

Something that we don't do enough of, Christians, that God wants us to do is to meditate on his Word. The Bible, for example, speaks of Isaac going out into the field to meditate at evening. And Psalm 1 says that a righteous man's "delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." So what do we mean, then, by meditation? What is the Bible talking about in this case? I can tell you what it's not talking about. It's not talking about the way we usually think of meditation, this kind of clearing your head thinking nothing at all as a way of trying to center your life. No, that's not what the Bible is talking about. That's an eastern way of thinking, something that comes from a false religion. When the Bible talks about meditation, it's talking about taking God's Word into our minds, to think about it, to consider what it is that he has to say. To use an example, it's kind of like if we have a nice plate of food out in front of us, and we take a bite of it and we consider the way that it tastes, the way that it feels, the way that it makes us happy. That would be like meditating on the food. Or if we have a diamond which is out in front of us, and we turn it this way and look at it this way so that we consider its beauty from every possible angle. That would be what the Bible is talking about with meditation. To take God's Word, to consider what it means in all of its different points and also what it means for us today. And if we do that, Christians, I think you will find that it is a very beneficial thing. Because not only will it strengthen our faith, it will also help us to see the beauty of God's Word and what he has to say to us today. And since it is Lent, it's only natural for us to focus on and to meditate on the things leading up to Easter, to meditate on what our Lord Jesus Christ has suffered on our behalf. And so during this season of Lent, we're going to focus on a number of passages in particular, starting with his arrest here in the garden of Gethsemane, and then moving on to his trial under Caiaphas, his trial under Herod, his trial under Pilate, and finally his sentencing and condemnation. So may the Holy Spirit then bless this time during which we meditate on these words and consider what it is that God is telling to us today.

So if you have your Bibles with you, I would encourage you to open up to Matthew chapter 26 and starting at verse 47. Because this is the situation that we're going to be focusing on this evening. So Jesus is here in the garden of Gethsemane, and he has been here already for several hours. And he's been praying during this whole time. In fact, the Bible tells us, especially in the gospel of Luke, that this has been a time of great agony for him. Luke tells us that Jesus was literally sweating blood as he prayed, and you sweat blood, in some cases, whenever you're in a time of great distress. It causes the blood vessels in your forehead to break and blood comes out with the sweat. So Jesus was in such distress as to what was about to happen to him that he was literally sweating blood in this way. But things were only going to get worse, and that's where we pick up here in Matthew chapter 26. Verse 47 says: "While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs from the chief priests and the elders of the people." Now, it'd be one thing if these people had come up against him at this time and caused him some additional stress. But it was much worse than that, because Judas, one of those who was closest to him, has now come to betray him. Matthew tells us that he was one of the twelve, one of his twelve apostles who has been with him for three years up to this point. And think of everything that Jesus has done for Judas. He has taught him many things. He has cared for him these many years. Judas has seen him do some amazing miracles. But he throws all of that away just to make a quick buck. Because a couple hours earlier, he made an agreement with the high priests to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. That's not a lot of money. All of that that Jesus had done for him was now thrown away just for that small amount of money. What ingratitude that must've been to treat his master in this way! And you can only imagine

how Jesus must've felt about that. We've all probably been betrayed one way or another at some point in our lives. We know what that feels like. But to have someone who is so close to you, closer than family, to treat you in this way, how do you think that must've affected our Lord?

But it doesn't get any better. In fact, it's just worse than that still. Because not only did Judas do this just for a little bit of money, he did it in a deceptive way. Verse 48: "Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him.' And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi,' and he kissed him. Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you came to do.' Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him." Not only has he betrayed him, but he's trying to make it look like nothing had changed. He tried to make it look like he was still his beloved teacher, to show this love towards him and to kiss him in this way. How that must've increased the suffering of our Savior! To not only be betrayed, but by one who was still pretending as if nothing had changed.

