



Matthew 26:31-46
Resisting and Submitting to God's Will

Summary: When God's will seems hard do you resist or submit? As the cross looms ominously on the horizon we separate the separate reactions of Peter and Jesus.

We're in the final 24 hours of Jesus' life. He and the disciples have already celebrated the Last Supper. Jesus told them He is the fulfillment of what they always celebrated as Passover and He has instituted what we now call communion.

He knows He is headed for the cross. He knows His body will be broken and His blood will be poured out. He knows what a terrible challenge it will be and so, He tries to prepare His followers and Himself for what's coming.

Now think about that for a moment: Jesus knows what He's about to face. He knows what the next 24 hours hold. It's not here yet, but it's looming on the horizon, so what does He do? How does He use this time to brace for the impact? Well, if you know the story, you know the answer – He takes a group of friends and He goes off to pray. He spends time preparing His soul for what His heart, mind, and body will experience.

Friends, there is a tremendous lesson for us to learn here about how we face and endure the challenges of life. I don't want to give away any spoilers, but the key is: reaching out to friends and reaching up to our Father. That's what we're going to see Jesus do this morning.

But, we're also going to see Peter and the other disciples fail and flounder because they choose the path of self-confidence instead of reaching out and up. As we read this morning look at the contrast between the response of Peter and Jesus and consider their ultimate outcomes. Jesus encourages Peter to follow His example, to watch and pray, but Peter insists, "I've got this!" and ultimately, he fails. There are two examples to see here, a wrong way and a right way, and next week we'll continue to see where each path leads.

But for now, let's begin with Jesus telling the disciples what lies ahead – the reason why they need to stick together and pray and watch how they respond.

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them [the disciples], "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

*'I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

32 But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

Jesus has tried to tell them several times what lies ahead, but they haven't been able to accept it. It seems impossible. They have seen Jesus do so much, work so many miracles. They just can't accept that He could actually be harmed. And so, they resist the news again:

33 Peter answered and said to Him, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."

34 Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

35 Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"
And so said all the disciples.

How could they be so sure of themselves? Well, you have to remember the whole context here. You have to remember that they just ate the Passover meal together, and you have to remember that Jesus just wrapped Himself in a towel like a servant and washed their feet. You have to remember He served them and prayed for them. Their hearts are stirred, they feel loyal and so they speak impulsively and make rash commitments without thinking things through or asking Jesus for more details.

And when Jesus pushes back on their enthusiasm, Peter doubles down – he seeks to distinguish himself from the crowd – "even if everyone else let's You down Jesus, I'll be there!" And the rest of them nod their head and say, yeah, yeah, me too!

Most of know how this going to turn out, right? In just a few hours they're all going to flee. They'll be spooked when Jesus is arrested and they'll take off into the darkness to protect themselves. Before the sun rises Peter will denies Jesus three times. Everything Jesus said would happen, happens. Their self-confidence may have been well intended, but it was an empty promise. They thought they were better than they really were.

The problem is Peter and the rest of the disciples are ignorant. They're ignorant about the strength of the challenge they're going to face, and they're ignorant of their own weakness.

Jesus is telling them, "This *will* happen. I know it will." And they, essentially, call Jesus a liar. Nope, not going to happen Jesus. I've got this.

Friends, I'm afraid this is true for many of us. We think we're stronger than we really are. We think we'll be fine, we think we should be able to handle this. We think we're ready. But we're not. We should be giving attention to our soul, we should be filling our hearts and minds with worship and the Word, we should be praying. But we find excuses, reasons to put it off, and we tell ourselves, it's OK, we're fine. It's all good.

And then, suddenly, life gets hard, tragedy or trial strikes, and suddenly we're frustrated and fearful and we run off and question God. Most people's theology lets down right when they need it most because they didn't respond to the things God was trying to do to prepare them *before the crisis came*.

Jesus knows difficulty is coming, He tries to share a warning with these men who will also be affected, and they blow Him off with self-confidence and enthusiasm believing everything is going to be OK.

