

Prayer Under Pressure

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 May 2023

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark, and you'll remember the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. About a month ago, your elders gathered together and discussed many things, but one of the things we discussed was, what is the next sermon series going to be at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church? Because you know we're getting near the end of the Gospel of Mark.

We're in chapter 14, near the end of that chapter, and we just have two left. And the main question that we ask when we look at our next series is this, what is the most helpful book for this people, that's us, in this time and this place? What is it that we need to hear from God and His Word as we face the challenges in Colorado Springs in 2023 as the particular folks that God's gathered to be a part of this congregation? And so it's not haphazard when we think about these things. Now, I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying. Of course, all Scripture is always timely. And so we actually could not make a mistake in a certain sense. Whatever book of the Bible we choose, that's going to be an important Word of God for us. But there are times and things that are especially timely. I bring all that up to say that the Gospels are, in fact, always especially timely. I don't feel a need, in a sense, to make a case for why a church might need to study a Gospel at a particular point in time, because we actually always need to have Christ brought before us over and over again. It is always especially timely and important to see Jesus. And Jesus is always beautiful, but I'm going to suggest to you that

He is especially beautiful as we look at Him in these days leading up to His death and His resurrection. And so that's been part of our focus over the last few weeks, is just to pause and say, look at Jesus.

See Jesus for who He is, what He does, His great love that becomes even clearer as He approaches His death.

[2 : 4 7] Last week, we saw Jesus feeding His disciples at the Last Supper, and that reminded us that we draw life from Jesus' death. We feed on Him then in a real sense. We saw Jesus' beauty there as He is giving Himself up. He's sacrificing Himself for the sake of His disciples and for us. Two weeks ago, we saw Jesus' care and control in arranging that dinner, that while He knew on the one hand He was going to be arrested, He wanted to make sure, on the other hand, it didn't happen too soon. Why? Because He valued that time with His disciples so much. As He faced the worst week of His life, what's on His mind, what's in His heart, is the good of those who are following Him, who love Him and trust Him. And so we're going to do the exact same thing this morning. We're going to look again at Jesus. Our hope is that we would see Him clearly, more clearly than we saw Him yesterday. And we're going to look at His intimacy with His

Father. One of the most famous passages in all of Scripture is Jesus' prayer here in the Garden of Gethsemane. So we'll see His intimacy with His Father and also His determination to save us. Now, as we look at Jesus' beauty, of course, there's a response that's called for, a response of love and faith and obedience. But that is not the first, the primary thing. What is always first and primary is that we would see Jesus. And so we're going to look to see Him this morning, both in His prayer and in His submission. We're going to look to see Jesus in His prayer and in His submission. With that, I invite you to turn with me. We're going to be in Mark chapter 14, starting in verse 26. You can turn with me in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 26. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, You will all fall away, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.

Peter said to Him, Even though they all fall away, I will not. And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, this very night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times. But He said emphatically, If I must die with you, I will not deny you. And they all said the same. Verse 32, And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And He said to His disciples, Sit here while I pray.

And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them, My soul is very sorrowful even to death. Remain here and watch. And going a little farther, He fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.

Yet not what I will, but what you will. Verse 37, And He came and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And again, He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again, He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him. And He came the third time and said to them, Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.

[7 : 22] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's Word. Our Father in heaven, we come before you this morning knowing that we have many, many needs.

But you know our greatest need, which is to see and know Jesus. We would see Him in His beauty, in His love, in His authority, in His power, in His holiness, in His glory. And so we ask, first and foremost, that you would help us with that. That as we look into your Word, you would cast a spotlight onto Him. That He would be clear to us. That we would know Him and understand Him and love Him more and more. That His love for us would grow, our love for Him. That His beauty would lead to our obedience and our faith. We thank you that you promise to do these things by your Word, that you promise in Isaiah 55, that your words will not return to you empty, but they will accomplish great things. And so we ask that you'd honor that and you would use your Word this morning to accomplish great things in our lives for your glory. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus

Christ. Amen. As I mentioned just a few moments ago, this is one of the most famous passages in all of Scripture. Jesus coming to pray to His Father as He looks and faces His death. And it's rich with meaning and depth. We could spend perhaps an entire series on just this event in Jesus' life, which makes us wonder, right, brings up the question, where do we even start? Where do we even start in a passage that's so full of detail about Jesus that gets at the heart of what it means for Him to be completely God and completely man, that shows Him returning over and over to prayer, even as He tells His disciples that the Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Now, I'm going to disappoint you at the beginning, like I sometimes do, which is to say that we're not going to be able to dig into everything and explore every detail of this passage. Thankfully, though, narratives, stories have sort of their own meaning embedded in them just by the very structure of it. I tell you guys every once in a while, maybe once or twice a year, that I don't just want you to learn things from the Bible, things about the Bible.

