

"WATCH AND PRAY"

Matthew 26:41

Intro: At this point in His earthly life, our Lord was in the most critical time of His sojourn in the world. He had been speaking from time to time with His disciples about His approaching death, but they did not understand. Peter especially had declared that he would see to it that our Lord's enemies were not able to do what they wanted to do. But the time had come, and the awful reality of it was bearing down upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Passover had been observed, and the Lord's Supper had been instituted. The Lord had lovingly told His disciples that He, the Shepherd, would be smitten, and they, the sheep, would be scattered. It was then that Peter told the Lord that, though all of the others would be offended and desert Him, he never would. Then Peter took a step further and said that, if it meant dying with the Lord, he would not deny Him.

At that point the Lord took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, and did something very unusual with them. He took them into the Garden of Gethsemane and asked them to watch and pray with Him. See vv. 38, 40, 41.

These men were to have a most important part in the work of the Lord in the days to follow, and therefore it was most important for them to learn this important lesson about prayer. And so let us think for a few moments about . . .

I. THE LORD AND PRAYER.

We can actually go beyond what I said a moment ago---that this was the most crucial hour in the life of our Lord. In many respects it was the most crucial hour in all of human history, up to that time or since that time! The salvation of the world was in the balance, so to speak. The moment had come when the Lord was faced with what had been the will of the Father from eternity past, and His soul was sorrowful, greatly troubled, and His body would show the strain as He sweat great drops of blood.

Is it not interesting to note that at this moment the thing that the Lord did was to pray. And that was what He wanted from His disciples. He did not ask them to defend Him. He did not ask them to help Him to escape. He did not ask them to appeal for mercy to His enemies. He did not send them to try to influence the crowds. He asked them to "watch and pray." He asked them to stand guard and to stay awake. As I have indicated, it was not His purpose that they would help Him to escape. He was determined to do His Father's will. But he needed this time

with the Father, and He needed their fellowship in prayer. This is another one of those great mysteries in Scripture about which I was speaking this morning. We cannot possibly understand the Lord's need as a Man as this time, but we can certainly understand the tremendous importance of prayer. How could it be emphasized in any stronger way?

The Lord had given His disciples many lessons on prayer. We have seen some of them in the Sermon on the Mount. In our Tuesday Class studies in the Gospel of Luke--in such chapters as 11 and 18. The disciples had been warned not to follow the hypocrisy of the Pharisees where prayer was concerned. They were told that they should always pray, and not faint. They were told that they should pray in faith. They should pray with perseverance, and not be discouraged if the answer to the prayers did not come at once. But it seems that this, like so many other things that the Lord taught them, had not really gripped their hearts and found its appropriate place in their lives.

There was nothing more important that they could have done for the Lord, nor for themselves, at that moment, than to pray. There never is! It is even more important than preaching because our preaching is powerless without prayer. It is in prayer that our messages are born, and it is in prayer that the truths of God's Word are opened up to us. A prayerless Christian is an enigma (inexplicable, inscrutable). No true Christian will argue against the importance of prayer, but hardly any of us are giving prayer the vital place in our lives that it must have.

But let us do what the Lord did, and place the word "watch" with the word "pray."

The word "watch" suggests that there are dangers present. And these are dangers greater than the Roman army or the Jewish hierarchy. These are the principalities and powers of the heavenly places that are arrayed against us, and that were arrayed against our Lord. They seek our downfall. They seek to ruin us spiritually. They seek to overwhelm us with sin. And they are headed up by the Devil himself, and he seeks to do what Peter said in 1 Pet. 5:8, 9: "Be sober, be vigilant, . . ."

After Paul had given the Ephesian church that marvelous description of our armor in Eph. 6 in order that believers might be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil, he added, "Praying always with all prayer . . . and watching thereunto . . ." The word "watching" is from a different root from the one our Lord used in Matt. 26:41, but it is a related word and suggests standing guard against an enemy.

When the Lord told Peter that Satan had desired to have him to sift him as wheat, the Lord said, "But I have prayed for thee . . ." (Luke 22:32).

Watch means to be alert, stand guard, but it also addresses itself to watching ourselves against a common problem that we all have--the problem of physical weariness and the need for sleep. I will say more about this in a moment, but I want you to notice that the thought is here in this word, "Watch."

