, "Is there another way?" And he said, "Yeah, there is another way."

Jesus, in Matthew 26, is saying in his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Lord, if it's possible, take this cup from me so I don't need to drink it. Is there another way?" On the night before he is betrayed, just hours before Judas would lead the whole rabble to come and arrest him up there in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember, it's a quiet place overlooking the city of Jerusalem. It's dark and he's in prayer. It's in that garden that a battle ensues. Jesus, in prayer, is battling. And it says he is sorrowful to the point of death. Other translations have it that he is sweating droplets of blood; this is so intense, this time of prayer before God. He saw what was coming, he knew Isaiah 53, and yet he prays that if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.

I mean, what is he concerned about? What is he worried about? Is it the fear of death? That has gripped humanity from the dawn of time. Is that what it was? Was it the crucifixion that was coming? Was he at a point, as some liberal scholars say,

where Jesus knew that he was “cornered, stuck, there was no way he could get out of this”? Was he just realizing it, as they surmise? Was it the suffering, was it the scourging, was it the beatings, was it that the abuse, the neglect, the betrayal of his closest friends? All those things, as horrific as they were, are not what he’s saying. “May this cup be taken from me.” What does it mean, “cup?” We’re going to unpack this this week and next week. This idea of the sins of humanity being put upon Jesus, that’s the cup. And what that implied, what came along with that, was the cup of God’s wrath that would be poured out upon Jesus Christ on the cross. That is what he’s seeing that’s coming his way. If you follow the Gospels—over the next couple of weeks, I encourage you to read them—you’ll see his friends betray him, turn their backs on him, and he says nothing. In all the trials that go sideways, from Pilate and Herod to the Sanhedrin (the religious leaders), Jesus, for the most part, is silent through the whole thing. But there’s one point where he cries out; do you remember what it is? There’s one point in the Easter narrative where Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” That’s the moment where he’s seeing and drinking the cup of the wrath of God. God turns his back, and the wrath falls upon him. Far more than the physical suffering, as horrible as that is, *this* is the cup where he says, “Is there any other way? Is it possible for another way?”

And what’s the answer that he gets in that prayer in the garden? Silence. As far as we know, there’s no answer. So, he responds and says, “Not my will but yours be done.” And he repeats that again here in Matthew. “Not my will but your will be done.” This sets the stage. So, he asks, “Is it possible for this cup to be taken from me? Is there another way?” And as Jesus battles in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, it points us back to another battle that was fought thousands of years earlier in another garden. And that battle was lost. You know the battle I’m talking about. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve at the dawn of creation, the beginning of the book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are given everything to enjoy. “Go and multiply!” They are given the task to work, to keep the garden, to enjoy it; they are given one commandment, really. “There’s one tree in that garden I don’t want you to eat of,” is what the Lord God says to them. So, there they are; they’re going about their day, but they failed at this task. They failed in the battle in the Garden of Eden. It could be argued that they actually failed to protect it from the Serpent himself, who is slithering around in the Garden. He comes alongside and he deceives them. He says, “Did God really say that if you touch that tree, you’ll die?” He has twisted the

word of God, and Eve gets hoodwinked by this. There's a bit of a sparring match with the Serpent; she's out of her league by far. Adam, as far as we know, is standing right there in silence the whole way through. He does nothing to protect his wife, does nothing to defend the Garden. And when she finally falls and says, "Here, Adam. Take this." there is no defense from him. He takes it and eats it. And their eyes are opened. The ultimate part that they seem to go for is when the devil says, "Hey, you know why God said, 'Don't eat of that tree?' It's because he's a killjoy. He doesn't want you to have fun. He wants to restrict power from you. If you eat of that, you will be like God. You'll be like him! Don't you want that? Isn't that the ultimate purpose of existence?" It was the ultimate self-help model: "This is the way for you to exalt yourself." But here's the reality, if you're familiar with the story: did they actually feel like God? Did they behave in a strong measure like a 'god' would? No. What'd they do? They went and hid. They were hiding in bushes. Does God do that? No! They make fig leaves—it's almost comical what they do. Their relationship with each other is separated, is broken. Shame. Fear is now in their relationship with God—"I'm hiding. I heard you coming and I was afraid, so I hid." They're blaming each other. Everything just falls apart.

