

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Son in Sorrow, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 26:40-46

Code: 2386

I want to invite you now to take your Bible, and open it to the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, as we return to the text of our Lord's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, a study which we began last Lord's day and will conclude this morning. For many years, it has been my own personal joy and privilege to make a rather intensive study of the life of Christ. I can remember, back when I was a seminary student, going to a used book store, and purchasing some old volumes on the life of Christ, and reading them with eagerness and excitement. Somewhere along the line, the Lord planted in my heart a desire to know all the details about the Savior; to know everything that I could possibly know about what He was like, and what He said, and what He did, and how He responded. And so it's always been a special love of mine.

Early on in the ministry here, we spent several years studying the gospel of John. Sunday after Sunday after Sunday, we looked at the Lord Jesus Christ as presented by John. Some years after that, we went into the epistle to the Hebrews, a glorious presentation of the superiority of Christ, and week after week again, we looked at Jesus Christ. And then it's been our marvelous and happy privilege for over five years to have been studying the gospel of Matthew, and week after week again, to be confronted with Jesus Christ. Well over half of the nearly 16 years that I've been here, our congregation has been involved in an intensive study of Jesus Christ. He is the theme of all that we do, all that we sing, all that we say, all that we love, and all that we hope for. And so it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our focus again today as we look at this marvelous passage.

And as I was thinking about that, and how privileged it is for us to have spent as much time as we have in the study of His life, I was reminded of the fact that so many Christians know so very little about Christ. I mean, all of the marvelous, thrilling details that seem to pass by most people, so rich, so rewarding, so profound, so blessed, and yet unknown to most Christians. In fact, I thought there are many Christians who know the characters and the details of a soap opera better than the details of the life of Jesus Christ. There are many Christians who could tell you all about movies, movie stars, TV. They could sing you almost every song that's been played in the last ten years. They know all of the music personalities. There are people who could tell you the story line and the characters in books and novels. Those who understand all there is to understand about cars and boats. And there are people who could give you the batting average for everybody on the Dodgers.

And now we have an entire world of trivia exploding on us, and it is amazing to play that game and find out all of the useless stuff you have crowded into your brain. It is amazing how much we know

about so many things, and how little we know about Jesus Christ, who is our Savior, who should be so beloved of us that we would not wish that any single detail of His blessed person or life should ever escape our knowledge. And I sensed that in my own heart as I came to this passage again. I wanted so desperately to understand everything there was to understand here. And try as I might, I found myself coming up short all the time, because the mystery was too deep. This is the God-Man, all God, 100 percent, all man, 100 percent, and yet He cries out to God for deliverance. And yet He willingly, as God, goes to the cross that awaits Him. The apparent paradoxes are too profound to perceive. And so, while we love to know every single detail about the life of Christ, we can only go as far as we can go. And I trust that your heart will be open to what the Spirit of God will and is able to teach you as you look again at this great passage.

On April 12, 1885, a very wonderful and famous preacher of the gospel by the name of Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached one of his great sermons, and he had many. The title of this great sermon that Spurgeon preached was, "The Man, Christ Jesus." And all the way through the sermon he cried out for people to consider the man Christ Jesus. In the midst of that sermon, he said this, "It will not be enough for you to hear or read of Christ. You must do your own thinking and consider your Lord for yourselves. The wine is not made by gathering the clusters, but by treading the grapes in the wine vat. Under the pressure, the red juice leaps forth. Not the truth as you read it, but the truth as you meditate upon it will be a blessing to you. Shut yourself up with Jesus, if you would know Him." And then he said this: "I am never more vexed with myself then when I have done my very best to extol His dear name. What is it but holding a candle to the sun? Beloved, I cannot speak as I would of Him, the blaze of the sun blinds me," end quote.

And so Spurgeon was caught in a tension not unknown to me, where you long with all your heart to know every detail and to try to explain every detail, but when you've done the best you can, you come woefully short of the reality. And so, as I approach again this passage, I do so with a great desire in my heart that you should understand the wonder of what is happening, and yet with the sense of hopelessness that it is too deep, even for me. And so we grasp what we can of the sacredness of this powerful moment in the life of our Lord. I want us to take the passage seriously. I believe it has been passed over lightly by so many. We love to focus on the cross, but we miss the garden, and the garden is equally a place of great suffering for you – for you, and for me, He suffered there. And if we cannot desire to know every whit of that which is perceivable to us, then something is lacking in our love of the Savior who suffered for us.

