

Sunday, November 24, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 13 | Luke 22:39-46 | “The Plea in Gethsemane”

Last week, we talked about how Jesus \*\*\*seemingly\*\*\* admonished his disciples to take their “moneybag,” bring their “knapsack,” and buy a “sword.” But as we learned, these instructions were not literal commandments. The Lord used physical objects to illustrate a critical principle: times were changing. His followers ought to be prepared to be **opposed** and **vilified**. The world is hostile to Christianity, and Christians ought to be ready with **arguments** informed by God’s word and not with **armaments** supplied by weapons dealers. Ultimately, this revelation should not discourage us. For, as we know, **the condemnation of the world is the commendation of God**. The hatred of the world means we are basking in the light of God’s love.

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**READ:** Luke 22:39-46 (ESV)

<sup>39</sup> And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> And when he came to the place, he said to them, “**Pray** that you may not enter into temptation.” <sup>41</sup> And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and **prayed**, <sup>42</sup> saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” <sup>43</sup> And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. <sup>44</sup> And being in agony he **prayed** more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. <sup>45</sup> And when he rose from **prayer**, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and **pray** that you may not enter into temptation.”

Though no Christian would deny the *importance* of prayer, many of us do not *prioritize* it. Isn’t that strange? If you were told that God would meet you every day at 3pm, would you not make that a standing appointment? Imagine it. You could talk to Him about all the troubles you’re having or the fears you’re experiencing. Better yet, you could ask for advice, trolling the depths of his boundless wisdom. What sane person would miss such an opportunity?

As you know, prayer actually works better than that. We don’t have to wait for God’s secretary to pencil us in. We could pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Thess. 5:17), carrying on a never-ending conversation with him. But, as F.B. Meyer put it, “The great tragedy of life is not *unanswered* prayer but *unoffered* prayer.”

Moreover, we don't have to wonder if God is too busy for us. C.S. Lewis said, "You are as much alone with Him as if you were the only being He had ever created." Like some heir to a kingdom, we can come *boldly* into heaven's throne room whenever we want (cf. Heb. 4:12). But so few of us regularly utilize that privilege.

As we'll see, Jesus spent his last few moments of freedom in prayer, preparing for what's ahead. This ought to tell us how *important* prayer is. He could've done anything and the Son of God chose to pray.

### **For further study:**

#### **"How to Pray" handout**

**Beginner** | *What If I Don't Desire to Pray?* By John Onwuchekwa

**Intermediate** | *Pray Big: Learn to Pray Like an Apostle* by Alistair Begg

**Advanced** | *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Tim Keller

This passage teaches us **three** lessons about prayer:

#### i. Vs. 39-40 – Prayer **cripples** our temptations.

Luke tells us it was his "**custom**" to come to the Mount of Olives each night (cf. 21:37). This is a reference to their camp site and demonstrates that Jesus wasn't hiding from Judas.<sup>1</sup> The betrayer would've known exactly where to find his former teacher.

Jesus instructed the disciples to "**pray that you may not enter into temptation.**" This is a call back to vs. 28-38, where the Lord explicitly told them that trouble was coming. It is also a call back to 21:36, "**But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.**"

Before I tell you what Jesus meant, I must first tell you what he ***didn't*** mean:

**First, Jesus was *not* saying we will *never* be tempted.** To say otherwise is to preach a wealth and prosperity Gospel. It would propose that, so long as you believe *hard enough* and pray *long enough*, you'll *never* experience any temptation again. A brief survey of the Bible shows that it is often the *most* righteous people, the most prayerful and faithful, who become the targets of temptation (e.g., Jesus; Daniel). Also, Jesus himself said in Matt. 18:7, "**Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is *inevitable* that stumbling blocks [offenses, temptations, enticements to sin] come; but woe to that**

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 644.

man through whom the stumbling block comes!” The world is an endless revolving door of invitations to sin. Do not deceive yourself; temptations are unavoidable.

Second, Jesus did **not** guarantee that our prayers would be answered. All mature Christians know that just because you pray for something doesn't mean you'll get it. To think that prayer is simply a means to get what you want reveals one's spiritual immaturity. Jesus' prayer in this very passage is illustrative of that very principle. But do not let this discourage you. The temptations of the world **coincide** with the testing of God (cf. Job 1). The same struggle that **entices** you to quit is also the same exercise that can **cultivate** perseverance (cf. Ja. 1:2-4). The same situation that **shakes** your faith is also the same instrument that can **strengthen** your faith (cf. Matt. 14:22-33). The same lure that tries to lead you **away from God** is the same catalyst that can lead you **closer to God** (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22).

