

## INTRODUCTION

The title for today's message is borrowed from the classical novel "A Tale of Two Cities" written by Charles Dickens. I was required to read the book in my middle school English class. The background of the book is the French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For now I will keep it a secret why I use that title until the end of the message. But I know human nature. The more I ask you not to guess the more you will think about it. Just stay focus on the message as you try to solve the puzzle. We all have experience of facing an important event. It can be a job interview, a sport competition or meeting your future parent-in-laws for the first time. You gathered all the information you could find. You practiced over and over again. You became more anxious as the day was drawing near. You simulated all the possible scenarios you could think of in your mind: if this happens then I will react that way. Rehearsal is not the real deal. But rehearsal prepares you to face the reality. In Matthew chapter 26 Jesus was about to meet the biggest challenge in His earthly life. He was going to the cross. After Jesus had finished the Last Supper with the disciples they went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus then took Peter, James and John to go further. Next, Jesus left the three disciples and went to pray alone. Jesus knew He would be arrested by the religious leaders that night, and be nailed to the cross on the next day. Have you ever wondered how Jesus felt at that moment? Jesus is the all-knowing God. He understood what was ahead of Him fully. Unlike us, He did not need any preparation. Or did He? Before this episode in the Garden of Gethsemane whenever Jesus mentioned about His death to the disciples He seemed to be calm. But now, Jesus looked hesitant. What was in His mind? What can we learn from Him? Jesus showed us that obeying the Heavenly Father's will is a tough decision. Submission is to give up on our own desire and to choose what God sees as the best.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. 耶穌的掙扎 Jesus' Struggle

First, the passage tells us that Jesus had struggles. **Verses 37 and 38** read: 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." Why did Jesus have struggles in His heart? He understood that there would be suffering in front of Him. He also knew that He had to walk this path of affliction alone. When He was still at the dinner table Jesus had foretold the disciples that they would desert Him. **Verse 31** tells us: 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.'" Jesus was abandoned by the closest people with whom He spent the past three and a half years. One of the twelve disciples, Judas, even betrayed Jesus and handed Him over to the religious authority. Subsequently, Jesus encountered both shame and pain that led to the cross. **Matthew 27:28-31** records: 28 They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29 and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe

and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. Jesus was ridiculed, insulted, beaten and finally crucified. He suffered all that alone. In **Matthew 27:46**, Jesus cried out to the Heavenly Father when He was hanging on the cross - ...“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” At that moment when Jesus shouldered the sins of the whole mankind even the Heavenly Father had to hide His face from Jesus. We can never imagine how it was like for a holy and righteous God to experience sin for the first time, and to be separated momentarily from His intimate Heavenly Father. Jesus had great struggle in His heart when He pondered on all that would happen to Him. How did Jesus cope with His struggle? He asked the disciples to stay alert and pray with Him. However, those brothers fell asleep because they were too tired. On His return after prayer, Jesus said to them in **verses 40 and 41**: 40 ... “Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?”... 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” Jesus asked the disciples to pray for Him to give Him spiritual support. Jesus also urged them to pray for themselves to guard against temptation. The temptation soon became a reality when the disciples fled the scene to protect their own lives. If even Jesus requested His disciples to pray for Him, how much more do we need others to pray for us? For some odd reasons, recently a number of our church members or their family members contracted serious diseases. I am thankful that we can pray for them in this big family. But if those brothers and sisters did not disclose the situation to us, then there is no way for us to share their burden. I am not saying that we have to tell people about every struggle we have. We need wisdom on that. However, God puts us in the same church for us to support and encourage each other. Many times we are eager to pray for others’ needs like sickness or job situation, and we even pray for our government and the situations in other parts of the world. However, we are often too hesitant to ask people to pray for our own needs. When we greet each other we always respond that we are doing fine. Can this expression of humility be a disguised pride? Are we too confident that we can handle our problems by our own effort? You do not necessarily have to share your problems with the whole church. You can inform a few closest brothers or sisters. So brothers can get together with a few brothers, and sisters with other sisters, to pour out their hearts to God. Jesus did not shy away from His emotion, either. The struggles in His heart showed up on His face. God understands our hearts. Therefore, when we pray we just tell God our true feelings, whether it is fear, confusion or sadness. God would not reject us because of those negative emotion. Rather, He desires to hear from us.