Remember, verse 36 introduces us, "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane." That means olive press. It was a garden on the hillside of the Mount of Olives owned by a follower of Jesus, who allowed Jesus to use it at His discretion. He went into that garden, a very familiar place. It was after midnight. They had just celebrated the Passover. Friday had come, the day He would die. It was the last time He would be with His disciples. He took them to that place for seclusion, for privacy, that He might enter into prayer with the Father. Entering in the gate, He said to the disciples, "Sit

here while I go and pray yonder.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John.” So He went in the gate, eight of them stayed, Judas already having gone. Three of them went with Him deeper into the garden, to seclusion. And so the scene is set. After midnight, the city bustling and alive because it is Passover season, Judas, already having contracted for his money, is now leading the band of people to come and capture Christ; at least they are assembling at this point. Jesus knows it is only a matter of moments until He will be taken prisoner for execution. And He says, “You stay here while I go and pray.” And that’s the introduction.

I told you that there were five key words that I wanted you to note to understand this text. Do you remember the first word was sorrow, wasn’t it? Well, you notice in verse 37, “He began to be sorrowful and very depressed.” And in verse 38, He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Tarry here and watch with Me.” And we, first of all, are very much aware of the sorrow and depression of the Lord. And no doubt our Lord at this particular point is thinking of the prophecy of Isaiah, back in chapter 53. And you remember it – we mentioned it briefly last week. And Isaiah 53 verse 3, it says of Him, “He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows.” Now, the phrase “a man of sorrows” is a characterization. In other words, He is a man characterized by sorrow. He is a man of sorrows. Sorrow is not just an element of His life; it is that which characterizes His life. Jesus sorrowed, life-long sorrow. He was always a man of sorrows. It says He was acquainted with grief as a rule of life. He has carried our griefs, and carried our sorrows. So Jesus was characteristically a sorrowing person. Sometimes that sorrow burst forth in tears. Sometimes it burst forth in sighing. Sometimes in anguish of face. Sometimes was hidden. But always was there, for always He suffered in the humiliation of His incarnation.

And so, He is a man of sorrows. And if you were to study in detail the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, you would know what led to that sorrow, for Isaiah says He is despised. That word basically means to be hated. He is rejected. That word is the word for being forsaken, but it literally means “He who is no longer regarded as a man.” He was so rejected that it could be said of Him that He wasn’t even considered to be human, not even worthy of the attention given to a human. He was esteemed not, which is to say He was held in contempt. Verse 4 says He was stricken. That word basically means to be like a leper, to have a fatal disease, a communicable disease, and become an outcast. He was smitten, that is He was hit. He was afflicted, that is given pain. He was wounded, which means pierced. Isaiah 53 goes on to say He was bruised, which means He was crushed. He had stripes, which speak of His scourging. He was oppressed, and the word oppressed basically means to have exacted on you the payment of a debt. Isaiah also says He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, to be offered like a sacrifice. He was imprisoned. He was wrongfully judged, and finally, He was cut off or killed. I mean, it was life-long suffering for Him – life-long.

But He endured it. It says He endured it, verse 11, to “justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” He shall see the pain of His soul and be satisfied. He bore it all, but was satisfied to do it for your

sake and my sake. And so the suffering of Jesus Christ is not simply isolated to the cross. In pre-cross suffering, we reach the epitome in this passage when we see Jesus in the garden. He suffers here the greatest suffering prior to His actual dying in all of His life. And He suffers here in a conflict with Satan, who would divert Him from the cross. He suffers here in the overwhelming anticipation of the sinless one becoming sin, of the deathless one dying, of being alienated from God. The suffering is more than we can understand or even explain.

The second word we see, not only sorrow, but the second word we see is supplication – supplication. In the midst of His sorrow, He cried out to God. In verse 39, 42, and 44, we have the three different periods of prayer in which He cried out to God. Now, what was going on here? I believe without a question this was a temptation. There are some people who have suggested to me personally that this was not a temptation. I feel it was a temptation. I feel Satan was there in full force, trying to keep Christ from going to the cross, preventing the cross, preventing the resurrection. You say, “What makes you think that? Satan isn’t mentioned in this passage.” That’s right, Matthew gives no dignity to Satan. He gives no place to Satan here. But Satan is behind the scenes, and that’s very obvious. If you go back into the upper room, you will remember that Satan appeared there and filled Judas, right? Filled Judas to do what he was going to do. And I don’t know if you recall that most provocative verse in John’s gospel, chapter 14, verse 30, where Jesus is in the upper room just before they left, and He said, “Hereafter, I will not talk with you much.” We’re not going to talk much more. Why? “For the prince of this world comes.” I’m going now, is what He’s saying, into conflict with Satan. I believe He knew that.

