



Sunday, February 18, 2024

Speaker: Pastor John VanderWindt

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-46

Sermon Title: Watch and Pray



Good morning. We are going to be looking at Matthew today. I invite you to open your Bibles and turn to Matthew 26, which is where we will be reading. As we are entering the season of Lent, which we began last Wednesday, (Ash Wednesday) there is a 40 day season, not counting the Sundays, in which we will look at this aspect of prayer. Our children who are in kids church, are going through the Lord's Prayer, and they are looking at how did Jesus teach us to pray? And in these next few weeks, we will take sections from the Lord's Prayer and include them in things that we learned from Christ, as He demonstrates in His conversations, either with people or with God, what it means to actually live out this aspect of the Lord's Prayer.

Today, we're going to begin with the story in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now to give you a bit of background just to make sure that we're all on the same page, this is happening just before Jesus was crucified. They have just had the Last Supper. During that time in the Last Supper, Jesus spoke to Peter and warned him that he would deny Him. And Peter, in his Peter-like way, told Jesus that that'll never happen. It is that supper in which Jesus said to Judas, "Go and do what you must do." Because He knew that Judas was going to betray Him.

And after that time of supper, they traveled down the hill to this garden called Gethsemane, which actually means 'the olive press.' Gethsemane is an olive orchard. In this olive orchard, there is a place in which Jesus went with his 12 disciples - or now 11 - and He went to pray. And so we're going to look at that story in Matthew 26 and we will begin reading at verse 36.

Matthew 26:36.

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." **40** Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. **41** "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." **43** When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **44** So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. **46** Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

This is the Word of the Lord. Join me in prayer. Dear Lord, You speak to us and You help us to understand more of who You are. Lord, You also help us to understand who we are and how much we need You. Lord, as we look at Your Word this morning, I pray that the words spoken may be of You and that nothing of me may come out, Lord, because it is You that we have come to hear. Lord, we ask that You will open our ears and that You will mold our hearts, Lord, that You will clean out the places that we have hidden for a long time, that we may be free with You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

As I mentioned before, Jesus knew what was going to happen. So Jesus took the time to pray. Oftentimes, when we look at this passage, the line that we focus on most often is where Jesus prays, "Yet not my will, but Yours be done." That is a very important line. But that is not what we are going to focus on this morning. We will come back to Jesus submitting to God's will and the need for us to submit to God's will later. But this morning, we want to look at, "How does Jesus, first of all, model this concept of prayer?" And then secondly, "What is the purpose of this prayer and what is the purpose of His phrase which He tells the disciples to, 'Watch with me?' To watch and pray? Could you not keep watch? Why watch?"

Let's begin with what Jesus models as has been stated earlier by Renee. Jesus often went out to pray by himself. In fact, in **Luke 5:16**, it says, "**16** But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

When you look at Jesus' ministry, anytime he began a big section of ministry or healing or teaching, there would be mention of the time that Jesus would begin that aspect in prayer. Jesus never went on his own strength. And you say, "Well, Jesus is Lord. He could do this on his own." Yes, he could. But Jesus was also human. And he knew that deep down, none of the things that he was called to do, he could do on his own strength. And so he went to be in a quiet place and pray by himself. That doesn't mean Jesus didn't have devotions with his disciples or times of worship, as we just saw at the Last Supper, where he did.

It means that we, as families and as individuals and as a church family, need to have devotions with each other. But we can never let that be our only time of devotion. We need to make sure that we ourselves also go to a time of personal devotions. John Calvin says, "It is useful to pray apart, for then the faithful soul develops itself more familiarly and with greater simplicity pours forth its petitions, groans, cares, fears, hopes, and joys into the bosom of God. We need this time alone."

And so Jesus and his disciples go down to Gethsemane and he says to the first group, "Sit here while I go over there." Then he brings three of them with him. Peter, James, and John. He brings Peter and James and John a little bit further and then with Peter, James and John, he says to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Jesus does not reveal this to everybody. Just to his closest friends. And to his closest friends, he says, "Will you watch with me and pray?"

