

[Psalm 106 for call to worship and opening hymn –
notice the pattern of Psalm 106:

Israel sins – but God had mercy and delivered his people at the Red Sea
Israel sins again – and God judges Dathan and Abiram –
but Moses intercedes,
and God has mercy and does not destroy all Israel;
Israel sins again – and provokes God to anger –
but Phineas intercedes,
and God has mercy and brings them into the Promised Land;
Israel sins again – and follows the practices of the Canaanites –
but God continually remembers his covenant –
and so God has mercy again and again.

Psalm 106 teaches us that God has mercy on sinners –
because of the faithful mediator who intercedes for us.
Moses interceded for Israel – and God had mercy.
Phineas interceded for Israel – and God had mercy.

But both of those men died – and stayed dead.

We need a mediator who has passed through death unto life.
And so let us confess our sins and put our trust in the righteous mediator,
Jesus Christ!
Let us confess our sins first silently, and then together...]

2 Samuel 15:13-37

David’s son, Absalom, is rebelling against him.
So David flees from Jerusalem.
David’s faithful servants are with him.
And as they are ascending the Mount of Olives,
David hears that “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.”

Ahithophel was one of David’s counselors – one of his most trusted friends.
But now Ahithophel has betrayed David.

A thousand years later, the Son of David is betrayed by one of his own disciples
on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.

And David’s prayer must have echoed in the heart of Jesus:
“O LORD, please turn the counsel of Judas into foolishness.”

But whereas David has many faithful friends who stand by him –
notice how many remain faithful! None fall away! –

the Son of David will have no one who stands by him.

On the Mount of Olives that night, it will be Jesus alone.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 88.

Psalm 88 is a song of darkness and loneliness.

I once had a pastor tell me that he couldn't imagine ever singing Psalm 88.

I asked him, "Don't you have anyone in your congregation
who struggles with depression?"

If you have ever been depressed, then you know that Ps 88 rightly expresses the mood:

"my soul is full of troubles"

"I am a man who has no strength"

"my companions have become darkness"

But Psalm 88 is not *whining*.

Psalm 88 still remembers who *God* is.

"O LORD, God of my salvation" –
the one hopeful line in the whole Psalm!

Because the "God of my salvation" is the one who has put me here!

Yes, it is true that David's sin with Bathsheba
was in one sense the reason why he was now driven from Jerusalem.

(Ahithophel, by the way, was Bathsheba's grandfather!)

And it is also true that Absalom is responsible for his own sin –
which in another sense is the reason for David's suffering.

But David recognizes that he is driven from Jerusalem *by God*.

Likewise, David's greater Son, our Lord Jesus, will recognize
that it is *God's will* that he go to the cross.

And you and I need to see that while our own sin may contribute to our suffering,
and the sins of others certainly affect us adversely –
all of this is happening to us because it is God's will.

Listen to Psalm 88, as Heman the Ezrahite speaks to God:

"You (O LORD) have put me in the depths of the pit...

You have caused my companions to shun me...

O LORD, why do you cast my soul away?

Why do you hide your face from me?

Your wrath has swept over me..."

Yes, the bad stuff in life (as well as the good stuff) comes from God.

So why does the Psalmist cry out to the LORD?

Because the LORD is the God of my salvation.

Jesus knew that it was God's will for him to go to the cross.
And for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning the shame.
So let us sing Psalm 88.

Sing Psalm 88
Read Matthew 26:30-56

1. "Strike the Shepherd" – the Centrality of the Resurrection (v30-35)

³⁰ *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* ³¹ *Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'* ³² *But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."* ³³ *Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."* ³⁴ *Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times."* ³⁵ *Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.*

Jesus said to them "You will all fall away because of me this night."

On their own, the disciples will fall away.
Only the resurrection of Jesus will give them the strength to stand.
Everything hinges on Jesus.

You will all fall away because of me...
But after I am raised up, I will go before you...