And then He says, “But he has nothing in Me.” In other words, he may come with his temptation, but he will find no place in Me where temptation will succeed. There’s nothing in Me that falls to that. But He said, “I’ll not talk with you much, because the prince of this world is coming.” And I believe as He approached the garden, He knew He was entering into conflict with Satan himself. And also in the 22nd chapter of Luke, and verse 53, He says, “This is your hour,” He says that to the leaders and the soldiers that came to capture Him, “and the power of darkness.” This is Satan’s hour. This is your hour. He knew Satan was involved in all of these things, and He sensed that conflict even in the upper room. And so I believe as He goes to the garden, He enters into the most intense struggle with Satan of His life; even more intense than the temptation at the beginning of His ministry is this one at the end. Because at the beginning we have no indication that He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. The agony of this temptation is unequalled. Satan comes to try to keep Christ off the cross, so redemption cannot be made, so atonement cannot be accomplished, so satisfaction for sin cannot be rendered. And so in the midst of this great temptation comes the second word, supplication.

In the midst of temptation, He cries out to God. And so what we learn here, beloved, is not just about Christ. We’re not only learning about His suffering, which is a wonderful thing to learn, because the more we know about His suffering, the more we understand His love, and the more we understand His love, the more thankful we ought to be. It’s a great thing to just see His suffering for us, that we

might know the measure of His love. But beyond even that, He gives us also a lesson about how to meet temptation, how to respond to the conflict that comes to one who endeavors to do the will of God, to experience the power of God. And the way He met temptation was in prayer. And so verse 39 says, "He went a little further." Beyond the three, Peter, James and John, who had come further into the garden than the other eight; he even went beyond them. Fell on His face, prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt."

He is saying, "O Father, I want to do Your will. If in Your will there is another way than this way, may it be, but I want to do Your will." There was never any equivocation about that. He says, "As You will," the end of verse 39. At the end of verse 42, "Thy will be done." And in verse 44, it says, "And He prayed the third time, saying the same words." He never said anything other than "Your will, Your will, Your will." But the agony was so great, and the pain was so great, and the horror of bearing sin, and dying, and being separated from God, and all that struggle that was going on, was so profound that He says, "If there's any other way, do it. If not, I'll be willing to do whatever Your will is." He was not trying to avoid the cross. In John, chapter 12, verses 23 to 27, that great passage, He said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die" – and He said this just a few days before this happened in the garden. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bring forth fruit." He knew He had to die.

He said, "What shall I say then? Father, save Me from this hour." But for this came I into the world," He says. And so He said, "I'm not asking God to save Me from this; this is what I came for." But the pain, and the anguish, and the excruciating horror is so great, that something in Him cries out and says, "If there's another way, O God, let it be another way. If not, I'm willing." At this point, He begins to sweat. It's a cool night. It's a time of the year when it isn't hot, and the sweat had to do with His agony. And He begins to profusely sweat. And then in Luke 22:44, Luke tells us something that is fascinating. He began to sweat what was "like great drops of blood." The word "drops" there in the Authorized is *thrombos* [???], we get thrombosis from it, clots, great clots of blood. Just prior to the sweating of what appeared to be great clots of blood, the Bible says in Luke 22:43, that an angel from heaven came – an angel from heaven came and strengthened Him.

His supplication was so intense, verse 38 says, that it was unto death. And as I suggested to you last time, it may well have been that Jesus might have died in the garden, except for an angel from heaven that strengthened Him. The angel came and strengthened Him in the midst of this excruciating agony, which caused blood to appear on His flesh. The sorrow is just amazing. The solitariness of His lonely prayer adds to the intensity. To be so sorrowful as to be nigh unto death intensifies it. To cry out to God asking if there's another way, then to sweat, and then to sweat, as it were, great clots of blood – unimaginable. The phenomenon of sweating blood is very, very rare – very rare. It can be best explained in simplicity in this way: when a person enters into extreme anguish and sensitivity, such as our Lord here, the resulting strain could go so far as to finally cause the dilation of the subcutaneous capillaries, the capillaries just under the tissue. And as those begin to

dilate under this kind of intensity, they could burst. And then the blood flowing out of those burst capillaries has to find its way out, and it does so through the sweat glands.

