

Matthew 26.30-46 | Greater Obedience

Intro | a divine conversation

Matthew 26-27 records the last few days of Jesus' life leading up to his crucifixion. On Thursday evening, Jesus celebrated the annual Jewish feast of Passover with his disciples. Two days earlier, Jesus told his disciples plainly that he would be delivered up to be crucified. At the Passover, fulfilling Old Testament Scripture, Jesus establishes a greater covenant, identifies himself as greater sacrificial lamb, and makes a **GREATER PROMISE to represent** men before God as their substitute in life and death.

This Greater Promise was necessary because of our GREAT our disobedience. **Fulfilling this promise would require a GREATER obedience.** After their Passover meal, Jesus takes His disciples out to a garden on the Mount of Olives just outside of Jerusalem. One disciple, Judas, has left to betray him. Jesus tells eight of his disciples to sit while he goes a little further to pray but He invites his three closest disciples, James, John, and Peter to join him. Visibly upset, Jesus tells his friends that he is **deeply troubled and sorrowful in his soul—so much so he sweats drops of blood** (Luke 22.44). Jesus is grieved fulfilling the greater Promise will require a greater obedience than anyone has or will ever endure—drinking the cup of the covenant. There were actually four cups at the Passover meal. The cup which he said, “this is my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins” was the third cup—the **cup of redemption**.

The redemption “cup” memorialized the escape from slavery in Egypt. But their redemption came as a result of God's wrath poured out on Egypt. In the garden, Jesus is not troubled by the coming **physical punishment that will be inflicted by the Romans as much as the spiritual wrath poured out by God, for the sins of the entire world.** The Bible calls Jesus our propitiation, meaning, Jesus absorbs God's wrath for our sin. Fulfilling the Greater Promise will require **Jesus willingly** enduring the agony that comes from burdening the guilt, facing the shame, and enduring the cosmic separation that forgiving sin requires. As Jesus **meditates on drinking this cup**, we get to eavesdrop on the most intimate plea from the Son to His heavenly Father. Essentially, Jesus asks: **“Is there any other way than the cross?”** This is a rhetorical question, asked to make a point not elicit an answer.

Jesus obedience to take up the cross is the only answer to God's BIG sin problem. Isn't sin our problem—Yes and No? The Bible teaches that God is sovereign over all that exists. God is right in all he does. God is just in all his punishments. But the Bible also teaches that God loves all His creation. This contradiction produces a problem for God. Problem: **How can God be just and kind toward sinners at the same time? God's forgiveness of our sin is a threat to his character. God's punishment of our sin is a threat to his character.** Before the cross is for anyone else, it is for God. As David Platt has written: It is incomplete to say that Jesus died for you for me or even for the world; Jesus died for God first.

As Jesus prepares for His impending trial, **his friends sleep.** Which begs the question—how do we know what Jesus prayed? Seeing as Jesus spent 40 days with his disciples after he rose from the dead, this is one of the stories that he wanted them to remember. Yes, **Jesus wants US to learn something from His great struggle. Jesus not only accomplishes our salvation through His greater obedience, he gives us an example to follow in our own DIFFICULT OBEDIENCE.**

What is a difficult obedience?

The realness and rawness of Jesus' prayer is encouraging. This passage, more than others, gives us insight into the uniqueness of Jesus's divine-humanity. Even though Jesus is completely unlike us as the Son of God, he was also made like us as the Son of man. Hebrews 4.15 reminds us: **15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** As his disciples snooze among the trees, Jesus asks some deep questions of God about one particular tree. **Three times, Jesus asks** the Father **IF THE CROSS**

CAN BE AVOIDED. Three times, Jesus asks IF IT CANNOT, God's will to be done. Three times, God the Father is silent. Some will suggest that this is the one instance where God doesn't answer Jesus' prayer. Even if that is true, I would humbly suggest that God already has answered it. **Jesus is showing us what it looks like to reverently explore the limits of God's will; He is not struggling to accept it.** This is not a matter of whether Jesus will accept God's purpose. It is a matter of whether God's purposes needs to include this cup of wrath—**Jesus is asking whether His will needs to unfold this way (through what I call a—the most—difficult obedience).**

