

From Agony to Victory
Luke 22:39-46

One of whom it has been said that there in Him everything is possible.

We continue on our journey with Christ to the cross. The Passover meal has ended, Judas has already left to gather those who will arrest Jesus and spring his diabolical plot. With your Bibles please turn to Luke 22:39-46 for our text today. Before His arrest, which we will consider next week, Jesus takes some time to pray. From our passage today we want to take a brief look at the prayer life of Jesus and the example He gives to us about its importance.

His call to prayer

His communion through prayer

His care during prayer

His condition in prayer

His concern after prayer

I. HIS CALL TO PRAYER – vs. 39-40

Prayer was an important part of the life and ministry of Jesus. It was a time to communicate with the Father. Even He needed time in the presence of God

From Luke 5:16 we read that “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray.”

I Thessalonians 5:17 exhorts us to “pray continually” or to keep on praying meaning that we should have a mindset of praying all the time.

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote “More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.”

Prayer is serious business and we need to take it seriously. There is conviction in serious prayer. By that I don’t just mean that God reveals to us areas of our life that don’t conform to His holy standard. He does do that, but that’s not what I mean. Instead, by conviction I mean that we have such a strong belief in the One to whom we are praying that we lay it all before God as the only one who can answer what it is we are bringing to Him. It isn’t an opinion or an estimation. It is faith, belief, fixed confidence in the

Back to Luke 5:16 for a moment.

“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray.”

It was a time for Him to seek the Father in prayer.

It was away from the hustle and bustle of ministry, the pull of people asking for some healing to be done, asking to be taught.

It was away from the religious leaders and their barrage of questions they hoped would bring an end to His popularity.

It was a time for Him to sit quietly and listen to the Father and the Father to listen to Him.

God enjoys such times, longs for those times with you. How often do you get away to a lonely place to pray? It was a regular habit of Jesus.

He prayed all night before choosing His disciples.

He prayed for Himself and His mission.

He prayed for His disciples and for all believers.

He prayed for His nation.

He prayed with thanksgiving.

He prayed at His baptism.

He prayed before the transfiguration.

He prayed before the cross.

He prayed on the cross.

Here, at a very critical time in His ministry, Jesus is going to pray. How important it is for us dear friends to take this lesson and pray before we begin any task.

We read in our text that “Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives...”

Some scholars suggest that after spending the day in the Temple teaching, that He went and spent the night in this garden. You could exit Jerusalem from the Temple crossing the Kidron river and Kidron valley that led to the Mt. of Olives.

In reading the accounts recorded for us in Matthew and Mark they mention that Jesus went to a place

called Gethsemane. You might think that this is a discrepancy, but it isn't. The Mt. of Olives was a large olive grove outside Jerusalem and Gethsemane was a garden plot located on the lower slopes of the Olive grove. It is into this garden area that Jesus withdrew. And we read that it was His custom to go there to pray.

Some of you have seen the recent movie "War Room." It is the story of a widow who has a closet into which she enters to pray. It is her regular habit. It is there that she meets with the Lord to petition Him with her requests. Plastered all over the closet walls are verses she is claiming on behalf of herself and those for whom she is praying. She has specific prayer requests written down that she is praying about. She invites another woman to join her in prayer by making her own prayer closet.

Dear friends, we need a usual place to go, a prayer closet where we do battle against that unseen enemy through prayer. We need Christians more than ever to rise up and habitually go out to a place to pray – to pray regularly, to pray fervently. We need to meet with the Lord in that solitary place.

I know I need to pray more and to pray more fervently.

I'm sure we can all pray more.

But you say, Pastor I'm already so busy, I don't know if I can afford any more time in my schedule to pray.

Folks, we can't afford not to pray.

Jesus gives us an example. If the Son of God spent regular time in prayer, what makes us think we can slide by with a few "God bless everyone today" kind of prayers? And no meals don't count.

Larnelle Harris - I Miss My Time With You

There He was just waiting
In our old familiar place
An empty spot beside Him
Where once I used to wait

To be filled with strength and wisdom
For the battles of the day
I would've passed Him by again
But I clearly heard Him say

I miss My time with you
Those moments together
I need to be with you each day
And it hurts me when you say
You're too busy, busy trying to serve Me
But how can you serve Me
When your spirit's empty
There's a longing in My heart
Wanting more than just a part of you
It's true
I miss My time with you

What will I have to offer
How can I truly care
My efforts have no meaning
When your presence isn't there
But You'll provide the power
If I take time to pray
I'll stay right here beside You
And you'll never have to say

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Jesus was about to enter the most difficult time of His life and He needed to go into it with the power of prayer. So He went to a familiar and favorite place – the garden of Gethsemane in the Mt. of Olives.

