

“Victorious Surrender”

Matthew 26:36-46

February 21, 2021

Scripture Reading: Matthew 26:36-46

In the Garden of Gethsemane, we find Jesus at the most defining moment of His earthly life. I cannot say that Gethsemane is more significant than the cross, but I don't think can say that it is less significant either. Jesus' surrender to the Father's will in Gethsemane is so deeply and intimately connected to the efficacy of His death and the triumph of the cross, that we cannot rightly interpret the cross but through the lens of Gethsemane.

It is here in Gethsemane that the cross will be ultimately settled in Jesus' heart. Having won the battle within, Jesus will never look back or to the side. He will not be deterred or distracted by the abuse or lies of His enemies. He will simply advance quietly and purposefully to the cross with utter resolve.

As we enter Gethsemane, we tread on sacred ground. It almost feels as though we have intruded on the most intimate moments of Jesus' life. So much so that I hesitate to even make personal application to our lives, lest we merely use this text and make it about us. We dare not trivialize anything in Gethsemane. And yet seeing Jesus here, has radical implications for what it means to follow Jesus. And in fact, Jesus Himself will call His disciples (and us) to an essential response.

Just as the triumph of the cross was accomplished through Jesus' surrendered will to the Father's, so we must follow Jesus with resolute obedience by surrendering our will to Him.

No spiritual victory is won without a resolved heart of surrender to God's will. We will never gain victory over temptation and the weakness of our flesh apart from a Spirit-empowered resolve to embrace God's will. Apathy

always fails. Confidence in the flesh (self) always fails. Spiritual victory is always and only won by surrender of our will to God's. This is true, not only in our lives, but in Jesus' as well.

What's at stake in Gethsemane? Everything! All of redemption hangs on what happens in the heart of Jesus in Gethsemane. Here's why: the only way for Jesus' death to be an effective sacrifice to redeem sinners is for His life (and therefore His sacrificial death) to be completely void of any trace or shadow of sin—not just in His external behavior, but in the deepest desires and motivations of His heart. That means never acting on a will or desire contrary to God's will and desire—perfect obedience, perfect righteousness that is acceptable to a good and holy God.

In Gethsemane, Jesus faces what is the greatest test of obedience because it comes with the greatest cost of suffering—not mere physical torture, but bearing the weight of hell for millions of sinners as He subjects Himself to the holy wrath of God for our sin. This is what Jesus is referring to when he resolves to do the Father's will by drinking the 'cup' in vs. 39.

In the Old Testament the term 'cup' was often used to refer to the full fury of God's judgment and wrath.¹ For example, Ps 11:5-11 says, *“The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous; He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face.”* Take note here that God's wrath is birthed out of and motivate by His righteousness. He is so intensely good that He exhibits fierce wrath toward evil.

Again in Ps 75:7-8 says, *“But God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another. For a cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; It is well mixed, and He pours out of this; Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs.”*

Revelation 14:10 and 16:19 use the term 'cup' in the same way: *“The cup of His anger”* which contains the *“wine of the fierce wrath of God.”*

¹ Ps 11:6; 75:7-8; Isa 51:19, 22; Jer 25:15-16; 27-29; 49:12; 51:57; Lam 4:21-22; Ezek 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2; cf. Job 21:20; Ps 60:3; Isa 63:6; Obad 1:16

The unspeakable mercy of the gospel is that at the cross Jesus drank the full cup, the full fury of God's holy and righteous wrath for underserving sinners. And it is that cup Jesus faces in Gethsemane. Will He drink it?

Let's look at Gethsemane in 3 stages:

1. **Jesus seeks His Father's strength in the battle for obedience** (Mt 26:36-38).

[36-38] One of the things we see in Gethsemane is the excruciating agony caused by sin as can only be fully known through the perfectly righteous eyes of Christ. We are accustomed to a heart that is distant from God. But Jesus had only known the perfect intimacy and joy of a relationship with His Father for all eternity—the Sunshine of His Father's face, with never a cloud or even a shadow of sin to obstruct the Father's perfect love, acceptance, and exuberant favor.