But it begins with this idea that they try to usurp God. They try to become like him. And because of that, everything falls apart. Everything collapsed. Sin has entered the existence of humanity. And so, you look around and you think the world is all a mess in all kinds of ways—it is! Before we diagnose all the problems, we have to come right back—as Christians who are opening our Bibles and are trying to be submitted to it—to the core problem, which is the problem of sin. That's the first thing. Men, humanity, tried to do what they were not equipped to do. Not able to handle sin. There's a scene in the movie End Game, the Avengers—the last scene. I'm going to spoil the movie; if you haven't seen it before, I apologize. In the end, Iron Man dies. Why does he die? "Well, he sacrificed himself." Yeah, he does, but he does something he is not equipped to do. He takes on these infinity stones and puts them on himself. Snaps his fingers. Then he basically blows up. He is not equipped as a human being to do that, so he dies.

When humans sin, we're not equipped, so it destroys us. Yet somehow, we think, "I can do that, I can handle that, I can do a little bit of this and a little bit of that." No, you can't. Adam and Eve made one sin, and a curse fell upon them, creation, relationships and on you and me today. Romans 5:12 says sin entered through one

man, and because of that, all have sin. As with Adam, we have all sinned. This idea of a curse has come. And so, we're not able to handle sin. It destroys us. But also, more importantly, God is altogether holy. He's the source of all life and light, and sin coming into the presence of God is eviscerated, destroyed. It can't be in his presence. Now, humans are corrupted by sin. And in the book of Genesis, you know how the story goes, Adam and Eve are removed from the Garden of Eden, symbolically saying they were removed from the presence of God. They're the real problem. Sin has now entered this existence. How is this going to happen? This begins the story line of the rest of the Bible, and it's all pointing forward to Jesus. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

They've forsaken God, they've rejected God, and then there's this idea of digging new cisterns, trying to create new ways for life. They're asking the question, "Is there another way to be right with God? Is there another way to have hope, peace and joy and life? There's got to be another way!" So, they're digging new cisterns, new ways.

I read this week that it is estimated that in 2025, the self-help industry will be a \$46 billion industry. To put this in perspective, NHL will gross roughly about \$6 billion this year. And that's a good year for the NHL. Self-help is exploding globally. Everyone is asking, "There's got to be another way! Another way to have peace, for me to sleep better, for me to lose weight, to feel better about myself..." Whatever it might be, as long as I can have it without God. As long as I can have it without this Jesus thing. And so, the problem just continues on.

In Genesis 3, after the Fall, God makes a statement: another battle is coming. And actually, history will hinge on this event. Somebody is coming. And he speaks to the serpent, curses the serpent for his role in deceiving men and women. God says to the serpent, "The battle is coming between you and the seed of the woman. You're going to strike his heel, but I warn you now, your head will be crushed." Justice will be done. An event, a foreshadowing, a statement that would ring right throughout the Old Testament pointing right into the New Testament. Another battle is coming.

And so, this idea of a battle where blood would be shed and yet victory would be won is playing together. There's a foreshadowing. We see it in the book of Exodus when God raises up Moses to deliver the people of Israel. They've been in captivity

for over 400 years. And through Moses, God speaks to Pharaoh and says, “Let my people go!” Pharaoh refuses, and you know how the story goes. Ten plagues come upon the nation of Egypt: plague of flies, of gnats, the Nile turns to blood, the sky goes dark, hail and all sorts of things come down. But then the last plague, the plague of the death of the firstborn, is proclaimed upon all the land of Egypt. But God says, “I will provide a way out, but you have to do exactly as I tell you. Take a lamb, one year old, pure and spotless. Slaughter it and put his blood on the doorposts of your home. All those who do that, the spirit of death will come and will pass over your house. It will come and will see the blood that is shed and will pass over.” And those who do that, wake up the next morning. Death has passed over and life is restored, life is realized. And those who did not, experience death.