And so what happened was Christ is sweating profusely in His agony, and as Hebrews 5 says, “He is in strong crying and tears.” He is crying, He is sobbing, He is shedding tears, and He is sweating profusely. The intensity bursts the subcutaneous capillaries, the blood comes flowing out the sweat glands, mixes with the sweat, and it looks as if blood is being sweat from His body. It runs down His face, it drips onto His clothing. The anguish is absolutely unimaginable to us, unimaginable. After that first session, He’s strengthened, no doubt, by the presence of the angel. He rises from prayer. Having defeated the enemy for that moment, He comes back to His disciples in verse 40. And then in verse 42, He goes back again the second time. And let’s go to verse 42, we’ll come back to the others. “He went away again the second time, and prayed.” And this time He says, “O My Father,” and again it’s the same thing. He uses the word “My”. This is the only occasion He did that in His life, because He’s holding on to the intimacy that He has with God. He feels the enemy trying to pull Him away from God, pull Him away from God’s will, get Him to do what He wants to do, what would be the easy way, rather than do what God has designed. And so He holds to the possessiveness of His relationship to the Father.

And then He changes His petition. First He said, “If it is possible, let it pass.” Now He says, “If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it,” in other words, endure it all, “Thy will be done.” First He said, “If it can pass, let it pass.” And now He says, “If it can’t pass, then Thy will be done.” And again we get the idea the temptation is to avoid the cross. The cross is the cup of wrath, of judgment, the experience of sin-bearing. And the tempter is saying, “Avoid the cross, avoid the cross, it shouldn’t happen to You, claim Your rights, You’re the Son of God, this is enough humiliation. The sweat, the agony, that is enough, not the cross, not the cross.” And so He says, “If it can pass, let it pass.” And He knows it can’t, and so He says, “If it can’t pass, then I’ll do it.” And so we can sense that He’s being strengthened in the commitment to do God’s will. And then He finishes the second round, goes back, and then in verse 44, returns to pray again. And this is the third verse that deals with our word supplication, it says, “He left them, went away again and prayed the third time and said the same words.”

It may have been that they had an even more resolute meaning, the word “if” and the word “since” are the same word. It may have been the third time that He said, “Since this cannot pass, Thy will be done.” Perhaps the first time He said, “If it can pass, let it pass,” the second time, “If it can’t pass, I’ll do it,” and the third time, “Since it can’t pass, let it happen.” Instead of getting weaker with every round, it appears He got – what – stronger. He was winning the victory over the enemy. What a beautiful picture. Strong crying, strong tears, agonizing, supplication before God, He is holding on to the will of God against all that hell could bring. Listen to me: if Satan can tempt, he tempted there. If he has power run to an absolute limit to tempt, he unloaded it there. It all came there to Christ to keep Him from the cross. But the bottom line all the way through is “Thy will be done, Thy will be done.” He

was resolute. He was committed to do the will of God.

And somebody asks, “Why were there three sessions? Why three times of prayer?” And I suppose the best answer is because there were three waves of Satanic attack, just like there were three waves of Satanic attack in Matthew 4, in the temptation when He began His ministry. Satan came at Him three times again, and it took those three times for Satan to unload all of his guns and to be defeated. It took those three times for Christ to come to absolute resolution of His will to God, perfectly. It took those three times for Christ to go through all the unrelenting agony that God desired Him to go through. And the thing that you learn about prayer in this is so vital. It is that prayer is not primarily an engine by which we run over God, by which we overcome His unwillingness. But prayer is primarily a means by which God, who is ever ready to give us what is best, gives it to us, because we set ourselves in the place of doing His will. Prayer is me lining up with what God wants to do at any price, even my life.