## 2. 耶穌的降服 Jesus’ Surrender

Submission is to give up on our own desire and to choose what God sees as the best. Jesus had His struggle when He was about to go to the cross. He lifted His burdens to the Heavenly Father through prayer. Finally, Jesus chose to surrender His will to the Father. **Verse 39** tells us: 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.” Jesus prayed a second time in **verse 42**, repeating the same wish: ...“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.” Can you sense the dilemma in Jesus’ words? He knew He would die on the cross but He plead with the Father for a possible alternative to accomplish the salvation plan. In both verses we see the word “cup.” This “cup” can be understood as the cup of God’s wrath. The Bible tells us that our sins stir up God’s wrath. Jesus drank this cup on our behalf. He substituted us to endure judgment to quench God’s wrath toward us. Jesus had His own desire. If there was a plan B, He did not want to suffer all the pain and shame, and be

separated from the Father. However, He chose to surrender to the Father's will. Sometimes, we may think that it was a piece of cake for Jesus to surrender Himself. Isn't He God? He is all powerful; and so He can do anything easily. We lose sight of the fact that Jesus' surrender was a true surrender, just like His struggle was a true struggle. [Luke 22:44](#) gives us a vivid description of Jesus' agony: And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus was having a great debate in His heart whether or not to take the easy way out. At the critical moment the Father ministered His grace to Jesus. [Verse 43](#) of the Luke's gospel tells us: An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. We may feel alone when we determine to follow God's will. But God is by our side to give us strength. In Acts 20 when the apostle Paul bid farewell to the Ephesian church elders, he knew that there would be persecution ahead. But he shared in [verse 24](#): "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." Paul had a choice between remaining free and taking the gospel to elsewhere or be arrested if he traveled back to Jerusalem. He chose the latter, because he understood that it would be a means for him to go to Rome and witness the gospel to the Roman Caesar. From then on, Paul became a prisoner for the gospel. God did not forsake Paul. In [Acts 23:11](#) God encouraged Paul when he was in jail: The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." In theory, we understand that God's will is higher than our will. It is easy for us to pray like Jesus did in normal times. But when our own interest is at stake we will pray differently: "Father, can Your Kingdom come later because I am having a good time with my pay raise? Can Your will be done on someone else other than on me, because I don't want to go back to my home country?" We often have a wrong impression that God enjoys to force us to do something we do not like. You wanted to marry a banker but ended up getting a beggar. You dreamed of entering into an Ivy League school but eventually graduated from a wild-melon league school. We conclude that our life is a failure because we do not get what we want. We do not understand God's will because we are so preoccupied with our self-interest. We only focus on ourselves but we forget that we are just one tiny piece of puzzle in God's big picture. We are so concerned about what happens to us. But a more important question we should ask is what God wants to achieve through what happens to us. Of course, we are insignificant compared to Jesus or Paul. However, God has His unique plan for your life and mine. He desires to use each of us to reflect His glory. The key is whether or not we are willing to surrender ourselves to the will of God.

## CONCLUSION

Submission is to give up on our own desire and to choose what God sees as the best. We should be thankful that Jesus obeyed God's will rather than His own will. He died on the cross, but He rose on the third day. Still remember the title for this sermon? Which are the two gardens? The first garden is the Garden of Eden. Adam, the first man God created, sinned. Adam violated God's command. He ate the fruit that God specifically did not allow him to eat. Seemingly, Adam was saying to God: "Not Your will, but mine be done!" Adam stumbled in the temptation, thus the whole mankind fell. But on that night in the second garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus made the right decision. He prayed to the Father: "Not my will, but Yours be done!" Jesus triumphed. In this life you will continue to face many decisions. The difference is between your own gain and God's glory. How will you choose?