

Alone in the Garden

A Perfect Example of Overcoming Temptation

Matthew 26:36-46

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Main point: Pray that you may not enter into temptation. (v.41)

Introduction:

There is a famous hymn in Christendom entitled *"I Come to the Garden Alone,"* which was written by C. Austin Miles and first published in 1912. Although you may not recognize the title, most people know the song best by its famous refrain: *"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own..."* This song pictures the sweet fellowship of the believer with God in Christ. There are two main ways that a believer experiences this communion with God: through Bible study and prayer. In Bible study, we hear the voice of God speaking to us through the pages of Scripture. In prayer, we speak to God with the result often being that our will is brought into alignment with His. The refrain ends with: *"And the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known."* The song is speaking about the joy of a personal, intimate relationship with a holy God. This is the greatest privilege any sinner can ever have! And the song paints the picture of this happening in a quiet, peaceful garden where the believer tarries in harmony with Him. What a beautiful scene. No wonder this song has been beloved by millions over the years.

Now contrast the serene garden scene pictured in the song with the one in the text before us today. In this passage, we don't see a placid terrace full of joy and peaceful assurance. No, instead we see a garden full of grief and turmoil, as our Savior is engaged in the most intense spiritual battle in redemptive history. His time had come. The culmination of Christ's purpose for coming into the world was imminent. At this point, the cross was only *hours* away. **The** hour that He had spoken about at length, **His** hour, was at hand.

However, why does it appear that Christ is struggling and wrestling in prayer? He's been telling His disciples repeatedly that the Son of Man would be betrayed unto death and that He soon would die. Jesus *knows* this is His mission. This is the Passion of the Christ. So why do we see Him praying the way He does? What is really going on here in the garden and what is the significance for us? Are there any lessons we can glean from Christ in His struggles? As we divide this passage, we're going to see a *perfect* example of how to overcome temptation. If you're like me, I'm sure you could certainly use some help in this area, so I'm excited to learn together with you today. Let's get started.

Context:

Since we've been making our way through this gospel letter, many of you already know the events that surround our focal text. It is the Passion Week for Jesus. After making a triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (*Matt.21:1-11*), Jesus proceeds to cleanse the temple (*Matt.21:12-13*), which began a series of run-ins with the chief priests and scribes where they continually challenged His authority seeking to trap Him. He would eventually denounce them with a series of woes. Christ used the final week of His earthly ministry to tear down the false religious system that the Pharisees had built. He exposed them, and in return, they plotted to kill Him.

Everything leading up to the section before us today has a tone of preparation to it. Jesus speaks of the destruction of the temple, the end of the age, the abomination of desolation, and the final judgment. At the beginning of this chapter (v.2), He foretells His own death by crucifixion. Mary anoints Jesus with perfume to which He replies was done to prepare Him for burial (*Matt.26:12*). Judas is given 30 pieces of silver and begins looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus; he was making preparations of his own. The Last Passover Meal was prepared and taken by Jesus and His disciples. And immediately before this section, Jesus seeks to prepare His men by telling them that they would all fall away that very night (*Matt.26:31*). We see one preparation after another.

So, what do we see in the section before us today except for further preparation by Jesus? He *knew* what was coming and He needed to prepare Himself to face it. So, what does He do? As was often His habit, He went away to a secluded place to pray to His Father (*Matt.14:13; Mark 1:35; 6:31-32; Luke 4:42*). This time He went to a garden in Gethsemane. And that's where our account begins.

Outline:

- A. The Setting (vv.36-38)
- B. The Savior's Supplications (vv.39, 42, 44)
- C. The Slumbering Disciples (vv.40-41, 43, 45-46)

Exposition:

A. The Setting (vv.36-38)

Verses 36-38 tell us the setting for this scene. We can quickly break down these verses by simply answering the basic five W's.