I also want you to learn how to read the Bible. And I've told you over and over again over the last six years or so that one of the ways we do that is through patterns and repetition and contrasts.

The Bible repeats what it intends to emphasize. The Bible repeats what it is we want to know, and we're not left to wonder in this passage. We have plenty of repetition. And it's the pattern that we see over and over. It's this, Jesus prays and the disciples sleep.

[10 : 29] And Jesus prays and the disciples sleep not one time, not two times, but three times in case we missed it. The first time is in verses 33 through 36, when Jesus has this poignant prayer asking for the cup to be taken away from him. And what does he immediately face? Verses 37 and 38, he came and found them sleeping. So then he goes back to prayer again, verse 39. And again, he went away and prayed, saying the same words. We could have a whole sermon about that. Jesus felt the need to come to God with the same request over and over. But then, second time, verse 40, he comes again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy. And we're getting to get the picture at this point. It gets shorter and shorter in the summary. Verse 41 just tells us, he came the third time and said to them, are you still sleeping and taking your rest? And so it's this pattern and this repetition that drives home the contrast of this passage for us, that Jesus is faithful in prayer while his disciples fail to watch. Jesus is faithful in prayer while his disciples fail to watch. He returns to prayer.

They return to sleep. So what do we do with that? Why is this contrast here? What is it meant to teach us? Well, I'll remind you what the apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. He says, be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Jesus is not just our savior, although he certainly is. He is also our model and our example. Jesus is the most human human. He's the one who shows us what we are meant to be, what we were intended for. In fact, 1 Peter chapter 2 tells us the same thing. We follow after Jesus in our suffering. He sets us an example. And so the point for us in this contrast is this, as Jesus faces darkness, he turns to his father. And this is meant to be great encouragement and instruction for us. You'll see this on the back of your worship guide from John Calvin. He says, we know that God is not called the father of all comfort in vain.

Christian, God is your father of all comfort. If we are separated from him, where else will we find strength if not in him?

Christian, you will not find strength outside of him. So we see that in time of need, God's son did not hold back. He therefore leads us by his example to our true refuge whenever we are sad and in distress.

As he faces darkness, Jesus turns to his father. Brothers and sisters, as we face darkness, we turn to our father as well.

[13 : 59] If Jesus, in the midst of his suffering, needed to go to God in prayer, how much more do we? If Jesus, in his suffering, needed to turn to his father in prayer, how much more do we?

And so Jesus shows us in our crisis and in our need what it is we need to do. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on verses 26 through 31, because really what that's doing is setting us up for what's going to happen later in the gospel of Mark. Jesus here is saying, look, you guys are going to fall when the shepherd is struck. The sheep are going to be scattered.

And then he predicts Peter's denial here. I just want you to think for a second, why is it that Peter denies Christ? I'm sure we could come up with a lot of reasons. If we had a whiteboard and we made a list, we brainstormed together, and there certainly are a lot of reasons, but I'll tell you there's one we know for sure. Peter denied Jesus because he did not listen in verse 38. Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. Why is it that Peter denied Christ? He refused to watch and pray.

Jesus sees what is coming. He is overwhelmed as he looks at the cup that he's going to have to drink.

And he shows us the path when we are overwhelmed as well. Christian, what overwhelms you?

[15 : 49] What causes you to stagger in the way that Jesus staggers here? Where do you need to run to God not once, not twice, three times or more in prayer?

I know for some of you who are older, you carry deep pain when you look at the lives of your children and your grandchildren.

Some of you deep pain over choices that they've made. Some of you not over the choices that they've made, but the choices that those around them have made.

Some of you have made, but the choices that they've made, you know, are the choices that they've made. What do you do when it's hard to look at it straight on? And you think if you do, you might stagger. Certainly many options, many right answers.

Jesus here gives us one. Watch and pray. Those of you who are younger, perhaps face a different temptation as you look at the rest of your life and you begin to understand the scope of it, the fact that it's limited and your options have constraints on them and you don't have all the time in the world.