Our experience with the Lord is the same. Yes. I accept to obey God's purposes. Yes. I want God to be glorified. Yes. I want to experience the fullness of joy. But...wait...not...that...way. **The nature of a difficult obedience is that it is difficult—they are those unexpected moments when God's will or purpose disagrees with your own.** It is when God's plan for your life circumstance conflicts with yours. Even though our specific experiences cannot compare, consider what generally characterizes Jesus' difficult obedience:

1. **A difficult obedience is a painful obedience** – it hurts us. It may hurt of physically, emotionally, relationally, or materially. It typically kills something, whether it is our comfort, our reputation, our wealth, our entitlement, our preference, or even our very lives.
2. **A difficult obedience is a sacrificial obedience** – it costs us. It's not just that it is costly, a difficult obedience is usually exclusively for the benefit of others. We lose so that others gain. This kind of obedience forces you to make others more important than yourself.
3. **A difficult obedience is an inconvenient obedience** – it interrupts us. A difficult obedience is a speed bump in our normal rhythms. God's calendar doesn't always link up with our own. In that sense, our obedience is made difficult when submission to God's will ruins our plans, schedules, or dreams.
4. **A difficult obedience is an irrational obedience** – it doesn't make sense to us. Rarely, does a difficult obedience make sense to us. We usually have 17 different ways that God's plan could be better. If God's wisdom is foolish, it's likely a difficult obedience will be counter cultural and counter intuitive.
5. **A difficult obedience is a lonely obedience** – it is only for us. Finally, Jesus is truly alone in his obedience. Even though he has invited his friends in hopes of having their support—their sleeping. More often than not, a difficult obedience is one that only you and the Lord know about.

Realize of course, that **Jesus knows what the will of the Lord is. When he asks, if there is any other way, he already knows there is not.** There is much to learn from this. First, he knows God's will. He's read it, learned it, remembered it, and even taught it. **God's will is not a mystery to Him because he listens to God's word.** Though he is stressed, He is not surprised by a difficult obedience.

Second, the emphasis of the prayer is not “can I get out of this” as much as it is, “Your will be done.” **When Jesus says, “Your will be done”, I wonder if Jesus I speaking more to his own soul, or to ours, than He is to God. As He declares God's will be done, he is also declaring belief that God's will and plan is greater than however else he might imagine it unfolding.** Jesus' difficult obedience is made less difficult by expressing His true feelings at the same time He declares truth about God.

Why is this kind of obedience difficult?

Why is this kind of obedience difficult for us? Unlike Jesus, we struggle with a difficult obedience. More than likely, the three different pleas to God contrast with the three times that his sleeping friend Peter will deny him in the next few hours. Prior to the entrance into the garden, the disciples are all warned—you are all going to fall away. They do not believe him. **They believe they are stronger than they really are,**

or that temptation to sin is weaker than it is. The first time Jesus wakes up his friends he tells them plainly why they must “stay awake” and fight temptation: **the spirit is willing but he flesh is weak.** Even if we have the desire to fulfill a difficult obedience, **our flesh is unprepared to obey.** There are many ways are flesh is naturally unprepared for a difficult obedience (or ripe for disobedience):

1. Obedience is difficult when we are **physically unprepared – we are tired and tireless.** Matthew makes a point to say that their eyes were heavy. Sometimes we are not prepared to be poured out for Jesus because we have poured out all we have for everything but Jesus.
2. Obedience is difficult when we are **emotionally unprepared - we are on joyful and clueless.** The disciples had just feasted with Jesus and sung with Jesus. They ignored much of what Jesus said and we full of joy about what was next! More often than not, temptation comes after a great spiritual high. This is when a difficult obedience is most difficult.
3. Obedience is difficult when we are **spiritually unprepared – we are prideful and prayer-less.** More than anything, these men were full of pride. None of the disciples believed Jesus would be crucified, and none believed they would fall away or deny him. Having been warned about what was coming next, they should have begun to prepare as Jesus had taught them to, through prayer: **Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil.**

How can I endure a difficult obedience?