Contrast that with the way Jesus responds to coming events. He who would have been most justified in saying "I've got this," turns to Heaven and to His friends and asks for help.

Matthew 26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there."

Now, just as an aside, I need to point this out because it reinforces something we've been noticing lately, and that is: how many people, often unnamed, used the regular stuff of life to help Jesus.

Most Christians have heard of the Garden of Gethsemane, these events are mentioned frequently in sermons and Bible Studies; the Garden is mentioned in each of the gospels. But as I was preparing for this sermon, I saw something I had never seen or considered before: this garden belonged to someone, most probably someone who lived in the city of Jerusalem. Like most busy cities there wasn't a lot of room for growing crops inside the city, so this was someone's plot of land outside the city.

Now, it wasn't far outside the city, but it was outside the city's walls. It was actually a grove of olive trees – gethsemane is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for oil press, this was someone's olive orchard, where they grew olives and pressed olive oil. And whoever it was, let Jesus use the spot as a place to get away from the noise and crowds of the city.

This is where He prayed His famous prayer that we're about to see, this is where He reaffirmed His submission to do the Father's will, this is where He will soon be arrested and taken into custody leading to His crucifixion, and someone *lent Him the use of the space*. A friend, no doubt, who said "Well, I have a little place outside the city you could use Jesus."

I want us to see this, because it's just like the manger where He was born, the donkey He rode into Jerusalem on, the room where He celebrated the Last Supper, and the tomb where His body will be buried – they all belonged to someone else who said, "I know it doesn't seem like much, but if you can use it Lord, you can have it."

Friends, what do you think serving God looks like? What do you think ministry looks like? Is it being on a platform and speaking? Is it playing keyboard or strumming a guitar and leading worship? Is it traveling around the world for missions work? Writing a famous blog? Or could it be simple things, like opening up your home, like making your stuff available, like meeting needs? Could it be practical stuff? Yes. Yes, it can. And it should.

Bringing someone a meal, lending out your car, mowing a lawn, babysitting or taking some other kid along with your family when you go out – these can all be forms of ministry, and there are many, many other ways you can serve God in what seems like ordinary ways that

are actually very important and valuable in the sight of God. What's your Garden and how can it be opened up for God to use?

Let me leave you with that question to chew on, but let's also look at what happened in the Garden that night with Jesus.

37 And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. 38 Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

39 He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Jesus knows what is coming up, knows what He is facing, knows His own death is imminent. And think about this – it's one thing to risk your life, to jump into a situation without giving any thought to your own safety– to react to an emergency for the sake of saving others; it's another to go into the situation willingly, knowingly, and sacrificially. It's going to take tremendous strength to face the things that lie ahead, and instead of trusting in Himself, in His experience, in His past achievements, instead of doing a little meditation and positive self-talk, Jesus reaches out for friends and reaches up to heaven.

In the face of tremendous affliction, Jesus reaches out to those around Him and reaches up to His Father above Him. Think about that: in the face of tremendous affliction, Jesus reaches out to those around Him and reaches up to His Father above Him

The proper response to challenge, temptation, trial, or test is to say, 'by God's grace and with His help I can face whatever comes my way.' But only with His help, and that help often comes in the form of people around me.

In the case of Jesus, that meant turning to the group of people that He had spent the most time with over the past three years – and from that group, asking a select few, Peter, James, and John to come with Him even closer. We often do this ourselves, you have your broad circle of friends, and then you have those few you are closest with and who know the most. And Jesus opens up to them. He shares His burdens with them.

He says, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."

Listen, I know this is Washington DC and I know some you are hard-chargers. I know you worked hard to get to where you are. And I know you're surrounded by people who work hard to get to where they are. And I know that there are times and there places where you don't feel like you can be open and vulnerable, you can't show any weakness. But listen to me – that's all out there, that's not in here.

In here, we follow the example of the greatest, strongest, manliest man who ever lived, and when He was facing hard times, He opened up to His friends and told the truth about what He was feeling.

