

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 4 January 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Not My Will, but Thine

Matthew 26:36-46

At a family reunion several years ago, I heard a story about something that happened to one of my aunts when she was a little girl. Apparently, my aunt went into a local shop one day to look around; and while she was there, she saw a candy bar that she really wanted. As she pondered how much she wanted that candy bar, she got it into her head to steal it; and so, she snatched it, and sneaked it home with her. However, somehow or other, my grandfather found the evidence; and he asked my aunt some pointed questions about how she had obtained that candy bar. Finally, she had to confess that she had stolen it. Well, my granddad wasn't about to let his little girl get away with theft. He dragged her back down to the shop, and made her look the shop owner in the eye, and tell him what she had done.

Now, how did the shop owner respond? He was totally understanding about it, right? He said that it was O.K., because "kids will be kids," and we all make mistakes, and that, after all, she had returned it, right? Not! The shop owner did exactly what my grandpa had hoped he would do! He acted as though he were a judge in a court of law, and that he were giving a harsh lecture to a criminal who had just been sentenced for grand theft auto, and who was about to be sent to the state penitentiary. He ripped my aunt up and down, and scared the daylights out of her. He left her with the impression that he was only a hair's breadth away from calling the cops, and from having her arrested, handcuffed, and put in the local jail; and he made it clear that she had better not even think of stepping into his store again, or of stealing anything again, or else she *would* end up in jail. (And you know what? She *didn't* ever steal again!)

Can you imagine the dread and shame that was in my aunt's heart as she was being dragged down the street toward that shop? It was a dread and shame that she had earned, and deserved. Yet, on the other hand, imagine if she *hadn't committed* the crime, yet she were treated as though she *had* committed it. Would her sense of shame and dread have been much less? Probably not. Imagine what it would be like if *you* were arrested for a crime that you hadn't committed, yet nearly everyone believed that you *had* committed it, and you were sentenced for it, and had to pay the penalty for it. Knowing that you were innocent wouldn't take away the awful sense of shame, would it? One of my relatives was once mistakenly arrested for "stealing" a car from a local garage, when he was merely using a "loaner" car that the garage had lent him while they were fixing his car. The whole neighbourhood watched as he was handcuffed, and taken off to the police station. He was released, of course, when the authorities discovered the real story; but it didn't take away the feeling of disgrace and shame.

People are wrongfully arrested every day; but this morning, we will be reading about the events that led up to the most wrongful arrest in history—the arrest of the Lord of glory. We'll also examine the failure of Jesus' disciples on that awful night, and what the *cause* of their failure was. The title of this message is ***"Not My Will, But Thine."***

Read Matthew 26:36-46.

I. The Saviour's agony (vv. 36-39, 42, 44)

Jesus and the disciples had now crossed the Brook Kidron, and had entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke says that this was a place where Jesus often went to pray. I don't know how long Gethsemane had been around, or how long it had been called by this name; but "Gethsemane" couldn't have been a more fitting name for the place where Jesus would pray that night. You see, the name "**Gethsemane**" means "**olive press**." Just as olives are placed into a crushing basin, and are crushed by a milling stone for about 30 to 50 minutes, until the oil is squeezed out of the pulp, so the Lord Jesus was "crushed" that night under the awful weight of what He was about to endure, so that we might be saved.

As Jesus entered Gethsemane, His agony of spirit could hardly be contained. No sooner were they in the garden before Jesus sent eight of the disciples a short distance away, and took Peter, James, and John with Him apart, so that they could pray with Him. And look at what Jesus said to them. He said, "**My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.**" That word "**sorrowful**" literally means "sad all around." In **verse 37**, Matthew says that Jesus "**began to be sorrowful and very heavy.**" The word for "**sorrowful**," in this verse, means "severely grieved"; and the word for "**heavy**" (the word *ademanéo*) means to be "restless, distracted, shrinking from some trouble...which nevertheless cannot be escaped."¹ These dire descriptions are further intensified by words such as "**very**," "**exceedingly**," and "**even unto death.**" Even Jesus' personal address to His Father was unusual. As Jesus began to pray, He addressed His heavenly Father not only as "Father," but as "**my Father**"—something that He didn't normally do. All these things reveal the turmoil in Jesus' soul.