But the very worst thing about it of all, Christians, was that everybody knew in this situation that Jesus didn't deserve any of this. Because it would be one thing if Jesus had done something wrong and Judas maybe had to do the hard thing in turning in Jesus. We could sympathize with Judas in that occasion. But Jesus hadn't done anything wrong. Jesus was innocent, and everybody knew that too. Because we're going to hear next week when we talk about the trial of Caiaphas that they were looking for witnesses to make a case against him. They didn't have a good reason. They were trying to make it up as they go along. For that reason, they knew that they didn't really have anything against him. And Pilate, we learn in the Gospel of Matthew, knows that the Jews do this entirely out of envy. There's no good reason for Jesus to suffer in this way, and everybody in that situation knows this.

That's why Peter does what he does. Verse 51: "And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear." Peter must've thought in that moment, "Well, if Jesus isn't going to do something about this, I will! I'm going to take control of this situation! I'm going to take matters into my own hands! And they will have to take my master over my dead body." That's what Peter must've thought in that moment. He didn't know he was talking about, of course, but that's what he wanted to do: to take control, to really have things in his hands, because then he was gonna fix everything and make it go the way he thought that it should go.

But that's a real easy temptation to fall into, Christians. How often do we do the same? To want to take control of the problems in our lives and to deal with them in the way that we think they should be dealt with. Even saying to God, "God, I want you to do something about it, and here's exactly what you should do. I've got it all figured out. You just follow my game plan, and everything will be fine. Everything will be perfect, because I want to be in control of this situation." It doesn't matter what we might be suffering, the things that we may be going through. We would rather try to take it for ourselves than to wait and to trust in God. But like Peter, it very often just makes things worse, doesn't it? When we don't wait on the Lord, when we don't wait for him to do something about it. Peter should give us a good example of what it means to need to wait on the Lord, to not want to take things into our own hands.

But listen to what Jesus says to him. Verse 52: "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?'" Jesus is saying, basically: "Peter, do you really think that I'm not in control here? Do you really think that this is somehow just happening to me and there's nothing I can do about it? Do you really think that I couldn't call on my Father at this very instant, and he wouldn't send me twelve legions of angels, thousands of these angels, one of which would be more than enough to defeat all the armies of the world? God would send all of these angels to me if I just asked him to do it. But I don't, because I'm the one in control here. All these things are happening because I choose them to happen." This is not happening to Jesus because he just had a bad day. This is not happening to Jesus because they just got the better of him. All of these things are happening because Jesus chose them for himself. Jesus suffers everything in this case precisely because he chooses too. The Son of Man lays down his life according to his own choice. No one is going to take it from him. And Jesus will also take it back up again. Jesus is in control of this situation from beginning to end.

And so we see that even in the beginning when he goes to Gethsemane. He doesn't try to hide from Judas the way that he might have, but he's so in control of the situation he goes exactly to where Judas will know that he is. And he also says to Judas, "Friend, do what you have come to do," giving him the freedom and the power to be able to carry out his evil designs. And Jesus will undergo everything, all of his suffering, because it is his choice. Every injustice he will suffer, every whip of the lash he will undergo, even the cross itself is his choice. No one's going to force him to do anything. Jesus is the one in control every step of the way.

That should be a comfort for us, Christians, as we deal with all of the things in our own lives. To realize that nothing happens apart from the control of God. Evil cannot go an inch further than God allows it to, because God is the one who controls our steps. God is the one who leads us along the way. And God will be with us no matter what. So we don't have to worry about what might happen tomorrow or what is going to happen in the future. God controls every step, and he will be with us no matter what. So Christians, don't be afraid about the suffering that you have to undergo. Jesus will be with you. He is the one who controls our steps.

So as we go home this evening, let us meditate on these things. To think about what it means that Jesus is in control of the situation. To meditate on what it means that all of these things happen according to his will alone. And also to meditate on what it means that God is in control also of the things that happen to us. May we glorify him then by this meditation.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have given us your Son Jesus Christ who has laid down his life willingly for our sake. We pray that you would watch over us every step of the way, knowing that Jesus is with us in every circumstance; in his name we pray. Amen.