

## 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.”*

Today’s passage contains three parts: Jesus’ prediction of Peter’s denial (27-31), Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane (32-42) and Jesus’ arrest (43-52). We are burdened to read this passage, for it describes the personal agony of our Lord Jesus before his suffering and death. However, we learn how he submitted himself to the will of God through his intense prayer. After his prayer struggle, Jesus was ready to take up the cross. May God help us to learn from Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer!

### I. JESUS PREDICTS PETER’S DENIAL (27-31)

After the Lord’s Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn (26). Then they went out to the Mount of Olives which was located across the Kidron Valley to the east of Jerusalem. As soon as they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Jesus told them more shocking news. He predicted that they would all fall away. Judas wasn’t the only one who had a commitment problem. Look at verse 27. *“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “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 temptations. So he told them this in advance so that they might remember what he said and become the future shepherds of those who stumble because of weak faith.

Jesus knew what would happen to his disciples at the time of his arrest and crucifixion. They would all scatter in desperation. They would desert him and leave him alone to face the terrible sufferings. Then they would return to Galilee, away from the reach of the murderous Jewish leaders. Jesus knew that they would despair and become helpless. How did Jesus help them? Look at verse 28. *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.*” This verse was a great promise for them even though they did not seem to realize it. First, he told them he would rise again after his crucifixion. Second, he promised that he would meet them in Galilee. Jesus promised that he would not abandon them even though they were about to. This was an important promise because the promise of his resurrection would enable them to come back to him after their failure.

How did they respond to Jesus’ words? Look at verse 29. *Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”* Peter would not admit that he would betray the Master. To him, such a thing was unthinkable. Peter had not paid a close attention to what Jesus said—that he would die to fulfill the redemptive plan of God but he would rise from the dead. Peter did not accept the promise. Instead, he was confident about his human loyalty toward the Lord. But Jesus answered, *“I tell you the truth, today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times”* (30). What a shocking prediction! The disciples could not believe their ears. Peter began to shake his head in protest. Look at

verse 31. *But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.*

There is no denying that Peter loved Jesus. But he did not realize that there is a limitation in human loyalty. He was too proud to accept the possibility that he could fail. More important, he did not accept the promise of Jesus’ resurrection in his heart. Peter was too emotional to accept the glorious promise of Jesus’ resurrection. We learn here that we should not rely on our self-confidence, but accept God’s promise in our hearts by faith.

## II. AT GETHSEMANE (32-42)

Look at verse 32. *They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”* Jesus went with the disciples to Gethsemane to pray, in his final preparation for the upcoming suffering and crucifixion. Gethsemane was also called the “Garden of Gethsemane,” probably because it was surrounded by many olive trees. The garden was on the western slope of the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39). The word “Gethsemane” means “oil press” or “olive press.” The Garden of Gethsemane was a favorite place for Jesus to visit for prayer and solitude.

Look at verses 33-34. *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.”* Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death when he thought about the crucifixion--the trial, the mocking, the spitting, and the pain of the huge nails driven through his hands and feet. Jesus never revealed the feeling of distress to his disciples before, but this time he said, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” It is in our human nature to want to avoid any suffering. No one wants to suffer for another person, let alone die for someone else’s sin, especially when he is young. Jesus was only 33 years old and full of life. But he had to die, crucified on a cross like a criminal. He would be spit on. He would be flogged. He would be beaten. He would be mocked by the Roman soldiers. Finally, they would nail him to a wooden beam. His naked body would be hung on the cross before the eyes of spectators. His mother and his disciples would stand beneath the cross as the blood would stream down on him. But this was not all. The physical pain, suffering, humiliation would be one thing. At the moment he would shoulder all the sins of the world, he would be separated by God the Father, even momentarily. This was too much to bear for Jesus. His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow.