Now, we often talk about watching something, that you are observing something, but that's not the watch which is used here. The watch here is like a night guardsmen, a person on security, who is taking watch, to be alert, to look for anything that may attack. This watch is knowing that things are going to get bad. Be alert. So Jesus says, "Will you watch with me?" This is a very unique time in the life of Christ. It is unique. Yes, because he is going to the cross. But this is one of the few times, maybe the only time, when we see Jesus asking his disciples to pray for him.

We often ask Jesus to pray for us and we know that the Spirit prays on our behalf. But this time we have Jesus asking his disciples, "Will you pray for me? Will you pray with me during this time? Because I need your prayers." And what is the prayer that Jesus needs? Many times we think the prayer that Jesus needs here is so that he will submit to the will of the Father. But that's not really the prayer. The prayer that Jesus needs is that he will resist the temptation to have the Father's will done another way. That he will resist the temptation to find a different way than what the Father has designed for the healing of the souls of all humankind.

Jesus is now facing his greatest temptation. This would be the time in which Satan will attack Jesus in a deeper level, saying, "You don't need to do this. There's got to be a different way." Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, spent 40 days in the desert.

During that time, he was tempted. Satan kept telling him, "There's got to be a different way. You don't need to do this." And Jesus, every time, responded not with his own words, but with the words of God in Scripture. Which is why we need to know Scripture so that when Satan comes to attack us, we are able to give him not our words, but we are able to give him God's words. Because God's Word speaks life to all of us.

So now here, Jesus, in his deepest time of temptation, has asked three of his closest friends to pray with him. To keep watch. Imagine being asked by Christ to pray for him. And then we will see what happens with Peter, James and John. Jesus, after going a little ways away, (you could probably still hear) comes back and he finds them sleeping. And Jesus says to them in **Matthew 26:40**, "40 Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" And then he says specifically to Peter in **Matthew 26:41**, "41 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Watch and pray. But do you notice what Jesus tells Peter to pray for? Jesus tells Peter to pray that he does not fall into temptation.

In the Lord's Prayer, it says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." That is a prayer which we all pray. And Jesus says, "You need to watch and pray so that you are not led into temptation." Remember what happens just before this, as I mentioned earlier, Jesus told Peter that he was going to deny him three times. And Peter says, "Absolutely not. I would never deny you, Lord." Do you know what story follows the story in the Garden of Gethsemane? Peter denied Jesus three times. Jesus here comes to Peter and he says, "Peter, you need to watch and pray." And Peter sleeps.

That's a big reminder. Do we pray before the time of temptation? Do we pray during the time of temptation? Or do we often say, "I can handle this." Let me give you a bit of a different picture. In the Garden of Eden, Eve is standing there having a conversation with Satan and Satan saying, "Hey, look at that tree. That looks like really good fruit." And Eve was like, "Yeah, that looks pretty good." So he says, "You know, Eve, did God really say that you couldn't eat from that?" What would have happened if Eve would have gone "Hey, God, can I get a clarification on this a minute? Can I eat from that tree or not?" I bet Eve would assert to God "Hey, "God, can I eat from that tree?" God would have said, "No" and Satan would have slithered off going, "Well, that one didn't work. I'll have to come up with another plan."

Think about the times when you are tempted. Are you first reacting in the sense of, "Hey, God, is this good for me? Lord, will this improve my life? Lord, will this bless the relationship between me and you? Lord, will this bless the relationship between me and somebody else?" How often, when we are tempted, isn't our response one of, "Well, I think I can handle this. I know what I'm doing. I know this is tempting. But, you know, I think I can handle it."

For those of you who like chocolate chip cookies and the smell of chocolate chip cookies right after they come out of the oven, and then there's a little note there that says, "Do not eat. I need them for someone else," where's the best place to be? Not in the kitchen where you can stand next to the chocolate chip cookies and think, "Oh, I can handle this." Now, you can usually handle - either right handed or left handed - and then down the hatch.