Satan comes and wants to divert us from the will of God to fulfill our own satisfaction, to push us off the track of obedience to grab whatever we want. What prayer does is say, “O God, I don’t want to go through this; this isn’t what I want to do, strengthen me – strengthen me.” And so, prayer lines us up with that perfect place of blessing. After that third temptation, Jesus was the victor and Satan was the vanquished. The enemy of His soul was gone. He was gone. Christ was in perfect harmony with the will of God, perfectly submitted to the purpose of God, calmly ready to move to the cross. Satan was defeated. And the key to victory was supplication. He cried out to God. And I daresay, beloved, that if He needed to do that, who was God Himself, how desperately do we, as men, need to do that in the midst of temptation. That is the lesson He would have His disciples learn, and us.

But there’s a third word here that we have to consider. It’s the word “sleep,” because that tells us something about this scene as well. Verse 39, Jesus went away to pray the first time. He told the disciples to stay there – to stay there. He came back, verse 40, “And He found them asleep – found them asleep.” Foolish – I mean they were sleeping at the moment of greatest spiritual conflict in the history of the world. They were sleeping when they should have been praying. I mean, it was obvious that when He left them and went forward to pray that He intended for them to pray where they were. He even says in verse 41, “Watch and pray.” The idea was that they had much to pray about, were they so absolutely indifferent to the agonizings of Jesus Christ that they slept? That they couldn’t even stay awake to pray for their own Master? Hadn’t they just been told in verse 31 that they were going to be offended, and they were going to be trapped, and they were going to be scattered, and they were going to run like scared sheep? Hadn’t Peter just been told that he was actually going to deny Jesus Christ three times before the cock crow? Didn’t they have something to pray about when Jesus had said He was going to die, and be offered as a sacrifice, and rise again, and that it was going to happen this night? How could they possibly sleep?

But they did. And I remind you that the price of victory spiritually is always vigilance. And so verse 40 says, “He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep.” Now it was natural to sleep. It was after midnight. They had had a busy week, and they had experienced the accumulated weariness that a busy week brings. Not only that, they had just eaten a huge meal, an entire sacrificial lamb, consumed by twelve people, and late at night, and all that went with it, with the unleavened bread, and the wine, and the dipping into the sop. I mean they had reason to be sleepy. And then they had taken a long walk and a hard hike up the Mount of Olives, and they must have felt weary from that. And then Luke adds they were sleepy and went to sleep because of sorrow. Everything was getting very depressing. And when you get very depressed, maybe you like to escape with sleep.

But it points out that they never had come to grips with the real issues. I don't know how it is with you, but it doesn't matter how weary my body is, if my mind is exercised in some spiritual conflict, I can't sleep. I'm awake. I have found that if I am struggling with some spiritual thing, if I'm struggling over some great crisis, sleep leaves me, and that battle takes over. But in their case, it didn't. They were so weak and so sinful that they could even be indifferent to the conflict that was coming, on their part and the Lord's, and go to sleep; hard to believe. By the way, we shouldn't be surprised at Peter, James and John falling asleep, I guess, because they fell asleep at the transfiguration, too. Isn't that amazing? I wouldn't have done that. The transfiguration – man – read Luke 9:32. They went to sleep. I wouldn't want them sitting in the front few rows of my church. I mean, the intensity of the struggle, the sense of their weakness, the warning of the Lord, the prediction that it was coming this night, the obvious agony of Christ, the institution of the supper, of the blood and the bread for the body, they must have known what was going on. And so the Lord comes back, and He said to Peter, the leader, “What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?” You can't even stay awake one hour, and it indicates that He was gone for a brief period of time. Can't you be mentally alert for one hour? Can't you join Me in the spiritual struggle for one hour?

Then He went back, in verse 42, to pray the second time, and after praying the second time, returned in verse 43, “And He came, and found them asleep again.” And the word “again” is very helpful, because if it just said “He came and found them asleep,” we might conclude that they never woke up from the first time. But the fact that they went to sleep again means they were awakened by the Lord the first time when He said, “What, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.” He had given them a warning when they were awake, and even that warning couldn't keep them alert. He went back to pray and they fell asleep again. Why did they fall asleep? “Their eyes were heavy.” Their eyes were heavy. They were overpowered by the natural. Kind of sad, really; the Lord is so alone. They're so indifferent. And then in verse 44, “He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” And then He came back again and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?” You're still totally indifferent, totally out of touch with what's happening – shocking. I believe it is best to translate that in the interrogatory, as a question. The Greek text can be translated that way. The New International Version does that, and I think properly so. He's asking them a pensive, painful question. You still

sleeping and taking your rest? Unaware of the nature of the spiritual battle, unaware of what is going on?

