“YET NOT WHAT I WILL, BUT WHAT YOU WILL”

Mark 14:27–52

Key Verse: 14:36

“‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”

How can we get ready for something really hard? For a hard test, we study like crazy. For a hard competition, we train intensely. For a hard task at work, we spend extra time preparing. In today’s passage, it’s late Thursday night of Passion Week. Jesus has just a few hours before many really hard things are about to happen to him. What does he do? He spends time alone in prayer. He also urges his disciples to watch and pray (38). Through prayer Jesus becomes spiritually ready. But without prayer, his disciples are unprepared, and despite their good intentions they all totally fail. In this study we especially want to take a careful look at the way Jesus prayed. And we want to think about how he could pray like this. May God speak to us personally through his word today.

Look at verses 27,28. For the last time in Mark’s Gospel Jesus predicts his death and resurrection (cf. 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34). But this time he relates it most closely to his disciples. He’s quoting from the book of Zechariah. Zechariah prophesied during a discouraging time when the Jews had just returned from Babylonian Captivity. He looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Jesus had intentionally fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy when he entered Jerusalem on a baby donkey (Zec9:9,10). This time Jesus mentions Zechariah’s prophecy again, when he predicts his disciples’ desertion. In his quote Jesus is emphasizing that *God* would strike the shepherd. It seems that the religious leaders are working for Jesus’ humiliation and death, but ultimately God is making these things happen. Just as Zechariah had prophesied, through the death of the shepherd God would purify and forgive his people’s sins and create a new people of God (Zec13:1).

But this is more than just a general story or an abstract prediction. Look at verse 27a again. “‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them.” Ouch! It’s such a discouraging thing to say, especially during his last moments with them. Why does Jesus need to tell them this so bluntly? To “fall away” in Greek is literally to be “scandalized.” The Gospel writer Mark uses this word often (4:17; 6:3; 9:42–47) because he’s writing to the Christians in Rome facing intense pressure to renounce their new Christian faith. It’s still hard to follow Jesus, because Jesus was rejected and died on a shameful cross. Living in this real world full of fallen people, if we identify with Jesus closely, hard things will happen to us, too. But it’s even harder to recover from a failure to follow Jesus. Here Jesus wants his disciples to know that even their failure is part of God’s plan. And he wants them, and us, to learn an important lesson: even with our sincerest, best intentions, we can’t really follow Jesus. To follow Jesus, we all need to find out how weak, unreliable and sinful we really are before God.

But it wouldn’t end with failure. Read verse 28. Though the shepherd would be struck and the sheep would scatter, the shepherd would go ahead of the sheep and gather them together again. Jesus promises that after his resurrection he’ll meet his disciples again in Galilee. Later at the tomb of Jesus the angel would remind the women of these words (16:7). Though he knows they’re going to fail, Jesus isn’t angry at his disciples—he loves them. He truly is the Good Shepherd. He promises that even after their failure he’s going to meet them again. Through their failure and meeting him again, he wants them to experience his grace. He wants them to have hope in him, not in themselves.

How does Peter respond? Read verse 29. He’s sure he’s better than the others and that he has an absolute commitment to Jesus. On the surface he seems to love Jesus and be loyal to him. But in his words he’s really bragging about himself. He doesn’t yet really know himself. What does Jesus say? Look at verse 30. “‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.’” Jesus’ words are so specific, so concrete, so unforgettable. The rooster would first crow just after midnight, and the second crowing would be about an hour later. Peter is trying to be nice, but Jesus is being brutally honest. In a sense he’s rebuking him for his foolish self-confidence and arrogance. But Jesus’ painful words later become the beginning point of grace and repentance in Peter’s life (14:72). What does Peter say to Jesus’ prediction? Read verse 31. Clearly he’s not listening, and neither are the others. They’re saying this probably because they think Jesus is discouraged and they need to encourage him. Not just Peter but all of them don’t really know themselves yet. We notice Jesus’ main goal in training his disciples is not to get them to do many things but to help them come to know themselves.