- **Who:** Jesus and His disciples—with Peter, James, and John being singled out
- **What:** A time of prayer in the garden
- **When:** It was evening—probably close to midnight on Thursday before Good Friday.
- **Where:** A small garden in Gethsemane, which was east of Jerusalem at the base of the Mount of Olives past the Kidron Valley (*John 18:1*)

- **Why:** To prepare Himself for the cross

A few things are significant about the setting. As is evident, Jesus and His men come to a garden in Gethsemane. Here Matthew says that the *place* was called Gethsemane (v.36). However, John's gospel tells us that the place was a garden (*John 18:1*). So, it was a garden—so what? Well, it was in another garden that mankind was first plunged into sin. It was in the Garden of Eden that mankind's first representative, Adam, was tempted and fell into sin. It is only fitting that Jesus—whom Paul refers to as the last Adam (*1 Cor.15:45*), meaning that He is the last representative we have before God—found His way to a garden on the eve before His crucifixion. However, unlike the first Adam who failed in the garden when he was tempted (*Gen.3:12*), Christ did not fail but stood firm even though the crucible of temptation was even hotter for Him than it was for Adam. What man lost in the garden, God was making preparations to restore in yet another garden.

It is also significant that when Christ wanted to prepare Himself for spiritual work—in this case, accomplishing our redemption—He felt the need to pray (v.36). As a matter of fact, according to Luke's account, he said it was *customary* for Jesus to steal away to the Mount of Olives (*Luke 22:39*); He went there *often* to pray. This should be a lesson to us. If Christ, the God-man, needed to pray to ready Himself for spiritual work, how much more do we need to pray? How much more? Our need for prayer is certainly not less than His, for He had no indwelling sin to distract Him. Our need for prayer is greater than His! Yet sadly, I'm sure every Christian listening to me right now would confess that they don't pray as they ought.

Finally, it is significant that even though Jesus instructed His disciples to sit in a certain place while He left them to go pray, He did take with Him Peter, James, and John (v.37) and He asked them to keep watch with Him. He was asking for them to support Him in prayer. Not only do we need to pray, but we need other people's prayers. What strength can be found in corporate prayer! Jesus felt the need to pray and he asked others to pray with Him. It is not just some Christian ritual that we offer up prayer requests and ask others to pray for us. We see that pattern established right here by our Lord. We are commanded to pray for one another (*James 5:16*) and there are times when we are to pray together corporately. We gather here every Wednesday night for a corporate prayer service. Sadly, it is the least-attended service we have here at the church. If we truly believe that prayer works, and more importantly, since we see our Lord modeling corporate prayer for us, we should cease neglecting our opportunities to gather together for the purpose of prayer. I hope to see you all this coming Wednesday night where we can offer up prayers and supplications together.

And speaking of supplications, that brings me to my next point, which is the Savior's supplications. What exactly did Christ need to pray about? What was on His mind that He needed His disciples to pray with Him?

B. The Savior's Supplications (vv.39, 42, 44)

We get an inside look at Jesus' frame of mind, as it says that He began to be grieved and distressed. Something was troubling Him, and the weight was so heavy on Him that when He finally spoke to His three closest disciples, He said, "*My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death...*" (v.38). According to Luke's account, He says that Christ was in *agony* (*Luke 22:44*). His soul was being tormented to the point that He felt as if He were dying. There is a very personal, intimate

struggle going on in the 100% human soul of Jesus. As I said before, this is the greatest spiritual battle ever fought and the outcome of the plan of redemption was hanging in the balance. No one has ever had to fight the powers of darkness so fiercely.

And because of the weight of this fight and the need to avoid temptation, Jesus tells His three closest human companions to wait and keep watch with Him. He was looking for their support. He also knew what was coming upon Him. That sometime soon Judas would be coming and there was a need not only for them to pray, but to stand guard like a sentry at a post while Jesus was praying. He was asking them to keep an eye out because He knew trouble was on its way.

