

Moonlight was intermittent as the clouds have their own agenda. Light breezes stirred restlessness in the trees setting the men on edge as they silently headed toward the secluded area in the garden. Four of them in total, three following close behind the one who walked with terrified determination. They had been travelling for over an hour. Any pleasant effects of the wine they had shared at dinner had easily worn off by now.

They were all breathing heavily, but the one in front — his breath was punctuated by sighs heavy with expectation and deep with certain knowledge of a horror end to his life drawing near. The other three had no meaningful idea what was going on, but the disciples were used to that by now. And they made sure that they just went with the flow as it happened. Tonight, Jesus was very different. They had seen him heavy in the past, but this time, they knew something was up. It looked like he was, for the first time in their full view, it looked as though he was struggling, that there was . . . conflict?

Jesus in front, stern and purposeful, deftly avoiding the rocks and stones on the path in such poor light. He was so familiar with the pathway since it led to his place of prayer. He would often come here to get away from it all. But tonight was different because ‘it all’ was coming with him. He would be alone, but his world was closing in on him, it’s edges drawing closer and excluding more and more from emotional view. Like an actor on a stage, the spotlight so bright and narrow on him, alone, but in full view of the cosmic onlookers who waited to see . . . to see what would become of the son of God in his most critical hour. He would be alone on this cosmic stage having to make decision about the

pressure of the events that he knew were about to unfold. The question, would he or wouldn't he? Yes or no. It was all boiling down to this.

From time to time he would look over his shoulder at the disciples who were following. They had just promised that they would never desert him, they would stay by him even to the point of death.

They were responding to what Jesus had just told them, that there was a prophecy in the old testament about these times, where the shepherd will be struck and the sheep will scatter. He had said to them that they would all become deserters. They would all leave Jesus, their leader to face the music.

And Peter, well meaning, but so foolish looked at Jesus and said that he would not. His actual words were that even if everyone else deserted Jesus, he would not. Jesus challenged him. "Peter, before the rooster crows in the morning, you will deny that you know me three times."

It was a prophecy that you wouldn't think much of, it wasn't like Nostradamus who would make prophecies about end times, no, this prophecy is pretty small, it's about words that would be spoken within the next 12 hours, it was concise and to the point. There were no loop holes in it, rooster, crowing, three times.

Three times. And Peter stopped and said to Jesus as sternly and honestly and profoundly and meaningfully as he could. "Jesus, you are wrong. I will never do that. Even if I have to die with you I will never deny you. I've walked on water for crying out loud. I've watched the miracles. I've called you the messiah, I have proclaimed that you are the son of God. You know how risky that is. I will never deny you Jesus." And the disciples nodded.

Jesus saw the hollowness of Peter's words. Jesus wanted to believe them, he wanted for the disciples to be around him especially at that moment as he needed them most. He knew the future was getting darker and darker. Jesus knew that the time of reckoning was fast approaching. And he didn't like it one bit. If he ever needed friends right now, this was the time. But their hollow commitment was worse than if they had said nothing at all. It just showed how little they knew of what was coming. It showed how naïve they were and how they didn't take Jesus seriously when he kept telling them that he was going to be killed.

They came to a small clearing and Jesus said to his three disciples. He opened his mouth to say something but nothing came out. And he tried again, tears welling up, a huge lump in his throat, sweat developing on his forehead and arms beginning to shake. "I want to tell you, I'm really cut up inside right now. There's a raging battle and I feel I could die with all this stuff going on inside. I need to go pray and I need your company and your prayers as I do. Stay here, and pray for me . . . please?"

Jesus looked intensely at them as they nodded without understanding. Jesus walked on a bit further and threw himself to the ground and wept.

It is at this point that I want you write down what you think Jesus prayed.

And the prayer is not the prayer of what we would expect of an obedient Jesus. It's not the kind of prayer that you would hear from anyone who intimately knows the workings of God's plan. It was

not the kind of prayer you would expect from someone who was at the same time fully God and fully human. It is not the type of prayer that fits neatly into our Jesus box. Because close to the heart of the prayer is doubt, indecision, pleading, survival instinct, fear, fragility. And we see that Jesus ends up submitting to God, and we can feel that's ok because that's the Jesus we have come to know. But we ignore the agony of the three hours leading up to that point. We ignore the process. We ignore the statement that Jesus makes to his disciples immediately before hand : "I am deeply grieved, even to death. Remain here and stay awake with me?"

