



Sunday School Lesson for March 21, 2004.
Released on: March 18, 2004.

Study Luke 22:7-23. Prayer and Arrest
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 30
PLACE: Mount of Olives

Matthew 26:36-50

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39 And 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.

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

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.

43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast.

49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed him.

50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

Lesson Background

At the conclusion of their final Passover meal together, after the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn together (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). Then they made their way to Gethsemane, a garden just outside of Jerusalem on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. Most likely this was the usual place of retreat for Jesus and the disciples following the Passover each year.

As we saw last week, Jesus had not allowed Judas to know the exact address of their last Passover meal together perhaps because of the need for uninterrupted time with His disciples. Judas, however, had full knowledge of the usual post-Passover meeting place that Jesus liked to use (John 18:1,2). It was just a matter of time until the betrayer, intent on his evil plot, showed up with an armed guard to take Jesus into custody. Jesus refused to face the most challenging few hours in human history without intensely seeking His Heavenly Father's help.

The Passionate Prayer (Matthew 26:36-44)

Need for Prayer (vs. 36-38)

1. Why did Jesus desire the companionship of His closest disciples (Matthew 26:36,37)?

Here Jesus brings the entire band of disciples, minus one. The human side of Jesus shines through this moment, as He desires the companionship of His closest friends. He does not want to go through this agony alone.

Even so, there is also a need for solitude and space, allowing Him the freedom to wrestle in private prayer. Thus Jesus has the disciples sit at the entrance of the garden while He goes to pray yonder.

Undoubtedly, Jesus has a powerful relationship with the disciples. His deepest relationship is with Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, namely James and John. These three are the only ones allowed to witness Jesus' raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:35-42). Jesus selects these three to accompany Him on the mountain of transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13). Now He desires their companionship in this hour of extreme distress.

Jesus' distress is captured in the words "sorrowful and very heavy." Overwhelming sadness and deep anguish flood His heart and mind as He begins to focus on what lies ahead.

2. Jesus wanted His closest friends nearby even as He took time alone with His Father. When has the presence of brothers and sisters in Christ been most helpful to you, and why?

Answers to this question will be highly individual. Members of your class undoubtedly have faced serious problems in their families or have lost loved ones. Perhaps some have had difficulty standing up for the Lord at the workplace, or they have been seriously challenged at the university. As each one tells his or her story, affirm the value of a group of supportive friends.

There should be no disagreement that it is good to have others pray with us and for us when we face difficulty. Perhaps your class can work on a plan to organize a team

or teams of prayer warriors to be with, and to pray with, church members who are in distress.

3. How sorrowful did Jesus tell Peter, James, and John He was (v. 38)?

Communication is a key to any relationship and situation. Some make the mistake of assuming that those around them should know what they are feeling or what to do in a difficult time. Jesus does not make that mistake. He tells the disciples clearly and specifically how He is feeling and what His expectations are for them.

Moreover, Jesus tells His disciples exactly how they can be of comfort when He says "tarry ye here." Jesus plans to move on ahead of them just far enough to get some comfortable space, and He wants them to wait nearby.

Yet He is not asking them to be passive as they wait. He calls them to stay awake, to be alert, and to watch with Him. He asks them to take note of His passion, feel His pain, and offer prayers for their own trials and temptations that are just around the corner (Luke 22:40). As they observe Him wrestling with the weight of the world, He expects them to be ready to offer help and consolation. His agonizing in prayer will at one point cause Him to sweat drops like blood (Luke 22:44).

Even without the benefit of hearing Jesus' voice inflection or seeing His body language, we can sense the urgency of His appeal to His friends. His anguish penetrates to the deepest part of His being, and He needs their comfort. Although "The Passion of the Christ" movie paints a very good picture of this scenario.

Subject of Prayer (v. 39)

4. What likely was the cup that Jesus was reluctant to drink (v. 39)?

Jesus went about a stone's throw away from the three disciples (Luke 22:41). There He knelt down and, according to Matthew's account, fell on His face to pray. Addressing God as His Father, Jesus asked that, if possible, the cup He was about to drink might be taken away from Him. However, He was prepared to do God's will. He was submissive, surrendered, and acquiescent as an obedient Son.

In considering what the cup represented, we are faced with at least two possibilities. One is that Jesus wanted to avoid enduring the shame and agony of a mock trial, cruel torture, and excruciating crucifixion. His human nature would naturally be repelled by the thought of these prospects; however, He knew that He had come to the earth "to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). He knew that He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). There was no way to avoid this.

