

When God's Will Hurts

Mark 14:32-42

Introduction

The pages of scripture are scattered with the lives of individuals who have, by obeying God, experienced tremendous pain and suffering.

I think of Hosea who was told by God to choose a wife. I would imagine that he had some lady friends from which he could have selected, but the Lord said, "I want you to choose a wife from among those who are prostitutes." (Hosea 1)

So, Hosea goes and chooses a wife named Gomer. She, of course, is unfaithful, and finally, leaves him.

We would expect God to say, "Okay, you have now done what I wanted you to do. The pain is over."

Instead, God says, "I want you to find Gomer and buy her back to be your wife again." (Hosea 3)

I think of Noah, whom we always think of riding on the crest of the waves in his ark. We sometimes forget that for more than one hundred twenty years, he faced unbelievable torture, pain, and scoffing from those around him. (Genesis 6)

I think of Paul who, by obeying God, would lose his life, as tradition says, in Rome, where he was beheaded.

However, ladies and gentlemen, as we come to the passage of scripture that we will be discussing today, in our continuing study through the Gospel of Mark, I can find nowhere else in the word where someone has suffered so greatly or experienced so much pain for doing the will of the Father as Jesus Christ Himself. This passage is perhaps the clearest expose' of a time when God's will hurts.

Setting the Stage

Turn to Mark, chapter 14. Let us go through this passage of scripture and trust that God will challenge our hearts to live for Him. We will begin with verse 32.

By way of context, let me tell you that the time is about midnight.

Jesus and His disciples have just finished a full course meal as they celebrated the Passover. They have walked up the western slope of the Mount of Olives and have come to the place called Gethsemane, which literally means, "oil press". This was a place where olive trees grew. The olives would be pressed into that liquid gold known as olive oil. This was the place where Jesus would go to pray. In fact, the gospels tell us that He went there on occasion.

It is interesting that there is a person in the New Testament who was nameless, and yet served the Lord by allowing Him to go to this retreat; this little oasis. There were no gardens inside the walled city of Jerusalem because it was so filled with people and homes and crowded streets. To find any gardens, the people had to go outside the walls. The wealthy people owned the gardens, so evidently, a wealthy person owned the garden that we refer to as Gethsemane. It would be a retreat for the Lord, in His ministry, and for His disciples, as they would often go there to pray.

Jesus goes to Gethsemane for the last time, to pray. Look at Mark 14:32.

They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed."

Observing the Lord – With His Closest Disciples

Now, let us observe the Lord as He takes with Him, according to Mark 14:33, Peter, James, and John.

Why did Jesus take Peter, James and John?

I want to stop and ask the question, "Why did Jesus choose to take these three disciples?"

Evidently, He comes to the entrance of the Garden of Gethsemane, deposits the disciples, and says, "Watch. Stand guard. I want to spend some time in prayer and I don't want to be interrupted. If I put you at the gate, then if anyone wants to find Me, at least they've got to go through you first."

Jesus then chooses three disciples – Peter, James, and John. He brings them with Him inside the garden; into the recesses where they will observe Him.

There are perhaps, several reasons that He took these three disciples with Him, but let me give two.

1. First, Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him for companionship.

Jesus Christ is facing, probably the loneliest time in His life. He will be betrayed, denied, and all of the things that will happen to Him. He takes His most intimate friends, the three who were usually with Him. They were with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration and when He raised Jairus' daughter, as well. It seems that when He wanted some disciples to pay close attention, He chose these three. However, I do not think He chose them just for companionship.

2. Secondly, Jesus took these three disciples with Him into the garden, perhaps even more, for their instruction.

Peter, James, and John were the leaders among the band of disciples. Jesus knew that if they would learn; if they were to pick up anything; if He wanted to teach something specific, then if He taught it to these three, they could go back and relay it to the others.

I think Jesus took these three leaders into the garden with Him because He wanted them to observe Him. He wanted them to see His agony and His sorrow. He perhaps, wanted to teach them the lesson of how to handle the will of God when it hurts. We do not know.

Jesus was always the teacher, even in His agony. He took these three with Him to teach by observation.

Why was Jesus depressed?

I also want to answer the question, "Why was Jesus depressed?"

Look at Mark 14:33b-34 and notice Jesus' depression.

. . . He . . . began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch."

Why was Jesus depressed? Because He, being God and, on the basis of that, being omniscient, knew exactly what was going to happen. As a result, let me give several reasons for His depression.

1. Jesus would be betrayed by Judas.

Judas was one who had walked with Jesus for just over three years, yet he would betray Him. I would imagine it would be depressing to think that you had poured your life into someone, yet for thirty pieces of silver, he would cast your friendship aside.

2. I think Jesus was depressed because He knew that Peter would deny Him.

Peter, the one whom He had renamed "Rock," the one whom He had so much invested in, would, in the crises hour, turn away from Him.

3. I think the rejection by Israel was probably one of the greatest contributors to Jesus' depression.

He had come from heaven to be the King; to offer the kingdom program, yet they had rejected Him as Messiah.

