

Jesus Confronts Our Self-dependence

Mark 14:27-42

This morning we come to the end of our series in the Gospel of Mark on Kingdom and Culture and all the ways Jesus confronted His culture – and by extension every culture - with the values of the kingdom of God. Next Sunday we begin a new series entitled "*Hero: Jesus in the Old Testament*" which we're really excited about. Jesus said the entire Bible is about Him; that He is the theme which links all the books of the Bible together; the hero of the story of how God rescues us from evil and from death. If we miss Jesus, we miss the point of the Bible, and the more we see Him throughout the story, the better we get to know Him and the more our faith in the bible itself grows for no book written by 40 different authors over 1600 years could tell a single story unless God was the author. Now this morning as we conclude *Kingdom or Culture*, I want us to look at the most fundamental difference between the kingdom of God and every human culture and why there is always conflict between God's kingdom and every human culture; we depend on ourselves rather than on God. Ever since the serpent told Adam and Eve they would be like God if they ate from the tree God commanded them not to eat, humans have believed that we don't need God; that we are capable of being our own god. Every human is born with a desire to be free of God; to control our life; to be able to do what we want when we want and not to have to check in with our Creator. And this desire is at the root of all of our problems because we are not designed to live independently from God. We need His power and wisdom and help to live in this world. Without Him, we are like astronauts in space without a space suit or a deep sea diver disconnected from his air supply. We are not self-sufficient. We cannot control life, other people or even ourselves. We need God and life will not work until we recognize our need for Him. That's why the first thing Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount is "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt. 5:3) "Blessed" means to receive power from God for the attainment of security, success, strength and satisfaction. When God blesses us He replaces our fear with security, our frustration with success, our fatigue with strength, and our failure with satisfaction. So who gets blessed? "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs (and the Greek is emphatic here: "theirs and theirs ALONE) is the kingdom of heaven.*" There are a number of Greek words for "poor" Jesus could have used here. One word meant financially disadvantaged. Somebody who doesn't have much, very similar to the way we use the word poor today. A poor person doesn't have many possessions, doesn't make much money. But the word Jesus chooses for poor is a much stronger word. The Greek word He chooses means utterly without any resources of their own, possessing nothing. And Jesus says that's the person God blesses because the kingdom of God belongs to them. Now how can Jesus possibly say that the person who has absolutely nothing is blessed? Well, notice He's talking about the person who is poor IN SPIRIT, the person who knows they have no spiritual resources of their own, the person who recognizes their limitations, who knows he's not God and who therefore depends on God for everything he needs. Secure, successful, strong and satisfied are those who need God for theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of heaven. In Mark 14:27-42, both Jesus and His disciples experience the most difficult night of their lives. Jesus depends upon God and the disciples depend upon themselves – with predictably very different results. As we look at the difference between Jesus and His disciples, I want to look at three questions we can ask ourselves to see if we are self-dependent or God –dependent; to see if we're trusting God to do His job or we're still trying to play God ourselves; and whether we're more like Jesus or more like His disciples.

1. To whom do I listen? (Mark 14:27-31)
2. When do I prepare for temptation? (Mark 14:38)
3. Whose plan do I trust most? (Mark 14:36)

The first question suggested by this passage to see if we're depending on God or on ourselves which is, "To whom do I listen?" Jesus is about to be arrested and He knows it. He has just celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples and now they are on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane; and as they walk, Jesus again tells them what's about to happen. "*And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN*

THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP SHALL BE SCATTERED.' (Zech. 13:7) *But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.*" Jesus told the disciples earlier in the evening that He would be betrayed that night and all He had told them would happen to Him was about to happen. Now Jesus adds one additional piece of information. "When I'm arrested and killed, you will all desert me. But I'll see you again in Galilee after I've been raised." Peter is hurt. How could Jesus ever think he would desert Him? "But Peter said to Him, "*{Even} though all may fall away, yet I will not.*" Peter won't desert – even if it means prison and death." I believe Peter really believes what he says. He is completely sincere. He has the best of intentions. He can't imagine abandoning Jesus in His hour of need. And he will eventually follow Jesus to both prison and death - just not today. He isn't ready. Peter doesn't yet realize yet how weak he really is. That's why Jesus continues, "*And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times." But {Peter} kept saying insistently, "{Even} if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also.*" (Mark 14:27-31) Notice, all the disciples are confident that they are ready to die with Jesus; even though Jesus has told them that when the time comes; they'll run away and leave Him. How does Jesus know that? "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.'" The first contrast between Jesus and His disciples -and between those who depend on God and those who do not – is that Jesus believed the Scriptures. His disciples did not. "Nothing personal, guys, but you're all going to run away. That's what the Scriptures say will happen tonight." In fact, throughout His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus keeps repeating, "This is happening that the Scriptures may be fulfilled." He was so confident that the Word of God could not be broken that He is able to accept all that happens to Him as fulfillment of God's will. "*But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.*" Do you see the incredible love and understanding Jesus has for these guys? "You will desert Me - but I'll see you again after I have been raised from the dead." How does Jesus know He'll be raised from the dead? The Scriptures say He will. At this point, Jesus believes the Scriptures but His disciples do not. "*But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not.*" Peter says in effect, "I don't care what the Bible says is going to happen. I know myself and I know I will never fall away. I'm not sure about these other guys, but I know you can count on me." What does that tell us about Peter? He trusts himself more than he trusts the Old Testament scriptures and more than he trusts what Jesus says. You would think by now that Peter and the other guys would have learned never to tell Jesus He's wrong, but they haven't. The first question to ask myself to see if I'm really depending on God or on myself is, "To whom do I listen?" Do I believe what God says or what I think? My thoughts say, "I have no idea what to do." God says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6) My thoughts say, "I can't go on." God says, "Come to Me all you who are weak and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28) My thoughts say, "He doesn't deserve my help or attention." God says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:24) My thoughts say, "I'm not capable of doing this." God says, "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9) My thoughts say, "I'm overwhelmed." God says, "I will be with you in trouble. I will deliver you and honor you." (Psalm 91:15) My thoughts say, "I could never forgive her." God says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven you." My thoughts say, "I can get close to sin without sinning." God says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." (Romans 13:14) My thoughts say, "I can't help but sin." God says, "For sin shall not be master over you for you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14) My thoughts say, "I'm scared to death." God says, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Josh. 1:9) All sin begins with unbelief. If I saw things as God sees them, I would not sin. I am not depending on God until I believe that God is always right about everything He says and that His word defines reality far more accurately than my thoughts and feelings. The first contrast between Jesus and disciples: He believes the Scriptures, they do not. By the way, have you noticed that Jesus always had a verse? He always asked, "Have you not read?" "Is it not written?" Jesus quotes from the Bible more than anyone else in the Bible – because faith in God is faith in God's promises. If you want to depend on God, you have to know what you can depend on Him for and that means you need to know His commands and promises. So how do I find those promises? Read your Bible regularly and whenever you find a promise or a command, write it down or underline it. You say, "That will take forever." Yep – better get started. But in case of emergency, if you have access to the internet, just do a search of "all the verses in the Bible about" and plug in a key word: fear, courage, holiness, confidence, whatever. Or pick up a bible concordance for your library. Or use one from the church library.

Look up all the verses about a subject and you'll find plenty of promises. Then just memorize a few so you always have them on hand. Jesus depended on God which means first of all, He listened to God. To whom do you listen? It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian or what your spiritual pedigree is, if we are not depending on God if we trust our thoughts and feelings more than we trust His word.