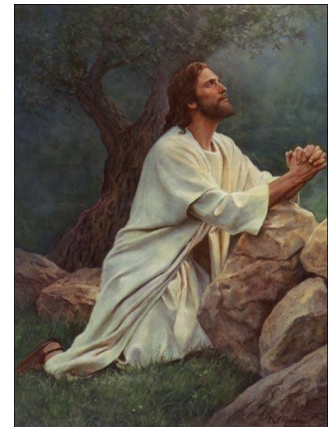
But Jesus did not try to avoid the will of God. He came to Gethsemane with his trusted disciples. He wanted to struggle in prayer so that he could bear the terrible burden willingly. Yet, he said, *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”* Jesus was the Son of God who came to this world, but at the same time, he was fully human. As a man, he was able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.” But it was not easy for him to face the suffering and death when he was so young. He was deeply distressed and troubled.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was lonely. He wanted his disciples to be with him. He needed their prayer support. He asked Peter, James and John to stay awake and support him in prayer. But he knew that he had to struggle personally before God in order to obey the will of God. What can we learn from the Gethsemane prayer of our Lord Jesus?

**First, “Going a little farther.”** Look at verse 35. *Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.* Jesus overcame his human limitations by coming to God. He was overwhelmed by his sorrow to the point of death. But he went a little farther to approach God. He did not give in to his human limitations. Instead, he went a little farther and fell to the ground to pray. He made an extra effort. He went an extra mile. He went a little closer to God. We learn from Jesus that we must struggle to come closer to God when we face human limitations. We should not give in to our human weaknesses. We must go a little farther. We shouldn’t hit the snooze button. Instead, we should set the alarm clock 10 minutes earlier. May God help us to go a little farther in our prayer struggle!

**Second, “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.”* Abba means “Father” in Aramaic. It was a little boy’s calling of his daddy. Jesus called God, “Daddy, Father.” In his extreme agony and distress, Jesus called on to God. He never doubted God’s love. He knew that it was God’s will for him to suffer and die for sinful, undeserving people like you and me. But Jesus also knew that God truly loved him. He held on to the love of God in a time of personal crisis.

**Third, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.”** 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.”* Jesus prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him (35). He prayed that God would take the bitter cup from him if there was a way to avoid it (36). Among all human desires, the desire to live may be the strongest. So he prayed that, if possible, God would allow him to avoid the cup. Again we must think about what terrible things Jesus was about to endure—shame and guilt, humiliation and abandonment, let alone the physical pains and abuse. Was there a way for God to bypass all these?



Jesus, however, did not insist on his ways. He said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” He prayed to overcome himself and obey God’s will. Again we should remember that while on earth Jesus was fully human. If you pinched him on his arm, he would have said “Ouch.” He had the same human desires as we do. So he needed to battle against himself in prayer in order to obey the will of God. Obedience was not a natural thing even for Jesus. In fact, he learned to obey 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....”

In Gethsemane, Jesus struggled to obey the will of God in his intense prayer. How intense was his prayer? Luke 22:44 says: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” That is how intense Jesus’ prayer was. This teaches us that prayer sometimes can be a time of fierce spiritual battle. When Jesus was distressed and troubled, he did not try to find a human solution; he came to God in prayer. When we are in trouble, we try to find our own solution through struggling with other people. This is a battle of flesh and blood. But we must follow the example of our Lord Jesus. We must fight a 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 through each of us.

The Gethsemane prayer of Jesus also teaches us an important aspect of prayer. Too often our prayer is aimed at asking God what we want. We try to change God’s mind to fit ours. But Jesus did not do that. He expressed his desires to God, but he quickly asked God to help him to follow God’s will, not his. He listened to God for his guidance. We should also ask God in our prayer to give us the courage and faith to obey God’s words. After his prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus was full of spirit, ready to face the trials, the sufferings, and even the terrible death on the cross. Praise Jesus who taught us how to fight the spiritual battle in prayer!

A pastor was happy to notice that a boy was praying earnestly one Sunday. He also heard the boy saying passionately, “Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo.” After the service, he said to the boy, “Son, I was pleased to see you praying so earnestly. But tell me, why were saying, “Tokyo, Tokyo, Tokyo”? The boy answered, “I was praying for my geography exam tomorrow. And I asked God to make Tokyo the capital of Slovenia.”

