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# “Your Will Be Done”

*“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will’”  
(Matthew 26:39).*

Late Thursday evening, Jesus descended from Jerusalem to a private garden, an orchard of olive trees at the foot of the Mount of Olives, to prepare Himself to be the atoning sacrifice for the world’s sin. In the middle of the night, this prayer vigil threw Him into the greatest struggle He had ever faced. At the beginning of His ministry, He had met the devil for a season of temptation. That cosmic conflict was fierce, energy-sapping, and historic; but throughout its forty days of trial Jesus was confident, in control, and victorious. However, the battle that raged in this garden was far more intense. It could well be termed the most significant struggle of time and eternity.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke used six of the strongest phrases in the Greek language to depict the sufferings that Jesus underwent. He told His disciples that He was “deeply grieved” (Matthew 26:38); He also said that His grief had brought Him down “to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). Mark reported that He began to be “very distressed” and “very . . . troubled” (Mark 14:33). Luke said, “And being in agony He was praying very fervently”; “His sweat” became “like drops of blood” and was “falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44).

Leaving eight of His apostles at the gate of the garden, Jesus took Peter, James, and John—three apostles with whom He had a special affinity—and walked among the olive trees. The garden must have been dark and desolate. After telling His three followers that He was exceedingly sorrowful and needed them to watch and pray, He left them. Going beyond

them the short distance that one could toss a stone (Luke 22:41), He began to pray. Matthew described the scene by saying that “He went a little beyond” the place where He left the three disciples (Matthew 26:39). Luke’s account goes on to say that He “knelt down” under one of the trees (Luke 22:41). Mark added that He soon bowed down “to the ground” (Mark 14:35), and Matthew put the final touch on the scene by saying that He “fell on His face” before God (Matthew 26:39). The accounts by these three synoptic writers imply a gradual increase in the intensity in our Savior’s praying: At first, He knelt down and prayed. As the burden upon His heart grew heavier, He bowed down to the ground. Finally, being overwhelmed with the weight of His sorrow, He fell on His face before His Father. Can anyone imagine the Son of God being so heavily laden with sorrow that He would be driven by its weight to fall on His face before God?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke gave a summation of what our Savior said to His Father under the branches of those olive trees during what must have been the world’s darkest night. He engaged in three periods of prayer, punctuated by two returns to the three apostles to receive their comfort and to give them a gentle reminder to be praying with Him and for Him. As we meditate upon these three prayers, we enter into the holy heart of our wonderful Savior. Let us not only witness but also partake, to some degree, in His sufferings for our sins.

*First, we see Jesus praying.* He brought His great struggle to God. This scene depicts, for

all who read the New Testament to see, His humanity, His oneness with the human race. Only man prays. The stars, the moon, the sun, the animals of the fields and forests, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea cannot pray. They do the will of God without thought and without choice. Of all God's creation, of all of His living creatures, only man prays. He thinks, reasons, believes, and intentionally looks up to God with his prayers of thanksgiving, petitions, and supplications. When he comes to life's dark valleys, the crushing, overwhelming struggles, he alone can fall upon his face before God.

Jesus is the second member of the Godhead, yet He prayed to His Father as His Servant who was in desperate need of His strength. He approached His Father for communion, sustenance, and a new understanding of what He must do. According to Mark, under this darkened sky, He cried out, "Abba! Father!" (Mark 14:36). "Abba" is an Aramaic word that suggests closeness and intimacy with God. Jesus laid His great burden before His God in prayer. Jesus, as the perfect Man, prayed.