And now we're getting down to the subject of His supplications in verse 39. Notice the posture of His prayer. It says that *"He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed."* This wasn't a microwave prayer thrown up in haste! Jesus completely prostrates Himself before the Father. It is indicative of His humility and total submission before the Father.

We see that same humble attitude in Philippians Chapter 2 where it says that *"although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself..."* (Phil.2:6-7a). Although Jesus is God in the flesh, He did not assert His God-given rights, that's what it means when it says that He did not grasp at equality with God; He did not cling to His rights. Instead, He emptied Himself, meaning that He willingly gave up His rights, for the Bible says, *"...that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor..."* (2 Cor.8:9). He gave up His divine riches when He came to earth and took on the form of a bond-servant. He had everything in glory, but when He came to earth, He said He had nowhere to lay His head (Matt.8:20). He gave up *everything* that was due Him *for your sake*. What amazing humility and selflessness!

We see that same humility in the opening words of His supplication. *"My Father..."* He addresses God as His Father. Mark reveals another detail in his account, as he records Jesus saying, *"Abba! Father!"* (Mark 14:36). The word, *"Abba,"* is the Aramaic equivalent of father and is in the vocative case, which means that Jesus was addressing God the Father *directly*. It does not mean *daddy*, as some say. It's like saying, "Son, I need to talk to you." It's a phrase that's meant to elicit the attention of the hearer. It also denotes exclamation; there was some force behind Jesus' cry to His Father.

However, there is also reverence, He's not yelling *at* God, but He's crying out *to* Him. There is a difference, and we see that expressed in His next words: *"...if it is possible."* Jesus is not *demanding* anything from God. Jesus is not commanding the Father to do something. He's exploring all the possibilities of God's plan. He's looking for other alternatives. We even get that sense in Mark's account where He says, *"All things are possible for you..."* (Mark 14:36). In other words, "God you can do whatever you want, is there any other way to accomplish your plan? You have the power to do whatever You will, is this the only way?"

The posture of His prayer also shows us the agony He was in. The pain in His soul literally brought Him to the ground. The weight upon Him was so great that His legs gave way and He fell to the ground on His face in prayer. The distress of His soul was crushing Him and driving Him to the ground. This was not a comfortable prayer. Jesus was wrestling with God. He was pouring out His soul to His Father.

The parallel account in Luke says that *"He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground"* (Luke 22:44). There is a rare condition called Hematohidrosis where the capillary blood vessels that feed the sweat glands can rupture, causing them to exude blood; it usually occurs under conditions of extreme physical or emotional stress. Now whether Jesus actually sweat real blood or His sweat was so profuse that it fell to the ground like drops of clotted blood, the point is that His prayer, the misery in His soul, was so great that His physical body displayed an adverse reaction to His anxiety. Just like the prayer came pouring out of His heart and up through His mouth, so His sweat came pouring out of His body in such great volumes that it splashed on the ground like great drops of blood.

Listen, I have seen pools of my own sweat once or twice before, but that only happened when I was really exerting myself *physically*; when I was doing some kind of exercise. That's usually when any of us would see that amount of sweat. However, Jesus was sweating like this while He was *praying*. He was just praying. He was exerting Himself *spiritually*. This is the dictionary definition of *fervent* prayer.

And one more note regarding the pain of His soul. The book of Hebrews gives us another view into this vignette where it says that *"in the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears"* (Heb.5:7). Listen, people, Jesus shows us that it's OK to *cry* to God; even to wail. The silence in the garden was broken by the echoes of the Savior's sobbing and weeping. Sometimes the burden upon your soul is such that you cannot contain the pain any longer and it comes bursting out. Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever prayed like that?