And Jesus says that this is what the scriptures say:
"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

This is a quote from Zechariah 13:7,
but there is a lot from Zechariah 9-14 that all fits in this passage.

Zechariah was one of the last of the OT prophets.
He prophesied after the exile – when the temple was rebuilt.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem he enacted Zechariah 9:9
"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Jesus is the King who brings righteousness and salvation.

Then in the institution of the Lord's Supper Jesus echoed Zechariah 9:11,
which spoke of the blood of the covenant in the context of the new Exodus –
the redemption from exile –

and the promise of grain and new wine that would make his people flourish (9:17)

Zechariah also speaks of thirty pieces of silver as the price of the Lord's shepherd,
which he throws into the temple "to the potter" (in Zech 11:13).

Chapter 12 of Zechariah speaks of how they will "look on me, on him whom they have pierced,"
which will be applied to the cross,
and how "on that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David
and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,
to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness." (13:1)

And Zechariah had said that the final battle would begin at the Mount of Olives (14:4).
And on the day when the LORD triumphs over his enemies,
"living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea
and half of them to the western sea." (14:8)

So Jesus is not just coming to fulfill one isolated verse in Zechariah.
He has come to fulfill the *whole* of Zechariah.

And now the battle begins at the Mount of Olives.

But Jesus must first battle against the misunderstanding of his own disciples:
Peter vehemently protests against such a thought.
I would die with you before I would deny you!
And all the disciples sound forth in a chorus of assent.

Let us not be too hard on the disciples.
They do not understand what they are up against.

I do not doubt that they meant what they said.
And if this was any other battle –
if this was any other foe –
then they surely would have gone to their deaths with him.

But they have no more chance of surviving this battle –
nay, they have no more chance of *entering* this battle –
than did David's brothers have a chance against Goliath.

Think back to David and Goliath.
Goliath is bigger, stronger, and meaner than anyone else.
No one in all of Israel can tangle with Goliath.
If Eliab, or any of David's brothers, had volunteered to go out against Goliath,
they would have been squashed like a bug.
ONLY David – and David alone – can go out against Goliath.
(Which makes the whole "you can defeat Goliath if you trust God like David did"
utterly ridiculous!)

Do you think that you could have succeeded where Peter failed?

No.

No one will be able to go with Jesus to face Goliath's master.

ONLY Jesus – and Jesus alone – can go out to fight against sin, death, and the devil.

2. “The Spirit Is Willing, but the Flesh Is Weak” – Jesus in the Oil Press (v36-46)

a. The Passion of the Son of God – the First Prayer (v36-41)

1) “My Soul Is Very Sorrowful, Even to Death”

³⁶ *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane,*

Gethsemane means “oil press” – a fitting place for Jesus to pray.

He has come to the Mount of Olives to prepare for his death.

And so he tells the disciples:

and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ *And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.* ³⁸ *Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death;*

Jesus takes on the refrain of Psalm 42:

Why are you downcast O my soul?

Jesus soul is downcast.

Jesus has reached the agony of Psalm 42.

He remembers the procession –

just a few days before he *had led* the procession into Jerusalem.

But now the waves and breakers engulf him,

and he is overwhelmed by the torrents of judgment

that are coming crashing down upon him!

“Remain here and watch with me.”

Literally, “stay awake.”

Jesus had told them in the Olivet Discourse, “stay awake.”

Will they be wise virgins? Or foolish?

They are gathered in the oil press – on the Mount of Olives –

Do they have enough oil for their lamps?

And Jesus says to them, “remain here and stay awake.”

The idea is that they must be watchful –

just like he had said they should be watchful concerning “that day.”

Because for Jesus “that day” has arrived.

2) “Thy Will Be Done” – the Son with His Father

³⁹ *And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”*

Jesus addresses God as “My Father” –
a highly unusual (and probably unique) practice.
You can find plenty of Jews referring to God as “our Father” –
after all, God had said that Israel was his firstborn son!