He was visibly distressed, he was concerned about what would happen to him, he was concerned that there was no other way and he pleaded with God. And all we get is this little snippet of his whole prayer that lasted an hour. "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me." That must be a summary of the whole hour that he spent praying.

It is a prayer that has the same depth that you hear from a man whose world is falling apart all around him. It is a prayer that has the same desperation when said by a woman whose child cannot feed from her breast because her country starves. It is a prayer that has the same disillusionment with God's wisdom as prayed by those who find their faith shipwrecked by too many doubts and want to throw it all in. It is a prayer that has the same hollow gut wrenching as when it is prayed by people who feel abandoned by God, alone in a world that seems set against them in every way. It is a prayer that has the same plea for rescue as

when prayed by many who are caught up in habitual, addictive and entrapping sin.

It was a prayer that fired a bold question at God. And we find that the prayer changes. Where he says “not what I want, but what you want.” There is what we would often call the resignation to God’s will. Jesus acknowledging that there is something greater about what God wants. And here is the conflict. How could Jesus who we say is God, be at conflict with . . . God?

Perhaps this shows us just how human Jesus was. That his humanity was being exposed. The survival instinct was kicking in perhaps, how pain was triggering resistance to a course of action, like feeling the heat before your hand is put into a flame. Except in this case Jesus had to ignore the heat and keep going. Jesus had to ignore the fire that was set beneath him and follow through to the bitter and gruesome end.

Look at what happens immediately following. Judas comes with a group of men, one of the disciples pulls out a sword and cuts the ear off the slave of the high priest. And Jesus turns to the disciples and says, “do you not think that I cannot appeal to God and he will send me more than 12 legions of angels?”

Do we not think it possible that this thought crossed through Jesus’ mind while he was praying? That he could get out of this with one click of his fingers? That he could have at once bailed on it all. Do you wonder if he thought for one moment, “Is this worth it?”

“what am I doing this for. I love these people, but they don’t acknowledge it. I love these people but they don’t understand. The people I love, are two

faced and mixed up. They say one thing and do another.

“They say that I am the only one they need when they sing to me, but they fulfil themselves with pandering to image. They say that I am everything to them, but they look desperately for other people to gratify them. They say that I am love and mercy and they judge and condemn each other, even in my name.

“They call me the prince of peace, yet will make up excuses to bomb others at the drop of a hat. They call me righteous, when their hearts are dedicated to success.

“They say I am the truth, when they are more content with painting a picture of me how they want me to look.

“They say that I am the way, when they walk willingly down paths that satisfy only themselves.

“They say I am the life, but they never acknowledge my gift of wealth and health when they have it, but resent me when they don't.

“And times will not change. I know that they're going to be like this for a very long time. The pursuit of self interest is what they will seek until time ends. I have no hope that this world will change.”

And Jesus brought these doubts to God. God in heaven, creator of all, sustainer of all, lover of all. Jesus brought these concerns to God. “Are they really worth it God? What do you see in these people? Look at my 'faithful' disciples. Even they will desert me. Look at them Father, they are sleeping as I pray. Why do we want to do this?”

God's will was solid. And God's will said, “they are worth it.”

And Jesus, agonised, so much so that the sweat was dripping from his forehead like beads of blood. Jesus resolved himself to go through with the terrible plan. Like standing on the edge of a cliff, ready to jump and now, he jumped. Nothing would stop the awful of events that he was plunging through.

Total submission to people. He was presenting himself for humanity to do with him what they want. They could and did do their worst. Jesus' knowledge of our evil potential was in stark contrast with God's merciful decision : "in spite of the worst they do, in spite of the fact that they think they are getting rid of you, Jesus, they are worth it."

They are worth it. You are worth it. And the question you have to ask yourself is why.

Now we have come back from thinking this. Why are we worth it? Because of God's love. Why does God love us? Because we are made in his image, because he wants relationship with us, because we are his children, because he is bonded to us.

We are precious to God. We are worth it. And all we've got to do is accept that, and respond to it.

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and
be gracious to you;
the LORD load up his love upon you, and give
you peace.