By the way, we mustn't forget that Jesus *is* a real "soul." He has a real flesh-and-blood body, *and* a real human spirit, which together make Him a "living soul." Some people have the idea that Jesus has a human body, but not a human spirit (in other words, that His *divine* Spirit is the substitute for a human spirit). This isn't right! In His divine nature, Christ is 100% God (which means that He is Spirit); but in His human nature, He is 100% Man—which means that He has both a human body *and* a human spirit. As a real Man, Jesus is able to experience both joy and sorrow, as we do; and on this occasion, His soul was crushed with sorrow.

With this in mind, let's read **verse 36** again. (**Read Matthew 26:36 again.**) It's sometimes hard for us to understand this: but Christ, in His humanity, was actually *dependent* upon His Father. Although He is Almighty God, He is also a Man. When He took on human flesh, He willingly made Himself dependent upon His Father. Christ, as a Man, actually *needed* this time of prayer in order to be strengthened for what He was about to undergo. The thought of having the sins of mankind placed upon Him, and of being separated from His Father for six hours on the cross, was so agonising to Him, that He sweat great drops of blood. This is a known medical condition, which happens on rare occasions to people who are in great

emotional distress. The small blood capillaries burst, and blood mixes with sweat. It is called *Hematidrosis*. Luke, being the physician that he was, made note of this in his Gospel.

Read Luke 22:39-47.

As a Man, Jesus not only was dependent upon His Father, but He also craved sympathy and comfort from *other human beings*. *That* is how much Jesus condescended to us, brethren! When the eternal God, who needs nothing, took on human flesh, and became one of us, He actually made Himself dependent upon other human beings. As a baby, of course, He needed human parents to feed Him, and to teach Him to walk, and talk; but even as a full-grown Man, He had the emotional need of love and comfort from other human beings. That is why He called three of His closest friends on earth to pray with Him.

Now, this truth tends to make us uncomfortable. How could the God-Man actually need sympathy and comfort? Was it even *right* for Jesus to desire comfort? Of course it was right! In a prophecy of the Messiah in **Psalm 69:20**, Christ Himself said, ***“Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.”*** If it were wrong of *Jesus* to desire comfort, it would mean that it is wrong for *us* to desire comfort in *our* hour of need, too. However, that is not the case. The Bible says that God delights in comforting His children; and He often uses our brothers and sisters in Christ to *render* us comfort. In **1 Corinthians 12**, Paul says that in the local church, if ***“one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.”*** Let’s look at what else Paul said about this.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Is it selfish to crave sympathy and comfort from others when you’re going through a fiery trial? No, it’s not—if you don’t allow the desire for sympathy to turn into *self*-pity and bitterness when the comfort is not forthcoming, and you stop serving God, and obeying His will. Many believers get angry when other believers fail them in a time of need; and they drop out of church, and stop serving God. Christian, don’t allow that to happen in your life! What would have happened if Jesus had become embittered by the fact that His friends couldn’t even stay up one hour to pray with Him? What if He had thrown in the towel, and said, “I quit! I’m not going to the cross! I needed comfort and pity, and no one came to my aid.” We would have been all lost forever, and doomed to outer darkness, unquenchable fire, and weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, away from the presence of the Lord. Our Saviour was faithful to us, despite our sin; and we should imitate His faithfulness. We should remain faithful to God, even when others do not comfort us as they should; and *we ourselves* should be ready to comfort our brethren in their time of need. God allows you to go through trials so that when *others* go through like trials, you can comfort them with the same comfort that God gave *you* in *your* time of need!

Jesus longed for His friends to give Him comfort on that night in Gethsemane; but the comfort was scarcely there. And so, God the Father Himself sent His Son comfort—but in an unusual way. As we read earlier, God sent an angel to appear to Christ, and strengthen Him. Think of that! The one who created the angels actually received aid and comfort from an angel. *That* is how much Christ humbled Himself! By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus didn’t *call* the angel

to come to Him; the Father *sent* the angel to Him. This is an example to us, that *we* shouldn't call for angels to come and help us. If you start trying to speak to angels, you might just get an answer—but from a *fallen* angel, who wants to deceive you! When God so wills, He can send angels to whisper words of comfort to your mind, or even to strengthen your body; but that is His prerogative. In all things, we should submit to God's will, just as Christ did.