But if we would, at that point, say, "Hey, Lord, is this the best thing for the relationship between me and someone else," wouldn't it be great if we could talk with God and say, "Hey, God, does this work?"

Well, here's the good news. We do.

Last week, we had as our verse of the week from Hebrews 4:16, which is a verse which reminds us that we are allowed to approach with boldness the throne of God. And this would be a bold approach. But God says, "I welcome that." But here's the piece we need to remember **Hebrews 4:15**, "15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

Jesus was tempted to look for shortcuts. Jesus was tempted to do things another way. Jesus was tempted to say, "Hey, Lord, there's got to be a different way." But he spent his time in prayer with the Father. And the Father sent angels to help him when he was tempted in the desert. Have you ever thought about the fact that when you are tempted, you have a direct line to God to say, "Hey, Lord, I need a little help. Can you send the heavenly hosts to take care of this problem for me?" To which God will, when you submit to Him, like Christ did. Jesus wasn't saying, "Lord, change your plan. There's got to be something different." He was saying, "Lord, if there's a different way, can you please explain this to me to make sure that I've got this right? Because if I don't, I want to make sure I've got it right."

And when Jesus comes back to Peter, he says to Peter, "Peter, watch and pray that you may not fall into temptation." Because we know that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. And we see that throughout Scripture, how we are reminded that we need to be in prayer with Christ and our Father.

So for this Lenten time, we are looking at this aspect of, "How do we strengthen our prayer life?" If we look at the fact that Christ, just before he went to the cross, the most important part of his life was that time of prayer with his Heavenly Father. Then how does that create in us a desire to do the same? But here's the beautiful part of Christ's prayer. Christ invited his friends, his closest friends, to pray with him on this.

It is quite common, when there is an illness, or when there is a tragedy, or when there's something else going on, that we invite others to pray with us and to pray for us. We pray for healing, we pray for safety in travel. We pray for comfort during times of mourning. What if? What if during this Lenten season, we were bold enough to say to one or two other people, "Will you pray with me for my greatest temptation? Will you come alongside me and pray with me as I directly appeal to the Father for this temptation?" And you need to fill in your own blank. You know what your greatest temptation is.

Is this a time when you are willing to say, "I am going to ask one other person or maybe two other people or, like Jesus, three other persons, to walk alongside me and say, "I am going to ask you to pray with me for my greatest temptation for the next 40 days."

And I'm asking the Father to remove that from me and to send his angels so that I know that that too can be defeated. Because we know that Satan loses. As Arlene read earlier from **Psalm 121**, Peter fell asleep, but we know that God never slumbers nor sleeps. So no matter where we are or when we are, we can come to Him in prayer.

Just before this passage in Matthew 26, in **Matthew 24**, Jesus says to His disciples, "**42** Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come." But understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. We need to prepare ourselves, not even just during the time of temptation, but we need to be on the watch beforehand, in prayer with God. And so we are invited this time of Lent to look at how we spend our time in prayer. How do we develop our deepest desire to know God and to know him more clearly? And to do that, we need to be in prayer. And in the end, Christ promises that there will be victory.

Victory. Many of us watched the Super Bowl last week. When a person receives the trophy at the end, what do they do? They raise the trophy with one hand. For those of us who are hockey fans, this really doesn't count. It's got to be both hands (holding the trophy cup). Okay, this is the sign of a champion. This is the sign of victory. But what if that's not really the sign of victory? What if this is the sign of victory? [Pastor John gets down on his knees]. When we get on our knees, we pray. In fact, if we are going to follow Jesus's example of victory, it says that Jesus went on and he lay prostrate.

What if this is a sign of victory? What if we place ourselves on the ground prostrate before our God and say, "God, we cannot handle this on our own. We need you and we are so grateful that we are able to come to that throne room at any time. But we need you." What if that becomes our position of victory? What if we allow ourselves to be in a place where we lay prostrate before God and say, "God, this is more than I can handle. I need you to fight for me in this battle." Our battle is not against flesh and blood but it is against the spiritual forces of this world. And we need God to carry us through each of those places.

