

When Prayer Is a Struggle

Matthew 26:36-46

Midweek of Lent 1 (2/24/21)

Introduction

Sometimes, prayer is a struggle. I'm not referring to those times when we don't know how to pray or what to pray for. I'm talking about those times when it seems like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. We know that the best thing to do, the only thing to do, is to take it to the Lord in prayer; unburden ourselves and let Him handle it. It seems like it should be so easy. Just let go and let God have His way. Yet, the harder we struggle with something, the harder it is to let it go. Today, we look to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as our example of what to do when prayer is a struggle.

A Familiar Place

In **John 18:2** we read that Judas knew where they were going to be because *Jesus often met there with His disciples*. Jesus chose this spot because it was a familiar spot. When we have something big to pray for, it's a good idea to have a familiar place, a comfortable place to go to and work it out. We also read that Jesus spent a lot of time in prayer. It helps if prayer is a familiar, regular part of our schedule. We'll be on familiar ground when we bring the big things to God.

A Time of Communing

Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me" (Matthew 26:38). Prayer is a time of communing. When we say this, we think about communing with God. Jesus took Peter, James, and John, three of His closest friends with Him to pray. When we have something really big, it's good to have other people pray with us if at all possible. When Jesus says, "Watch with me", He's not just talking about staying awake and watching as a lookout. He's inviting them to share the load by praying with Him. Or better yet, by praying for Him as He goes off to pray by Himself. This is what the apostle Paul is talking about in **Galatians 6:2**, when he says, *bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*.

Posture = Attitude

We often talk about kneeling in prayer. Is our posture important? Body posture conveys attitude. In church, we stand as subjects standing before their king. Standing shows respect. Kneeling communicates humility and penitence. That's why, if we had the kneelers, people could kneel for the prayer of confession. Sitting is a receptive position. That's why we sit for Scripture and the sermon. If done out of habit, however, the body posture is meaningless. Notice what Jesus did. *He fell on His face (v. 39)*. Jesus was completely broken by the weight of the burden of sin on His shoulder. If we're completely broken, we shouldn't be afraid to fall on our face before God, either.

"Watch and Pray"

When Jesus asks His disciples to watch and pray, He's reminding them of the necessity of being alert. We don't want to let our minds wander. That's Satan trying to make our prayer time ineffective.

“If It Be Possible”

Jesus isn't shy about telling God what He wants. We might be tempted to think, “Why was Jesus so conflicted? Didn't He know, wasn't He in on the plan that He had to go to the cross? After all, that was why He came.” But remember, Jesus is also fully human, with all our human weaknesses. One human trait is self-preservation. Don't be afraid to lay it all before the Lord. We want to be honest about our doubts and insecurities. They are part of who we are, too. He knows we have them, anyway. So, we must not be afraid to share freely with God.

“Not as I Will, But as You Will”

Now comes the hard part. Just turn it over to God. **James 4:7** says to *submit yourselves therefore to God; resist the devil and he will flee from you*. The first step in winning any battle against the devil is to submit to God. He knows what's best. He wants what's best. He has the power to give what's best. So, the best thing to do is just give up, give in, and submit to Him. Not only will we feel better about things. No matter what happens, we'll be able to handle it better, because God will be handling it for us. Let us **RETURN TO HIM IN PRAYER**.

*And the peace of God,
Which passes all understanding,
Will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