Oh, what weak men; indifferent to the needs of Christ, indifferent to the power of the enemy, who is going to tempt them. They are about to be utterly overwhelmed with sin. Verse 56 says they're all going to forsake Christ and flee. They'll never pass the temptation. They'll fall into sin and denial and rejection of Christ. They don't want to be associated with Him. They run. They weren't ready. And what our Lord is communicating here in this is that in all spiritual battles, the victory goes to those who are alert, because they know their weakness. They're not fools like the disciples, who said, "Oh, we would never be offended. Oh, we would never deny You. Why we would go to prison and die before we would ever do that." They put too much stock in their good intentions, and they didn't realize their weakness. The battle doesn't go to the sleepers, it goes to the vigilant. It's a tragedy to see spiritual self-confidence, which is unpreparedness.

There's a fourth word. Key word, it's the word "strength – strength." Notice verse 45; oh, this is so magnificent. After coming back the third time and saying, Are you still sleeping? He says, "Behold, look," the word means look. Did He see something? I think so. I think He saw something. What did He see? I think He saw torches. I think He saw men with swords. I think He saw Roman soldiers from Fort Antonius. I think He saw the Jewish leaders. I think He saw Judas. Down the slope of the Mount of Olives, He could see the moving of this crowd of people coming to Him. "Look, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." What a contradiction; oh, what a humiliation, the sinless one given to sinners. "Look, look, they're coming – you're sleeping – they're coming." He had won the victory. He had won the victory – defeated the fleeing hosts of hell. He stood, covered with bloody sweat, victorious; the victor, courageously ready to face the cross. And He said, "You sleep. You'll never survive this, you're not ready." He was ready. He had conquered the enemy in the strength of His Father. They had slept.

And then He speaks in verse 46, "Rise, get up," He says to them all. "Get up, let us be going." And it is not meaning, "Let us flee, let us run." No, it's a very interesting word, that word "going." It basically means to go forward to meet an advancing enemy. It's a military term. He says, "Get up, we're going to meet them." That's strength. O, He was strengthened in the temptation. He was victorious. He resolutely proceeds to them; they don't have to find Him. And if you follow the account – we shall after Christmas Sunday – He walks up to them and says, "Whom do you seek?" They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He said, "I am He." Great courage – the courage of invincibility, of one who has committed His life to God, who can raise the dead. You know that He was tempted by Satan, "Do you know God will raise you from the dead? What if you die and never rise again? What if this is the end? What if you die and perish in hell?" And He committed Himself to the One who is able to raise the dead, and resolutely moved toward them in confidence. That going to the cross, He could see beyond that cross the joy that was set before Him, as Hebrews describes it in chapter 12, the joy that was set before Him, He willingly endured the cross. And so, there is great strength here. In fact, it says in John 18

that when He said, “Whom seek ye?” and they said “Jesus of Nazareth,” and He responded, they all fell down – they all fell down flat – so powerful was He. And so, in strength He meets the enemy.

There’s nothing in the Scripture that says “run from the devil.” The Scripture says “resist the devil and he’ll” – what – “run from you.” You resist him in the strength of prayer, and the strength of the Word of God, which He demonstrated in His first temptation. Each time in the first temptation, He answered with the Word. Each time in the second great temptation, He answered in prayer. It is the Word and prayer that is the two-edged sword with which we defeat the enemy. And so He says, “The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” And by that phrase “hands of sinners,” He has reference to all of those who will be responsible for His execution, Jews and Romans alike, the sinners who take His life. “Rise, let us be going. Look, he is near that does betray Me.” And He points out Judas, leading the parade. The word “betray” again is the word “deliver,” the one who delivers Me up. Look, there he is. Let’s go to meet him. O the victory in that temptation.

That brings us to the last word, and it’s the word “sequence.” And that may not seem like an obvious word for this passage – I’ll explain it in a moment – but go back to verse 41. After the first prayer session, Jesus came back and said, “Can’t you watch with Me one hour,” to Peter. And then He gives the principle that I believe He intends to teach: “Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation.” Stop at that point. He says to them, after the first time of prayer, and their first episode of sleeping, “Be alert and be praying, keep praying.” Continuous action: stay alert and stay in prayer. I mean be discerning enough to know when you’re in a spiritual war and go to God. Don’t let your self-confidence lull you to sleep. Don’t let your good intentions make you drowsy, that you enter not into temptation. The way to keep from being engulfed in temptation is to be alert to it, to look at the craftiness of Satan, to be aware of what he’s doing, of what’s going on, and to go in prayer to the Father.

