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A Comparative Study of The Prayer of Gethsemane

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For years scholars have observed that there are many differences and similarities between the parallel Synoptic passages in terms of content and structure. It is this writer's premise that the differences between the parallel passages (e.g. omission or addition of material; substitutions of text; differences in vocabulary) provide the key to unlocking the theological purposes of the respective gospel writers. In this article the writer examines the differences in the parallel accounts of the Prayer of Gethsemane in order to show the distinctiveness of each author's theological purpose.

Introduction

All three Synoptics contain the Prayer of Gethsemane¹ [Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46]. An initial reading of the three texts shows that Matthew and Mark are closely related in terms of content and structure. Luke, on the other hand, follows the structure of Mark and to a lesser degree Mark's vocabulary until the end of the first 'return to the sleeping disciples' and after that Luke is significantly different from Matthew and Mark in that he omits the remainder of the Gethsemane account found in Mark and Matthew. In spite of the close relationship between Matthew and Mark, there are several points of deviation. Namely, at certain points Matthew omits material included in Mark [e.g. πάντα δυνατά σοι; Mk 14:36] but in others Matthew adds material not included in Mark [e.g. εἰ οὐ δύναται τοῦτο παρελθεῖν ἐάν μη; αὐτό; πῶ, γεννηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου; Mt 26:42] yet in others Matthew makes substitutions for the Markan text [e.g. Mt 26:37 τοὺς δύο υἱοὺς Ζεβεδαίου for [τὸν

¹ The historicity of this event has been challenged. Bultmann, for example, considers this pericope as "an individual story of a thorough-going legendary character which has not survived intact in Mark" [Bultmann, *Synoptic*, 267-68]. Cranfield, however, astutely points out it is doubtful that the Early Church would create such a debilitating picture of Jesus.

Ἰάκωβον καὶ [τὸν] Ἰωάννην in Mk 14:33]. It is my thesis that these very differences are the clues to discovering the theological purposes of the respective gospel writers. Thus my intention in this paper is not to determine the underlying sources² for each of the writers³. Rather my purpose is to show that the distinct theological purpose of the respective writers of each gospel is determined through examining the differences between the texts.

Withdrawal to Gethsemane

The narrative begins with Jesus going with all the disciples⁴ to the strategic location of Gethsemane⁵, found on the Mount of Olives (εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν in Mk14:26). Only Luke says it was customary, κατὰ τὸ ἔθος, for Jesus and His disciples to retreat to Gethsemane with His disciples, probably to receive a private

² The possibilities for source are varied and include i) Mk. 14:32-42 as one complete unit upon which the Matthew and Luke depend ii) K.G. Kuhn's position of two sources combined in Mk. 14:32-42; iii) independent tradition of Luke iv) Hebrews 5:7-8 is considered to be a reference to Gethsemane and thus another early tradition upon which they are drawing v) a Johannine tradition centered around the use of "hour" (Jn. 12:27ff) and "cup" (Jn. 18:11). See Barbour, "Gethsemane" 232..

³ For an excellent overview of the Synoptic Problem and solutions see Bellenzoni, A.J. *The Two Source Hypothesis*; 3-19.

⁴ The usage of "disciples" for all three evangelists means the "eleven". None of synoptics includes Judas' previous departure at the Last Supper [c.f. John 13:30 who includes Judas leaving]. They only include his arrival at Gethsemane with the soldiers and Jewish officials.

⁵ Gethsemane is a transliteration of the Hebrew and means "oil press". This suggests that where the disciples met was an olive orchard and not the traditional idea of garden [c.f. useage of κήπος, "garden" in Jn 18:1,20; Hagner *Matthew* p.782]. For a different meaning but same idea, see Lachs, *Rabbinic* p.414 where he translates it "oil plots". Gethsemane was the site of significant events in Jesus' ministry; His triumphal entry [Mk 11:1]; His lament over; Jerusalem [Lk 19:29-44]; His teaching about the temple's doom [Mt 24:1-3; Mk 13:1-4]; His arrest [Mk 14:43] and ascension [Lk 24:50-51].

teaching [Mt 24:3] or to sleep after a day of teaching in the Temple [c.f. Lk 21:37]. Early church tradition concurs [Jn 18:2].

The traditions differ concerning “how Jesus arrives”⁶. Matthew depicts Christ leading the way and taking His disciples to be “with Him”⁷. This reflects Jesus’ hope for solidarity that His disciples will “wait and watch with Him” [Mt 26:38] but as the story sadly unfolds they fail [Mt 26:40]. This is a stark contrast to Christ’s character who, as Immanuel [‘God with us’], faithfully abides and watches over His disciples. Luke changes to the passive verb ἐπορεύθη. This may be a veiled reference to death [c.f. Lk 22:22 for the same meaning] since the real struggle takes place in Gethsemane not on the Cross. Here Jesus really dies to His will. For this reason Luke adds the angel account since Jesus needs angelic help when His friends fail Him by sleeping ‘because of grief’ (Lk 22:45). Jesus is also singled out and given centre stage to emphasise His initiative [so Marshall, Luke, 829] but more than that He becomes the paradigm of prayer particularly amidst temptation. Luke’s addition of ἠκολούθησαν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ further supports this pedagogical purpose [contra Nolland, Luke, 1083]. Mark, does not single out Jesus but has them come as a group.

Jesus commands His disciples to sit⁸ while He prays. The same rare phraseology of καθίσατε αὐτοῦ, in Matthew [Mt 26:36], for Mark’s καθίσατε ὧδε [Mk 14:32], is found in Gen 22:5. This has led Sabourin to conclude this is a “subtle pointer to Gen 22:5” [Matthew, 875], in which Abraham tells his servants to wait while he and Isaac worship and later return. According to him, “the similarity of the situations is suggestive, and their connection may have been intended: Jesus goes to his passion as Isaac to his

⁶ The verbs used are ἔρχεται μετ’ αὐτῶν, ἔρχονται and ἐπορεύθη by Matthew, Mark and Luke respectively.

