

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, April 10, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**  
**The Road to Gethsemane – Mt 26:36-46**

**Introduction:** Last Sunday we began a three part series on the Journey to Calvary by looking at Jesus' determination as He set out on the Road to Jerusalem. Jesus knew when He made that last trip into the city that it would only be a matter of time before the people would turn against Him. He knew that once the tide had turned He would be mocked, beaten and crucified. Jesus also knew that had been His Father's salvation plan for the world all along. It was for that very reason He had left the glory of heaven and came to earth. Jerusalem was where He would die and pay the price for the sins of the world. Jesus knew it and He was determined that nothing was going to keep Him from going there.

Now, a lot of things happened after Jesus arrived in Jerusalem that Sunday morning. First, He was greeted as a hero by many of the locals who welcomed Him by spreading their coats on the ground and waving palm branches in the air as He rode through one of the city gates on a donkey. It was quite an impromptu parade as everybody was celebrating that Sunday.

Monday was the day Jesus went to the Temple and found the traders and money changers doing business there, which prompted Him to overturn their tables, grab a whip and chase them from the temple, shouting "*My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers*" (**Matthew 21:13 (NIV)**).

On Tuesday, Jesus spent time teaching His disciples on the Mount of Olives and also in the Temple. When night came He retreated back to the Mount of Olives.

On Wednesday, Jesus went to the nearby village of Bethany where Simon the leper lived. That was where the woman came to Him with the alabaster box of precious ointment which she broke open and poured on His head. When the disciples questioned the waste, Jesus rebuked them and told them that this lady had done a good thing because they would not have Him with them in this manner always. After this incident, this was the day Judas made the fateful agreement with the chief priests to betray Jesus.

On Thursday evening, Jesus celebrating the Passover meal with His disciples. When the meal was over, they sang a hymn and went back to the Mount of Olives---just like they'd done the previous three nights. Only this night was different. This was the night Jesus would be betrayed by Judas and arrested. And this is where we catch up with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, a place He had often retreated to, located on the Mount of Olives. Let's turn to **Mt. 26:36-46 (NIV)** and read what happened there:

*36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane {the word Gethsemane by the way means oil press and was probably a fenced in garden area on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives}, 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."*

*40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not 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 body is weak."*

*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."*

*43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.*

*45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.*

*46 Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (PRAYER)*

When it comes to preaching about Jesus, I feel so inadequate. Especially when we come to passages like this where He pours His heart out to His Father in prayer. I mean, these prayers are so intense, and these moments are so incredibly intimate, we almost feel unworthy to even be given knowledge of them. Trying and describe the agony Jesus went through there in the Garden is so difficult, it's like the great preacher of

yesteryear, Dr. Charles Spurgeon said, *“It’s like trying to hold a candle to the Sun.”* John MacArthur in his commentary on this passage writes *“We cannot comprehend the depth of Jesus’ agony, because, as sinless and holy God incarnate, He was able to perceive the horror of sin in a way we cannot. Therefore even to attempt to understand the suffering of Jesus that night on the Mount of Olives is to tread on holy ground. The mystery is too profound for human beings to comprehend and even angels. We can only stand in awe of the God-Man.”* (John MacArthur – Matthew 24-28 – pg. 167).

In spite of centuries of preaching and teaching on Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, man hasn’t even begun to scratch the surface of the pain and sorrow Jesus felt that night. But what we can do is learn from this experience.

So today, we have before us, two lessons about what to do about God’s will in those times when it’s tough to follow. We can learn from Jesus’ example about what to do with God’s will, and we can learn from the failures of Peter, James and John about what not to do when tempted to turn aside from God’s will.

In all honesty, sometimes it’s easy for us to follow God’s will and sometimes it’s not. Take for instance God’s command to Adam to be fruitful and multiply. I mean, one look at Eve, and He probably said, *“No problem! Let’s get started today!”* But what about God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? Talk about a hard one, that’d be tough to do wouldn’t it?

And what about God’s command to Israel to observe a holiday to remember the Passover. How hard could that be? I mean after all, you get to take time off work, and have family get together with food and celebration; I’d say that was pretty easy to keep. But what about God’s command to Moses to go to the Pharaoh of Egypt and demand the release of the Israelites. Tough assignment for a man who had killed an Egyptian earlier, and now didn’t think he could even speak plainly.

