

Wanting What He Wills

Mark 14:32-42

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One of my favorite scenes from the Andy Griffith show is when Barney Fife fights hard to stay awake during a sermon.

Have you ever tried to pray but went astray because you fell asleep? Have you ever had a hard time staying awake in church? I can't imagine that ever happening here! During our Growth Group on Wednesday night, I made the point that it's easy to fall asleep when we're called to do spiritual battle. After all, the disciples fell asleep and missed what Jesus was going through at Gethsemane. I emphasized the importance of not falling asleep during sermons. With impeccable timing, Rick Widdel spoke up and said, "*That's more on you, then it is on us!*"

I take comfort in the fact that at least one person fell asleep even when the Apostle Paul preached according to Acts 20:7-12. Some may think I'm long-winded but the Apostle Paul preached an all-nighter. During his sermon Eutychus "*sank into a deep sleep,*" fell out of an open third-story window and died. Amazingly, God used Paul to bring him back to life! Paul helped him get back upstairs and then continued to preach until morning. My guess is Eutychus stayed awake for the rest of the sermon.

As we continue in our verse-by-verse journey through the Gospel of Mark, we're going to a nighttime prayer meeting with Jesus. The disciples have just celebrated their last meal with the Master and are making their way across the Kidron Creek and up the Mount of Olives. It's dark and yet the moon is full and casting shadows as they walk (Passover always falls on the night of a full moon). Turn to Mark 14:32-42.

There are a number of different scenes in this narrative.

1. A Place of Support. Look at verse 32: "*And they went to a place called Gethsemane.*" Jesus wanted his disciples to be with Him so He took them to an Olive Garden (no, not the new one by South Park) called Gethsemane, which means, "*oil-press.*" Scholars believe that olives were crushed at this place to make oil. Luke 22:39 indicates that Jesus spent a lot of time here: "*And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives,*

and the disciples followed him.”

It’s interesting that as the suffering of our Savior begins; He wants to be with his friends. We don’t think much about this but Jesus had a need for friendship and fellowship. Jesus tells eight of the disciples to **“sit here while I pray.”** We could call this the ministry of presence, where we don’t have to say anything but simply spend time with someone while he or she is suffering.

2. A Place of Sorrow. Mark 14:33 tells us that Jesus **“took with him Peter and James and John.”** Jesus brings these three guys, who made up the inner circle, deeper into the garden with Him. He desired their companionship but He was also preparing them as future leaders. Peter had just boasted that he would never bail on Jesus and James and John had brazenly claimed that they could drink the cup that Jesus would drink (10:39). Jesus now gives them a chance to back up their words.

Next we read that Jesus **“began to be greatly distressed and troubled.”** Let’s unpack these descriptive phrases.

- **Greatly distressed.** This can be translated as *“extremely alarmed and appalled.”* The idea is that Jesus was shuddering in distress and in terrified astonishment. He is literally beside Himself and horror-struck.

- **Troubled.** This refers to being, *“overwhelmed, in extreme anguish, heavy-hearted and depressed.”* The idea is that He was *“distracted to the point of separation”* from others. Hebrews 5:7 says that Jesus **“offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death...”** The Savior is experiencing the awful intensity of Psalms 55:4-5: **“My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.”**

In verse 34, we see one more description.

- **My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.** We get our word *“periphery”* from this word; it means, *“to be surrounded by overwhelming sorrows.”* His anguish threatened to extinguish His life. Psalms 88:3: **“For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws**

near to Sheol.” Isaiah 53:10 says: **“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief.”** Isaiah 53:12 tells us that the Savior **“poured out his soul to death.”**

In the midst of this sorrow, Jesus asks the three to **“remain here and watch.”** This is a command in the present tense. The word **“remain”** means, *“to abide”* and **“watch”** has the idea of being alert to what the Lord is doing and where Satan is attacking. It literally means, *“to give strict attention to something.”* This may have reminded the disciples of the parable in the previous chapter when the doorkeeper is commanded to stay awake. Beth pointed out that according to Exodus 12:42, the Passover was to be **“a night of watching.”** In essence, they’re urged to not pull a Barney Fife during the prayer time.