So, if temptations are unavoidable, why even pray at all? Why would Jesus admonish us to pray that temptations pass us by when he knew that, sooner or later, we'd be tempted? **Because praying *not* to enter temptation keeps us *from* falling into temptation.**<sup>2</sup> In other words, **those who do not pray regularly to avoid sin become easy targets for sin.** If I tell you you'll be attacked sometime today, you'll likely be ready for your attacker; you'll be on the lookout so you won't be caught off guard. This same applies to temptation except rather than looking with our eyes, we're praying.

**READ:** James 1:13-15 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> Let no one say when [not if] he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

All temptation is, first and foremost, an inside job. If the devil made you do it, it is only because you first invited him in (cf. Lu. 22:3-6; Jn. 12:6). **Prayer is the *means* by which we do not fall prey to temptation, even when we are tempted; it keeps our desires in check.** Those who pray regularly to avoid temptation will be less prone to fall into temptation because they've prayerfully prepared for its arrival. This is **not** to say we will never fail (cf. Rom. 7:15-20), but it is to say that our failures will be mitigated and sometimes nonexistent if we pray, especially when compared to those who do not pray at all. Had the disciples prayed and not fallen asleep,

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<sup>2</sup> Bock (1996), p. 1757, "The way to faithfulness is the midst of hostile rejection of Christ is a dependent spirit that communes with God."

how differently would they've responded when Jesus was arrested? Would Peter have pulled a sword? Would the apostles have deserted the Lord? **Temptation finds fertile soil in a prayerless heart, whereas it finds a veritable fortress in a prayerful heart (cf. Dan. 6).**

ii. **Vs. 41-42 – Prayer adjusts our will to God's.**

Luke tells us that Jesus “**withdrew from [the apostles] about a stone's throw.**” This means he was far enough away to get some privacy but not so far away that the disciples couldn't hear him. One wonders if, had the apostles not fallen asleep, they might've heard more than what they did.

We're then told he “**knelt down and prayed.**” On the one hand, we mustn't emphasize the posture of prayer to such an extent that we think the Lord will be more inclined to hear our prayers if we're kneeling, but, on the other hand, we do ourselves a disservice if we discount the practice entirely. As I see it, **kneling in prayer has at least two benefits: it mitigates distractions (cf. Lu. 5:16) and expresses worship (cf. Psa. 95:6-7).**

Luke recorded Jesus' prayer: “**Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.**”<sup>3</sup> I want to notice three things about this prayer:

1. **Jesus' will was distinct from God's will.**

I cannot explain this. If I fully understood the mysteries of the incarnation, I'd explain it to you. But, as it is, such insight is beyond me. As God, Jesus was committed to the cross, but as a man, he did not want to go to the cross. This is one of the best passages that illustrate Jesus' humanity.

2. **Jesus' will was distinct from God's will because it was God's will that Jesus drink from the “cup” of God's wrath.**

In the O.T., a “cup” is used as a metaphor to describe how God conveys blessings (cf. Psa. 23:5; 1 Cor. 10:16-17) and cursing (cf. Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:25, 17, 28; Rev. 14:10). **In other words, God actively doles out rewards and retribution and a “cup” is a handy rhetorical device to express this idea.** To say that Jesus took this cup is to say that Jesus took the penalty for our sins. As the Beloved Disciple put it, the Lord is “**the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world**” (1 Jn. 2:2). He took the cup so that we didn't have to. **At times, prayer is struggling to come to grips with God's will.** If this was true for the Son of God, it is even more so with us.

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<sup>3</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 645, “This prayer, atomic in compactness, is quintessentially Jesus, quintessentially Jewish, and quintessentially human.”

### An aside on God's wrath:

God is love; this is true (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8, 16). But you cannot fully appreciate God's limitless love until you understand God's righteous anger. **These two things are not contradictory but complimentary.** They are both a part of God's holy character. So much so that the "cup" of God's wrath so troubled the Son's mind that he asked for an escape, it so shook the Lord's heart that he was put in a state of agony, and it so unsettled the Messiah's body that he perspired profusely, like blood from an open wound.

John the Baptist implored his audience to "flee from the wrath to come" by bearing "fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:7-8). Paul tells Christians living in Rome, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18).

### READ: John 3:16, 36 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> For God so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

<sup>36</sup> He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the **wrath** of God **abides** on him."

**God is as much full of wrath as he is love.** We need only look to the cross to see not only God's love but also his wrath on full display. And all that is left for those who reject God's absolution is his retribution. **To turn away from God's love that leads to life is to turn into God's wrath that leads to death** (cf. Heb. 10:26-31).

