

## **The Son in Sorrow, Part 2**

Scripture: Matthew 26:40–46

Code: 2386

### **INTRODUCTION**

For many years it has been my personal joy and privilege to be involved in an intensive study of the life of Christ. When I was a seminary student, I went to a used book store and purchased old volumes on the life of Christ. I read them with eagerness and excitement, for the Lord planted a desire in my heart to know everything I could about what the Savior was like, what He said, and what He did.

Many Christians know little about Christ. All the rich, rewarding, profound, and blessed events of the Savior's life are unknown to them. I imagine there are many Christians who know the characters and details of soap operas better than the details of the life of Christ. Many Christians can tell you all about movies and movie stars, television and television personalities. Many can sing you the hit songs of the last ten years; and they can tell you who sang them. Many can tell you the story line and characters in novels. Some believers know all there is to know about cars and boats. Others can give you all the batting averages for their favorite baseball teams. A couple of years ago the popularity of trivia games exploded. It is amazing to discover how much useless stuff you can crowd into your brain! We can know so much about so many things, yet know little about Jesus Christ, who is our Savior. We should love Him so much that we would not wish for any detail of His life and being to escape our knowledge.

Jesus Christ is the God-Man--one hundred percent God, and one hundred percent man. Yet in Matthew 26:39 He cries out to God for deliverance, but then willingly goes to the cross that awaits Him. The apparent paradoxes are too profound to understand. So while we desire to know every detail about the life of Christ, we can only know so much.

I believe Matthew 26:36-46 has been passed over by many scholars. We tend to focus on Christ's suffering on the cross to the detriment of what He suffered in the garden of Gethsemane.

### **REVIEW**

#### **I. SETTING THE SCENE (vv. 36-37a; see pp. xx-xx)**

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee."

#### **II. UNFOLDING THE TEXT (vv. 37b-46)**

##### **A. Sorrow (vv. 37b-38; see pp. xx-xx)**

"[He] began to be sorrowful and very depressed. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; tarry here, and watch with me."

##### **B. Supplication (vv. 39, 42, 44)**

In the midst of His sorrow, Jesus cried out to God three different times.

### **The Tempter Behind the Scenes**

I believe that Christ was tempted in the garden. Some people believe He wasn't. Satan's goal was to prevent Christ from going to the cross, thus preventing the resurrection. Those who disagree with that interpretation claim Satan isn't mentioned in this passage. That's true; Matthew doesn't dignify

Satan. But it's obvious that Satan is behind the scenes.

While Christ and all the disciples were still in the upper room, Satan entered into Judas to accomplish his work (John 13:27). Later, as Christ instructed the remaining disciples, He said, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). Christ affirmed Satan would tempt Him, but that his temptation would not succeed. As Christ approached the garden, He anticipated His impending conflict with Satan.

In Luke 22:53 as Jesus is seized by the religious leaders and soldiers, He tells them, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." In reality, it was Satan's hour.

Jesus knew Satan was behind His arrest and eventual crucifixion, even while He was in the upper room. As Christ entered the garden, He began the most intense struggle of His life--more intense than the temptation at the beginning of His ministry. That first time there is no indication He sweat great drops of blood. The agony of this final temptation is unequalled, as Satan attempts to keep Christ off the cross so He cannot atone for sin.

As Jesus cries out to God in the midst of His temptation, we learn about His suffering, which gives us a better understanding of His love. The more we know about His love, the more thankful we ought to be. But beyond that, Christ's temptation shows those of us who would follow God's will how to meet temptation--He met temptation through prayer.

#### 1. The first supplication (v. 39)

"He went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

a) The elements of Christ's prayer Christ was always clear about His commitment to follow God's will. In verse 39 He says, "As thou wilt" and in verse 42, "Thy will be done." Then verse 44 says, "[He] prayed the third time, saying the same words." But because the prospect of bearing sin, dying on the cross, and being separated from God was so much to bear, He asked God if there were another way to accomplish redemption. Still, Christ held fast to His willingness to follow God's plan. Make no mistake: Jesus was not trying to avoid the cross as long as it was God's will for Him to go there. Only a few days earlier Jesus had said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). Christ knew He had to die. In verse 27 He says, "What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour." Christ did not ask God to save Him from death--He came into the world to die. But when faced with the pain and horror of His impending crucifixion, He asked if it were possible for God's plan to be fulfilled in another way.