3. A Place of Solitude. The eight disciples are somewhere near the entrance to the garden, the three are allowed to go deeper, but then Jesus leaves them and verse 35 says **“And going a little farther, he fell on the ground...”** Luke adds that it was a **“stone’s throw away.”** Jesus is now alone and falls on His face in reverence and awe before His heavenly Father. He alone can bear the unmitigated wrath of a holy and righteous God. I’m reminded of Psalms 38:11: **“My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off.”**

When people in the Bible were serious about seeking God, they often hit the ground. According to Genesis 17:3 Abraham **“fell on his face”** before entering a covenant with God. We read in Numbers 16:22 how intense Moses and Aaron were when they interceded on behalf of their people: **“And they fell on their faces...”**

W.A. Criswell tells of the first time he heard Billy Graham say, *“I feel God’s call on me to be an evangelist.”* Dr. Criswell encouraged him and said, *“Let’s pray about this matter.”* After he led in prayer, Criswell recalls, *“When I opened my eyes, there was Billy Graham flat on the floor, with his face on the carpet in prayer. I knew right then that God was going to use that young man in a special way.”*

4. A Place of Struggle. The second half of verse 35 reveals the Savior’s struggle: **“and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.”** When Jesus sees and senses the sum total of all the sin in the world and the resulting penalty and punishment that awaits Him, He wants to take

a pass.

In the midst of all that Jesus is going through, I love how He addresses God in verse 36: ***“And he said, ‘Abba, Father, all things are possible for you...”*** He’s literally saying, *“Daddy, Father.”* *Abba* speaks of relationship and *Father* is a term of respect. Romans 8:15 says that we receive the Holy Spirit who makes us children of God, ***“and by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”***

In the middle part of verse 36, Jesus gets specific in his request: ***“Remove this cup from me.”*** The word ***“cup”*** in the Bible was figurative for God’s blessings (Psalm 23:5) and was also used to describe the Almighty’s wrath (Psalm 75:8). The cup contained joy and judgment, redemption and wrath. Jesus is saying, *“If there’s another way, let me do it that way.”* As Jesus looked into this “cup,” what did He see? Why did He ask for it to be removed?

Pastor C. Matthews suggests that there were at least five things that Jesus saw in the cup.

- **Sin.** As Jesus is moving toward the cross, He realizes that the punishment for all the terrible trespasses, awful iniquities and sordid sins of the world is about to be poured out on Him. This was something we can’t even imagine. Isaiah 53:6: ***“...and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*** Jesus knew that 2 Corinthians 5:21 was about to be fulfilled: ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”***

One of my favorite songs is *In Christ Alone* written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty. We sing it often at Edgewood; the most recent was just two weeks ago. Several years ago, two denominations wanted to publish this song but wanted to change the words because they didn’t like this line: *“Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.”* Instead, they wanted to soften the idea of propitiation by changing the words to: *“Till on that cross Jesus died, the love of God was magnified.”* Friends, we don’t have the liberty of removing the atonement from the gospel message. The song writers stood strong and refused to allow the revision!

If the cross is not preached, the gospel is not proclaimed! There are way too many felt-need messages being preached from pulpits in America. That alone explains why there are so many on the fringes of evangelicalism.

- **Suffering.** Jesus certainly knew that He was about to suffer, but in the Garden it suddenly became very real. Even though He knew what was coming, the anticipation of the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain was almost unbearable. Isaiah 51:22 calls the cup the “*cup of staggering.*” The full fury of the righteous and undiluted wrath of God was about to be unleashed on the One who was sinless.

Incidentally, while I found the Passion of the Christ movie very moving, I think there was an overemphasis upon the physical pain that Jesus endured. Jesus certainly suffered incredibly, but what He absorbed in his body was nothing like what happened when He took the sins of the world upon Himself. In Scripture, the details of the scourging and the crucifixion are restrained but the Gospel writers spend a lot of time describing the agony of Gethsemane.

In the location of the olive press, Jesus was feeling the squeeze of sin and suffering. Luke 22:44 says, “*And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*” I have never prayed with that kind of intensity. Most of my prayers are pretty perfunctory compared to that.

- **Sacrifice.** The shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida this past week was absolutely awful. In the midst of the senseless killing, Aaron Feis, the assistant football coach, according to the football team’s Twitter account, “*selflessly shielded students from the shooter when he was shot. He died a hero.*” He absorbed the bullets so boys and girls could be saved. He sacrificed himself so others could live.

