

April 12, 2026

THE FULL HUMANITY OF OUR SAVIOR AND HIS SUBMISSIVE OBEDIENCE

Mark 14:32-52

(11 of 15 in a series through Mark 10-16)

For most of the world, believing that Jesus of Nazareth was (and is) divine is what they stumble over. Even in the first century, those who saw him and his miraculous works struggled to believe this. They knew his parents, noted that he came from a lowly place, and some probably grew up alongside of him. Again, it feels like a big step to acknowledge that someone you know is the creator of the universe, having taken on flesh and become the God-man.

What's interesting for us—those of us who have a high view of the Bible and have been taught the Word of God—is that I don't think most of us struggle with that. We rightly believe what the Bible says, can note that Jesus did things no mere man can do—like walk on water, calm the sea, forgive sins, and raise the dead—and, therefore, believe that he is indeed God the Son. Ironically, what I think you and I can most struggle with is believing that Jesus really was a human being, having a real human mind, will, and emotions, experiencing some of the struggles that we deal with. And if there's a text that pushes us most on this issue and might even make us feel uncomfortable to read, it's the text we're dealing with this morning—Mark 14:32-52.

If you and I were to create an image of what God would be like in becoming a man, I don't think any of us would imagine him experiencing the scene that unfolds in this text. Jesus struggles in these verses. He is deeply sorrowful. He's distressed and troubled. He asks his Father if there's any other possible way the work of redemption might be accomplished, and if so, let that happen. His closest companions betray him or flee from him. And, ultimately, we know that he's going to hang on a cross, gasping for air, until he's too weak to do the necessary work to breathe, and he'll die.

But this scene in the garden that we see in our text is indeed what happened, and though there was much in Jesus' life that the Scripture doesn't include, the Lord wanted us to know of these details and this event. And I think our Lord wants us to see this not only because it happened and not only because it led to his death—which was essential for our redemption—but also because we need to know that our Lord suffered as we suffer, struggled as we struggle, and is able to sympathize with us in our weakness, having experienced it himself.

But we not only get to learn about Christ as our sympathetic high priest by looking at this text, we also learn by looking at his followers. Indeed, part of Jesus' suffering in these verses is seen in the abandonment he experiences by his followers. Having just pledged they'd die with him, we find them betraying him and fleeing from him. And yet this too helps us understand the nature of sin and provides a helpful warning to us. Therefore, I want us to see all these things as we walk through this text and the events it records under three headings, the first of which is: the anguish and submission of Jesus.

The anguish and submission of Jesus

In the opening scene of our text, we see perhaps the most difficult scene in the gospels. We might rate the fact that he's flogged, nailed to a cross, and dies as more difficult in the sense that we might imagine the physical pain he endures or the finality of breathing his last. But in those scenes, we're not exposed to his innermost thoughts or emotional turmoil. In the garden, those things are front and center.

We're told that Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him to a garden called Gethsemane. Among the disciples, it seems that these three had become Jesus' closest companions. Now, to this point, we've seen Jesus always coming out on top, without struggle. He bests his opponents when they try to argue with him or challenge him. Even nature itself has yielded to his every command. There was a commercial for some deodorant in the 80s that said, "Never let them see you sweat." And that feels descriptive of Jesus to this point in Mark's gospel.

But now, the mood shifts. Mark tells us that once Jesus was in the garden, he "began to be greatly distressed and troubled" (v. 33). Feeling distressed and troubled is not what we're used to seeing with Jesus, and yet it gets worse. He says to Peter, James, and John, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (v. 34), which I think means that his sorrow is so deep that he feels like it's going to kill him. This is definitely not something we've seen before.

But it may well be something we've *felt* before. Maybe it's a sorrow you've experienced when for what feels like the thousandth time, this month reveals yet again that you're not pregnant. Maybe it's when you got news that your spouse was unfaithful. Perhaps it was the pain of watching your dad walk out the door, never to come back. Maybe it was watching your child run headlong into rebellion. Or perhaps when you watched that loved one suffer through cancer and die. Or it could be a million other experiences. Brother and sister, it's okay to feel deep sorrow as a Christian. It's okay to hurt so bad you don't know how you're going to go on. It's okay to feel so sad that you think it's going to kill you. No, it's more than okay; it was the experience of our Lord in this moment as he knelt in the garden.

And yet Mark doesn't simply tell us of the distress and sorrow of Jesus; he adds that Jesus begins to pray in a way that we might not anticipate. We're told that after telling his disciples to watch and pray, he went on from them a little farther "fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him" (v. 35), adding, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me" (v. 36a).

Now, what does Jesus mean by this request? Well, first, the hour is a reference to the hour of his suffering and death. In the gospel of John, for example, we read of two occasions where we're told that individuals were seeking to arrest Jesus but weren't able to do it "because his hour had not yet come" (John 7:30; 8:20). In other words, there was a specific, appointed time for Jesus to suffer and die. And to this point, Jesus was not yet at that moment. Now, he's on the brink of it—the moment that he'll suffer and die on the cross—and he's asking that this hour might pass and he not have to bear the suffering and death to come.