Why do you think He did that? And why do you think the disciples wrote it down? Don't you think there's a message here for us?

Brothers and sisters, we are supposed to care about each other. And that means we're supposed to open up and share with one another, and that means we're supposed to listen, help, and care when others open up to us. If Jesus did it, it's OK for you to do it too! We are supposed to be here for each other. Part of my hope for this church in particular is that we would be a safe place for sheep, a safe harbor, a refuge, a place where you refuel, repair, and resupply and then get back out there and face the trials of life.

Because, notice, Jesus wasn't turning to these men and saying get Me out of here, He wasn't asking them to save Him or protect Him, He was simply asking them to be with Him, to encourage Him, and, as we will see in a moment, He was encouraging them to do the same thing He was doing – turning to prayer, to fellowship with God, and with each other, as a source of strength to face the challenges of life.

But that wasn't all Jesus did, He involved His friends, but He also turned to His Father. Look with me at vs 39 where Jesus prays: *“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*

The cup He's referring to is the suffering He's about to endure. It was a common figure of speech for wrath.

This passage has a massive impact on the way I see and understand the world. Jesus knows what's coming. He understands the pain and agony, the stress and pressure that are involved, and He says, “Father, if there's another way, let's take it. I don't want to go through this unless I absolutely have to. But if I have to, I am willing to submit.”

Right here we see the difference between true Christianity and what passes for religion in so many circles. Here we see submission and acceptance along with a humble request.

You see, most people, including many of us, would pray: Father, keep this cup away from me. Save me from what's coming. Get me out of this mess.

And that's OK, but it's missing something important – *if it is possible*, and *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*”

Most of our prayers are some version of “God, give me what I want.”

Jesus prayed, “Father, I am yours.”

And that gets right to the heart of sin. As we have said so many times, sin is doing what I want to do instead of what God requires. But so many times our prayers are filled with what we desire and there is no mention of *“nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”*

As Jesus saw it, the most important outcome was for the Father to be satisfied, for His own will to be done. That was what mattered most. He had His preference, of course, and He stated it – if it is possible, let this cup pass, if it comes it's not going to be comfortable, *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*"

That modifier, that signifier of acceptance and submission teaches us so much about the nature of prayer and the nature of our relationship with God. How many of us have felt let down because God didn't answer our prayer? How many of us have felt like, "well, I prayed about it, and it didn't work?" But what does that mean? What does it mean when we say, I prayed, but it didn't work? Does that mean you didn't get the exact answer you were looking for?

Well, neither did Jesus, but He also prayed, *if it is possible*, and *nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*"

But let's be honest, let's just state the facts – most of don't want to pray that way. We're praying for something because we can't do it all by ourselves, we're turning to God and asking for help, we're asking Him to do something for us that we can't make happen. So, if He doesn't do it, we feel disappointed. The problem is: we don't know why He doesn't answer. The Father did not answer Jesus' request to avoid the suffering of the cross. Why? Because there was no other way, and there was an ultimate good, an infinitely good, outcome to be gained.

Friends, do not judge prayer, and do not judge God, simply on the basis of whether you get what you want. Don't think of prayer as a requisition process or a wish list. Think of prayer as communication with a mighty, loving, God – ask for whatever you want, but ask, even more, for what He says is best and for the strength to be able to accept that.

Jesus knows a terrible trial is coming His way and in order to pass the time until it arrives He seeks companionship and comfort horizontally and vertically – from friends and from our heavenly Father.

Unfortunately, someone is going to let Him down.

40 Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Now, remember, these are the guys who just said they would go through anything for Jesus.

So, what's going on? Well, there is something in all of us that wants to do the good thing, the part that wants to help, the part that wants to be there for people, and then there is the part that says, but I'm tired, it's late, I've already done so much or I'll just take a break and come back again later.