⁷ This phrase is used three times in the passage, Mt 26:36,38,40.

⁸ This reference to sitting on the ground may be an Old Testament reference, to abasement or humiliation [Is. 47:1] in order to learn a lesson [Lk. 10:39] so that later they will be lifted up and receive their place of honour [Eph. 2:6, Matt. 19:28, Mk. 10:37-40].

sacrifice” [Matthew, 875]. But unlike the Abraham incident God does not hold back the knife (i.e. death) from Jesus. Stanley, an earlier proponent of this position, finds there is a connection here with the “Son of Abraham” reference in the genealogy in Mt 1:1. Jesus is the *true* Son of Abraham, not Isaac, since He is the obedient son to the father’s will and gives His life willingly. By doing so He legitimates His position as the true Son of God [c.f. Heb 5:8; 10:5-10]. Jesus, as the true Son of Abraham, would confirm Matthew’s OT fulfilment theme through typology [c.f. Mt 1:23; 2:5; 8:17; 12:17-21].

It is only Luke who tells the disciples what they are to pray while He goes off with the three disciples. The content of the prayer, Προσεύχεσθε μὴ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς πειρασμόν, is again repeated in Lk 22:46 (with a small morphological change to the verb εἰσερχομαι) and provides the outer brackets for the chiasm found in Luke’s prayer⁹. Deliverance from temptation echoes back to Jesus’ words

⁹ For further discussion see Nolland [*Luke*, 1081]. The following is my delineation of the chiasm. The natural symmetry suggests that verses 43-44 were a later addition to the original oral form. The external evidence weighs slightly in favour of their exclusion [P⁷⁵, κ^a]. The internal evidence is inconclusive, since the angel visit and agony of Christ could easily be Luke’s addition to the pericope to accentuate Christ’s struggle, who had little concern for maintaining the original structure. In fact it could be this very awkwardness which Luke used in order to highlight Christ’s struggle. Reservedly I omit the verses. Nevertheless Luke’s intention, to have Christ as the paradigm for prayer remains. The important issue is submission of the personal will to God.

prayer for deliverance from temptation [40]

movement from disciples [41a]

approach to prayer: kneeling [41b]

paradigm of prayer of submission amidst temptation [42]

approach from prayer: rising [45a]

movement toward disciples [45b]

prayer for deliverance from temptation [45c-46]

concerning prayer [11:4]. Jesus urges them to pray that prayer now in light of the impending crisis. Matthew and Mark, though omit this prayer now, do in fact pick up this same theme later in the story [Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38].

Through the common word, παραλαμβάνω, Matthew and Mark shift scenes [Mt 26:37; Mk 14:33], from Jesus with the eleven disciples to Jesus with the three disciples [Peter, James and John]. Luke omits this reference and has Jesus praying alone. There are two reasons for this omission. First, Luke wants to show his readers that temptation is often suffered alone since people will be consumed with their own grief [Lk 22:45]. Second, he shows the need to be alone in prayer because prayer is the means through which one overcomes temptation by submitting to God's will and receiving His sustaining power. But what is the significance of the inclusion of the disciples for Mark? William Lane believes they were selected because of their glibly expressed confidence to follow God¹⁰ so that Christ might show them discipleship requires steadfast, obedient dedication [Mark, 515-16]. Barbour contends that when these three are with Jesus [5:37; 9:2;13:3] there is a reference to the parousia [*Gethsemane*, 236]. There is some truth to this thesis, yet more often these references usually point to some characteristic of the Son of Man inherent in His identity; authority over the hostile force of death [5:37] or a demonstration of His power which substantiates His Messianic kingdom call [9:2]. The traditional position is that Jesus brought them for His sake because He needed their companionship. Some consider this argument specious since the disciple's inattentive presence only served to heighten Jesus' distress and loneliness. Cranfield proposes that Mark's purpose for his readers was the same as Jesus', namely, He took them along for their sake to witness and know that the Son of Man's identity can only be understood within the context of a Suffering Servant [also Mohn, *Gethsemane*, 204-205]. All the above positions have strengths. In the original Sitz im Leben, Jesus may have brought them for moral support and that may even be a

¹⁰ Note the brash statements of Peter [14:29,31] and the Sons of Zebedee [10:36-38].

secondary purpose for Mark here. But, because Mark refers to Jesus and the three disciples and he uses the καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς formula¹¹ then we can conclude Mark has a special teaching about Christ's identity or kingdom. Thus Cranfield's position has the most merit. Matthew's purpose coincides with Mark's. One difference from Mark, is Matthew's reference to the "two sons of Zebedee" as opposed to Mark's more personal "James and John". First, this is due to Matthew's consistent portrayal of Peter as the spokesperson for the group [c.f. Mt 26:40; 16:16]. Second, Matthew's intention is to provide his primarily Jewish audience information about Peter, his life and character [Mt 14:28-31; 16:17-19; 17:24-27] since he was a major personality in founding the Church [Eph 2:20].

Alone with the disciples Jesus shares His emotional struggle, which until this time He has kept under control [Carson, Matthew, 543], and a request. The exact reason for His troubled emotional state is not mentioned in the text, only the extent to which He is struggling, "unto death" [Mt 26:38]. Cullmann believes because Jesus is completely human He is afraid of death since death is the enemy of God and means to be completely forsaken by God¹². For this reason Jesus is desperately looking for companionship from God [c.f. Mt 27:46] and even the disciples [Cullmann, *Immortalité*, 26-27]. Hagner, on the other hand, believes it is because He is being faced with the reality of having to bear the sin of the world and God's wrath that He is overwhelmed with grief. In this instance it is

¹¹This formula is used when Jesus has something significant to say or to clarify some issue (1:38; 2:25; 3:4; 4:13).