Names have significance and we find that true in regard to where Jesus went. Gethsemane means oil press. The valley He crossed, Kirdron, means murky or dark.

Think for a moment about what Jesus is about to endure over the course of the next 12 hours or so and you begin to understand the meaning of these two words. It certainly would be a place where He is pressed, a dark place where His soul will go.

I'm sure you have been to or through such places, places that seem dark and lonely, foreboding, places where you feel like every ounce of your soul is

being pressed out. It is into those places that we must enter into prayer. Jesus has gone there. Jesus has taken His disciples with Him. Matthew and Mark both indicate that Jesus left eight of the disciples near the entrance of the garden and invited Peter, James, and John to accompany Him further into the garden. Matthew and Mark also indicate that Jesus asked the three to sit with Him and watch while He prayed. He not only requested their company, He needed their support. Those who had been with Him throughout His ministry are now with Him near the end of His ministry.

I want to suggest to you that we need friends like that, friends who will sit with us when our soul is troubled, friends who will put aside their agendas and come into the garden where we are being pressed to watch with us. We need to surround ourselves with people who go with us when we are in the murky places of life. There are times in life when we slam into the wall and things are tough, we hurt, we're facing some daunting life event and often our initial response is not to say anything or if we do let it out we make it to be something less than it really is. We isolate ourselves. We don't want people to know. We feel embarrassed. We feel that if others find out they might think less of us or think we are a failure. No one needs to know about what we're going through. But friends, we need others to be there with us, especially in those times.

Before He entered His time of prayer He called them to pray. But notice that He didn't ask them to pray for Him. He instructed them to pray that they wouldn't enter into temptation. The tense suggests that they were to keep on praying so they wouldn't fall into temptation, not even once. The awful truth about temptation is that it doesn't leave us alone. It may leave for a while but it will return and with a greater urgency. So keep on praying.

Because temptation can be so strong, there is always a need to pray before, during, and after. That is why Paul exhorts us that after we have put

on the whole armor of God we need to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18) Temptation while not sin is still strong. It is the carrot that is dangled out in front of us enticing us in some way to give in – just this once won't hurt anyone. But attached to the temptation is a snare that entraps.

The call to pray by Jesus is somewhat vague. To what might He be referring? Did they each hold some secret vice that only the Lord knew about? Some scholars suggest Jesus was asking them to pray so they wouldn't fall into the temptation of falling asleep on such an important night.

I believe that it refers to the trial they are about to face that would lead to a faltering of their faith. Earlier that evening Jesus said He had prayed for them that their faith wouldn't fail. There is in prayer both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Even though Jesus had prayed for them, they needed to pray as well. If we ask someone to pray we should also be praying.

Like the disciples, we have been invited with a call to pray.

To pray without ceasing
To pray with thanksgiving
To pray for one another

What Jesus invites them to pray about is something we should pray ourselves and for each other – pray that we don't fall into temptation, that our faith not falter.

His was a call to prayer.

Next, we see His communion through prayer

II. HIS COMMUNION THROUGH PRAYER –
vs. 41-42

I don't know how far you can throw a stone, but

that's how far Jesus was from the disciples when He began to pray. Some suggest that a stone's throw was equivalent to the distance from someone who was being stoned to death. Whether it was 20 feet or 200 feet it was within ear shot of the disciples.

Matthew and Mark indicate that when He took Peter, James, and John further into the garden that He left them and went a little farther. The point is they could hear Him pray and what He prayed.

We spoke earlier of how important it was for Jesus to communicate with the Father through prayer. It was an intimate time of conversation. Even though Jesus was God in the flesh He still needed in His humanity conversation with the Father. From eternity past prior to His incarnation there had always been perfect communication between God the Father and God the Son. There was perfect unity. Now, while on earth as a man, still perfectly divine, He needed to regularly meet with God. It was a time to be refreshed, encouraged, and even affirmed regarding His mission.