Folks, what we are seeing here is our Saviour at His most vulnerable point. He was so distraught at the thought of what He was about to do, that He asked His Father to let the cup *pass from Him*, if possible. There is probably no greater demonstration of Jesus' humanity than in that request! Christ knew full well that He must suffer and die, according to the Scriptures that *He Himself* had given to the Old Testament prophets; yet, as a Man, He so recoiled from the thought of this suffering, that He actually asked for the cup to be removed, if possible. And what *is* this "cup," exactly? It is the cup of God's judgment upon sin, and sinners! **Psalm 11:6** says, ***"Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup."*** **Psalm 75:8** says that ***"in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them."*** This is the cup that *we* deserve to drink; yet, God poured out His fury on His Son instead; and the Son willingly drank it, so that *we* might be saved.

Now, don't misunderstand: the cup had not actually been drunk by Jesus *yet*. The agony that Jesus went through in Gethsemane was *not* what brought us our atonement. It was on the *cross* that Christ took our sins upon Himself, and paid for them. What Jesus was facing in Gethsemane was the *prospect* of taking the sins of the world upon Him. He was facing was an ocean of sin, far deeper and darker than the Mariana Trench. All the sins of human history were coming crashing toward Him like an incalculably high tsunami wall!

Now, look closely at the request that Jesus made of His Father. **(Read Matthew 26:39 again.)** Folks, this is another one of those things that, to us, is hard to grasp. Jesus knew that He had come into this world to die for our sins: so why, then, did He ask His Father if it were possible to remove the cup of suffering from Him? Was Jesus *opposing* or *questioning* His Father's will? Jesus Himself had told His disciples many times that He must suffer and die, so that the Scriptures be fulfilled. Why, then, would He be asking such a thing?

Well, you must remember that Jesus is a true man; and oftentimes during His earthly ministry, He limited Himself to His human powers, and did not exercise His divine omniscience. *This* is one of those hours when He was limiting Himself. What we are seeing here is Jesus' humanity, through and through. If you want to know the extent of Jesus' vulnerability as a man, this is it. In His humanity, Jesus was shrinking in horror from the thought of all the gross, vile sins of all humanity, from the Garden of Eden until the end of the world, being put on Himself! Now, just to give you an idea of what Jesus was undergoing, think about *your own* life. Think back on all the sins that *you* have committed in your lifetime. Think of all the things you've done of which you are so ashamed, that you have forcibly buried them in your memory. Think of all the sins that you are thankful that you can no longer even remember (which is probably about 98% of them, at least). Imagine if all the hundreds of thousands—nay millions—of sins that you've ever committed were all to be dragged out of the dark

corners of your memory, and you remembered all of them—*all of them*—in their entirety, all at once! And then, imagine if all those sins were held *against* you, as you stood before the thrice-holy God. Would the weight of it not be crushing? Would you not be down on the floor in a foetal position, whimpering and trembling uncontrollably like a worm, and begging God to be merciful, and to take it all away? That’s an unbelievably frightening thought, isn’t it? Now, imagine if not only all *your* sins, but all the sins of the billions and billions of other souls who have ever lived, and who ever will live, were laid on you, as though they were yours! Imagine being conscious of those countless trillions of sins being on *you*! **That is the prospect that Jesus was facing!** You think *you* ’ve had a bad day? You think that even God can’t understand what you’re going through? If so, you are dead wrong. The worst day in your life cannot even be compared to the day when Jesus had all the sins of mankind laid on Him, as though He were the criminal!

Do you see why Jesus was recoiling from what lay ahead? Why *wouldn’t* Christ shrink from the prospect of having all the sins of humanity placed upon Him? If *you and I* can’t even bear the thought of it, what would it be like for the Holy One, who knew no sin, to have all our vile sins laid on Him? His righteous soul was absolutely horrified. He wouldn’t have *been* the Holy One if He *weren’t* horrified.