As He looks deeper into the cup, the Savior sees beyond the sin and the suffering as He recognizes Himself as final sacrifice. John 18:1 says that when they went to Gethsemane, they crossed over the Kidron valley. The Brook “*Kidron*” basically was the drainage ditch from the temple. During the Passover, commentator William Barclay estimates that as many as 250,000 lambs were slain. The blood of

those lambs would drain down through this brook into the Jordan River. On Passover night, when Jesus was going to Gethsemane, He stepped over that brook, and He could see it colored red with the blood of lambs. He knew that in a few hours, He was going to be slain as the final sacrificial Lamb of God, His blood satisfying the righteous demands of God's justice.

- **Separation.** As He continued to look into the cup, Jesus saw something that caused Him to shudder in horror because He was about to face separation from His Father when all the sins of world would be piled upon Him. We see verbalized in Matthew 27:46: ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** This cup was filled with bitterness and was almost unbearable. Revelation 14:10 describes God's wrath as ***“poured full strength into the cup of his anger.”*** The Bible Knowledge Commentary says: *“The full impact of His death and its spiritual consequences struck Jesus and He staggered under its weight. The prospect of alienation from His father horrified Him.”* If Jesus trembled at the thought of separation from the Father for just a short while, what must it be like for the lost to be separated from the Father for eternity?
- **Salvation.** But there was more. In the bottom of the cup, was something sweet. Ultimately, Jesus knew that He had to drink the cup in order to save us from our sins. This is why He came. Mark 10:45: ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

As Jesus struggled with what was in the cup, the disciples snoozed. Look at verse 37: ***“And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour?’”*** I wonder how Peter felt when Jesus singled him out. Notice that Jesus refers to him by his old name ***“Simon,”*** which means, *“to hearken or listen.”* He was certainly not listening to the Lord and not acting like Peter the Rock. He had reverted to sleepy Simon who couldn't fight off the Sandman. In Jonah 1:6, the prophet Jonah was called ***“the sleeper”*** instead of the spokesman for God.

Peter had just declared that he would never deny Christ, and now he was drooling on his pillow and wiping “sleepies” from his eyes. In fairness, the disciples were under emotional strain too. They had eaten a big meal and it

was probably one or two o'clock in the morning.

In verse 38, Jesus gives a command to the drowsy disciples: ***“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** The idea is that we are to *“keep watching and praying so that we don’t cave or compromise.”* I’ve always found 1 Corinthians 16:13 to be a challenge to me as a man: ***“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”*** Guys, I hope you’ll join me at the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference in Davenport on Saturday, March 24. Darryl Strawberry, former Major League Baseball player, will be one of the speakers.

It’s interesting how this prayer prepared Jesus to fulfill His purpose. We see this in John 12:27: ***“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.”*** In a similar way, we will only fulfill our purpose to the extent that we pray.

5. A Place of Submission. As Jesus anticipates the cup of sin, suffering, sacrifice, separation and salvation, He verbalizes His submission to the Father’s plan in the last part of verse 36: ***“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”*** The phrases ***“not what I will”*** and ***“but what you will”*** are both emphatic. Jesus is resolutely and voluntarily lining up his will under the Father’s will. Isn’t his the ultimate goal of prayer? We come to God with our desires, our longings, our preferences and then we must say, ***“Yet not what I will, but what you will.”***

His prayer is slightly different the second time according to Matthew 26:42: ***“My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.”*** The first time He prayed, ***“If it be possible,”*** and now He prays, ***“If this cannot pass.”*** In his first request he longs for the cup to be taken from Him; now He mentions drinking it. In the first plea, He says, ***“Yet not as I will”*** and in the second He declares, ***“May your will be done.”***

When we pray, ***“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,”*** we’re really saying, ***“Abba Father, take control of my life and do what you will for your glory.”*** Prayer is not getting God to do my will. It is bringing me into conformity with His!

Henry Blackaby says that instead of asking God to bless our plans we need to commit ourselves to His. Figure out where God is moving and join Him in that. We could say it like this: *“God show me your plans and bless me as I make them mine.”*

There are two elements to Jesus’ prayer that are instructional for us.

- HE EXPRESSED HIS OWN DESIRE - *“This is what I want!”*
- HE SUBMITTED HIS DESIRES TO THE FATHER - *“Not My will, but your will be done.”*

I like how Spurgeon puts it: *“Let it be as God wills, and God will will that it shall be for the best.”*

6. A Place of Sleep. While Jesus is surrendering, the disciples are sleeping. Look at verses 39-40: *“And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.”* This is similar to what happened when these three guys were on top of the mountain. According to Luke 9:32, they almost missed the demonstration of God’s glory because they were sawing logs: *“Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake they saw his glory...”*

They had nothing to say to the Savior because no explanation seemed sufficient. They were mute in the face of Majesty. In fairness, Luke 22:45 tells us that they were sleepy because they were filled with sorrow.