The second question suggested by this passage to check if we're depending on God or on ourselves which is, "When do I prepare for temptation?" The thing we learn from Jesus in this passage is that we will either win or lose the battle with temptation before it's even fought. *"They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Sit here until I have prayed.' And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, 'My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.' And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, 'Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.'"* (Mark 14:32-36) Christians believe that Jesus is fully God and fully human; and His full humanity is on display in this passage. (Hebrews 2:17 says *"Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."* In order to become our champion and substitute and die in our place, Jesus had to become like us, fully human, experiencing everything that we experience and yet remain obedient to His Father. Which is why Hebrews 4:15 says, *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."* In becoming like us, Jesus experienced every temptation known to man and passed each one with flying colors. He is fully God but He is also fully human. And because He is fully human, as He approaches His crucifixion and experiencing the wrath of God for all our sins, He struggles with His greatest temptation, because He can pull the plug on this plan at any time. He can walk away and leave us in our sins. As He faces all that's about to happen to Him, Jesus becomes very troubled; and He is transparently honest about His distress. He tells His three disciples, *"My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. I'm so stressed, so scared, so anxious about what is coming I feel like I'm going to die. Please pray for Me guys."* Then Jesus leaves the disciples and goes a few yards away to pray by Himself and I want you to notice how Jesus prays. He is fully submitted to God's will. *"Abba! (Daddy!) Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; ("Get me out of here. If there is any other way, let's do that. I don't want to go to the cross.") yet not what I will, but what You will."* As a man, Jesus has His own will just as we have our own will. But Jesus submits His will to His Father. *"Father, You can do anything and if there is some other way to accomplish Your will, please show me. In any case, not My will but Yours be done."* Jesus is honest with His Father about what He wants but He is also completely yielded to His Father. Now it might appear that Jesus' prayer went unanswered because His Father didn't remove the cup from Him. He still had to go to the cross. But look at Hebrews 5:7. *"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety."* Clearly this passage is referring to this incident in Jesus' life. Yet God didn't save Jesus from death; so how can the writer of Hebrews say that God heard His prayer? Well, what did Jesus actually pray for? He prayed, *"Not my will but Yours be done."* And God answered that prayer. He gave Jesus the strength to do His will. Jesus fights the battle on His knees before He fights it on His feet.

Now remember, when He left His disciples, He told them to pray as well. In fact, Luke tells us that Jesus told all His disciples that night in the garden to pray so that they wouldn't enter temptation; because they're also about to face the greatest battle of their lives. *"And He *came and *found them sleeping, and *said to Peter, 'Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'"* (Mark 14:37-38) Why should the disciples be praying right now instead of sleeping? Because prayer is the only way they are going to be able get through what they're about to go through. Jesus says, *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation."* Prayer protects us from temptation. That's why Jesus says to Peter in Mark, *"Simon, are you asleep? You who were so sure earlier this evening that you would never deny Me, so sure you were ready for prison and death? And yet now you can't even stay awake to pray for an hour! Watch and pray so that you may not come into temptation: I know your spirit is willing. I know you want to do the right thing. I know your intentions are good. You just don't realize how weak your flesh is; how at the moment of temptation, it will betray you; how quickly you'll forget about all your good intentions and give in. Peter, you need outside help to escape temptation. That's why you should be*

praying. *"Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words.* (Jesus still hasn't prayed enough. He leaves the disciples to pray more.) *"And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him."* (Jesus has to wake His disciples up again to ask them to pray. He knows what it's like to be a parent on Sunday mornings and to try to get your kids out of bed. Then Jesus goes back to praying by Himself.) *"And He *came the third time, and *said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up and let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand."* (Mark 14:39-42) Jesus is fighting the greatest battle of His life and He keeps asking His disciples to fight it with Him, but they can't stay awake. Luke tells us they were sleeping out of sorrow. What Jesus has been predicting for a long time now is finally hitting them. He is going to be arrested, tried, and crucified. But they deal with the sorrow and the fear of what they and Jesus are about to experience far differently than Jesus does. While Jesus prays, they try to escape through sleep. And as a result, when the moment of truth comes, Jesus is strong and fully obeys His Father, taking charge of His own arrest, trial and execution in order to die for our sins without hesitation or doubt. The disciples, on the other hand, do exactly what Jesus predicted. They all desert Jesus. Peter - who was so hurt and angry that Jesus would doubt His allegiance - denies that he even knows Jesus when a little girl recognizes him. Do you see the point here? Jesus depends on God; His disciples do not. Jesus fights the greatest battle of His life first on His knees and as a result, stands strong before the supreme court of Israel, before the government of Rome, and before torture, humiliation, and crucifixion. Peter sleeps and as a result, betrays Christ because of a little girl. Good intentions without prayer lead inevitably to failure because we don't have the strength in ourselves to conquer temptation. We need outside help. That's why Jesus says, *"Watch and pray so that you may not enter temptation: the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!"* If I'm not praying, I'm not depending on God. My confidence is in myself, not in Him. Wingback: Three Ps. How does prayer conquer temptation? First, we access God's power through prayer. Jesus prays and God answers His prayer with strength. The disciples fail to pray and quickly discover the limitations of their own strength: that even though their spirit is willing, their flesh is unable to do what their spirit desires. Peter failed to carry through on his promise to Jesus because he overestimated his own strength; which is the same reason we give into temptation. As long as I think I would never do that, I'll never fall for that, I'm not that kind of guy - I am vulnerable; because you and I are made of the same stuff as Peter. We're all flesh and the flesh is weak. Somebody said, "I can resist anything - but temptation." Think about all the promises we've made to God that "I'll never do that again." Until the next opportunity to do it comes along. And all our good intentions, all our plans go out the window and we find our self wallowing in the same sin all over again. And we wonder, "What is wrong with me? Why do I do that? Why can't I just say, 'No?' - because we're weak. Our problem isn't our sincerity. Our problem is our lack of strength. We don't have the power to resist temptation. But prayer accesses God's power. That's why Jesus fights His battle before the actual battle. He knows what's coming. He knows that He can do nothing apart from His Father. And if Jesus, the Son of God, the only Perfect man needed outside help to overcome temptation, what does that say about us? Prayer accesses God's power. Much prayer, much power; little prayer, little power; no prayer - remember the disciples sleep when they should be praying - no power. I have found that the more I pray, the more resistant to temptation I become and the less I pray, the more helpless before temptation I become. And it doesn't matter if I have a good excuse for not praying, if I'm too busy serving God to pray, or if I'm in a situation where I think I'm far from temptation; temptation always finds me when I'm don't pray regularly. That's why we have to win the battle before it's fought, on our knees rather than on the battle field.

