JESUS’ PRAYER AT GETHSEMANE

Mark 14:32-72

Key Verse: 36

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

Thank God for revealing the deep meaning of the Last Supper. It was a radical transition in God’s history from the Exodus to the Cross. This historical transition has affected not only the Jews but the everyone in the whole world. At the Last Supper, Jesus offered his body and blood for the forgiveness of man’s sins and true life in him. The taking the bread of his body and the drinking of the cup of his blood will continue until he comes again. This is both keeping Communion in public and in private, that is having intimate relationship with him through his words and prayer in the Holy Spirit. Today’s passage covers Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane, his arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin and Peter’s denial. We will focus on the prayer of Jesus at Gethsemane.

Verse 32 says, “They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” Gethsemane has the meaning of “oil press”. It is the Mount of Olives and the press was used to produce olive oil. Gethsemane was the garden, the place where Jesus often came with his disciples and prayed. He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. In Matthew 26:37, “…he began to be sorrowful and troubled.” Here “deeply distressed” is in Greek ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι (ekthambeisthai) having the meaning of “awe-struck, greatly amazed and astonished.” And he said to the disciples, Peter, James and John, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” What made him awe-struck, so amazed and astonished? What made him so overwhelmed with sorrow, driving him to the point of death before completing God’s mission? He could endure his enemy’s malice and murderous hatred, the heart-broken pain of Judas’ betrayal and the anticipation of Peter’s denial. Isaiah 53:3 described the coming Messiah as a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. He could bear all the human sorrows we cannot comprehend. Certainly, he was keenly aware of his crucifixion which awaited him on that day. The pain of crucifixion would be too great for anyone, undoubtedly to Jesus also.

Yet, here we should think about what was coming to him. We know that the crucifixion was God’s punishment, more than Romean punishment. That was God’s punishment because of man’s sin. Because sin all men were destined to be judged and punished by God, suffering in the fiery lake of burning sulfur eternally. The lake of fire or the fiery lake of burning sulfur (19:20; 20:10, 15; 221:8) is mentioned four times in Revelation. It is real. So Jesus’ crucifixion, taking the cross means bearing all the punishment of God in the place of sinners. No one can be saved without the bearer of the sin and the punishment. We don’t know how many people will be saved. But God knows the number of those who are to be saved. And Jesus had to bear the sin and total punishment of all those people whom God saves. No one but the innocent Son of God had to receive such an enormous punishment of God. The hellish wrath of God would be poured out on him for each sinner who is to be saved. As for Jesus, he knew no sin at all. He was in complete union with God the Father in his perfect holiness. Even committing one sin would be frightening to him. Yet, against his holiness and righteousness he had to become the sin itself, as 2 Corinthians 5:21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us…” To be sin and receive the consequent wrath of God would be frightening and astonishing to the holy Son of God.

What did Jesus do in this time of overwhelming sorrow and deep distress and trouble? Verse 35 says, “Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him.” “Going a little farther” was locationally going a little farther making a little distance from the disciples, according to Luke 22:41, “withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them” (Lk 22:41). As for us it is important to go a little farther from the distraction of people and things of the world at certain times.

He prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. The hour would be the most difficult hour in his life. Jesus said in John 12:27, “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” Here in Mark’s gospel we see his prayer battle. “‘Abba, Father,’ he said, ‘everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” Even in such a troublesome time, Jesus called God, “Abba, Father,” a very fund affectionate call, trusting in his loving care. In his prayer, Jesus brought his matter to God the Father, saying, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me.” Again, the cup was the cup of God’s wrath, which otherwise would be eternal wrath upon each of us. However, he was not just imposing his will upon God the Father, though he knew that everything was possible to God.

