

When you go through a difficult time, who do you want close beside you? Say you're going through the breakup of a relationship; or you've gotten a very bad grade on an assignment, or you got cut from the team or didn't get the job you'd placed your hopes in. Mom's, who did you want in the birthing room with you? Guys, who do you call if you got laid off or fired? If you face some painful treatment, who would you ask to accompany you? If you're going into a difficult meeting who do you ask to pray? Or upon receiving news of the death of a loved one, who's the first person you would call? It's very valuable to have people we can depend on during difficult times.

Now let's turn it around. How have you done when called upon to be that person of support? How have you responded to news of a friend's breakup or their bad grade or that they got cut from the team or didn't get the job? How would you do beside that woman giving birth? What would you do to support a friend who got laid off or fired? Would you be able to sit with someone in the waiting room as they faced painful treatment? Would you remember to pray for someone who had a difficult meeting the next day? How might you respond to a call from someone whose loved one has just passed away?

Sometimes we experience disappointment in difficult times. People we thought would be there aren't there. Or we disappoint someone who looked to us for support. We may not know how we would respond until we're in those situations. But we get to observe how Jesus and his three closest disciples handled this in one of the most revealing passages of Scripture about Jesus humanity and His need for support. The last time we were in Matthew, it was Thursday evening of Holy Week. Judas left the gathering in the upper room to get the chief priests and their guards so he could betray Jesus to them. The remaining 11 disciples and Jesus leave the last supper and begin to make their way out of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley and over to the Mount of Olives.

On the way, Jesus prepares the remaining 11 for their coming desertion. He reveals they will all fall away from him that night. They completely deny it, especially Peter who declares he will never fall away. Jesus then predicts that before the rooster crows, Peter will deny him three times. Peter vows he will die before denying Jesus.

Then they arrive at the Garden of Gethsemane, a familiar place to Jesus and the disciples. Therefore, Judas would know about it and could lead the chief priest's soldiers to Jesus' location. Jesus is not running away. But He has a few hours before the arrest happens.

Jesus will face one of His most difficult times of His life. How will Peter, James and John do at standing with Him? Let's find out in Matthew 26:36-46 in the Bible. It's on page 701 in the Bible in front of you.

Matthew 26:36-46 (ESV) (Insert by Easy Worship)

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." ³⁹And 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."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? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴²Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Jesus and the 11 arrive at this place called Gethsemane which means "oil press." So this must have been some sort of garden among the olive groves where olive oil was prepared. He instructs 8 of them to sit in one location while he goes to another location to pray. But Jesus brings Peter, James and John with him to His prayer spot. He completely lets down His guard. We have seen the bold and challenging Jesus through chapters 21-26. He deliberately and intentionally challenged the religious leadership. We have seen Him make visual and verbal claims to be the Messiah.

But now we discover what's going on inside of Him. Matthew tells us Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled. He tells Peter, James and John, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch with me." Jesus faces the most difficult moment of His life up to that point. He asks His friends to remain with him and watch or stand vigil with Him. It's like someone who's dying asking you to stay with them until they're gone.

Why does Jesus choose these three? Well, they had been given the privilege of sharing in some very special moments of His ministry. They were the only ones who witnessed him raise a little girl from the dead in front of her parents. They witnessed Jesus in all His glory during the transfiguration back in Matthew 17. They will play significant roles in leading the early church. But they were also the ones who boasted most loudly that they wanted to be the power brokers in Jesus' kingdom. James and John asked to sit on Jesus' right and left. Peter declared he would never deny Jesus. So here they are with their Lord at his darkest hour. He asks them to remain with him and watch.

Then He goes to pray. Matthew tells us Jesus fell on His face. This was the posture of absolute humility. No standing prominently in the marketplace to be seen by others. No flowery language or deep poetry. Jesus lays before His Father in complete dependence.

Then He utters words that should shake us. "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." So two questions are raised by this prayer.

What is the cup? A cup served as symbol of someone's destiny or something that was coming into that person's life. So In Psalm 23, when the Psalmist says "my cup overflows," he rejoices in a cup of blessing, the overwhelming presence and comfort of the Lord even when facing great trial. What is the cup here? It could be the suffering of going to the cross. But there were many others who were crucified and had to drink that cup. This cup is necessary for God's will to be accomplished. No one else could drink it. So it had to be something unique.

