

*"The state of being calm, peaceful, and untroubled."* That's the definition of *serenity*. Serenity is much easier felt than defined in words. You might feel serenity when Friday afternoon rolls around and your work week is done. Students, you might feel serenity when you have your homework done at 6:30 at night and you can play video games or watch a movie or your favorite TV show. Parents might feel serenity when a sports season is over or the orthodontist tells you, "Nope, your child doesn't need braces!" A vacation at the beach, a quiet Saturday morning, or just the peaceful, easy feeling you get when the sun shines on your face in February (or March 3) – that's serenity. Or, maybe for some of you, when you hear the word serenity, all you can hear is George Costanza's father screaming "Serenity now!" on Seinfeld as Frank Costanza uses that phrase to lower his blood pressure.

Serenity is a real thing. Maybe your sense of it is greatest when you don't have it but you long for it. For our Savior there was no serenity for him in the Garden of Gethsemane. The ransom for human souls included hidden charges: last week we heard it cost Jesus his friends, today as we sit with him and watch, we see it cost him any serenity he might have felt.

Jesus did have serenity just a few hours earlier. That Thursday night in early April Jesus and his twelve disciples celebrated the Passover for the last time. Picture the serene scene: it's about 9:00 that night, Jesus had earlier washed his disciples' feet, the smell of roast lamb is still in the upper room, they had finished the Passover meal and said the words of remembrance about the Israelites coming out of Egypt (the "Passover liturgy" if you will), their full stomachs turned into heavy eyes, and then they tasted a final piece of bread and the last sip of wine in the new covenant meal Jesus introduced. They even sang Psalms 115-118 together to wrap up the Passover celebration. It was such a nice evening. Serene. Serenity!

Then they walked by the light of the full moon, east out of Jerusalem down the slope of the Kidron Valley, they crossed the creek and ascended the slope of the Mount of Olives, to a spot call the "olive press" or Gethsemane. And there after leaving eight of his disciples, Jesus took Peter, James, & John a good 100 feet away. Very soon the serenity would be gone.

Jesus' inner circle could see that something was wrong. They had witnessed Jesus in an exalted moment on the mount of transfiguration six months earlier; now they see him at his lowest. Jesus explains by saying, **"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."** What Jesus was feeling was not just the dread of the pain he would soon face – like the feeling just before you get a shot at the doctor's office and the nurse says, "This might sting a little" and then you feel a little pain even before the needle touches your skin. That was only a part of it.

No, Jesus was overwhelmed with much more than that: it was the weight of the sin of the entire world. It was the cost of our ransom. Think of it this way. Have you ever felt the burden of guilt, real guilt? You did something wrong, something sinful, something terrible and you realized it. You felt awful. Maybe you knew you were going to get caught and that just increased the anxiety and the dread. Maybe you tried to hide or cover up what you did. Or you thought nobody knew, but you did and the guilt just ate you up.

Now take that feeling and multiply it times millions and millions. The agony Jesus was going through was caused by the understanding of what he would face the next day. Jesus had a real sense of the magnitude of not just the physical suffering, but spiritual and eternal cost of the punishment of mankind's sin. In about 12 hours he would be forsaken by God the Father because of the guilt of all sin, placed on him.

Jesus' time in Gethsemane was a foretaste of his death, of his separation from his heavenly Father, of his dealing with sin and its wages. The serenity of the beautiful evening a few hours earlier was gone.

So Jesus prays that if it's possible, if there is some other way, that God would ***"take this cup from me."*** The cup is the anger of God on human evil, *divine justice* poured out on *injustice*. We understand evil and injustice. No need to list the last month's examples in the news – there are human beings who violate other people and violate God himself. There are humans blatantly disregard clear commands of God about how to act, how to treat people, how to talk, how to think, how to do life. The cup Jesus was about to drink was God's righteous anger at all *sin, evil, wickedness*. And the worst part of this, is that the cup wasn't only filled by a gunman in America, an Islamic extremist in the middle east, a sex trafficker in Thailand, a scammer in Africa. It was filled by us.

The amount of God's anger over *just our sin* was enough to take away Jesus' serenity. Three times Jesus' agony, sorrow, and spiritual torment led him to pray that God might find another way to save mankind. God answered Jesus by not giving him what he asked for. Jesus surrendered himself to his Father's will. His prayer was not demanding, it was not in any way an act of cowardice or unwillingness to pay the price. His lack of serenity led him to ask God for another way. But there wasn't another way. There was no other way to ransom us, to redeem us. The ransom had to be paid, and only God himself could do it.

The loss of his serenity was intensified when three different times he returned to Peter, James and John and found them sleeping. They were there to encourage him. They could have said, "The Lord will give you strength" or "We'll pray for you too" or "Can we help you" or just by being there for him would offer encouragement. But they didn't watch and they didn't pray. They fell asleep when Jesus needed them the most. Jesus told them to watch and pray because while our new self, the new creation in us, is willing to do what God wants, the sinful nature is so weak. Jesus was showing that war with Satan is real, and it's serious. He warned Peter, James, & John, and they fell asleep.

Can you relate to them? How many times has it happened to you – or should I say how many times in a day does it happen to you – that you have the desire to do the right thing but your sinful nature so easily caves in to the devil's temptations? So you see once again, it wasn't just those disciples who brought on Jesus' agony, it wasn't just the evil people in our world, it was us.

But the focal point of what happened in Garden of Gethsemane is Jesus. Only Jesus could come up with the ransom. And he did it. Those hours (maybe 10:00 to midnight) were spent in agony of soul for you and me – for the times we haven't watched and haven't prayed. Jesus' suffering had begun. The anguish was so real and his body in such torment that Luke tells us that the sweat on his face was red like blood – even before a single fist or whip or thorn or nail. Luke also mentions that Jesus' physical condition was so weak that God sent an angel to strengthen him.

Our Savior was enduring all this agony for us. His love is beyond compare. The ransom he gave was required. It was the cost of our sin. It had to be paid – either each of us would pay it for all eternity, or the eternal God would pay it once...for all. And aren't we grateful that Jesus did just that. He paid what we couldn't, and in the process of paying that ransom, he gave up his serenity – so we wouldn't have to give up ours.

Maybe at times you have felt like you have given up your serenity. Maybe you've even felt like you could relate to Jesus...disappointed by your friends, betrayed by someone close to you, carrying a mountain of guilt, dreading the impending pain. But because Jesus gave us his serenity for us, we are safe with him, secure in his ransom, satisfied in his love.

You might say that in the world's history there was only one time and one place where there was complete and perfect serenity. It was the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. God was there with his friends, the perfect creatures he made for his glory. Total serenity! But in a different garden, Gethsemane, God was also there...with his friends, the forgiven followers he ransomed for his glory. And because he paid that ransom the next day on the cross, we are *calm, peaceful, and untroubled*. Even if you don't feel perfect serenity right now, because Jesus gave up his serenity for a time, you and I will have serenity for eternity. Amen.