

Matthew 26:35-41

MW Lent 3, March 16, 2022

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Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same. ³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." ³⁹ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

It was in the garden where everything was a *perfect* paradise that Satan came to Adam and Eve and poisoned their minds with his lying tongue—and he ruined everything. Death began to seep into every corner of creation—flowers would now wither, animals were no longer tame, fruit began to rot and fall from the trees, insects became pests. Man went into hiding from the God whose visits He used to look forward to, and that same man began aging and laboring and sweating and suffering and eventually dying.

Yes, Adam and Eve would live a long while, but eventually their bodies would shrivel back into the dust from which they were formed. And their sin would bring an even *worse* fate than that. So, they wanted to talk and listen to Satan so badly? Well, by their rebellion against God, they and all their descendants earned the right to chat with Satan in hell forever.

In our text before us this evening, we find ourselves in another garden, namely, the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had just ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey a few days earlier, passing right by this garden on His way into the city. And now here He is standing, or trying to stand anyways, under the heavy weight of his suffering for the sins of the world. This was Ground Zero. There in that garden, the Son of God would begin in earnest to undo the hellish devastation that Satan had wrought in that other garden.

In Psalm 40, the Son of God speaks through the Psalmist and says, ***"Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do Your will My God; Your law is within my heart."*** (Psalm 40:7-8) Tonight, this same Son of God says something similar as He prays to His Father in Heaven, but He also adds **Three Words of Truth** to sharpen our focus this Lenten season. Our theme tonight are those three words: **Watch and Pray. I. Watch our Savior faithfully do the will of God. II. Pray that God's will also be done in us.**

There have been great tragedies in world history that were caused by such small things. Think, for instance, of how in 1986 the space shuttle *Challenger* and its crew were quickly burned up shortly after liftoff because just one small piece of equipment, a simple O-Ring, had failed. Or

think of the immense wildfires that we've seen in California and Australia in the recent past. Millions and millions of acres burned up and 100's of billions of dollars of damage that can happen just because of a small spark landing on some dry kindling.

In the Garden of Eden, it seemed like such a *small* thing, just a tiny, little choice that the Devil was offering Eve—just a sampling of a piece of fruit. Surely that couldn't be so bad! But it was a deep, profound, and wickedly genius temptation. What Satan was after was to corrupt man's perfect will, and so he prodded Eve, *"Look at you! You are the crown of God's creation, even above me! But do you really want to be treated as God's servant when you could be His equal???* I know a way to make that happen..."

Ever since that fateful day, our human hearts and minds have been at war against God's perfect will. Think of how casually we talk about "my life" and what "I" want. In our world, we hear people assert all the time, *"I want to be who I am! I have the right to be me! I need to do what makes ME happy!"* This type of attitude affects every aspect of human life from our relationships to sexuality to our careers and so on. Satan taught us in that first garden to defiantly say to God, *"No, MY will be done! My will be done! If you're going to accept me, God, it's going to be on MY terms!"* And now, we're born with that attitude. You don't have to be around a two-year-old for very long at all to see this corrupt nature already peaking through.

What Satan *didn't* tell Eve was that this defiance was the exact rebellion that got *him* thrown out of heaven and condemned to hell—and Eve and her descendants would have to face the same fate.

But that wasn't the last garden to bear lasting consequences, because the second Adam came—that was Jesus. And as He stepped into the garden that night, He did everything right. He wouldn't blow it as our ancestors did.

But watch what it is going to cost Him to do so! He took three disciples with Him that evening—Peter, James, and John—and told them to watch. Not to stand watch for enemies, not to watch for Judas or the soldiers or danger, but to watch *Him*. **"Watch,"** He says, and try to understand what's going on. These three had been with Jesus when He raised people from the dead. They'd stood in the presence of Jesus' glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. But they needed to watch Him now at *this* hour to understand that being the Messiah did not just mean success after shining success and triumph and glory and fame.