## LESSON

b) The explanation of Christ's perspiration As Christ agonized in prayer over His temptation, He began to sweat. The nights are cool that time of year, so His sweat was a result of His agony. Luke 22:44 says, "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood." The Greek word translated "drops" is thrombos, which means "clots." (1) Receiving strength from an angel Just prior to Christ's perspiring blood, Luke 22:43 says, "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening Him." Matthew 26:38 tells us His sorrow was so intense, that it was "unto death." Jesus might have died in the garden were it not for the strengthening from the angel. His solitary prayer intensified His struggle, as did His sorrow unto death. (2) Releasing sweat mixed with blood Hermatidrosis, the phenomenon of sweating blood, is rare. When a person enters into extreme anguish, such as our Lord did, the resulting strain can cause the dilation of the subcutaneous capillaries (those tiny blood vessels just under the skin). As they dilate, they could burst. In the vicinity of the sweat glands, blood and sweat will then be exuded together. As Christ shed a multitude of tears (Heb. 5:7) and sweat profusely in His agony, His capillaries burst. The clots of blood gave a red color to beads of sweat running down His face and dripping onto His clothing. After that first session, having been

strengthened by the angel, He rose from prayer and returned to His disciples (v. 40). But then He returned to prayer a second time.

## 2. The second supplication (v. 42)

"He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done."

a) A secure companionship Again Christ addressed God as His Father, as He continued to hold on to His intimate relationship with God. He felt the enemy trying to pull Him away from God's will. b) A strengthened commitment Then Christ changed His petition. The first time He said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass" (v. 39). Now He said, "If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it [endure it], thy will be done." Again we see the emphasis of the temptation was to get Christ to avoid the cross. At the cross our Lord would experience the cup of God's wrath against sin. Although Christ asked God if the cup could pass Him by, He knew it couldn't. So we see Him strengthened in His commitment to do God's will.

## 3. The third supplication (v. 44)

"He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words."

His words may have been even more resolute. He may have said, "Since this cannot pass, Thy will be done." Instead of getting weaker with every round, it appears He became stronger. Christ was winning the victory over the enemy.

What a beautiful picture! With strong crying and tears, great agony, and persistent supplication to God, Christ held firmly to God's will and against all that hell could bring. Satan's powers of temptation were energized to their absolute limit in his effort to keep Christ from the cross. Yet all the way through Christ said, "Thy will be done." He was resolute in His commitment to God's will.

## The Purpose of Prayer in the Midst of Temptation

There were three waves to Satan's attack, just as there were in the first temptation at the beginning of Christ's ministry (Matt. 4:1- 12). Satan required three sequences to unleash his powerful temptation. Christ endured unrelenting agony as He affirmed His resolution to fulfill God's will perfectly.

Through Christ's experience we learn that "prayer is not an engine by which we overcome the unwillingness of God. God is ever ready to grant what is really good for us, when we have, by prayer, made ourselves ready to receive it" (Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew [London: Elliot Stock, 1909], p. 370). Prayer is perhaps best defined as lining up with what God wants us to do at any price, even if our lives are at stake. Satan tries to divert us from obeying God's will by appealing to our lusts. Prayer puts us in touch with God so we can tell Him, "I don't want to disobey You; strengthen me!" Prayer lines us up with God's blessing.

After the third temptation, Jesus was the victor and Satan the vanquished. The enemy of Christ's soul was gone. Christ was now in perfect harmony with the will of God, calmly prepared to move toward the cross. The key to Christ's victory was supplication-- He cried out to God. And if He who is God needed to do that, how desperately we need to do the same, especially when in the midst of temptation. That is the lesson He wanted His disciples and us to learn.

## C. Sleep (vv. 40, 43, 45a)

### 1. The first instance (v. 40)

a) The disinterest of the disciples (v. 40a) "He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep." The three disciples were sleeping at the moment of the greatest spiritual conflict in the history of the world. They should have been praying. It was obvious that's what Christ intended for them when He left to pray on His own. In verse 41 He even tells them, "Watch and pray." They had much to pray about. Were they so absolutely indifferent to the agony of Christ that they slept and couldn't stay awake to pray for their own Master? Jesus previously told them that they would be

