

**4/2/26 – Maundy Thursday    The Mountain of Surrender****Pastor Doug Scalise, Brewster Baptist Church*****Matthew 26:36-46***

When you hear the word **surrender**, do you hear it as a positive or negative word, as a good word or a bad word? I enjoy reading about history, and I've read about many battles and wars, so one of my first thoughts when I hear the word surrender is that it's a bad, negative word. Surrender is associated with losing, being defeated, yielding to an opponent, or feeling forced to give up – against one's will – because victory is impossible. We know from history and the Bible that sometimes surrender leads to being tortured, killed, sold into slavery, or other terrible things, for you, your loved ones, your clan, tribe, or nation. That's why some people would say they prefer death to surrender. To surrender means having to acknowledge that someone is more powerful, or smarter, or better than you. That can be hard to accept. On an individual level, surrendering can be viewed as a character flaw, reflecting a lack of grit or a failure to persevere. For many of us, our first thought when we hear the word "surrender" is negative, and it's not something we want to do. We want to win, to dominate, to be in control, to be able to dictate terms.

Surrender, however, is a complex word that can be bad or good, depending on the context. While, in one sense, it carries negative connotations of defeat, it can also **represent a positive, spiritual act of letting go**. Surrendering can be a courageous, empowering, transformative choice. Surrender can be a healthy act of releasing or letting go of the need to control uncontrollable situations, reducing our stress and anxiety. Surrendering can be a powerful form of accepting reality as it is, which can lead to greater inner peace, humility, and the ability to heal or grow. I have witnessed this type of spiritual surrender many times in people, especially in how they've coped with a terminal illness, and how they've accepted the situation with grace, courage, and even thankfulness for the blessings they've experienced throughout their lives.

In spiritual contexts, surrendering to God is not a negative act – it's a courageous act of trust that brings peace, freedom, and at times even joy. Ultimately, surrender is not necessarily about giving up, which is how we may think of it at times, but about **changing one's approach from resistance to acceptance. It's a shift from**

**striving to allowing**, often leading to a more peaceful and fulfilling life, and even enabling us to face death with dignity and courage.

This evening, we're observing Jesus on what we're calling **The Mountain of Surrender. Surrender, in the Bible**, is the voluntary act of yielding one's will, plans, and desires to God's authority, acknowledging God as Lord and trusting God completely. For each of us, as a follower of Jesus, surrender is comprehensive; it involves all we are and all we have – our life, heart, mind, and actions, our present and our future. This is not easy for most of us to do. We have our own thoughts, plans, hopes, and desires, and we'd prefer if life unfolded the way we want it to, thank you very much, without God or life interrupting and making a mess of what we want, or think is best.

Surrender and obedience require a daily commitment to deny self and follow Jesus that brings spiritual victory, peace, and deeper intimacy with God. On this night, we witness Jesus modeling what surrender and obedience look like, in the most difficult situation one can face. When Jesus was tested in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11*), we said the battle is often won before the contest begins. We see that, again, on the Mount of Olives, as Jesus faces the greatest trial and test of his life. The greatest spiritual victories often happen in prayer before the battle.

**Matthew 26:36-46.** “Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, *‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’* **He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee**, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, *‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, **and stay awake with me.**’* And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ***‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.’*** Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, *‘So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’* Again he went away for the second time and prayed, ***‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’*** Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, *‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of*

*Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”*

**This evening, I invite you to reflect for a few minutes on what happens in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus, the disciples, and yourself.**

### **Jesus**

One of the things that struck me this week, thinking about Jesus surrendering his will to God’s will, is that **Jesus’ earthly life began and ended in surrender**. Think back to the decision that Jesus’ mother, Mary, made. Upon learning she would bear the Savior, she said, **“I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word”** (Luke 1:38). This is a way of saying, *I will surrender my plans, hopes, and dreams to you, God; your will be done*. Jesus prays pretty much the same thing in the Garden of Gethsemane. We hear about people like Mary and Jesus surrendering their will to God, but it’s difficult to do, which is reflected in Jesus praying essentially the same thing **three times** over a period that’s at least an hour or so. **“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.”** We can understand why this was so difficult for Jesus to pray, because no one wants to be tortured to death, which is what crucifixion is, and Jesus had power at his command that we don’t. Moments later, in **Matthew 26:53**, *“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”* Jesus could have called on 60,000 angels; yet he didn’t use them to save himself from suffering, nor to inflict pain or revenge on others. He surrendered his will to God’s will.

We all have our “Gethsemane” moments of pressure, testing, and decision. Take a moment and think about your own life – when have you felt the weight of pressure, testing, or deciding which path to take? Often, we think the easier path is the preferred one to take, but in the Bible, we learn that sometimes it’s the harder path, the seemingly more difficult choice, that leads us where God wants us to go.

### **Peter, James, John, and the Disciples**

At a critical moment, when he needs support, Jesus asks his inner circle of Peter, James, and John, to be with him, and in this case, asks them **to stay awake with him**.

The three times Jesus invites only Peter, James, and John to be with him are when Jesus restores Jairus' daughter to life, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and here, in the Garden of Gethsemane. **At first, all Jesus asks them to do is to stay awake with him. He doesn't even ask them to pray. Just stay awake.** And they fall asleep.