¹² Cullman states "Jésus est si complètement homme qu'il partage la peur naturelle que nous inspire la mort... La mort, pour lui, n'est pas une chose divine...Jésu sait que la mort en elle-même, puis qu'elle est l'ennemie de Dieu, signifie isolement extreme, solitude radicale. Voilà pourquoi il implore Dieu. En présence de la grande ennemie de Dieu, il ne veut pas être seul...Tant qu'il est entre ses mains, il n'est plus entre les mains de Dieu, mais de l'ennemie de Dieu" [*Immortalité*, 26-29].

impossible to separate the two. In fact it is the combined effect of the two which makes the event so terrifying for Christ¹³.

Matthew substitutes *λυπεῖσθαι* for *ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι* in Mark's account. This may be intentional because he considered the more intense form found in Mark "to be inappropriate for his representation of Jesus" [so Sabourin, Matthew, 875]. More likely Matthew wanted to strengthen the connection to the cognate *Περίλυπος* in Mt 26:38 and therefore to the Ps 42:6 quotation. Mark's word, *ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι*, an intensive form of *θαμβεῖσθαι*, is exclusively Markan [9:15, 14:33, 16:5,6]. In each case it refers to a person's intense reaction to the presence of God, which is sometimes "wonder" [9:15] but elsewhere "fear or shock" [16:5,6]. It is the latter category which describes Jesus, since He has come face to face with God whose will is that He should die.

It is generally accepted by scholars that Jesus' statement to His disciples, *Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή μου ἕως θανάτου*, which is found in Matthew and Mark but omitted in Luke, comes from the OT, but where? Gundry considers it to be a conflation of Ps 42:6 [*Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή*] and Jonah 4:9 [*ἕως θανάτου*]. The latter he believes is included because of Jesus' "known interest in Jonah [Mt 12:39-41; Lk 11:29-30]" and the text's depiction of "extreme grief" [Gundry, Mark, 867]. Ps 42:6 is certainly the source due to the linguistic and thematic parallels. This Lament Psalm [c.f. 43:5] vividly reveals the human struggle of the righteous man who feels isolated and under tremendous pressure from the false accusations of unrighteous men. The Jonah background, though, is spurious. In the original context of Jonah 4:9, the phrase "*ἕως θανάτου*", shows the extent to which he is angry but also it is a sort of death wish; to paraphrase Jonah, "I'm so angry I wish I were dead". In the Gethsemane passage only the former idea is present. To paraphrase Jesus, it says "I am grieving in my soul to the point I feel like I am

¹³ Lane correctly recognizes Jesus' distress "is not an expression of fear before a dark destiny nor a shrinking from the prospect of physical suffering and death. It is, rather, horror of the one who lives wholly for the Father at the prospect of the alienation from God which entailed in the judgment upon sin which Jesus assumes" [Mark, 516].

dying” not “I am grieving so much I wish I were dead”. Clearly in this passage the converse is true. Jesus wants to live, death is His choice only because God’s will supersedes His own. Therefore it is either a creation of Mark or “merely a reflection of the OT-tinged language which Jesus used” [Moo, *Use of OT*, 241].

Before separating Himself to pray, Jesus leaves the three disciples with a twofold request, μείνῃτε ὧδε καὶ γρηγορεῖτε. The emphasis is on the latter since only this request of the two is subsequently repeated by Jesus [Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38]. Both Matthew and Mark use this word only in their respective eschatological discourses [Mk 14:34,35,37; Mt 24:42,43; 25:13] and here in the Gethsemane passage. One option is that this is simply a request “to protect Him from intrusion in His deep anguish¹⁴” [Moo, *The Use of OT*, 241]. A more likely meaning is “moral preparedness”. This is consistent with Mark and Matthew’s previous usage in the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13:34,35,37; Mt 24:42,43) and other NT writers [c.f. 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Pet 5:8]. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus calls on believers to be prepared for His return through consistently remaining steadfast in the face of temptation and trial [Mk 13:9-13]. Therefore Jesus is calling them to a life of moral preparedness, which in light of 1 Thess 5:6,8 means living a life of love, faith and hope. Their response to Jesus’ arrest and death confirms that they are not ready. In fact it is only because earlier Jesus had been watching and praying for them [Lk 22:31-32] and even now is praying for them [c.f. Jn 17] that they will one day return to God and understand who Jesus is and what is the nature of the Kingdom of God. For this reason, finding a parallel between this Passover night and the one in Ex 12:42 is legitimate. Just as “the Lord kept vigil that night to bring [Israel] out of Egypt” likewise Jesus is keeping vigil to bring them out of darkness and into the Kingdom of God [see Hagner, *Matthew*, 783].

¹⁴ Gundry spells out this thought in greater detail: in the same way they are to be alert for Jesus’ return, likewise Jesus is asking the disciples to remain awake to await Judas’ return so that Jesus can “give Himself entirely to praying through His emotional distress” [*Mark*, 854].

Jesus' Prayer

Mark¹⁵ pictures Jesus praying three times [1:35, 6:46, 14:32]. In each situation the setting is similar; He prays alone, at night time, amidst an air of demonic oppression. Each time Jesus prays alone, it marks a significant point in Jesus' ministry¹⁶, after a time of busy stressful activity or before entering another one. It seems tacitly understood that Christ is seeking the refreshing solitude and communion with His Father. Gethsemane is no exception. In the evening air, there is a surreptitious evil looming, Christ is alone preparing for the most painful moment in His life, namely His death for humankind.

The scene changes again. Jesus further separates Himself¹⁷ by walking just ahead of the three disciples, falling to the ground in order to pray. We the readers are permitted to listen into the prayer of Jesus at this most sacred moment. Both Matthew and Mark's account state the distance is μικρὸν, probably to dismiss any objection that the disciples could not have known what Jesus prayed. The fact that it was customary for Jews to pray aloud lends

¹⁵ Matthew only has a parallel to Mk 6:46 and Mk 14:32. Luke has parallels to Mk 1:35 and Mk 14:32.