When I meet Muslim students at U of T, many of them say that God is almighty and merciful, so he can forgive and save sinners without any sacrifice. To them, the sacrifice of Jesus limits God’s power. That sounds appealing to human reason. However, to us God is not only almighty but also holy – all-powerful and all-holy. These two characters of God must be kept and cannot contradict each other. In his holiness and power of wisdom, he provided a way of salvation through the sacrifice of his own Son to be the Lamb of God. This salvation plan was even before the creation of the world. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “…you were redeemed…with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world…” Revelation 13:8 says, “All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” As you know, at the very beginning of man’s fall God promised to save fallen mankind in Genesis 3:15, which was God’s curse upon Satan, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” This plan of God could never be altered. Satan’s ultimate temptation and goal against Jesus was that he might not die on the cross. Muslims also say that the latest promise of God can override all the previous promises of God and so God can change his promises. However, the LORD our God is consistent and faithful to all his promises. So God cannot do two things, altering his original salvation plan and changing his promises according to situations. So Jesus’ final prayer was, “Yet not what I will but what you will.” In Matthew 26:39, “not as I will but as you will” and in Luke 22: 42, “not my will but yours be done.” This is truly a beautiful prayer. We see that Jesus’ bottom line was God’s will, though he had to take the cup of the divine wrath. According to Luke 22:44, his prayer was so earnest and intense that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. This was a fierce battle.

As for us, how thankful are we for this prayer of Jesus? In his prayer, he was willing to take upon himself God’s eternal wrath which was to be directed to each of us. In deep gratitude ,what we can do is obey the will of God. God’s will for Jesus was to become sin for us, denying his holiness and taking the cup of God’s dreadful wrath. But God’s will for us is to overcome our sinful nature and grow in his holiness and Christ-like character, more and more, deeply realizing Jesus’ marvelous grace of salvation. We remember the Lord’s prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:9). As those owed to Jesus’ prayer, we are to pray for the kingdom of God to come on earth. With the hope of Christ’s kingdom to come, we are to pray for the community of God and his soul saving work for U of T students. And according to our key verse Acts 1:8, Jesus wants us to be his powerful witnesses in the power of the Holy Spirit. I thank God for enabling me to serve the gospel work in GTA as the coordinator for the last 23 years. In the early years of gospel ministry in Toronto, Mark 14:36, “Not what I will, but what you will” was in mind. God has led me and his ministry until now. He led my two daughters to graduate from U of T and be sent out as missionaries to Germany and Brazil, respectively. I believe that God will restore Sara to live a missionary in Heidelberg, Germany. People have come and gone. But God raised Ian and Jemmie as a shepherd family, and sent M. Moses and Hannah and established them as a missionary family. I may continue to live in this stream of God’s history and pray for God’s will of the expansion of his kingdom in GTA and Canada through the ministry of God’s word. May we prepare for GTA SBC together and see the evident work of the Holy Spirit through this conference.

In verses 37-38, “Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. ‘Simon,’ he said to Peter, ‘are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Nothing would interrupt Jesus’ prayer, but his concern for his disciples. Out of his loving compassion for them he returned to his disciples and exhorted them to watch and pray to overcome temptation by the spirit despite the weakness of the body. Our Lord Jesus is concerned about whether we pray, especially each morning. Thank God for helping Jemmie to hold to Luke 22:46, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” as her 2024 key verse. May God mould her into a woman of prayer for her family and God’s ministry for his kingdom. If Christ Himself needs to pray in the face of temptation, how much more do we need to pray? We all may realize more and more the significance of prayer.

In verses 39-40, “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.” According to Luke 22:45, they were asleep, exhausted from sorrow. What a contrast that, in sorrow, they slept while, in sorrow, Jesus prayed.

In verses 41-42, “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 betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” What an outcome of prayer! Before prayer Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow. After the prayer he became victorious and triumphant ready to confront the foes. Two weeks ago, M. Daniel and Sarah Sohn in USA and M. Sarah and myself formed a prayer vessel to pray for our children in Germany. Around more than 10 years ago, they sent their two daughters, Sarah and Ruth, as missionaries to Germany, and now the missionaries need much prayer support, while our daughter Sara also needs more and more prayer support. We realize anew that this is really a spiritual battle and we decided to pray with each other every other Monday. May we fiercely pray until we see victory over Satan in the lives of our missionary children. We all also experience the victory through prayer, one after another.