Here's a second reason we're to pray so that we don't enter temptation. Prayer accesses God's perspective. Prayer enables us to see things from God's point of view. And if we could see the things which tempt us from God's perspective, we wouldn't be tempted by them at all. I mean, how many times each day are you tempted to rob a bank? "Oh, I can't drive down East 14th; too many banks on that street. I just don't know what I'll do with all that temptation in front of me." But we're not tempted to rob banks because the consequences of robbing banks are so unattractive to us. If we could see the consequences of all sins as clearly as we see the consequences of some sins, we'd be immune to temptation. You see, the battle between good and evil is won or lost in our heart long before it is won or lost on the battlefield. And if I'm not clear in my own heart about what I think about a particular temptation, if I'm not clear about why I would never want to do that, if I'm still entertaining the possibility of giving into it, then I've already lost the war before the actual opportunity to do that thing comes along. The unresolved heart is easy prey in the hour of temptation. That's why Jesus prays. He

senses the uncertainty in His own heart, the desire to escape what is about to come upon Him, the horror of what He has to go through. He is unable to see the Father's plan as clearly as He once did; and so He prays. He needs to again see the cross through His Father's eyes. He needs God's perspective in order to do the right thing. And so He fights this battle on His knees and in His heart before He fights it with His body. If I haven't decided that no matter what, by the strength that God supplies, I will resist a particular temptation, I'm vulnerable. I can't afford to wait until the actual opportunity to sin to decide whether or not I'll resist. If I do, I've already lost. That's why I need to be like Jesus and be completely honest with God about my temptations. "Lord, I am really tempted to be bitter here – or to act out of fear – or to follow my own lusts. Help me to see this sin through Your eyes. I'm not really willing to resist right now. I'm still entertaining the possibility of giving in. I am so vulnerable to this. I need Your perspective." That's why we have to win the battle before it's fought, on our knees rather than on the battle field. You know, virtue for many people is simply a lack of opportunity. We think we'd never be tempted to do the things other people do; because we've never been in their shoes. "If I had several million dollars, I'd be generous," even though most people discover that the more money they have, the more money they want. Like Jesus, we need to be honest with God and with ourselves about the temptations to which you are vulnerable right now. Don't wait for the hour of temptation to face them. Face them now in prayer. Wrestle with God until you know you can see those temptations through His eyes and the ruin that sin would cause you is clear in your mind and you are sincerely submitted to His will, until you can say, "Not my will but Yours be done," until you see those temptations the way He sees those temptations. Otherwise, you won't be able to resist them when the opportunity arises.