The more likely reason for Jesus' agony in the garden is that He was contemplating the awful prospect of incurring the wrath of His heavenly Father as He bore the sins of mankind. The cup is sometimes used in the Old Testament as a figure of God's wrath (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:19, 22), and man's sin has brought God's eternal wrath upon him (John 3:36; Romans 1:18; 2:5). When Christ took upon Himself man's sin, He experienced the divine punishment that human sin deserved (II Corinthians 5:21; I Pet. 2:24). This took place on the cross, and it is what elicited Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Many people have endured great suffering, but only Jesus Christ has known the anguish of assuming the guilt of mankind and experiencing the divine punishment it deserves.

5. How did Jesus receive strength after His first prayer (vs. 40, 41)?

Although Jesus speaks directly to Peter, the word ye is plural in the Greek, so the message is for all three disciples. This is neither the first nor last disappointment Jesus experiences with the disciples during this trying time.

Even so, Jesus does not get angry, ranting and raving over their failure. He knows that people get sleepy after a heavy meal, and that the disciples really don't have much of a clue as to what is about to happen. A simple "what" leads the question that registers His disappointment.

Although Jesus did not mention it to Peter, James, and John, He had been visited by an angel after His first prayer and strengthened by him (Luke 22:43). Jesus had been helped by a heavenly being even though He had been deprived of the help requested from His earthly companions.

Jesus now urged His disciples to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation and suffer the consequences of it. He wanted them to be prepared for what was coming so that they would not yield to temptation. It was one thing to have a willing spirit, but it was another thing to restrain the weakness of their flesh. Paul later gave this topic a thorough treatment when he dealt with the continual struggle of the Spirit with the flesh (Rom. 7:15-8:13). The only way to be victorious is to yield to the Holy Spirit.

Repetition in Prayer (vs. 42-44)

6. How did the disciples respond (vs. 42,43)?

No response to Jesus by the three disciples is recorded. We assume that they felt chastened, but as subsequent verses show, they were apparently so exhausted that they could not stay awake to profit from what He said.

Except for matters of style, there is no addition or subtraction in the content of Jesus' second prayer. The issues and concerns have not changed. He knows His strength for the crisis at hand can come only from the Father. The reality of impending ultimate suffering causes an earthquake in His soul that finds Him contemplating some other way to save the world. However, if the only way to achieve God's eternal purpose for us is for Jesus to drink the cup of suffering and death, then drink it He will!

7. What does Jesus' example in repeating His prayer teach us (v. 44)?

Jesus' example in prayer during the biggest crisis of His life can save us from misconceptions in our own prayer lives. First of all, we should realize that repeating a prayer does not automatically place it in the category of vain or meaningless repetition that we see condemned in Matthew 6:7. That passage refers to pointless and mindless babble such as the pagan world used in praying to their imaginary gods; likewise, when we memorize certain formulas and repeat them without thinking, our prayers are meaningless.

Also, some mistakenly draw the conclusion that if we have faith, we should pray about something only once, trust God with its outcome, and leave it at that. To do otherwise is a lack of faith, they claim. But here Jesus demonstrates the error in that thinking. He prays about the same urgent matter over and over. No one can accuse Jesus of lacking faith! Satan wants Jesus to convince Himself that He can find God's

"Plan B." Jesus fights off the temptation to avoid God's one-and-only plan by using the same prayer of surrender over and over.

When an issue is heartfelt, we can pray about it in many different ways as we rely on our need for God's help. Our prayers may be short and repetitious (as Jesus' prayer here is); our prayers may last "all night" (Luke 6:12); and they may be persistent (Luke 18:1-8).

The Awful Arrest (Matthew 26:45-50)

Jesus Complies (vs. 45, 46)

8. What three types of resignation did Jesus display in Gethsemane (v. 45)?

Jesus' resignation to His Father was next transposed to resignation to the situation with His disciples. He returned to Peter, James, and John and again found them sleeping, as were the other eight disciples at their location. Jesus told them to sleep on now and take their rest. The die had been cast. The Son of man was being betrayed into the hands of sinners. The betrayer had joined hands with the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes in a plot to find Jesus and take Him to trial before the Sanhedrin. An attempt would then be made to persuade the Roman authorities to authorize His execution.

It appears that Jesus allowed His exhausted disciples to sleep for a while until the officers led by Judas Iscariot arrived. Jesus then commanded His disciples to rise up and get ready to go, for he who was to betray Him was at hand.

Thus we see a threefold resignation on Jesus' part. First, He was resigned to God's will. Second, He was resigned to His disciples' exhaustion. Third, He was resigned to His betrayal and arrest. Once we have resigned ourselves to God's will, we are ready to resign ourselves to whatever else is necessary in order to carry out His will.

