

Sunday, 5 September 2021

Announcements

Well, it's September! This year has flown by!

There's nothing much to report this week, except that Friday's games night was a success! We really enjoyed ourselves. And I want to say thanks to Rachel for how much work she put into it. Thank you Rachel!

Challenge

Well, last week, I introduced a way to help you pray, the TEASPOON method. Whenever you use a teaspoon during the day, you pray TSP: Thanks, Sorry and Please. Well, this week, I've been thinking about ways that we can bless others around us, and I thought of two challenges this week. First, think of a neighbour who isn't Christian. Maybe it's an actual neighbour, or a friend or a family. And I want you to pray for them this week. Pray that God would soften their hearts. And pray that God would provide you an opportunity to show Jesus' love to them. The second thing is, be on the look out for an opportunity to show them Jesus' love. And then, in faith, show them, it might be something small.

Colossians 1

Col. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Col. 1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Col. 1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:1-14 (ESV)

Well, some of you might recognise this passage because you're going through Colossians with Know Your Bible (KYB). June actually gave me one and I've been going through it and I'm really encouraged by this passage because Paul, even though he hadn't met the Colossians was encouraged by their faith. And even though he hadn't met them, he prays for them. Do you notice the prayer? That the Colossians would grow in their knowledge, but it's not just knowledge, it's knowledge that turns to love, and reverence. It's a knowledge that produces good work. And it's the opposite of a vicious cycle. It's a blessed cycle. You grow in knowing God, and then you do good works, and as you do good works, your knowledge of God grows.

Let's pray,

Heavenly Father, thank you for today. Today, we ask that you would fill us with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to you. May we bear fruit in every good work and therefore increase in the knowledge of God. Help us to have hope for the day that you return and may we be strengthened with all power, ac-

according to his glorious might, that we may all endure through suffering and trials, and difficult moment until the day you call us home. In Jesus name, amen.

Confession

Paul in his second letter to Timothy has a confession, a declaration of who Christ is, let's confess this together.

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.”

2 Timothy 2:11-13 (ESV)

I love what Paul says, if we are faithless, he remains faithful. He has shown he is faithful to us even when we find ourselves weak.

Scripture

We're going to read Mark 14:26-52

Mark 14:26 And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. 27 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.' 28 But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." 29 Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not." 30 And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." 31 But he said emphatically, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." And they all said the same.

Mark 14:32 And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34 And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." 35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 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." 37 And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. 41 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. 42 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

Mark 14:43 And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man. Seize him and lead him away under guard." 45 And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" And he kissed him. 46 And they laid hands on him and seized him. 47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the Scriptures be fulfilled." 50 And they all left him and fled.

Mark 14:51 And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, 52 but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

Mark 14:26-52 (ESV)

Sermon

Introduction

So let's pray,

Heavenly Father, thank you for this account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, I pray that it would be an encouragement for us to look to Jesus and not at our own weaknesses. In his name, Amen.

Someone in my family, a loved member of my family, rightly tells me these words, they say to me, "It's not about you, Justin!" And before you start guessing it's Rachel, I have to say it's not Rachel. Sometimes, though, I encourage her to tell me that, it's not about me! So now you're probably trying to guess who I'm talking about. Have you ever had someone you love tell you that? When I first heard this family member tell me that, I was taken aback. It was like everyone had this information about me that they knew about me, but I didn't. And once this person told me it was like the blinders were taken off, and I knew exactly what they meant. I acted as if the whole world was centred on me when the truth is, it isn't. And it hurt. I felt a little ashamed, but over time, I realise that this family member really had my best interests at heart. Perhaps we tell our children, our nieces and nephews it's not about you! You are not the centre of the universe. Telling someone we love that the world does not centre around them is actually something that is healthy.

When we read the Scriptures, it's sometimes healthy to be reminded that it's not about us! It's not about me, it's not about you. Especially, here in this passage, in the Garden of Gethsemane. We need to be reminded that that the Garden isn't about us, the focus isn't on what we do or don't do. Now, that can be confronting. Perhaps, we've acted like the world is centred on us. It's confronting to be told that life isn't about us. But, I hope that today as we hear what Jesus is doing, it'll be freeing. It'll be freeing for each one of us this morning.

