

Sleep and a Desperate Appeal -- Mark 14:32-42

Textual citations taken from the NKJV

by Travis Dean

February 8, 2014

Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

Lord, we need You just now. Help me take Your message and deliver it effectively to Your people. Every one of us needs Your Spirit to not only be hearers of Your word, but doers. We pray for this in Jesus' name, amen.

During my initial reading of this story, I could relate to the experience of a couple woodpeckers. We have a large ash tree in our backyard. I remember watching two palliated woodpeckers recently pecking relentlessly on the bark of this tree. They moved quickly up and down this tall tree leaving large pieces of bark lying at the base of the tree. Somehow they knew that there was more than wood beneath that bark. Their instincts told them that there was an abundant supply of food to be had, if they pecked their way past the outer bark of that tree.

Whenever I read God's Word there is always a reward for digging deeper than the surface. I have found that to be true for every story that we have looked at in the book of Mark. But I have never found it to be more true than with this story from Mark 14. My prayer for you is that you would experience what those woodpeckers and I have experienced by digging deeper. As we look below the surface, by God's grace we will be rewarded.

Let's consider now a summary of our story:

Jesus and His disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Here, in great sorrow, Jesus prayed to His Father. Meanwhile, His disciples stayed nearby. Jesus aroused them from sleep three different times. The third time He told them to get up and go with Him to meet His approaching betrayer.

We will now consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced a desire to pray. If you are familiar with the previous story, you will recall that Jesus and His disciples have recently left Jerusalem where they celebrated the Passover meal together. They have crossed over the Brook Kidron walking east, and are now ascending the western slope of the Mount of Olives. Mark 14:32 then says that they came to a place called, "Gethsemane". The name means "oil press". The oil referred to is most likely the oil from the olive as the hill was covered with olive trees. Jesus has spent entire nights praying. So experiencing a desire to pray was not unusual. But His desire and desperation on this particular night were unequalled by any other time in His life.

Second, Jesus experienced intensifying distress. Mark uses a series of words to describe the strong feelings that Jesus was experiencing. Chapter 14 and verse 33 says that Jesus began to be troubled. This word translated, "troubled" can either have a positive or negative connotation. It can mean either "terrified" or "utterly astounded". A second feeling word is found in verse 33. Jesus was "deeply distressed". This word comes from a root word meaning to be "full" or "stuffed". Jesus' distress was overpowering His whole body. A third feeling word is found in verse 34. Jesus was "exceedingly sorrowful". This word means to be "surrounded by sadness". His "soul" (a word often meaning "life") was being overcome with a sorrow all around Him. In Mark 14:35 Jesus describes His distress as intensifying to the point of death. His suffering is becoming progressively more severe. The book, [Desire of Ages](#), gives a vivid description of this progression in the chapter entitled, "Gethsemane" pages 685-686. The disciples first noticed that Jesus was strangely silent. Then His expression changed to one of sadness. Then His whole body began swaying. Every step took great effort. As they arrived at Gethsemane, He began to groan aloud as if under a heavy burden. Notice Mark's description in Mark 14:35: "He went a little farther and fell on the ground." Once He reached His place of prayer, He collapsed with His face down to the ground. Something is smothering Him. It reminds me of Isaiah 53:6, which says, "The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." What a crushing weight that was!

Third, Jesus experienced pleading with God. Prostrate on the ground, Jesus began to pray. Mark 14:35 says that Jesus prayed that "the hour might pass away from Him." What hour was Jesus talking about? I invite you to turn with me to the book of John. We will read chapter 7 and verse 30 as well as chapter 8 and verse 20. (Read) In both of these situations, people were trying to take Jesus' life. But the reason they could not was because His hour had not yet come. In other words, it was not time for Him to die yet. And so in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that His death might disappear and vanish away: "Take this hour of death and make it be gone forever!"