So Jesus, with His disciples, prayed. He comes back to Peter and he says, "Can't you watch and pray with me for one hour?" Now, when you read through this, do you realize that the passage in which we last read lasted probably about three hours? Which we read in less than three minutes. This time of prayer is not a quick, "God is good. God is great. Let us thank him for this food. Amen." This is a deep time of prayer. It is a time in which you make an effort to set aside a time to pray before God and to listen to God.

So during this time of Lent, we invite you to a time in which you focus on your prayer. And if you want help with that, we invite you to come on Saturday mornings from 8:30 to 9:30. One hour of prayer. There is a group of faithful members here at Living Hope which meet the first and third Tuesday of the month from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for an hour of prayer. We talk about people praying for each other and we need people to pray for us, but we also need to pray for each other.

How much time do you spend interceding for a family member, or a friend, or a colleague at work? Or your neighbor? Jesus invited his disciples to intercede for God when he was human form. Don't you think Jesus also invites us to intercede for the neighbors and the humans that live around us?

That's an invitation which Jesus says, "We can't do this on our own. We need each other." You need your personal time of prayer. Absolutely. But you need to be praying with and for others as well.

So Jesus comes back to Peter and he says, "Can't you watch with me for one hour?" He comes back a second time and Peter is sleeping. He comes back a third time and Peter is sleeping. Jesus prayed three times. Is there a connection between Jesus's three prayers, Peter's lack of three prayers, and Peter denying Jesus three times?

If Peter had prayed those three times, would he have been able to resist that temptation to deny Christ? Is the fall into temptation for each of us an explanation? Or is it explained by the fact that we are not praying about it? What if, during this Lenten season, we would decide to watch and pray? What if our watching and praying would ask God to transform us in a new way? What would it look like to watch and pray that we may not fall into temptation, whatever that temptation is? What would it look like? For each of us, this Lent to watch and pray.

That doesn't mean temptation won't come. It doesn't mean trouble won't come. As we look at this week's verse from John 14, the first part says, "You will have trouble." Jesus, when he was finished praying, he said in **Matthew 26:45-46**, "**45** Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. **46** Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

When we pray, that doesn't mean trouble isn't going to come. It does mean that we will be able to do what God asks us to do in that time. Jesus knew that the sinners were coming, they were going to take his life, and they were taking his life so that he may die for all sinners, so that we may have life. But Jesus, before that, went into prayer saying, "Lord, help me to do what you have called me to do. Whether that is good, or whether it's hard." And God says in that space, "I will be with you. I will carry you through, whether that is through life or through death. I will be there and I will carry you." But it is not on our strength. It is not on our desires. It is on the will of God and the strength of God, that we are able to move on.

So this Lent, we invite you to watch and to pray because we can sleep later on when the war has been one. Have you ever thought maybe part of Heaven is just really getting a good night's sleep? Because you've got nothing to worry about. Because God is there with us. And God never slumbers and he never sleeps. Jesus invites us to prayer and Jesus says, "If you want a powerful tool to help you resist temptation, prayer is the best thing you've got. Laying prostrate before God is the ultimate sign of victory. And we come to him and say, "Thank you, Lord, for opening a way that we may come to the throne room of God at any time in prayer.

Join me in prayer. Dear Lord, we thank You. We thank you Lord, that You are God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings. Jesus, we thank you that on that night in the Garden of Gethsemane, you did not give into temptation but that you carried out the tasks that God had set before you, so that we may come before the throne of God at any time. And Lord, remind us in our times of temptation - or remind us even before things get bad - to watch and to pray because we don't know the hour that will come when we will fall. Lord, strengthen us and give us your spirit to work with each other and with you in holding each other up in prayer. And it's only, Lord, because of your great love for us that we can love you and love others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by: *Liza Perry*