

40 Days of Prayer, The Garden, Mark 14:32-42, 3/12/23

We are in a 40 day season of prayer and fasting. Hopefully you've been following along with our daily prayer guide and devos. What is prayer for? What might the average person say? Many treat prayer like Aladdin's genie in a bottle. To get what we want, as a teen in school, I wouldn't study for a test and I remember just before starting, "God I know I didn't study but if you could just hook me up with supernatural guessing ability today I'd really appreciate that." Or, "God you know I'm really into that girl, if you could just make her so desperate for a date that she would say yes to me, that would be amazing of you." Maybe a little more scriptural, many use pray we might say to change circumstances...change my boss, change my finances, change my health, change my job, or you pray for God to change circumstances in the life of other people. These are legitimate reasons to pray. Deeper still some of us learned the ACTS acronym to pray- adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. All also legitimate and biblical. But there is one purpose for prayer that few people mention or pursue that we see modeled for us by Jesus in Garden of Gethsemane: what we will call today **the prayer of realignment.**¹ I believe if we could really get a hold of this prayer as a practice in our daily lives it would radically transform the way we follow Christ as resilient disciples.

Mark 14 ³² *They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."* ³³ *He took Peter, James and John along with him.* Remember, Jesus just came from the Last Supper with his disciples in Bethany, back over the Mt. of Olives, and down toward the Kidron Valley and the temple mount was a place called Gethsemane. Not a garden like we think of a garden...not Longwood Gardens, Gethsemane is a combo Greek word that means olive press, this was a commercial site where they harvested olives and processed olive oil to be sold in the marketplace. Gethsemane is still there at its original location. Today, they have turned it into a Olive Garden...not the chain restaurant with the never-ending pasta bowl, and there are some ancient olive trees there, some that have roots systems that date back 2000 years to the time of Christ. And it was here that Jesus committed himself to prayer, bringing along 3 of his disciples deeper into Gethsemane to pray with him. *and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled.*³⁴ *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*

³⁵ *Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.* ³⁶ *"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.* If you've ever doubted the humanity of Jesus, look no further than this description. Those of you who personally know anxiety or depression, or who have been so overwhelmed with grief that death you feel like you're dying and you can't even stand up, those of us who have experienced a panic attack...this is what Jesus was experiencing. You've seen the ad campaign Jesus gets us? But, if you have been tracking with Jesus up to this point in Mark this is shocking to see. Because up to this point, Jesus has been unflappable. He's calm in the face of threats, he always knows just what to say. This is the Jesus who encounters the demons and they tremble. This is the Jesus who fell asleep in the middle of a hurricane on the sea, and wakes up and says,

¹ Thanks to Lon Solomon

“Hush” and the winds and waves stilled. This is a completely different side of Jesus we haven’t seen. What is it that has him in this deep personal crisis? You say, well he knew he was going to die. After all, Jesus has been telling the disciples in no uncertain terms that this is exactly what was going to happen. He even said this is the who reason he came was to be a ransom for many. That’s true. But still, I find it ironic that many of Jesus’ followers were able to face death with a much greater emotional resolve and courage than it appears Jesus has in this moment. Polycarp, the disciple of John, who just before his death was told to recant his faith or burn in the fire. Polycarp said, “The fire you speak of lasts but an hour, and is quenched with a little. But what do you know of the fire of judgment. So come, why delay? Do what you will.” Or how about Dietrich Bonhoeffer who calmly went to the gallows saying, “This is the end, but it is just the beginning.” What was it that made Jesus fall apart emotionally and physically in this moment? It had to be something more than suffering and death, as awful as that was. Well the answer is right here in our text. ³⁶ *“Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.* What is the cup? In the Scriptures, the **cup is used of the wrath of God against evil and rebellion**, God’s divine justice poured out on injustice. In the Garden, the gravity of what he was about to experience hit Jesus and knocked him off his feet. The perfect union and loving relationship within the Godhead with the Father and the Spirit, would be broken and instead of the loving union with the Father, he would experience the horror of his divine justice and forsakenness, where on the cross the Father would turn his face away from Jesus while the sin of the world was laid on the Lamb of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 *He who knew no sin became sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.*

[Blank Slide] This is the crucible moment in the life of Jesus Christ. And if he would have turned back here, all the good and wonderful things he did, all the healings, miracles, sermons, teachings about morality and justice would not made a difference because none of those things purchase forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He didn’t come into the world to be a healer, a teacher, a philosopher, an humanitarian, or a revolutionary. There are many people who think that’s all he is, all of those things are secondary- He came to be a ransom for the sin of the world in the sight of a holy God.

And in this crucible moment, we might say His human will was in conflict with His divine will. God’s will was going in one direction, and his human will was going in another direction. “But Nate, I’m confused, wasn’t Jesus God in human flesh? Was this really a crisis? Would he have made any other choice? How exactly does his God Nature and Human Nature relate to one another?” I don’t know. Above my paygrade. He’s the only unique being in the universe that has ever experienced this and he’s not here to tell us...God doesn’t explain, it’s part of the hiddenness, the mystery. But the important thing isn’t that we understand how that works but that we understand how he resolved this gap between his human will and God’s will.

How did Jesus go into the Gethsemane? Sorrowful, panic-attack, in agony and in a crisis. How did he come out of Gethsemane? Resolved, calm, submitted, ready to fulfill his mission. How? He got on his knees and He prayed...**not my will but yours be done**. Now we gloss over this little phrase sometimes, and as Christians we like to just throw it on the end of a prayer, “Not my will but yours.” But there’s so much going on in that little prayer. “Father, we have a gap problem,

there is enormous gap between my will and your will, my desires and your desires. I don't want to have to face this, I'm hoping there is an escape hatch, I'm filled with fear and anxiety and dread. Father, I need you to close the gap between your will and my will, so that my desires and will align with your desires and will." And this wasn't just a 20 sec prayer... he kept at it, ³⁷ *Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour?"* Poor Peter...But notice while the disciples are sleeping, Jesus was praying for an hour already at this point. He's wrestling with the Father in prayer.