I think the strongest explanation is that the cup was God's infinite judgment and holy wrath upon sin. The Old Testaments prophets talk about the cup of God's wrath. Isaiah 51:17 - *Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.*

Jeremiah 25:15 - *Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.*

Revelation 14:9-109 "And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb". If this is the correct interpretation, drinking this cup would require Jesus to bear that judgment and dreadful wrath of God on the cross. Yes, the cross and everything leading up to it would be horrible. But no one else would actually bear God's judgment and like this; especially being innocent.

It needs to be drunk if sinners will be pardoned. No one else has ever or will ever face something so terrible. So He prays, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Remove the cup of your terrible wrath that will overwhelm me on the cross.

But then comes the second and much deeper question. How can He even pray this prayer? This is God the Son. He's the Second person of the Triune God. He's just prayed at the last supper that we would all be one just like He and His Father are one. He set His face towards Jerusalem bravely moving toward this dreadful moment. He's told the disciples over and over that he must be handed over and killed. And now He prays that this cup be removed?

Christian commentators have struggled with this throughout the entire history of the church. One states "It's a bit uncomfortable to have your God and Savior agonizing and praying not to go to the cross." Another writes "His prayer reveals a natural human shrinking from the awful death that lay ahead of him." Another writes *"In every normal person there exists the urge to continue to live, accompanied by an aversion from suffering and death. Jesus, who was completely Man is infinitely more sensitive in His feeling of repugnance to unnatural things."*

We come to the limits of our understanding in this prayer. We can't fully comprehend how Jesus, as fully man and fully God faced this moment. But he uttered this prayer and it was preserved for us in the Scriptures. It reveals some of the depth of His struggles. Perhaps God included it in the Scriptures to communicate to us the truth about ourselves, the depth of our sin and the high cost of our salvation.

But then comes the second phrase of his initial prayer. "Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will." Jesus does not ask that God change His plans. But He wonders in prayer if it is possible that the plan must include this terrible cup. Remember back in Matthew 4 when Satan tempted Jesus. He tried to get Jesus to take a short cut and thereby nullify God's plan of redemption. Well Satan may have been working overtime in this moment, whispering maybe that "You doesn't have to do this. There is an easier way. Would a loving Father really command you to go through something this horrific?"

Jesus finishes His first session of prayer. He has struggled and agonized and laid it out before His Father. Now He goes back to His friends to receive their encouragement, consolation and perhaps insights gained from their own time of prayer with the Father. But what does He find?

Peter, James and John are asleep. I can't even imagine how tremendously disappointing this must have been for Jesus. Here He's at His most vulnerable and desperate moment depending on His friend's support. They can't even stay up and watch with Him. I tried to think of times in my life where something similar has happened. I remember when I thought someone was with me and it turned out they were against me. Or I thought that there would be someone to

take on that difficult challenge but in the end, I had to do it alone. Or I had depended on someone to do something and they came up with some lame excuse for why they didn't get to it. But I still had my family in those times. I still had at least one friend to turn to. But Jesus had no one in that moment except His Father. Together, they were working through this most difficult moment of Jesus' life.

Notice, Jesus does not let the disciples off the hook. Yes it was late. Yes they were exhausted physically and emotionally. But so was He! He also reveals something about His prayer life. "Peter, you couldn't watch with me one hour?" What is Jesus implying there? According to Jesus, an hour is a very short commitment to pray. We complain or moan about praying for 15 minutes.

Jesus then says "Watch and pray so that you may not enter temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Remember the Lord's Prayer. "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Jesus acknowledges that these three declared their intention to remain loyal to him. But they didn't translate their intentions into action. They needed to stop thinking so highly of themselves and turn to the Lord so they wouldn't fall into temptation. They were so weak like us.