How can we endure a difficult obedience? We prepare like Jesus through prayer. Hebrews 5.7-10 ⁷ **In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.** ⁸ **Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.** ⁹ **And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him,** ¹⁰ **being designated by God a high priest after the order of.**

Jesus didn't “learn obedience” through the natural consequences of disobedience. Jesus also did not learn something new that he didn't know. Jesus learned what was involved in following God as a man. **And what is involved is dependence upon God—that is the essence of prayer. Jesus succeeds in his difficult obedience is because he communes with God before and even during His experience.** How does Jesus express his dependence through prayer?

1. **WHERE? He prays on his face.** He completely humbles himself and surrenders. He depends for obedience. Surrendering is not about giving up; it is about bowing down. **when he suffered...[he] continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Peter 2.23).**
2. **WHEN? He prays in advance.** He pleads to God *before* things get difficult. He plans for obedience. There was much more to happen before the cross. Jesus was looking ahead, planning for and praying for obedience in the future. He desired obedience and so he required strength.
3. **HOW? He prays three times.** He communes His Father repeatedly. He pesters for obedience. There are many things that ask God for, but how often are we asking him to help us with a difficult obedience. More often than not, we are asking him to change the circumstances so as to avoid one.

Prayer is how we prepare and endure our difficult obedience, because prayer is the most tangible means of surrender to God. Prayer involves everything, our mind, emotion, will, and even bodies. When we share in the sufferings of Christ like this, **we too learn the true nature and BLESSING of obedience.** **We do not mature as we depend on ourselves and do only what is comfortable, affordable, and convenient but what is painful, costly, and disruptive.** **Easy obedience is important, but it is not transformational.** Difficult obediences are what transform us because **they require Jesus to work in and for us.**

Why is Jesus obedience Greater?

I do not want you to misunderstand what I am saying. This is not a plea to make our obedience greater, but to focus our attention on Jesus GREATER OBEDIENCE.

We need to pray, not for the power to do the right things for Christ as much as for the power to believe the right things about Christ. In the gospel of John, this same experience is recorded little differently. John includes much more teaching. Prior to the Passover, Jesus says ²³ **And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. John 12.23-28**

More often than not, we disobey God's will for our lives in order to get something that we think we need or not lose something that we believe we must have. Ironically, we can obey for the same reason. Our motivation for obedience can be just as wrong, where we obey in order to get or not lost God's love and acceptance. **This is what makes Jesus obedience greater.**

Jesus obedience is so great because it completely changes the nature of my obedience. Through faith in Christ's greater obedience, I die with Christ and I rise with Him. Jesus takes all that I had (sin and poverty) and I get all he had (righteousness and blessing). Through faith in Christ's greater obedience, all fear of loss has been removed by His great love. Through Christ's greater obedience, I've not only been forgiven for my past insufficiencies, I have been guaranteed a future greater glory.

Jesus greater obedience makes my obedience greater. I no longer obey out of fear of rejection or hope for reward. I have been saved from punishment and given all that matters in eternity. My obedience comes not from an emptiness I am trying to fill, but from a heart that is full. I am no longer obeying for my sake, but for God's sake. My life is no longer my own because my life is hidden in Christ. And the extent to which I understand that my life is found in Christ, is the limit to what God can ask me to do.

Conclusion | a new life

NOTHING can be RESSURECTED to new life unless the old has fully died. Dying with Christ means surrendering all control up to him. **This is our most difficult obedience.** But because **our spirit is still willing, and our flesh is still weak...**we take communion each week in order **to reflect on our great disobedience and remember Jesus greater obedience.**

Jesus said in Matthew 16.24-25 **"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** **Let us pray that God will help us lose our life for the one who lost His life for us.**