They’re on their way to the Mount of Olives (26), and once there, they go to a place called “Gethsemane” (32). This name originally meant “olive oil press,” and the place was also a garden (Jn18:1), part of an estate at the foot of the mountain. Jesus had often met here with his disciples (Lk22:39; Jn18:2). Look at verses 32,33. Jesus is leaving his disciples for a while to go pray privately. He usually prayed in private (1:35; 6:46), but this time he takes Peter, James and John along with him. He’s taken these three with him before (5:37; 9:2). Why? He wants them to be close to him and witness things the others won’t. They want to have top positions in his kingdom and share in his glory (10:37). But Jesus wants them to share in his prayer and in his sufferings. He wants them to share his burden and support him in prayer. Verse 33 says that Jesus begins to be “deeply distressed and troubled.” The original Greek words are rare, and even rarer are they used to describe Jesus. Here, “distressed” can also mean “shocked” or “alarmed” (9:15; 16:5,6). “Troubled” is an even stronger word and can be translated as “depressed.” What? Really? Jesus is like the psalmist who confessed that his soul was downcast (Ps42:5,11; 43:5). Read verse 34. Here, “overwhelmed with sorrow” means “burdened with grief.”

What is happening to Jesus? He’s usually calm, cool and collected, and totally in charge. How could he be like this now, when everything’s on the line? He’s the one who knew all along that all these bad things were going to happen. He’s the one who's been predicting them. He’s been teaching his disciples that they would have to join him in following the way of the cross. But now, as the moment draws near, he’s squirming? The honesty may make us uncomfortable, but it shows that Jesus is fully human, just like us. He shared in our humanity and was fully human in every way (Heb2:14a,17a). He can empathize with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way, just as we are (Heb4:15). Now he’s facing some of the hardest things a human being can ever experience: betrayal, rejection, abandonment by every friend, mocking, humiliation, torment, and death. But even these things don’t seem to be his real burden.

Look at verse 35. It begins with the phrase, “Going a little farther…” Usually when we’re overwhelmed with sorrow, trouble or distress, we just despair and try to hide from the world in bed, in binge eating, TV watching, or worse, in alcohol or drugs. But Jesus doesn’t get stuck in this; he goes a little farther, falls to the ground and prays. He comes to God in complete helplessness, on his knees. This isn’t the first time in his life he comes to God like this, only when it’s an emergency. The Bible says that during the days of Jesus’ life on earth he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears (Heb5:7). But this time, what does he actually say? Read verse 36. We notice several things here.

**First**, Jesus called God “Abba, Father.” “Abba” was the Aramaic word kids used for their father, like our English words " papa" or "daddy." It was a term of endearment that expressed the closest love, trust and dependency. Many legalistic Jews would have thought it was not right to use such a familiar term to address the holy God. But Jesus did. When he had no one to support him, no one to turn to, he could turn to his Father God and be sure that the Father loved him and was always there for him. He was confident in the Father’s love. By his grace we can talk to God like this, too (Ro8:15; Gal4:6). Why is it that we can always come to God personally and pray? It’s because of his great love for us. He has great compassion on us as his dearly beloved children, knowing how frail we are (Ps103:13,14). To pray, we need to really believe God is our personal, loving Father, our Daddy.

**Second**, Jesus says, “everything is possible for you.” He’s in a humanly impossible situation, but he starts his prayer thinking about who God really is. He’s knows he’s praying to the God with whom everything is possible. When we pray to God, we need to believe this most of all, that God can always do the impossible (11:23,24). Jesus once rebuked an unbelieving father, “Everything is possible for one who believes” (9:23). When we come to God in prayer to ask him about anything, we first need to believe that he’s listening, that he’s generous, that he’s always willing to give us the best, and we must never doubt him (Jas1:5,6). It’s always possible for God to change things, even things that seem impossible to be changed. We need to learn to pray like we believe that.