How about Jesus’ command to us to remember what He did for us on the cross by taking communion? That’s relatively easy to do once a quarter isn’t it? But what about His command to love our enemies? Are you kidding me? It’s hard enough to love our families! Like I said sometimes it’s easy to obey God’s will, other times it’s not so easy.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, this was a tough time for Jesus to choose to follow God’s will. After all, following God’s will at this point was going to mean being crucified. But even that paled in comparison to the agony He was being asked to endure as He would take on our sins and ultimately be forsaken by His Father. So we see some of the tough part that Jesus was facing.

But what about Jesus’ disciples that night? What was so tough for them? All Jesus asked them to do was stay awake and alert while He went to pray. Sounds easy doesn’t it? Well, it was around midnight, and they had just finished off a big ole meal, and had to hike it a little ways uphill to the Garden. And let’s not forget about the sad news Jesus had broken to them during the Passover Meal. All that talk about suffering, being beaten and killed---that had to be depressing. They probably were pretty tired. I mean we don’t have to do half of those things, and yet we all come to church and we’re all wide awake and paying attention every Sunday aren’t we?

The point is, they might have been a little tired and sleepy, but Jesus asks them to stay awake for just a little while longer. It wasn’t easy to do, but it wasn’t impossible either, and they failed miserably, and that no doubt this added to Jesus’ anguish that night. And don’t forget, everything that was true for the disciples, was true for Jesus as well. But on top of those things was the spiritual struggle Jesus was facing by taking on Himself the punishment for our sins and being rejected by the Father - yet Jesus was undeniably victorious.

So let’s look a little closer at what happened that night. Let’s see if we can determine what led to the disciples’ failure in choosing God’s will, and what helped Jesus succeed in following God’s will? First, let’s look at:

### **1. The Failure of the Disciples**

One of the biggest reasons the disciples failed that night was pride. **Prov. 16:18 (NIV)** reads *“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”* And **1 Cor. 10:12 (NIV)** carries this warning about temptation, *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”* Just before their failure to stay awake---Jesus’ disciples had boasted about their loyalty to Him. They told Him they’d fight for Him, go to prison for Him, and even die for Him! Those were mighty big words from guys who couldn’t even stay awake.

You see, their pride made them overconfident in their own abilities and their own will because we can’t find any indication in the Gospels that any of the disciples prayed and asked God for help, strength or wisdom

in fighting off sleep that night. They were proud and they were confident in themselves, but they were foolish. And as a result, they dropped their guard and went to sleep even though Jesus had specifically asked them to stay alert.

What we see in their actions is a typical pattern for failure among believers. Pride leads to overconfidence, which leads to lack of prayer, which results in dropping one's guard, and ends up in falling to temptation. Here's how those things might play out today: A Christian who goes to church regularly and begins to grow spiritually, but subtly, this thing called pride begins to creep in, and they start thinking they've overcome their old sinful habits and the temptations that led to them. They think, "*I can handle that now...no problem there. I've mastered this stuff so it can't bother me.*" But then we read in **Proverbs 1:32 (NIV)** which says, "*the complacency of fools will destroy them.*"

Have you ever heard a Christian say "*I know that movie has some bad stuff in it, but it's not that bad;*" or "*I can handle my liquor;*" or "*I just gamble for the entertainment of it. I know when to stop;*" or "*It's just a harmless chat room---I know better than to let myself get caught up in it.*" People who think that way are putting themselves at risk. **Proverbs 6:27 (NIV)** warns, "*Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?*" The obvious answer is "*no*" but there's always the temptation to try and be the one who beat the odds, isn't there?

There's a two-fold warning here for every Christian: First, don't overestimate your power of resistance, and second, don't leave God out when it comes to handling temptation. These disciples did just that, and they failed miserably. So now, let's see what Jesus did and how He won.

## **2. The Success of Jesus**

One of the first things we notice about Jesus' actions that night is that He admitted He was struggling. As He and the disciples approached the Garden of Gethsemane, He told 8 of them to stay back, and asked Peter, James and John to go with Him a little further. As He got closer to His praying place, that inner struggle within Him intensified and He told the three about it. He said in vs. 38, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.* In other words, He admitted that His inner anguish was literally killing Him. He was on a grief overload.

