

Matthew 23-01-15b

We resume our study in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 26, and Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. He has gone a little farther. His disciples are now in two groups, two-thirds of them are way back, one-third of them is just a short distance away, and Jesus says, Oh, my father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping and said to Peter, did you catch that, in verse 40, he came to the disciples, there are three disciples to whom he comes, he has not gone back to the original eight, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping and he said to Peter, what, could you not watch with me one hour? How many warnings have the disciples had that the Lord Jesus is going to be arrested and delivered into the hands of men? We have gone through these warnings over and over again in scripture. Peter, Jesus begins to warn them well back in the march to Jerusalem that he is going to be crucified and delivered into the hands of men. On this night, he warned Peter in the upper room that he would deny him, he reminded him again and declared it twice on the road to this garden.

Peter says, though all are tripped up, I will never be tripped up. And we looked in detail at what it is to be trapped, to be tripped, to be caused to stumble last time with the word scandalizo. Peter has just affirmed just a few minutes earlier, though all be caused to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble.

What, Peter, could you not watch with me one hour? You're ready to die with me, you're ready to go the distance, though all forsake me, though all are made to stumble, you won't, and you can't even pray. You can't watch with me one hour. What would it mean to watch with the Lord Jesus? This is sympathetic companionship.

There are times when someone is under duress, they have physical ailment, they're in a hospital bed, they're in a sick bed, they're on their deathbed, they are mourning the loss of someone, they are facing incredible difficulties of whatever kind and sort, and to just be present and watch with them. Your presence, your attention, your intercessory prayer is powerful and often needful. They could not watch with him.

He doesn't say you could not pray with me, although that would be a good thing to do while you are watching, but to watch, to be vigilant, to pay attention, to be in sympathy and to, by your presence, put a shoulder under that burden, to be an encouragement, to offer fellowship, friendship, like-mindedness, and in some fashion to enter into what another individual is going through as they seek to be pleasing to God and to accomplish His will. Jesus is praying to His Father intensely, I want to do Your will. This is daunting, it makes me sorrowful, it shakes me to the roots of my soul, but I want to accomplish Your will.

You have the quotation in Hebrews from the Old Testament, I have come to do Thy will. Could you not watch with me one hour? What is the exhortation here? What is the solution? How could Peter fulfill his pledge to not stumble, to not deny, to not fall away? How could he accomplish this? Jesus tells him how. Verse 41, watch and pray.

You will remember many years ago we did a study on watch and pray. And wonderful folks in our church typed that up, it's available in print. Watch and pray.

What happens if you don't? Watch and pray, otherwise you will enter into temptation. This doesn't mean to be tempted, entering into it means to succumb to it. You will fall for it, you will be diverted, deflected, and made to stumble by it.

Enter into isn't to be tested, it is to fail the test. Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is willing.

We have intentions, we have ideals, we have goals. What diverts us, what causes us to fail? It's the flesh, the desires of the flesh. The King James says, the lust of the flesh.

When lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin. It conceives. What is the antidote to our natural proclivities, our inherent desires? What's the antidote? Be alert, Gregoreo, and pray.

Watch and pray. The Spirit is willing, indeed, but the flesh is weak. Now, again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying again, O my Father, Jesus claims His personal, individual relationship with God in heaven.

O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me, unless I drink it, your will be done. If this cup cannot pass away, unless I drink it, your will be done. There is a shift here from the first prayer to the second prayer.

Do you see it? If it is possible, let this cup pass away from me. That's the first option. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

The second prayer, O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away, it's not going to go away unless I drink it. I cannot be delivered out of the problem. It's not going to go away unless I travel through the problem.

I cannot turn aside from the valley of the shadow of death. I must pass through it. I must drink it, your will be done.

If this is what your will entails, let's do that. Verse 43, He came and found them asleep again. How many exhortations does it take? How many warnings does it take? All of us have gotten sleepy.

It happens in church, it happens in places where you wish it didn't. And it's worse if you're a noisy sleeper, and it becomes obvious to those around you that you have lost

consciousness. If your head adopts a strange angle and or your jaw, you, there's a very funny bit that Rowan Atkinson did where he's in church on the front row and he cannot stay awake no matter how hard he tries.

But if you know that you are prone to fall asleep, what can you do? What, this used to happen when I was in college and it is seriously unbecoming to fall asleep. What we were allowed to do is stand up and go to the back of the room. You're very much less likely to fall asleep if you are on your feet.