Second, the request for his Father to remove the cup from him is similar. The cup throughout Scripture is used as a metaphor for suffering, death, and even God's judgment. For example, in Psalm 75:8, the psalmist writes, "For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." That's a picture of drinking down the very wrath and judgment of God. Now, it's fair to say that the cup imagery might just represent suffering and death, but knowing that Jesus is going to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, bearing the wrath of God for us, it's utterly reasonable for us to conclude that Jesus' reference to the cup here is a reference not just to the suffering and death to come but to the wrath-bearing suffering and death to come. Therefore, when Jesus says, "Remove this cup from me," he's asking his Father to allow him to avoid bearing divine wrath on the cross for sinners. We can wrestle with the why of this request shortly, but let's not be mistaken about what Jesus is asking in prayer here. He's asking if it's possible to bring about the Father's redeeming plan apart from Jesus having to go to the cross and die. He genuinely wants another route. He wants the hour to pass from him and the cup to be removed from him.

So, what do we do with that request when Jesus has announced repeatedly that this is why he had come? Well, this is Jesus, as a human being recoiling from the reality of suffering, death, and judgment that awaits him. It's his sinless desire not to suffer and die. This means, brothers and sisters, that if you and I recoil when facing death, we're not being unspiritual. We're not showing our immaturity as believers. Death is an enemy that will one day be cast into a lake of fire.

I remember my last conversation with our dear brother, Eric Reini, who is now with our Lord. He said that he had genuine confidence about what awaited him on the other side of death. He'd be with the Lord. But the process of dying wasn't something he was excited about. And I want to say that that is a Christian response to death. We don't have to be stoic. In fact, we're not meant to be stoic. Jesus struggled here. He was distressed and troubled. He felt deep sorrow. He asked if there was another way. We don't have to try to be holier than Jesus (which, obviously, we can never be).

Nor is it wrong to request things that we desire that God might not will. We can ask for God to remove our suffering, for example, even if his ultimate answer is no, and that's not a sign that we're weak or immature Christians. Consider Paul, who asked for the thorn in his flesh to be removed repeatedly, but God's will was for it to remain so that God's power might be demonstrated in Paul's weakness. But we don't have to go to Paul to see this. We see it right here with our Lord Jesus Christ, who asked his Father, if possible, to remove the cup and less the hour pass from him. What we see here, in the words of Hebrews 4, is our high priest who is able to sympathize with us in our weakness.

And yet, we also see Jesus submitting to the Father's will. Jesus does ask for the hour to pass and the cup to be removed, and then end his prayer there. He also says, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (v. 36). This, brothers and sisters, is our path forward when obedience is difficult and, at one level, we do not want it. In our weakness, we can say, "Father, this is not what I want,

but I will submit to your will over my own.” That’s what Jesus does here. We see in this scene both the anguish and submission of our Lord. And if to compound the gravity and struggle of the moment, we also see the isolation and betrayal of Jesus.

The isolation and betrayal of Jesus

Though Jesus is the central player in this painful episode in Mark’s gospel, he’s not the only player. We also see Jesus’ disciples, and at every turn they disappoint. As Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with him, he gives them one word of instruction. He wants them to watch and pray. We see it first as he says at the end of verse 34, “Remain here and watch.” Then again in verse 38, he says, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Now, it’s not immediately clear what Jesus means by “watch.” Some have suggested he could be telling his disciples to keep on the lookout for enemies approaching. After all, in a bit the chief priests, scribes, and elders would come to arrest Jesus. But I don’t think that’s what Jesus means. If you’ll remember, at the end of Mark 13, as Jesus is speaking about his eventual return, his last exhortation was “Stay awake . . . lest he come and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (13:36).

Obviously this isn’t a command not to sleep. It’s an exhortation to be spiritually alert. Don’t just drift through life, but be attentive to how you’re thinking, speaking, and living. Live an intentional life of seeking to honor the Lord, always being aware of how your actions are reflecting or detracting from that. I think that’s what Jesus is saying here when he tells his disciples to watch.

I think this is even clearer when he combines it with prayer, telling them to “watch and pray” so that they might not “enter into temptation” (v. 38). In other words, Jesus is saying, temptation is crouching at your door, so be alert and pray so that you might be strengthened against it. And yet they fall asleep, and when the crowds come to address Jesus and temptation is present, what is their response? We read in verse 50, “And they all left him and fled.”

For us, this should serve as a reminder for the need of prayer in our pursuit of holiness. My guess is that if there’s some particular sin we’re seeking to battle, our immediate thoughts are what we might do to overcome it in terms of putting accountability into our lives, setting up safeguards, and maybe ridding ourselves of certain things—even as Jesus tells us that it’d be better to pluck out our eye or cut off our hand than to let sin drag us into hell. And all of that is good.

But I wonder how much we incorporate prayer in our fight against sin? Jesus could have said to Peter, James, and John, “While I’m praying, you guys be psyching yourselves up to be bold. Tell each other courageous stories that might inspire you. Challenge each other to be strong and stand when cowardice might try to get its hands on your hearts.” But he doesn’t. He tells them to pray.

