

“Gethsemane: Submission versus Resistance”

February 18, 2024

Matthew 26:31-56

I. Introduction

The Passover Day that began in [Matthew 26:17](#) had been a long day and a rather puzzling day for the disciples. It started out with Jesus giving some strange directions to Peter and John about how to locate the room in which they needed to prepare the Passover. In the evening, when they were together in the upper room, [Luke 22:24](#) says that “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.” [John 13:4-5](#) records that Jesus then “got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet.” Later, in the middle of the meal, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.” After a stunned silence, the disciples began questioning who it could be and each asked Jesus, “Surely not I, Lord?” ([Matt. 26:21-22](#)). A little later, Judas left the meal on what the disciples assumed was an errand for Jesus. Finally, as the Passover meal was coming to a close Jesus had made some changes to it. As they would eventually understand, Jesus established the Lord’s Table to remember His death on a cross for the sins of the world. At last, they had finished the meal, and the disciples were about to do something familiar with Jesus. They were going to the Garden of Gethsemane, one among many garden plots on the Mount of Olives. This was where Jesus often took them to meditate and pray. It may have been that the Garden of Gethsemane belonged to one of Jesus’ followers, who made it available to Him as a place of meditation and retreat; a place to get away from the noise and bustle of the crowded city.

The first scene in today’s Scripture happened before they reached the garden. In the Upper Room, Jesus had given many positive promises which are recorded in [John 14-17](#). But now while they were on their way to the Garden, Jesus stopped and warned the disciples of their coming desertion.

II. The Disciples’ Coming Desertion

Quoting from [Zechariah 13:7](#), Jesus warned the 11 that were still with Him that “this very night you will all fall away on account of me.” In this warning, Jesus also added a word of promise: “After I have

risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” But, after hearing the part calling them cowards and untrustworthy, the disciples didn’t hear the rest of what Jesus said. On Resurrection Day, the angels would have to remind them of the meeting in Galilee (Matthew 28:7, 10). Peter definitely missed or disregarded what Jesus had just said about His being raised and appearing to them after His death. Peter was so concerned about defending his loyal character that in his typical boldness he said, “Even if everyone else rejects you, I never will!” Peter was unwilling to apply the word “all” to himself.

This was the second time that night that Jesus had predicted Peter’s betrayal. Earlier, in the Upper Room, Jesus had predicted Peter’s betrayal—turn Luke 22:31-34. Peter didn’t believe his Master this second time any more than he had the first time. In his pride Peter thought that, wise as Jesus was, Jesus was wrong about the dependability and courage of His number one disciple. Peter’s pride in himself was evident in at least 3 ways. First, it led him to contradict Jesus. “I never will.” Secondly, it led him to consider himself better than all the other disciples—“Even if all fall away, I never will.” Finally, it led him to trust in his own strength when he said, “I am ready to die with you.” Echoing Peter’s foolish self-confidence, though not to the same degree, “All the other disciples said the same.”

All the disciples were blind to their own weaknesses and of Satan’s power. They didn’t know what power fear would have over them in the near future. They willfully chose to trust in their own understanding and not in the Lord’s. In the Garden of Gethsemane, they would learn the hard way that they were really foolish, cowardly, and weak.

III. In the Garden of Gethsemane

A. Jesus’ prayers When they got to the Garden, Jesus left 8 of His disciples at the entrance while He and Peter, James and John went in. This was the inner group that had been with Jesus at other important times, including the Transfiguration. Jesus was entering into a difficult time, and the presence of His closest disciples and friends would be an encouragement to Him. He also took them along for their benefit. He wanted to show them that as important and helpful as fellowship and support from other believers can be,

there are times when one's only help is prayer to God. Jesus showed them that even the Son of God needed strength from His heavenly Father.

Jesus wasn't "**overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death**" because He was afraid He would yield to Satan's temptations and somehow escape what was coming. He wasn't "**overwhelmed**" because He was afraid to die. He knew the outcome. He willingly gave His life for the world because of His love for us so that we might have eternal life (**John 3:16**). **Hebrews 12:2** says, "**Who for the joy set before him endured the cross.**" What caused the extreme sorrow was that as **1 Peter 2:24** says, "**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.**" Or as Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "**God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**" The sinless Son of God would take on the sin of the world and be forsaken by the Father (**Matt. 27:46**). Because in His holiness God cannot look on sin, when Jesus became sin, God the Father would have to turn His back on Him. As part of the Trinity, Jesus had always been in communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, but when He hung on the cross and took on the sins of the world, this communion would be broken. When Jesus cried, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,**" He would be totally and completely alone bearing the sins of the world. In overwhelming sorrow Jesus willingly drank this cup for us.

Except when He hung on the cross, Jesus always addressed God as Father. This time He called Him "**My Father,**" emphasizing the intimacy between them. **Mark 14:36** adds that Jesus also called Him "**Abba! Father!**" *Abba* is the Aramaic equivalent to "*Daddy*." Jesus implored the Father—Daddy—"If it is possible, **may this cup be taken from Me.**" The anticipation of the agony of becoming sin was becoming unbearable for the sinless Son of God. He wondered aloud in His prayer to His Father if there could be another way to deliver men from sin. **BUT** His only consideration was God's will. So, Jesus prayed submissively, "**Yet not as I will, but as You will.**" The conflict between what "**I will**" and "**You will**" seems to imply that just like in the Wilderness, Jesus was being tempted. Though sinless and unable to sin, He clearly could be brought into the real conflict of temptation. This is why **Hebrews 2:18** is able to say, "**Because he himself suffered**

when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” Jesus understands the strength of the temptations that come our way. He used the same weapons we have, Scripture and prayer—turn to Ephesians 6:13-18.