9. When did Jesus know that Judas and the mob were coming (v. 46)?

Whether He hears them coming, sees the torches in the distance, or senses divinely that the enemies are on their way, Jesus implores His disciples to Rise, let us be going. The word "going" in the overall context does not suggest resignation or retreat, but a courageous advance to meet the enemy.

Jesus knows that the one leading the approaching band is "he . . . that doth betray" Him. Judas, called to follow, seeks to force events down a path of his own choosing. This one, who could have been sent into the world with a message of hope, now sends his Master on a journey of death. A man who was once known as Jesus' friend now wears for eternity the label "betrayer."

10. Jesus gained ultimate victory by yielding to the arrest. How does that encourage us when we face difficult, seemingly no-win circumstances?

From a human standpoint it appeared that Jesus had lost when He surrendered to the mob. The disciples thought so, and they fled. The rulers thought so, and they were glad. But in God's timing these events were part of a greater victory. When we face trials and hardships, sometimes we feel the outcome has not been positive. But if we remain faithful to the Lord and His purposes, we are part of a greater plan (see

the example of Joseph in Genesis 45:5-8). More than yielding to a mob, Jesus yielded to the Father.

11. How did Judas plan to betray Jesus to the multitude (vs. 47,48)?

Jesus also knew the intentions of the approaching multitude. Led by the deceitful Judas Iscariot; who knew the place (John 18:2), this mob came armed with swords and staves, or clubs. Included in this crowd was "a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees," who were equipped with "lanterns and torches and weapons" (v. 3). There were "chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders" (Luke 22:52).

Judas Iscariot had given the multitude a sign, saying that the one he kissed in greeting would be Jesus. They were to grab Him and hold Him fast. This was the plan, and it was put into motion. It might be noted here that affectionate gestures such as this between men were common to the culture and customs of that time. In fact, men in the Middle East still have a habit of greeting one another with a kiss.

12. Why did Jesus ask "wherefore art thou come" (vs. 49,50)?

We can find more details of this incident in John 18:2-13. "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. . . . As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground."

Jesus again asked them for whom they sought. They told Him it was Jesus of Nazareth, and He repeated His statement that He was that person. Then He requested that His disciples be allowed to go free. He asked this so that none of the men whom God had given Him would be lost (John 18:7-9).

In spite of the fact that Jesus had identified Himself twice to the arresting mob, Judas came up to Him to hail, or greet, Him as Master and to kiss Him. Jesus said, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

13. In what way did all the disciples let Jesus down?

The case of Judas Iscariot underscores the fact that appearances often shield inner feelings. Despite the fact that Judas Iscariot was numbered among the twelve disciples, his subsequent actions proved he was not truly one of them.

Peter's action in cutting off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant, was rebuked by Jesus. He told him to put his sword back into his sheath, remarking that those who take to the sword will perish by the sword. Jesus could have prayed to His Father and had twelve legions of angels come to rescue Him from the arresting mob, but then the Scriptures regarding His atoning death would not have been fulfilled (Matt. 26:51-54).

The incident regarding Peter's rash act with his sword is mentioned here because it ties in directly with the cup Jesus was destined to drink as recorded in our lesson text. "Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

If Jesus had not allowed the betrayal to take place and had not suffered and died to atone for our sins, the whole redemptive plan of God would have been aborted. If Jesus had not

CONCLUSION

The Power of Prayer-

Jesus was falsely accused of a crime He did not commit. Even so, His unwarranted arrest was a part of the predetermined plan of God. There was no escape, short of disobeying the Father. But Jesus would be obedient to the end.

We marvel at Jesus' determination to "stay the course," to teach His followers to the end, to treat the most heinous betrayal with civility, to love mankind so extravagantly, and to obey the Heavenly Father regardless of the cost.

Where can we find such power to obey? Where Jesus did! The fact that He threw Himself so completely into His prayer is a witness to us. But turning to God in prayer-the kind of prayer where He wrestled repeatedly over the same issue, and where He totally surrendered to God's will-He found the power to overcome the most painful reality.

But Jesus also found the power to act when the time for prayer had passed. This heroic example shines brightly for us as well, even two thousand years later!

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You from the bottom of our hearts for Jesus' unwavering commitment to You! His inexhaustible love for us leaves us stunned and amazed. Lord, help us to overcome the weakness of the flesh and to be responsive always to Your will. Shield us from ever committing an act of betrayal against You.

Father, also teach us to rely on prayer as Jesus did. Teach us to act as well. We surrender our lives to Your leading, and we thank You for the blessings that result. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

State a plan of action to make prayer a consistent and effective weapon against temptation.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson draws us even nearer to the crucifixion. Study Mark 14:1 through 15:47 as you prepare for a lesson on Jesus' trials before the high priest and Pilate.

I hope you enjoyed this weeks' lesson !

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