Now, a few minutes ago I asked the question, “Was Jesus opposing His Father’s will?”: and the answer to that question is a resounding “No!” In this hour of human limitation, Christ was sincerely asking His Father whether there were any way for this cup to pass from Him. However, at each turn, He resigned Himself to His Father’s will, and said, **“Not my will, but thine be done.”** By the time He was finished praying, He was no longer trembling and sweating blood: He was calm, and ready to face the enemy. What made the difference? It was that “sweet hour of prayer” that Jesus had spent with His Father! With perfect calmness of soul, He woke up His faithless disciples, and said, **“Arise, let us be going.”** He wasn’t calling on them to *flee* from the enemy: He was calling them to *face* the enemy.

By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus prayed *three times*; and each time He said the same basic thing. Let’s read **verses 42-44** again. **(Read Matthew 26:42-44)**. Christian, have you ever found yourself praying intently for something, and asking the same thing again and again, in slightly different ways? Did you ever wonder if you were guilty of using **“vain repetitions,”** as Jesus warned us not to do? If so, you may take comfort in what you are reading here. Jesus Himself made the same request three times (and probably multiple more times within those three prayer sessions); yet, He was *not* guilty of “vain repetitions.” Christian, never think that you are wasting your breath, or wearying the Lord, by praying the same basic prayer again and again. “Vain repetition” is when you say a mantra (a certain word formula) many times over, thinking that that particular word formula is some kind of “magic” that guarantees an outcome. Muttering mantras is *not* communicating with God! What God wants is a contrite heart. What God wants is for us to talk with Him, and *depend* on Him—not to try to *manipulate* Him with “magic words.” When you are praying and fasting about a serious matter, and you find yourself saying, “Help me, Lord, help me Lord!” again and again, God is not sitting up in Heaven with a frown on His face, because there isn’t enough variety in your prayer, and your words are not polished. He loves you; and every word you say, and every

tear that runs down your face, is precious to Him. When you pray, “Father, not my will, but thine,” as Jesus did, you may be sure that your heavenly Father *will* hear, and answer according to His will. His will may be to *deny* your request, because He knows what is best; but He *will* answer.

II. The disciples’ apathy (vv. 38-46)

(Read Matthew 26:38-46.) While Christ was preparing for the most agonising battle of His life, the disciples were completely *unprepared*. Instead of praying, as Jesus had urged them to do, they were sleeping. Jesus had urged them to pray with Him not just so that they could comfort *Him*, but so that they might be prepared for the most intense battle of *their* lives, which was now less than an hour away. Sadly, though, they did not see the importance of watching and praying; and they were *not* being strengthened for the battle.

Was it *understandable* that the disciples were sleeping? From a human point of view, yes. It had been a very long, exhausting day, and it was now late in the evening. They had also had some highly-charged emotional bombshells dropped on them that evening (such as being told that Jesus was about to leave them, and go back to Heaven). However, Jesus had specifically warned them that an exceptionally intense spiritual battle was coming; and He had urged them to pray (three times, no less). He had also told them that *His own* soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to the point of death. That statement should have been enough to jolt them out of their sleepiness, and to keep them awake and praying. But it wasn’t. They slept instead; and consequently, when the soldiers came, they fled. Just as had been prophesied by Zechariah, Jesus’ disciples were scattered abroad that evening. Almost as soon as the danger arose, the disciples were gone. They were unprepared.

Now, this brings to mind something that happened earlier in Jesus’ ministry. There was a day when James and John came to Jesus and made a very bold request. Jesus had already promised the disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones in the future Kingdom age, and that they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel; but James and John wanted something more. They asked Jesus if they may sit *on His right hand and left hand* in the Kingdom. In answer to their question, Jesus asked *them* a question—a question which was far weightier than theirs was. Let’s take a look at that question.

Read Mark 10:35-40.

Jesus had a cup of physical and emotional suffering to undergo; but He wanted the disciples to understand that they would one day undergo much suffering, too. Of course, Jesus would suffer for an entirely different *reason* than that for which the disciples would suffer. Christ would suffer God’s *wrath* for our sins. The disciples wouldn’t undergo suffering to pay for anyone’s sins, because only Christ could do that. The disciples’ suffering would be *for the sake of* Christ. Christ suffered *God’s* wrath for our sins; but the disciples suffered *man’s* wrath, as God’s enemies tried to stop them from spreading the Gospel. Because Christ had paid for their sins, they would gladly and willingly suffer in Christ’s service for the rest of their lives. Yet, at this particular point, they were not ready for that cup. Christ was ready to drink *His* cup; but they were not ready to drink theirs. When the cup of suffering was brought to them in the Garden of Gethsemane, they ran.

