

JESUS PRAYS AT GETHSEMANE

Mark 14:27-52

Key Verse: 14:36

"Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"

Just before, in Mark 14:1-26, Jesus had the Last Supper with his disciples. During the Passover meal, he taught what the blood of the covenant meant. The blood of the covenant is God's promise that he would send his one and only Son to shed his blood for our sins. Nothing can heal the sin-stained blood of human beings except the holy blood of Jesus. For this, he had predicted his death repeatedly and progressively (8:31,32; 9:31,32; 10:33,34). Now it was the time for him to prepare for his forthcoming suffering and crucifixion. Today's passage contains Jesus' prediction of Peter's denial (27-31), Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (32-42), and Jesus' arrest (43-52). We are distressed to read this passage, for to read it seems to intrude into the private agony of Jesus. But his prayer in Gethsemane teaches us the true humanness of Jesus, and how he submitted himself to the will of God, and how he prepared himself to meet all the rejection, suffering and death on the cross.

I. Jesus predicts Peter's denial (27-31)

As soon as they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Jesus told them that they would all fall away. Look at verse 27. "You will all fall away...for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'" This is the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7. Here, "shepherd" refers to Jesus, and "sheep," to the disciples. Jesus knew that his disciples' faith was not strong enough to withstand the approaching trials and involvement in Jesus' suffering. Jesus told them this so that they might remember what he said and stand firm amid the devil's attack and so that they might be shepherds for those whose faith was weak. In Luke 22:31,32 Jesus said, "Simon, Simon,

Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." At that time Simon Peter was as weak as Kermit the frog. But Jesus had great hope in him.

Jesus knew what would happen to his disciples at the time of his arrest, trials and crucifixion. In desperation, they would all scatter and wander around to look for a hiding place so as not to be tracked down by the Pharisees. They would go back to Galilee one by one, secretly. How did Jesus help them? Jesus gave them the promise of God about his resurrection. Look at verse 28. "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." This promise does not seem to be much of a help to the disciples, who would soon be in great troubles. However, this promise declares that even though evil men put Jesus to death, he will rise again on the third day. After that, Jesus would give all men eternal salvation (Jn 3:16), and a living hope in the kingdom of God (1Pe 1:3-4). Those who crucified Jesus will be put into eternal condemnation in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 21:8). Jesus also promised that he would go ahead of his disciples into Galilee. This sure promise enabled them to stand in this shocking event. This promise would be the best remedy to them--at that time as well as in the future. How did they respond to his words? Peter heard what Jesus said, but he couldn't get the main point because he was upset when he heard that he would fall away from his master. He could not believe that he would fall away from Jesus like a coward. He could not believe that he would be a failure in his loyalty to his master. So he declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not" (29).

In verse 30 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth...today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him three times that night. What a surprising prediction! The disciples' hearts must have sunk at his words. Maybe each disciple heard what Jesus said in his own way. Among them, Peter, who heard his word as it was, trembled and said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (31). His heart was right, but what he said was based on his feelings, not on faith. Peter did not know that human feeling is changeable, like the Chicago weather or vicissitudes of the world. He did not know that no one can overcome the devil's temptation by his own effort. Even the first man Adam was swallowed up by the temptation of the

devil. Peter was too immature to accept Jesus' prediction, "...you will fall away." Peter was so spiritually blind that he could not grasp the concept of the glorious promise of Jesus' resurrection. Peter could not anticipate the joy of meeting Jesus again face to face in Galilee. Peter was too emotional to accept this glorious promise.