The good news is that God listens to such prayers, for the rest of the verse says that Jesus *"was heard because of His piety"* (Heb.5:7). He offered up His prayers in humility and reverence and He was heard. How do we know He was heard? Luke says in his account that *"an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him"* (Luke 22:43); God heard Him and sent Him spiritual help from heaven. Again, He is the model for us. As we follow His example, we can find assurance in the fact that God does not despise a broken spirit and a contrite heart (Ps.51:17), He stores up our tears in a bottle (Ps.56:8), and He keeps our prayers in a bowl like incense (Rev.5:8). Just like our Lord, our pain does not go unnoticed by God. He cares, people. He cares.

And because He cares, we are commanded to cast our anxieties on Him (1 Pet.5:7). What anxieties did Jesus cast upon the Father? What was causing Him to be so deeply grieved and distressed that He cried out like this? Verse 39 records Him saying, *"...let this cup pass from Me."* What was the cause of His suffering? This verse answers that question in one short, simple, profound, biblical, redemptive word: *cup*. Jesus was being tormented by thoughts of a *cup*. A cup? What is Jesus talking about?

Well, to be clear, He is not speaking about a *literal* cup. No, Jesus is speaking *metaphorically* about a cup that is being given to Him. In the Bible, the term **"cup"** is often used to refer to an individual's fate, and it can be used either positively or negatively. One's lot in life is said in the scriptures to be their cup that they must drink. The picture is that a drink is *handed* to you and you must finish it—whether bitter or pleasant.

- **Psalm 16:5**—The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You support my lot.
- **Psalm 116:13**—I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the LORD.

- **Psalm 11:6**—Upon the wicked He will rain snares; fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.
- **Jeremiah 25:15-17**—For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, “Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. ¹⁶ They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.” ¹⁷ Then I took the cup from the LORD’S hand and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it.
- **Matthew 20:22**—But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.”
- **Revelation 16:19**—The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

So, Christ is praying that this cup, **His cup**, might pass Him by. Jesus is praying about His own fate. But why is He praying to let it pass? What is the fate that He wants to avoid? The Bible says that He is the “*Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (*Rev.13:8 KJV*), meaning that before the foundation of the world, it was decided within the Godhead that Jesus would fulfill the prophecy spoken by Abraham when He told Isaac that God would provide for Himself a lamb (*Gen.22:8*). It was decided in eternity past that Christ would come and be God’s sacrificial lamb; that He would give His life as a ransom for many (*Matt.20:28; Mark 10:45*); and that He would come to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, for our sins (*1 John 4:10*). The cup represents His death. It represents His role in accomplishing the plan of redemption. It points to His work in making purification of sins (*Heb.1:3*).

Some have said that Jesus was born to die, speaking of His purpose for coming into the world. The incarnation was a prerequisite for Calvary. Make no mistake, if the Lord tarries in coming again, you and I will die one day. However, we were not *born to die*. That can only be said of Christ. His birth, His life, and His existence as a *real* man were only precedents for His death; the fulfillment of His purpose as a man was His death. Calvary was the reason that He was born. And now the reality of Golgotha loomed before Him like a giant that was seeking to crush Him.

However, to say that Jesus wanted to avoid the cup because He was afraid of death does a great disservice to Christ. Jesus just told His disciples that He would be struck down and would be raised again (*Matt.26:31-32*). Jesus *knew* that God would raise Him again. He even predicted, on more than one occasion, that He would be raised on the third day (*Matt.17:23, 20:19*). Jesus knew that He would not remain in the grave. He knew that God would not allow His Holy One to undergo decay (*Ps.16:10*). So, if Jesus knew all this, why the prayer to let the cup pass Him by?

Because He knew something else too—He knew that all the Old Testament prophecies regarding the suffering Servant were also true about Him. He knew that He was about to be stricken, smitten *of God* and afflicted (*Is.53:4*), that He would be pierced through and crushed for our iniquities (*Is.53:5*), and that the *Father* would be pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief (*Is.53:10*). He knew that He was about to be accursed of God, as He hung on a tree at Calvary (*Deut.21:23; Gal.3:13*). He knew that “*it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (*Heb.10:31*). No, Jesus wasn’t afraid of death. He was afraid of God’s judgment. He feared the cup of God’s fierce, unmixed wrath that He was about to drink.