¹⁶ In Mk. 1:37, Jesus prays alone after a busy schedule in Capernaum and before going on to preach in different places and meet the religious leaders' conflicts [2:1-3:6]. In 6:46, Jesus has just finished feeding the 5000 and is preparing to be recognized by the people of Gennesaret and move towards fulfilling His passion prediction [8:31].

¹⁷ Schweizer perceives this act of separation from the disciples as a symbolic act of preparation for "God's action through prayer, or preparing to defend oneself against the coming tempter" [Schweizer, Mark, 312]. Jesus is therefore seeking the nearer presence of the Father. Throughout this scene there is an air of temptation or testing which is often attributed to either the Father or Satan. Barbour wisely points out that the testing is much "too terrible" to be from the Father and does not really fit in the context of Ps. 137:23 where God tests men to determine if they are men of God ["Gethsemane", 246]. It seems the Father allows Satan, though never mentioned, to tempt Jesus to forego the cross in order to permit Jesus the opportunity to accept the Father's plan willingly by seeking the Father's counsel. Therefore, the Father is always Jesus' ally throughout this ordeal, behind the scene, hoping for Jesus' steadfast obedience as a "beloved Son".

further support. But Luke qualifies the distance separating the disciples and Jesus, as a stone's throw. This comment coupled with the Lucan verb ἀπεσπάσθη, "tear away" [Acts 20:30; 21:1] intensifies the idea of isolation in times of temptation and the human struggle involved for Jesus to leave His disciples and to cleave to God whose will is the ultimate letting go of self for others.

The posture of prayer differs in the three accounts. Mark has Jesus falling to the ground, ἐπιπτεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Gundry believes this is an act of panic [c.f. Mk 5:22; Lk 5:12; Mt 17:6; 18:26,29] which coincides with having to drink the cup [Mark, 855]. Hooker, suggests it stresses the urgency of the matter [Mark, 348]. Szarek finds a parallel to the necessity of the falling seed to die before it bears fruit [Mk 4:8] and Jesus to die to His will in order to go to the Cross, and also, the handing over of the fruit at harvest [4:29] with Jesus being handed over [for a full rebuttal see Gundry, Mark, 869]. This fanciful argument holds no weight. More likely the falling on the ground signifies for, Mark, the idea of Jesus' humble submission to the Father but for the sake of his primarily Gentile audience he omits any Jewish concepts. In contrast Matthew, who is writing to a Jewish audience, adds that Jesus ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ. This could reflect "awe" in accordance with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition [so Sabourin, Matthew, 876]. More likely it refers to humble submission, translating the Hebrew idiom ויפול אברהם על-פניו [c.f. Abraham falling prostrate before God in Gen 17:3,17]. Luke on the other hand changes Mark's rendition to "θεῖς τὰ γόνατα", a Lucan distinctive [c.f. Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5]. Instead of the typical posture of standing, it reflects the "urgency and humility" of Jesus in prayer [Marshall, Luke, 830]. The textual changes are minor but the main idea of reverent humble submission before a superior remains and thus provides a paradigm of prayer for Luke's readers.

Mark alone has the clause ἵνα εἰ δυνατόν ἐστὶν παρέλθῃ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα [Mk 14:35]. The use of ἵνα could be understood in two different ways. It could introduce the discourse, "He prayed, saying..."; or it could give the purpose of His prayer, "He prayed in order that...". The latter interpretation is the more common usage of ἵνα, and accentuates His humanity, struggle and need for help and should be accepted.

Mark uses ὥρα in two ways. First, it can refer simply to time, ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης [Mk 6:35; 11:11; 15:25]. Second, it designates a specific time or an appointed time, for example, when one is tested [Mk 13:11] or when Christ returns [13:32]. This idea is firmly rooted in the Old Testament tradition of God's sovereignty over time. Yahweh ensures everything in creation takes place at its appointed time¹⁸ [Deut 11:14 God sends the rain; Is 2:12 day for the proud; c.f. Heb 9:27]. This latter interpretation is in Mark's mind. But to what exactly does this hour refer? Because of the parallel structure between 13:35b and 13:36a, Lane equates "hour" and "cup"¹⁹. According to him "both are metaphors for the passion in its deeper redemptive significance" [Lane, Mark, 517]. Gundry on the other hand perceives a distinction between the two [also Barbour, *Gethsemane*, 232-33] which mark the progression from "betrayal" [i.e. hour] to "death" [i.e. cup]. Lane is closer to the mark since "hour" refers to the whole Passion event, which begins with His arrest [14:41] and ends with His death. The "cup" functions to interpret these events. Though Matthew does not use "hour" at this point of the story, he does refer to "the hour" later in Mt 26:45, in which Jesus says "the hour is near". For Matthew, then, the hour does not begin at Jesus' arrest because at the arrest Jesus says "the hour is near" but "not here". "The hour" then is still to come. Therefore unlike Mark, who considers "the hour" to begin with His arrest, Matthew considers "the hour" to refer specifically to His death on the Cross.

The plea "to take away the cup" is found in the three accounts, though in somewhat varied forms. Each account starts with a reference to Father, a term of endearment, which is magnified with

¹⁸ For a fuller discussion see ed. Brown, Colin *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 p.848.

¹⁹ Kuhn's distinguishes between two sources. Source A [14:32,35,40,41] refers to the "hour". Source B [34,36-38, vs.39 is an editorial addition] speaks about the "cup". Source A, he perceives to be Christological and eschatological because of its emphasis on the hour and the betrayal unto sinners. Source B, on the other hand, has a "paranetic" focus. I am indebted to him for recognizing the parallelism and themes but his reconstruction is stretched [Lane, Mark, 517].