Rather, it meant Jesus humbling Himself and being obedient to God's will, even to the point of suffering and death on a cross for the sins of the world. And, oh, what that means! You know, there are stories of early Christian martyrs in the years after Jesus ascended—people being put to death for their faith in Jesus. There are stories of such people being condemned to death and yet marching to their *own* crosses with joy on their faces and hymns of praise on their lips. They knew that *this* wasn't death, this was just the beginning of life with God! And

the Romans didn't get it! Were these people insane? How could they be happy in the face of their own deaths?!

And, well, when you compare those accounts with this one, it's odd to consider: those Christians rejoiced in their dying days, so why is Jesus here doing the opposite? We're told that Jesus could barely stand here in His last hours, that His anxiety was so great the He was literally bewildered and confused. He threw Himself facedown on the grass under the burden of it all. What does this all mean?

Well, it's clear that this would be no ordinary death. His Father asked Him to drink the cup of *His judgment!*—a cup filled with the most vile, putrid, reeking substance there is, because that is what sin is to God. Jesus would be covered with it and experience the full wrath of the Almighty God. And as a true man, Jesus' knees buckled at the very thought.

But **watch!** Watch what He says, ***“Not as I will, but as you will.”*** The tempter had come to a garden again to try his old trick of warping man's will. But here he lost! The Son's will remained in perfect harmony with His Father's, and He would follow through on the divine plan.

And then He returned to His disciples—and what a contrast! They were sleeping! Imagine that. Peter had just said an hour earlier, ***“Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!”*** (Matthew 26:35) Just a few months before this, that pair of brothers, James and John, had confidently exclaimed that they would be willing to undergo the same baptism of suffering that Jesus was about to endure. And here they were, all three so *confident* in their inner strength—and they're asleep! Three fisherman, by the way, who were well accustomed staying up all night fishing on the Sea of Galilee, and they couldn't stay awake here for one hour!

And so Jesus asks, *“You guys weren't strong enough to keep watching, were you?”* The sad answer, *“No.”* As Jesus warned them, ***“The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*** The flesh is weak, weakened by the sin that lives inside it. And we know the struggle too, just like those three disciples. We know what is good and even desire to do it, but so often we are just not able. We fail to resist temptation. We fail to watch. We fail to pray. And instead, we play with fire and get badly burned.

This season of lent, Christ calls us to spiritual discipline, to **“Watch and Pray.”** Yet, Jesus here doesn't tell us to somehow inside find inside our own flesh the strength to stand firm. He doesn't tell us to search within ourselves and find some sort of inner resolve to just try harder and do better—because if we try to beat temptation and sin by just trying harder, we will fail every time! We'd be no better off than those self-assured disciples, and we'd be fast asleep.

No, Jesus says, first of all, **“Watch.”** Watch Him. Watch the one who went through all of this suffering and temptation and yet came out victorious. Watch Him who endured many

tribulations so that you might enter the Kingdom of God. Watch Him who became the curse of sin, so that you might have the blessing of life.

And while watching Him, **“Pray.”** Pray for spiritual discipline and pray for God’s help in times of testing. And really, that’s exactly what Jesus teaches us to do in the words of the Lord’s prayer. We pray, **“Lead us not into temptation.”** We’re not praying for our own strength, but for God’s strength and for God’s help against the attacks launched against us by the devil, the world, and our flesh.

In that same Lord’s Prayer, we also pray, **“Thy will be done.”** And this is the same prayer that Jesus prayed in the garden, **“Not as I will, but as you will.”** And God *does* do His will. And this is His will: to break and frustrate every evil plan of Satan and to protect you His children all the way to eternal life. His will is to bring you through faith to cling to His Son as your only Savior from sin and as your only hope for eternal life. This is God’s will, and through Jesus, He has accomplished it.

So, as we **watch** our Savior suffering in the garden and accomplishing these things—let us also **pray** for strength from the Lord, knowing that He is able to hear and to help us in our time of need. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.