

INTRODUCTION

Over the last couple of weeks, we have established not only the fact that Jesus withdrew consistently to be in prayer with His Father, but also the way that He taught His disciples to prayer. This was something that seemed to sustain Jesus' ministry; it was very important to Him... so it should be important to us. It's one of the ways that our religion, Christianity, is distinct among other religions - we have a personal relationship with God the Father, an "Abba" type relationship, one that we press into His available presence to ask that His will be done in our lives.

But that's also a scary prayer. I sometimes find myself guilty of only praying when times are hard, when I need something from God. But if I am trying to live a life like Jesus', I need to establish a rhythm of prayer like He did where I'm not just asking for something... but I'm exulting Him, praising Him; all while being fully authentic with Him.

Today, our sermon title is "Talking to God." For many of us, this is an intimidating concept. It's easy to feel like there is an expectation or requirement on how "well" we execute our prayers, but that's simply not the case. Our Father, or "Abba", wants to talk to us like a father would want to talk to their child. And through Jesus' exemplifying of frequent prayer, He was able to remain authentic while simultaneously submitting Himself to the Father's will in one of His hardest moments; I want to argue that by following Jesus' example of talking to God in our own lives, that we too can remain authentic while submitting ourselves to God's will for our lives... even in OUR hardest moments.

PRAYER

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

If you would go ahead and turn there, our primary text today will be Mark 14:32-42. While you get to that spot in your Bible app or physical Bible, I want to paint the scene for you. Jesus has spent the last few days with his disciples around the Mount of Olives, just a stones throw from Jerusalem. He has entered through the Eastern gates of Jerusalem on a donkey, held stark conversations with His disciples, and thrown over money tables in the Temple, among other things. Just before our passage today, we read about Jesus' infamous last supper with his disciples. They eat, drink, and enjoy each others company. A disciple named Judas leaves the dinner to betray Jesus to the Pharisees; and as the dinner winds down, Jesus walks to a garden called Gethsemane with his disciples alongside Him. Let's pick up in Mark 14:32-42 together:

"And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." ³⁷ And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. 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. ⁴² Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." -Mark 14:32-42

This is the beginning of the most horrific story in human history: Jesus' trial and crucifixion... although death would not hold Him.

This story takes place in a garden called Gethsemane. It was most likely a small olive garden, as named in the Gospel of John. Olive gardens such as these had presses where the olives would be pressed three times... the first press for extra virgin olive oil, the second press for virgin olive oil, and the third press for olive oil; it would make sense that this is the very location where Jesus would be pressed three times through prayer before the longest night of His life. This was a place where Jesus would frequent with His disciples. It was known by all, including Judas, which explains how Judas knew where to lead the ones who would arrest Jesus... in the cover of night where evil can be hidden.

We see Jesus here "greatly distressed and troubled"; He would even personally say that His "soul [was] very sorrowful, even to death." Jesus clearly understood the wrath of God that He was heading towards on our behalf; this wrath and separation from His Father would have been daunting and extreme. Can you imagine? Have you ever experienced separation from the most important person in your life? How must this anticipation felt to Jesus, heading down a path that led to Him shouldering our shame and the Father turning away from Him for a time... the pain that we run so hard from is the pain that Jesus runs toward.

What do you do when experiencing hardships, to the point of great distress and trouble? I often find myself reaching for the nearest thing to numb out and distract. I have noticed that I do that by jam packing my schedule and going from one thing to the next. I build in no time for silence, no time to process, no time to connect to my Father... and as I've noticed myself doing that, I've begun to try to purposely build in extra space in the morning or the evening. I wonder what it is for you? But what does Jesus do when He is feeling this way? He prays.

