

Jesus Prays on the Mount of Olives
Luke 22:39-62
Key Verse: 22:42

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."

In today's passage Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives just before his arrest and trial. In one respect, Jesus' prayer is unique. It was the prayer of the Son of God before a mission that only he could do. In this regard, we only observe Jesus' holy prayer in admiration and gratitude. All we can do is say, "Thank you, Jesus." But at the same time, Jesus is our example. Jesus is teaching us to pray. What do you do when life seems too hard and your burden is too heavy to bear? Jesus teaches us to pray. It is the way to spiritual victory. Peter and the disciples did not pray and failed in the time of crisis. Let's learn more about Jesus, and how to pray, through today's study.

I. Jesus prays and the disciples sleep (39-46)

As we have studied, Jesus observed the Passover in a secret place in order to establish a new covenant in his blood with his disciples and us. After finishing, Jesus resumed his normal routine (Lk 21:37-38). He went out as usual to the Mount of Olives (39). Jesus went there to pray. In so doing, he made himself vulnerable to betrayal and arrest. The Mount of Olives is located east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley. This past January, I had the privilege of visiting there and stood in the olive garden. The olive trees had thick, gnarly bark coverings and looked to be 2,000 years old. It was a serene place, conducive to prayer. Fittingly, "The Church of All Nations" is now there. Verse 39 tells us that Jesus went "as usual" to the Mount of Olives. This expresses that for Jesus prayer was a regular practice. Jesus prayed in the early morning and in the evening (Mk 1:35).

Jesus' disciples followed him to the Mount of Olives. Jesus said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." Until now, Jesus had not directly told his disciples to pray. Jesus had set an example for them through his own habit of regular prayer. Jesus had taught them how to pray. Jesus had taught them to pray persistently. Jesus had told them to watch and pray. But here, Jesus directly told them to pray as he had not done before. It was a very urgent matter. Temptation was about to come upon them. Satan would attack their fellowship in a sudden and shocking manner. The only way for them to overcome the devil's power was to pray.

Jesus withdrew from his disciples about a stone's throw. At this time, Jesus needed to be alone to fight a spiritual battle. Jesus knelt down and prayed. Jesus was humble before God. Jesus was submissive to God, though he knew that the moment of great trial was coming upon him. What did Jesus pray? Let's read verse 42. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." We learn several things here.

First, Jesus called God, "Father." This is an expression of intimacy. It was an expression of trust in the love of God. It was a confession of his clear identity as the Son of God. Though Jesus knew that the time of trial was coming, he trusted God's love. This assurance gave Jesus freedom to come to God as he was. Jesus' prayer was a heart cry to God in complete transparency. In order to truly pray to God, we need to trust the love of God like Jesus did. When we do, we can bring the real problems of our hearts to God.

Second, Jesus submitted his prayer to God's will. Jesus began his prayer with, "if you are willing," and ended with "yet not my will, but yours be done." These are like bookends on Jesus' prayer. Jesus'

request was enclosed in a qualifier that God's will be done above all. Jesus did not pray to change God's will. Again, we learn from Jesus. Though our requests are urgent and important, we should subordinate them to God's will. We may be blinded by our desires. Our vision and understanding may be far too small. It may be that what we pray for is actually not best for us or for others. Fundamentally, we should trust God who is wiser than all, and who is loving and good. God's will is best! When we believe this, we can pray like Jesus did.

Third, "take this cup from me." This is what Jesus was really asking God. Jesus wanted God to take the cup away from him. What did Jesus mean by "the cup"? In terms of upcoming events, Jesus knew full well what awaited him. Jesus foretold in Luke 9:22: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Jesus had plainly foretold his betrayal (Lk 9:44), and repeated the prediction of his suffering, death and resurrection (Lk 18:31-33). Jesus would die a shameful and painful death at the age of 33. No one wants to be rejected. But Jesus would be utterly rejected. No one wants to experience pain. But Jesus would go through terrible torture. No one wants to die, especially at a young age. But Jesus had to die. When Jesus said, "take this cup from me," he honestly admitted that he wanted to avoid the awful ordeal which was upon him.

