Mark Lesson 48 (2023)

**THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE**

*(Subtitle: Embracing God’s Plan)*

Mark 14:27-42

Key Verse: 14:36

“‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”

Good morning! Last week, our region experienced an extraordinary amount of rainfall, causing significant disruptions, including the unexpected flooding of LaGuardia Airport Terminals. Many flights were delayed and canceled, including mine. However, we are grateful for the gorgeous weather we have today. On this beautiful morning, let us turn our focus to the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord Jesus grappled with profound distress and ultimately surrendered to God’s divine plan for our lives. This narrative offers valuable insights into conquering fear and finding strength through trust and surrender to God’s sovereign will.

Look at verses 27-28. “‘You will all fall away,’ Jesus told them, ‘for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.’” Jesus, while possibly en route to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples, foretold their desertion during his impending arrest. This announcement comes as another shock following the betrayal by Judas Iscariot. The disciples must have felt that everything was crumbling all at once. Yet, Jesus, in predicting their abandonment, quoted Zechariah 13:7, a messianic prophecy, to convey that these events were within God’s redemptive plan and that they should trust in God’s sovereign purpose, even in the face of adversity. He also predicted that after rising from the dead, he would see them in Galilee, where he started his messianic ministry and called them his disciples.

Look at verses 29-31. “Peter declared, ‘Even if all fall away, I will not.’ ‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus answered, ‘today- yes, tonight – before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.’ But Peter insisted emphatically, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the others said the same.” Peter boldly declared that he wouldn’t abandon Jesus, and other disciples joined Peter. Despite their good intention and love for Jesus, their denial only revealed their overconfidence and spiritual ignorance. Yet Jesus responded with a sobering prediction that Peter would deny him three times. It means that they were unprepared to face the intense pressure, fear, trials, and crucifixion that lay ahead.

Look at verses 32-34. “They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them, ‘Stay here and keep watch.’” Upon arriving in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, fully aware of the suffering that awaited him, began to experience deep distress and turmoil. Leaving his disciples behind, he took along Peter, James, and John and confided about the overwhelming emotion in his soul, saying, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” (Pic#1)

This was something unprecedented. Throughout his ministry as the Messiah, Jesus remained strong and invincible. He had never appeared to be vulnerable or weak on any occasion. Yet, at this point in his life and ministry, Jesus revealed his vulnerability and was open to sharing his emotions with his disciples. What does it show about him? It underscores his full humanity as the Son of God. Hebrews 2:18 elaborates on Jesus’ humanity, stating, “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted,” Hebrews 4:15 also states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.”

Jesus is relatable to us, for he knew what it was like to be physically and emotionally exhausted, suffer grief and betrayals from close friends, struggle financially, and be tempted in every way. Amazingly, the paradoxical truth of Jesus’ full humanity is not a sign of weakness but God’s glory. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He will never reject or forsake us when we come to him just as we are.

Verses 35 and 36 illustrate Jesus alone with God in prayer. Look at verses 35 and 36. “Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. ‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’” We see that Jesus was in such profound distress that he fell to the ground and prayed for an alternative to the impending suffering and death on the cross. His use of *“Abba, Father”* reflects an intimate relationship with God, underscoring his unique connection as the Son of God. Despite his emotional turmoil, Jesus demonstrated his unwavering commitment to the divine plan and was willing to surrender to God’s will.

Hebrews 5:7 describes Jesus’ submission: "During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” Surrendering God’s plan of salvation through his death on the cross was extremely difficult, even for Jesus. Yet, through his intense spiritual struggle in the Garden, Jesus was fully prepared to submit himself to God’s will.

When we pray, *“God’s will be done”* does not eliminate our responsibility. We must actively choose to align ourselves with God’s plan through obedience. Sometimes, we are not sure what is best for us and are afraid of the unknown. Therefore, we must trust God our Father, who knows what is best for us. The author, Mark, didn’t mention it, but Luke’s account reveals that an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened Jesus during this critical moment. It indicates that surrendering God’s sovereign plan opens the door to divine support and assurance. (Lk. 22:43)

Look at verses 37-38. “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” These verses illustrate how Jesus’ top disciples lacked spiritual vigilance. Despite Jesus’ plea to stay awake and pray, they were asleep. Jesus acknowledged their willingness but pointed out their physical and emotional weakness. The phrase “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” recognizes their human frailty. Yet, Jesus continued to encourage them to watch and pray. What does “watch and pray” mean to his disciples in this context? It does not mean to say many words of prayer. It means they should trust God’s absolute love and sovereign plan. Sometimes, we don’t know what to pray for in our distress. Will God be angry with us if we fail to pray? No. But he still wants us to trust in him in any adversity. Jesus said to his disciples in John 14:1, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.”

In verses 39-42. “Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. Returning the third time, he said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!’” In these verses, we see Jesus repeatedly praying in Gethsemane while his disciples struggled to stay awake due to exhaustion. We witness the stark contrast between Jesus’ unwavering trust and his disciples’ anxiety.

Jesus’ example illustrates that surrendering to God’s will is possible, even amid distress and sorrow. We can have peace, wisdom, and incredible strength through deep trust in God's absolute goodness. Proverbs 3:5-6 states, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

We must know that God’s plan is perfect even when we don’t fully comprehend it. The life story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 exemplifies trust in God’s sovereignty during adversity. Despite facing adversity and betrayal, Joseph ultimately trusted God’s plan for his life, leading to his rise from enslaved to ruler in Egypt. We often make our plans, but it’s crucial to remember that God’s plans ultimately prevail. Therefore, our willingness to surrender our plans to Him is an act of faith and obedience.

Jesus’ repeated prayers in Gethsemane emphasize the importance of seeking God’s will in distress. He was fully prepared through his determination to submit to God’s will. He said to his disciples, “Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayal!” On the other hand, the disciples’ anxiety reminds us of our human weakness. We may fall in our faith and understanding, yet God’s grace and patience are always available. Prayer is a way to express our anxieties and surrender our concerns to God. Philippians 4:6-7 states, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We should also remember that God’s plan unfolds in his perfect timing, not necessarily our own. Patience and trust are vital in this journey. Just as Jesus didn’t hide his distress, we should acknowledge our anxiety and not feel guilty for experiencing it. We should also pray honestly, pouring out our fears, worries, and uncertainties while reminding ourselves of what God has done for us. Surrendering to God does not mean giving up. It means letting go of control and trusting God’s plan, ***“Let go and Let God.”*** (pic#2)

As we navigate anxiety and uncertainty in our lives, we should remember the Garden of Gethsemane, where our Lord Jesus fell to the ground and chose to surrender to God’s will. In surrendering to God, we can find strength, support, and, ultimately, the fulfillment of God’s perfect plan. The Prophet Jeremiah spoke God’s plan for his people in exile, “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seven years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” (Jeremiah 29:10-11)

Embracing God’s plan through trust and surrender is a transformative journey. It’s a transformative journey because it requires the change of our inner person through the development of unwavering confidence in god’s goodness and wisdom. May we stand firm by faith in adversity, knowing that God’s plan is the most beautiful and fulfilling destination we could ever hope for.