Mark 14:36 reveals more of Jesus' prayer. He addressed God with the words, "Abba, Father". "Abba" is a personal address by a Hebrew son to his dad. Jesus' relationship with God was on a very personal and intimate level. Notice His next words: "all things are possible for You". They are spoken like a true son. Many sons believe that their fathers can do anything. In most cases sons are delusional, but not in this case. God's Word makes it clear that with God all things are possible. And yet in this instance it will become apparent that there are some things that even God cannot do. He could not save the world and spare His Son from death. Going on in Mark 14:36 Jesus tells His Father to take "this cup" away from Him. What cup is He referring to? Later, in John 18:11, Peter will take his sword and try to protect Jesus from being arrested. And Jesus will respond, "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" The cup Jesus told His Father in Gethsemane to take away from Him was the experience of suffering and death awaiting Him at the hands of His enemies.

As Jesus pled with God that night in Gethsemane, I get the picture of a son refusing his bottle. I had many frustrating experiences with my son not wanting to drink milk from his bottle when he was a baby. But what a sudden change this was for Jesus. At a young age He had accepted His role as the Lamb of God. Throughout His ministry He had been predicting His own death. And yet this night in Gethsemane He was in great distress, and He wanted out.

There's an amazing contrast in the last part of Mark 14:36: "...nevertheless not what I will, but what You will." The word translated, "nevertheless", is the strongest possible word to show a contrast. It's like Jesus said, "I want You to do this! (pause) But ...what I really want is Your will." How could Jesus submit to His Father in the middle of His desperate appeal? He had been doing this His whole life. It had been a lifelong habit for Him. In John 5:19, 30 Jesus spelled this out. He chose to do nothing on His own agenda. He chose to do God's work alone.

And yet we find in Mark 14:39, 41 that Jesus had to repeat this desperate appeal and surrender two more times that night. I don't think we can comprehend what a struggle this was for Jesus. But the thrice-repeated prayer does show us a glimpse into something deeper that was going on that night. Turn with me to Luke 4:13. Jesus has been tempted by Satan in the wilderness how many times? Three. Now notice what Luke 4:13 says. (Read) Satan's opportune time had come in Gethsemane. It was his final attack. If you compare Matthew 4:11 with Luke 22:43, you will notice another parallel between Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and His struggle in Gethsemane. Both times He needed an angel to come and strengthen Him or He wouldn't have survived.

Fourth, Jesus experienced being mindful of His disciples. This takes place through the entirety of this story. In spite of His own suffering and agony, He did not forget His disciples. As they entered Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to stay there and wait for Him. Then in Mark 14:33 He took Peter, James, and John with Him further into Gethsemane. He had made a similar distinction between the disciples in Mark 9:2, when He took Peter, James and John up onto a mountain where He was transfigured. As He and these three disciples walked together in Gethsemane, He shared with them His feelings. He then told them to stay awake, while He went a little further into Gethsemane. Luke 22:41 gives a more detailed description, saying that Jesus went "a stone's throw" away. So Peter, James, and John could still see and hear Him. But they were far enough away that they were not traumatized by the ordeal that Jesus endured. How thoughtful He was of them.

After a while Jesus again returned to these three disciples. And He found them sleeping. Perhaps He was checking to see if they were ok. Perhaps He was looking for support and encouragement from them. He must have been saddened to find them asleep. He woke up Peter in Mark 14:37. (Read) Only a short while before Peter had been boasting about his dedication even to the point of death (Mark 14:27-31). But now he is failing to even stay awake. Jesus told them in Mark 14:38 that the reason they needed to pray was not just for Him, but for the sake of their own faith: "lest you enter into temptation". Then Jesus gave them these most gracious words: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." A more revealing translation of the original Greek text might be: "You really want to pray with me, but the sinful nature has no strength to do so." Jesus came to them two more times that night. Mark's description of the disciples' experience that night is very revealing in verse 40. He says, "Their eyes were heavy." A better translation of "heavy" would be, "being weighed down". Something was pushing their eyes closed. In fact, it was a supernatural stupor in that hour of the powers of darkness. Mark also says in verse 40 that the disciples "did not know what to answer Him." They were speechless. Perhaps they felt guilty and ashamed. Perhaps they were struck speechless by the haggard look on Jesus' face.