II. At Gethsemane (32-42)

Look at verse 32. Jesus went with his disciples to Gethsemane to pray as the final preparation for his rejection, suffering and crucifixion. He said to them, "Sit here while I pray" (32b). "He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,' he said to them. 'Stay here and keep watch'" (33,34). Jesus was also a human being, and he was in the prime of life. He was too young to die. But Jesus was willing to obey God's will to drink the cup of suffering. Jesus had to do battle with Satan in prayer. It was not an easy battle. He wanted his three top disciples to support him in prayer. Jesus never revealed feelings of distress, but this time he said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Sorrow is mental suffering and spiritual agony. The agony of his soul was unbearable; it drove him to the point of death. When he thought about his approaching rejection, suffering and crucifixion, his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. When Jesus thought about the process of crucifixion, event by event--the trial, the mocking, the spitting, the pain of the nailing--he was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Everyone wants to enjoy life; no one wants to suffer. Everyone wants to live happily; no one is willing to die when he is young. But Jesus was willing to obey God's will for world salvation. For this, Jesus had to die, crucified on a cross like a criminal. So he had to struggle to overcome his desire to live even one more day. He also had to drink the cup of suffering to overcome all the misunderstanding and rejection, shameful treatment and crucifixion. So he said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death."

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was lonely. He needed his dis-

ciples' prayer support. That was the reason Jesus took Peter, James and John and said, "Stay here and keep watch" (34). Their souls were willing. But their flesh was weak. Instead of praying, Peter was snoring in deep sleep. When they did not know the meaning of Jesus' shedding his blood on the cross, they could not participate in the labor of Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane.

What did Jesus pray? Look at verse 35. "Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him." When we read this verse, there seem to be many prayer topics. But when we carefully read it, we find only one prayer topic. His prayer begins with the request that "if possible the hour might pass from him." Here, "the hour" refers to the time of execution on the cross. That hour was appointed by God, according to his promise. It was the hour when Jesus would shed his blood as the Paschal Lamb for the sin of the world. When he thought about that hour, he trembled. So he prayed that hour might pass from him. If possible, Jesus wanted to avoid that hour. But he did not stop there.

Look at verse 36a. He went on to pray, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me." He wanted to avoid this cup of suffering, but at the same time, he knew what God's will for him was. Jesus was happy to obey the will of God, but he needed God's help. So he prayed with the same prayer topic again and again. "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me" (36a). Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (37,38).

Look at verse 39. "Once more he went away and prayed the same thing." He prayed with one specific prayer topic again and again. He stayed up the whole night with one prayer topic. Here we learn several things about Jesus' prayer.

In the first place, Jesus prayed all night to overcome his human desire.

"Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will'" (36). He prayed that God would help him not to drink the cup. In short, he prayed that he might not die, but live. Among all human desires, the desire to live may be the strongest. So he prayed that if possible, God would not allow him to drink the cup. Jesus knew how to struggle in prayer to overcome his desires. He overcame his desire through prayer. Jesus is the greatest man who ever lived because he overcame his human desire by prayer.

In the second place, Jesus prayed to obey the will of God. Look at verse 36 again. "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" "Yet not what I will, but what you will." This phrase clearly tells us that he prayed to overcome himself and obey God's will--which was humanly impossible to obey. Though he was the Son of God, he could not obey naturally. He needed a fierce battle. He needed to battle against himself in prayer in order to obey the will of God. Hebrews 5:8,9 says, "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him..." Had he not had the prayer of Gethsemane, he might not have accomplished the work of world salvation. The same is true with us. If we want to be servants of God, we must have a night of prayer at Gethsemane.

In the third place, his prayer was a spiritual battle. When he was in deep trouble, Jesus did not try to find any political solution. Jesus came to God in prayer. He did not fight a human battle; he fought a spiritual battle in prayer. When we are in trouble, we want to destroy our opponent as well as his family members and relatives. The devil is always ready to wage war against God's people and destroy them. The devil is bloodthirsty. But God's people must follow the example of our Lord Jesus. We must fight the spiritual battle in prayer. Through fighting a spiritual battle in prayer we must overcome our human desires. Through fighting a spiritual battle in prayer we must ask God that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In the fourth place, prayer is the most potent weapon for his people. The time of prayer is a time of listening to God's word and to his instructions. The time of prayer is the time to receive new spiritual strength from God. This is true. After prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus was full of spirit, ready to withstand the trial, the suffering, and even death. Here we learn that there are physical battles and spiritual battles in the world. We must fight the spiritual battle in prayer like Jesus.