One of the greatest weapons we have in our pursuit of holiness is prayer. And this shouldn't be surprising to us. When Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, he says that we should pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from [the evil one]" (Matt 6:13). Let's make sure, then, that we're consistent in prayer for our own holiness. We neglect prayer for our personal holiness at great risk. Now, certainly, not everyone who fails to pray consistently against temptation necessarily walks in long-term unrepentant sin. But I'd bet that everyone who walks in long-term unrepentant sin has first stopped praying against temptation. So, let's pray faithfully for strength in the fight against sin, unlike the disciples here.

But obviously Peter, James, and John don't rise to the top in terms of showing the disgusting nature of sin in this moment in Jesus' life. That place goes to Judas. We know that the chief priests, scribes, and elders wanted to arrest Jesus in an isolated place and in a stealth-like fashion so as not to stir up the crowds against them. And Judas had given them a way to accomplish this. For a sum of money, he'd agreed to betray Jesus. Key to his betrayal was being able to identify where Jesus would be and when. And Judas knew that Jesus regularly went to Gethsemane and often met there with his disciples. Additionally, he could easily identify Jesus even under the cloak of darkness. Therefore, he leads them to Gethsemane, kisses Jesus to identify him as the one, and Jesus is arrested. Judas has succeeded, if you will, in his betrayal.

Now, it's hard to imagine a more vile sin in human history. But let's not make that our focus and be blinded from how this might help us. I think there's a warning in Judas's actions for us. Remember what transpired prior to this moment. Judas had arranged with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus. But then, Jesus had told Judas that he knew what he had done and was doing. Remember that he'd said to Judas as they shared the last supper together, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me" (Mark 14:18).

Now, in that moment, both Jesus and Judas knew Jesus was talking about Judas. So, Judas plans to sin. Then, Jesus, sitting right with him says, "I know your plans to sin." And so, you'd think that Judas would change his mind.

I mean, imagine that you were going to go say something slanderously to another about Pastor Tom. And as you're on your way to talk to that person, Tom stops you and says, "You're about to slander me, speaking falsely and ill of me behind my back." And then, after hearing Tom say that, you walk right over to that person and speak slanderously of Tom to them. I mean, that's ridiculous, isn't it? It's irrational. Who would do that? Almost everyone would stop when confronted, right?

Well, it is irrational. But I can explain why Judas did that very thing. Here's why. Sin deceives us and hardens our heart. In Hebrews 3:13 the author of Hebrews tells us, "Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Here's how that works. Imagine a couple decides to commit sexual immorality, and they're professing believers. The first time, their hearts are probably screaming at them not to. Then, as

they pursue the sin together, they're still fighting off conviction. Then, after sinning, the conviction feels overwhelming. But then they ignore that conviction. After all, they like their sin. Well, the next time, the conviction prior, during, and after is a bit less. And eventually there's no conviction at all. Their heart doesn't yearn to repent at all. That's how sin works. It deceives, and it hardens. And it's why—even in the face of being called out for your sin beforehand (as Judas was)—you can still run headlong toward it.

We must let this be a warning for us. Don't mess around with sin. It's not something you can pick up, enjoy, and put away. It's something that wants to kill you through its deceiving, hardening effect. So, if you recognize sin today, repent of it. Confess it, be forgiven, and then fight it—with everything you've got, including prayer. Let's learn from the failures of the disciples and Judas. But I want to note one more element: the obedience and faithfulness of Jesus.

The obedience and faithfulness of Jesus

After Jesus submitted his will to the Father in the garden, he still had to carry it out. When Judas and the crowds showed up, he could have spoken a word and destroyed them. I mean, this is a guy who's walked on water, multiplied food, healed all kinds of diseases, and raised a man from the dead. He could stop them if he wanted. Yet, even as Peter cuts off one of the guard's ears (we know it's Peter from John 18:10), Jesus stops any aggression, and answers, "But let the Scriptures be fulfilled" (v. 49). He was betrayed, abandoned by all—even the man who ran away naked (possibly Mark himself?)—but he was obedient even to the point of death.

Jesus wrestled in the garden, submitted his will, but then he carried it out. By the next afternoon he'd say from the cross, "It is finished," meaning that he'd done everything that was required of him for our redemption. All that was left was for him to be raised from the dead. But he'd done it. He'd endured in obedience to the end.

And I know that a number of us may be feeling worn down in the fight of faith. Maybe obedience is hard. Maybe the devil is telling you that you deserve a good sin. But, brothers and sisters, the one who can sympathize with you in your struggle has also shown us that enduring in faithful obedience is the way. There's a day, when this life is nearing its end that you too can say, "It is finished." And you'll never regret walking in faithful obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I just want to say as your brother, your enduring obedience is encouraging to me. For a number of you, I know you've been dealt some severe blows in this life. And yet here you are, gathering with your brothers and sisters to praise the risen and reigning Christ. I feel confident your Father is saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Keep pressing on until you can say, 'It is finished' as our Lord did." And just as our Lord was raised from the dead just a couple days later, so you will one day be as well. So let's give thanks as we come to the table. Amen.