Last of all, Jesus experienced facing His betrayal. In Mark 14:41 Jesus' demeanor and words have drastically changed. After waking up the disciples the third time, He declared with confidence, "The hour has come." The struggle was over. He was now ready to face His hour of suffering and death. He was resolved to drink the cup of woe. In verses 41 and 42 Jesus alerted His disciples to His coming betrayer. He points them towards Jerusalem from where His betrayer and enemies have come. Jesus did not wait for them to get to Him. He told His disciples, "Rise, let us be going." He did not run away or hide. He moved towards His adversaries. He was on the offensive.

Now that we've looked at what Jesus experienced in this story, let's now consider our own experience. How did Jesus model for us how Christians in 2014 should live? The first time that I read this story in preparation for this sermon, a list of examples jumped out at me. This has never happened before throughout the whole book of Mark. So, before we look at two of them in detail, I want you to see the list:

(1) *He kept healthy boundaries.* He often mingled with the crowds. But there were times when He only wanted His closest disciples with Him. He knew the difference between an acquaintance and a close friend. And He knew where to draw the line.

(2) *He disclosed His emotions.* He didn't hide His feelings. Nor did He blurt them out to just anyone. Peter, James, and John were the only ones to whom He confided His deepest, strongest feelings that night in Gethsemane.

(3) *He related to God in a personal way.* He addressed Him as a son would his father in the healthiest possible father-son relationship.

(4) *He expressed faith in what His Father could do.* He believed in His heart that there was nothing His Father couldn't do.

(5) *He submitted His will to God's will.* As we mentioned earlier, this was not a new experience for Jesus. He had done this His entire life.

(6) *He confronted Peter.* Peter had boasted confidently of his own dedication and strength. So in his hour of weakness, Jesus called him on it. Certainly His motives were in order to help Peter see his own weakness to which he himself was blinded.

(7) *He expressed concern in the midst of suffering.* How often we become self-absorbed under stress. But Jesus continued to be mindful of His disciples and their needs even when He was in the midst of a desperate struggle.

(8) *He responded to the disciples' failure with grace.* Immediately after confronting Peter, He showed He understood them. He acknowledged the love they held for Him in their hearts. He also gently reminded them that their sinful natures were helpless and in need of strength from their Father in heaven.

(9) *He prayed with tenacity and passion.* Jesus was not afraid to tell God what He really wanted, even if it was not in line with God's will. He was not afraid to yell and scream. His passion, though, was from a love relationship, not out of anger.

(10) *He was changed by prayer.* As a result of Jesus' time in prayer, God did not change His mind. God did not come up with another way to save the world. Jesus was the one who changed. He was

made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10). He came out of that experience strengthened to carry out God's plan for Him.

Let's take a few minutes now to look at a couple of these in detail. Consider first of all how Jesus is revealed as our example in that He disclosed His emotions. When Jesus told Peter, James, and John that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death, it was an invitation to enter into His experience. He made Himself vulnerable. He wasn't afraid for them to know that He was struggling. This was also an opportunity for Peter, James, and John to encourage their Lord. If only they had realized that His suffering was for their salvation!

It's often said that men are not in touch with their feelings. That's probably more true of some of us than others. But I know it has often been the case with me. This is not only because of my gender but also because of my spirituality. I was in the habit of subconsciously ignoring my feelings. Most of my life was spent measuring my words, thoughts, and actions. Jesus says in Matthew 12:37 that by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Proverbs 23:7 says, "As he thinks in his heart, so is he." Revelation 20:12 says that we are judged by our works. So, God brought my wife into my life to introduce me to feelings. When she asked me how I was feeling, the best I could come up with was, "Good!" Or "Ok." Or "Tired." That was about it. God's next big step for me in identifying my feelings came when I took a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education. This feeling wheel is a close example of what they taught us. The more intense feeling words are in the center of the wheel. The two outer portions of this wheel list more mild feelings in the same category.