4. Jesus was depressed because He faced the bearing of sin.

We are trying to explain something today, ladies and gentlemen, that is unexplainable. We cannot ever comprehend the agony that Jesus felt. We could never put on a data sheet all of the agony that He must have felt and knew was coming by being made sin; by taking on Himself the sins of the *whole* world. We cannot imagine.

5. Undoubtedly the abandonment by God the Father added to Jesus' agony and depression.

God the Father and Jesus had been inseparable, of course.

6. Being human, the fear of the prospect of death was also a cause of Jesus' depression.

There is no doubt in my mind that Jesus Christ was filled with terror, knowing what the cross meant.

As one man wrote, “Jesus Christ, in the garden, lifted the cup of our agony and our sorrow and drank damnation dry.”

Observing the Lord – Alone in Prayer

Now, notice the Lord as He is alone in prayer.

See His sorrow!

Look at Mark 14:35a.

And He went a little beyond them [Peter, James, and John], and fell to the ground and began to pray . . .

This is interesting because the tense means that Jesus continually fell and continually prayed. It is as if Jesus, in the dark inner recesses of that garden, observed by Peter, James, and John before they fell asleep, would stumble and fall and pray, and then, would pick Himself up off the ground and, in His sorrow, would stumble and fall and pray again, as He wept. It must have been an awesome sight to see Him in such agony and sorrow.

See His agony!

Turn to Luke, chapter 22, which adds to this text and reveals something of the agony that Jesus must have felt.

Medically, what Jesus experienced is called, hematidrosis. It is impressive that I was able to even say that because I am not a doctor and have no idea how to pronounce such medical terms. Evidently, from what I have read, this is when the capillaries burst underneath the skin and the clotting of the blood can be mixed with sweat, so that you literally “sweat blood”.

Notice what happens in Luke 22:44.

And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

I have no doubt in my mind that Jesus could have died. The commentators that I have read, are rather convinced of this as well. Evidently, when this happens to your body, it means that you are in the throws of anguish. Jesus was in such agony that He

perhaps, could have died of a broken heart at that moment.

In Luke 22:43, we are told that at this point, an angel comes and ministers to Jesus. It is almost as if it would be premature for Him to die at this time, so an angel comes and refreshes Him temporarily.

However, my friends, this gives us a clue as to the agony that Jesus experienced. The capillaries literally, burst in His agony.

Hear His prayers!

Now turn back to Mark, chapter 14, and notice Jesus’ prayers. Look at Mark 14:35a.

And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began to pray . . .

The word in this verse for “pray,” in the original language, is “proseuchomai”. It is a different word than that used for the typical word “prayer”. “Proseuchomai” does not have the idea of begging someone for something, but instead, of pouring your heart out in prayer. Jesus is pouring out His heart; laying Himself bare; unloading on the Father.

Let me point out three elements of Jesus’ prayers that will help us as we struggle with the will of God.

1. First, notice Jesus’ strength from God’s love.

Look at Mark 14:36a.

And He was saying, “Abba! Father! . . .”

It is interesting that even though He was in such agony, God was still His Father and He continued to think of God the Father as His Father. I think, ladies and gentlemen, when you, if you are like me, face a difficulty or a trial, the first thing you are tempted to do is say, “Ha! You don’t even care! Some Father You are! Some God!”

Notice that even in this kind of agony, Jesus Christ still evidences the intimate relationship with God the Father. He says, “Abba!” – which is an intimate term that could be translated “Daddy” – “Father!”

Christ had such strength in His relationship with God the Father.

2. Secondly, notice Jesus’ struggle with God’s plan.

Look at the next phrase in Mark 14:36.

“. . . All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; . . .”

This verse is really interesting. In fact, if you read a hundred commentaries, you might find a hundred different viewpoints as to what this cup was. The viewpoint of each commentary might seem good and might make a lot of sense, so you have many varying views as to what this cup meant.

As I studied, I concluded that it would probably be correct to think that a lot of the views are right. This cup was probably a combination of agony. It could have referred to Jesus' death, His rejection, and the fact that He was made sin. I think we have to recognize that the cup was death and separation.

It is unbelievable to think that we are viewing Jesus Christ, who was without sin, come to a point in His life in which it would seem that He faltered – although He did not. It is as if He asked God the Father, "Father, I know that this is going to mean death, so, if possible, let's do this another way."

We have the idea, I think, that in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord has a script in His hand and it is as if He goes through the motions of this redemption, "Okay, it's time to pray because the scriptures are going to say, 'Pray.' Oh, I've got to fall down, so I fall down. . . ."

No. This was real. This was agony. This was the contemplation of death.

Jesus said, "This cup is almost too much to bear."

3. Thirdly, notice Jesus' surrender to the Father's will.

Look at the last part of Mark 14:36.

"... yet not what I will, but what You will."

I read recently, of a missionary family stationed in Ecuador. Their home was at the base of a mountain. In 1971, a freak accident occurred in which a hundred yards of that mountain collapsed. It looked to the people who watched, as if this mountain collapse was designed to smother and kill that missionary family because the mountain range extended miles in either direction. The telegram came to the States that Walt and Bonnie Steincross, the missionary family, were killed.

