

Jesus Faced the Will of God

Mark 14:32–42
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Commentators emphasize two major points in today's text. One is theological or christological, viz, that it shows the real humanity of Jesus. He wasn't a dispassionate ghost or vision in human form, but a real man who struggled with the realities of sin and judgment. And this is critical because, if Jesus' humanity wasn't real, he couldn't save us. As our catechism says, "the same human nature which has sinned should make satisfaction for sin" (HC 16).

The second point commentators emphasize is soteriological, i.e., having to do with our salvation. It asks why this passage is so important and what it teaches us about Jesus' work for sinners. What did his prayer contribute to our standing before God?

Without ignoring the theological question, today we'll focus on the soteriological one. I want us to go through our text line by line and marvel at our Savior's great love for his people.

Gethsemane and Jesus' Disciples

Two weeks ago, we noted that Jesus led his disciples out to the mount of Olives sometime after instituting the Lord's Supper. Today's text says that they eventually arrived at a place called Gethsemane, an olive grove at the base of this mount. The word *Gethsemane* literally means "oil press," suggesting that it was where the Jews extracted precious oil from their olive crop.

But why did Jesus take his disciples to this place? Our text suggests at least two good reasons. His immediate concern was to pray. That's what he said to his disciples in verse 32: *Sit ye here, while I shall pray*. Gethsemane was a nice place for quiet devotions. It was a quiet garden, where one might enjoy quality time alone with our heavenly Father. In fact, Gethsemane was one of Jesus' favorite places to pray. John 18:2 says that he *ofttimes resorted thither with his disciples*. We get an even better sense of how much time Jesus spent there and how much he enjoyed it in Luke 21:37, which says that Jesus taught in the temple during the day and then spent the night in the mount of Olives.

Jesus prayed frequently during his ministry, but our text emphasizes that he prayed especially fervently on the night of his arrest. He knew what was coming and that he had to prepare for it. Likewise, we should greet every challenge and major decision with prayer.

Another reason Jesus took his disciples to Gethsemane was to face his adversary head-on. You see, the eleven disciples who remained with Jesus weren't the only ones who knew where he was. So did Judas Iscariot. A minute ago, I read part of a verse from John 18. The full verse says, *And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.* Judas knew Jesus would be in the garden and led a band of 'thugs' with lanterns and swords to arrest him. Mark's account ends with Judas on the way. Jesus said, *He that betrayeth me is at hand.*

The role of the disciples at Gethsemane is also important. Jesus took his eleven to the garden and told eight of them to sit, probably somewhere near its entrance. Then he took the remaining three — Peter, James and John (who had been alone with Jesus at other key points in his ministry) — further into the garden and had them wait in a different place. Verse 24 gives the reason for this: he wanted them to watch or be alert. But what were they to watch? Were they to look out for wild animals? Maybe they were to warn Jesus if Judas were to show up since Jesus told him to do what he had to do. No, before Jesus told his three disciples to watch, he said, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death.* Jesus wanted his disciples to witness the great agony of soul he would experience that very night as he prepared for the suffering of the coming hours. To see this, they had to be close. Verse 35 says that Jesus *went forward a little* from them, i.e., he wasn't far away. Luke was even more explicit. He said that Jesus *withdrew from them about a stone's cast* (Luke 22:41). The disciples were close enough that they could see what Jesus was doing, even in the dark of night. It's also likely that they heard him. Luke 22:44 says that he *prayed in an agony and more earnestly.* And Hebrews 5:7, which may describe our Lord's garden prayer, says, *who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.*

The better we understand our Savior's suffering, the better we'll appreciate it. We emphasize it on Good Friday, but it should be a constant subject of meditation for every child of God. Jesus bore the curse for us, suffering in body and soul to bear our sins. That's an enormous deal. It reveals the vastness of his love and compassion. But we should also never forget that he overcame suffering and death by rising again from the dead, and his resurrection gives us unshakable hope.

Jesus' Prayer

Next, we have Jesus' prayer, a prayer borne out of wonder and sorrow, as we see in verses 33 and 34. The content of his prayer comes in the next two verses. Mark wrote, *And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

What do we learn here? First, we see Jesus' posture. According to Luke, he first knelt, as was common practice among the Jews (Luke 22:41). Then, according to Mark, he *fell on the ground*. And finally, Matthew wrote that he fell on his face, i.e., completely humbling himself before his Father.

