

“NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE”

Luke 22:39–62

Key Verse: 22:42

“...saying, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.’”

Are you living by any life motto? A popular one today is “YOLO” (You Only Live Once). It means to seize the best opportunities and experiences right now, because life is short. Others say, “Do epic ‘stuff,’” “Follow your passion,” or “Create your own path.” These are big statements on living large. But in today’s passage Jesus is living by a totally opposite motto. All by himself, he’s praying so hard, saying, “Not my will, but yours be done.” These aren’t just words: he really means it. He struggles with all his might in prayer to conquer himself and really live this out. It seems Jesus has been living by this motto his whole life, and now, it’s about to cut his life short, in his early thirties. Is this a good way to live? Are we all supposed to do this? In his prayer we see not only a life motto, but also an essential truth about who he is. Who is Jesus? Why is he praying like this? And what relevance does it have for us? May God speak to us through his word.

Look at verse 39 (ESV). He’s leaving the house where he just finished the Last Supper with his disciples. There, he explained about the new covenant in his blood. Hearing it, the disciples are disturbed. And after hearing that one of them would betray him and that Peter would deny him, they’re troubled. A few days before, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey with a crowd cheering him as King. But now, what he’s saying seems to knock the wind right out of them. Now it’s night, and he quietly heads out of the city to the Mount of Olives.

Luke says “as was his custom” (39). It means Jesus has been going there nightly (21:37). It’s outdoors, where they all can stay free of charge. But “...as was his custom” also refers to his prayer life. Jesus likes to pray at night on the Mount of Olives. Early in his ministry, when great crowds gathered to him, Jesus withdrew to desolate places and prayed (5:16). Once, he continued all night in prayer to God (6:12). Once, he was praying in a certain place, and his disciples wanted to learn to pray (11:1). For Jesus, prayer was not an afterthought or last resort; it was his custom, his habit. The Greek word for “custom” is “ethos,” which means “characteristic spirit.” Jesus lived with the spirit of prayer. The phrase “and the disciples followed him” is also key. They’re following him physically, but they’re sorrowful, without his same spirit (46b). Now, Jesus is using probably his most desperate personal moment to show these men something.

Read verse 40. Things are dire. They're all facing serious temptation. The disciples are on the verge of abandoning him. Jesus is about to encounter a powerful temptation, which we'll soon see. At such a moment, what does he do? He's always kept his disciples close and has been so concerned for them. But look at verse 41. He pulls away from them to come to God alone. Luke adds that he "knelt down." Location and posture in prayer usually don't matter. But at this moment, away from the others, Jesus kneels down. Kneeling expresses his humility, his reverence, his surrender. Kneeling alone in prayer is still a good way to get serious with God.¹

What does he say? Read verse 42. First he calls God "Father." It shows the personal, Father-and-Son love relationship they have. Jesus has always spoken of God like this.² But what he's asking is startling: "...if you are willing, remove this cup from me." What? Is he backing out? The "cup" is the "baptism" he has to undergo; earlier he said he'll be distressed until it's accomplished.³ It's about his upcoming suffering and death on a cross. He's already told his disciples about it several times (9:22,44; 13:33; 18:31–33a). He said it "must" happen. So, how can he now be praying that it won't? What's going on?

In chapter 1, Jesus is the holy Son of God, being conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:35). But because he was born of a virgin, Mary, Jesus is also fully human. In his growth from childhood, as well as in his genealogy back to Adam,⁴ Luke portrays Jesus as an ordinary person, like anyone of any race, culture or social class, made like us in every respect (Heb.2:17). As God's Son, he's very in tune with the will of God; as a human he also has his own desires. As God's Son, he's sinless and knows that he has to die now. But fully human, he has a strong desire to live. This desire is so deep, it'll take quite a struggle to overcome it.

There's more to this cup than just the pain of execution on a cross. It's being abandoned by his disciples and looking like a failure. It's having all the people he loved and served just walk away. Most of all, on that cross he'll have to take the full force of God's punishment for our sin. He'll be bearing all the holy wrath, judgment and condemnation our sin deserves. On the cross, he's going to become sin for us (2 Cor.5:21, NIV), severed from God's holy presence until it's done. His whole life, Jesus has always lived in perfect fellowship with God. So, to us who aren't that close to God, we can't fully get what he's feeling. He doesn't want to feel cut off from God even for a moment. As grief and anguish of soul arise in him (Isa.53:10–11) he prays, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup

¹ Luke also uses this word several times to describe the prayer of believers (Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5).

² Jesus called God his "Father" (2:49; 10:21–22; 22:29; 23:34,46). He also taught his disciples to think of God and pray to him as their "Father" (6:36; 9:26; 11:2,13; 12:30,32; Acts 1:4,7).

³ 12:50; cf. Mark 10:38–39.

⁴ 2:39–52; 3:23–38.

from me.” Sure of his Father’s love, he’s free to be honest with him. He shares with his Father what’s really in his heart. His first words in prayer are so genuine.