So if you're in the garden, it is dark, you have had a full meal and it's very quiet. All you can hear is the Lord Jesus praying. And I think these words are representative.

I think his prayers were probably much longer because Jesus says in verse 40, could you not watch with me one hour? Could you not watch with me one hour? So evidently the better part of an hour has passed. Uh, if we need to be alert and awake and we are falling asleep, we have to do something. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

We've got to do something about the flesh. If the flesh is causing us to stumble, if the flesh is interfering with our ability to do what we need to do, we have to address the flesh. If you are driving and you start falling asleep, you need to stop the car, get out, do a couple of wind sprints, get some caffeine, do something.

You cannot fall asleep at the wheel. This can be and often is fatal to yourself or to others. You have to find a way to address the weakness of the flesh.

If you're falling asleep at a time you don't want to, stand up, move around, get a cup of coffee, do something. When you're not to fall asleep here in the garden, what could Peter, James and John have done? Stand up, flap your arms, do something. If you care enough about not falling asleep, you will find a way to not fall asleep.

You're driving your family across country in the middle of the night. You will find a way to not fall asleep. You'll pull over at a stop.

You'll get a double shot caffeine or whatever it takes. But the consequences are too great. What is the application here? After you have been caught sleeping the first time, how bad is it to be caught sleeping a second time? The most earth-shaking, heaven-moving events of all of human history are unfolding and about to unfold.

Do you really want to sleep through that? Do something, make a change. If the flesh is the weakness, and Jesus has just pointed that out, it's not enough to want to stay awake. Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak.

So do something about the flesh. Can you pray for alertness? Can you pray for energy? Can you pray to God, Lord, give me the ability, the strength to endure this test of my flesh? Sleep is a metaphor for what? Death. And if you're falling asleep in the physical

realm, you are spiritually unfruitful.

You are a dead branch, no fruit. If you're asleep, you cannot produce spiritual fruit. This is the idea.

Jesus is about to die and they are dying in advance. They are falling asleep. He came and found them asleep again.

Why? Their eyes were heavy. Their eyes were heavy. What do eyes represent? This is how we perceive.

This is how we understand what is going on. We look, we observe, we draw conclusions based on what we see. But their eyes are dull.

Their eyes are heavy. Seeing they see and do not perceive. Hearing they hear and do not understand.

The heart of this people has grown calloused. Jesus himself comes and finds them sleeping. So in verse 44, he left them, went away and prayed the third time.

How many failures did Jesus predict for Peter in terms of denial? Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times. Once again, Peter has denied the words of the Lord three times predicting his denial. He now fails in the garden three times being warned by the Lord Jesus twice, being awakened twice.

You would think, well, surely this won't go to a third failure. He left them, went away again and prayed the third time saying the same words. Saying the same words.

Then he came to his disciples and said to them, are you still sleeping and resting three times? Look, the hour is at hand and the son of man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.

There are actually some who have come to verse 46 and it's parallels and have tried to argue that Jesus is saying, come on, let's get out of here. The betrayer is coming. Let's escape the garden and go elsewhere.

I don't, you could not be more obtuse. The Lord Jesus has already acknowledged that he is ready to drink the cup that is a part of the father's will. And what he says here, rise, let us be going forward.

We are going through the valley. I am going to drink the cup that is a part of the will of the father. My betrayer is at hand.

Jesus basically says, let's get on with it. Who is prepared and who is not to be going? The Lord Jesus has prayed three separate intense sessions. The disciples have slept three separate intense sessions.

Who is going to persevere and accomplish the will of the father? Who is going to fail and be scattered? There is a lot of dross to be separated from the silver and gold here. And verse 47, while he was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the 12, with a great multitude, with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now his betrayer had given them a sign saying, whomever I kiss, he is the one, seize him.

Whoever I kiss, he is the one. Turn with me to Luke chapter seven. Luke chapter seven.

This is a very famous part of the story where Jesus is betrayed with a kiss. Luke chapter seven, verse 36, Luke 7, 36. One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him.

And he went to the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat. Behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that he sat at table at the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at his feet behind him weeping. And she began to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head.

And she kissed his feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he spoke to himself saying, this man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner. Now you picture the scene.

We've talked about this in terms of the upper room meal where individuals who came and sat down were actually reclining. Jews would recline on their left side in a U shape around a low table. They would lean on their left elbow and they would partake of the food with their right.

Jesus is so reclining. And as his head and shoulders and arms are near the table and his reclining form, his feet are on the outside of this U shape as are everyone else's. The woman has heard that he is at the Pharisee's house.

