

JESUS PRAYS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26:36-75

Key Verse: 26:39b

"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.
Yet not as I will, but as you will."

During the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). Jesus gave his people the blood covenant. Thus he made his people covenant people newly. Jesus knew that death as the Lamb of God lay before him. At a time of distress, no one can do anything. Nevertheless, Jesus did not remain helpless. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Let's learn what Jesus did through his prayer. After prayer, Jesus was arrested and tried before the Sanhedrin in our place.

First, Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (36-38). Look at verse 30. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." Before going to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn. Most probably, they sang the [Lord's prayer](#): "Our Father in heaven...Your kingdom come, your will be done..." What a marvelous act of faith! What can we do in a helpless situation? We must not remain helpless; we must sing a hymn and go to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus left eight of his disciples in a place where they could rest. Then he took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. In verse 38, Jesus said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Before the cup of suffering and death, Jesus' soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Jesus needed some people to support him. But there was no one who supported him in prayer.

But Jesus did not give up. He prayed. Look at verse 39. "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'" Jesus prayed to obey God's will to take the cup of suffering, even though it was so distressing for him even to think about. We learn two things from his prayer.

Firstly, Jesus prayed to overcome himself (39-40). "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" (39). Jesus was fully human. In his manhood, if possible, he did not want to drink the cup of suffering and death. So he said, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me." Jesus was around 33 years old. He was too young to die. Jesus had many unfinished tasks to [complete](#). Jesus had his mother and many brothers and sisters to care for. It would have been good to die naturally, but it was painful for him to be sentenced to death by capital punishment and die as a criminal. Most of all, Jesus was too young to die. He was only 33 years old. At that time, it was a most painful and shameful way of death to die on the cross.

Because of his impending death, Jesus was sorrowful and lonely.

Jesus was apprehensive about his impending death. Jesus was sorry because he had to be treated like a sinner even though he was sinless (2Co 5:21). To Jesus, becoming a curse to redeem his people from the curse of the law was unbearable. It was because Jesus' relationship with God would be broken during the time he was under the curse of death. Jesus would not see God's face. Jesus would be in a completely forsaken state. The thought of having a broken relationship with God grieved him more than the physical torture he would undergo on the cross. In this situation, Jesus prayed to decide to follow God's will, overcoming his own will. Jesus prayed to make a decision of faith.

Secondly, Jesus won the victory over his soul's battle (41-46). It is obvious that Jesus began to pray from the time of 11:00 p.m., and he finished the first period of his soul's battle in prayer. Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He said to them, "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" He went on to say, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (41). Most people are willing to pray, but in actuality, not many people can pray. Many sleep instead of praying. When they don't pray, they fall into Satan's temptations. No one can withstand Satan's temptations without praying.

Look at verse 42. "He went away a second time and prayed, 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.'" Basically, the content of his prayer was the same as the first time. But when Jesus prayed the second time, there was a progression. At first, Jesus prayed in order to decide whether to follow his own will or his Father's will, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (39b). When Jesus prayed the second time, he prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done" (42). In this verse, "May your will be done" is added. Jesus was getting ready to drink the cup, and his decision to take the cup was made through intensive prayer. Prayer was the source of power to Jesus.

It is easy for us to wander, saying, "To be or not to be, that is the question." But to make a decision is not easy at all. To make a decision requires strenuous effort and a tremendous consumption of energy. This is why many avoid even to make a decision to marry. But when Jesus prayed, God empowered him to make a decision to take the cup. God strengthens those who pray. Praise God! When Jesus came back, he again found his disciples sleeping because their eyes were heavy. Jesus understood them, that the spirit is willing, but the body is weak (41). So he left them and went away once more and prayed a third time, saying the same thing (43,44).

What happened when Jesus prayed a third time? He was fully equipped with the power of God to drink the cup. On the other hand, the disciples were still sleeping. Jesus said, "Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (45). When Jesus engaged in his soul's battle in prayer to accept God's will, God gave him the strength to overcome himself. When Jesus decided through prayer to drink the cup, God gave him the strength to do so. Before prayer, Jesus had been overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. After prayer, Jesus was empowered with a sense of victory. Prayer made Jesus

very different. Jesus was ready to drink the cup and said, "Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (46).

Second, Jesus was arrested (47-56). It was Judas, one of the Twelve, who led the temple police and the mob to find Jesus in the privacy of the Garden of Gethsemane. The chief priests and the elders of the people sent a large crowd armed with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus. "Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him" (49). It was the betrayer's signal.

What did Jesus do? Look at verse 50. "Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.' Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him." Jesus allowed this without resistance. At that moment, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off, not his head, but his ear (51). John tells us that this was Peter (Jn 18:10).