I read a story, by a very popular writer, of a woman whose son had just finished his training and was headed to the mission field. In the airport, he found a scrap of paper and jotted a note to his mother. On the other side of the paper were the letters "w," "h," "y," that read "why". The plane on which this son was flying, crashed and he was killed. We can

think of all the potential of a man who had just prepared for the mission field, and yet, his plane crashes. The mother received the note – and the word on the other side is the word that I think, you and I ask the most often; that is, the word, "why".

Why? In your life and in my life, when we struggle and grapple with something that perhaps, we are convinced God wants us to do, I think the key is not asking "Why?" but recognizing "Who?"

That is what Christ did as He surrenders His will to the Father's will,

... "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will."

Victory.

Learning From the Disciples

Now, in the process of all that is going on with Jesus, there is a sub-plot going on with the sleepy disciples. Let us take a look at this and learn something from them.

1. First, notice the disciples' indifference.

Look at Mark 14:37. After Jesus spent an hour in prayer, He went to Peter, James, and John.

And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?"

There is evidently an indifference in the lives of these disciples because in this verse, it appears that they do not understand the real issues that are going on. In this perhaps, eye-witness account given by Peter to Mark, Peter, for just a moment, watched the Lord stumble and fall and pray and cry and agonize, and then, went to sleep.

What you are like when you are faced with a difficulty? Perhaps you have a difficult decision to make or someone at work is getting under your skin. Is it keeping you up at night?

I do not know how in the world these men slept, but they did. I think it revealed their indifference.

2. Secondly, notice the disciples' confidence.

Look at Mark 14:38. This is what Jesus told the disciples.

"Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

I think these three disciples were very confident. In fact, Peter, James, and John probably woke up from their sleep, scratched their heads, and thought, "Well, Lord, didn't You hear us a little while ago? We'll never leave You. Hey, we already told You that we're sticking to You to the very end. Now, we can go to sleep. We're confident."

Notice that Jesus Christ never asked them to pray for Him, but says,

"Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; . . ."

"For although you are confident in your spirit, and are thinking, 'Man, we're going to the cross,'"

". . . the flesh is weak."

It is interesting, in this Gethsemane scene, that Jesus is humble, and that leads Him to pray; the disciples are confident, and that leads them to sleep.

3. Thirdly, notice, almost inevitably, the disciples' cowardice.

Skip to Mark 14:50.

And they all left Him and fled.

They all left Him and fled.

Application – Lessons On Handling God's Will . . . Even When It Hurts!

Now you and I are disciples, if we know Christ personally. What does Christ teach us from this garden, on how to handle the will of the Father – even when it hurts? Let me give four lessons that I gleaned from this text.

1. Number one, closeness to God does not erase the potential of pain.

There was no one closer to God the Father than Jesus Christ. Do not ever be tempted, when trial comes your way, to think, "Well, I must be sinning," or "I must be doing something wrong."

You can be intimate with the Father; you can be right on track, yet His will may involve tragedy, pain, or difficulty. Closeness to God the Father does not, all of the sudden, erase the potential for pain – it may come.

2. Number two, when in pain, friendships are to be utilized, not ignored.

I think the Lord gives us a very practical point when He takes the three disciples into the garden with

Him. He did not really need them and yet, He gives us a precedent concerning friendships.

I know what it is like when you face a difficult time. In a way, you want to build a wall or shut a door and stay inside. You do not want anyone to bother you; you want to go through this all alone. You, kind of, cry in your soup.

It is at times like this that intimate friendships can be utilized; can play a part. I think this is important.

3. Number three, our resources in pain are the word and prayer.

It is interesting that Jesus Christ prayed three times in the garden on three different occasions.

Jesus was tempted by Satan on three other occasions. Each time He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He responded with the word.

In our text today, in the garden, I think there was a battle going on between the forces of evil and the forces of righteousness. Every time, in battling the feelings of rebelling against the will of the Father, as we would, Jesus Christ responded in prayer.

4. Number four, we pray, not to change God, but to change ourselves.

The prayers of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane were not determined, necessarily, to change the Father, but to align Himself with the will of the Father.

Many times, you and I consider prayer to be the engine to talk God into doing something that we want Him to do. We think that if we pray consistently enough, then somehow, we can change His sovereign mind.

No. Prayer is going to God to allow Him to change us; to allow Him to do a work in *our* hearts. Then, as we struggle with pain; with trial; with difficulty, He can do a work in our hearts and change us.

I do not know where you are today, my friend, but I suspect that there may be some who are in the Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps you have some unanswered questions or you are experiencing some difficulty, trial, or pain. I think we could summarize, through the study of this text, that following the plan of God, whatever that may be and it is never written in bold print, we merely resign ourselves every day to whatever He wants us to do.

I can remember a man telling me one time that the Christian life is not a lot of decisions, it is one – that you are going to live for Christ.

Knowing God personally and intimately does not erase the potential of pain and difficulty. In fact, you

may be experiencing it now. Yet, God has designed it to transform your character and mine, that we might be for Him, what we ought to be.

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