

No Thanks. I Suppose. I Will.

Matthew 16:36-46

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Jesus is facing death. His death is immanent. He knows this. He knows betrayal, death and torture are coming his way. His disciples seem oblivious to this. Oh, he's told them. He's told them repeatedly! But they still haven't clued in. What Jesus has warned them about – continuously – doesn't match the reality they see in front of them.

Heavy hearted and stressed, Jesus goes to Gethsemane to pray. We will see very quickly that Jesus and his disciples are not on the same page.

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

We can almost hear the anxiety in Jesus' voice. What we see of his body language is not what we commonly see in pictures depicting this moment. Jesus is not on his knees, hands neatly folded on a conveniently placed boulder, while he looks absently to the sky. No! Jesus falls with his face to the ground!

When he returns to the disciples, what does he find?

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.

Jesus is in agony. His disciples are sleeping. ***"Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."***

Disciples warned, Jesus returns to prayer. Again, he is desperate, asking God the Father for relief from his upcoming crucifixion.

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Jesus again returns to his disciples. What do you suppose they are doing now?

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

Again, asleep! Jesus, knowing he is alone, returns to pray. ***⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.***

Jesus prays again the same prayer as before. He returns again to the disciples and what do you know?

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The disciples don't look so hot here. They should be alert and supporting Jesus. But instead they are sleeping. But . . .

. . . have you ever thought that Jesus was giving them a hard time?

I thought about this a bit. It's late. Really late. They're not fully understanding the scope of the situation. And Jesus is keeping them at a distance. He's asked them to join him, but he's also praying at a distance from them. He does not seem to really be involving them.

If it was late, and if someone asked you to do something, but kept your action at a distance, wouldn't you fall asleep too?

Maybe. But it's significant that the disciples fall asleep here.

At the start of the passage we read the word “then” - ***“Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane.”*** They were obviously coming from something. What happened before this? What is “then” referring to?

Let's head back a few verses to 31.

³¹ Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

***“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”***

³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

³³ Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

³⁴ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

³⁵ But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

The disciples all pledged that they would die for Jesus! Every last one of them. Peter leads the way! And the rest agree.

Next scene? They are all asleep.

Don't we all have these good intentions? Don't we always believe ourselves to act virtuously in all situations? We hear a news story where someone behaves badly – we automatically assume we'd act

heroically. The disciples believed they would behave heroically for Jesus, too – but they could not even stay awake.

Contrast the way the disciples behave to what Jesus does. Look at each of his prayers:

With his face to the ground, Jesus prays, ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”***

“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Again, he returns to prayer and prays, ***“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”***

It often surprises us to see Jesus pray this way. All along he has told his disciples he was going to die. He had spoken of God’s timing and plan. Yet as the time approaches for all things to be fulfilled, he seems to want out of God’s plan for the world. ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.”*** But that’s no lack of will. That’s honesty. Because the concluding statement is, ***“Yet not as I will, but as you will.”***

Jesus KNOWS the cost. Jesus KNOWS the pain that awaits him. Jesus KNOWS what is required of him. He is hesitant to do it, but he does. Jesus is not floating on positivity. He knows he is headed for the cross. Which means trial, torture and execution. But he trusts in God.

From his reluctant and anguished prayers he emerges with confidence in God. And he emerges ready. ***Rise let us go!*** He is prepared to meet what is coming his way.

Jesus emerges ready. The disciples are completely unprepared. They don’t understand the moment, so they are not alert. But they also haven’t surrendered to God in the moment either. They trust in their own power and strength to handle the moment, and it’s not enough.

The disciples were ready to make huge sweeping statements of commitment to Jesus. Jesus was surrendering the moment in front of him. The disciples couldn’t back up their words. Jesus could be honest to God about how difficult his path was, and could then rise to meet the moment in confidence. Speaking of rising to meet the moment . . .

In this unprecedented time . . . (aren’t you sick of that word, unprecedented?) it can be really hard. We can cross our fingers and hope things get better. But we can’t control that. We can make little decisions that give us some sense of control. But we don’t know what’s next.

That is OK.

We submit ourselves to God. We turn things over to him that we are hesitant to turn over to him. And we stand ready for what comes our way. We do not know the outcome. But we seek to know the God that is with us.

We don't entrust ourselves to the future. We entrust our lives to Jesus. We place all things in his hands. We surrender the things we want to keep to ourselves. And we confess, "I don't know what happens next, but whatever it is, Jesus, I want to follow you."

It's not confidence in an eventual easy path that helps us put one foot in front of the other. It is confidence in God that helps us put one foot in front of the other.

In this moment, what kind of things can we do to surrender one day at a time, one small decision at a time? What's one way you can start putting a surrendered life to Jesus into action this week?

In reading youth worker Ron Hutchcraft's book *The Battle For a Generation*, he proposed two simple ideas of ways we can follow Jesus and surrender to God.

Write down . . . one job in your family that everyone hates to do. During this next week, do it without complaining – even if it's not normally your job. Don't make a big announcement; just do it. As you're doing it say, 'Lord, this is for You. I'm doing this for You. I'm learning how to be like You.

If that's not applicable while we're all stuck in our homes, I don't know what is! He goes on,

Another example might be for them to identify one person in their life who is a difficult person. They shouldn't call that person an enemy, but let's call that person an "unfriend" in their world. During this week they would pray for that person every day by name and ask God to show them a way they could express caring for that person, even if they don't feel like it, and even if their gesture is unreturned. They should do it because that's how Jesus treats people, and this next week they're going to try to treat other people like Jesus would.

Again, something we can do while stuck in a variety of ways – we have phones, every social media app ever invented – we have multiple ways to look out and care for people, even "unfriends".

Surrendering to God is a big deal, but it is made one small decision at a time.

All of life is an opportunity to surrender to Jesus moment by moment.

Our current situation seems especially important. Surrender to and confidence in our God is what pulls us through.

Entrust your life – your soul, your needs, your job, your friends, your family, your stuff – to Jesus. And make one decision at a time trusting in him.