



# Prayer of Submission

Matthew 26:36-46

TRINITY PULPIT

**T**his summer we have been exploring the great prayers of the Bible. I think most of us would agree that the “Lord’s Prayer” is probably the most familiar prayer to us. However, if there were one that might be a close second in familiarity it would be Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The prayer of Jesus uttering those incredible words of submission and obedience to the will of God remind us that we are in a constant struggle between our humanity and our desiring to be all that God has called us to be.

We are told that on the night of Jesus’ arrest he and the disciples have gone to the Mount of Olives, and within the Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane. What had happened on that day must not be forgotten. Jesus had met with his disciples in an upper room that had been prepared. There in that upper room Jesus and his disciples had observed the Passover Meal. It was there in this intimate setting that Jesus would begin to talk again about his death, and he would even reveal that there was one of the twelve that was going to betray him. In addition, Peter had just promised that no matter what, he would stay with Jesus; Jesus tells the brave Peter that even he would deny him. Peter says what we would call those famous last words, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”(Matthew 26:35) The Bible says something we many times forget: “And all the others disciples said the same thing.” They all promised to stay by Jesus’ side, but in just a few hours, they will be running into the night and hiding in the shadows. Jesus knows the denial and the betrayal that is coming. Just those experiences would be enough to make you grieve and for your heart be heavy.

Now that the meal was over and the night had come, Jesus’ heart has become heavy. Jesus knows what is before him,

and he knows that the time had come for the very reason that he has come to us. They make their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. This place — meaning Olive Press — is a place where pressure will be applied to Jesus.

We are told that they make their way to Gethsemane and Jesus tells the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” However, Jesus did not go farther into the Garden alone. He took his inner circle — Peter, James and John — with him a little farther into the Garden. That is what we would do. If we knew we were facing something difficult, we would want to take our trusted friends. As much as Jesus loved all of his disciples, like us, there were those who were closer to him. We find this inner circle of three in other significant places like the transfiguration. Even as they go deeper into the Garden, there also comes a point that Jesus must go ultimately by himself. Turning to the three he says, “Stay here and keep watch with me.” That simply means, “Stay awake, stay with me, and let me know I am not alone.” Jesus then goes further in and begins to pray. Jesus’ prayer is simple, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Why would Jesus pray this prayer? There are many moments in life where Jesus is seen as brave and courageous. He has walked the waters, calmed the storm, stood among those who wanted to stone him, and even challenged the very corrupt system in the Temple court. However, now he is overwhelmed with sorrow and troubled to the place of death.

There have been many questions about why Jesus became overwhelmed with sorrow and grief. It is interesting the text says it begins to happen. In the Garden we are told he began to be troubled and sorrowful.

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Whatever was on his mind was not simply troubling — it was horrifying. That is actually what the word means. Jesus, in this moment, is horrified, overwhelmed, and troubled by what he understands.

Jesus prays the prayer of submission. The answer is silence. There is no response. Jesus utters those words of intimacy that he had uttered and taught us to pray, “Our Father.” But this time the Father is silent. What was happening at Gethsemane?

Some suggest it was the knowledge of his pending death on the cross that overwhelmed Jesus in this moment. To be sure, that would overwhelm you. To see crosses on the side of the road was one of the ways the Romans controlled people and kept uprisings from happening. The capital punishment for crimes against the state were to be hung on a cross, and many times along the side of the road, and as people would go from place to place, to see someone hanging on a cross was a vivid reminder of who was in charge and what happened to those who would challenge the rule of the Romans. It could be that the horror that overwhelmed Jesus was the cross itself.

However, many New Testament scholars suggest that there is something more. They suggest that what overwhelmed Jesus in that moment was the silence.

William Lane, a New Testament scholar, says that here, in Gethsemane, God had already begun to turn his face away. The judgment for our sin had already begun. Before the first nail was driven into his body, Jesus’ soul was being abandoned by God.

Jesus had lived his entire life, you see, with the approval of the Father, and now, in the moment Jesus needed his Father most, God turned his face away. And Jesus staggered under the weight of it, almost to the point of death. Lane says, “This is the horror of one who lived wholly for the Father, who came to be with his Father for a brief interlude before his death and found hell, rather than heaven, open before him.”

Somehow, in that one moment, Jesus glimpsed an eternity in hell for us. Because that is the essence of what hell is: complete abandonment by God.

Then notice he returns to those who are closest to him on this earth and they are sleeping. “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray.” Then going a second time Jesus prayed again, “My Father, if it is not possible for this

cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” Going back, he finds the disciples sleeping again, and returning to prayer a third time, Jesus says the same thing.

Jesus prays the prayer of submission. In a moment when we would look for a way out, a way to run away, Jesus says, “If it is your will, then let your will be done.” Jesus prays this beautiful prayer of submission to the will of the Father.

I have always noticed just a slight difference in the prayer uttered the second time from the first time in the Garden. Do you notice the very slight change in the words of Jesus? The first prayer is, “If it is possible, may this cup – the cross – be taken from me. When Jesus returns the second time the prayer is, “If it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, thy will be done.”

Even Jesus is working his way toward submission to God’s will. At first he is praying, “If it is possible,” then he prays, “If it is not possible.” At first he prays, “Take the cup away from me.” The second prayer is essentially, “If this is the only way, then thy will be done.”

In all cases Jesus prays, “My father. “ Within the relationship of Father and son, Jesus is coming to the place of complete submission and obedience. Just like for us, we pray within the relationship with God, and as we continue to pray, we begin to get a picture of what submission to the will of God looks like in our lives.

