

Why are You Sleeping?

Scripture Text: Luke 22:39-46

Introduction

It is Palm Sunday. This is the day the Church celebrates Jesus' triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. On this day, almost two thousand years ago, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey amongst the praise and adoration of many people. Once He entered the city, He went to the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers because God's house should be a "house of prayer." (Matthew 21:13) Later, He taught His disciples the importance of faithful prayer and said, "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matthew 21:21-22) During this week, He lamented over Jerusalem and foretold the destruction of the Temple. He told many parables and spoke on the end times, the resurrection from the dead, and the final judgement to come. He celebrated the Jewish Passover with His disciples and instituted the first Lord's Supper. Then Judas left the group to betray Jesus and the remaining disciples went with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. This was the last time Jesus would be with His disciples before His death. A lot happened during this important week, but what does Jesus do with His time while in the garden? He prayed.

The Garden Prayer

In Matthew and Mark's account of Jesus' garden prayer, we see the following things. The disciples followed Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter, James and John went further into the garden with Jesus to pray. Jesus told them that He was "greatly distressed and troubled" and that His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death." He was in deep emotional distress. He told Peter, James and John to remain behind and stay awake, while He went about a stone's throw from them to pray. When He came back to them, He found them sleeping, and He said, "Could you not watch one hour?" In spite of their best intentions to be with Jesus, they could not even stay awake for one hour. Jesus told them, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation." Clearly, Jesus' expectation for His closest friends was for them to not only stay awake while He went off by Himself and prayed, but also for them to be praying, too. He returned to them two more times, and each time He found them asleep.

I love to sleep. I need to sleep. I typically want to sleep more than I probably should. I will typically procrastinate as long as I can. Luke told us in his account of this prayer that the disciples were asleep because of sorrow. Maybe they had grieved so much for Jesus and over what He had told them that they became weary. Nevertheless, when Jesus came back the last time, He told them, "Get up and pray!" This reminds me of my mom telling me to get up for school when I was little. I had a habit of sleeping too late on school days, as some of you probably do on Sunday, and did not want to get up. My mom would come into my room and say, "Get up! You are going to be late!" Jesus told His disciples to get up and pray. They had slept long enough. There was much to pray about and they needed to be praying. Why should they pray? Why is it important? I will give you five things about Jesus' prayer in the Garden that should encourage us to pray.

Pray Because Jesus Prayed

The first thing we can learn from Jesus' prayer is that we ought to pray. Not only did Jesus set for us an example for how to pray, but He also told us to pray. This was not a suggestion, it was a command from our Lord and Savior. Prayer is a marching order from our Commander in Chief. It is essential wartime communications for soldiers in the Lord's army. We pray because Jesus told us to pray, but we also pray because Jesus, our Lord and Savior, prayed and led by example. In this passage, we actually see both: we see a command from Jesus to His disciples telling them to pray and we also see our Lord praying and giving us an example for how we should pray. So, prayer is an essential spiritual discipline that we ought to be doing, because our Lord said so.

Pray for the Father's Will to be Done

Secondly, prayer should be about the Father's will. Jesus already gave us an example of prayer. He had taught His disciples about prayer and its importance. In this prayer, though, He modeled one of the most important truths about prayer and our relationship with God. Jesus expressed His desires to the Father with full honesty and humility. Yet, even more importantly than His requests to God, was His submission to God's greater plan. Look at the following verses.

Luke 22:41–42 ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Some may be confused by Jesus' prayer here. Some may find it hard to believe that the Son of God would want the Father in Heaven to make it possible that He not go through the pain and suffering of the cross. If Jesus was solely divine, this criticism may be warranted, but Jesus was not just God. Jesus was God in the flesh. For someone Who was also completely human, it was natural for Jesus to not want to go through the horror of crucifixion. None of us would want that. More than that, it is natural for Jesus, who had enjoyed complete fellowship with the Father for all eternity, to not want to endure the pain of being separated and forsaken by His Father. Nevertheless, Jesus prayed that the Father's will be done and not His. In the midst of painful suffering and anguish over what was about to happen, Jesus prayed the Father's will be done.