And now in Gethsemane Jesus faces the extreme opposite: the anticipation of God's full fury and wrath against the incalculable severity and volume of our sin. This led to an anguish of soul in which Jesus was "distressed" and "deeply grieved, to the point of death." Have you ever been overcome by distress and sorrow? It only takes one severe trial to lay a crushing weight upon my soul, yet Jesus felt the weight of all sin's essence and effects for millions of sinners. And it is in this moment of excruciating torment of mind and soul, that Jesus prays for the strength of His Father—the very One who wills that He walk this severe path. So intense of Jesus distress and anguish of soul, that Luke 22:44 tells us that He sweat drops of blood.

Notice that Jesus is facing an internal battle, a battle within the soul. And it is essential that He not lose this battle. If Jesus were to be overcome by His emotions and lose the battle against distress and sorrow, He would not

² "He...fell on His face and prayed" (39): a posture of humility, dependence, and intimacy in which Jesus pours out His soul and lays His life before the Father (ESV Study Bible, pg. 1882).

³ It's right for Jesus to desire God's deliverance from interrupted fellowship with the Father. It is right for Jesus to submit Himself to God's will, regardless of its severity,

execute the Father's will, accomplish the plan of redemption, or provide mercy to sinners. And so He wages this war with the weapon of prayer and the strength He receives from His Father.

And we must do the same. We must seek God's strength to oppose and overcome any emotions that oppose God's will. It's ok (and at times essential) to live in opposition to how you feel. This is why Jesus tells His disciples to keep watch with Him (38). Watch for what? Vs. 41: "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." You must win the war within by the power of God's strength.

2. **Jesus submits to his Father's will as the means to obedience** (Mt 26:39-44).

[39-44]² We don't typically think of the victories being won by means of surrender, but that is precisely how Jesus won the greatest victory. He won the victory over sin and death by *surrendering and submitting Himself to God's will, however severe*. Three times Jesus prayed, resolving to embrace His Father's will as supremely essential, regardless of its severity.³ This is what it means to be a follower of Christ in Gethsemane: "Father, I will do Your will—I'm resolving now to do Your will in this matter—however severe, however costly. What aspect of God's will do you need to resolve to do today? Without following Jesus in Gethsemane, you cannot walk in His cross-won victory. You cannot walk in the victory of the cross and compromise your integrity at the same time. You cannot walk in the victory of the cross and pursue lustful impurity at the same time. You cannot claim the victory of the cross while clinging to bitterness or resentment toward someone. You can't experience the deliverance of the cross and persist in rebellion against your parents simultaneously. You cannot be free in Christ and go on belittling your spouse. Everything in you will fight to follow your flesh and to be loyal to how you feel, but you must crucify your flesh. You must die to sin. You must pray for Spirit-empowered strength to walk in the liberating power of God's will.

and it is right for Jesus to sacrificially endure suffering to extend mercy to sinners. Thus, Jesus surrenders not in the sense of giving up sinful independence, but rather surrendering to the painful prospect of perfect obedience.

Here in Gethsemane we see that *the most essential purpose of prayer is to bend our will to God's*. Prayer is not about getting God to do what we want. It's primarily about getting ourselves to do what God wants. Prayer is about getting our independence, selfishness, and pride out of the way so that God is free to work powerfully in and through our lives. Even when we pray for God's provision, we are surrendering our self-sufficiency to acknowledge that we are dependent and that He is sufficient. That's what faith does—it puts God in His proper place. Beloved, we need to learn to pray with Jesus in Gethsemane. We need to learn to bend our will to God's. We need to make a choice between spiritual victory or taking a nap.

Vs. 40: "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So you men could not keep watch with me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, [you have noble aspirations] but the flesh is weak." I won't be too harsh on the disciples because I am they. But notice what's at stake. Surrendering our will to God's is the key to obedience. And until we get to that point, we are vulnerable to the false confidence of our flesh which will cave under pressure. And we must not think that we can sleep one hour and be victorious the next.

The disciples gave in to the weakness of their flesh, napping when they should have been praying for God's strength to be steadfast in the face of temptation. And what was the outcome? Vs. 56: "...then all the disciples left Him and fled." How did this happen, when Jesus had clearly warned them earlier that evening about falling away (31-35) and now repeatedly urging them to be vigilant in prayer (38, 41)? The disciples failed to move their point of reference in life from themselves to God. Trace it back:

- The disciples who denied Jesus were the disciples who drifted off to sleep in Gethsemane (Mt 26:56, 41, 43).
- The disciples who drifted off to sleep in Gethsemane were the disciples who over-confidently argued with the Lord that they would never fall away even if it cost them their lives (Mt 26:31-35)).
- These disciples who vowed to follow Jesus at all cost were the same disciples that were indignant with Mary for anointing Jesus' feet

with costly perfume because they were distracted by material concerns and earthly values (Mt 26:5-13).