The Bible doesn't prescribe a specific posture for prayer, but the posture we use often says something about our attitude. Jesus fell on his face because he threw himself entirely on his Father's mercy. He pleaded with his Father to take this cup from him, if it were possible. In the Old Testament, the cup often represented God's righteous anger being poured out on sinners. Psalm 75:8 says, *For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them*. James and John, not knowing what they were saying, once said they could drink from this cup. Not with Jesus, they couldn't. But Jesus drank all of it for us.

Jesus prayed about the removal of this cup three times. We don't know exactly what he said the third time, but the first two show him wrestling with and coming to grips with his Father's will. Yes, being a man, he had to learn to embrace the will of God. Hebrews 5:8 says that, *though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered*. He first prayed, *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt* (Matt. 26:39). He pondered whether there was another way to fulfill his messianic mission besides suffering and death. If there had been, he would have preferred it, as any man would have. Then he prayed a second time, *O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done* (Matt. 26:42). By this time, he had accepted the inevitability of drinking the cup of God's wrath and fulfilling his Father's will.

There's a sense, then, in which Jesus' death wasn't completely voluntary. As a man, the prospect of death, especially one in which he would bear the wrath of God and the outrage of sinners, horrified him. We can't imagine what he endured. And yet, our Lord's death was also completely voluntary because he had committed himself to his Father's will. David wrote about his determination in Psalm 40: *I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart* (v. 8). And during his earthly ministry, our Lord affirmed the same. He said, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work* (John 4:34); and, *For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me* (John 6:38). And the apostle Paul described him as a servant who humbled himself even to the point of death (Phil. 2:8).

The cup Jesus would drink from was horrible because of what it represented. We've already seen that it was a cup of God's wrath. That alone would have been enough to make him sweat great drops of blood, as Luke wrote (Luke 22:43). But there was more that made this cup so frightening to him. It also represented sin and necessity of the perfectly sinless and pure Son of God bearing the full

weight of our offenses on the cross. That's what he came for. John the Baptist said, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). Later, Paul wrote, *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* (2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, the one who dwelt eternally in the incomprehensible glory of his Father was counted the worst of sinners and endured severe punishment for sins he hadn't committed. He bore all our adulteries and thefts and blasphemies. How could such a thing be? Only the greatness of God's love for his people can explain it.

Because Jesus suffered all this for us, he now invites us to drink a different cup — the cup of salvation and blessing. David wrote about this cup in the twenty-third Psalm, affirming that his cup was so full that it was running over. And in Psalm 116, the psalmist committed himself to drinking that cup. He wrote, *I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD* (v. 13).

The gospel invites us to drink from the cup of salvation — bought with the precious blood of God's only begotten Son and yet free to everyone who believes in him. This invitation says, *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.... Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David* (Isa. 55:1, 3). The sure mercies of David come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Disciple's Sleep

Every time Jesus went into the garden to pray, he returned to find his disciples sleeping. How could they do this? Even though they had had a long day, wouldn't the drama they were witnessing have kept them awake? Before they fell asleep, they saw Jesus agonizing in prayer with his face on the ground. They witnessed him wrestling with the reality of sin and anticipating God's wrath being poured out on him. With all of this, it's inconceivable how they could have fallen asleep.

They fell asleep because they didn't really understand what was going on. Jesus told them to watch and pray, but they hadn't been watching or praying. They might not have known what to watch or pray for. According to verse 40, when Jesus found them sleeping the second time, they didn't know how to answer him. And the third time Jesus found them sleeping, he sort of acknowledged that they had to sleep but then told them it was time to move on. *It is enough*, he said, *the hour is come; behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners* (v. 41).

What happens when we fail to watch and pray? We not only fall into temptation (a period of testing), but we often fall to temptation (i.e., give in to it). That's why we need to keep our eyes on

our Savior, glorying in his person and work, and trusting him alone to keep us secure every second of every day.

The last verse of our text also helps us to understand our Savior's work. Jesus said, *Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.*

Why is this helpful? Because it specifies who did what. Jesus didn't wait for Judas and his rabble to tackle him. No, he said, *Rise up, let us go.* He made it his mission to face his betrayer. He had so fortified himself with doing his Father's will even knowing what it meant, that he sought out his enemy.

As with the wilderness temptation, most Christians assume Jesus was just minding his own business when Satan assaulted him. But this isn't the right way to look at it. The devil didn't ambush Jesus; Jesus went out into the wilderness to conquer him. And in today's text, Judas didn't have the upper hand. He wasn't in control. Our Savior was. Everlasting life was in his hands all the time.

Today's text assures us of Jesus' true humanity. It shows him struggling with doing God's will and what it meant. But it also assures us that he's faithful. Having conquered temptation and sin himself, he'll be with us in all our trials. He promises to do so: *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need* (Heb. 4:15–16). Amen.