In the fifth place, the time of prayer is the time to confirm God's love. When Jesus prayed, he said, "Abba, Father." Look at verse 36. "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" Even in this terrible hour, Jesus had a basic attitude toward God. God was still his Daddy. He never doubted God's love. Even though he had to die on the cross, God was still his loving Daddy. As long as Jesus prayed, this graceful love relationship was maintained.

When Jesus came to his disciples a second time, they were sleeping. But this time, Jesus did not wake them up. Perhaps he covered them with a blanket so that they could sleep better. When he returned a third time, he saw that they were oversleeping. So he said, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough!" On the other hand, Jesus himself was fully prepared to meet any kind of trial--even crucifixion. The time of suffering came upon him, but he was ready to confront it. Jesus' heart was not shaken by his beloved one's betrayal or by separation from his beloved disciples or by being handed over like a criminal. Rather, Jesus was full of spirit and said, "The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (41b,42)

III. Jesus arrested (43-52)

Look at verse 43. To our surprise, the traitor was one of the Twelve. He was Judas Iscariot, the treasurer of Jesus' company. He appeared in the dim light of the garden, accompanied by a crowd armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders. It is unbelievable that one of the Twelve had stood on the side of

the enemies, who were the religious leaders--the devil. We could not imagine that Judas Iscariot could betray Jesus. It is too shameful even to think about. But as long as the devil is behind us, such inhuman things can happen at any time. It was a historical fact that remains in the gospel story as the grimmest and most terrible thing which could ever have happened among men.

Judas, the betrayer, coming up to Jesus said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. It was a signal to the Sanhedrin police. When he followed Jesus without any commitment, Judas became a betrayer and a man of tragedy. He did not commit himself to God. So he could commit himself to nobody. Many people say, "I only commit to God, I commit to nobody else." In reality, they have no commitment in God, so they cannot commit themselves to anybody. Even if they commit themselves to somebody, commitment without God is unpredictable and it is dangerous.

Look at verse 47. "Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear." John 18:10 tells us that this was Peter. But Mark omitted the name because he respected Peter as his own father, both humanly and spiritually. In this terrifying atmosphere, Peter was the one who drew his sword to hack a man. It was an expression of his loyalty to Jesus. In the scuffle, he drew his sword and struck a blow for Jesus. We see Peter's readiness to do something for Jesus. But his impulsive action in forlorn hope was not at all a help to Jesus. Because of the blow, things were getting worse.

What did Jesus do in that situation? Look at verse 48. "'Am I leading a rebellion?' said Jesus." Those people saw Jesus teaching every day in the temple courts, but they did not do anything. Now, they came to him fully prepared for a blood-shedding fight. Nerves were taut and tense, and they emanated terror. In this scene, we find the greatness of Jesus in his fortitude and serenity. He was assaulted by Judas' betrayal and by the encirclement of court police. There was nothing but heartbreak behind and torture ahead, yet he was quiet and consistent. He controlled the situation.

But we cannot stop at the sheer heroism of Jesus. We must find what made it possible for him to be so supremely majestic in controlling the situation. It was prayer--a spiritual battle. When he prayed, God helped him to overcome the power of death.

The disciples were in Jesus' mind at the time of his arrest, but he could entrust them to God's hand in prayer, based on the prophecy of Zechariah. After prayer, Jesus was ready to be arrested like a criminal. If only he could obey the will of God, nothing mattered to him.

Look at verses 51,52. "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." Mark's gospel indicates it was Mark, the author of this gospel. He was the ancestor of streaking. He was a city man. He was a mommy boy. He was provided for by his parents. So he was lazy. But later, he was changed and became a gospel writer.

In this passage we learn how to fight spiritually in prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane. We also learn how to fight the spiritual battle in prayer. May God help us to fight spiritual battles as Jesus prayed. May God bless us as the men and women of prayer.