

# Submitting to the Father's Will

Lesson Text: Matthew 26:36-50

Related Scriptures: Psalm 88:1-18; Mark 14:32-42;  
John 12:20-26; Hebrews 5:7-9

TIME: A.D. 30

PLACE: Mount of Olives

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39).

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## Lesson Exposition

Jesus had come to the most critical moment of His life. We often think of the events of Calvary and the triumph of the resurrection as Jesus' most crucial moments. Yet neither of those would have occurred without the resolute courage of spirit Jesus manifested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus and His disciples had concluded their Passover observance. They sang a hymn and left the house in which they had eaten the meal (Matt. 26:30). As they journeyed toward the Mount of Olives, Jesus tried to convey to the disciples that He was going to die soon (vs. 31). Peter and the rest of the disciples renewed their devotion to Jesus, regardless of the cost (vss. 33-35).

### **THE AGONY OF GETHSEMANE— Matt. 26:36-46**

**The point of death (Matt. 26:36-38).** The Mount of Olives was across the Kidron Valley, east of the city of Jerusalem. There was a garden called Gethsemane situated somewhere on the Mount of Olives. It was probably

a grove of olive trees. ("Gethsemane" means "olive press.") Jesus and His disciples had gone there often (John 18:2). It was probably a good place to sit and rest for a moment before entering or after exiting Jerusalem. On this night, Jesus told His disciples to sit and wait while He went into the garden to pray (Matt. 26:36).

Jesus did not want to be completely alone, so He chose three disciples to accompany Him into the interior of the garden. Peter, James, and John were Jesus' inner circle. He felt a special emotional closeness to the three men. Jesus' mood was somber. He began to feel sorrowful and troubled. This was not a lighthearted moment. Jesus was keenly aware of the mission before Him. His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Some have speculated that Jesus thought He might not live through the emotionally crushing anticipation of the cross. We cannot know exactly what Jesus meant, but it is obvious that the agony of His spirit was intense. Jesus wanted

His three closest friends with Him. He asked them to remain close to Him.

**Another way (Matt. 26:39).** Jesus ventured a little farther into the garden, prostrated Himself on the ground, and began to pray. He asked His Father whether there was a way the awful events of Calvary could be avoided. Was it possible that the salvation of humankind could be accomplished without the cross? Here we see the humanity of Jesus. Who would not shrink from the physical and spiritual agonies Jesus was about to experience?

Jesus referred to His ordeal as a "cup." Similar references in the Old Testament are associated with suffering and wrath (Ps. 11:6; Isa. 51:17). We must remember that Jesus was not merely anticipating the physical pain of the cross. He was anticipating the true agony of the cross—becoming sin itself and suffering separation from His Father because of that sin (Matt. 27:46; II Cor. 5:21). Despite all the agony revealed by His knowledge of upcoming events, Jesus committed Himself to the Father's will (Matt. 26:39).

**Disappointment (Matt. 26:40-41).** Jesus stopped praying and returned to Peter, James, and John. Even though He had gone deeper into the garden to be alone in prayer, He wanted them close by. Knowing that they were there must have afforded Him some comfort. He probably assumed that they would be praying for Him. Imagine His disappointment when He found them asleep! His heartache is evident as He asks Peter whether they could not even stay awake to pray for Him for an hour.

Jesus was disappointed, but He also recognized the frailty of human flesh. The disciples probably wanted to help Jesus however they could, but they were very tired. They were not experiencing the intense agony Jesus was experiencing. Their strength was gone. Even though they wanted to support

Jesus in whatever way He needed, they did not have the strength to do so.

**The Father's will (Matt. 26:42).** Jesus again left the three men to pray alone. It is easy to miss the small difference in Jesus' second prayer. This time Jesus seemed to recognize that there was no "plan B." If Jesus is God and is therefore omniscient (all-knowing), would He not already have known what the answer would be? Had He set aside some of His omniscience when He came to earth, or were His prayers in Gethsemane a rhetorical exercise? Those are difficult questions. The one issue we can be sure of is Jesus' unwavering commitment to His Father's will.

**Further disappointment (Matt. 26:43-44).** Jesus returned to the three disciples and once again found them asleep. In the moment of His greatest need, Jesus' closest friends failed Him. This time He apparently did not awaken the three men. Was He disgusted with them? Did He simply recognize their inability to minister to Him? Having been failed by His human friends, Jesus returned to speak again with His Father. Matthew curtly recorded that Jesus "prayed the third time, saying the same words."

**Final disappointment (Matt. 26:45-46).** Jesus returned to the three disciples and once again found them asleep. In sad recognition of their human weakness, Jesus said, "Sleep on." Jesus had never failed His disciples. Yet in His moment of greatest need, they did nothing but miserably disappoint Him.

Jesus knew that the clock was ticking. His hour had come. He knew of Judas's treachery. He had hoped to find some consolation in His other disciples, but He was bitterly disappointed.