What did Jesus say to this disciple? Look at verses 52-54. "'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him, 'for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'" Here Jesus plainly says that he was going to suffer in order to obey the will of God and that his suffering was a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12). Jesus' people's struggle is not a physical one: It is a spiritual one. If the battle had been a physical one, then Jesus would have called more than twelve legions of angels to defend himself (53). But he did not do that. Jesus only fought the spiritual battle to fulfill what was said in the Scriptures. It is amazing that Jesus saw this event, not as bad luck, but as one of the fulfillments of God's will written in the prophecies. In this part we see that the mob did not know what they were doing. Yet, Jesus was clear about what he was doing. Jesus chose to drink the cup of suffering because he knew that his death was the purpose of God. Jesus took the cup of suffering because he decided to obey the will of God for him, and prayer enabled him to take the cup of suffering.

Third, Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin (57-68). God chose his people Israel and reared them as his firstborn son. God made a covenant with them that he would send the Messiah of the world from the stump of Jesse. According to his promise, he came to his people, but his people did not accept him (Jn 1:10,11). They rather judged him by human standards (Jn 8:15). It is irony that the Jewish religious leaders, who had long awaited the coming of the Messiah, failed to accept him when he came to the world. Jesus healed the sick and preached the good news of the kingdom of heaven. He taught the word of truth to those who came to him. But they did not see the glorious work of God through Jesus. They were spiritually blind men. They completely ignored the work of God that was done in the hearts and souls of the people through Jesus. They did not care that the blind were able to see because of Jesus. They did not care that the lepers were cured by Jesus. They were the chosen people who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah. But when the Messiah came to them, they rejected him. Their only hope was the hope of the Messiah's coming. But when he came, they did not accept him. Rather, they despised and rejected him. They arrested and tried him because he taught the word of truth.

Those who had arrested Jesus handcuffed him and tied him up and made him sit down before the Sanhedrin members (57,58). They looked arrogant. Among them, Caiaphas the high priest was conspicuous. On the other hand, Jesus looked humble. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false charges against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any.

Finally, two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" After clearing the temple, Jesus had said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." But the temple he had spoken of was his body. This was a prediction of his resurrection from the dead on the third day (Jn 2:21). It should have been understood according to its spiritual meaning. But in their animal mentality they twisted it into a charge that he had said he would destroy the temple. To the Jews, destroying the temple was more than blasphemy.

At this false accusation, Jesus remained silent (62,63). Then the high priest, who had seized the opportunity to have the Sanhedrin members consent to his charge, asked, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." This question was devious, and by law, criminal cases were not to be tried during the Passover season. But the high priest did it anyway, deceiving himself and violating the laws of the Sanhedrin.

What did Jesus answer? Look at verse 64. "'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied." Jesus knew that if he said, "Yes," it would cost him his life. But he said, "Yes."

Look at verse 64b. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." In this desperate situation, Jesus talked about the kingdom of God and his coming back as the Judge. In fact, the high priest was the judge at the trial of Jesus. But Jesus will be the Judge when he comes again. Then, the high priest who judged Jesus will not be able to run away, but must come to see Jesus face to face and be judged by him.

Still, the high priest did not repent. He tore his expensive priestly clothes and condemned Jesus with a verdict of blasphemy. Those who were watching realized that Jesus was in deep trouble. So in order to please the authorities, they spoke up, "He is worthy of death!" Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?" (66-68) Though Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah of the world, he was tried and judged by men.

Fourth, Peter disowns Jesus (69-75). Personally, Peter was very loyal to Jesus. But his human loyalty had limitation. Peter, who did not pray but slept, had no strength to fight the spiritual battle. He followed Jesus to the courtyard of the high priest to see the outcome (58). While he was sitting out in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee" (69). At that moment, the power of death terrified him. In his fear, Peter denied Jesus, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about" (70). Another girl saw

him and said, "This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth." He said with an oath, "I don't know the man!" (72) After a little while, many of them went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away" (73). Peter did not know what he was talking about, but he denied Jesus again, saying, "I don't know the man!"

Peter disowned Jesus three times in a row. As soon as he disowned Jesus the third time, a rooster crowed. What did Peter do at that moment? Look at verse 75. "Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly." Though Peter completely failed as his disciple, he revealed that he was a good disciple of Jesus because he remembered what Jesus had spoken. He did not remember Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but he remembered with the help of a rooster, "You will disown me three times" (26:34). He failed, but he did not give himself away to Satan's attack. He went outside and wept bitterly. His action reveals that he repented for the first time.

In this troubled world, prayer does not seem to work. But in this passage we learn that Jesus was empowered by prayer to make a decision to take the cup of suffering. May God help us to pray as Jesus did.