But he doesn’t stop there. He says, “Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done” (42b). This is no fatalistic resignation. His words reveal one of the most beautiful things about him. He genuinely loves God. In love he came to do his Father’s will.⁵ As a human, he loves life, but he loves his Father God more. He’s ready to go through anything for him. Above all, he wants his Father’s will to be done. Even in his most painful moment, this is the focus of his prayer. It shows that his love for God is real. And there’s something else. Jesus loved God with all his heart and soul and strength and mind, **and** he loved his neighbor as himself (10:27). He’s praying to go through with God’s will, to make this new covenant in his blood for us, because he **loves us too**. He wants us all to repent and receive his forgiveness and the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He wants this gospel to reach people of all nations (Luke 24:47). He wants everyone who believes in him to receive forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43). The only way for God to do that is through the death of his sinless Son. Jesus once said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Now, Jesus our Friend is about to give “himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...” (Gal.1:4).

But how does his prayer to do God’s will relate to us? “My will” can refer to all kinds of human desires and plans, which may not seem so bad. But the Bible says that if we believe in Jesus, we too should “live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Pet.4:2). Apostle Paul writes, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph.5:17). Paul urges us to “discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom.12:2). He says we all should be “doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph.6:6). He has a clear goal for our spiritual life: to “stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God” (Col.4:12). He means to align all our thoughts, purposes and decisions with the desires and purposes of God. Sounds great, but it never happens easily. It requires, among other things, a continuous struggle in prayer. Each of us needs God’s help to truly do his will.

Look at verse 43. When Jesus prays to put God’s will ahead of his own, God sends an angel from heaven to strengthen him. And it’s just the beginning. Read verse 44. The word “agony” is key. In Greek it means to get into a fight or a wrestling match, straining every nerve. It’s the same word as “struggle”⁶ or “strive,”⁷ used especially to describe prayer (Rom.15:30). And the verb tense in

⁵ Heb.10:5–7; cf. Ps.40:8a.

⁶ Col.1:29; 4:12; Heb.12:4.

⁷ Luke 13:24; 1 Tim.4:10.

verse 44 implies a growing intensity. Jesus is agonizing so much, doctor Luke writes that “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (44b). Has any of us ever broken even a little sweat in prayer? Jesus is praying so hard, he’s sweating profusely. He’s soaked. He’s going deep, fighting against this inner desire just to live physically. For Jesus, fully the Son of God and fully human, this agony is unique. But anyone serious about God’s will is going to taste a similar agony. When we feel agony, we tend to give up. But in his agony Jesus prays “more earnestly.” Literally, this expression means “stretching” or “straining” (Phil.3:13). He may be pushing himself beyond anything he’s ever done before. Through this fervent prayer he wins over himself. Through prayer he wins the victory over inner temptation. If we’re going to accomplish the will of God, we all need such intense prayer.

Look at verse 45. He finds his disciples “sleeping for sorrow.” It’s understandable. They’re weak. But read verse 46. Jesus repeats what he said earlier, to pray not to enter into temptation (40). It’s what he taught at the end of the Lord’s Prayer: “...and lead us not into temptation” (11:4b). These words are not just a flowery expression. We need to take this prayer topic seriously. Some people are curious and seek to play around with the wrong things. They like to live dangerously. Jesus wants us to be just the opposite. He wants us to be asking God to “keep temptation far from me.”⁸ Are we really praying for that?

Temptation is real, even for Jesus. In every respect he’s been tempted as we are (Heb.4:15). Before his ministry began he was tempted (4:1–13). During his ministry he went through “trials” or “temptations” (22:28). Now, at the end of his ministry he’s tempted perhaps the most. Even after his prayer, while suffering on the cross, the devil’s still tempting him, through people, to save himself. Jesus warned us, “Temptations to sin are sure to come” (17:1). Temptation can “overtake” or seize us (1 Cor.10:13). Some temptations are obvious, like sexual immorality (1 Cor.7:2) or the desire to get rich (1 Tim.6:9). But there’s a much more subtle temptation: to escape the cross. Giving in to this temptation is spiritually deadly. We fight against temptation through prayer, so the devil also tempts us not to pray. He uses even close human relationships to hinder our prayer (1 Pet.3:7). Jesus urges us (40,46) to stay “alert” in prayer (cf. Eph.6:18).

Luke shows what a difference prayer makes. After prayer, Jesus has the peace and presence of mind to speak to his betrayer, Judas, soberly (47–48). His disciples, who didn’t pray, are quick to fight a human battle (49–50). Being peaceful through prayer, Jesus acts based on forgiveness and brings not violence but healing (51). He also has the courage to rebuke the religious leaders for coming with swords and clubs and siding with the power of darkness (52–53).

⁸ Ps.101:4; 119:29; Prov.30:8.

In verses 54–60 we see a sorry result of a failure to pray. Peter, who boasted that he was ready to go with Jesus both to prison and to death, denies him three times, just as Jesus said he would (33–34). In contrast, after prayer, Jesus doesn't miss the chance; with just one look, he helps Peter, at the crucial moment, to repent based on his word (61–62).

Praise Jesus, who shows us how to come to God humbly in personal prayer to overcome temptation and do God's will. Praise Jesus, who asked God to help him go to the cross, so that he could bring the forgiveness of sins to all who believe. Read verse 42 again. May God help us make Jesus' words, "not my will, but yours be done," not just our daily prayer, but our very own life motto.