On the other hand, there is a story about President Lincoln that teaches us about how we should come to God in prayer. One day, an old lady was ushered into his office. “What can I do for you?” he asked. “Mr. President,” she said, “I am not here to ask you any favor for me or anyone else. I heard that you were fond of cookies and I brought a basket of cookies.” Lincoln was deeply moved by this and said, “My dear lady, thousands have come into this office since I became president. But you are the first one to come asking no favor for yourself and someone else.” It would be difficult for us not to ask anything from God, but we can please God by asking him to give us the courage to obey his words.

After the prayer struggle, Jesus returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. He woke up Simon and said, “*Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?*” (37) He went on to say, “*The spirit is willing, but the body is weak*” (38). In other words, they were willing to take part in his prayer labor, but they couldn’t. Why? It was because they didn’t struggle enough. They did not go a little farther. The harder they tried to open their eyes, the heavier their eyes became. Their eyes did not obey them.

When Jesus returned to them the second time, they were sleeping. But this time, he did not wake them up. Maybe he covered them with blankets. When he returned the third time, he saw that they were still sleeping. 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 and death came upon him, and he was ready to confront it. The terrible betrayal by his own disciple and painful sufferings were about to happen, but Jesus was full of spirit to meet the challenge and obey the will of God. He said to them, *“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)

Again what was the result of Jesus’ prayer struggle in Gethsemane? Before the prayer, Jesus had been overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. After the prayer struggle, Jesus was empowered with a sense of victory. Jesus was ready to drink the cup and said, *“Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”* We learn that prayer can change our attitude. Do you think there is a difference between starting a day with prayer and without prayer? We can clearly see the difference between Jesus who prayed and the disciples who did not in the next passage of this chapter.

### III. JESUS IS ARRESTED (43-52)

Look at verse 43. *Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.* The traitor was none other than one of his beloved disciples. Judas appeared in the dim light of the garden, by the flare of the torches, 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. But it is a historical fact that is recorded in the gospel as one of the darkest moments of the sinful humanity.

Judas, the betrayer, coming up to Jesus, said, *“Rabbi!”* and kissed him. It was a signal to the Jewish police to arrest Jesus. When Judas followed Jesus without a commitment, he became a betrayer. He became a man of tragedy.

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.* According to John (18:10), it was Peter. In this terrifying moment, Peter did not know what to do. He wasn’t prepared for this, because he did not pray. But he thought he had to do something for Jesus. After all, he had declared that he would die with the Lord. So he drew his sword and cut off a man’s ear. It was an expression of his loyalty to Jesus. But his impulsive action did not help Jesus at all.

What did Jesus do in this situation? Look at verses 48-49. *“Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”* The armed mob came prepared for a bloody fight. In today’s terms, they were like a SWAT team that is about to raid a crack house. But to their surprise, they found no resistance from Jesus. Instead Jesus was calm. He was the one who controlled the situation. We cannot but marvel at the sheer heroism of Jesus. But we must realize that it was his spiritual battle in Gethsemane that prepared him for the situation. When he prayed, God helped him to overcome the power of death.

The disciples were on his mind at the time of his arrest, but Jesus could entrust them to God's hand, based on the prophecy of Zechariah. After the prayer, he was ready to be arrested. He was ready to obey the will of God. He did not resist the arrest. "*The Scriptures must be fulfilled,*" he said. He was captured by the armed mob and taken away like a lamb is led to a slaughter house. He did not open his mouth.

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.* The young man was Mark, the author of this gospel. He was only a teenager at that time and was terrified by what happened in that dark moment. But the quiet confidence of Jesus in that situation must have made a lasting impression on his mind.

In this passage, we learn how Jesus overcame himself through his prayer struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane. Through his prayer struggle in Gethsemane Jesus made a decision of faith to obey God. May God help us to go a little farther in our prayer struggle so that we may obey the word of God!