"And going a little farther, he 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 for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." -Mark 14:35-36

When there was no where else to go, when His soul was in great sorrow, Jesus leaned back on the frequent habit He had of praying. He fell on the ground and prayed the hour might pass from Him. Imagine that imagery for a second. He threw Himself down because He felt the weight of what was to come. He cries out "Abba!" This is what a Hebrew child might cry out to their Father when they are beckoning for their attention or need their help. A couple weeks ago, I got the privilege of going to Israel. Our tour guide, Nadav, a wonderful, joyful man, led many parts of our trip. But I didn't get to truly see his heart until his 7 year old daughter was sitting at my dinner table, petitioning her father to pay attention to her by calling out "Abba! Abba!" Do you believe that you have that relationship with our Father in heaven? Do you petition Him as a child would, beckoning for the love He so desperately wants to give you?

But Jesus doesn't stop at "Abba"; He follows it by saying "Father." Jesus was petitioning His Abba, but submitting to His Father. You see, He knows His Father, His Abba, because He has spent time with Him! He knows that what He says after is true... "all things are possible for you." Jesus is refilling His sponge with the Father, even in the midst of pain. He knew from experience the importance of this action.

But our prayers are often void of faith. We dare not petition our Father for something because we are afraid He won't grant it... or dare I say, there's a part of us that doesn't believe He can. This cup that Jesus is asking to be removed is the ultimate cup of suffering. It's the very thing that will separate Him, even momentarily, from the Father. A cup of wrath that could only be endured by the Messiah Himself. Jesus, however, being who He is, experiencing the relationship He had with His Abba, knowing what is coming, says a remarkable thing...

"Yet not what I will, but what you will."

You see, all the time that Jesus spent with the Father in the good times and the hard times had reaffirmed in His heart what He always believed and therefore could confidently say... yet not what I will, but what you will. How many of us can say that confidently? Lord, I pray for your will to be done in my life... as long as I stay in Dallas. God, would your will be done in my work life... as long as I'm making six figures. Friends, it's a scary place when we pray a legitimate prayer of submission to the Father's will for our lives... it may lead to our very death. And yet, we often find ourselves in the place of the disciples in the garden.

³⁷ And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? ³⁸ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." -Mark 14:37-38

Jesus is drawing a comparison here between the spirit and the flesh. The spirit represents our desire to pray and to submit to God; the flesh is our earthly, often selfish, desires of our own control, comfort and will. It's not that we don't want to keep watch and remain in prayer, but our flesh is weak. We can find ourselves bending to our desires and what our own idea of success is. But does weak flesh mean we stop practicing prayer? May it never be! Running to prayer and therefore being in relationship with God is what sustains us through the crucible that is either happening to us or will happen. Whether you are getting older and experiencing the challenges of that; or being in a younger stage of life and experiencing the crucible of that, we must understand our flesh is weak and therefore we need to be sustained by the Father through prayer and His will. Maybe you're married and experiencing the challenges and joys within... or you're single and experiencing those joys and challenges - we must spend time with the Father to be prepared to engage with Him in authenticity and submission as Jesus was.

This pattern of prayer and engagement with the disciples would go on two more times. Jesus would pray to the Father, cry out for intercession, and ultimately submit. The disciples would fall asleep. And that lands us on the beginning of the ultimate walk to Jesus' death...

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. ⁴² Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." -Mark 14:41-42

You see church, I believe that Jesus' conversation with the Father was strengthened because "Jesus Himself frequently withdrew to the wilderness and prayed." (Luke 5:16 NET) I believe that Jesus' submission to the will of the Father allowed Him, in the middle of pain we could never comprehend, to pray things from the cross like...

"...Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do..." -Luke 23:34

"...My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" -Mark 15:34

"...Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" -Luke 23:46

Jesus was led by the will of His Father; the will of His Father was to die. For you. For me. It was to endure the cross for the joy set before Him. It was to experience the penalty of our sin. Jesus knew the will of His Father because He frequently retreated to pray to Him.