Mark's use of *Abba*²⁰. The phrase πάντα δυνατά σοι, omitted in Matthew and Luke, is a recognition of God's authority and power [9:23, 10:27] before making His request παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ. Söding is correct when he recognises that this couplet in Mark, provides the basis by which Jesus can make His request to take the cup away²¹. In Mark and Luke²², the imperative [2nd person singular] is addressed to the Father directly creating a sense of urgency and desperateness. In contrast, Matthew uses an imperative [3rd person singular with τὸ ποτήριον the subject] to reduce the harshness of Mark's command to an entreaty. Matthew may have lessened the harshness of Mark's text for the sake of his Jewish audience who would most likely take offence at God being commanded.

What is the meaning of "the cup"? According to Sabourin, the "cup" here refers to Jesus' death as determined by God [Sabourin, Matthew, 748] or "the cross" [so Gundry, Mark, 869]. He believes at the time of Jesus the "cup of death" saying found in the Palestinian Targum [Gen 40:23; Deut 32:1] would have been known [c.f. Martyrdom of Isaiah 5.2 and Martyrdom of Polycarp 14.2 though later]. Furthermore in Mk 10:38, Jesus asks James and John if they can "drink the cup which He will drink?". They say they are

²⁰ *Abba* comes from the Aramaic root אבא. There is no precedent for calling God, "Abba" in Judaism. The closest parallel is Ps 89:27 and the Targum of Mal 2:10. According to Jeremias, this word lies behind every instance of Father uttered in Jesus' prayers [Theology, 65]. This demonstrates Jesus' special relationship with the Father [n.b. "my Father"] and obliterates the commonly held Jewish conception of a transcendent God [Eccl 5:1]. It implies the new manner in which all people in Christ will be able to address God.

²¹ "Abba-Anrede und Allmachts-Bekennntnis begründen die Bitte Jesu: παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ [Söding, "Gebet", 89].

²² In some early manuscripts, the imperative in Lk. 22:42 is exchanged for an infinitive. The text would read "are you willing to remove this cup from me? [so Grundmann] or "if you are willing to remove this cup from me, well and good" [so Marshall, *Luke*, 831] and therefore increases the sense of resignation to the will of God. The external evidence for the infinitival text is weaker than the imperatival text, whether παρένεγκε [κ] or παρένεγκεῖν [A,W,Ψ]. But the internal evidence favours the infinitival reading because it is the harder reading.

able and Jesus predicts they will. Thus the meanings for “cup”, namely death, must be the same for both Jesus and James and John. In fact this is true. The “cup” for James was death through beheading [Acts 12:2]. But for John, his “cup” was his exile to death on the island of Patmos. Therefore under Sabourin’s position, the “cup” cannot refer to God’s judgment and wrath because that would be assigning to James and John vicarious suffering which clearly their cup does not include. Carson does not aver their position because “the frequent allusions in the passion narrative demand an OT meaning for τὸ ποτήριον” [Matthew, 544; Söding, *Gebet*, 89]. By far the most frequent meaning of this term in the OT is God’s judgment and wrath [Ps 11:6; 75:7-8; Is 51:17]. Therefore the cup here refers to the judgment and wrath of God on humanity which Christ must suffer vicariously for others. But can one apply this meaning to the “cup” which James and John are to drink? Clearly one cannot since their deaths do not effect salvation from sin. Lane has the final word on this issue, because he, rightly, sees that both ideas are present [also Söding, *Gebet*, 89]. On one hand Jesus, James and John share the same cup of suffering²³, which results in death for being obedient to God’s calling. But on the other hand Jesus’ cup is unique because His cup includes bearing the judgment and wrath of God. This idea is parallel to Mk 10:45. Both Jesus and the disciples are called to serve obediently, even unto death, but only Jesus’ service includes giving His life as a ransom and bearing the wrath of God for all human sin.

All three accounts retain a qualifying statement to the entreaty [Mk 14:36c; Mt 26:39c; Lk 22:42b] conveying the meaning “not my will but your will”. Mark juxtaposes ἐγώ and σύ to emphasise the disparity between what (literally “what thing”, note the use of the neuter demonstrative pronoun τί) the human will wants and the divine will wants. This coincides directly with the contrast later in Mk 14:38 between the flesh and the Spirit. Matthew imports ὡς into the text, from Mt 6:10 in order to contrast the heavenly will [drink the cup] and earthly will [avoid the cup]. Luke follows Matthew’s example using the Lord’s prayer [θέλῃμά...τὸ σὸν

²³ Söding calls this the “Leidensbecher des Martyriums” [“Gebet”, 89].

γινέσθω; c.f. Mt 6:10] but substitutes τὸ θέλημα for θέλω. What is clear in all three accounts is Jesus' resolution that the will of the Father supersedes the human will whatever the cost.

One major difficulty in this passage is the seeming confusion surrounding the use of the first class condition “εἰ δυνατόν²⁴“. At first glance, it suggests that Jesus can avoid His imminent death and that God can bring in the Kingdom by another means, without Jesus' death [Barbour, *Gethsemane*, 233]. Part of this confusion is due to scholars who have incorrectly called the first class condition, the “condition of fact”, since it was believed that the protasis was true and therefore the sentence could be translated “since [this is true]...then...” Examples exist in the NT which support this hypothesis (Mk 4:23; Jn 11:12). But there are several examples which do not support this hypothesis (Mt 12:27; Jn 10:37), including this one. The purpose of the protasis of the first class condition is to put forward an idea, true or untrue, for consideration followed by the apodosis which gives the resultant action or idea which derives from the fulfilment of the protasis. Jesus, then, through His prayer, is putting forth an idea for consideration, namely, “not to drink the cup”. In fact, the truth of the protasis in a first class condition is determined from the context, not the grammatical construction itself. Therefore, it is only possible to determine if the protasis, “if it is possible (to let this cup pass)”, is true through looking at the context. In the Matthean account, Jesus repeats the conditional statement, once in the positive, “if it is possible...” (Mt 26:39) and once in the negative, “if it is not possible unless I drink the cup...” (Mt 26:42). By doing this Matthew is allowing the reader into Jesus' internal world as Christ processes whether it is indeed possible that the cup may pass. In the positive conditional statement, Jesus examines the possibility of not drinking the cup and avoiding death and God's righteous wrath. But in the negative conditional statement, Jesus has resigned Himself to the Father's will, which is drinking the cup because the cup cannot pass

