

RETURN TO PRAYER

Matthew 26:36-45 ³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*." ⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak." ⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." ⁴³ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

There are some skills we learn as children that we ought to cultivate throughout our life. Unfortunately, we allow many of these skills to fall by the wayside. One such example would be learning to keep a food diary in high school. It would be good to do a better job keeping track of the food I ate and making sure I am getting a balanced meal.

Another such example is our prayer life. We learn simple prayers when we are little, which are good prayers, but there is certainly room for growth and maturity in our prayer life.

Scripture is of course full of encouragements to make prayer an integral part of our life.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 ¹⁷ pray without ceasing

Eph 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -

Mat 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

As well as the parables of the unjust judge and the neighbor who wouldn't stop knocking on the door.

All of these passages as well as our text reminds us just how far short of the ideal our own prayer life is. We see in Christ's example in our text what prayer could be. But more than that we see Christ who seeks us out in our weakness and fills in the gaps where we fail.

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.

Jesus both brings his disciples with him and also goes off a little by himself. Prayer is a thing that is both personal and communal. At times it is a private thing, at other times it is a chance for fellowship.

There are times when we pray online with out father. But there are other times when we ought to come together to pray. It is so important for families to pray together. It is only in Christ that we grow together. When we come together before Christ, we grow together. Husband and wife ought to pray together. It strengths your marriage.

But more than anything else pray is time to be with Christ. Christ brings his disciples with him to spend time with them and so that they can spend time with him. The entire purpose of prayer is to spend time with Christ and receive the comfort and strength that we need for this life.

The Lord calls us to follow him to the garden, to return to the Lord, to return to prayer.

³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Prayer is a time of honesty and transparency.

Jesus does not try to pretend that what he is about to face is no big deal. He does not try to pretend that he can do it alone. He does not pretend that it will be a fun thing that he wants to do. He is perfectly honest with God about his fears and his feelings.

We spend so much of our life pretending, wearing masks. There is absolutely no point in pretending with God. And there is no need. Before one another, our sins and actions define us so much that we try to put a good face on everything. Before God our sins do not define us. The cross of Christ and the sacrifice he made for us is what defines us. And even if we wanted, we could not hide or masks our feelings.

Our prayers do not need to be sound good. Prayer is an opportunity to share our heart with God.

Jesus invites us to the garden to pray with honesty, to pour out our hearts before God. He calls us to return to the Lord with our hearts, to return to prayer.

⁴⁰ Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? ⁴¹ "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We probably sympathize greatly with Peter, James and John. Most of us would probably be sleeping with them. Like Peter we probably think that the danger is not that eminent. WE often think of prayer as something that can wait. But Jesus warns us and our disciples that the temptation is very real and close at hand.

On the one hand Jesus was hoping for some companionship and comfort from his friends as he was about to go through this great ordeal, on the other hand it was also important that they pray so that they do not fall into temptation.

Jesus words here probably don't and didn't sound to the disciples like this was really that big of a deal.

I remember two days before Kaylee was born. The doctor warned us that the amniotic fluid was dangerously low and that vanessa should get induced that night. However, he said it in such a low key manner that we thought it was only something to watch. Later on we found out just how dangerous that situation really was. We found out that the doctor's tone of voice, which we had taken as an indication of mild concern, was simple meant not to alarm us.

Christ often speaks to us in a very loving and low-key manner. But that does not mean that the danger is not very real and very eminent. Peter doesn't seem to take Jesus words very seriously but we know how soon Peter would fall into temptation and sin.

"Sin is lurking at your door" God tells Cain. We have a tendency to think we won't fail we won't sin like that but the danger is far more real and far closer than we are usually willing to admit. "watch and pray lest you enter into temptation." Our marriages, our lives, our spiritual well being can fall apart so quickly.

Christ's manner of speaking to us in love sometimes leaves us with the impression that its not really that big of deal. But nothing could be further from the truth. The piles of stress and anxiety, the demands of our earthly life, our inability to clearly see the path before us, but above all the very real danger and threat of temptation that lies before our door makes prayer so important and of such real consequence in our life. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Christ calls us to return to prayer before temptation leads to sin. Return to the Lord in prayer to receive the comfort and strength we need for this life.

⁴² Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Learning to say "your will be done" is the hardest part of learning to prayer. It is also one of the reasons we are so lax in our prayer life.

On the one hand we do not want God's will we want our will. We don't want the life God has in mind. We want the life we have in mind.

On the other hand if God is going to do his will regardless of whether or not we pray why bother praying? We aren't going to convince God that our way is better, are we? Its not going to change anything or make anything different so why bother?

But thinking that way just shows us how sinful our view of prayer is? The purpose of prayer is not to get what we want. Prayer is not a spiritual shopping trip. The purpose of prayer is to spend time with our father in heaven, to share our fears and experiences, our heart breaks and our worries.

Jesus does not pray because he does not know what to do, or because he has a list of things he needs from the father. Jesus prays because he is deeply afraid and troubled and wants the comfort and the time to spend with his father.

Jesus calls us to return to the Father's will, to return to prayer.

⁴⁴ So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then He came to His disciples and said to them, "Are *you* still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.

All of this shows us just how sinful we are, and how far we fall from the ideal of prayer. But if the story of Jesus in the garden shows us how far short we have fallen of the ideal, the story of Jacob shows us how great God's grace is in our life.

It is not Jacob who wrestles with God but rather God who wrestles with Jacob. It was not Jacob who went to find God, but God came to find Jacob. In fact God had been wrestling with Jacob with his whole life trying to call him to return to the Lord.

And in our text as well. Jesus takes time out of his prayer to go back to the disciples and encourage them because he knows how much they need that comfort and that strength. He knows the temptations that wait for them.

God wrestles with us in our life too. Calling us back to him, calling us back to a life of prayer, but when we fail, and we fail rather miserably he covers our failures by his grace.

Paul reminds us :

Romans 8:26 ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Yes our prayer life fall really short of what it could be in Christ. But just like everything else in our life prayer is not primarily our efforts but Christ's. He comes back to find us. He wrestles with us by his grace and love to bring us back to him.

Think of a parent and their children. Who is that usually makes the greatest effort to talk and stay in touch and spend time together? Especially when the children are teenagers and in college? It's usually the parents who try the to be a part of their children's lives.

In the same way God was the one who made the effort to be a part of Jacob's life and he is the one who makes the effort in our lives as well.

Our text calls us to return to the Lord and to return to prayer but it is the Lord who wrestles with us and comes to find us and bring us back to him. The Lord by his grace fills in the gaps in our lives because of our failings.

Amen