Praise God that He didn't stay dead! You see, Jesus knew the will of the Father... not just for Him to remain dead, but to be raised from the dead - to conquer death! We know this good news from the story of Scripture, that after being crucified, Jesus conquered death, rose from the grave, and now allows us to experience justification in God's eyes that can only come through Him. How does this apply to us? Why this story? What lesson could there be for a willing spirit and weak flesh, such as ourselves? Three points:

APPLICATION

1. FREQUENCY OVER PERFECTION

The emphasis throughout Jesus' life was that He prayed frequently. He made time. He got up early when I'm sure He was tired. He stepped away from the busy, demanding nature of the world around Him. He knew that the most important thing was communing with His Father. So should it be with us. This will encourage us in both good seasons and demanding seasons. It will spur us into a greater security in the Father's will for our lives.

Jesus ultimately knew that in order to be sustained, He needed to go to the Father. Again... and again... and again. It was this intimate relationship that allowed Jesus to ask authentically from the Lord and submit to His ultimate authority and will in the hardest moment of His life.

2. OPEN-HANDED EXPECTATION (PASTORAL FOCUS) [ALIGN YOUR HEARTS WITH HIS]

Jesus understood that God could take the cup if He will it - but He ultimately submitted to the Father through it all. We should never find ourselves praying with the expectation that God can and will provide... without an open hand.

You may be in this room today praying for a really good thing... but have you submitted to God's will in the process?

Maybe you are praying for healing. You are expectant of God wanting to heal you and being able to... but you are still holding onto the control of it happening.

Perhaps you are in the middle of addiction. You've prayed for God to relieve you of it in a specific way, but you've never held your hands open during it.

Maybe you want to be used by the Lord in overseas missions, but you have not submitted to God's will in whether or not He wants you to.

Or you might be in this room and you're just praying that the pain stops... you might be tempted to take that into your own hands... but God's will is not for you to do that. His will is for you to submit to Him - which might look like you submitting to Him to stay alive.

We can pray really important, really crucial prayers and miss the aspect of God's will still being the leading force. We can desperately want something, but ignore the aspect that God may have a different plan. I'm not telling you today that God wants you to stay broken, in addiction, or hurt. I believe He wants you to be healed, whole and experiencing His joy. I'm imploring you to continue to pray those authentic prayers... and simply open your hands in the process.

3. PRAYING FOR SUBMISSION

The more frequently we commune with the Father, the more in tune we become with His will for us, the more we will understand the countercultural truth that we too are invited to die to ourselves... to submit to the new life we have in Christ Jesus. What if the ultimate desire of God in your life was the death of your control, comfort and desires and a submission to His will for you?

"Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life^a will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" -Matthew 16:24-26

Jesus knew the will of the Father for His life... it was to lose it for our sake and gain it back for our sake as well. Jesus invites us into this death of our old self on the cross alongside Him and the experience of a new life in Him. The more frequently we commune with the Father through prayer, the more we will understand that we too are called to die... and through that death of our flesh save our life by clinging to the one who submitted first.

This looks like dying to the dream of what we think our family should look like. This looks like submitting our hope of achievements, success and desires to His will for us. This looks like abandoning our longing for popularity, approval and acceptance to get in line with His invitation for our life instead. This may even look like submitting our desire to not exist anymore for His desire for us to live a life with Him despite our pain and suffering. God wants us to suffer faithfully alongside Him, consistently and persistently coming to Him as our Abba and authentically communicating to Him what we desire... all while submitting to His will, even if that will is different from ours.

What if the ultimate desire of God in your life was the death of your control, comfort and desires and a submission to His will for you?

Would you join me today, friends? Would you press in to that prompting you are feeling in your heart to take a further step into submission? Would you be brave enough to pray the same prayer you've been praying today, all while adding the clause that God's will be done instead of yours, even if it contradicts what you think you want?

During this response song, our elders and their wives, as well as staff in this room, will be along the outside of this room. I want to invite you to allow them in... seek one of them out right now and ask for

them to partner with you in prayer for what God has laid on your heart. Be bold; take a step. Let's praise God together for what He has done and is doing; let's engage with Him in prayer in an authentic and submitted way. May it become a way of life for us, as it was for our Christ.