³⁸ *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.* ³⁹ *Once more he went away and prayed the same thing.*

⁴⁰ *When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.* ⁴¹ *Returning the third time* 3x he prayed. He kept at it. Slowly but surely his human will and God's will got closer together. It was a process of wrestling with the Lord, of petitioning and quietness, of speaking and listening until Jesus' will was submitted and at peace with the will of the Father. As one pastor said, "The victory of the cross was won on his knees in the garden."² And we are forever grateful because by doing so he purchased our redemption.

[Blank Slide] Now that's as far as we want to go in the story, because we need to spend a few minutes talking about us today. I used to have a VW Jetta and this car would have a habit of going out of wheel alignment. I got used to it, but anytime someone else got into the car I would have to explain why the car would shake, and why the steering wheel would always be turning by itself toward the right. You say, "Nate, why didn't you get it fixed?" Well, I tried a couple times and it would work for a little while and then soon enough it would start get out of alignment again...and I was a poor college student, who solved most of my problems with duct tape not cash.

In reflecting this week on this message, I was reminded of that car, always going out of alignment and said, "You know that car is a lot like me." I can be in alignment with God and his will for my day and then something will happen and I'm out of alignment again. One time I was prayerful and feeling in the Spirit before I was ready to preach, driving to the church and a guy pulled out in front of me and gave me the finger, and I was so angry, I felt like driving right passed the church to catch up with him and let him know what I thought. Don't judge me, you are the same way. Why? Our human will is often set against God's will. God is trying to get us to go in the direction that we don't want to go. Our human will is always wanting to tug against his direction and we fight against him to go our own way. This goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, next sin after the garden we are told about is Cain and Abel, sin is crouching at your door, you must master it...Cain didn't listen... It's the story of man. Like a tug-o-war: God's will wants to go one way and our human will wants to go another way.

² Lon Solomon, from sermon on Matthew 26.

And this is why this **prayer of realignment** that we see from Jesus in Gethsemane is so critical to following Christ. It's getting on our knees like Jesus and getting honest with God, and saying "Father, I'm anxious, I'm afraid, I'm stubborn, my emotions are all over the place. And I know there is a huge gap between your will and my will. I don't want to follow you in my flesh. And Lord, I need you to supernaturally align my will with your will. My heart with your heart. My desires with your desires." And that is a process, it's wrestling with the Lord, it's painful, oh but it works! For me sometimes it's quick, and sometimes it's through prayer walks over the course of days or weeks. I was wrestling with God in prayers of alignment just a week ago over the issue of forgiveness...God says we have to forgive because God has forgiven us, we have no right to not forgive someone else. But can I be honest, someone really hurt me...I don't often feel victimized and betrayed, but I did in this instance. In my heart I was saying, "After all I have done for you, after all the ways I've tried to help, this is how you treat me?" And I was angry and I didn't want to forgive. And I had to wrestle with the Lord, "Father, we have a gap problem, I know you want me to forgive, but I don't want to. I'm angry, I'm hurt, I'm feeling bitter. I don't know how to do it, so Lord I need you to close the gap. I need you to do it in my life. I don't want my will to reign, I want yours." I don't know how, but God supernaturally does it. He began to soften my heart and show me how to forgive.

What I've experienced in my prayer life is that sometimes He changes our circumstances, but much of the time it's not our circumstances that change, it's us he changes. Just like Jesus, that's where the victories are won on our knees praying prayers of realignment.

Where do you need prayer of realignment in your life? Maybe there is an area of your life you have been praying for God to change your circumstances, but you need to start praying for God to realign your will to his will? Where are you stubbornly resisting God's will? What desires are you acting on that you know are sinful before God and go against His desires in your life?

Maybe it's forgiveness like me. And you say, "Forgiveness are you kidding me? Do you know what he or she has done to me? I can't forgive them."

Finances- God calls us to living within our means, to sacrificial generosity. But that maybe your will really wants that new sports car, or to upgrade all your furniture... How do we get inside the will of God? Prayers of realignment.

How about sexual desires? Oh now I'm really getting countercultural and bordering on being offensive at this notion- because our world tells us that our sexual desires and impulses should be expressed and acted upon whatever they may be and to do anything else is repressive and inauthentic to your true self. But God's will when it comes to our acting on our sexual desires and impulses is clear. Flee sexual temptation- sex is designed to be lived out in a commitment, covenant marriage between husband and wife. All else is sin. But it's really hard because our will is not God's will, how do we do that? Prayers of realignment. You might pray- God change my desires, or take away my desires...and maybe he will, but maybe he will give you the peace and power to be aligned with his desires.

Now, as effective and helpful as these prayers of realignment are, they mean nothing IF we don't trust in the character of God, that he is loving and good. In the Garden of Eden, Adam in the gap between his will and God's will, didn't trust the good of the Father, and disobeyed. But in the Garden of Gethsemane, the second Adam, Jesus, in the gap between his will and God's will, trusted the goodness of Father and obeyed. Look to Jesus! From an earthly perspective, how could betrayal, mocking, beating, abandonment, agony and death possibly be good?! Oh but how good and loving it was in redeeming us forever and ever. Trust the character of God. Not my will, yours be done.