Today, I want to share two things with you as we watch Jesus praying to his Father. Firstly, look to Jesus. Secondly, be human sized.

Look to Jesus

Let's turn to the first point, because when we hear this account in Mark's gospel, we need to look to Jesus. It's like that Christian song, the heart of worship, it's all about Jesus.

Let's look at the story,

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." Mark 14:32-36 (ESV)

It might be easy to focus on what the disciples do and don't do. How they sleep in the garden. But it's not about them. It's not about you. It's not about me. It's about Jesus. Instead of looking at the disciples' weaknesses, we need to look at the strength of Jesus and the sacrifice that he makes for you and me.

Rachel and I have been hooked on Marvel, you know the movies, Iron Man, Captain America, Thor. Recently, it's been Loki on Disney. But Disney have come out with a new television series called, "What if?" It's a look at hypothetical situations... What if Captain America didn't get the serum? What if... Iron man... Sometimes, I wonder, what if Jesus didn't drink the cup of suffering? What if Jesus chose not to be obedient to his Heavenly Father? What if Jesus didn't go to the cross and die for us? We'd be in serious trouble. We would be under judgement, the wrath of God. We wouldn't have eternal life, we wouldn't have an inheritance waiting for us in heaven. We would be lost, we would be in darkness. We would have no hope. That is what we would be. What a terrible place we would be in.

But the truth is that Jesus chose to be obedient to his Father in Heaven, he chose to drink the cup of suffering. He chose to go and be betrayed into the hands of sinners so that our sins might be forgiven. He was obedient that we might have eternal life. He chose to go to the cross so that we might have an everlasting inheritance secure in heaven. That we might have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. I hope that is what we find ourselves rejoicing over. I hope that's a truth that

we hold onto, that we cling to. I hope that Jesus is our focus. I hope that we find that we look at Jesus.

Sometimes, it's easier for us to be focused on ourselves. On our own struggles, our own weaknesses. We can be like the disciples and we can focus on our own weaknesses.

When Rachel was younger, her mother taught her maths. And her mum found it hard at times teaching Rachel maths, she sometimes lost her patience with her. Rachel, at the time, promised that she would always be patient if she were to teach or tutor anyone. Fast forward a couple of years, and she's teaching her cousins. And it's a slog. And Rachel loses her patience with her cousins. It's easy for us to focus on our weaknesses, to condemn others and ourselves. And it's easy for us to focus on how we fail, but you know what? It's not about me, it's not about us. It's not about the disciples. Instead of focusing on ourselves, we need to focus on what Jesus has done. Instead of focusing on how faithless the disciples were, we should focus on how Jesus was faithful. It's like, how Paul in 2 Timothy says,

The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

*if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; **if we are faithless, he remains faithful**— for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (ESV)*

Do you find yourself condemning yourself? Are you confronted by your weakness? Do you find yourself losing hope? Like you say to yourself, I just need to be stronger, I just need to be more loving. I sometimes catch myself saying that. Sometimes I look at circumstances, I can lose hope. Sometimes, I tell myself that I need to do is try harder!! If only I tried harder, everything would be better. But I need to remember it's not about me. It's what Christ has done. Rachel needs to remind me to take my eyes off my circumstances and onto Jesus. Even when you and I are faithless, he remains faithful.

What's the hymn say? Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look forward in his wonderful face and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. Brothers and sisters, it's a truth that we need to hold onto. Instead of focusing on our weaknesses, instead of focusing on ways that we need to improve, we need to look at Jesus. Behold him. Look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the

shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. We need to look to Jesus. Just as the Israelites were being chased by Pharaoh and his chariots after leaving Egypt. The Israelites had nothing to defend against Pharaoh, but God said to them,

And Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."
Exodus 14:13-14 (ESV)

The Israelites were only to look to the LORD. And the LORD parted the Red Sea, so that they could pass through safely. All we have to do is look at Jesus raised up on the cross and see that the LORD is fighting for us. We only need to be silent. It's all about Jesus. Look to Him.

Be human sized

Let's talk about being human sized. I want to focus on the disciples for a moment. Have a look at what Jesus says to the disciples,

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.'" Mark 14:26-28 (ESV)

We know that Jesus is about to be betrayed by Judas Iscariot. What do the disciples do in response to Jesus?