When the Lord came back from the inner Garden, He found His disciples neither watching nor praying. They were like we are: they heard what the Lord said, but somehow they were not able to do what He said.

Are you guarding against the danger that you will go to sleep when you ought to be praying? Have you ever quit praying just because you were too tired to continue? How often do you sleep in when you ought to be up praying, but you are just too much in need of the sleep. This is where we need to take steps to correct a situation that is probably a problem to most of us. We simply need more sleep.

The disciples were to "watch and pray" with the Lord, but what was to be the burden of their prayer?

II. THE BURDEN OF THEIR PRAYER.

What was it? "Lest ye enter into temptation."

This word "temptation" can mean two things:

- 1) It can mean trials.
- 2) Or, it can mean a temptation to sin.

Which did the Lord have in mind? Do we have His promise that we will not have trials if we pray to escape them?

Well, we do have His promise in 1 Cor. 10:13 that they will not get too hard for us to bear, but I do not know of any place where the Lord has promised us that we will not have troubles. In fact, we are promised just the opposite: we will have troubles. And for the Lord to be in trouble meant that they were in trouble. That was the fear that ultimately led Peter to deny that he had any connection at all with the Lord. He did not want to suffer the same fate that the Lord had suffered.

What did the Lord have in mind when He taught the disciples to pray, "And lead us not into temptation"?

The next statement in that prayer tells us: "But deliver

us from evil," or from the Evil One.

Our greatest dangers are spiritual. Our worst Enemy is the Devil. While none of likes to suffer, yet it is far better to suffer in the flesh than to sin in the flesh. And there is no suffering comparable to the suffering we experience in our souls when we have sinned against the Lord.

Trials can often bring us into circumstances where we will sin, and that was what the Lord was concerned about. If we only realized how weak we are, and how quickly we can respond to temptations to sin, no one would have to argue with us to get us to pray.

III. OUR GREATEST PROBLEM IN PRAYER.

With most of us it is not that we do not know how to pray. We have our Bibles, and we can learn all that we need to know about prayer from our Bibles.

We also have wonderful books written on the Scripture passages dealing with prayer to help us to understand.

And there are lots of good biographies of men and women of God whose lives have been blessed with a close relationship to God in prayer. I think of George Mueller, of Amy Carmichael, of Andrew Bonar, of many of the Puritans, of Spurgeon, of Luther.

And then the Lord will often bring people into our lives who are an inspiration to us in prayer.

We, of all of the generations of believers from the beginning of time until now, are most without excuse as to how to pray.

And it is not that we do not want to pray. It is not that we do not sense our need to pray.

Our Lord touched upon the crux of the matter when He said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

What is the spirit to which the Lord was referring? Was it the Holy Spirit? I do not think so. The Lord was talking about Peter's spirit, John's spirit, James' spirit. As it applies to us, He was talking about your spirit, and my spirit.

What is our spirit? It is our inner man. It is the real person that we are. It is that part of us which feels the need to pray, and wants to pray. We are willing to pray.

Then why do we not give ourselves more to pray.

I do not know how many biographies I have read where the person being written about had to confess at the end of his days that his greatest regret was that he had not prayed more.

What is "the flesh"--this "flesh" that is weak?

Is it our old nature? The word refers to our old, sinful nature many times in Scripture, but that is not the meaning here.

No, "the flesh" here that the Lord was referring to is the body--yours and mine. We are weak, and we grow weaker. But Isaiah said, "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall" (Isa. 40:30). So this is not a problem limited to older people; young people have the same problem.

Which of us does not know the feeling that Paul described in Rom. 8:22, 23?

For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, **the redemption of the body.**

Oh, how wonderful it will be to have new bodies! Then we will not have the problem with communion with God that we have now.

But what is the answer?

Let me make two suggestions, and I believe that these are the great needs of every one of us here tonight.

- 1) Do all that you can to make sure that you are getting the proper amount of sleep--the amount you need! You may have to cut out some things that you are doing now, but do it. It is a sin to push these bodies of ours until we go to sleep when we try to pray.
- 2) Let me ask you to memorize a verse of Scripture: Isa. 40:31. Remember that all true praying must be in the Holy Spirit. And this is why we wait upon the Lord--that He might strengthen us for the most important work that we have to do: PRAYING!

Concl: May God enable each one of us to learn the meaning of the words of our Lord in our text that we may profit from them in our walk with the Lord from day to day.