**Third**, Jesus says, “take this cup from me.” This is what’s really bothering him: not the betrayal, the abandonment, the suffering, the humiliation, not even the physical death on a cross, but “the cup.” He’d already talked to James and John about it. He asked them, “Can you drink the cup I drink?” (10:38). What is “this cup”? It’s the cup of God’s wrath for human beings’ sins. On the cross Jesus would have to figuratively drink that cup to its bitter dregs. By drinking it, he would become the atoning sacrifice for our sins (Ro3:25a; 1Jn2:2). 2 Corinthians 5:21a says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us…” Jesus knows it’s the Father’s will to be pierced and crushed and punished and wounded, to become the perfect offering for sin (Isa53:5,10a). In doing so, he’s temporarily going to have his intimate relationship with God severed. To us, to be apart from God may seem normal. But Jesus has always enjoyed the closest fellowship with God, so the thought of being alienated from him, even for a short while, is almost unbearable. In his humanity he doesn’t want to do it. Such a desire may seem sinful, but it’s not, because Jesus, the Bible says, was without sin, and yet here he is, asking the Father to take this cup from him. It tells us that it’s normal not to want to suffer. But that desire can become a temptation the devil uses to try to get us to run away from God’s will for us.

So what should we learn from this? We should learn from Jesus’ prayer to be totally honest with God. We can tell God anything that’s in our hearts, anything and everything, and ask his help. It’s an amazing blessing and privilege, to be able to talk to God about everything. Actually, this is what a real relationship is, to be totally honest. If people don’t say what they really want, we can’t have a real relationship with them. The same is true with God. Prayer is not saying all the right things we think we’re supposed to say; prayer is to get totally real with God. If we’re not being honest with God, he can’t help us.

**Fourth**, Jesus says, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” The point of his prayer is not just to vent; it’s to get to a place in his heart where he can fully embrace God’s will. He knows God’s will in his mind, but he has to embrace it in his heart, and that requires a real struggle. But where does this come from, this desire to do God’s will ahead of his own? It’s not just a desire to do the right thing; it comes from a genuine love for God. Jesus truly loved his Father God. Out of this love he wanted nothing more than to please God and do his will. Likewise, if we truly love God, we’ll seek to do his will ahead of our own. If we love God, seeking his will becomes most important to us, in whatever we’re doing. May God help us each to grow in real love for him.

But doing the Father’s will is never easy, not even for Jesus. In verses 39 and 41 we notice that he has to go back a second and even a third time to keep on praying the same thing. It may seem boring to keep on praying the same thing. But Jesus keeps praying, “Yet not my will, but yours be done,” “Yet not my will, but yours be done,” until he has the conviction in his heart that he can totally do the Father’s will. Prayer is not a struggle to get God to do what we want; prayer is a struggle to get ourselves to do what God wants.

And Jesus isn’t just praying alone; he’s engaging his disciples in it, too. Look at verse 37. Jesus calls him by his former name “Simon” not his new name “Peter.” He’s implying that Peter is not really changed yet. Peter said he would die with Jesus, but here he can’t keep watch even for one hour. Look at verse 40. Why are the disciples so sleepy? Did they eat and drink too much at the Last Supper? Luke says they were exhausted from sorrow (Lk22:45). Hearing Jesus’ words about betrayal and denial made them depressed, and they aren’t familiar with praying. To them, praying is like weightlifting. Without regular practice, they could barely lift the light weights of prayer, not to mention heavy lifting. Read verse 38. It’s such an important teaching both to the disciples and to us. Nobody can handle temptation with their own human goodness or strength. No matter who we are, we all need to take Jesus’ words seriously, and watch and pray. Look at verses 41,42. Here we see Jesus transformed. No longer is he distressed, troubled, and overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Now, he’s fully ready. Prayer gave him new heart, new spirit, new courage.

In verses 43–52 we see Jesus’ arrest. We see Judas betraying him with a kiss. We see a disciple of Jesus striking with a sword—obviously he hadn’t been praying. We see Jesus surrendering to the Father’s will freely. We see all the disciples deserting Jesus. And we see a young man fleeing naked—which was probably the author, Mark.

Today we thought about Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane. He called God “Abba, Father.” He believed that everything is possible for God. He was totally honest with God. But most of all, he struggled to submit himself to God’s will, out of his love for God. And he persevered until prayer changed him. May God help us learn to pray like Jesus.