Here's one reason it is hard to share your feelings with someone. It makes you vulnerable. If you say, "I'm scared," or "I'm mad," someone might make you feel like a weak Christian. That's why you have to have healthy boundaries. Jesus only shared His feelings with His three closest disciples. But sharing your feelings is a starting place for healing. When I was a chaplain intern, it was by sorting out my feelings, that I discovered more about myself. It allowed me to become more effective in ministry and to come closer to becoming the man God created me to be. Sharing your feelings also builds your relationship with God. You find that God understands. You realize that He still likes you and won't censure you for feeling angry or scared. He'll help you work through it and experience healing.

Let's also consider the example Jesus gave us when He talked to God as a friend and father. Jesus addressed God as "Abba", the Hebrew word for Dad. It reveals a personal father-son relationship between them. I love how Paul says in Romans 8:15 that our relationship with God is not based on fear. He has adopted us, so that we, too, can cry out to Him as our "Abba". Jesus also talked to God as a friend. God was someone He could be real with and share His raw emotions. He could scream, "I want out!" and not be afraid that God would disown Him. A third dimension, though, to this father-friend relationship is found in Jesus' absolute submission to God. He had spent His whole life surrendering to God's will. And it was such an engrained habit that even in His desperate struggle, He released His will into His Father's hands.

Notice what Hebrews 5:7 says. (Read) This description of Jesus aligns very closely with what He experienced in Gethsemane. Jesus was in a desperate situation, but His prayers only increased in intensity. He knew His Father could save Him from death. And according to this passage Jesus' prayer was answered. How can that be when Jesus did die? What Jesus really wanted was to be close to His Father. But even more than that He wanted to honor His Father. No one was closer to God than Jesus. But it is also true that no one was more submissive and surrendered to Him.

Let's look now at three other biblical examples of this kind of prayer in the Bible. First of all is Abraham, who is referred to in the Bible as the friend of God (James 2:23). Turn with me to Genesis chapter 18. The Lord has come to earth to bring judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. He first, though, lets Abraham overhear what He is about to do. Let's now read verses 20-26. (Read) Abraham is not afraid to question God. He is confident enough in His relationship with God to ask Him to reconsider and even change His decision. Here's the amazing thing as you read on in this chapter: God agreed to Abraham's successive proposals.

Another biblical example is Moses in Exodus 32. He has been on top of Mount Sinai alone with God for forty days and forty nights. Meanwhile, the Israelites have convinced Aaron, Moses' brother, to make them a golden calf to worship. Notice how God responded and what He said to Moses. Let's read verses 9-14. (Read) God told Moses, "Leave Me alone so I can burn these Israelites to a crisp. And I will make a great nation out of you." But Moses who spoke face to face with God as to a friend (Exodus 33:11), and who knew the Lord face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10), was not afraid to disagree with God's idea. And here's the amazing thing: God listened to Moses. He decided to spare the Israelites. Moses' confidence came from know that the Lord is a God of mercy.

A third biblical example is David in 2 Samuel 12. David's son is being punished by God. He pleaded with God for seven days to spare his son's life. But his son still died. And when David saw that God had not answered his prayer, he bathed and changed his clothes. He went to the sanctuary and worshipped the Lord. God had said, "No." But David still chose to worship Him. David knew God was a gracious God and so he asked for mercy. But when he didn't get what he asked for, it didn't ruin the relationship. God called David a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

How do you talk to God? I'm afraid we are often far too passive and distant in our prayers. I know that the times when I have wrestled with God in prayer is when I have felt distressed. On one hand you've got to know that God is safe no matter what you throw at Him. And on the other hand you've got to submit to Him completely. This is the father-friend relationship Jesus modeled for us in this story.

So, here's what I want to leave you with. Prayer is not ultimately about changing God's mind. It's not ultimately about God giving us what we ask for. It's about us being supernaturally strengthened to honor God. Sometimes God will intervene. Sometimes He will act in ways just because we prayed. But ultimately prayer is about us leaving our time of prayer supernaturally strengthened to face the challenge that lies before us. Maybe you're in a situation today and want out. If so, I would like to have a prayer for you.