How do we get to the place that we can pray a prayer of submission to God? How do we get to the place where we can honestly say to God that if this is your will, then your will be done in my life? How do we get to the place where we can trust God to pray this prayer?

I think the answer to this is found in something that happened in the upper room prior to this moment in Gethsemane. Not every gospel has this story, but John records a story for us that I think gives us some insight into why Jesus is able to pray the prayer of submission in the Garden.

In John 13 we find the story of the washing of the disciples’ feet. We are told that this something happens just prior to the Feast of Passover. The disciples have gathered there in the upper room. Preparations are being made for the meal itself, but before the meal, there was the custom of washing the feet. Coming in from the dusty roads and streets

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and now gathering for the meal, it was normal for the lowliest of servants to take a wash basin and a towel and go from one to the other and wash the feet of the guests.

I can picture the scene as the disciples arrive in the upper room. Over in the corner is the washbasin and towel. Yet, no one looks that way. These are the same ones who have been arguing who is the greatest. The same men who were worried about status and pecking order; no one is about to assume that lowliest place and wash the feet. They may have thought, *I wonder where the servant of house is, surely there is someone who is suppose to come and serve us.*

Then John writes something amazing. John writes:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3-5)

That passage has always intrigued me. Jesus submitted himself to the lowliest role of the servant, but he did so because he knew that the Father had placed all things under him and that he had come from God and was going to God. Because Jesus found his worth in his relationship with God, and because he knew he had come from God and was going to God, he submitted himself to the place of the servant.

Now, in the Garden of Gethsemane when faced with the horror of the cross, with a moment of rejection Jesus is able again to pray this prayer and choose submission. Could it be that ultimately he is able to submit to the will of God in the garden because just like in the upper room, Jesus knew the Father and knew he had come from God and was going to God?

I preached a sermon several years ago entitled "Submission is not a Four Letter Word." That sermon was on our submitting to each other in our relationship as husband and wife. However, submission is not a word with a popular definition. None of us like to think of submitting. Submission in the Bible is never something we are forced to do but something we choose to do because of who we are

in Christ. We submit to authorities not because authorities are right or just but because we trust God more than we do authorities. We know who ultimately has authority. We submit to one another as husband and wife not because our spouse says you will submit to me; no, we submit to one another out of love and because Jesus submitted to the Father. Jesus shows us what love looks like and it is submission. We submit to one another in the church, not because everyone is as right as anyone else; that is everyone's opinion is important but not everyone's opinion is of equal validity, but we still submit to one another out of love because the unity and the fellowship of the church is more important than one issue or one disagreement.

We do not submit out of weakness but out of strength. So how can we get to the place where we not only pray the prayer of submission but we also practice submission to God and to one another?

First, we find our worth in our relationship with the Father. Jesus, throughout his prayer, utters the most important words first. He says each time, "My Father." When you and I find our worth in our relationship with God first we don't have to seek power, the upper hand, or have our way. We find our worth in our relationship with our heavenly father. What is our worth? We are loved, we are cherished, and we were worth the very life of our Lord Jesus. That is how much the Father loves us.

One of our leaders, Mark Munday, likes to say, "People are God's treasure." You are the treasure of God. Your worth is not found in what you own, what you know, your strength, your experience, or in your influence; your worth is found in the Father. You are loved and are the treasure of God.

Second, we can live a life of submission when we have an eternal perspective. Jesus knew he had come from God and was going to God. Your life and my life has an eternal significance. What is happening right here and now is only a prelude for eternity. We are getting to know God through Jesus so we can fully know God in eternity. We came from God and we are going to God. Now for Jesus that means that Jesus was eternal before his birth and is eternal. For us to come from God and go to God tells me that our life is purposeful.

Rick Warren writes in his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*:

It is not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than you own personal fulfill-

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ment, your peace of mind or even your happiness. It is far greater than your family, your career or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.

Our lives have an eternal purpose, and because we are aware of that purpose, we can practice submission.

Finally, we can practice submission because we trust the Father. We are going to God. In that moment in the Garden when Jesus prayed, there was silence. In that moment when Jesus seems to catch a glimpse of what is coming and overwhelmed and troubled, Jesus could pray the prayer of submission because he trusted the Father. On the cross we are told that Jesus' last words were, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46) We are reminded in Acts that God did not abandon Jesus in Hades. That is, in death, God did not abandon his one and only Son. In that moment of death, Jesus could again pray a prayer of submission because he knew the character of the Father: that although he had experienced silence, forsakenness, and now even death, God could be trusted.

My friends, we can pray the prayer of submission because we know that no matter what we might go through, God will not abandon us. God can be

trusted.

In what areas of our lives do we need to pray the prayer of submission?

We need to pray that we might submit our wills to God's will, that we might be pleasing to God.

We need to pray that we might be submissive in our families. Families that are constantly demanding their privileges, their rights, and their way are never pleasing to God. The family that is filled with loving submission for the best of the other exemplify the spirit of Christ.

We need to pray for submission to one another. Our culture is filled with those who are demanding their way and their rights and yet the church is to be different. The church is to be filled with people who submit to one another out of love. The church is to be the people who look to the interest of others as well as your own. You see, the church is to be this peculiar people where submission is not a four-letter word but a word of beauty and power.

We need to pray the prayer of submission that we might serve others. Like Jesus, a prayer of sub-



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