**YET NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL**

April 7, 2019

Matthew 26:36-75

Key Verse 26:39 “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.”

In this passage we learn that Jesus prayed at Gethsemane in order to prepare himself for upcoming trial and crucifixion. Through prayer, he won the victory before fighting. Through prayer, God strengthened him to obey God’s will. Through prayer, he had a clear identity as the Son of God. On the other hand, Peter did not pray. Thus he did not have clear identity as a disciple of Jesus, and then denied Jesus three times. May God help us learn Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. May God use us as prayer servants in this generation.

**First**, Jesus prayed to obey God’s will. Jesus went with his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane means, “olive press.” He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Look at verse 38. “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 someone 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.” Here Jesus is struggling with Satan’s temptation. Remember that Satan tempted Jesus at the beginning of the ministry to avoid the cross (Mt 4:9), and Jesus defeated him, saying, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.” Again Satan tempted him through Peter after his confession not to take the cross (Mt 16:22), and Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” Here Satan appears again not to take the cross, saying, “You don’t have to die. The loving God will not let you die.” The cross is the cup of wrath, of judgment, the experience of sin-bearing. The tempter is saying, “Avoid the cross. It shouldn’t happen to you. Claim your rights as the Son of God. You have the power.” Jesus already decided to take the cross, but under Satan’s temptation, he began to be sorrowful and troubled because he had the power not to take the cross.

Look at verse 39 again. “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.”

Notice that Jesus said, “My Father.” He did not simply say, “Father.” He used the word “My”. This is the only occasion he did that in his life, because he is holding on to the intimacy that he has with God. He feels Satan trying to pull him away from God, pull him away from God’s will, get him to do what he wants to do, which would be the easy way, to avoid the cross, rather than do what God has designed. Mark says that he cried “Abba,” Daddy. He is holding on to intimacy of his relationship with the Father, which he will not let go; “My Father,” very possessive, very personal, very intimate, and he holds on to that. He will not distrust God, like he wouldn’t make bread on his own, and he would not take the kingdoms of the world on his own, but he waited for the Father. He will not avoid the cross or make his own plan. He will go through God’s plan, and so he says, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

When he says “if it is possible,” he is not asking if it is possible within the power of God, because anything is possible within the power of God. God has the power to do it. He is asking, “Is it possible in the plan of God?” If it is possible morally, if it is possible redemptively, if it is possible in the consistency with the plan to save sinners, is there any other way, let it happen another way. Jesus is pleading, “My Father, if there is any other way by which ungodly sinners can be saved than my going to the cross, reveal that way now! But in all of this, I want it known that I desire nothing contrary to your will.” What was the answer? There was none; the heaven was silent. The angels were silent. By this silence, we know that there was no other way for God to justify the guilty sinners than for Jesus, the sinless Savior to die on the cross.

Here we learn from Jesus how to pray and take up the cross of mission. Sometimes, we struggle when we face impossible situations. We desperately pray to God to remove the suffering and hardship. King David had such a problem. He prayed in Psalm 22:1,2, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.” But God is silent. It does not mean that God does not care. It means that there is no other way for us than taking up the cross. We should not avoid the difficulties and face them head on. At that point, we need to remember Jesus. Hebrews 12:2-3 says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” May God bless you to learn the Gethsemane prayer to take up your many crosses.

One more thing we can learn about prayer is that prayer is not nagging God to do what we want. It is not about overcoming his unwillingness through our persistence. But prayer is me lining up with what God wants to do at any price, even my life. Satan comes and wants to divert us from the will of God to fulfill our own satisfaction. What prayer does is to say, “O God, I don’t want to go through this; strengthen me to do your will.” And so, prayer set ourselves in the place of God. Prayer lines us up with that perfect place of blessing. After the third temptation, Jesus was the victor and Satan was defeated. The enemy of his soul was gone. Christ was in perfect harmony with the will of God, perfectly submitted to the purpose of God, calmly ready to move to the cross. 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.’” When Jesus engaged in his soul’s battle in prayer to accept God’s will, God gave him the strength to win the victory. 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!”

