

Week of April 1-7

BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS

Scripture Reading: Read Luke chapter 22

Some of the readers of this devotional may be old enough to remember the launch of the music group "Blood, Sweat & Tears" in the late 1960's. The group's name was chosen by Al Kooper, initial bandleader for the music group, and was inspired after a late-night performance in which Kooper played with a bloody hand. While it has gone through a variety of personnel changes through the years, the band is most known for its fusing of rock, blues, pop music, horn arrangements, and jazz improvisation into a mix that came to be known as "jazz-rock."

Almost 2,000 years ago, in a garden called Gethsemane, we're introduced to a Savior named Jesus, the Rock of Ages, who truly understood and experienced the reality of literal blood, sweat and tears as today's chapter reading reveals. Following the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples made their way out of the city of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley and to the Garden of Gethsemane on the side of the Mount of Olives. Once there, he called his disciples to pray and, then, he went off by himself to pray to his Father. According to Luke, an angel from heaven appeared to strengthen him while he prayed. So great was Jesus' anguish in prayer that he apparently ruptured tiny blood vessels around his sweat glands so that blood mixed in with the sweat in a condition known as hematidrosis. Luke, with a physician's keen eye for detail, is the only one of the gospel writers to mention this fact. According to doctors, the cause of this condition is extreme mental and emotional stress. Matthew and Mark both record Jesus' emotional state in the garden: *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death"* (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34). Jesus knows what awaits him. With all that is within him, he pleads with the Father for the cup of suffering to pass from him. He longs for another way other than the path that awaits him.

Often, we focus on the cross as the climax of Jesus' suffering and trial and, of course, it is on many levels. However, I wonder if we might miss how serious the time of Gethsemane really was for Jesus. The strain of knowing not only the physical suffering that awaited him but also the spiritual reality of carrying the sin of all humanity on his back, as well the thought of being alienated from the Father as he became our sin-bearer must have been overwhelming. The anguish is real. The blood, sweat and tears prove it. It was also the last chance for the devil to tempt Jesus to avoid the cross, the last gasp of the enemy to take Jesus down, and it failed. Jesus submits to the Father's plan as he has his whole life. There is no turning back from the cross at the end, no disqualification in the last two minutes of the game. Without the blood, sweat and tears in Gethsemane, Calvary would have been impossible.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Take some time to reread the accounts of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane as presented by Matthew, Mark and Luke. Reflect on what Jesus went through in light of today's devotional. Spend some time giving thanks that he was willing to accept the Father's cup so that we could have salvation.

Take-away: *The prayer in Gethsemane made possible the victory at Calvary.*