²⁴ Luke substitutes εἰ βούλει for εἰ δυνατόν in order to emphasize resignation to the will of God. Luke shows less interest and concern whether something is possible for God [and thus prayer bargaining] but more concern if the “will” will submit.

unless He drinks it. By working through the process, Jesus has resigned Himself to the Father's will, which includes drinking the cup and the conclusion that it is not possible for Him to let the cup pass. It is obvious that Jesus could indeed let the cup pass and not proceed with His death; so in this sense it is possible that the cup may pass. But Jesus cannot let the cup pass if indeed He wants to fulfill His calling, given at His birth; "[to] save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). In the Marcan account (Mk 14:35-36), the statement "all things are possible for you", is added to the conditional statement, "if it is possible...". In so doing, Mark is emphasising the omnipotence of God. But the addition of this phrase also serves to heighten the tension. On the one hand Mark is saying that God is able to do all things but on the other hand is He able to forgive sins without the death of His Son? Jesus tests this idea by asking the Father to take this cup from Him but with one qualification, to do so must be in accordance with the Father's will (Mk 14:36b *ἀλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σύ*). Mark says Jesus repeated this prayer again (Mk 14:39). The twofold repetition of this prayer functions like Jesus' profession of faith, namely that Jesus has firmly established in His mind that the Father's will is His first priority.

Scholars have tried to determine the motive behind Jesus' statement "εἰ δυνατόν". Lane suggests that Jesus thought, on the basis of Is 51:17-23, that He, like the Israelites, might be spared God's wrath without suffering. Carson believed that this statement may have been "self confessed ignorance" of the same order as Mt 24:36 [Carson, Matthew, 544]. This position seems unlikely since in the threefold passion prediction Jesus does not appear to be ignorant about His need to die rather quite the contrary, He seems clearly aware that He must die²⁵. Blaising believes that Jesus utters these words not because Jesus is afraid to drink the cup, but because He is afraid that He will continue to experience the wrath of God after His death [Gundry, Mark, 870]. Actually the converse is true. Jesus is afraid of the experience of death but He is not afraid that He will

²⁵In these predictions, Jesus speaks of the necessity, inevitability and inescapability of His death [Mk 8:31]. For a fuller explanation of this issue see Vanhoye, Albert "L'angoisse du Christ", p. 382.

continue to experience the wrath of God after His death since in His passion predictions He states that He will be raised. Christ's resurrection is His guarantee that He has finished drinking the wrath of God and that He has been vindicated and reinstated to His former Glory. Therefore there is a need for a better way to explain the motive behind Jesus' statement "εἰ δυνατόν". Since Jesus is fully human and fully God, there is a natural tension within His being. Therefore in His Deity, He knows that it is not possible for Him to avoid the cup since it is the only way to fulfil the Father's will; to save people from their sins. But in His humanity, He is confronted with the horror of death. Though He is life itself (Jn 14:6) He was now to experience something totally antithetical to His being. His human nature led Him to consider the possibility of another way of fulfilling His calling. But through prayer He concluded that there was no other way but to follow the will of God. Therefore Jesus could come to the decision that though "all things are possible for God" [Mt 19:26] in that He is omnipotent, "not all things are possible for God" when they contradict His will or nature. Therefore if Jesus avoided the Cross it would contradict the Father's will and righteous nature²⁶.

Luke 22:43-44 has no parallel in Matthew and Mark. It is not without its problems because strong external evidence [P^{69,75}, K^a] calls for its exclusion. The internal evidence is inconclusive [see note #9]. The purpose of these two verses is twofold; first to describe the intensity of His struggle through presentation of His posture, ἐκτενέστερον²⁷, and His emotional state, γνόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ and ἐγένετο ὁ ἰδρῶς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ θρόμβοι αἵματος καταβαίνοντος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν; second, to describe the purpose of prayer, as the means to receive strength in order to embrace God's will. Since Luke is more interested in the theme of prayer and presenting Jesus as the paradigm for prayer, than he is the disciple's

²⁶ John later chooses to resolve this tension, by emphasizing the inevitability of His suffering [Jn 12:27; "Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I came to this hour" [see Hooker, *Message*, 99].

²⁷The literal meaning of ἐκτενέστερον, "more stretched out" is preferable to the metaphorical meaning, "more earnestly".

failure, Luke limits to one the number of times Jesus prays and return to the disciples.

Jesus Returns to the Sleeping Disciples

When Jesus returns from His first prayer he finds the disciples sleeping and thus failing to heed His command to watch. Jesus addresses Peter specifically [except in Luke] concerning his powerlessness, to remain alert for even one hour. “Hour” may be taken literally here or at least the short time in which Jesus was alone praying. Matthew tones down Jesus’ rebuke of Peter in Mark, by omitting the question Σίμων, καθεύδεις, by excluding the name Σίμων which is a reference to the Old Peter and by asking the question οὐκ ἰσχύσατε μίαν ὥραν γρηγορῆσαι in the second person plural. This was done firstly because Matthew was a disciple and thus empathises with Peter and secondly because Matthew does not have the same purpose as Mark does for the disciples. Mark consistently shows the failure of the disciples to understand who Jesus is, because he wants to show his readers that Jesus can only be understood in terms of a Suffering Servant.

