

## “Waving the White Flag”

Genesis 3:1-11

Intro

So how do we start Living Inside Out? It may sound strange, but the answer lies in an action that almost everyone has a visceral reaction to: (waving the white flag).

When we see that, let alone when we do that, it represents a reality that is starkly negative. The first mention of the usage of white flags to surrender is made during the Eastern Han dynasty in China all the way back in the year 25 (that would be when Jesus was still alive just as a frame of reference) and was widely used during the Middle Ages in Western Europe to indicate the desire to surrender. People know what it means. We know what it means.

So why is that the starting place?

Because it begins to allow this internal belief, this internal faith to have the opportunity to be felt by those who are around us.

So, why this passage from Genesis?

Because this story is able to remind us what begins to happen when we don't surrender to the God of all creation. So as you hear this very familiar story ask yourselves, what did Adam and Eve surrender to? What about you? The scripture reads this way.

Genesis 3:1-11

3Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' 2The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' 4But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; 5for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' 6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. 8 They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' 10He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' 11He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?'

## Matthew 26:36-46

### Intro

Our second passage provides the contrast of what surrender to God looks like and feels like as it describes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. As always, whenever Jesus is used as an illustrative example, many of us feel like throwing up our hands and (dare I say it?!) surrender because there is no way that we can live up to his example.

I hear what you're saying.

Therefore, don't look up to Jesus example as the bar that all believers have to reach in order to be considered worthy of God's love.

Instead look at it as who you can become as you surrender to God, allowing His Spirit to work in and through you. The scripture reads this way.

Matthew 26:36-46 36 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.' 37He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. 38Then he said to them, 'I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.' 39And 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.' 40Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, 'So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? 41Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' 42Again he went away for the second time and prayed, 'My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.' 43Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. 45Then 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. 46Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.'

### 'Waving the White Flag'

Let me begin by saying that this topic is hard for me because I recognize that there are way too many occasions when what I surrender to ends up leaving things undone, feelings hurt, and a building up of a general state of overwhelm.

I know, you hear that sort of admission and wonder if anything that is said afterward will hold any merit. I believe that it does...because what we are talking about is founded upon Biblical truths.

So let's work backwards.

What do Jesus actions in the garden show us?

Well, the first thing that is readily apparent is that the burdens that were on Jesus were ridiculously heavy. 'I am grieved, even to death' and 'let this cup pass from me' are not statements of, 'I'm a little nervous about events that may or may not transpire'.

Un-un.

No, Jesus knows what is coming, certainly in regard to the personal betrayal that is about to come upon him (see this disciples who keep falling asleep and then Judas who is bringing the guard to have Jesus seized). Maybe even down to the number of lashes that he's going to receive. He knows what's coming...and as much as he is able to picture, he doesn't want to have to carry that load. 'Let this cup pass from me'.

What about you? When you have been facing a 'known' future (and I air quote it, because we are not the son of God, so until a future comes to fruition, even the firmest of certainties still have (at the very least) shadings of 'TBD': think the 'cone of uncertainty' as we have come to know it with hurricane forecasts), but when you have been facing events that if they do transpire, you want no part of, how have you dealt with them, or more appropriately said, how have you prepared for them? What have you given in to? What have you surrendered to?

Because we all surrender to something.

In preparation for this sermon I came upon the following quote by the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth. He once said, "The greatness of a man's power is in the measure of his surrender."

But what will we surrender to? Status? Superiority? Salary? Success? Smarts? Schemes? Significance?

I would venture to say that when we have prepared for, or at the very least responded to those events that we haven't wanted to face (you know, when we haven't pretended as if they are not there...because that works so well!), many of us have leaned upon these sorts of resources. In some cases, maybe surrendering to these things provided some footing.

But was the footing permanent...or temporary?

Backing up through the scripture, the Adam and Eve made a call in the garden and they surrendered to believing that if their 'eyes were opened', that they would be able to take care of themselves.

They surrendered to knowledge, or at the very least trying to put themselves on par with the One who walked with them in the Garden (and no, I'm not talking about one of the animals). And immediately they started seeing the world in a different way, in a way that had them doing what? Yes, you've got the whole fig leaf thing, but more than that, they began to hide from God.

How'd that work out? How does it work out for you when you meander, let alone hide from God? Exactly, not well.

Throughout scripture we are able to hear example after example of individuals who surrender to the things of the world (Saul, David, Peter) and what ends up transpiring is their foundations became ever more unstable.

What Jesus shows us is what can happen when we wave the white flag in a different direction. 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.' The white

flag is waved, a new type of surrender declared, but in this surrender isn't some sort of fatalistic defeat or trying to personally grasp control by using all of the worldly metrics that we may have at our discretion.

Instead, the surrender that Jesus exemplifies, says 'YES' to his heavenly Father and 'NO' to everyone and everything else. If we surrender to self instead, what we are also saying is 'No' to God, and in doing so, we deny our own humanity (because we are the creation of God, created to surrender, to say 'YES' to the Almighty). . . which is exactly what Adam and Eve did. They refused to surrender God (to depend, to trust, to count on Him), and we have been caught up in that wave ever since.

We have to pick up the white flag and start waving it toward God, surrendering who we are and what we do into His hands.

We need to surrender in regard to our relationships (Not my will, but Your will God be done: wave white flag).

We need to surrender in regard to our children (Not my will, but Your will God be done: wave white flag).

We need to surrender in regard to our finances and our occupations (Not my will, but Your will God be done: wave white flag).

We need to surrender our very being (Not my will, but Your will God be done: wave white flag).

So let's start to take an assessment. In what areas have you totally surrendered yourself to the will of God? In what areas are you holding back?

Seriously, think about it. Don't just give it the, 'what did the preacher guy ask me to do?' effort, but really let those questions sink in. Really start to unpack what is keeping you from totally surrendering and trusting God in any of these areas, start to unpack them and ask yourself, are you okay with that?

Because here's the thing (and we all know it's true): whatever rules your heart shapes your life; whatever you refuse to surrender to God ends up serving as your functional savior.

What rules your heart? What has your heart surrendered to?

Now start to recognize that when you wave the white flag and surrender your life to the lordship of the Almighty, you live for something bigger than your own life. Yes, your life is able to be blessed (that is certainly a promise that is articulated in the midst of scripture).

But not only will you be blessed, you will open yourself up to God blessing others through you. Again: look at scripture.

Yes, God is able to bless in all circumstances but when the people of God, wave the white flag and surrender to God, the power of God starts to flow outward in ways that we go, 'did that really just happen?'

When you live for the transcendent purposes of God you live a life that truly matters—not just on Sunday, but every day of the week.

A surrendered life is the fulfillment of the example of Jesus: a white flag faithfulness that may lead us through hardships (I mean Jesus in the Garden leads us right into events that all of us would avoid if we could) but when God leads us we are ultimately led toward a life that is able to thrive, a life that is able to allow God to breathe life into others. It is only through waving the white flag of surrender to God that you can truly live for your God.

We have to wave the white flag! It's going to happen no matter what: we all surrender to something. Our submission needs to be before the Lord. Not my will...but Your will be done.

So go ahead! Wave the white flag and live the life you were created by God to live.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy and gracious Lord, surrender is not one of those words that we like, especially when it is in regard to our own lives. We are taught that surrender means that we have lost. But in You, surrender is not losing: it's moving us back to who we were created to be. God, help us to reject those things that separate us from You so that we instead might surrender to Your will, which not alone allows us to be blessed, but even more so to become a blessing. Lord, let it be so. Help us to surrender to You. In Jesus' name we pray.