Do we pray like that? Do we want God's will and God's plan to be done regardless of what it means for us? "Not my will, but your will be done" ought to be the banner that flies over every prayer we make. When we pray to God the Father, we should pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done, regardless of what we want or what it may mean for us personally. Sometimes His will is not what we want. Sometimes His will and His plan brings pain and suffering to us for a while. We can and should pray to God though, knowing that He has the best plan possible. Even when God says "no" to us, it can only be what is best. We can and should trust God that His will is far better than anything we desire. Our Heavenly Father knows best. May our desires conform to His. May His will be done in our lives, in the life of the church, and in the whole world.

Pray Fervently in the Midst of Trouble

The third thing we see in Jesus' prayer here is that He prayed fervently. He knew what was coming and He still prayed to the Father. The cup that Jesus mentioned in His prayer was a symbol of suffering and divine anger. From the Old Testament, we see that taking of the cup denotes that Jesus took upon himself the wrath of God. Look at what the prophet Isaiah wrote.

Isaiah 51:22 ²² *Thus says your Lord, the Lord, your God who pleads the cause of his people: "Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;*

Interesting, Jesus and His disciples had just observed the first Lord's Supper which symbolized His death and sacrifice for them. They used a cup during the supper to represent His blood that was shed for the forgiveness of sin. Here, Jesus prayed to the Father that if possible, the cup of suffering would pass from Him. Jesus had to face this suffering and death, knowing the Father would not be with Him. For the first time ever, the Son of God would be separated from His Heavenly Father. For the first time, the Holy Trinity of God would be separated and their fellowship broken. Jesus anticipated His own pain and suffering on the cross and the separation from His Father in heaven, therefore he prayed more earnestly. Look at the following verses.

Luke 22:43-44 ⁴³ *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.* ⁴⁴ *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Luke alone tells us of Jesus being in so much agony that His sweat fell to the ground like "great drops of blood." (Luke 22:44) This could be just a description of Jesus' anguish over what was about to happen, or it could be that Jesus experienced a condition known as *hematidrosis*, where extreme anguish or physical strain causes one's capillary blood vessels to dilate and burst. In either case, Luke's main purpose here was to describe the intensity of Jesus' emotional and physical trauma. He was in agony. Because He was in such agony, Jesus prayed more fervently. He kept praying and the passage tells us that He was strengthened by an angel.

When faced with some difficult circumstance or some pain and suffering, do you sometimes want to just give up and throw in the towel? Sometimes it may seem easier to do just that, but don't give up! Be like the persistent widow who kept praying. Be like our Lord and Savior who kept praying. Pray fervently and you will be strengthened. God does not promise to remove your cup of suffering, just as He did not remove Jesus' cup of suffering, but God will strengthen you so that you can go through whatever it is you are experiencing. Pray fervently to receive strength in the midst of trouble. I have heard it said that Jesus did not say He would take your cross from you, meaning your suffering, but He did say that He will help you bear it. His grace is sufficient and He is with you always, even until the end of the age. You can trust Christ to be with you and to strengthen you through the most painful moments of your life. Just keep praying.

Pray That You Do Not Succumb to Temptation

Fourthly, when we pray, we ought to ask for God's help to not yield to temptations of sin. We have already seen this request in the Lord's Prayer, which not only includes a request for forgiveness but also a petition for God to help us not succumb to temptation. We see this mentioned twice in Jesus' garden prayer. The first time was in verse forty. The second time was in verse forty-six. Look at the verses below.

Luke 22:45–46 ⁴⁵ *And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow,* ⁴⁶ *and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."*

Temptations are attempts for you to do something wrong. It is the same thing Satan tried to do to Jesus when He went into the wilderness for forty days. Satan tried to get Jesus to do something He should not do, to get Him off His mission so that He would not do what God had sent Him to the world to do. The word "enter" is used as if temptation is something you can go into, like a room or a building. The analogy is interesting, because we typically have the choice whether we go into a room or not. I chose to go to the bathroom this morning. I chose to get into my car. I chose to come to place today. Sometimes, the reason we go somewhere is because someone is asking us to go there. Someone may tell you, "Come go with me to the club," or "Come go with me to the game." There is oftentimes a pleading for you to go, and then there is a choice whether you will go. The same is true for temptation. Temptations are presented to us every day and we have a choice as to whether we will "go" or "enter into" them.