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. Mark 14:29-31 (ESV)

What would you do if you were there, with Jesus? If I'm honest, I would probably do the same as the disciples, declare my allegiance to him! I would say with a loud voice that I would never ever leave him. Of course I would never abandon him at his most desperate hour of need. Perhaps you'd be the same as well. It's what Peter declares.

But what happens in the Garden? Jesus with his closest disciples, Peter, James and John, Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays one of the most agonising prayers, and what are his disciples doing?

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. Mark 14:37-38 (ESV)

How do you feel towards the disciples? Perhaps, you're angry. How could these disciples abandon Jesus at his greatest hour of need? How dare they! In fact, it doesn't just happen once does it? It happens a second time.

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. Mark 14:39-40 (ESV)

Do you feel angry? Do you feel like the disciples have betrayed Jesus? Maybe you think, if I was there, things would have been completely different. I would have not just sliced off the servant's ear, I would have welded that sword in a professional manner. Maybe you'd bring out your jujitsu. Nobody would have been able to touch Jesus.

When I look at the disciples, when I see the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, I see real, genuine human beings. I see human beings who are weak just like you and me. And if I'm being honest, I struggle with prayer and I probably would have slept just like Peter, James and John. And the point here isn't to condemn these disciples. When we look at these disciples, it's to remind us that we are human. And we are to be human sized. Jesus doesn't ask us to be him, there's only one Jesus. Not once does he ask us to be him. There's only one Jesus.

I want to suggest a couple of ways where we can acknowledge that we are human sized.

Firstly, we can acknowledge our human size by acknowledging that we have limits. We have limits in time, in resources, in energy. Like the disciples, we need sleep, we can be weak. Being human means you can't do everything! And it means acknowledging that we have weaknesses. We all have weaknesses and strengths. And it means you don't need to be a saviour to people, Jesus is their saviour.

Secondly, we can pray. We can pray like Jesus. Jesus teaches us how to pray, do you notice what he says, He says, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you." He acknowledges that God is in control. He expresses his own emotion, "Remove this cup from me." He's honest with God with how he's feeling, he's wrestling with his own emotions. And yet he acknowledges his own obedience to God, "Yet not what I will, but what you will." We can acknowledge that we are not in control. But trust in the Father just as Jesus trusted in the Father, because he knew that the Father was completely for him.

Let's remember that we're only human. Let's take our eyes off ourselves, off others and look to Jesus.

Church Family Prayer

Let's pray,

Loving Heavenly Father, we come as your children to bow before you in quietness, reverence, and humble obedience. And in that spirit, we take to heart and pray for ourselves the prayer which your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours be done."

We rest our souls in you. We cease striving after plans of our own making. We sacrifice all self-interest, pride and ungodly ambition before you. We repudiate all worldly gain, privilege and prestige. We refuse to be driven, controlled, or mastered by them.

We yield to you in glad and willing surrender. We acknowledge that your will is best, your way is good, and your paths are right. We affirm that our vision is clearest, our faith is strongest, and our life most rewarding when your will, not ours, is done.

It is humbling to realise that there is no good in us except what you have worked in us according to your good pleasure and will. It is humbling to think that we are like clay, of no use or value by ourselves, until we are shaped and moulded by the will of you, our Master. And yet with grateful thanks we acknowledge it to be true.

And we welcome your continued working. We submit to your discipline. We follow your leading. We heed your correction. And we defer to your greater wisdom.

Show us what sins hide you from us. Help us to humble ourselves for past evils. Grant us your grace to walk before you with greater care, consistency, and conviction.

Keep us meek and humble before you. By faith may we rest in your grace and so find your will. And knowing your will, may we continually evidence your love.

So, gracious Father, enable us never to run ahead of you, or lag behind you, but always keep step with you. May we ever await your will, ever pray for it to be done, always accepting of it, even when it crosses our own, and ever striving to be fully obedient to it, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Closing

Today, I thought it would be great to listen to another of Songs of Praise. I've chosen the one where they are in Norwich Cathedral.

<https://iview.abc.net.au/video/ZW2408A001S00>

Let me give the blessing for this week,

The grace of the LORD Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forevermore. Amen.

Have a good week, we hope to see you soon!