To understand this, we need to remember the unique, dual nature of Christ. We need to recall the truth about who He is. He is the God-man. As the creed says, He is 100% God as if He were never man and 100% man as if He were never God, united in one person. He is 100% man. He is as human as we are, yet without sin. He had the same physical needs as us. He slept, He hungered, He thirsted, and in this case, He *feared* suffering.

Matthew Henry clarifies this point for us:

He begs that this cup might pass from him, that is, that he might avoid the sufferings now at hand; or, at least, that they might be shortened. This intimates no more than that he was really and truly Man, and as a Man he could not but be averse to pain and suffering. This is the first and simple act of man's will - to start back from that which is sensibly grievous to us, and to desire the prevention and removal of it. The law of self-preservation is impressed upon the innocent nature of man, and rules there till overruled by some other law; therefore Christ admitted and expressed a reluctance to suffer.¹

The fact that Jesus recoils at the thought of suffering the wrath of God shows that He is truly man. He has the same initial reaction to suffering that we do. Think about what your first prayer usually is when you encounter extreme suffering. "Lord, please take this away." That's exactly how Jesus prayed.

However, thank God, that for our sake, He didn't just leave the request there. His entreaty for the cup to pass Him by was tempered by His recognition of God's sovereignty. He concludes His appeal by saying, **"...yet not as I will, but as You will."** In the end, Jesus was resigned to do the Father's will. He did not seek His own will, but instead the will of the Father (*John 5:30*). Jesus said that His very food was to do the will of Him who had sent Him and to accomplish His work (*John 4:34*). Christ said that the reason that He came down from heaven was to do the will of the Father and not His own will (*John 6:38*). To show the world His love for God, Jesus said that He does exactly what the Father commanded Him (*John 14:31*) and that He always does the things that are pleasing to Him (*John 8:29*).

Ultimately, if it was God's will that Christ suffer in order to free the elect from their sins, then Christ would do it. Not because He loves sinners so much, although He does love us, but because He loves the Father and desires to accomplish His will. Christ's obedience is born out of love for God, as ours should be. If you say you love God, then you will keep His commandments (*John 14:15*); the proof of your love is displayed in your life. The Apostle John makes it clear that if you say you have fellowship with God, but still walk in darkness, you lie and do not practice the truth (*1 John 1:6*). You're only fooling yourself if you think you can say one thing but do another and still get into heaven. The Bible says that without sanctification (practical holiness), no one will see the Lord (*Heb. 12:14*). If we are born of His seed, our lives should resemble Christ's—not perfectly of course, but there should be a growing practice of the truth happening.

As for the other two verses that mention His second and third attempts at prayer (vv. 42, 44), we won't go into any more detail about them since they are redundant to verse 39. However, a couple of final observations about Christ's supplications. Notice in verse 42 that the request is changed from the removal of the cup to *"unless I drink it"*; Jesus' human will is now beginning to find strength and resignation to carry out the plan of God, even in the face of great suffering. Notice that in verse 44, although it says He went away and repeated the same thing once more,

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Matthew 26:39

it seems that this shorthand by Matthew points to the fact that by this point, the wrestling was over; Jesus was fully resolved to carry out His brutal task.

The other thing is that we see Jesus doing the very thing that He commanded us earlier in this same book. He said, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you*" (Matt.7:7). We see Jesus going three times to make His petitions. We see the same pattern with Paul when he asked for the thorn to be removed from his flesh; he implored the Lord three times (2 Cor.12:8). Don't misunderstand me; three is not some magic number. It's not like rubbing a lamp where a genie comes out and gives us three wishes; it's not that the "third time is the charm."