*Second, we see a human reasonableness in His prayers.* Jesus focused upon the awful cost of redemption, which was only one day away. He asked His Father, "Do You know of any other way?" He was fully and completely man, yet fully and completely God the Son. As He saw the cloud of suffering billowing up—as He saw the approach of the awful hour for Him to bear the guilt of the sin of the world—His human side asked, "Is there any other way to do this?" He had already seen the crucifixion coming toward Him, and He had accepted it. Much earlier in His ministry, He had said to His disciples, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:27, 28a). With His question, Jesus was not shrinking back from the cross. He had not changed His mind about it. He, the Son of Man, was facing all of its horrid dimensions with a human reasonableness. The words of J. W. McGarvey are worth considering in connection with our Lord's question:

For want . . . of a better expression, we may say that from the time Jesus entered the garden until he expired on the cross the human in him

was in the ascendant; and "being found in fashion as a man," he endured these trials as if wholly human. His prayer, therefore, is the cry of his humanity for deliverance.<sup>1</sup>

*Third, His prayers show us that He was seeking the will of God, regardless of the cost.* He had never intended to avoid God's eternal purpose. In the first period of His prayers, He implied that He did not come into the garden to pursue His own wishes, but to offer Himself for the fulfillment of God's will. Again, consider the words of J. W. McGarvey:

The words "if it be possible," with which [His prayers] open, breathe the same spirit of submissive obedience which is found in the closing words. Reminding the Father of the limitless range of his power, he petitions him to change his counsel as to the crucifixion of the son, if his gracious purposes can be in any other ways carried out.<sup>2</sup>

How long the Lord Jesus remained prostrated on the ground absorbed in this anguish of soul, we do not know. He referred to it as "one hour" (Matthew 26:40), but He must have used the word figuratively. However, it is clear that He uttered this petition (Matthew 26:39) at the very beginning of His time of supplication in the garden. Later, during His second prayer, He said, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Doing God's will was foremost in His mind from start to finish. If the will of God had nothing in it but a cross covered with agony and blood, Jesus was ready to accept that.

From the beginning of His praying to the end of the hour, He exhibited an underlying, unshakable resignation to God's eternal purpose. Jesus did use the "if" of possibility at the opening of His prayers: He said, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matthew 26:39b; emphasis mine). Alongside the "if," however, He used the "yet" of reality: He said, "Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39c; emphasis mine). We sometimes use "if" in an attempt to bargain with God. We say, "If You provide another way, then I will accept it; if You do not, I am through." Jesus did not use

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<sup>1</sup>J. W. McGarvey and Philip Y. Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel or A Harmony of the Four Gospels* (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1914), 686.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 687.

“if” in this way. We use it to demand our own way; Jesus used it as He sought God’s will. Jesus said “yet” to declare that—whatever might come, sweet peace or a bitter sword—He would do what God wanted Him to do.

In this prayer vigil at the midnight hour, the heart of Jesus was laid out for the entire world to see. We watch Him suffer on the cross as nails are driven through His flesh. We hear Him cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). We listen to His six other utterances from the cross, but we do not see His inner choice to lay Himself before God’s will quite the way we see it in these prayers. After announcing to His Father in prayer that He would resolutely yield Himself to God’s plan, regardless of what it might involve for Him, He never looked back. As God’s suffering Servant, He moved on into the night of the arrest and trials, the scourging in the early morning, and the crucifixion at 9 o’clock Friday morning. He left the garden to be obedient, trusting, and faithful to His heavenly Father.

The lesson we learn from our Savior in the garden is that the will of God must be our prior-

ity. By example, He leads every disciple to say, “My Father, not my will, but Yours be done.” God’s will towers above everything else; there can be no rival. Regardless of the circumstances or the consequences—regardless of what I must do, how I must do it, or how long I will have to do it—His will must be my first ambition. Though the night may be dark, though the pain may be unimaginable, though the humiliation may be unbelievable, doing the will of God is the only way to peace and to eternal life.

Eddie Cloer



*Perhaps it was only the shadow of the cross that made Gethsemane so dark and so full of sorrow. The guilt of the world was pressing its full weight down upon Jesus’ heart; the shame of the cross was before His eyes. The cup He was to drink was the great sacrifice that would atone for the sins of the world. The wrath of God was in that cup; the pains of hell were in it; every sin we have ever committed or ever will commit was in it. To look closely at that cup must have been the most overpowering terror that the human heart could ever know.*