3. Jesus' will was distinct from God's will because it was God's will that Jesus drink from the "cup" of God's wrath, **yet despite this, Jesus submitted his will to God's will.**

Though Jesus' humanity did not want to accept the cup of God's wrath, he accepted it anyway. Prayer helps us accept an unpleasant outcome if it is God's will; it reconciles our will with God's will. Here is a sobering truth: **suffering is inevitable.** Paul told Timothy, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). **Sometimes, the valley of suffering is exactly where God wants you to be.**

### READ: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but **not** crushed; perplexed, but **not** driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but **not** forsaken; struck

down, but **not** destroyed;<sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Jesus did want to suffer God's wrath, but did so any ways, because he knew it was his Father's will. It is one thing to suffer because you've made a mistake. It is another thing to suffer innocently. Only by prayer can we reconcile/adjust our will to God's will for our life, even if that means accepting pain, sorrow, and heartache.

iii. Vs. 43-46 – Prayer **strengthens** our resolve.

Luke tells us that as Jesus was praying, “there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him” (cf. Dan. 10:18). But surprisingly, rather than being told that the Lord felt better or was given an avenue of escape, Jesus' “agony” did not leave him and “he prayed more earnestly.” And though it was cold, Dr. Luke tells us that the Lord prayed so “earnestly” that “his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” Though it is possible that Jesus **literally** perspired blood, a condition called *hematidrosis*, the use of the word “like” makes this statement a **simile**. Like blood flowing from an open wound, the Lord was so disturbed that he was drenched in sweat. This, I might add, despite the cold (cf. Jn. 18:18).

Unlike before, when angels ministered to Jesus **after** his temptation in the wilderness, here, they come **before** his trial and crucifixion to “steel him for the battle.”<sup>4</sup> And, as Edwards aptly points out, “The most intense description of Jesus' suffering in the Gospels occurs not at Golgotha but at Gethsemane, in his decision to submit to the Father's redemptive will. **On the Mount of Olives, Jesus' soul is crucified; on the Mount of Calvary, his body is surrendered.**”<sup>5</sup>

Prayer is the means by which we can endure hardship. Sometimes, God rescues us from trial and temptation, giving us a way of escape (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). But, as we discussed, sometimes

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<sup>4</sup> Garland (2011), p. 883.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards (2015), p. 647.

trial and temptation are unavoidable. What then? Pray. Pray before temptation. Pray during temptation. Pray after temptation. "Pray without ceasing" (cf. 1 Thess. 5:17).

**READ:** Ephesians 6:17-18 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. <sup>18</sup> To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Paul connects "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" to keeping "alert, with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints." In other words, **we are persevering when we pray at all times!** Prayer may not make it so you avoid trouble, heartache, or testing, but it will strengthen you so that you do not quit. **Prayer ensures that we are not suffering alone in our trials.**

Luke tells us that after Jesus prayed, "he came to the disciples and found [the disciples] sleeping for sorrow." **It has been a very long week and a very long day.** The apostles were exhausted. Not only that, Luke tells us they slept "for sorrow," meaning, at some level, like Christ, they were grieved, and such intense grief caused them to sleep (e.g., exhaustion after a funeral). But the Lord chastens them for their sleepiness. He says to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." **Just as the Lord had done, the apostles should've bathed their grief in prayer rather than sleep.**

If you think Jesus was too harsh, remember, he knew what was coming. And, according to Matthew's account, the Lord didn't just find the apostles sleeping one time but three. At one point, he tells Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:40-41). **Their sleepfulness symbolized their vulnerability.**<sup>6</sup> The Lord didn't want them to be vulnerable he wanted them to be prayerful.

**Prayer is the only way our spirit wins the battle over our flesh.** By prayer, we receive help in time of need (cf. Heb. 4:16). Without prayer, we will be without help! When we enter tribulation, we must follow Jesus' lead and pray. Otherwise, we're bound to fail. "Battles are won or lost on the field of prayer, but even prayer can be a battle."<sup>7</sup> **The times when we are the most exhausted, the most stressed, and the most overwhelmed are the times when we are the**

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<sup>6</sup> Bock (1996), p. 1762.

<sup>7</sup> Garland (2011), p. 884.

**most** vulnerable to attack, and so are the times when we need prayer the **most**. Otherwise, we'll enter temptation's arena in a **most** unprepared state.



## **Video Description:**

### **Holy Week | Week 13 | “The Plea in Gethsemane” (Luke 22:39-46)**

SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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