She has come in and she has come to Jesus' feet. Normally a greeting of welcome like they do in France and other European venues, they will come and there is this sort of ceremonial kiss. It's usually in the air or somewhere near the cheek, you know, one on each side.

And this is a sign of honor to a visitor or to a guest. It is a recognition and an expression that they are welcome, that they are honored, that they are respected. And it is administered somewhere in the vicinity of the face.

This kissing takes place at the feet. Simon the Pharisee, we know this is Simon from other sources. This man in verse 39, if he were a prophet would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him.

Is Jesus in fact the prophet, capital P spoken of by Moses? He is. Does he know who and

what manner of woman this is? Yes, he does. Does he also know who and what manner of person the Pharisee is? Yes, he does.

Does Jesus know who and what manner of person Judas is? Yes, he does. Does he know who and what manner of person Peter and James and John and his other disciples are? Yes, he does. So the Pharisee who had invited him spoke to himself, spoke within himself.

He's thinking this. Jesus in verse 40 answered and said to him, he's thinking inside his head. And Jesus answers out loud, Simon, I have something to say to you.

So he said, teacher, say it. There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, the other 50.

When they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him more? Simon answered and said, I suppose the one whom he forgave more. And Jesus said to him, you have rightly judged.

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, notice he turned to the woman because Jesus is reclining at the table and he is able to see and converse with Simon. He is not facing his own feet. So he turns to the woman and he is looking at the woman as he speaks and says to Simon, do you see this woman? Look where I am looking.

I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss.

This woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil. This woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil, with perfume.

Therefore, I say to you, her sins, which are many are forgiven for she loved much, but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. This goes all the way back to Jesus' words in his teaching on the hill, the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They will be filled. Blessed are the poor.

Theirs is the kingdom. It isn't physical circumstances that are in view. You can be rich and be poor, poor in spirit.

You can be well-known. You can be honored. You can be famous in your community.

You can be famous to any extent. And yet be humble, not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. You can be rich and yet be poor.

You can be famous and yet be humble. You can be well thought of and yet hunger and

thirst after righteousness. You can have sight and yet be blind.

You can acknowledge blindness and God gives sight. It is spiritual truth about which Jesus is speaking. And this formal set of customary honors that are given to a guest which Simon has skipped, he evidently invited Jesus as a curiosity, as Jesus is becoming well-known.

And so, well, let's bring him here and see what happens. But even the customary signs of hospitality were not granted. Simon does not deign to treat Jesus as an honored guest.

He's just someone who is asked to come and is allowed in, but he's not given any of the customary honors. Jesus' feet were not washed when he came in. This woman washes them.

And there is a perception here of two different kinds of this woman's actions. Women kept their hair up and under cover in these days. To let one's hair down was a sign of intimacy.

This is something that was done in private, not in public. And yet this woman uncovers her head and lets her hair down so that she can use it to dry Jesus' feet. This is misinterpreted as this woman doing something socially unacceptable, something that would be considered immodest at the least, perhaps erotic.

And so those who see her doing this say, well, see, there's a sinful woman. Look at how immodest she is. She is exposing her hair when it should be covered.

She is massaging Jesus' feet. She is cleansing them. She is anointing them.

These would be things, if you remember the immoral woman in Proverbs with her seductive ploys. And so there are two ways to view her actions. Jesus sees what is in her heart.

The Pharisee sees her external behavior and he immediately imputes it to immodesty, to sinfulness, to bad motives. But the focus here is on the kiss. You can misinterpret the kiss.

She is kissing his feet. Judas is going to come up in the garden and kiss Jesus, which is a formal sign of honor and respect and acceptance as when one honored guest enters the house. So this idea of what does the kiss mean? Here is a woman whose appreciation and whose opportunity to minister to the Lord Jesus is completely misconstrued and damages her reputation and adds to an already bad reputation.

And so Jesus honors her for what is in her heart. Simon fails in these areas because of his self-righteousness. Judas is going to come up and kiss the Lord Jesus, which is a formal expression of respect.

In this context, intimacy and affection as a longstanding companion and so on. Outward appearance is one thing. What is going in the heart is another.

You can be Simon the Pharisee and not express appreciation and cast aspersions on those who do because you assume that they're doing it out of sinful motivation and it is a part of a reputation and a lifestyle that you decry and condemn. You can be Judas and give a formal sign of respect, honor, and affection. And you are in the very act of betraying the Lord you purport to serve, who chose you, who entered you into his inner circle and has trained and instructed and shared life with you for over three years.