However, there is more to the meaning of "the cup." It referred to the outpouring of God's wrath as expressed by the prophets (Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15-16). If God looked with favor upon Jesus as he went through his suffering and death, it would be bearable for Jesus. But Jesus knew that God would not look with favor upon him. In fact, God would see Jesus as the sin of the world. Paul said, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21a). Jesus would take the place of the abusive husband, the wayward mother, the rebellious child, the thief, the liar, the substance abuser, the coward, the murderer, the sexually immoral, and so on. Jesus would take upon himself the sin of the world. And God would pour out upon Jesus the full measure of punishment that sin deserves. God would express his anger and hatred of sin without holding back. Only Jesus knew how terribly awful this would be. Jesus knew that at that moment, he would feel crushed and abandoned and cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus shuddered at the thought of taking this awful separation from God for our sins. So Jesus prayed, "Take this cup from me."

God heard Jesus' anguished prayer. God understood the pain and revulsion Jesus felt before the cup. I believe that if there had been another way to solve man's sin problem, God would have found it at that moment. But God did not deviate. God proceeded with his plan to offer Jesus as a ransom sacrifice for the sins of the world. So instead of taking the cup from Jesus, God sent an angel to Jesus. The angel came to strengthen Jesus to take the cup. Then Jesus knew what God's answer was: "Take the cup." According to Luke, Jesus did not ask God again to take the cup from him. Instead, Jesus changed his prayer topic. Jesus prayed more earnestly to take the cup. His prayer was so intense that Luke says his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. It may be that the capillaries of Jesus' blood vessels were bursting at the intensity of his struggle, and blood was literally mixed with his sweat. In this way, through a bloody struggle of prayer, Jesus overcame his aversion to the cup of wrath and determined to obey the will of God. Through prayer, Jesus won the victory before fighting.

Let's think for a minute about two cups which Luke has mentioned in chapter 22. One was the cup which symbolized a new covenant in Jesus' blood. Jesus offered it as a means of grace to bring forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation with God. Yet, in order to offer that cup, Jesus had to take another cup, the awful cup of God's wrath. Only Jesus could do this for us. Our response: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise" (Rev 5:12).

When Jesus rose from prayer, he went back to his disciples and found them sleeping. Luke says that they were "exhausted from sorrow." They were facing the reality that Jesus had been warning them about. Jesus would be taken from them and treated like a criminal. The disciples would appear to be criminals too, and would be greatly despised. Dreams of messianic glory were breaking. Worst of all, they felt confidence oozing out of their souls. They felt that total failure was looming before them and they could do nothing to stop it. They did not want to think about hideous Satan. It was more than they could bear. Their sorrow felt like a ton of bricks on their backs. They struggled for a while and then fell asleep. Jesus did not excuse them. Jesus wanted them to win the victory as he had. So he said, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

In this part Luke challenges us to learn Jesus' prayer. Jesus' regular practice of prayer has been a theme of Luke's gospel. There is a saying, "The extraordinary comes from the ordinary." When Jesus prayed regularly during ordinary times, he experienced extraordinary power in the time of need. On the other hand, the disciples, who don't seem to have formed a habit of prayer, were unable to pray when they needed to. We should make daily prayer our habit of life. Then we will be ready when the times of crisis come.

We also learn from Jesus the importance of a night of prayer as he had at the Mount of Olives. During our pilgrimage as Christians we all face moments of unbearable anguish of soul. A few years ago, I found that my oldest son had entered into an alternative lifestyle. When I realized that it was not just a teenage phase, but a deliberate life choice that he had made, I was shocked and lost the strength to live in this world. Then the Lord led me to spend a night in prayer over this matter. After much struggle, Romans 8:32 came to my heart. It says: "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things." My own grief became a bridge by which to understand the heart of God even a little. God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for sinners like me. God's heart was broken, but he did this because he loves sinners. The love of God overwhelmed me like a flood. I stopped thinking about myself and could only praise God for his love. Moreover, my heart changed. I realized that God was grieving over all of his prodigal children, including my son. From that time on, I began to love each of them as my own and to pray for them. Without that night of prayer, I might not be here today. But through it God granted me a new heart. Still, I am still learning to pray.