Prayer is our access to God and accesses His power, His perspective and finally His pleasures. Let me ask you a question. When are you most vulnerable to temptation: when you are happy or when you are sad? When you're full of energy or when you're tired? When you're excited about life or when you're depressed? We are most vulnerable to temptation when - like Jesus - we are in a dark night of our soul. Happy, fulfilled people do not become porn addicts, or drug addicts or alcoholics or shopaholics, or angry and ill-tempered. Our vulnerability to temptation is just a symptom of a big hole in our soul. Something is missing and we're trying to fill it with the wrong stuff. Sin is always a matter of supply and demand. I have to have a desire to sin - that's the demand side - and I've got to have the opportunity to sin - that's the supply side. We usually focus on efforts in resisting temptation solely on the supply side - getting rid of the Internet or our access to the drugs or the bottle or the mall. But the real key to escaping temptation is to focus on the demand side of the equation. Why do I even want to do this stuff? And why not fill my need for intimacy or purpose or excitement or happiness with the real thing rather than with a cheap substitute? We were created for God and no created thing or person can fill our need for Him. That's why until we find our happiness and fulfillment through our relationship with Him, we will be vulnerable to any temptation which promises us joy or happiness or escape from pain and boredom. We were made to take pleasure in God. The Psalmist says that in His presence is fullness of joy, in His right hand are pleasures forever. And we access the pleasures of His presence through prayer. The more I pray, the more of His joy I have, the more contentment I experience, the happier I am. And I'm able to take the appropriate measure of pleasure then in the things He has created for me to take pleasure in because He is in His proper place at the center of my life. But if I'm not taking my pleasure in God, then I begin to pursue that pleasure in created things that were never designed to fulfill me the way only God can, and I become vulnerable to temptation. That's why Jesus tells His disciples to pray so that they will not enter into temptation. Prayer accesses God's power, God's perspective and God's pleasures. If - like Jesus - we'll face our temptations before the fact with God in prayer, then - like Jesus - we'll be able to overcome them in the hour of temptation. On the other hand, if we try to face those temptations on our own - like the disciples did - we're dead meat. Look at it this way. Great musicians practice every day. That's what makes them great. Great athletes train every day and great writers write every day. Great Christians pray every day. That's what makes them great. Sin will keep you from prayer and prayer will keep you from sin. The choice is yours.

So by contrasting Jesus with His disciples in Mark 14, not listening to God's word and not praying regularly are dead giveaways that I am depending on myself and not on God. And that brings us to a third question suggested by this passage to check if we're depending on God or on ourselves, "Whose plan for my life do I trust most?" Whose plan for His life did Jesus trust most? "*Not what I will but what You will.*" (vs. 36) Jesus clearly doesn't want to face what lies before Him but because He trusts His Father's plan, He goes through it. He believes that

God's plan is better than His plan; that as Isaiah 53 says, even though the Messiah will not be recognized or honored by most people when He comes, even though He will not be attractive but despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; one from whom men hide their faces; and assume He suffers because God has rejected Him; even though He is pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities and chastened for our well-being and whipped for our healing; even though He bears our griefs and carries our sorrows, and dies for our transgressions with transgressors; even though God's plan for His life is so awful; Jesus still trusts God that if He will render Himself as a guilt offering, God will raise Him from the dead, declare all those who trust in Him to be righteous and exalt Him with the highest of honor because He bore the sin of the many and interceded on behalf of the wicked. As hard as God's plan was for His Son, Jesus trusted that plan more than any plan He might choose because He knew His Father's heart. And we are not really depending on God until we say with Jesus, "Not what I will but what You will." Why should I trust God's plan over my own? It is because God knows the future and the outcome of every decision – and I don't? Sure. Is it because God is wiser than I? Of course, but the most fundamental reason I should choose God's plan over my plan is because He loves me infinitely more than I love myself. He has loved me throughout eternity and will always love me and always wants only the best for me. How do I know that; by what He sent His Son to bear for me that I might spend eternity together with Him. Jesus fought the battle of His life at Gethsemane for me. Saving me was the most difficult thing Jesus ever had to do. Choosing to save me was the most painful decision Jesus' Father ever had to make because saving me required the sacrifice of His own Son. How could I ever doubt God's love for me? Where are you struggling with choosing God's plan over your own? Where do you fear that if I do what God wants, I will ruin my life? No matter how difficult or dark His plan looks now, that plan is only motivated by pure and perfect love for you. He is smarter than us and loves us far more than we love ourselves. We can trust Him.