

*Sunday, July 19, 2020*

## **Bible Study** **Luke 22:39-46**

**Listen to Pastor Kelly's sermon for July 19, and then read Luke 22:39-46.**

Jesus went out “as usual”, or “as was his custom” (v. 39), to the Mount of Olives to pray. This was usual for Jesus not just for his last week in Jerusalem, but for his entire life and ministry. We are told that Jesus frequently went off by himself to secluded places in order to talk with the Father (*Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16*). Often, Jesus could be found praying alone even while his disciples were with him as when he asks them who the crowd thinks he is (*Luke 9:18*).

So, Jesus had a habit of stealing away, by himself, to pray. As has been said before, prayer is not an attempt to bend the will of God toward our own, but to submit our wills to that of God's. Jesus' example of solitude and prayer is given to us to highlight the importance of such disciplines. If it is not our custom, as it was his, we may find it very difficult to follow (or even discern) the will of God during times of trial.

We see in this very trying time for Jesus that “his disciples followed him” (v. 39). As we read further we discover that they only follow so far. Certainly, at his request, they remain “a stone's throw” away (v. 41). Jesus needed to deal with his struggle alone. Yet the failure in their following that I see is in their failure to stay awake (v. 45). Exhausted from sorrow, as they were, even Jesus does not blame them. But it makes me wonder how far do I follow. Have I cultivated the necessary disciplines in my spiritual life so that I can remain “awake”, expectant, and ready for God's answers and guidance?

And so Jesus' words to them, and us, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation” (v. 40). To what temptation is he referring? Any and all that may assail us, or something specific? Could he refer to the temptation with which he currently wrestles — the temptation to follow his own will rather than the Father's? He returns to his place of solitude to pray further and even more earnestly (v. 44).

You see, he is in a battle between his will and his Father's. For our sakes, the Father's will must win the battle. If in this conflict within himself Jesus chooses his own will, rather than the Father's, then all remains lost. “...take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours, be done” (v. 42).

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The late pastor and teacher, William Barclay, wrote that the tone of voice a person uses while uttering “thy will be done” makes a difference. A person may say it out of helpless submission after losing all hope. A person may say it as one who has been defeated and battered into submission. A person may say it out of utter frustration, bleak regret, or bitter anger. And finally, a person may say it out of complete and perfect trust. Barclay concludes that it was from this fourth attitude of trust that Jesus utters these words (*Daily Study Bible, The Gospel of Luke, p. 284*).

As Ken Gire explains, “Though it is a terrible cup, brimming with the wrath of God for the ferment of sin from centuries past and centuries yet to come...and though it is a cup he fears...he takes it. Because more than he fears the cup, he loves the hand from which it comes” (*Moments With The Savior, p. 328*) And so from absolute trust in the love of the Father, Jesus is winning the battle, and an angel appears to support him in his struggle (v. 43).

And it is a severe struggle to be sure. We can not emphasize enough the nature of the conflict that Jesus suffers here on our behalf. The author of Hebrews describes Jesus offering prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears (*Hebrews 5:7*). In verse 44 we are told that Jesus is in agony and anguish. This word comes to us from the Greek *agōn*. It originally meant “a place of contest or conflict”, and then evolved to mean the conflict itself. “Antagonist,” (opponent, competitor, adversary, enemy, foe) also comes to us from *agōn*.

The word used in verse 44, also derived from *agōn*, is *agōnia* — agony, anguish. It refers to “conflict”, but originally meant “inner tension” or “anxiety”. Strictly speaking it means “the supreme concentration of powers in the face of imminent decisions or disasters”. What this means in our text is that Jesus’ struggle was “not with the fear of death, but concern for victory in the face of the approaching decisive battle on which the fate of the world depends” (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Gerhard Kittel, ed., p.140*).

The battle that Jesus prayed through was so intense, and the pressure so severe, that we are told “his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (v. 44). And we cannot miss that this battle was won in prayer. Jesus did not win this battle through sheer will. His will was to bypass the cup altogether. The battle in prayer conformed Jesus’ will to that of the Father’s. And as we have already discerned, this conformation took place in love and absolute trust of the Father. That’s the power of prayer. Not the conforming of God’s will to our desires, but

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the conforming of our will to God's. Might we also sweat drops of blood if we too so thoroughly pitched ourselves into this battle as our Lord did?

And so, I wonder again, as Jesus emerges victorious from battle, does he find me asleep — weary from whatever this world has been assaulting me with? Like those first disciples before me, I know that Jesus does not blame me for my weaknesses. I pray that he can also see that though my flesh is weak, my spirit is willing (*Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38*).

We must be battle ready. Like Jesus, we must cultivate those times and places in our lives where we may steal away to places of solitude. Places where, like Jesus, we may wrestle through prayer as he did in the battle between our wills and that of our loving Father's. And so Jesus enjoins us to "Get up and pray...".

**And so, May you "Get up and pray." May you join the battle through prayer, and find the joy in the will of the Father (*see Hebrews 12:2*) . And may you truly say, out of love and trust for the Father, as our Lord did, "Not my will, but thine be done."**

### **Questions for Further Reflection**

What do you do in times of crisis: stay cool, panic, or dig in?

Jesus was constantly going off by himself to secluded places in order to be alone with the Father (*Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16*). Where do you go to be alone? Do you often spend this 'alone time' communing with God?

What impressions do you get from Jesus' prayer? What strikes you the most? Have you ever wrestled with following the will of God for your life as Jesus wrestles here? What stresses and pressures are you feeling and dealing with right now? Have you ever before thought of prayer in terms of warfare? If it is like warfare, how will you "train" for the "battles" to come?

Considering William Barclay's suggestions above (*top of page 2*), from which attitude do you think Jesus is saying, "Your will be done"? Have you ever pray those words to God? What do you mean when you pray, "Your will be done"?

How might you "remain awake," ready and alert, for God's voice and guidance?