But no one *addressed* God as “my Father.”

In Mark’s gospel he says, “Abba, Father.”

You may have heard preachers say that the Aramaic, “Abba” is like a child saying “Daddy.”
That is *not true*.
Certainly little children called their father ‘abba’ –
but so did grown children,
and for that matter, disciples would address their rabbis as ‘abba.’
It is *simply* the Aramaic word for “Father.”

As many have pointed out,
“The term conveys the respectful intimacy of a son in a patriarchal family.” (France 584)

But now the Son of God addresses “my Father” and asks,
“if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”

Is it possible that God would do things a different way?
Is it possible that God would now, at the last minute,
change the plan of salvation?

Sometimes we get so used to the history that we know,
that it takes on an aura of inevitability.

What if the British had won the Revolutionary War?
What if the prophet Mohammed had been run over by a camel on his way to Mecca?
What if Luther recanted at Worms?

What if the Father changed the plan?

What we see here is that until this moment
there is nothing inevitable about the cross for Jesus.

After all, God had told Abraham to sacrifice his own son.
And yet, God provided a ram at the last minute in place of Isaac.

And yes, Jesus knows that *he* is called to die and be raised from the dead.

But we know from the previous chapter
that the incarnate Son does not know the hour of “that day,”
which indicates that the incarnate Son
does not know everything that the Father knows.

Will this turn out like Abraham?

Is God going to let Jesus go all the way to the cross –
and then rescue him, as he provided the ram as a substitute for Isaac?

If it be possible,

Let this cup pass from me.

The cup is a familiar image of wrath and judgment from the OT.

Jesus understands that the cross will be his cup,
where he will be given the wrath of God to drain to the dregs.

And so Jesus asks his Father to remove the cup.

Isn't there any other way?

The role of Isaac is hard to fill.

Especially because Jesus seems to understand full well
that this time there will be no substitute –
because he *is* the substitute.

He is the one who will die in the place of Isaac.

If only there was another way to redeem his people!

But such is the love of God for humanity – for his whole creation –
that he sent his only begotten Son to die in our place.

And so Jesus says:

nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

What you see here is not a battle between the “human will” of Jesus
and the “divine will” of Jesus.

While there *are* two principles of willing in Jesus
there is but one who wills.

There were never two voices in his head –

it was not as if the human will was saying “run away”
and the divine will was saying “stick to it!”

That would be the Nestorian heresy of dividing Jesus into two Sons.

Rather the one person of Jesus willed according to the principles of willing
found in his two distinct natures.

If you think about it, he had to have two distinct principles of willing:

it does not pertain to the divine nature to will to eat.
If he had no human principle of willing he would have starved to death!

And certainly, the ability to fear, to tremble, to be “sorrowful even to death”
is something that very definitely pertains to his human nature.
There is nothing in his divine nature that would cause him to tremble before death,
because death can have no power over the eternal Son of God –

except that the eternal Son of God has taken to himself a true humanity.

And so according to the properties of his human nature,
and according to the genuine weakness of the mortal flesh that he took to himself,
the eternal Son of God speaks honestly to his Father:

nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

When we speak of Jesus alone – we must remember that he was never alone –
at least not in Gethsemane.

The disciples were sleeping – but the Father and the Spirit were with him –
at least, for now!

3) “Watch and Pray” – the Weakness of the Disciples

⁴⁰ *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with me one hour?”* ⁴¹ *Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

They had testified just hours before that they would stick to him –
but now they cannot shake the slumber from their eyes.

The spirit indeed was willing –
they wanted to stay awake and be watchful –
but the flesh is weak.

This phrase gets used so often to describe the struggle with temptation!
And that’s fine – but there are two things that we need to understand about this:

- 1) Jesus is referring to the disciples in their current state.
The disciples have not yet received the Holy Spirit.
They do not watch – they do not pray –
because they are still dominated by the flesh,
they are still in the flesh,
and the flesh is weak.
- 2) But after the Holy Spirit is poured out,
the disciples *will* watch and pray –
they will become a new man and will be both willing *and able*
from now on to live for Christ.