How did Jesus deal with temptations? He obeyed and recited God's Word. We need to study and know God's Word for the times we are tempted. Jesus also prayed. Was He tempted to not go through with the crucifixion? Maybe so! Jesus certainly did not want to experience the pain, suffering, and separation from God that was about to happen, but doing His Father's will was more important than succumbing to His own human desires. He prayed and so we need to pray that we do not yield to own selfish desires. The temptation of sin is great. I may not be tempted in the same way as you, but we each face temptations that beg for our attention, and we will give them our undivided attention if we have the opportunity. Therefore, we must pray! We must pray that we will not yield to sinful temptations. We must pray that we resist the devil and flee from Him.

Do not be arrogant and prideful saying to yourself, "I would never do this or that." You will sin given the opportunity and the right circumstances. That is why it is so important to put boundaries around yourself. That is why it is important for married men and women to not have close encounters with someone of the opposite sex. Do not say you will not cheat on your spouse, because you will if you are in the "wrong" situation. That is why if you are tempted to drink too much that you not associate or be around others who do drink. That is why if you are a compulsive gambler or you like to spend too much money that you not put yourself in situations that might give you that opportunity. We all have temptations vying for our attention, so we need to pray earnestly that we do not yield to those temptations.

Pray to Accomplish the Work of God

One last observation about Jesus' prayer is about the work Jesus was called to do. Several times in the Gospel accounts, it was written that Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. He was on a mission. The Father sent His only Son to the world for the purpose of saving mankind, and the path to completing His mission was through the cross. When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, the crowds were saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!" Now, toward the end of the week, Jesus was facing His upcoming trial, rejection, suffering and death. A lot can change in a matter of a few days. Jesus was on the way to the cross. He knew what He was sent to do and the great work that was involved to do it. And so, in the garden right before the soldiers came to arrest Him, Jesus prayed to the Father so that He would accomplish this great work. He prayed that God's will and God's plan would be done.

Church, we have a great work to do. God has given to His church a great mission to reach the world for Jesus Christ, and it too, requires prayer. Last week, we read a passage where Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few." Because of that situation, Jesus told His disciples to pray for more workers of the harvest. God has given us many resources. He has placed this church in the middle of a great harvest of people who need to hear about Jesus Christ. He has given us the Holy Spirit to empower us to accomplish supernatural things. What we do not have right now is a lot people going into the field to reap the harvest of God. There is work to be done and we need more disciples to do it. Are you praying for this great work? Are you praying for laborers in the field? Remember, we are soldiers in the Lord's army. We are on the front lines of a spiritual battle. We fight supernatural forces that are bent on destroying us and preventing people from hearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we all need to be talking to our Commander in Chief, getting our marching orders, receiving His power to serve, and completing the works He has called us to do. Therefore, pray!

Conclusion

In closing, are you sleeping when you should be praying? Are you like the disciples who were found sleeping on the job? Is the Master catching you asleep when you should be awake and praying? There is much for which we should be praying. There is much work for us to do. The disciples faced Satan's sifting (Luke 22:31) and they needed to pray so that their faith would not fail them. We, too, face the enemy who is determined to see God's Church fail. Satan loves to get a church off mission so that they will not faithfully serve God. Satan loves to deprive a church of the power of God through prayer. Let us not give Satan what he wants. Let us stay awake while we have time, and pray earnestly for this church, for the work God has called us to do, and for the lost people who need to hear the name of Jesus Christ. Let us stay awake in prayer so that we accomplish the mission of reaching this world for Christ. Arm yourself with prayer, for with it, you will be able to persevere and be faithful to our Lord. Let us not fall asleep. Let us pray earnestly. Amen and amen!