But what did He pray about? It was about a cup. "Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

When we look at the account of this event from the pen of Matthew we learn that He tells His three companions that His soul is exceedingly sorrowful. Mark adds that before His prayer He was "deeply distressed and troubled." That provides us with some perspective when we then read His prayer and see the request that the cup be removed from Him.

But to what cup is He referring? Let me read an excerpt from H.A. Ironside's message on this passage that provides an answer. "What was the cup He dreaded? I have heard many unworthy things said by those who have endeavored to explain this. Some have maintained that He was in such distress that He feared He might lose His reason and be unable to go on to the cross as a

voluntary Substitute for sinners. But they who speak in this way lose sight of the fact that He was not only Man in all perfection, but also God with all power. Satan could do nothing against Him save by divine consent; and nowhere in Scripture is it intimated that the devil might be permitted such an advantage as this over the Christ of God.

Others have taught that He feared the adversary would crush Him to death in the garden, and the plan of God be defeated which involved His hanging upon a tree. But this theory ignores His own declaration, "No man taketh it (His life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power (authority) to take it again. This commandment I have received of My Father" (John 10:18). This absolutely contradicts any supposition as to Satan's ability to destroy Him before His time.

The cup He dreaded was not death as such. It was the cup of judgment which our sins had filled. In Psalm 75:8 we read, "In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them." This cup of the wrath of God against sin was that from which the Holy Soul of our Savior drank." (Luke pg. 646-647)

Here the holy Son of God, the perfect man who was guilty of no sin, would face the wrath of God for our sin, sin that you and I committed in rebellion against God. The wrath of God would be poured out on Him for all sin. Even though as a new creation in Christ we are still in a body that has a hard time letting go of sin, we struggle against the desire to sin. Yet here is the perfect man who struggled to take our sin because He was holy. John MacArthur writes that Jesus fought "against the holy impulses to allow Himself to be made sin for believers. Satan tempts believers to cling to sin, but he tempted Jesus to cling to His holiness."

But there was no other way, there is no other way. He was sent to be our sacrifice, to take our place. This prayer is not one in which He finally consents to the will of God as if all along it had been a struggle and finally He was willing to go through with it. When the plan to become our sacrifice was made in the corridors of heaven long before the creation of the universe, the Son had already agreed to the plan and now here it was and in perfect love for the Father and for us, there would be perfect obedience to God's will. Jesus prays about God's will in the perfect tense meaning that God's will would keep on being done.

And isn't that how He taught His disciples to pray? "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Therein lies the essence of His prayer and the way in which we should pray "not My will, but Yours be done."

How difficult a prayer that really is. Too often I pray that my will would be done. Too often I'm reluctant to ask for God's will to be done because I may not like the outcome, it most likely will be different than what I want, it may result in some very difficult circumstances that may include pain and sorrow. But if we are going to be completely obedient to God we must, without reluctance or hesitation on our part, pray that God's will be done.

What are you praying about today that now must include God's will be done over yours?

As Jesus spent time in communion with the Father through prayer, He received care after prayer.

III. HIS CARE AFTER PRAYER – v. 43

Here is an immediate answer to His prayer. An angel was sent to strengthen Him. What comfort. It wasn't the first time. At the beginning of His ministry after He had spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness when He was victorious over the three temptations of the devil that angels came to

minister to Him and here, now, in the garden during His time of trouble an angel arrives to encourage Him. Whether we are in a desert place or a garden God is ready to send comfort in order to strengthen.

Here is an angel who had spent time around the throne of Jesus giving Him glory now giving Him strength. Hebrews 1:14 describes angels and their service in this way: "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

An angel came and strengthened Him. It's an example of God's grace, to give Jesus respite from the ordeal He was about to face. The word strengthen used here is an intensified form of the word describing the supernatural strengthening He received from the angel. In the garden Jesus received strength and so will we when needed.

Someone has rightly written that "Every life has its Gethsemane and every Gethsemane has its angel."

So when you find yourself being pressed hard in your Gethsemane, pray. Scripture provides some comforting words that remind us that we will be strengthened when we face our Gethsemane.

Psalm 34:6-7 "This poor man called (cried), and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and He delivers them."

God's strength is given to those who fear or reverence Him, who obey Him, who seek to do His will. These are the conditions for those to whom God will send His strengthening angel.

