

### 5.3.08 midweekchurch      Matthew 26:36-46      Jesus 5 (mid)

I was sitting down with a family a while back to prepare their Dad's funeral service. We had talked about the eulogy, about the Bible readings about the service itself and we got to talking about music. What hymns would be appropriate? What music summed up and fitted their Dad's life? What music did they want to sing or heard sung?

And after a bit of discussion, they decided on two pieces of music. A hymn and a secular song. The hymn was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, Dad loved that hymn. And the secular song was Frank Sinatra's, "I did it my way." That's how he lived.

And in the gentlest of ways I tried to point out the contradiction in those two songs. You can't have the Lord as your shepherd and then do it my way. You either go your shepherd's way or your way? God's way or my way. But you can't do them both.

But don't we all deep inside want to do both? Yes we want Jesus as our Saviour, the Lord as our shepherd but we also want to be our own boss. We want salvation from God but we want independence from God as well. We want it both ways.

And now, the end is near;  
And so I'll face the final curtain.  
My friend, I'll say it clear,  
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full.  
I've travelled each and every highway;  
But more, much more than this,  
I did it my way.

Many people live by the Frank Sinatra theme, don't they? "I DID IT MY WAY." Yet when we open our Bibles, we see that the Lord Jesus, however, lived a different kind of life. He came to seek and to save the lost. His interest was people. His life centred on God's will and on others.

And yet even Jesus was tempted to do it his way. For in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus may well have faced the greatest struggle of His life. Do I submit to the will of God, my Heavenly Father, or do I do it my way? Do I really want to die for the sins of the world or do I want to look after number 1? When push comes to shove, am I more interested in my will or thy will?

Which is a good question even today. For its all very well saying I'll

follow Jesus when life is easy, but will I follow him when life gets tough? Its easy to say I'm a Christian when God seems close, but are we still one when God seems far away? Its OK being a follower of Jesus when he tells us to do the things that we ourselves want to do. But what happens when his will is different to our will? What happens when his way is different to everyone else's way?

We're now in the last day or two of Jesus life. He's in Jerusalem, he's had the Passover meal and he knows that Judas is going to betray him. He is also aware that the disciples will desert him and that even God will leave him on his lonesome. He has to face the cross alone and quite simply he's doesn't like what he sees.

As one author has put it. *"The final encounter of the battle has begun. As Jesus looks at the city of Jerusalem, He sees what the disciples can't... He sees the Evil One preparing for the final encounter... Hell is breaking loose... History records it as a battle of the Jews against Jesus. It wasn't... It was a battle of God against Satan. AND JESUS KNEW IT. He knew that before the war was over, he would be taken captive. He knew that before victory, would come defeat. He knew that before the throne would come the cup. He knew that before the light of Sunday would come the blackness of Friday... AND HE IS AFRAID."*

1. So what does he do? **He withdraws**... He withdraws from the hustle and bustle of the city so that he can have some time alone. He needs time to think, he needs time to pray. I know he was the second member of the Trinity, I know that he and the Father were one, but Jesus too needed to pray. His grief was too deep. The path was too dangerous. The shadows loomed too large. The storm that was approaching was too ferocious. He could not go on without prayer.

So without trying to state the obvious, if Jesus needed to pray, we will need to pray. If the Son of God needed to bring his requests before his Father, how much more do we need to? If Jesus in his sorrow, in his pain, in his loneliness thought the best port in the storm was to withdraw and be with God, can we afford not to do likewise?

2. Jesus withdrew and he called on his disciples **to watch**. Look at what Jesus says in v 38, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here & keep watch with me."* And later again when he returns and finds them he says *"Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?"* he asks. *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."*

What does he mean by watch and pray? Don't you normally close your eyes when you pray? How then can you watch and pray at the same time?

I think what Jesus is talking about is some sort of spiritual awareness. The disciples need to be aware of what is going on. They need to understand that there is more than what meets the eye. So they are to pray in such a way that one eye is on God and the other is on what is going around them. So that they may understand what God is doing as well as what the people around them are also doing.

Prayer then doesn't make us so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly use. Instead it sharpens our understanding of the world. It readies us for the spiritual battles that takes place every day. It helps us to see what is really happening all around us more clearly. Jesus and his disciples have then withdrawn so that they can better watch how events unfold. And that leads to Jesus

**3. Wrestling in prayer.** For when we read Luke's account of Jesus time in Gethsemane we hear him say that *"being in much anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."* This is not some leisurely stroll in the garden where Jesus and God walk side by side. This is a wrestle, a tussle. As Jesus begins to understand what is ahead of him, this cup of suffering and he knows full well that he has to drink it down to the dregs, but he feels too weak to do it. The task is too enormous. The mountain is too high to climb. So for over an hour, he wrestles with God, looking for another way out, looking for an alternative route but in the end looking for God's help and blessing on what was going to come.