Jesus understands all of that. He knows there is a noble ambition inside of us. He knows the spirit is willing. He doesn't berate them or them belittle them, He doesn't mock them. But He also knows we're human and the flesh is weak. We need sleep. We need food. We get tired. There is only so much stress our bodies can handle.

And that is why He is encouraging them to pray! He's saying in light of what's about to come PRAY. Being with each other and being in the presence of God is the single best thing you can do in this moment because what's about to come isn't just a physical or mental test, it's going to test your soul. Pray to prepare.

Friends, do you see the change we need to make? Do you see the example we need to follow? If there was a better way to respond wouldn't Jesus have done it?

If the answer was to smoke a cigar and share some whiskey, wouldn't Jesus have done it?

If the answer was to just share all His feelings and thoughts with His friends, to talk it all out, wouldn't Jesus have done it?

If the answer was to shove it all down inside and press on with Stoic confidence, wouldn't Jesus have done it?

Was there ever a greater challenge, a greater trial, a greater temptation or test faced by man this? And how did Jesus handle it? By reaching out to friends and reaching up to the Father through prayer. And that's what He's encouraging the men to do as well, to be present with each other and pray.

So, do we do it? Have we learned anything from it? Is this a regular response in our lives? Unfortunately, I think the honest answer, for me, and for all of us, is: we could do a lot better. We're just like the disciples, full of good intentions, but we keep falling asleep.

42 Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." 43 And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

Jesus tries to rally the troops and returns to the Father, praying the same prayer again – 'Father, I don't want to do this if we don't have to, but I'm willing to endure anything You say is essential.'

44 So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand."

Notice the finality and acceptance here. There's no going back only going forward. The crisis is coming, and it's too late to prepare your heart and soul if they aren't prepared yet.

Jesus encouraged the men to pray, to be ready to face what was coming. He set the example for them and tried to include them. If they had followed His example, who knows how things would have turned out?

But this we can know – His was the right response. As the storm crashes down upon them, they will scatter and He will stand strong. He will work for their eternal good while they run off seeking immediate safety.

What can we learn from this?

First of all, *you cannot miss what God is trying to tell us about how to respond and how to react to difficulties we know are coming* – we can't pretend that we don't understand that we should share with our friends and reach out to our Father. That's something you need to strongly consider this afternoon – in light of what you just saw in Scripture, who do you need to reach out to, share what you're going through, or what you're facing, share what is coming up, and ask them to pray with you.

Don't let pride get in the way of sharing with people what you're really feeling, what you're really facing. It's always awkward to open up and be real. But what's the alternative? To suffer on quietly alone? How's that working out for you so far? And, is that what Jesus did? Yes, some people will let you down, they won't understand what you mean or what you feel – but Jesus knows what that is like – that's why He shared with the people around Him, and took things to the Father as well. Follow that example, which brings us to our second point.

Second, *you can't miss the fact that even though we have to include others in our struggles and trials, ultimately our hope is in our personal relationship with God*. Other people will eventually let us down. Their spirit is willing, but their flesh is weak. God, on the other hand, is all-powerful and everlasting. So involve others in your life, but depend, ultimately, on God and don't be too disappointed when humans let you down.

Third, *you can't miss the foolishness of self-confidence and enthusiasm*. Thinking "I've got this" and trying to face life on your own will bite you sooner or later and may disappoint those who are counting on you. But you know who does have this? God. And with His grace and strength you'll be able to face whatever comes your way.

Fourth, *you can't miss the fact that Jesus made open and honest requests in prayer but ended it with "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."* What is your goal in prayer? To get your wish fulfilled, or see God's plan unfold? How many of your prayers are you really, honestly willing to end with, "*nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.*"

Fifth, and finally, *Jesus is the hero*. No one saved Jesus, no one helps Him get through, He pours Himself out, at all costs for you, for me. We'll focus in on this even more in the

coming weeks leading up to Easter, but it still has to be said – Jesus invited the disciples to come with Him, but ultimately, He endured without their help. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

So let's follow His example now and turn to our Father in prayer.