We also face painful conflicts between God's will and our desires. This conflict may surface as we struggle to decide who to marry. It may surface as we seek to set our future career direction, or decide where and how to engage in Christian ministry. When this conflict arises, we should confront it through prayer. I remember my shepherd Dr. Abraham Kim. He was sent by the Korean Military Academy to study for a Ph.D. in ocean engineering at Oregon State University in the late 1970's. His real purpose in coming was to be a missionary. Through his Bible teaching and prayer several disciples of Jesus began to grow, including me. One day Dr. Kim's advisor told him to give up his Christian ministry and focus exclusively on Ph.D. study. If not, he would be dismissed. Dr. Kim took this matter to the Lord in prayer. He prayed all night, and finally decided to give up his Ph.D. study in order to obey God's will as a missionary. He informed his advisor, and was dismissed. But the Lord gave him inspiration and strength. He found a new advisor who accepted all of his research. He finished his Ph.D. right on schedule and returned to Korea with honor. Most of all, God blessed his ministry to bear spiritual fruits. Dr. Samuel Lee recognized this prayerful decision as an important event in the work of God. When Dr. Lee went to Korea for the World Mission Report in 1985, he shared Dr. Kim's decision as an example, like Moses' decision of faith. This inspired others to pray and make decisions of faith to please God. A night of prayer led to a great spiritual victory that spread to the body of Christ. Let's not avoid spiritual struggles. Let's take them to the Lord in prayer. It is the way of victory.

II. Jesus reveals God's love as the disciples strike with the sword (47-53)

In this part Luke contrasts Jesus' response to the crisis with that of his disciples. While Jesus was still speaking, a crowd came up, and Judas, a beloved disciple, approached Jesus to kiss him. But this kiss was a signal to the arresters. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Throughout history, the betrayal of a close and trusted friend has been a shocking tragedy to many a great leader. For example, Julius Caesar conquered foreign armies with great wisdom and courage. But when betrayed by his friend Brutus in Rome, he lost heart and cried tragically. Jesus, as a man who had loved and served his disciples, was vulnerable to the pain of betrayal. But through his prayer, Jesus was spiritually alert and had keen insight. He exposed Judas' act and warned that Judas would face grave consequences. Judas was not just betraying his friend Jesus, he was betraying the Son of Man whom God sent to judge the world. Warning Judas like this came from true love for his soul.

Jesus' words alerted the sleepy disciples. They said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. Though it may have seemed courageous, it was a foolish act. It could have turned the event into a bloodbath and some or all of the disciples could have been killed. When the disciples did not pray, they had no wisdom. They were trying to fight a spiritual battle with the weapons of the flesh. This kind of response always makes things worse, not better.

Jesus rebuked his disciples, saying, "No more of this!" Then Jesus touched the man's ear and healed him. Jesus' touch revealed his love for the wounded man. Jesus loved even his enemies and healed one who had come to arrest him. By the power of God's love, Jesus was ruling over the situation and he averted a bloody conflict.

Then Jesus spoke to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders who had come for him. These men were avowed enemies of Jesus. They were full of hatred. They were irrational. But Jesus reasoned with them, pointing out that he had never tried to arouse a rebellion and that he had always worked openly in the daylight. Jesus tried to help them realize that they were under the power of darkness. Jesus faced the forces of darkness all alone. No one understood him or helped him except his Father God. Yet we see that Jesus was full of the love of God. Jesus overcame hatred with love and darkness with the light. It was through his prayer.

III. Jesus submits to God's will and Peter denies Jesus three times (54-62)

Verse 54a says, "Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest." Though Jesus had many ways to resist his arrest and trial, he did not do so. Jesus yielded himself to his arresters and quietly went to torture and death like a lamb led to the slaughter. It was to fulfill the will of God. It was to give his life as a ransom for many. Though it looked like a defeat, it led to the greatest spiritual victory of all.

Peter followed Jesus at a distance, hoping to find some way to do something for Jesus. He ended up in the middle of the high priest's courtyard surrounded by his servants. There, in a little over an hour, Peter denied Jesus three times before three different persons, emphasizing his denial more strongly each time. Just after he denied Jesus for the third time, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." What Jesus had foretold had come true exactly. Even though Peter had adamantly insisted he would lay down his life for Jesus, he completely failed to do so. Peter went outside and wept bitterly. Peter had to acknowledge how truly weak he was. This failure

humbled him. Then he began to learn the power of prayer and the power of Jesus' word (1 Pe 1:24-25). The time of failure is the time to learn prayer.

In this passage we have learned Jesus' prayer. We praise and thank Jesus who took the cup of God's wrath, so that we may receive grace. Let's also learn to pray as Jesus did. It is the secret to spiritual victory.