[17 : 16] You wonder what's going to happen in the future and perhaps whether you have one. What do you do when you look out at that uncertainty and at times maybe it feels overwhelming?

There are certainly many good answers and one of them is this. Watch and pray. Some of you are stuck in the middle.

You're pressed in from so many different sides because of the stage that you're in in life. You have the demands not just of parents, but also of children. And you have questions that you need to answer about your work and your future.

You need wisdom and direction and guidance. And at times when you stop and you think about all those things, it seems like it might crush you. What do you do?

There's certainly many good answers. One of them is this. Watch and pray. What do you do both young and old as you come to grips with the reality that your body is finite and fragile?

[18 : 27] It's failing and it cracks. There are certainly many good answers. One of them is this. Watch and pray. If you truly have faced reality head on and you've looked it in the eyes and you've lived long enough, you know that you are powerless to change other people.

Powerlessness, by the way, is very frightening. What do you do as you come to grips with that and you face the temptation to try to squeeze those around you into the mold you want them to fit into?

I'm sure there are many good answers. One of them is this. Watch and pray. Jesus tells his disciples over and over.

If you face and struggle great temptation to sin, there are many good things you can do. Jesus presents one of them here for us. A great one that Peter fails to take hold of.

That he would watch and pray. And so Jesus here simply shows us the right path. He is our savior.

[19 : 44] He's also our model and our example. And so there's a conviction in this passage. And the conviction comes when we ask ourselves the question, how often is it that we fail like Peter to watch and pray?

But there's great encouragement as well. Jesus finds strength in this time with the Father. You notice how this passage ends.

It ends with Jesus receiving the answer to his prayers. He receives an answer very quickly. Finally, verses 41 and 42. It is enough.

The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hand of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.

Jesus prays for a different way. And it becomes clear very quickly. There is no other way. And Jesus finds the strength in prayer and communion with his Father that he needs to keep going.

[20 : 54] Brothers and sisters, the same is true for us. As God calls us into suffering and uncomfortable circumstances, he provides us with the strength that we need in communion with him through prayer.

Why does he tell them? And why does he tell us to watch and pray? Because he knows how much we need it. He knows how much strength we require.

It's been a while since I've mentioned this, but I've mentioned it over and over in the Gospel of Mark, that need is the price of admission. There is no way to get at the Gospel without it.

And here, Jesus doesn't just preach that need. He shows it as well. Now, obviously, Jesus' need is different than ours. He doesn't need to admit sin in the same way that we do because he's without sin.

And he still has a fragile human body. He is still in relationship with God the Father. And so that's why he comes and returns to God in prayer over and over again.

[22 : 10] If you've perused your worship guide, you've already seen this on page 5. Jesus is, without question, the most dependent human being who ever lived. Because he can't do life on his own, he prays and he prays and he prays.

Luke tells us that Jesus would withdraw to desolate places and pray. Christian, do you face things in this life that are beyond what you can handle on your own?

Do you need great and supernatural strength to keep moving? If you're honest, the answer is yes.

Watch and pray. This prayer of Jesus, by the way, is not a magic trick. The promise is not that we will get whatever we want.

And Jesus shows us that as well. It's in his prayer, in this first section of prayer, that we see Jesus anguish his great distress. Verse 33, he began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

[23 : 30] And then verse 34, my soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Now Mark is known for giving us the shortest account of all the Gospels, and we receive other details in parallel passages.

Luke chapter 22 says this, His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Jesus is in incredible distress.

Now commentators have pointed out that this is actually odd, and it's odd for this reason. We have stories of Christian martyrs going to their death with great strength and courage.

We have stories of Christian martyrs laughing at death. And so what do we make of that? Does that mean that Jesus is somehow weaker than those martyrs?

Well, no, of course not. It is not that Jesus is weaker. It is that his suffering is so much greater. Those martyrs worried only about death and its pain.

[24 : 42] Jesus here is facing something so much worse. It is not simply death that is causing him to have this anguish. No, if it were merely death on a cross, I don't think we would be looking and hearing about this.

But it is something worse. Let's look at Jesus' prayer in verse 36. He doesn't say, spare me from death. He says, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me.

Now, if you're familiar with the Old Testament, you know that the cup is an image that's used over and over in Scripture to capture God's judgment and wrath and punishment on the earth.

In fact, we're told sometimes about the cup being poured out, this cup of God's judgment. When Jesus is here in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he's praying, what he's facing is not merely the prospect of death.