Philippians 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Here we see peace that settles the heart and mind for the person who presents their prayers with thanksgiving. His peace will surround you on all sides. It does not necessarily state that the requests will be granted but it does say that we will receive His peace. It is a peace that settles our otherwise anxious heart and mind giving us a calmness that helps us through that which we are praying about. This peace as one author suggests is an “inner tranquility of a believer who is closely walking with God.”

Yet even in the middle of peace there can still be anguish, trouble, sorrow that presses in hard trying to squeeze the life out of us. Notice His condition in prayer.

IV. HIS CONDITION IN PRAYER – v. 44

There is a rare medical condition called hematomatosis. Dermatological research suggests that the phenomena described here by Dr. Luke is very plausible. They note the presence of this condition in people who are awaiting execution. It is caused by great stress making tiny blood vessels rupture. Whether or not Jesus had this condition or that Luke was just saying His sweat was like drops of blood is not clear. What is clear though is the amount of great stress He was under prior to the cross caused great stress. The KJV uses the word agony to describe the great emotional strain Jesus was under with what was about to take place. I prefer that word over the NIV word anguish. Agony is a word used in reference to athletic competition and refers to an athlete who is straining with all his might to win.

Author John Philipps notes that “mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish completely drained Him.” Sweat like drops of blood describes the inner struggle which resulted in His praying all the more fervently. He kept praying intensely. It is a word that is only used here in the Bible and means to stretch. He was hard at prayer. In His praying

every nerve was stretched to the breaking point.

Jesus gives us an example that when we are faced with a severe trial that results in inner agony, how much harder we need to pray. Jesus once told the disciples that “men ought always to pray and not to faint.” He was testimony to that instruction. Do we pray with such fervency or do we just play at prayer?

Jesus was not spared the trial, but He did receive the strength to endure it. Just as Paul prayed earnestly that his thorn in the flesh would be removed, God’s answer was not to take it away from him, but to give him the grace and strength to endure it.

When Christ rose from His time of prayer after the battle with the devil, He was victorious and Satan was defeated. How encouraging that should be to us when we wrestle in pray.

There is one final point I want to make from this passage about prayer.

We have considered so far:

His call to prayer

His communion through prayer

His care during prayer

His condition in prayer

Let’s close with His concern after prayer

V. HIS CONCERN AFTER PRAYER – vs. 45-46

Have you ever fallen asleep while praying? I have. It’s from being tired. But notice the reason given by Luke as to why the disciples were asleep: they were “exhausted from sorrow.”

I’ve been there, too. My guess is most of you have as well. Sorrow of one kind or another overwhelms you, overtakes you. You are exhausted from it. It leaves you tired, drained emotionally and physically. All you want to do at that point is sleep. I get it. They had just been reminded by Jesus that

He was going to suffer and be betrayed. Peter was told he was going to deny the Lord. That was a lot to take in, to process. Not to mention it was also late.

Jesus was once again concerned about them falling into temptation. He hoped they had spent time praying, but they hadn't, they were sleeping. He needed them to pray so they wouldn't be tempted.

In a similar fashion God says something similar to Cain before he murders his brother Abel. We read in Genesis 4:7 "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." In effect He's saying "pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

But it is more than just a single, simple prayer. It is to be an ongoing commitment to pray so we don't fall into temptation.

Restated, perhaps our prayer should be "grant that we won't fall into temptation."

Jesus was in a garden praying in His final hour of temptation. He had invited His disciples to pray that they would not fall into temptation. We know that they failed, at least temporarily, but in time they would prove to be stalwarts of the faith with jaws set firm to do the will of God. He is inviting us when we enter our Gethsemane to pray and to realize even there, help has been sent to strengthen us. He is inviting us to pray that God's will be done.

Scripture speaks of another garden where man fell into sin because of temptation. But here in this garden Jesus would be victorious. Where the first man failed to follow God's will, Jesus would be victorious.

J. Vernon McGee writes "the victory of the Calvary was won in Gethsemane."

Let me close with a final thought from the writings

of E.M. Bounds on prayer. His words ring loudly for our need to be in prayer. "Without prayer – no matter what else he has – the Christian soldier's life will be feeble, and ineffective, and constitute him an easy prey for his spiritual enemies."

May the Lord help us to follow His example and be more fervent in prayer.

Will you commit to pray more as Jesus did?