If you're in the US military, falling asleep on watch in a combat environment is an extremely serious offense, legally punishable by death under military law, specifically Article 95 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Known as a **"betrayal of responsibility"**, it can lead to court-martial, dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of pay, and significant prison time. In a combat zone, this action is viewed as gross negligence that jeopardizes the lives of all unit members and the success of the mission. Even if the soldier was sleep-deprived, this is typically not a defense against charges of dereliction of duty. That's what Peter, James, and John are guilty of; they have fallen asleep on watch in a spiritual combat zone. This is a betrayal of responsibility and dereliction of duty that jeopardized Jesus and themselves. It also shows they still lack the spiritual training and discipline to meet the needs of the hour. That's why Jesus says to them, ***"Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*** The disciples need more spiritual training and growth to fulfill their mission for God's kingdom, and they will need the help of the Spirit God will send to give them the power and courage to meet the moment.

### **You. Us.**

As we wrestle with surrendering what we want to what God wants, as we struggle to relinquish our will to God's will, we're not facing something life threatening, like Jesus was on the Mountain of Surrender. However, we all struggle to give up our own will and plans, to be open to or accepting of what God may want us to do. **Proverbs 19:21** says, *"The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established."* Because we *"devise many plans,"* our tendency can be to tenaciously cling to the plans we've made, rather than trusting that, even in difficult or painful circumstances, God may actually be at work behind the scenes – and that if we're open to the Spirit and God's direction, we may even find ourselves in the center of God's will, and in a place we wouldn't have picked or chosen on our own, with blessings

we didn't anticipate or imagine. But that requires surrender; it means taking up our own cross, and following Jesus wherever he is leading us. The Apostle Paul described this dying to self and surrendering our own will to live and walk by faith in ***Galatians 2:19b-20***, ***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”***

Jesus triumphed through prayer and surrendering to God's will. Jesus chose obedience over self-preservation. Jesus' response highlights the cost of discipleship: surrendering our will to align with God's purpose. This can be so difficult to do, because all of us, if we're honest, like to and want to get our own way, and we tend to get mad, angry, hurt, or upset if we don't. This is true for two-year-olds and 82-year-olds. Jesus does not insist on his own way, and his obedience in Gethsemane inspires us to reflect on areas where we resist God's plan, due to fear or personal desires. Aligning our will with God's involves regular prayer for discernment, studying Scripture for guidance, and taking small steps of faith toward trust and surrender.

Like the disciples who fell asleep, despite their best intentions, we may feel we've let Jesus down, through spiritual weakness, neglect, or some other failure. However, God's grace reminds us that failure is not final; God's forgiveness restores us when we repent. Trusting in the Lord's mercy allows us to learn from mistakes and grow stronger in faith through God's unfailing love.

Jesus teaches his followers to pray (*Matthew 6:10*), ***“Your kingdom come. **Your will be done**, on earth as it is in heaven.”*** We say that every week. Many of us pray it every day. **It's a short phrase that's easy to say and difficult to live.** Jesus' willingness to surrender his will to God's will, enables the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of humanity. Through suffering and obedience, Jesus secures salvation for all who trust in Him. Seeing and listening to Jesus on the Mountain of Surrender, we can all grow in our ability to surrender and say, ***“Your will be done.”***

A closing story. I've told you before about Eric Liddell of Scotland, who ran in the 1924 Summer Olympic Games in Paris. He won the gold medal in the 400-meter race and a bronze medal in the 200-meter race, but he withdrew from the 100-meter race – his best event – because the heats were on a Sunday, and he didn't compete in the relays

for the same reason. His decision was a testament to his convictions about the Sabbath, and his resolve to surrender his will to God's will to honor God was depicted in the Academy Award winning film *Chariots of Fire*. Later, while serving as a missionary in China, Eric Liddell was arrested and put in a Japanese-run civilian internment camp in Weih sien. Eric Liddell died on February 21, 1945, at age 43, from an inoperable brain tumor aggravated by malnutrition, overwork, and exhaustion, after months of caring for others in the camp. Despite suffering severe headaches and failing health, Liddell remained dedicated to teaching, organizing games for children, and tutoring. He passed away, after suffering a stroke. According to his friend, Annie Buchan, his last words were, "***It's complete surrender,***" reflecting his faith and submission to God. May we be able to say the same tonight, throughout our life, and even at the time of our death.

### **Let's pray.**

Dear Heavenly Father, as we reflect on Jesus in Gethsemane, we're reminded of the importance of surrendering to Your will, even in times of great personal struggle. Help us to trust in Your plan, and to say with Jesus, "*Not my will, but Yours be done.*" We acknowledge our own weaknesses and failures, like the disciples who fell asleep, and we ask for Your grace to forgive and restore us. May we learn from their mistakes, and cultivate spiritual discipline through consistent prayer and study of the Word. Remind us of the transformative power of choosing Your will. Give us the courage to align our desires with Yours, knowing that Your ways are higher than our ways and lead to redemption and eternal life. Thank You for Your unending love and mercy that guides us forward, even when we stumble. Amen.

**Blessing:** Let's leave tonight resolved to pray and live as Jesus did on the Mountain of Surrender, saying with trust and acceptance **not my will, but Yours, be done** — and may we live lives that reflect Jesus' surrender, obedience, and love.