In Matthew and Mark (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38), Jesus links προσεύχεσθε with γρηγορεῖτε which suggests the emphasis is shifting from watching with Jesus (Matthew adds μετ’ ἐμου, in Mt 26:40 to emphasise this) to the disciples’ need to be prepared for the future temptation by praying for themselves. The reason for Jesus’ twofold command “to watch and pray” is that the “spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”. But what do these authors mean by spirit and flesh? Lane believes this refers to the Holy Spirit in its power [so Schweizer, Mark, 314] in contrast to human weakness. The unusual phrase, πνεῦμα πρόθυμον, according to Lane, has its background in Ps. 51:12 where he equates it with רוח נדיבה [MT Ps. 51:14; in the LXX Ps. 52:12 ἡγεμονικὸς πνεῦμα]. Therefore spiritual alertness is only possible through full dependence upon God through the HS. Hill believes Mark’s understanding of pneuma is psychological and thus refers to the human spirit [Mk. 2:8; 8:12]. Flesh does not refer to “life in opposition to God and the Spirit but to the frailty of the body” [Hill, Greek Words, 242]. The

former position is considered to import Paul's theology into Mark's. Also Hill does not think the parallelism to the HS is that clear. He believes the "willing spirit is closer in meaning to the experience of joy in God's salvation and connotes a human spirit responsive to God and capable of meeting the demands of the new situation [therefore] the logic of the narrative requires that the distinctive between spirit and flesh be understood, not in terms of the difference between God and man but between the will of man and his physical weakness" [Hill, *Greek Words*, 243]. Lane's argument has greater weight since the context stresses the need to align oneself with the will of God, which is only possible by having the Spirit of God [c.f. 1 Cor 2:10-16] and because Jesus' example of being tempted to let the cup pass demonstrated the tension between the human will and the will of God.

The Disciples' Failure

In the previous section we learned that in Mark the disciples were unable to remain awake because of their human frailty, whereas in Luke the disciples are exonerated from their weakness by Luke attributing their sleep to grief. Usually one thinks of lying awake from grief (Ps. 6:6), though in light of Jn. 16:6, 20-22, Mk. 14:19 Luke may be giving a fair representation of the actual events. The NEB translation of Lk. 22:45, "worn out by grief" reflects the nuance well.

After a brief mention of Jesus' second prayer (14:39), Mark states three important facts in 14:40; the state (i.e. sleeping) in which Jesus finds the disciples, the reason for their sleeping and their inability to respond [14:40c]. Clearly, for Mark, there has been a shift of emphasis from Jesus' prayer to the disciples' failure to remain alert. Mark uses a γάρ clause, to state the reason for their failure to remain awake; ἦσαν γὰρ αὐτῶν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ καταβαρυνόμενοι²⁸. Through this clause, Mark alludes to the

²⁸ καταβαρυνόμενοι is an intensive form of βαρέω which means "to weigh down" or "to be heavy".

disciples' human frailty and their spiritual blindness in Christ's hour of need, seemingly unable to perceive the gravity and significance of the situation. Therefore, as Kelber notes, Mark is less concerned with "the disciples" being overcome with sleep but rather their metaphysical blindness." [Kelber, *Gethsemane*, 179]. The disciples' failure to recognise or understand the significance of the hour is reminiscent of their ignorance of the transfiguration and for this reason Mark uses a clause which is very similar to the clause found in Mark 9:6, οὐκ γὰρ ᾔδει τί ἀποκριθῆ. Therefore, in Mark, the second prayer emphasises the failure of the disciples to recognise the Christological significance of this event (c.f. Mk 14:41).

Matthew's emphasis is somewhat different. Firstly, he maintains the structure of the first prayer; the address to the Father, conditional clause and qualifying clause γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου. The style and language of the prayer is again reminiscent of his Lord's prayer in Mt. 6:9-13. He emphasises the return of Jesus, πάλιν ἐκ δευτέρου, as a reminder to his readers that Jesus cares and thus returns to care for His flock. Again, the content of the prayer refers to the τὸ ποτήριον. Through the use of the conditional phrase ἐὰν μὴ αὐτὸ πῖω, Matthew shows the reader that God's will can only be accomplished if He drinks the cup. Jesus submits to His Father's plan willingly. Matthew also makes reference to the "heavy eyes" of the disciples though he lessens the intensity of Mark's word, from καταβαρυνόμενοι to βεβαρημένοι. It appears there is not the shift in emphasis as in Mark mainly because Matthew is more interested in showing his readers how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures by aligning His will with the Father's than showing the disciples' failure to recognise the Christological significance of the event.

Mark 14:41 records Jesus' third return to the disciples. This time Mark makes no mention of Jesus' prayer and only includes a reference to the disciples sleeping, thus drawing attention to the failure of the disciples to stay awake. Jesus' return marks the end of the threefold prayer and return to the failure of the disciples to stay awake. It is possible that Mark is recording the historical event which included the threefold prayer and return. But it is possible that the singular prayer/return motif of Luke has been expanded to

three. Scholars have differed in their understanding of the background of the threefold prayer/return motif. It is possible that it could be based on the Jewish tradition that a man in distress customarily prayed three times [Dan 6:10,13; 2 Cor 12:8; Schweizer, Mark, 310]. The problem with this position is that it does not take into consideration the threefold return only the threefold prayer. It is more likely that the threefold prayer and return to sleeping disciples is used to balance the threefold call “to stay awake” at the end of the Olivet Discourse in Mark [14:33-37]. In Mk 14:33-37, Jesus exhorts the three disciples (and Andrew) to stay awake until the Lord returns. Thus thematically Mk 13:33-37 and Mk 14:32-42 are similar in that the disciples are to stay awake until the Lord returns from each time of prayer but ultimately at His parousia. Linguistically, the parallels between the passages are evident as seen in the overlap of language [e.g. ἔρχομαι, εὕρισκω, καθεύδω, γρηγορέω].

The sentence Καθεύετε [τὸ λοιπὸν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθε has various interpretations. Cranfield in his commentary, outlines three possibilities a) an ironical command or rebuke: to continue to sleep since Jesus does not perceive the need for them to remain awake with Him anymore; b) a serious command: to sleep in order to remain protected since He sees Judas and His betrayers approaching; c) an interrogative: are you still sleeping?” To Cranfield’s list can be added Moule’s translation “all that is left to do is sleep” [Idiom, 161] and Blass and Debrunner’s idea that it is as an exclamatory statement; “So you are still sleeping and taking rest” [Greek Grammar, §451.6]. Within its context, it is most appropriate to take it as an interrogative since it heightens the intensity of the contrast between staying awake [and praying] and sleeping.