- These disciples, distracted with early values, are the disciples who were consumed with lust for personal gain and positions of status when Jesus was attempting to reveal the reality of his coming death (Mt 20: 17-19).
- It was one of these disciples, who rebuked Jesus when He first foretold His death (Mt 16), to whom Jesus replied: "*Get behind Me Satan...for you are not setting your mind on God's interests but man's*" (vs. 23). In other words, they were still living in the mindset of the Garden of Eden (where Eve in essence said, "not Your will but mine be done") rather than the Garden of Gethsemane (where Jesus said, "not My will but Yours be done"). Which garden are you living in?

The disciples' fell because they failed to surrender their will to God's. It's important to see that Gethsemane cannot stand alone as a mere event in our lives. Olympic metals are not just won in arenas. They are won on mundane mornings when athletes drag themselves out of bed before dawn. Gethsemane must become the pattern of our lives as it was for Jesus. John's gospel captures the pattern of Jesus' life so clearly:

- John 5:30--*I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*
- John 6:38--*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*
- John 12:49--*For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak.*

Jesus never lived independently of the Father. Gethsemane was not an exceptional moment in Jesus life. It was the climactic moment of an entire life lived in submission to His Father's will. And what was the result of Jesus' submission and surrendered will to God? It was the courageous resolve of active obedience. This is the 3rd stage of Gethsemane...

3. **Jesus serves His Father willingly with the resolve of obedience** (Mt 26:45-46).

[45-46] The whole outcome of Gethsemane hinges on this phrase: “let’s go!” Where is Jesus going? Is He fleeing? Was He ultimately overcome by distress and sorrow? No! He has submitted His will to the Father’s. He has defied the anguish of His humanity. Jesus goes to meet Judas who is betraying Him. He goes to meet those who will arrest Him and crucify Him. John 18:4 captures this moment in time, with utter clarity: “*Jesus, therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth...*” From this point on, there is a settled determination in Jesus soul in which He will never look back or look to the side. Regardless of what others do to Him, he cannot be deterred from His mission. He walks straight into the storm to do His Father’s will and drink the cup. With surrendered heart, Jesus goes to claim the victory of the cross! And that victory is for all who will look to the cross, see the severity of God’s love to purchase mercy for sinners and say to Jesus, “not my will, but yours be done.”

There is so much to see in Gethsemane. Let’s just take a step back and survey what we see. *In Gethsemane we see:*

- The excruciating agony caused by sin. And we see it most clearly from the righteous eyes of Christ.
- The severity of the Father’s love in the essence of the Father’s will for Jesus to drink the ‘cup’ of judgment and wrath our sin deserves.
- Obedience to God’s will as supremely essential, regardless of the cost.
- That we must oppose any emotions that oppose God’s will.
- Our need to be delivered from suffering is secondary to our need to be delivered from temptation.
- That spiritual victory is won in surrender and submission to God’s will.
- That the essence of prayer is bending our will to God’s.
- The weakness of human flesh (disciples).
- A vigilant call to watch and pray to not fall to temptation.
- That a surrendered will to God results in the resolute action of obedience.

Most importantly we see the essence of the gospel and what it means to follow Christ in Gethsemane. The essence of the gospel is that Jesus never forfeited God’s will but obeyed it fully with perfect righteousness and drank the full cup of the fury of God’s holy wrath against our sin at the cross so that we could receive mercy and be reconciled to God, a reconciliation that erases our shame, guilt, and condemnation and replaces it with the fullness of God’s loving favor.

So how do you take hold of that grace? You renounce your old life in Eden where you have persistently said, “not Your will but mine be done.” And in repenting of your self-will, you turn to Jesus and say, “not my will but Yours be done.” That’s what it means for Jesus to be Lord. And all who submit to Him as Lord are saved by His loving mercy.