A lamb was slaughtered. This idea pointing forward, foreshadowing. John the Baptist said this about Jesus when he saw him, “**Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**” (John 1:29) This is the one that would come and take the curse for us. That would be in our place, that he would rescue us from the curse. The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Galatians 3:10.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

What he means is unless you follow everything God says for you to do, you’re under a curse. You might say, “Well, I’m batting, you know, 500. I’m going pretty good. I haven’t killed anybody, I haven’t stolen... whatever.” Make your résumé, whatever it might be. Again, look back at Adam and Eve. The one sin—I mean, it was a big one, but it was still one sin—and they were removed. No amount of good deeds can pay this back. If you’ve ever tried to build a sandcastle near the ocean, you know how futile it is. Trying to build your good deeds as a better résumé to God—Adam and Eve didn’t have that chance.

Here's the good news that we're pointing to here at Easter. Galatians 3:13 says:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

Somehow the crushing of the serpent—this is the victory we’re talking about—is tied into this death, this loss and this defeat. They are blending in here. This is why we have, with Easter and Good Friday, and mix of emotions. It’s not like Christmas

morning where there's lots of presents and lots of food and lots of celebration, with symbolism of lots of new life. Good Friday is pointing to death. If you come here for the Good Friday service, we'll likely have the room darkened out and it will be a time of reflecting on why Jesus suffered. His suffering actually takes up a third of all the Gospels. It's a very important part when you're reading through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

But Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. It sounds like an exchange or a substitute, and this is a really important part of our understanding of what happened that first Easter.

John Stott: "The concept of substitution lies at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. My contention is that substitution is not another theory or image to be said alongside others, but rather it is the foundation of them all."

And that's what we're seeing here at the beginning as we're looking at this and Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He's asking, "Take this cup from me. Is there another way?"

We're looking at the concept of atonement, Jesus paying for our sins. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the means by which we are reconciled to a Holy God. His death and his resurrection atone for sin, and it restores this relationship to God. This is the means by which humanity has been trying, digging out their cisterns, doing things to find a way to be right with God. And yet Jesus did it all. We sing that hymn, "Jesus paid it all. All to hymn I owe."

Many are opposed to this idea of atonement. They say it's too gruesome, it's abusive. Disciples didn't like it, nobody liked it; throughout the New Testament they're saying, "Jesus, is there another way? This can't be it. You're the King, you're the one to come and conquer." But Jesus was clear on this.

One of my favourite stories in the Easter narrative is in Luke 24. You have these two disciples and they're walking through his town called Emmaus, about 700 miles from Jerusalem. After the death of Jesus, it's early on Sunday morning—the third day—and Jesus has risen from the dead and they're walking back to their town. They're confused, they're sad. Jesus comes alongside them and they don't know it's

Jesus and it's almost like he's playing with them as he's revealing himself slowly, to help them.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

This shouldn't be a surprise! Didn't you read Isaiah 53? Didn't you see what was being pointed forward to? The lamb, the blood that was shed? The disciples didn't understand then. They were confused. They had asked, “Is there another way? We want victory without pain!”

This is us too, today. We want victory without pain, we want maturity without learning. We want wisdom without growth. Salvation without cost. Grace without confession. Change without repentance. That's what we all want. *Is there another way?*

When I got my pulpotomy, there wasn't another way, actually. It didn't work. The pain came back and eventually I had to have my root canal. The root inside my tooth had to come out. It was poisoned. It didn't just need to be medicated; it needed to be removed completely.

This is the issue of sin. The problem in this fallen world in our fallen lives. It is the number one cause of all the weariness and brokenness we see. We read this in Romans 8 recently: all the world is groaning from the first time sin entered. Parents, I know there's an idea that *maybe if I do this and I do this, or if I get them to go to this right school or if I teach them this way*, then all will work well. I have bad news for you: you cannot train sin out of a child. They need to be atoned for. That sin needs to be paid for. Not trained out of them. Yes, we train them, and we discipline them in the fear of the Lord—yes and amen. But they need a Saviour, same as you do.

If you're a Christian here this morning, you cannot cover your own sin and your own shame on your own with good deeds and good effort. There is sin inside you. It doesn't matter what family you come from or what background you boast you have; you cannot satisfy the curse that was placed upon humanity. You can't! That's the

story that we have in Scripture. There is no other way to be right with God except with believing in Jesus.

The Apostle Peter puts it really well in 1 Peter 3:18.

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit...”