Jesus, trusting that they will now watch and pray with him goes back to pray a second time. But this time the prayer is different. "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." There's maybe a little wondering about the necessity of the cup. Maybe, along with magnitude of God's judgment and wrath about to be poured out on Him, Jesus shrunk back from actually being crucified. To think that He would be the one who actually be nailed to wood must have sent shudders down His spine. The Romans often crucified people at major crossroads to send a loud and clear message that any rebel would suffer the same fate. They left the bodies on the crosses for days and weeks. Jesus would have seen this. To think, he would suffer like they did for something he didn't do.

Yet, there's no question in this prayer. There's no appeal. It's more a comment; even an affirmation. "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it; your will be done." There's no more talk about "this cup possibly passing." It's about God's will and that God's will be done.

If part of the Christian life involves imitating our Lord including imitating His prayers, I wonder how much we take to heart this prayer? I just can't get my head around "name it and claim it prayers." I can't understand people commanding God to do something in prayer. How do we justify that in light of this? Jesus' prayers blend a request with

an acceptance that the request might not be granted. He questions the limits of God's will. He does not attempt to break outside of them.

In the book Packer on the Christian life, there is one section where the author lists J.I Packer's Signs of Spiritual Maturity. One of them goes like this – "Spiritual maturity is a greater patience and willingness to wait for God and bow to his will, with a deeper abhorrence of what masquerades as bold faith, but is really the childish immaturity, that tries to force God's hand." Do you see what He's saying there? Waiting on God and submitting to His will shows greater maturity than the apparently bold faith that commands God to act.

"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it; your will be done." He returns again to Peter James and John. They have fallen asleep again. They have not learned the discipline of spirit over flesh. This time, Jesus just lets them sleep. He goes back to pray again the same thing as before – "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Then he returns to again find them sleeping. But now he must wake them up. So He declares "See, the hour is at hand. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see my betrayer is at hand."

Earlier this day, in Matthew 26:18, Jesus instructed the disciples to go into Jerusalem to find a man in whose home they would eat the Passover. They were to say to him, "The Lord says, 'My time is at hand.'" But now in verse 45 "the hour is at hand." The very hour – the very moment when Jesus will be betrayed has come. Perhaps Jesus has watched the troop of temple guards being led by Judas cross the Kidron Valley coming to the garden with torches. Now he rises to face them.

What did Jesus do in the garden?

Jesus moves from appeal to acceptance of His Father's will. Jesus and His Father have gotten through the past few hours together. Without the help of His disciples, Jesus has moved from questioning the necessity of cup to readiness to drink the cup. He will allow Himself to be arrested, tried, crucified and killed. One commentator notes that from this time on, Jesus enters into a passive state. He allows others to do to Him what they will because this is all part of God's bigger plan.

What have we seen happen here?

Jesus' agony emphasizes to me the serious and devastating effects of sin. Sometimes we like to sanitize sin so it doesn't look so bad - but close up its horrible. Yet His yes means we don't have to pay the price for it. We don't have to

drink that cup. We may have to drink other cups in life. But the hardest cup has already been drunk by our Savior.

And if we have nothing else, we still have Him. He is more than enough.

We must recognize, ponder and meditate on the magnitude of our sin that required a great and costly sacrifice by the Father and the Son. We must put our trust solely and completely in Christ and His Work for salvation. If you are not a Christian, you have not personally trusted Christ to protect you from God's wrath. You might think you'll be okay because you think the universe works by rewarding those who do more good deeds than bad deeds in their lives. But it doesn't work like that according to the Bible. Ultimately, only in trusting Christ protects you from the holy just wrath of God upon your sin. That's why the Gospel we talk about is Good News. We don't have to drink the cup. We are forgiven. We are declared not guilty. So we Christians get to live life with the good news that we are no longer condemned. We no longer face God's wrath.

But if you don't trust Christ and you die, or He comes back, you will face God on Judgment Day. You'll have to drink the cup that Jesus already drank. Friend, will you ponder and consider at look at the in depth struggle Jesus went through here? Then will you turn from trusting yourself to get to God and throw your dependence on Him and all He provided for you through the cross and His death?

Once we have trusted Him and His work for salvation, we must trust Him for the power to live the Christian life – to pray that we will not fall into temptation – to pray for strength so our willing spirit may over the weakness of our flesh to live as He wants us to and do what He calls us to.