

The Garden of Surrender

John 18:1-14

INTRODUCTION

On April 9, 1865, just over 160 years ago and after four years of Civil War, approximately 630,000 deaths and over 1 million casualties, General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, at the home of Wilmer and Virginia McLean in the rural town of Appomattox Court House, Virginia. General Lee arrived at the McLean home shortly after 1:00 p.m. General Grant arrived half an hour later. Their historic meeting lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Just about 2,000 years ago, after three years of constant hounding and threats, Jesus of Nazareth surrendered Himself to a combined regimen of Jewish Temple authorities and Roman soldiers. They were led by one of the 12 disciples – Judas Iscariot – to the private garden where Jesus had been praying.

We know that place as the Garden of Gethsemane. Every time we come to worship in this facility we are reminded of that night and of that place by the stained glass window behind me.

The Civil War was filled with many major military battles. But one of the biggest battles ever fought in human history was waged in the Garden of Gethsemane. In fact, as one author wrote:

In a sense, the two greatest "battles" of history were fought in gardens. (Ed Vasicek)

In the Garden of Eden, Adam chose to disobey God, bringing sin to the human race.

- Adam did not resist temptation but chose his own will over the will of his Heavenly Father.
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ chose His Heavenly Father's will over His own human will.

That is the truth communicated in those verses of Scripture I have encouraged you to memorize as a part of our Lenten journey this year. Let's review them together:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Two gardens. Eden and the Empty Tomb where our salvation was secured in the resurrection of Jesus. But before there is a garden with an empty tomb in it, Jesus had to come to this garden – Gethsemane – in order to surrender to what was to come.

There are actually two surrenders that happened that night.

SURRENDER #1: JESUS SURRENDERED TO THE WILL OF GOD

Although the pain and spiritual misery of the cross awaited Jesus, it seems as though the biggest battle was fought internally here in the Garden of Gethsemane. Our text from John's Gospel doesn't describe that portion of the story, so let me remind you of that night:

Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:39-44)

Just as Adam's decision in Eden affected all who are related to Adam, so Christ's decision in Gethsemane affects all who are related to Him by faith. Jesus, as both God and man, had a sinless human nature and a divine nature. He had a human will and a divine will that worked in harmony. In Gethsemane, we get the clearest picture of how He submitted His human will to the Father.

Since Jesus was to bear our sins on the cross, He had to experience the consequences of those sins. Throughout Scripture the image of a "cup" is used to talk about God's hatred of sin. Jesus – who never knew what sin felt like – would have to SURRENDER to the weight of every sin ever committed.

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

The Battle of Gethsemane was a fierce one. One writer called this battle "the night before" because it was the night before His crucifixion when all this took place. Here's how this writer described it:

On the night before: Jesus saw what was coming by way of the cross. Jesus saw the beating of the Roman whip with the metal attached to the ends that would rip the skin from the victims back.

- That night before: He saw that same blood that poured from his brow as He prayed also run down His arm and drip off his elbow as the nails were driven into His hands.
- That night before: He saw that same blood dripping off His toes and down to the foot of the cross as nails were driving into His feet.
- The night before: He saw that same blood as a crown of thorns was placed on His head and that same blood ran down His forehead onto His eyebrows and down onto His eyelashes and into His eyes and blurred His vision.

And then he writes: But wait!!! That blood might have blurred His human vision but Jesus was God in the flesh.

- The night before: Jesus also saw that blood as salvation for whosoever would come to Him in faith.
- The night before: He saw you and me as we came to that cross and watched as that blood washed away our sins and give us life eternal.
- The night before He could see the defeat of death and the fall of Satan.
- The night before: He could see the blueprints for the Heavenly home He would prepare for you and for me.

Because Jesus saw all that, He surrendered. But His surrender was not a sign of defeat.

- When Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses Grant, Lee admitted he had lost the war. He had been defeated.
- But not Jesus.
- When Jesus surrendered Himself to the divine will of God, he was victorious.
- The roles were reversed.

Jesus surrendered. BUT THE DEVIL LOST THE WAR.

Whenever you and I surrender ourselves to the will, we win. We always win. Our journey to the Empty Tomb brings us to a point where we are asked to surrender to the will of God as well.

But there was still one more surrender to happen that night.

Matthew's Gospel records the transition like this:

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Matthew 22:45-46)

SURRENDER #2: JESUS SURRENDERED TO THE ARRESTING SOLDIERS

Now look at these words from tonight's Gospel:

Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" (John 18:2-5)

Did you catch it? Jesus went out to them. They did not go into the garden after.

- He was able to surrender to those very people He KNEW had horrible plans in mind for Him because He had already surrendered in the biggest battle in all of history ...

Jesus had surrendered His will to the divine will of God.

So surrendering to the soldiers was nothing. They were only a part of God's divine will.

APPLICATION

The Roman Catholic Church has produced a “novena” on what it means to surrender to the divine will of God.

A “novena” is an ancient tradition of devotional praying. It consists of private or public prayers repeated for nine successive days or weeks. (Novena is the Latin word for “nine.”) The nine days between the Ascension of Jesus and Pentecost when the disciples gathered in the upper room and devoted themselves to prayer is often considered to be the first novena.

Novenas are most often prayed by members of the Roman Catholic Church, but it is also widely used by Lutherans, Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox Christians. You will find them in many devotional prayer books, too.

This particular novena was written by Father Don Dolindo Ruotolo in the mid-1950s. Each of the nine section begins with a statement from God to us, and it concludes with the encouragement to pray this phrase multiple times:

O Jesus, I surrender myself to you, take care of everything!

I want to conclude by sharing with you two of those short statements from God from Father Ruotolo’s novena:

On Day #1, God says: Leave the care of your affairs to me and everything will be peaceful. I say to you in truth that every act of true, blind, complete surrender to me produces the effect that you desire and resolves all difficult situations.

On Day #9, He says: Pray always in readiness to surrender, and you will receive from it great peace and great rewards, even when I confer on you the grace of trials, of repentance and of love. Then what does suffering matter? It seems impossible to you? Close your eyes and say with all your soul, “Jesus, you take care of it.” Do not be afraid, I will take care of things and you will bless my name by humbling yourself. A thousand prayers cannot equal one single act of surrender, remember this well.

I surrender all, I surrender all.
All to Thee my blessed Savior.

Amen.