The point of Jesus going back three times illustrates what He commanded earlier, namely that we must ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking. We must keep wrestling with God in prayer until we have prevailed like Jacob (Gen.32:24-28). We are foolish to expect that if we are under extreme duress that we can pray *one* time and find the strength that we need. Of course, God can do all things and give us the peace we need after the first hearing, but usually because of the weakness of our flesh, we need to tarry long at the throne of grace in order for us to be convinced, like Paul, that *His power is perfected in weakness* (2 Cor.12:9). And that's the point that Jesus illustrates for us by example; He is strengthened by prayer, while the disciples are slumbering.

C. The Slumbering Disciples (vv.40-41, 43, 45-46)

And that brings me to my final point. We see the inaction of the disciples sharply contrasted with the activity of Christ; He continually prayed, while they continually slumbered. He constantly wept, while they constantly slept. He made persistent petitions, while they lingered in lethargy. I think you get the picture. Right away we see the principle of sowing and reaping (Gal.6:7-8). In whatever we do, we can either sow to the flesh and reap corruption, or we can sow to the Spirit and reap eternal life. In our account, the disciples sowed to the flesh, they should have been praying as Jesus instructed them to do, but instead, they slept; they indulged the flesh.

Now don't get me wrong sleep is not sinful. *Too* much sleep can be sinful, but God has created our physical bodies to require sleep. Remember that He is the only One who never slumbers or sleeps (Ps.121:4). And as someone has said before, whenever we lay down to rest, it should be a reminder to humble yourself because it shows that you are not God. However, there are times when we need to deny ourselves and watch and pray. This occasion in the Garden was one of those times for the disciples. Jesus even told them so, but they failed to obey Him. They failed Jesus.

Think about the insensitivity of the disciples. Jesus tells His three closest earthly companions that His soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; He confessed to them that He was deeply troubled and asked them to pray. Then He went a little beyond them, Luke says it was about a stone's throw away (Luke 22:41) and fell to the ground and began crying aloud to the Father. It is very likely that they could still *see* and *hear* Jesus from where they were. And yet, they could not stay awake to keep watch with Him for one hour (v.40). Do you see how spiritually dull they were? Do you see how they failed Christ? Now, what about you? What about me? Are you spiritually dull right now? Jesus provides us the remedy in verse 41.

- **Matthew 26:41**—Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

How do we keep from getting spiritually dull? How do we stay alert and avoid temptation? How do we strengthen ourselves when the fires of temptation have suddenly blazed up against us? Jesus tells us and shows us by example in this passage: *keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation*. That is the main point of this passage of scripture. Jesus has been doing that very thing for an hour; He's leading by example, but the disciples are too sleepy to see it. So now He tells them what they are supposed to do.

How do we know that this is the main point? Well, some word clues are given, a little deduction is needed, and comparing scripture with scripture proves it. First, we have to remember what we've been taught to do when we study the Bible. We need to observe what we see in the passage. Here we see that the word "**prayer**" repeated several times in various tenses in this passage. One of those times is in the command given in verse 41 by Jesus. We can deduce that this is the main idea by looking at the structure of the passage itself. We see Jesus praying three times. We see the disciples sleeping three times. These components of the passage are grouped together by their repetition. However, one thing stands out as not being like the others, and that's the command we have in verse 41. Finally, if we compare the accounts in the three synoptic gospels, we see that Luke makes it clear that this command is the main idea, as he repeats it twice in his account (*Luke 22:40, 46*).

So, if we wish to be successful at fighting through temptation the way Jesus does here, then we must "*keep watching and praying*." The two words in English translated as "**keep watching**" are one word in Greek (*grēgoreuō*: gray-gor-yoo'-o) and it means to stay awake or to be vigilant. The picture that this word conveys is like a sentry standing guard at a post. The word is used throughout the New Testament and is also translated as *keeping alert, be on the alert, alert*, etc. We must stay awake spiritually and not let our guard down. We are to guard our hearts with all diligence (*Prov.4:23*) because the way we live springs forth from it. Once Christ has awakened us spiritually, there is a need to stay awake and be on the alert. There is always a danger of us getting dull.