We can fool ourselves by what we do externally. It is not the outward appearance. It is the heart.

Sometimes the heart is exposed in outward behavior like Simon the Pharisee. Sometimes the heart is exposed in outward behavior as with the woman and it is misconstrued and misunderstood and becomes the basis for vilification and condemnation and casting aspersions and rejecting and castigating someone. Sometimes it has all the appearances of hail fellow well met and it is the very essence of betrayal.

What should we be tending to? Look at the disciples in the garden. Prayer and watching are a matter of the heart. Sometimes the heart has to overcome the flesh.

The flesh is weak. The flesh wants to sleep. You go to the parallels and it says that Peter in Luke, in his account of this garden scene, says that they were grieving on his behalf.

But even grief, if it doesn't end up being productive, is a stumbling block. In Luke 22, verse 39, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives as he was accustomed as his disciples followed him. When he came to the place, he said to them, pray that you may not enter into temptation.

Pray. The answer is prayer. The answer is, oh my father.

Verse 41 of Luke 22, he was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw. He knelt down and prayed saying, father, if it is your will, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done.

The next two verses 43 and 44 are probably late additions. I will skip over those. When he rose up from prayer and come to his disciples, he found them sleeping from sorrow.

Sleeping from sorrow. Then he said to them, why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The answer is not sorrow.

The answer is not to go inward. The answer is not to ultimately fall asleep. Be awake and pray.

Watch and pray. Watch and pray. How important is prayer in our lives, especially as we

enter into pressure or as we are in fellowship with others who are under pressure.

This is our communication channel. It is a conversation. One-way conversations are not great.

This is why I love spending time in fellowship together, where we all speak and we all get to express what's on our hearts and on our minds. And it's not just a one-way lecture. It's so important that we commune, that we converse.

And prayer is our half of the job. It's our half of the conversation. And when you're talking with somebody, they bring up a subject, they express something, and you talk about what they are talking about.

What they said is a part of what you say. And you respond and you analyze and make parallels and draw conclusions and so on. It is a conversation on the same topic.

There is input from both sides. That's what prayer is. That's what the word of God in our souls provides.

God's part of the conversation is his word. Our part of the conversation is our prayer. And you cannot underappreciate without entering into great peril the importance of that conversation during times of stress.

It is always important, but lest we enter into the temptation, lest we be caused to stumble, caused to deny, caused to betray who we are and why we're here, prayer and watchfulness are essential. Peter denies the words of the Lord Jesus three times before they ever get to Gethsemane. Peter falls asleep and fails to follow the exhortation of the Lord Jesus to watch and pray three times before the arresting party ever arrives.

He is now going to deny the Lord Jesus three times at the fire when the young maiden says, aren't you one of them? Three times to push away the words of the Lord Jesus. Three times to fail to watch and pray. Leads to three times denying.

It doesn't come out of the blue. It's not just a problem of the moment and a momentary fear. It is a lack of preparation.

It is a lack of diligence. It is a lack of paying attention and internalizing what Jesus says and going to God in prayer for strength. That's where Jesus went.

Jesus didn't fall asleep three times. Jesus prayed three times and got the strength to endure the cross, despise the shame, and he is now seated at the right hand of the Father. This is our pattern.

This is our teaching moment, teachable moment, learning from the example given to us in all of the gospels of the comparison and contrast between the Lord Jesus and the disciples. Well, plenty to chew on here. We will continue and see what happens just as

and after Judas expresses this kiss of recognition and welcome next time.

Father, thank you for the privilege of learning your word, of having our personal copy of it on which we can reflect, in which we can meditate and spend time allowing it to sink deeply into the soil of our souls and put its roots into bare fruit. We pray that as we think about these most cataclysmic of events 2,000 years ago, that your Holy Spirit will make them real to us, help us see their pertinence and application in our own lives, both individually and as a fellowship, that we can stick together. We cannot be scattered when times of trial come, when there are efforts made to separate us from our great shepherd, from the example and words of the Lord Jesus himself, and that the gifts you've distributed amongst us, the unifying spirit that dwells in our midst and within us will enable us, both individually and collectively, to live the life to which we've been called, to serve as the body of the Lord Jesus and provide testimony and witness so that through how we live and what we do, others will be drawn to the light and will come to relationship and to the privilege of glorifying you, both now and in ages to come.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.