Jesus sensed the moment of Judas's arrival and told His disciples to get up. They would go to a place where

Judas and his accomplices could easily find them. The moment of Jesus' divine appointment on behalf of sinners had arrived.

### **THE ARREST AT GETHSEMANE— Matt. 26:47-50**

**The men of violence (Matt. 26:47-49).** Before Jesus finished speaking, Judas arrived, accompanied by a large contingent of temple guards. They were armed with swords and clubs, indicating that they were prepared to use violence in taking Jesus. Judas had prearranged a signal. He would kiss Jesus. Remember, it was dark. Everyone would probably have been wearing a head covering, and most Jewish men wore beards. Those who did not know Jesus might have had trouble picking Him out of the crowd of disciples.

Judas instructed the guards to grab the man he kissed and arrest him. Did he fear that Jesus would fight or perhaps flee? We do not know. It is clear that Judas feared in some sense that the plan would not go smoothly.

Judas executed his plan. He approached Jesus and kissed Him, calling Him "master" (vs. 49). Jesus' disciples, not knowing what Judas was doing, would not have thought this an unusual greeting.

**The Man of peace (Matt. 26:50).** Jesus' use of the word "friend" is ironic in that He willingly recognized Judas as a colleague. He was also being somewhat curt, however, since the underlying Greek word *etairos* "always denotes a mutually binding relation between the speaker and the hearer which the latter has disregarded and scorned" (Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans). Consider the situations in which this word was used the two other times it appears in the New Testament (20:13; 22:12).

Jesus' statement to Judas was also ironic, since He knew exactly what Judas was doing. How do you think Judas felt when Jesus treated him so gently? Jesus was not going to fight or flee. When the men of violence stepped forward to take Him, the Man of peace offered no resistance. The words to a hymn by Ray Overholt express it well: "He could have called ten thousand angels, to destroy the world and set Him free" ("Ten Thousand Angels"). Jesus did not call for assistance—human or supernatural.

In Gethsemane, Jesus' flesh struggled against His spirit. In Gethsemane, Jesus experienced the dark night of human fear and dread. In Gethsemane, Jesus listened for His Father's deliverance and heard nothing. He left the garden to go to the cross. There He would redeem sinful humanity.

—Terry A. Clark.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. Why do you think Jesus picked only three disciples to go with Him while He prayed?
2. Do you think Jesus thought He might die of heartache before He got to the cross?
3. In what way did Jesus' three closest friends fail Him?
4. Did Jesus think His Father had another way to accomplish salvation? Was that what He was praying for?
5. Why do you think the flesh is so weak even when the spirit is willing?
6. Who accompanied Judas to Gethsemane? Why were they armed? How did Jesus respond to them?

—Terry A. Clark.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We do well when we, like Jesus, take our burdens to God (Matt. 26:36; cf. 14:23; John 6:15).
2. To have close friends in times of crises is a blessing (Matt. 26:37-38; cf. Rom. 12:15).
3. Ultimate submission to the will of God is a spiritual goal all should seek to attain (Matt. 26:39; cf. Heb. 10:36).
4. Friends may fail us; God never will (Matt. 26:40; cf. Heb. 13:5).
5. There is no room for letting down one's guard against Satan (Matt. 26:41-46; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8).
6. Sadly, there are those who yield to the devil (Matt. 26:47-50).

—Darrell W. McKay.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why would Jesus have chosen to pray in Gethsemane rather than in the upper room (Matt. 26:36)?
2. What was it about Peter and the sons of Zebedee that moved Jesus to invite them to go beyond the others (vss. 37-38)?
3. Why did Jesus go even beyond the three disciples (vs. 39)?
4. What does it say about Jesus that He kept checking on His disciples (vss. 40-46)?
5. Why would Judas have thought to look for Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:47; cf. Luke 22:39)?
6. Why would Judas betray Jesus with a kiss rather than by simply pointing at Him and telling the authorities He was the one (Matt. 26:48-49)?

—Darrell W. McKay.

## GOLDEN TEXT ILLUMINATED

**“And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matthew 26:39).**

Our golden text records the first of Jesus' three prayers in the garden, all of similar content: He asked the Father to let the cup of His impending torture and crucifixion pass from Him if possible, followed by His affirmation of willingness to do His Father's will, no matter what.

Jesus' resolve to do His Father's will is a shining example for us. Jesus was as frail and human as any of us, yet He relied upon the power of God through the Holy Spirit to overcome His human weakness and give Himself as an offering for our redemption.

We have the same spiritual resources available to us today that Jesus relied on that fateful night in Gethsemane. But will we trust our heavenly Father's will for us as He did?

Even with the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, our fallen human nature craves autonomy. We stubbornly desire to maintain a firm grasp on the tiller of our own destiny, no matter how many times we have experienced the Father's faithfulness.

Yet Jesus forsook His own welfare for the sake of those He loved. He chose to keep His own will in perfect sync with the will of His heavenly Father so that He could redeem us from our lost condition.

To truly follow Jesus' example in Gethsemane, we must love God and others enough to trust His will under the most extreme and demanding situations.

—John Lody.