offended because of Him and be scattered abroad (v. 31). He told Peter that he would deny Him on three occasions before the cock crowed (v. 34). He even told them that He would be betrayed, offered as a sacrifice for sin, and rise again, and that it all would begin that night (John 13-16). How could they possibly sleep? But they did. They did not understand that the price of victory is vigilance.(1) The reason for their sleepThe natural thing for the disciples to do after midnight was sleep. After all, they were weary from a busy week of activity. Additionally, they recently had eaten a huge meal--all eleven had consumed an entire sacrificial lamb and everything that went with it, including unleavened bread and four cups of wine. Then they had just completed a long walk and a hard hike up the Mount of Olives. I'm sure they felt weary just from that. Luke adds that they also were sleepy because of sorrow (22:45). The circumstances were depressing for them, and when people become depressed, they often find escape in sleep.(2) The reason for their disinterestThe disciples had not come to grips with the real issues. When my mind is exercised over some spiritual conflict, I can't sleep even though my body is extremely weary. The battle takes over. But the disciples didn't engage in the battle. Weakness and sinfulness caused them to be indifferent to the impending conflict. So they slept.We shouldn't be surprised that Peter, James, and John fell asleep; they also fell asleep on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32). The intensity of Christ's struggle, the warning of the Lord about their desertion, Christ's prediction of His crucifixion, and the institution of the Lord's supper should have clued them in on what was happening.b) The disappointment of Christ (v. 40b)"He saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"That Peter couldn't stay awake for one hour indicates that Christ was in prayer with the Father for that period of time.

## 2. The second instance (v. 43)

"He came and found them asleep again; for their eyes were heavy."

That Jesus found them asleep again indicates they fell asleep a second time. We know the Lord awakened them once because He told Peter, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation" (vv. 40-41). Even with that warning, they still couldn't keep alert. When He went back to pray, they fell asleep again. Why did they fall asleep? Their eyes were heavy. They were overpowered by their physical impulses. While the Lord was alone in agony, the three disciples were indifferent.

## 3. The third instance (v. 45a)

"Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest."

The disciples were still indifferent--out of touch with the situation. I believe it is best to translate the phrase "Sleep on now, and take your rest" as a question. The New International Version translates that way, and I believe properly so. Jesus was asking them a pensive, painful question: "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?" They were unaware of the nature of the spiritual battle.

Indifferent to the needs of Christ and the power of the enemy, the disciples were about to be totally overwhelmed by the circumstances and forsake Christ (v. 56). They would never pass the temptation. They would fall into sin and reject Christ. At the moment of crisis, they would run away. They weren't ready. Our Lord's lesson is clear: victory belongs to those who are alert in all spiritual battles--those who have recognized their weaknesses. The disciples were fools, believing they would never be offended because of Christ, and claiming they were prepared to go to prison or die before denying Him. They put too much stock in their good intentions. Victory isn't won by those who sleep when the battle is imminent, but to those who are vigilant. It's a tragedy to see spiritual self-confidence, for it betrays a state of unpreparedness.

## D. Strength (vv. 45b-46)

### 1. Stating the victory (v. 45b)

"Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

When Christ made that statement, I believe He saw the Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders carrying their torches and swords, accompanied by Judas, moving up the Mount of Olives. The sinless Son of God was about to be arrested by sinners. As they came, the disciples were sleeping. But Christ was

victorious. He had defeated the hosts of hell. He stood victorious, covered with bloody sweat, courageously prepared to face the cross. While He had been conquering the enemy in the strength of His Father, the disciples had slept.

## 2. Summoning the disciples (v. 46a)

"Rise, let us be going."

Christ was not encouraging the disciples to flee with Him. The Greek word translated "going" is a military term meaning "to go forward," as in going to meet an advancing enemy. Jesus was strengthened in His temptation. He was victorious. Now He was ready to confront His captors--they didn't have to find Him.

As He approached them He said, "Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus, of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he" (John 18:4-5). When He said that, they all fell to the ground (v. 6). Christ exemplifies great courage. Satan tempted Jesus to disbelieve that God would raise Him from the dead. But He committed Himself to the One who is able to raise the dead. So with confidence He moved resolutely toward His captors. He saw beyond the cross to the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). He willingly endured the cross.

Scripture doesn't say we're to run from the devil. It says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7, emphasis added). We're to stand our ground. We resist him in the strength of prayer and the Word of God, as Christ demonstrated in both of His temptations. We can defeat the enemy with the two-edged sword of the Word and prayer.

## 3. Signifying the traitor (v. 46b)

"Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me."

When Christ said, "The Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (v. 45), He was referring to all those who would be responsible for His execution. But the one leading the parade of sinners was Judas. The Greek word translated "betray" means "deliver." Judas was the one who delivered Christ into the hands of those sinners. But Christ went on to meet him victoriously.

## E. Sequence (v. 41)

After His first session of prayer, Jesus said to Peter, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (v. 40). Then He gave the principle I believe He was intending to teach them.

### 1. Establishing the principle for victory (v. 41a)

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

Christ was telling them to stay alert and stay in prayer. He was encouraging them to discern when they were in the midst of spiritual warfare and turn to God. They were not to let their self-confidence lull them to sleep. The way to avoid temptation is to stay alert to it--to be aware of Satan's devices (2 Cor. 2:11)--and then to go to the Father in prayer.

