

INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with a question: have you wondered why you do certain things you do not really like to do? For example, some kids do not like to eat veggies but their moms insist that they should eat some because it is good for their body; or some of you may not want to go to school or work when you get up tomorrow. I remember when I interviewed for my first pastoral position, I told the search committee that I knew there may be things I like to do versus the things that I need to do. I love to preach and teach the Bible, though I often stare at my Bible and wrestle in the mind about how to interpret a passage. Then I get clueless about what to write on my notebook and computer. But without exception, it brings me great joy to learn something new from God's Word and to share it with you. However, there are other pastoral duties I do not like to do. When a church member passed away, I need to help organize a memorial service. It is never a fun thing to walk into a funeral home and see people with sad faces. Sometimes, I have to talk to a coworker who may hold a very strong position on some issues. A coworker in a former church I served insisted that we had to buy a particular brand of grape juice for communion because he thought the color is darker. I am an advocate to go with whichever brand is on sale and buy a bunch of them. After all, does it really matter for something like grape juice that will be consumed in a matter of seconds? There are certain things you like to do, but there are other things you need to do. But even when you do the things you do not like, it does not necessarily mean that you act out of reluctance. Many people walk out of their comfort zone to exercise harder to improve their health or volunteer for new challenges at work to build their career path. You will be motivated to do those things when you expect a favorable outcome. In our passage today, Jesus hesitated when He was about to go to the cross. What can we learn from His example? Jesus showed us that submission is to put God's will above our personal desire.

EXPLANATION

1. Meekness in the Spirit 靈裡的柔和

In the story, we see a sharp contrast between the determination of Jesus and the limitation of the disciples. Jesus showed meekness in His Spirit. Jesus willingly obeyed the Heavenly Father and followed His plan. Jesus and the disciples were at Gethsemane. The name means "oil press." It could be an olive grove. They just finished the Passover meal. Judas left the table and went to see the Jewish religious leaders to follow through the scheme to betray Jesus. The Lord asked the disciples to stay in the garden and wait. He then took Peter, James and John to walk a little further. Jesus asked the three men to stop there and pray, while He proceeded some distance and prayed alone. Jesus' heart was heavy and full of grief. Mark added in his gospel that Jesus was consumed with fear. Let us pause and ponder on his emotions. Jesus, being God, knew exactly what would happen in the next few hours. Why was He overcome with sadness? It is like when you see a dentist for a repeated procedure, you remember the details vividly – the pain from the disease, the discomfort in the treatment and the inconvenience in the recovery. There should not be anything new to you. However, before you walk into the clinic you still feel like a chicken. Why? Although the knowledge of a previous experience gives you some mental preparation, you

still have to endure all the suffering. We often have a misconception that since Jesus is the King of kings, going to the cross should be a piece of cake to Him. Of course not! The pain and shame were real. The disciples abandoned Him. The crowd ridiculed Him. Jesus also had to separate from the Heavenly Father. After evaluating the afflictions in front of Him, Jesus could have walked away. Thankfully, He did not, or else you and I are still in sin. Jesus was a real person like you and me when He came into our world. How did Jesus muster up enough strength to move on? He prayed to the Father in **verse 39**: ... “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” In the Old Testament, the “cup” symbolizes God’s wrath and judgment. When Jesus suffered on the cross, it was as if He drank this cup on our behalf. You may wonder: “Why did Jesus pray? Shouldn’t He know the Father’s will perfectly?” The simple answer is, Jesus prayed for the same reason why we pray. He presented His own desires to the Father. Jesus did not just pray once. He prayed three times! We live in a microwave culture. Sometimes, when we ask God but do not get what we want we quickly move on to a different plan. Jesus showed earnestness and urgency in His repeated prayer. He was not trying to wear God down. The religious leaders were coming to arrest Him soon. He had to make sure that the Father’s plan remained unchanged. But Jesus said: “Not as I will, but as you will.” That should be our mindset too. Very often we think we know better than God does. Thus, our prayer list turns into an ordering form: “Father, you know I want to go to that college. Yes, with full scholarship, please. Lord, my future husband has to be at least six-feet tall, and with blond hair and blue eyes if I’m not asking for too much. God, I will love to work for that company. But please, not in Memphis but somewhere that has sunshine and a beach.” Not so with Jesus. He showed meekness in His Spirit by submitting to the Father’s will. Did God give Jesus any reply? No, there was complete silence. There was no plan B. But the Father was never absent. He cheered for Jesus all along! **Luke 22:43** tells us that God sent a helper when Jesus was praying: An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. Luke did not tell us exactly how the angel supported Jesus. As humans when we are weak and in distress perhaps all it takes is a good friend or loved one shouting from the sideline: “Don’t give up. You’re almost there. I believe you can do it!” Although sometimes we feel alone when we submit to God’s will, we are never lonely. God will send helpers our way. Brothers and sisters will pray for us and rally for assistance. God speaks from His Word to give us guidance and reminder. Even when our hearts are heavy and do not know how to pray, the Bible says the Holy Spirit will pray on our behalf in ways that we cannot comprehend. God is our ever-present help when we follow His plans.