There is much to be learned from this. How often do *we* “sleep,” spiritually speaking? How often do *we* doze off spiritually, and dream about pleasures, comforts, and pursuits of this world, and become totally oblivious to the spiritual warfare that is raging all around us?

Read Ephesians 5:14-17.

It has been 2,000 years since Paul wrote those words; but the days are *still* evil. Why? Because our old enemy, the devil, is still walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. God’s people *still* need to walk circumspectly (literally, “looking around” for danger). We still need to stay spiritually awake, and to be on our knees in prayer. Spending much time in prayer is the *only* way that we can be strengthened and prepared for the spiritual battle that we face every day. If we do not start off our day with quality and quantity time with God, yet we think that we are spiritually prepared for the day, we are fooling ourselves. We are “sleeping on the job”; and we *will* stumble and fall. Repeatedly, God commands us to “watch”—to stay awake like a sentinel, look out for spiritual danger, and pray!

Read Mark 13:33-37.

I remember a night years ago, when I was working at McDonald’s, when I got into a discussion with a Christian co-worker about the subject of prayer. I told him about how sad and guilty I feel when I fall asleep while praying; however, he told me that falling asleep while praying is understandable—that is like “falling asleep in your Daddy’s lap.” That made me feel better at first; but upon further reflection, I had to conclude that he was wrong. When Jesus said, “***The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,***” He wasn’t making an excuse for them. He was simply acknowledging the weakness of their human bodies, and was warning them that they needed to be all the more vigilant *because* their bodies were weak.

You see, the “***flesh***” that Jesus is speaking of here is not our “sinful nature.” The word “***flesh***” *does* mean “the sinful nature” in many Scriptures; but that isn’t how Christ is using it here. How do I know? Because our sinful nature doesn’t have *any* good intentions toward God! Our sinful nature is *always* oriented toward self. Christ wasn’t saying that their fleshly nature was good intentioned, yet weak: He was speaking of their **physical bodies**, which were weak. Their *bodies* were weak from the long day, and from emotional fatigue.

Now, that having been said, there *is* a very close connection between the *physical flesh*, which is frail, and the *fleshly nature*, which is sinful. It’s not wrong to be physically weak (unless, of course, you’re tired because you’ve been staying up all night playing video games). Sometimes we are exhausted from sickness, chronic illness, or from “getting old.” However, when your *body* is weak, your *sinful nature* is quick to give you an excuse to *stop* watching and praying. However, this temptation *can* be overcome, by God’s grace. Think about Peter, James, and John. If it had been *physically impossible* for Peter, James, and John to stay awake, would Jesus have rebuked them? Of course not. The plain fact is that there was no excuse for their failure to pray. Failing to pray when you know that you should be praying *is* a sin, no matter how tired you may be. To fail to pray is to prepare to fail. However, by God’s grace, God’s children *can* overcome even physical weakness, and do God’s will.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-13.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

Conclusion: If God had given the disciples a vision of what would be happening twelve hours in the future (of their Lord being ripped to shreds, and hung on a cross), they would have been *extremely* motivated to stay awake! Yet, the Lord didn't give them that privilege. Instead, He expected them to pray. And so it is with us. If God were to open *our* eyes, so that *we* could see the temptations that are coming our way—if He were to open our eyes to the spiritual realm, and let us overhear the conversations of demons, as they laugh at our pride and foolishness, and lay plans to entice us to disobey the Lord—we would be *extremely* awake. However, God doesn't give us such visions. Instead, He expects us to trust His Word, and obey Him. **Jesus said “Watch!” Are you watching, Christian?** Perhaps you have little idea of what we're talking about this morning, **because you've never been saved.** If you aren't sure that you're on your way to Heaven, it's simple: Jesus paid the *full price* for your sins on the cross. This means that if you can't earn it by any good work of your own. *He* paid for your sins; and if you will repent in your heart, and simply put your trust in what Christ has already done on the cross to pay for your sins, He will give you eternal life, and come into your heart. Ask Christ to save you today!

¹ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), p. 305.