No, he is facing the prospect of experiencing all of God's judgment and wrath that is justly meant to be poured out on those he saves.

[25 : 49] Jesus is not just facing God's judgment and wrath. He is facing the separation of the most important relationship he has, one that we could not imagine.

Jesus is facing something too horrific for words. That is what causes his anguish.

You'll see this on page 7. Jesus began to experience the spiritual, cosmic, infinite disintegration that would happen when he became separated from his Father on the cross.

Jesus began to experience merely a foretaste of that. And he staggered. God's judgment.

The wrath that Jesus faced and the punishment that he took that we deserved is beyond overwhelming. And so Jesus cries out.

[26 : 58] He asks for help. And yet, as we've already seen, he doesn't have to wait long for an answer. The cup is not removed.

Jesus submits to the will of his Father. Brothers and sisters, as we face suffering and trials and tribulation in this world, we submit to the will of our Father as well.

In fact, we already prayed it this morning. Thy will be done. Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Yet it's easier said than done, right?

Right? Why is it that we can submit to God's will? How are we able to do it? I'll give you a few suggestions from this passage right here.

First, we submit to his will because we know his purposes are good. And how do we know that? We don't just know it from Romans 8, 28, which says he works all things for good.

[28 : 16] We also know it because we can see Jesus accomplishing it here. If he did not intend all things for our good, Jesus would not have gone to the cross.

So you can think about it another way. The question is often asked, what do we do with suffering in this world? How can we answer that there's this loving God who allows these things to happen?

And it's a difficult question with difficult answers. We know what the answer isn't.

We know that the answer isn't that God doesn't care because he sent his only son to die. Because Jesus took and drank the cup to the bottom.

We don't just submit to God's will like Christ because we know his purposes are good. We also submit to his will because we see his love in the price of sin.

[29 : 21] How terrible is our sin? It is so terrible that when Jesus caught just a foretaste of it, he paused.

When Jesus caught just a foretaste of it, he staggered. And he kept going.

Why? Because of his great love. His purposes are good, better than we can imagine.

And his love is great, greater than we can understand. And so for us, as we think about our response, as we look at Jesus, as we see him in his beauty, our task is very simple.

We turn to Jesus and we trust him. We trust him by praying to him, by bringing our needs and concerns to him.

[30 : 27] We trust him when he says no to our prayers because we know it's not because he doesn't care. We know of how good his purposes are. We know how great his love is.

Verse 36. He says, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

Remove this cup from me. Trusting him and following Jesus is the only way to avoid tasting the cup.

God's wrath and punishment in this world caused Jesus to pause and he staggered. Imagine what it will do to you.

There are many reasons to have faith in Jesus Christ and to follow after him, to repent of our sins and embrace righteousness. And one of them is this. The cup of God's wrath and judgment is more than we can imagine.

[31 : 32] And it is worse than we would ever want to endure. And yet the good news is for those who follow after Christ, they can be like those martyrs that we talked about.

We can face death and we can laugh at it because the cup is not a threat to us. And why is it not a threat? Because Jesus is willing to go through what he endured here in the garden and later.

Jesus is not just separated from the Father. The problem is not simply or merely that he faces death. It is not just that he's disintegrated. Watch what happened earlier.

Verses 26 through 31. Jesus is going to be abandoned by everyone. We'll talk more about that in the coming weeks.

It is going to get worse next week. Because we're going to be told that everyone fled. Great challenges, as you know, require great community.

[32 : 35] There are many things we can't do alone. But Jesus here does. And so that is our motivation, our encouragement, our salvation.

We see Jesus' love by what he is willing to go through. We see his love by what he's willing to endure. We see his commitment to us as he accepts the cup that causes him to shudder.

Jesus is separated from God the Father so that we can run to him.

Jesus is cut off from God the Father so that we can have access to him in prayer. Jesus continues in his plan, submitting to the will of the Father, even as he sees how terrible it will be.

Christian, that is what grows our love and our faith and our obedience to him. That is what causes us to run to him and to trust him no matter what.

[33 : 48] Will you watch and pray? Because that is what we're going to sing now.

Jesus, what a strength in weakness. Let me hide myself in him. Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing, he my strength. My victory wins.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for your great love for us. We thank you that Jesus saw how terrible the cup was.

Your wrath and judgment and justice poured out on the earth and he took it for us. We ask that you would use this to grow our love and affection for him, that we would follow him and obey him.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.