Look now at verse 41: *“And he came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.’”* The word **“enough”** was frequently used in a commercial sense and meant, *“paid in full”* or *“the account is closed.”*

7. A Place of Strength. After surrendering, Jesus has been strengthened according to verse 42: *“Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”* Jesus went into the garden very sorrowful and now emerges strengthened. Before He finished His prayer, we know that the Father sent a heavenly messenger to His Son. Luke 22:43 says, *“An angel from Heaven appeared and strengthened Him.”*

When Jesus got up from this place of prayer, He had a spirit of resolve and assurance that He was ready to go to the cross. Jesus is going out to meet His foes, not as victim, but as Victor.

The drowsy disciples are given two commands – *Rise and Go*. I'm reminded of Proverbs 6:9: ***“How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?”*** We could say it like this: *Get up and go because it's go time!* That's the same command He gives to us today. We're to awaken and start witnessing. In Revelation 3:2 Jesus speaks to sleepy saints in Sardis and in the Quad Cities: ***“Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.***

The process of prayer in Gethsemane is instructive for us when facing trials or temptation.

- Look for support from others.
- Pour out your sorrow
- Find some solitude
- Struggle with God openly
- Submit to His will
- Fight off sleepiness
- Then you will find strength

In an article by Pastor J. Sidlow Baxter called, *“The Day my Emotions Joined Me in Prayer,”* Baxter confessed how his prayer time and Bible study had started to fade. He realized that a big part of him didn’t want to pray so he decided to give himself a talking to. Here’s how he explains it...

I found myself asking Sidlow Baxter: *“Are you going to let your will be dragged about by your changing emotions?”* And I said to my will: *“Will, are you ready for prayer?”* And Will said, *“Here I am, I’m ready.”*

So Will and I set off to pray. But the minute we turned our footsteps to go and pray all my emotions began to talk: *“We’re not coming, we’re not coming.”* And I said to Will, *“Will, can you stick with it?”* And Will said, *“Yes, if you can.”*

So Will and I, we dragged off those wretched emotions and we went to pray and stayed an hour in prayer. If you had asked me afterwards, *“Did you have a good time?”* do you think I could have said yes? No, it was a fight all the way!

The next morning came. I looked at my watch and it was time. I said to Will, *“Come on, Will, it’s time for prayer.”* And all the emotions began to pull the other way and I said, *“Will, can you stick with it?”* And Will said, *“Yes, in fact I think I’m stronger after the struggle yesterday morning.”* So Will and I went in again.

The same thing happened - rebellious, tumultuous, uncooperative emotions. If you had asked me, *“Have you had a good time?”* I would have had to tell you with tears, *“No, the heavens were like brass. It was a job to concentrate. I had an awful time with the emotions.”*

This went on for about two and a half weeks. But Will and I stuck it out. Then one morning during that third week I looked at my watch and I said, *“Will, it’s time for prayer. Are you ready?”* And Will said, *“Yes, I’m ready.”*

And just as we were going in, I heard one of my chief emotions say to the others, *“Come on, fellows, there’s no use wearing ourselves out: they’ll go on whatever we do.”*

That morning we didn’t have any experience of wonderful visions with heavenly voices and raptures. But Will and I were able with less distraction to get on with praying. And that went on for another two or three weeks. In fact, Will and I had begun to forget the emotions. I would say, *“Will, are you ready for prayer?”* And Will replied, *“Yes, I’m always ready.”*

Suddenly one day while Will and I were pressing our case at the throne of the heavenly glory one of the chief emotions shouted, *“Hallelujah!”* and all the other emotions suddenly shouted, *“Amen!”* For the first time the whole territory of James Sidlow Baxter was happily coordinated in the exercise of prayer and God suddenly became real and heaven was wide open and Christ was there and the Holy Spirit was moving and I knew that all the time God had been listening.

I close with these words from Max Lucado.

“The battle is won. You may have thought it was won on Golgotha. It wasn’t. You may have thought the sign of victory is the empty tomb. It isn’t. The final battle was won in Gethsemane. And the sign of conquest is Jesus at peace in the Olive trees. For it was in the Garden that He made His decision...He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you.”

And that’s nothing to sleep through!