**Second**, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss (47-56). Just then Judas arrived, leading a large crowd with swords and clubs. Judas had arranged a signal: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” Judas went to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. It is amazing that Jesus didn’t punch Judas or at least push him away. Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus loved even his betrayer. Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” Then Jesus was seized and arrested. Just then, one of Jesus’ companions drew his sword and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his ear. Though Matthew didn’t include the detail, it was Peter who did this. Obviously he aimed at the neck, but he missed. His aim was as poor as his judgment. “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?” Then all the disciples deserted him and fled, just as Jesus had foretold.

**Third**, Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin (57-68). Jesus was taken to Caiaphas the high priest, with the Jewish teachers and elders assembled there. The whole Jewish Sanhedrin was looking for false evidence against Jesus to put him to death. Many false witnesses came forward, surely from among those paid to lie. Finally, two declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’” Actually, that was a misquote of Jesus. He said, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn 2:19), and he meant his own body. At this accusation, the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” But Jesus remained silent. Jesus knew the charges were wrong and not worth debating over. He also did not want to try to save himself. Finally, the high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” Jesus only needed to say, “No,” to save himself. Jesus only needed to say, “No,” if people had misunderstood who he was. This time Jesus did not remain silent. What did Jesus say? “You have said so,” Jesus replied. “But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Combining prophecies from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 Jesus declared that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and they would see him at the right hand of God. Jesus’ words were too much for the high priest to handle. He tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” “He is worthy of death,” they answered. Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, “Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?” They were mocking his identity. They were blinded by their unbelief.

**Fourth**, Peter denied Jesus three times. When Jesus prayed, God gave him strength to commit himself to God completely, and to face the suffering and death on the cross, with a sense of victory. On the other hand, the disciples did not pray. They just slept. They were not ready to face the sufferings and trials. Verse 58 says that Peter followed Jesus at a distance. This was true spatially and spiritually. The distance came when Peter did not follow Jesus in prayer to make a clear decision to obey the will of God. Peter felt ready to die with Jesus just a few hours ago. So he said, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” (33) He also declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” (35) He wanted to follow Jesus. But when he did not pray, he was following Jesus without a clear decision of faith. He was following Jesus out of his human loyalty. While he was sitting out in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus of Galilee.” 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.” He could not identify himself as Jesus’ disciple before a servant girl. His first denial was followed by a second, and then a third. 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 with the help of a rooster, “You will disown me three times.” He failed, but he did not give himself away to Satan’s attack and committed suicide like Judas. He went outside and wept bitterly. His action reveals that he repented for the first time.

Why did Peter fail? Because he did not pray. When he did not pray, he followed Jesus without clear commitment. So when he was terrified by the power of death, he disowned Jesus three times. He could not see beyond the power of death, the glorious hope of the kingdom of God. On the other hand, Jesus saw the glorious hope of the kingdom of God, and was able to withstand the pain and suffering and death on the cross. When we follow Jesus without clear commitment to Jesus, we will surely fail at a crucial moment. Let’s pray that we may be renewed in the love of God that is in Christ Jesus so that we may follow Jesus with clear decision, looking beyond all pain and suffering, rejection and failures, and look at the glorious hope of the kingdom of God.

In summary, we have two sequences; First, the sequence for disaster in temptation: Over-confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster. Over-confidence: I can handle it, I don’t need to pray. I will never deny the Lord. I will be faithful. I am all right – confidence. Sleep follows confidence. Why bother to be alert? Sleep leads then to temptation, and to sin, and disaster. The disciples lived it that way. Second, the sequence of victory: Here is the pattern we see in Jesus. Instead of over-confidence, you have humility. Jesus humbled Himself and became dependent on God. While the disciples were confidently saying, “We will never ever fail you,” Jesus, knowing the weakness of human existence, and knowing he was a man, knew he needed to go to God to be strengthened. Over-confidence led to sleep, humility led to prayer. Then came temptation, and in the temptation, obedience to the will of God, and victory. You make a choice in your life, either to be self- confident, sleep, end up in disaster, or in humility, fall on your knees before God in prayer for strength, and in the temptation comes obedience, and out of the obedience, victory.

Today we learn that Jesus prayed before the cup of suffering and death. We also learn that Jesus won the victory through prayer even before fighting. May God help us not to be slaves of emotions in a helpless situation, but warriors of prayer. May God use each of us as prayer servants in this generation.