Oh, I love what Peter said, and he must have learned it here. In 2 Peter 2:8 he says, “For He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation.” Isn’t that a great statement? He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation. So who do you go to? You go to Him – you go to Him. The one who is the scout for the army, when he finds the enemy, doesn’t start a war with the enemy. That would be idiocy. He returns to tell the general what he’s learned, and the general leads the troops into battle. No Christian who is a scout coming upon Satan fights Satan by himself victoriously. You have to report to the commander. Jesus went for the divine strength that was essential. And so the Lord says you better watch, be alert, keep a wary eye for Satan, and keep praying, depending on God.

It’s just like Matthew 6 where we pray, “Lead us not” – what – “into temptation, but deliver us” – what – “from evil.” We go to the Lord for that. We can’t do it on our own. Oh, they thought they could. “Oh, we would never betray You, we would never deny You. We would never be offended by You. We’ll never forsake You.” And they did it all. So if our Lord never gave us anything but this, He gave us a great principle for victory. You say, “But it’s not easy, is it?” No it isn’t. It’s still not easy. Why? The

second half of verse 41 explains why. “Because the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is” – what – “is weak.” And our Lord says something here that is very, very essential for every believer to understand. You have got a problem inside of you that Christ really didn’t have, in a sense. His perfection allowed Him to act perfectly, and to respond perfectly in every temptation, so that He was without sin. But what we have is a unique problem. We have a willing spirit, and a weak flesh. What that means is that regenerated people who love God, desire to do what is right. And, no doubt, Peter and James and John, bless them, loved the Savior, and would have wanted to do what was right. But they were weak. And no doubt the other eight wanted to do what was right. There was something in their heart that longed to do what the Lord would want them to do and do the will of God, but they were weak.

And that particular problem is described for us most clearly in Romans chapter 7. May I draw your attention to verse 15 of Romans 7? Paul really elucidates this same issue. In fact, our Lord uses the terms that Paul uses, so parallel is the truth. Paul says this as a believer, verse 15, “For that which I do, I do not understand.” I don’t understand what I do. “For what I want to do, I do not do; but what I hate, I do.” Listen: I’m sure Peter later on, when he cried and wept over his denial, wept because he did things he would not have wanted to do, and he did not do things he would have wanted to do. And later on, Peter – bless his heart – wrote 1 Peter, and in chapter 5, verse 8, he said, “Be sober and be vigilant, for your adversary, the devil, goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Where do you think he learned that? Well, lesson number one was right here, in the garden. You better be alert, and you better be vigilant, because Satan is there, and he’s after you. And he got me, and he got all the rest of us, the night our Lord needed us the most, and it wasn’t what we wanted to do, but it’s what we did. And Jesus says it’s because your spirit may be willing, but your flesh is so weak.

And Paul’s fighting the same thing here. He says, “Look, the things I want to do, I don’t do. The things I don’t want to do, I do.” And verse 16, “If then I do that which I don’t want to do, I consent that the law is good.” In other words, that God’s law is good, that the things I want to do are good. “So it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me, for I know that in me” – and here it comes – “that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing.” And here’s what we have. You have a regenerated spirit, a renewed spirit. And in that renewed spirit, you desire to do what is right. You desire to do what is good. You desire to do the law of God, divine principles. But you also have, as a part of your makeup, the flesh, and what that means is your humanness, it’s your body, it’s your bodily appetites, it’s your mental desires. It’s all the lusts of your humanness, the lusts of the flesh. And you have a spirit that’s been renewed, reborn, regenerated, recreated, and it longs to do what is right, and it seeks to obey, and it seeks to do the thing that God is pleased that it should do, but it is restrained. It is defeated, very often, by your humanness, your flesh. Now keep this in mind.