There is no other way. This is the event that would change world history. This is the event that changes your life. And you and I will sing about this event for all eternity. This is the event we will boast about. We opened our morning singing “All my boast is in Jesus. All my hope is his love.”

This is the story. You read about the transfiguration when Moses and Elijah come down and they meet with Jesus on the mountain and Peter is there, with a couple of other disciples. They see Jesus; he is transfigured before them, glowing white, with Moses and Elijah. Why would they come and meet with Jesus? What’s the agenda? They came to talk about his suffering. To talk about that—that’s the plan! It’d be nice to have some of those details, but it was enough to know that is what they were talking about. It was crucial. There was no other way.

If someone today tells you they don’t believe in the atonement or they find it repugnant, you can ask them, “Okay, who pays for sins? Who covers sins? Who reconciles you to God?” These are individuals, generally, who want justice in the world, but they don’t want a God who will bring justice. (We’ll talk more about that next week.)

Anything less than the atonement mocks the suffering of Jesus as incidental and tragic. They dig cisterns for themselves believing that “all dogs will go to heaven” but I’m sorry, that is not the story of the Bible. That is not the story of Easter that we celebrate every year. Jesus knew that this was the plan. “Not my will but your will.” He knew that he would take upon your sins and mine, the wrath that’s reserved for us; he took it upon himself willingly.

Why did he do that? Is he looking at this equation: here’s sinful humanity (they’re pretty messed up), and here’s a Holy God (seems to be angry at these people)... I’ve got to come down and fix this, say, “Hey, they’re not so bad... hey, you guys, clean up a bit and come together and we’ll all have *faspa* or something.”

Is that what happened? Some people think that's what happened! That Jesus is appeasing God the Father. This makes a mockery of what Jesus did on the cross. It says that God is someone who cannot be placated. That's not the story of the Bible.

Turn over to Ephesians 2:4-9, where the Apostle Paul points to this beautifully.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Amen. And then Paul goes on in Romans 5:8:

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus willingly submitted to the Father—“Your will be done.” And he takes our place. The reality is, all sin will be accountable before God. All sin will be paid for. Every one of them.

Every crime that's gone unsolved, every sorrow that has been undiscovered, every justice that has been removed—it will all be atoned for, accounted for. Here's the question: either Jesus pays for it, or you will. That's what's being laid out for us. There is no other way. Humans have tried through the centuries to try to find another way to be right with God, and there is no other way but by believing in Jesus and boasting in him.

Jesus atoned for your sins and mine. I have good news and bad news. Here's the good news: no sin can separate you from him. No sin that you have done or will do that Jesus' blood cannot atone for. Do you believe that? I'm not kidding. Do you believe that? This is what sin does: it creates shame. Go back to the Garden. It makes us hide and think, “God doesn't want to see me because of what I did, what I thought, how I behaved, how I acted!” And so, we hide. And maybe if we have a week or two of better attitudes and better behaviour, we'll come back to God and maybe pray a little bit. I understand that. We all do that. While you were at your worst, is

when he died for you. Don't believe the lie that you've got to be better than you are for him to love you. Don't believe that.

So, the good news is no sin can separate you. The bad news is—or maybe this is good news, depending on how you look at it—none of your good deeds are going to bring him nearer or make him love you more, prove your worthiness to him. You need to come to him as you are, not pretend to be something that you're not.

So, there was a battle in the Garden of Eden that was lost. And there was a battle in the Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus won that battle. And we're going to close this morning with a song about another battle.

So, now you and I go out into the world and there's a battle that you and I are going to face. We battle sin that tries to tell us, "Do what you want. Be the god of your life. Go your own way."

A battle to put too much confidence in our own righteousness.

A battle to put too much doubt in our shame.

A battle to put too much fear in our future.

Too much worry in our steps, in our choices.

And to be too indifferent to the condition of our soul. This is the battle you and I will face as we go out into our day.

Jesus won the battle for your salvation, the battle for your adoption. We will sing about this victory forever and ever. That though the serpent struck his heel and he bled, he crushed the serpent's head. That the venom and the poison and the curse would be taken upon Jesus, not upon you. And for that you and I will stand forever and ever and say, "Amen! Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honour and power and praise forever and ever! Amen."