2. Weakness in the Flesh 身體的軟弱

Jesus showed meekness in His Spirit, despite the struggles in His heart. In comparison, the disciples exposed their weakness in the flesh. Jesus prayed three times. He urged Peter, James and John to also pray three times. Jesus told them in **verse 41**: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” We can think of a few reasons why Jesus asked the disciples to pray. He might be looking for mental and spiritual support. When we have a few options to choose from we will ask some brothers and sisters to pray for us. On the surface, it seems that Jesus was being inconsiderate. It was late at night and the disciples were tired. In those days people went to bed soon after dinner and they rose when the sun was up. I am an early-bird all my life. A 5 a.m. prayer meeting is not a problem to me. But I will snore halfway if I attend an all-night prayer vigil. But here Jesus actually cared about His disciples. They had to watch and pray, lest they might succumb to temptation. The

temptation the disciples faced was to rely on their own strength. Remember how Peter reacted when the religious leaders came to arrest Jesus? He fought back by cutting off a servant's ear with a knife! Jesus stopped Peter and said to him in [verses 53-54](#): 53 "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" If Jesus had planned to engage in a hand-to-hand combat, He could have asked the Father to dispatch His own bodyguards! Jesus did not come to accomplish His own agenda. In the gospel, we see many examples of how the disciples failed when they relied on their own flesh. When Jesus revealed that He would suffer in the hands of the religious leaders, be killed and rise on the third day, Peter rebuked His teacher about the plan. How dare Peter to scold Jesus! Jesus then turned around and replied in [Matthew 16:23](#) – ... "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Poor Peter! Just moments before that Jesus praised Peter for recognizing Him as the Christ. Peter acted in his flesh when he persuaded Jesus not to go to the cross. Also, most of us should remember at the last supper when Peter and his brothers banged on their own chests and pledged that they would never forsake their Master. But Jesus foretold that Peter would deny Him three times. When the religious leaders arrived at Gethsemane, all the disciples ran for their own lives. They fell into the biggest temptation of all. They stumbled in their faith and betrayed Jesus. In fact, later on Peter even swore that he did not know Jesus to protect his own life. He denied Jesus three times. When he heard the rooster crowed, he remembered Jesus' words. Peter was crushed in his heart and he sobbed bitterly. The lesson for Peter, the other disciples and for us too is this: do not trust in our own strength. That was why Jesus asked us to pray. We will not pray if we count on ourselves, or at least we do not pray as if God is our only solution. Sometimes brothers and sisters may ask me to pray for "trivial things" like safety in their travel or a successful minor surgery. I thought: do I even need to ask the Lord for that? The chance of any tragic accident like the two plane crashes in recent weeks is very slim. It is only a cataract surgery that takes less than half an hour. The risk is very low. Why bother God when He has a ton of more important matters to handle? Having said all that, I would still love to pray for you whether it is a big or small thing. Yes, the probability that something may go wrong can be one in a million. But no one wants to be the one victim among the million. You may not pray if you rely on your bank account, your intelligence or those so-called experts. In our church, do we pray first before we ponder on starting a new ministry? Someone said a church coworker meeting begins and ends with a prayer. But what is sandwiched in between is no different from a company's business meeting. We care more about money, manpower and resources. But we fail to ask the Lord for His guidance. When we pray, we should say to the Lord: "This is my desire. But Lord, what do you think?"

CONCLUSION

Submission is to put God's will above our personal desire. God did not answer Jesus' prayer. But He granted Jesus strength to complete the salvation plan. It is natural for us to make plans in life. But what if God directs you to a different path? No, God may not lead you to India or Africa for mission work. Perhaps God may not send you to college, may not offer you a dream job, may not provide you wealth or may not give you any kid like most people do. God is asking you to trust Him. He will strengthen you when you step out in faith. We are weak, but He is strong. It is hard to do the things we do not like. But when we see God's hands leading our path, we can follow Him with joy. As we look back, we may realize that His plan is the best for us.