So you really have a battle between the new you and your humanness. So he says, it’s in my flesh. He says in verse 19, “The good that I would, I do not. And the evil which I would not, that I do.” And

then in verse 20, “Now, if I do what I would not, it isn’t really I,” that is, it isn’t my spirit – it isn’t that new I, it isn’t that recreated self – “but it is sin that dwells in me.” And where does it dwell? It dwells in my flesh, in my humanness. He says in verse 22, “Because I delight in the law of God after the inward man,” my spirit delights in God’s law. “But I see another law in my members,” in my bodily parts, in my humanness, “and it wars against the law of my mind,” which is the spirit, the good. And it brings me into captivity to the principle of sin which is in my members.” He keeps making this distinction, it’s the distinction between spirit and flesh, the law that is good, and evil that is present, spirit and flesh, same thing. It is my mind against my members – that’s the way he pictures it.

So his conclusion in verse 24 is “O wretched man that I am,” I’ve got a real battle, it’s wretchedness. “Who’s going to deliver me from the body of this death,” that retards the spirit from doing what it wills to do? And he gives himself the answer, in verse 25: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Jesus Christ is going to deliver me and someday, someday, Christ is going to end the battle. He’s going to deliver me from the flesh. You know what happens when you die and go to heaven? You lose the flesh, and your spirit is free to do what it wills to do in the perfection of God’s holy purpose. Until then, he says, verse 25, “So then, until that happens, with my mind I continue to serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin.” That’s how it is in any Christian’s life. That’s the battleground. The spirit is willing, prompted by God; the flesh is weak. How are you going to win? How are you going to be victorious? May I suggest to you the answer is given by the Apostle Paul in Galatians, chapter 5? He says this, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill” – what – “the lusts of the flesh.” It is a matter of walking in obedience to the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Word of God, yielding your life to God’s Spirit. That’s the solution.

Now, to conclude: what is the sequence, then, that we see in this lesson? It’s a great one. Let me give you the sequence for disaster, all right, in temptation. Here it comes. The disciples lived it out. Here’s the sequence I want you to see. It goes like this: Confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster – confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster. Confidence: I can handle it, I don’t need to pray. I’ll never deny the Lord. I’ll be faithful. I’m never going to get beyond the possibility where I’m strong enough to be victorious. I’m all right – confidence. Sleep follows confidence. What do you have to be vigilant about? Why bother to be alert? Why bother to watch what you see, and what you read, and what you hear, and where you go, and what you think? Just sleep. Sleep leads then to temptation, and to sin, and disaster. The disciples lived it that way.

But what about the sequence of victory? Listen to this one. Here’s the pattern we see in the Lord. It’s very different. Instead of confidence, you have humility. Amazing – Jesus humbled Himself and became dependent on God. And while the disciples were confidently saying, “We will never ever fail You,” Jesus, knowing the weakness of human existence, and knowing He was a man, even if a sinless man, knew He needed to go to God to be strengthened, and was strengthened by an angel. So where you have confidence on the disciples’ part, you have humility on His. Confidence led to sleep, humility led to what? What did Jesus do while they were asleep? Prayed – He prayed. Then

came temptation, and in the temptation, obedience to the will of God, and victory. You see the sequence? And you make a choice. You make a choice in your life, either to be self- confident, sleep, end up in disaster, or in humility, fall on your knees before God in prayer for strength, and in the temptation comes obedience, and out of the obedience, victory. That's the lesson our Lord would have us learn. Let's bow in prayer.

Our Father, we know that we all face, we all face Gethsemanes of our own. We all face agonies, anguish, disappointment, grief, sorrow. We all face temptation. The enemy comes against us, sometimes in waves. I think back, O God, even to this week, in the preparation of this, when I felt so besieged, as it were, so oppressed by the enemy, who seems particularly not to wish the sufferings of Christ to be made known. I think of all the times in my life when, knowing your perfect will, I was tempted to do otherwise. We've all had our Gethsemanes, and some victory, and some defeat; but Lord, teach us the sequence of victory: humility, prayer, temptation, obedience, at any price, victory. And we thank You that we have Christ as our example. O what a Savior is mine. In Him, God's mercies combine, His love will never decline, and He loves me, and oh, how we see that love as He suffered for us.

While your heads are bowed, in the closing moment, if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ who died for you, if you have never received Him as Lord and Savior, do that now in your heart. Open your heart. You may believe all of the gospel, but never have opened your heart to receive the Savior. Others of you have walked with the Lord, but not very closely. And you have been in the sequence of defeat and disaster, and it's time to turn it around. Commit yourself afresh to Him for that.

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