Scholars have struggled to ascertain the exact meaning of ἀπέχει in Mk 14:41. Matthew avoids this difficulty by omitting ἀπέχει from his text. Determining the meaning of ἀπέχει in Mark’s account is complicated by the fact there is no subject given, the verb stands alone. Some later copyists noticed this and amended the text by adding τὸ τέλος. But the variant, ἀπέχει τὸ τέλος, must be rejected on grounds of the external evidence [the date and character of the manuscript evidence is poor] and the internal evidence [shorter

more difficult reading plus the variant appears to be a Western/Caesarean gloss based on Lk. 22:37]. ἀπέχει can be used in an impersonal or a personal sense. J. deZwaan [*Text*] rejects the use of ἀπέχει in the impersonal sense and thus disagrees with the translations “it is sufficient” [referring to disciples’ sleeping] or “it is finished” [referring to Judas’ act of taking Jesus] or “it is paid up” [the bribe money has been paid to Judas]. de Zwaan is correct to reject these translations since no translation reflects the most common meaning of ἀπέχει, “to receive a sum in full” (BAGD, 84) and no translation takes into consideration the context, which has Judas entering into the scene. Therefore, the personal usage of ἀπέχει is appropriate. G.H. Boobyer [*Text*, 44-48] states that ἀπέχει is an asyndeton which serves to contrast the behaviour of the disciples sleeping on the one hand and Judas the betrayer on the other. His translation is therefore “You are still sleeping”. He [Judas] is taking possession of [me]! Boobyer is correct on two accounts; first he recognises that the context requires that Judas become the subject of ἀπέχει and second he astutely points out that ἀπέχει serves to contrast the disciples and Judas. But Boobyer misses the mark when he translates ἀπέχει, as “he is taking possession of me”. Boobyer is mistaken, since ἀπέχει does not mean “to take” but “to receive”. Furthermore, at this point in the story, Judas is not taking possession of Jesus since Judas is still a distance away; Judas is near and can be seen by Jesus but he is not there yet (see Mk 14:42; ὁ παραδιδούς με ἤγγικεν). Thus J. deZwaan [*Text*, 459-72] is correct to say that ἀπέχει refers to Judas’ action of receiving the bribe. His translation, with which I agree, is “he has received (it)”. This best fits the immediate context and fulfils Jesus’ betrayal-prediction (Mk 10:33).

The hour referred to in Mk 14:35 has now arrived in Mk 14:41 and His three passion predictions (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34) are coming to fruition. Mark by using ἰδοῦ (Mk 14:41) draws attention to the fulfilment of a promise, in order to introduce the Son of Man’s betrayal. In essence, the Father is handing the Son over to Satan’s sphere of power and death (n.b. the divine passive of παραδίδωμι). Christ is to be tried and killed by Satan’s agents (c.f. 1 Cor 2:6-7), “sinners” in much the same way John the Baptist was handed over and killed by “sinners” [1:14]. “Being handed over to authorities” is a theme which Mark has mentioned before (13:9). Indirectly

Mark is alerting his readers to the fact that just as Jesus was handed over to the authorities, they too may be handed over. Mark's insertion of the Messianic title ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, serves a Christological purpose, to conjoin His identity with His destiny, which the disciples have failed to see and hopefully Mark's readers will not miss. Matthew's clause, ἤγγικεν ἡ ὥρα, and Mark's clause, ὁ παραδιδούς με ἤγγικεν, emphasise the temporal and personal element of Jesus' betrayal respectively. Time is important to Matthew since the arrival of this hour also means that the OT prophecies are now being fulfilled [Mt 26:56]. For Mark it makes the reality of persecution very real and the essence of Christ's identity clear.

Exhortation to Face Trials

The text of Mark and Matthew are the same in this final exhortation (Mt 26:46; Mk 14:42) in which Jesus tells His disciples "to rise and go". In Mk 14:41, Jesus proclaims that "The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" but in Mk 14:42, Jesus exhorts "let us go". Mark has changed from the third person [14:41] to the first person. The effect of this is that Jesus is not portrayed not so much as being betrayed as much as He is choosing to face God's will unwaveringly, regardless of the cost. The use of the hortatory subjunctive denotes it is a call for all Christians to face the battle in the same way. Therefore story ends on a note of enthusiasm for his readers to rise [possibly "wake up!"] and face their betrayer with confidence since Christ did. Cranfield astutely notes that there is underlying typological contrast between Adam and Christ. Adam, while in the Garden of Eden, rebelled against God and brought death [Gen. 3:1-19; betrayer] but Christ, while in the Garden of Gethsemane, obeyed God and brought life and thus reversed the effects of the former rebellion.

Conclusion

Through this critical study it has been shown that the distinctiveness in authorial purpose in the three synoptic accounts is clearly

identified through examining the textual differences. Mark consistently portrayed the disciples in a poor light, as those who regularly missed recognising Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah (Mk 1:1). Furthermore he demonstrates the necessity of Jesus to suffer in order to be true to His essential nature as the Suffering Servant and in order for one to understand His identity as the Son of God and the Christ. In doing this, Mark also shows that Jesus is the paradigm for Mark's readers to follow when faced with tribulation. Matthew, borrowing from Mark, generally tones down the Marcan account. His concern, in writing to a predominately Jewish audience, is to show Christ as the fulfilment of the OT prophecies [Immanuel, the cup bearer], to highlight the role of Peter in the Church and hopefully to lessen the Jews' obduracy to the gospel. Finally, Luke uses this pericope as a model for prayer so that his readers will be prepared to face the temptations ahead of them, their cross or betrayer.

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