Here we have Jesus, the Son of God; the one who hated sin but the one who loved the Father. He knows that He's about to be separated from His Father for the first time in His life because of the sin He hated. But it was not even His own sin...it would be the weight of the sin of the entire human race at once that would be dumped on Him. Jesus was being asked to take all the guilt and all the punishment of our sins upon Himself. And I believe the prospect of it all---all the emotional and spiritual pain and sorrow He was feeling ---was becoming so great that He felt that He could die from it right then. Luke, the physician, writes, "*And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*" **Luke 22:44 (NIV)**. Can you imagine being under such extreme emotional stress that blood would actually seep from your pores? That's how Jesus felt. That's how intense His prayers were. Jesus was admittedly struggling with following His Father's will, perhaps like He'd never struggled before, and that is the first step one must take in order to be able to follow God's will when it's tough to do so.

You see, I believe God understands our weaknesses. That is one reason God came to earth in human form, so He could be in touch with the human experience. Always remember that when the temptations come, Jesus knows what you're facing.

The temptation Jesus faced in Gethsemane was to not do something good because of the personal pain it would bring. And the example Jesus set for us can help us deal with it.

So humbly Jesus admits it is a struggle, but next we see what else He did to find success in following God's will. Almost immediately He goes to His Father in prayer. He said in vs. 39, "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me...*"

Now here's where the wisdom of Jesus shines through. Removing yourself from temptation is one of the best ways to avoid giving into it. I mean, if you can avoid being in a compromising situation in the first place, then do it! Don't go to the party where there's going to be booze! Don't hang out with the wrong crowd! Turn the channel! Do whatever it takes to remove yourself from the source of temptation.

But then, Jesus shows the utter brilliance of His wisdom. Not only does He ask for God's help in removing Him from the situation, He adds--- "*yet not as I will, but as you will.*" And He prayed this same prayer three times (vs. 39, 42, & 44).

You see, for Jesus, His Father's will was more important than His own, and that's where most of us fail. We fail because we forget or we lose sight of the fact that it's not all about us. It's all about God because He sees the bigger picture.

Jesus, although under extreme duress and stress, ultimately He knew that this was the moment He came to earth for. He knew the plan, and even though His human self wasn't looking forward to it, He was willing to place Himself in His Father's hands and do His will. So, it seems as if Jesus was saying in vs. 42 and 44, "*Father, give me the strength I need to go on. My spirit's willing---even if this body of flesh isn't sure it can handle it.*" Why do I believe this was Jesus' prayer? Well, Luke tells us in **Luke 22:43 (NIV)**, "*An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him.*" So, Jesus had His answer---the cup wasn't going to be taken away. Instead He was given the strength to endure it.

After this, Jesus goes back to the disciples, finds them asleep again, wakes them up and says "*Get up guys! Here comes my betrayer!*" **Matthew 26:46 (NIV)**.

**Conclusion:** The lessons we can learn from Jesus' example in the Garden of Gethsemane are important because we all face the temptation to either follow or turn from doing God's will every day of our lives. Sometimes it shows up in what we would call the big decisions, but most of the time it's in the little things that add up and lead to the big decisions.

The disciples actions show us what not do when God gives us a choice about His will. But Jesus set an example of what we should do. Humbly, we should admit to God our struggle to be obedient to Him. Then, we should pray. I mean, if Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we, right? Then specifically we should ask God to help us deal with whatever temptation we're facing the way He wants us to. And then when His way becomes evident we should move forward with faith. Jesus did and God was pleased. In fact, had Jesus had not accepted God's will for Him, where would that put us today? Without a hope in this world!

You see, it's taking God's way out that counts. **1 Cor. 10:13 (NIV)** says, "*... God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*"

It's not just saying, "*Not my will but your will be done.*" It's living by those words. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

So if you're struggling with God's will this morning, as we sing our invitation hymn, you come and bring it before Him in prayer. Don't put it off or pretend it doesn't exist. Admit the struggle. Ask for His help. And make Jesus' prayer your prayer.