Peter learned that principle. In 2 Peter 2:9 he says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." You go to God for deliverance. The scout for the army doesn't engage in battle with the enemy once he finds them; that would be idiotic. Instead, he returns to tell the commander what he's learned, and then the commander leads the troops into battle. No Christian can be victorious in fighting Satan by himself; he must report to the Commander. Jesus Himself sought out our heavenly Father for divine strength.

In Matthew 6:13 Jesus teaches us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." We can accomplish that through the Lord only; we can't do it on our own. The disciples thought they could. But they denied and forsook Christ.

### 2. Explaining the principle for victory (v. 41b)

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Every believer has a problem that Christ didn't have. His perfection allowed Him to act and respond without sin in every occasion of temptation. But we have a unique problem: a willing spirit, but weak flesh. Regenerated people love God and desire to do what is right. No doubt, Peter, James, and John loved the Savior and wanted to do what was right. I'm sure the other eight disciples also

wanted to do what was right, but they were weak.

a) Peter's explanation I'm sure Peter suffered greatly over his denial because that was the last thing he wanted to do (Matt. 26:33, 35). In 1 Peter 5:8 he says, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Peter learned that lesson right in the garden of Gethsemane. He could teach that with conviction because Satan devoured all the disciples on the night the Lord needed them the most. They didn't want to abandon the Lord, but they did. b) Paul's explanation How can you be victorious? The apostle Paul gives us the answer in Galatians 5:16: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Victory results when a believer walks in obedience to the Holy Spirit, fills himself with the Word of God, and yields his life to God's Spirit.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **A. The Sequence for Disaster**

The sequence for disaster in the midst of temptation is confidence, sleep, temptation, sin, disaster. The confident believer claims he can handle any temptation. He maintains he doesn't need to pray. He says he will never deny the Lord. He is sure he will remain faithful. He firmly believes he will always be strong enough to be victorious. Sleep then follows confidence. After all, what would he need to be vigilant about? The confident believer doesn't see a need to guard what he sees, reads, hears, and thinks. Sleep then leads to temptation, and from that to sin and disaster. That's the way the disciples lived.

### **B. The Sequence for Victory**

We see a different pattern in Jesus' life. Instead of being confident, He was humble. Jesus recognized the weakness of His humanness, even though He was sinless. So while the disciples were claiming confidently that they would never fail Christ, Jesus turned to God for strength. Whereas the disciples' confidence led to sleep, Christ's humility led to prayer. But after the temptation came Christ's obedience to the will of God. And that was followed by victory. You have a choice. You can either be self-confident and end up in disaster, or you can be humble, fall on your knees before God in prayer for strength, and then commit yourself to God's will in the midst of temptation. The latter is the only way to victory.

## **Focusing on the Facts**

1. Why do many Christians know so little about the Life of Christ?
2. How can we know Jesus was being tempted by Satan in the garden of Gethsemane?
3. What happened to Christ in the midst of His agony (Luke 22:44)? Explain how that could have happened.
4. According to Matthew 26:42, in what way did Christ change His petition to God?
5. Give a definition of prayer as it relates to temptation.
6. Why should the disciples have been praying instead of sleeping? What didn't they understand?
7. Why were the disciples sleeping? What were they indifferent to?
8. How often did the three disciples fall asleep?
9. Explain the significance of Christ's statement to the disciples, "Rise, let us be going" (Matt. 26:46).
10. How does a believer effectively resist the devil?
11. According to Matthew 26:41, what is the principle for victory? Explain it.
12. In facing temptation, what problem do believers have that Christ didn't have?
13. What is the sequence for disaster? What is the sequence for victory?

## **Pondering the Principles**

1. How much do you know about Christ? Are there earthly things you know more about? What are they? How many of them warrant more attention from you than the life of Christ? If you want to know

more about the life of Christ, you can begin a study of His life in the gospels. You will need to obtain a harmony of the gospels to capture the chronological flow of His life. You also may want to obtain a book on His life; there are many fine ones available, such as The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by Alfred Edersheim. Then commit yourself to studying about Him each day.

2. Are you like the disciples, indifferent to the spiritual battles taking place around you? Or have you taken heed to Christ's warning to watch and pray, knowing that vigilance will pay off in victory? Be specific in your analysis. How can you turn your indifference into victory? What things can you do to become more alert to temptation? How often do you ask God to reveal your weaknesses? And when you do enter a time of temptation, do you seek to get out of it yourself, or do you turn to God? Ask God to show you the battles occurring around you. Be aware of how Satan operates (2 Cor. 2:11). Dig into His Word so you might be better able to recognize temptation. Finally, develop a richer prayer life. Get to know your Father in heaven by spending more time with Him.

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