So you need to understand that “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”
is no longer an excuse for giving in to temptation.

It is still true that the flesh is weak.

But, as Paul says, “You are not in the flesh, but you are in the Spirit,
if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.” (Romans 8:9)

The key is to understand the uniqueness of Christ.

The sleepiness of the disciples should be seen as the power of this age.

Darkness has fallen upon the earth.

The flesh cannot escape the fatal lullaby of this age.

Watch?

Stay awake?

Israel never has before!

And against the hypnotic powers of Morpheus (the god of sleep)
no one can forever stay awake.

b. “Thy Will Be Done” – the Second Prayer (v42-43)

⁴² *Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”* ⁴³ *And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.*

Jesus says nothing in response.

Even so, we should not condemn the disciples for their soporific stupor.

They are not the Spirit-empowered Son of God!

Jesus is preparing to do battle against the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

And so the powers are sending forth all their efforts to stop him.

Only one who is God-in-the-flesh –

only the Christ could endure that night awake.

Sleep has clouded their wits –

they are dazed and drowsy,

and speechless they watch him walk away again.

c. “The Hour Is at Hand” – The Third Prayer (v44-46)

⁴⁴ *So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.* ⁴⁵ *Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on.^[e] See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.* ⁴⁶ *Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”*

Our Lord Jesus does not condemn the disciples.

He had called them to watch and pray –

that *is* what they were supposed to be doing –

but he is not surprised that they failed.

You can hear sadness in his voice,
but not surprise.

Indeed, it might be better to translate this,
“Go back to sleep – it’s all over.”
It’s too late.

The hour has come.

He knows full well what is coming –
he has received his answer.

The Father is not going to release him from his mission.

There will be no ram caught in the thicket.
He has come to take the place of Isaac,
to fulfill the calling of Israel, the suffering Servant of the Lord.

The hour has come.

And only now do we hear that *one* of the twelve had stayed awake!
The power that sapped the strength of the eleven
had energized Judas and the murderous mob that accompanied him.

3. “Betrayed into the Hands of Sinners” – Judas, One of the Twelve (v47-56)

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.”^[f] Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

In the dark it might be easy to mistake one Galilean for another.

The kiss – the normal greeting of a disciple and his master –
is an ironic close to Judas’ relationship to Jesus.

The holy kiss – the kiss of peace –
will be a regular part of Christian worship for centuries after,
and every time the kiss of peace is practiced,
there is always the threat of betrayal –
always the danger of apostasy.

⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant^[g] of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

We know from John's gospel that it was Peter with the sword.

But Jesus rebukes him.

After all, Satan was right!

Remember the temptation of Jesus? (back in Matthew 4)

Satan had said "he will command his angels concerning you"!

Satan was right.

All Jesus had to do was ask, and "my Father" would deliver him!

At any point Jesus could have pulled plug and walked away.

He didn't *have to do this!*

But if he did not do this, then "how should the Scriptures be fulfilled?"

Jesus does not quote one particular passage here.

After all, it is the *whole* of the Scripture that is fulfilled here.

Everything leads up to *this*.

And Jesus knows that he is headed for all the worst parts of Psalm 88.

⁵⁵ *At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me.*

⁵⁶ *But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled.*

This is why we sang Psalm 88.

"You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a horror to them.

I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow." (88:8-9)

Jesus sings Psalm 88 as "my life draws near to Sheol.

I am counted among those who go down to the pit."

"Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me.

They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together." (88:16-17)

And so Jesus is left alone with his captors.

Truly, "you have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;
my companions have become darkness."

Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

Only the Christ can walk this path.

Jesus alone.

No other flesh could endure the path that the Word incarnate now treads.

No other man could accompany him on this road.

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!