It reminds me a bit of Jacob in the book of Genesis. He had mistreated Esau, claiming the birth rite that his brother should have had. He had escaped and gone to live with a distant relative Laban who had recently tricked him. And now Jacob is on the run with two wives, a whole flock of sheep and with much wealth. And he was about to meet his brother Esau again when he wrestled with an angel of God.

Yes there he was physically wrestling with God's messenger as he had spiritually wrestled with God all his life. And in the end after they were both physically exhausted, Jacob grabs hold of the angel and wouldn't let go of him until he blessed him.

That's what is goes on here. For over an hour, Jesus wrestles in prayer with his father. His sweat is like drops of blood falling on the ground. Jesus is not just politely talking to God, he's wrestling with him. While the other disciples sleep, because sorrow has taken over them, Jesus wrestles because sorrow has gripped him. He knows that he has come to die. He knew the enormity of his task before he came down here on earth, but now the temptation to walk away from the cross is a real one, not an academic one. Now his doubts and fears are real also. Now his Father is

just about to turn his back on him and so he wrestles with God in prayer. For he knows that he can't face it without God's blessing. He knows that in the end it is not about my will but thy will being done.

So as one commentator has put it *"the sleepers for whom Jesus will die have lost their opportunity to gain strength through prayer. While Jesus has prayed in agony but now rises with poise and advances to meet his betrayer."* (Carson, 545)

Do you see what this means for us today? Prayer is not always polite. Prayer is not always civil. Prayer can be passionate, strength sapping even, as we wrestle with God's will and as we seek to make it our will. And you don't get that with 5 minutes talking to God with your list of requests. You don't get that when you briefly turn to God at the end of the day and ask for the blessing of sleep. You get that when you see prayer as not so much getting what you want from God. But giving yourself to God until he changes you and you no longer want to do it my way, you want to do it His way. And trust me, that never happens without a fight.

But as Jesus wrestles, the disciples sleep. The spirit was willing but the flesh was **weak**. **4.** For prayer is for those who are weak, not those who are strong. Those who are strong, don't often pray because they feel there is no need to pray. Those who are weak, search out for their God, seek out for His strength, knock on his door until we know for sure that it is now open.

So prayer is a discipline. It is a form of training, of subjugating the will. Of placing yourself again & again within God's hands, within God's will. For the flesh is weak. Left to ourselves we will continually take the path of least resistance. It is hard to do the right thing. And it takes moral courage to stand up for what is right. And prayer is the time when you align your spirit with Christ's spirit. When you tune your body with Christ's body. Where in your weakness, you learn to rely on the strength that God offers you.

5. As you seek the **way** forward. "Father would you take away this cup of suffering, of sin, of separation from me? Father is there another way of saving the world other than this way? Father can you dredge up from your heavenly wisdom a plan B? But if this be your will, make it my will also?"

Thousands of years early Adam and Eve are in a Garden and while being tempted by the serpent say to God *"not your will but mine"* and their sin had turned paradise into a desert. But now Jesus faced with an even greater temptation, to walk away from the cross and the chance to pay the penalty for sins of the world, Jesus says to God *"not my will but yours"*

and he turns the desert back into a paradise, into the very gates of heaven.

So do you think, was it possible for Jesus to refuse the cup? YES! Was it possible for the Father to remove the cup? YES! All things are possible with God, BUT it was not possible for the Father to remove the cup *and* for Jesus to refuse the cup and accomplish redemption. It was not possible to remove or refuse the cup *and* provide atonement for our sins. It was not possible to remove it or refuse it *and* still keep you and me out of eternal damnation! So Jesus obeys his Father's will.

Author, Max Lucado concludes "The battle is won. You may have thought it was won on Golgotha. It wasn't. You may have thought the sign of victory is the empty tomb. It isn't. The final battle was won in Gethsemane. And the sign of conquest is Jesus at peace in the olive trees. For it was in the garden that he made his decision... He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you." *He would rather go to hell for you than go to heaven without you.*

Where is the battle won and lost for us today? I believe it is not won in our schools, or at work or in our parliaments or even in the midst of our family together. The battle is won and lost when we are on our knees. For this is the time we say and we mean it that we are not doing things according to our will but thy will.

As the preacher SD Gordon once said "*the great people of the earth are the people who pray ... not... those who talk about prayer, not those who say they believe in prayer, nor yet those who explain about prayer, but I mean those who take time to prayer*"

Friends this is what we really need today, great men and women of prayer. Just look at what is going on right around us. Fractured Relationships. Struggles with our families. Finding it hard to make ends meet. Working in stressful jobs. Trying to find the way forward. All the possibilities, all the challenges. All the choices. Everyone of us need to be down on our knees, like Jesus was, reaching out to the God who has the whole world in his hands.

Can we do anything else? Is this our decisive hour? If only we were to withdraw, watch, and wrestle, we would find our weaknesses weaken and we would find His will is better than our will. But friends lets not just talk about, lets actually do it and continue to do it. Friends let us pray....