- **Ephesians 5:14-17**—For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

After Christ shines His light upon us, the admonition given is to be careful how we walk. We are to exercise wisdom and use our time wisely. We must wake up! If we do not stay alert and walk in wisdom, then the verses I just read said that we are foolish. The way to avoid foolishness is to keep alert and pray. How do we stay vigilant? We need to ask God for help. We need to pray. This is not something that we can do in our strength. If you try, you will fail like the disciples. We *must* be on the alert and we *must* pray. That is the only way to avoid entering into temptation.

The word here for temptation (*peirasmos*: pi-ras-mos') means to put to the test. It refers to a solicitation to do either good or evil and specifically in this context, Jesus was referring to the test that would be coming on the disciples soon, as they would be tested in their allegiance to Christ at His arrest. It means the same thing for us. When we are tempted, we are also tested in our allegiance to Him. Will we obey Him, or will we give in to the temptation and falter?

The only way to succeed is to keep watching and praying. Why? Jesus explains in the latter half of verse 41, when He says, *"the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."* As believers, we have a struggle that Christ did not have. We have a spiritual battle going on inside of us between the flesh and the Spirit. It is the same thing that Paul describes in detail in Romans Chapter 7. The Spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak. Therefore, we must stay alert, be aware of our own weaknesses, and pray.

A final contrast can be seen here between Christ and the disciples. He was strengthened to overcome the temptation that came upon Him. At the end of His third petition, He was ready to face the cross. However, the disciples, although they had been warned about everything that was about to happen, chose to sleep instead of pray; they were unprepared spiritually. They were not ready for what was about to happen, and that becomes evident as we witness them doing exactly what Jesus predicted they would do, they left Him and fled (v.56). They were unprepared, they had indulged the flesh, and now they were about to immediately reap the corruption of sin by fleeing and denying the Lord.

Jesus was ready because He had been vigilant. He had prepared Himself spiritually. How do we know this? He closes out this section of scripture triumphantly. We see that after He comes to the disciples a third time and wakes them again, He says, *"Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!"* (vv.45-46). He's telling them to pay attention, to look around. That's what **"behold"** means. He probably saw the crowds coming. He's saying, "I'm about to be captured. Wake up! It's time. The one who betrays me is coming." However, we get the sense that Jesus was trying to flee, as verse 46 is translated as *let us be going*. However, the Greek word used here (*agō*: *ag'-o*) is a military term that can be used to refer to going to meet an enemy, like advancing toward a coming army. Jesus was not fleeing, He was going to meet the angry mob that had come to capture Him. He was ready for the cross. He had beaten Satan and his waves of temptation alone in the garden just like He had beaten him before at the start of His ministry when He was tempted in the wilderness (*Matt.4:1-11*). Once again Jesus proved that He could not be beaten. He proved that the ruler of this world (Satan) had nothing on Him (*John 14:30*). There was nothing in Christ that Satan could grab hold of. There was no temptation that Jesus would succumb to. He had beaten Satan and was ready to go to the cross to drink the cup.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I have to ask, "Do you know Christ today?" Do you know Him as *your* sin-bearer? Do you realize that He drank the cup of God's wrath for you? If you don't know Him in this way, I invite you to call upon Him for salvation today. If you do not, then you will drink the cup of judgment yourself. Christ has already drunk it for you. There is no reason for you wait any longer. Submit to Him now. And for those who have already surrendered to Him, the word for us is to keep watching and praying. We must stay awake. We must keep watch over our own hearts, know our weaknesses, and resist temptation by praying. We cannot fight the spiritual battle and win apart from Christ, for He said we can do nothing apart from Him (*John 15:5*). We will not overcome unless we watch and pray.

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