



“Prayerfully Submitted”

Week 2 | October 14, 2018

Matthew 26:36-46

Sermon Summary: The example, *par excellence*, of prayerful submission is Jesus in Gethsemane. The name means “Oil Press” and is perfectly befitting the situation. The weight of heaven and earth is falling upon Jesus. He is face down on the ground. Luke reports that he is sweating great drops of blood. This is “the Holy of Holies”—our Great High Priest, entering alone to make atonement for our sins.

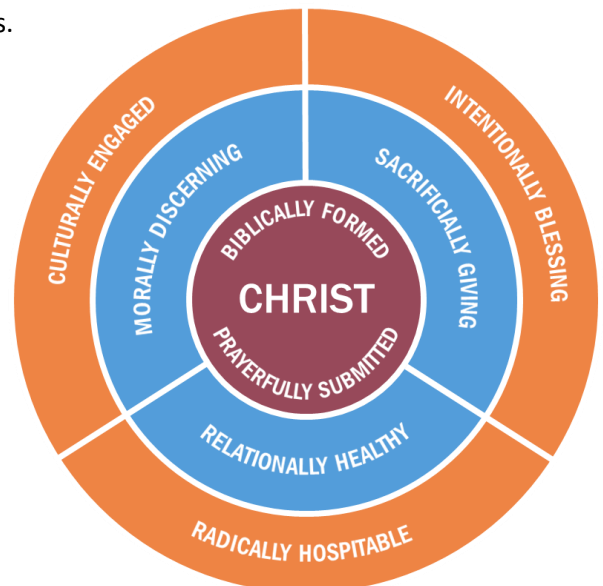
What Jesus is recoiling from is *this cup*. What is in *this cup*? It’s surely more than suffering and death. Many martyrs have died bravely, and Jesus has always been a model of poise and self control. But this cup contain more than suffering and death; it contains Sin. The sins of the world will be drunk up by Jesus to the point that he “becomes sin” for us (2 Cor. 5:21). And more, this cup contains Wrath. The wrath of God that he serves in a goblet; that makes people stagger and go mad; that contains horror and destruction (Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Ezek. 23:33). Infinite Sin, eternal Wrath. Jesus must drink it all.

But as much as Jesus is necessarily isolated in this agony, he is still discipling his followers. The Eleven are near, but the text specifically says that Peter, James, and John are taken further, to be with him and watch with him. To “be with” is synonymous with discipleship (Mark 3:14), and Jesus wants to entrust what he says and does to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

So what does it mean for us to bring all our pain, sorrow, and suffering to God in prayerful submission? First it means **Be prayerful, asking in faith**. Jesus prays, “My Father”—the only time in the Bible that we see the possessive “my” paired with *Abba*, Father. When we pray we do not address the Man Upstairs or the Ineffable Glory, or even “God.” We address *Dad*, the Father who loves us infinitely. And in speaking to him, we bring our desires to him. Especially those born of suffering and holy desire.

We suffer in the gap between our desires and our circumstances. But rather than giving way to anxiety, we present our requests to God (Phil. 4:6). We cast our cares on God because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). In so doing we are assured that God will change either our circumstances or our desires.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism is a disciple-making document that poses questions and answers about faith. Question 98 reads, “What is prayer?” And the answer: “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.” We offer up our desires not only by asking them to be filled but by holding them with open hands, surrendering them to the deeper desire of having “things agreeable to his will.”



In other words, we're not only to be prayerful, asking in faith for our desires to be filled. We're also to **be submitted, accepting his answers in faithfulness**. In a prayerful relationship with God there will be many yeses and nos. His ways are higher than our ways (Is. 55:8-9). God is playing the long game, working his Plan A for ultimate goodness and glory—his and ours. Many of our desires wouldn't even be "plan B." They might not even be in God's alphabet.

Vaneetha Risner maturely holds together being prayerful and being submissive, asking in faith and accepting in faithfulness. The author of *The Scars That Have Shaped Me* writes,

"So often I filter my requests. Should I ask God to relieve my suffering when I know he can use it? Is it okay to ask for healing, or is that presumptuous? Should I not ask for anything and just accept what I've been given? That posture seems more holy.

"Yet Jesus asks God to *remove* the cup. If Jesus can ask, I can too. It's appropriate to ask God to remove my suffering, change my situation, keep me from further pain. He longs to give me good gifts. I've begged God to heal friends, save family members, and give clarity, and he has answered yes. But I've also pleaded with God to save my dying son, heal my escalating disease, and bring back my husband, and he said no. So even though I don't know how he will answer, **my Father** still bids me to petition him earnestly for the things I desire."

In the end, the call is for us to follow the way of the cross. We subscribe to a "theology of the cross," in which Philippians 2 is the paradigm of our lives. Like Christ, we serve and suffer obediently (submissively) and *therefore God raises us, with Christ, to the highest place*. We do not fall prey to a "theology of glory" assuming that heaven can be ours on earth; that God always wills health and wealth; that suffering is an anomaly to be prayed away. Prayerful submission does not carry us *around* suffering but *through* it.

Discussion Guide

1. Read Matthew 26:36-46.
2. We suffer when there is a gap between our desires and our circumstances.
 - What has been the hardest, darkest circumstance of your life?
 - How does it help you understand what Jesus felt in Gethsemane?
 - How does Gethsemane reassure you that Jesus understands your pain?
3. In pain and suffering, some people pray fervently while others can't hardly pray at all.
 - Which is more typical of you?
 - What lessons does Gethsemane teach to either affirm or challenge your prayer life?
4. The Bible offers many promises about answered prayer. James 5:15, for example, says that the prayer of faith will heal the sick. Some teach that "the prayer of faith" is a technical term and try to teach it as a technique. They tell people to banish all doubt, to brandish Bible verse like weapons, and—*whatever you do*—don't "go to Gethsemane." Don't pray, "If it be thy will...." That is a spiritual cop-out, an emotional hedge that virtually guarantees you won't receive your miracle.
 - Have you ever been taught this?
 - What do you think of it? What are the holes in this argument?
 - What is a better understanding of effective prayer?
5. Process the quote from Vaneetha Risner above? What does it teach you about prayerful submission?
6. Compare and contrast "theology of glory" with "theology of the cross."
7. What is one practical way in which you can be more prayerfully submitted right now in your life?