Now Jesus was ready to be arrested. Judas came with the crowd armed with swords and clubs. According to John 18:3, those who came includes a detachment of Roman soldiers. The number of the group could be as many as 1,000. They came to arrest Jesus and also to quell a possible riot of any kind. Jesus was not annoyed by Judas disguised loving kiss. And he took initiative in this arrest, saying, “Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Everyday I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Jesus saw all things from the viewpoint of the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Then everyone deserted him and fled. A young man’s fleeing naked supports the factuality of this event.

Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin shows the complete falsity of the trial. Though it was in the middle of the night, all the chief priests, elders and teachers came together, which consisted of 71 members of the Sanhedrin. Opening the court at night was illegal. And on the day of the Feast or one day before the Feast, there was to be no court-opening. Yet they did it illegally. It was held at the residence of the high priest (Mt 26:3), which was also illegal. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence. This Sanhedrin court was not to look for evidence to arraign but to investigate the charge brought, whether it was true or not. They were acting as prosecutors, which was also illegal. They already had in mind to put him to death, which was totally wrong. Mark uses the word “false” two times: in verse 56, “Many testified falsely against him…” and in verse 57, “Then some stood up and gave this false testimony…”

When Jesus remained silent and gave no answer for any accusation, which was not worthy of his response, the high priest finally asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of Blessed One?” Such a question as “Who are you?” is not a valid one. The question was to be like “What did you?” Anyway, the question was an important question to Jesus, so he said, “I am”, though it would bring him death penalty. And at this situation of the highest human court of the people he had to reveal himself. So he spoke further about his identity, “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven?” In essence, he will come back as the Judge and all including the high priest and the whole Sanhedrin are to stand before him to be judged. Then the high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think? They all condemned him as worthy of death. It was unanimous, with no voting at all, which was also illegal. The Jews had an outstanding jurisprudence, the system of justice in the whole world based on Deuteronomy 16:18-20, “…Do not pervert justice or show partiality…Follow justice and justice alone...” Even the judge was to fast in the case of someone to be executed and the court, after the verdict, were to give one full day of defence to the accused to find any other evidence of relief. But at the trial of Jesus, the Son of God, they showed the worst of injustice. They even displayed their biased behaviour. Some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, ‘Prophesy!’” This was what the Sanhedrin members , the supposed righteous people of the nation, did. And the guards took him and beat him. Christ Jesus received such a treatment in our place. We are to know that he is the righteous judge, and all should stand before him to be tried.

When Jesus prayed, he could confidently handle the arrest and trial, fulfilling the Scriptures and clearly demonstrating his identity. But when Peter did not pray, he was rapidly heading toward a miserable downfall. The first step was following Jesus at a distance and sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire. He denied the Lord Jesus even before a servant girl of the high priest, saying, “I don’t know or understand what you are talking about” as if they had language or communication problem.” He finally even said, “I don’t know the man you are talking about,” denying all the wonderful fellowships with the Lord in the personal relationship between the two. This was a terrible result of not praying, ignoring Jesus’ word of warning. The spiritual battle is real and fierce. However, when the rooster crowed the second time, Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept. How critical it is to remember the words of God! Later, Peter came to know the reality of a fierce spiritual battle and exhorted the early Christians in 1 Peter 5:8, 9, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith…” He also said in 4:7, “The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled, so that you can pray.”

We thank God for Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane, in which he determined to take the cup of God’s eternal wrath for us, and is an example for all believers to follow to fight the spiritual battle to overcome temptation and obey the will of God. Owing to his marvelous grace, we may fight our own spiritual battle, especially at each critical time and be victorious. May we keep Jesus’ prayer in our hearts, “Not what I will, but what you will.”