When Jesus returned to the 3 disciples, He found them sleeping. In His omniscience, He wasn’t surprised. But the pain caused by their not being sensitive enough or even caring enough to watch and pray with Him in the last hours of His life would still be real. It would add to His grief and distress. Peter and his fellow disciples had promised to be faithful unto death. And yet what were they doing? They were asleep. Jesus woke them and told them to “Watch and pray.” As well as keeping watch with Jesus, they needed to pray for themselves because danger and temptation were just around the corner. But because they didn’t really believe Jesus’ predictions about His death and their defection, they failed and let Jesus down.

Years later, when Peter understood, he wrote in 1 Peter 5:8, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” But in the Garden, he didn’t yet understand. But Jesus did, He knew that doing right is sometimes difficult, that’s why He said, “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” We are no different than the disciples; we sometimes find ourselves doing things that in our heart we do not want to do. As Paul wrote, the only source of victory is the power of Jesus Christ. Turn to Romans 7:15-25. “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

When Jesus went away to pray a second and third time, He prayed almost the same thing. However, there is a slight but significant difference from the 1st prayer. Now He prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” Jesus understood that it was *not* possible for the cup to be taken away and that He must drink its wrathful judgment. So, He submitted to God’s will and prayed, “May your will be done.”

B. Jesus’ Arrest Jesus knew that Judas, along with “a large crowd armed with swords and clubs,” was near, so He woke up the sleeping disciples one more time and prepared them for what was coming. The fact that Judas came with soldiers and temple guards armed with weapons and lanterns showed that Judas didn’t really understand Jesus. Comparing the various records in the 4 Gospels, it appears that the number of men

who came with Judas may have been as high as 1000. It's almost as if Judas thought that they would have to search for Jesus in the Garden and perhaps fight off the disciples in order to arrest Him. It wasn't even necessary for Judas to betray Jesus with a kiss, Jesus told the mob who He was.

Since it was dark and since many of the soldiers didn't know Jesus by sight, Judas had come up with a way to indicate which one was Jesus. In the culture of the Middle East, in Jesus' day as well as today, a kiss was an act of special respect and affection. But Judas used the kiss not as a sign of affection but as a weapon. By calling Judas "**friend**" Jesus tried one more time to get Judas to see what he was doing, but to no end.

At this point, **Luke 22:49** says that some of the other disciples asked, "**Lord, should we strike with our swords?**" Peter had argued with Jesus on the way to the Garden. He had disobeyed Jesus when he fell asleep and now, he ran ahead of Him. He didn't wait for the Lord to tell him what to do; Peter rushed ahead and trusted in his strength. In his enthusiasm to help Jesus, Peter cut off Malchus' ear with a sword. If Jesus hadn't healed the ear of the high priest's servant (**John 18:10**), there may have been 4 crosses on Calvary.

As Jesus was arrested like a common thief, the disciples, who earlier had bravely promised to stand by Jesus, "**deserted Him and fled.**" In **John 16:32** Jesus had prophesied to the disciples, "**But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.**" Later, even His Father would leave Him!

IV. Conclusion

It's easy to criticize Peter and the other disciples. In today's Scripture, they boasted too loudly, slept too much, and acted too fast, and, for that reason, they often missed the point of what Jesus was saying and doing. Rather than being submissive to God and His will, they often resisted instead. So, what can be learned from the disciples so that we are submissive to God and not resistant?

A. First, we need to know God's will. The best way to know God and what He would have us do is to study His Word. **2 Timothy 2:15** says, "**Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.**" **Ephesians 6:17** calls the

Word of Truth—God’s Word—the sword of the Spirit. The only way to be able to use a sword is through practice—studying it and working with it. The only way to know God’s Word is to study it and to work with it.

B. Second, we need to pray. It is much easier to submit to someone if you know them and have a relationship with them. A person doesn’t just share the major things in his life with a close friend; he shares everything—just look at what people put in their Facebook and other internet accounts with their hundreds of so-called friends. To develop a relationship with God, you need to share all the things in your heart. You need to keep the lines of prayer open all the time, not just when something huge comes our way.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray continually.” Turn to Philippians 4:6-7. If you want to have a good relationship with God, you need to do the same thing. Talk to Him; that’s all prayer is—there is no “right way”—just talk to God.

C. Finally, we need to trust the Lord. Proverbs 3:5-6 say, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” If you know God’s Word and if you have close relationship with Him, you will be able to trust Him and if you trust Him you will submit to Him.

As children of God, our goal should be to be submissive just like Jesus. But, like Peter, sometimes in our selfish pride, we will contradict Jesus and trust in our own strength. And then, like Peter, we will fail. But, as well as being a God of love, God is merciful and just as He did for Peter and the rest of the disciples, He will forgive us when we repent—1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” He will be there to pick you up—1 Peter 5:6-7 says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” Trust Him—give your life to be used by Him and see what He will do through you and with you. Romans 8:28 says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”