



Luke 22:39-65

“One Hero”
(16th in a series on Luke’s Gospel)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

LUKE 22:39-65 "THE ONLY HERO"

Jesus Is The Martyr's Model

1) vv.39-46 ON THE MOUNT OF TEMPTATION JESUS PRAYS, THE SLEEP.

Bridge From Supper To Trial

a) v.39 Prayer And Temptation: Command Of Jesus.

How Do Martyr's Stay Strong? Pray

39 And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. Judas Gone, What Disciples Do: Follow, 5:11, 27-28, 9:23, 57-61, 18:22, 28, 43

40 And when he came to the place he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Threat Of Lapse: 21:36, 22:22, 32, 34, 54-62

Command + Warning, Peirasmos = Fiery Trial (4:2, 13; 11:4) Enter = Succumb, Test Opens Ministry in 4:1-13, Acts 4:21-31

b) vv.41-42 Jesus' Response To Crisis: Prayer And Surrender. Jesus Models What He Asks

Jn. 12:27, Heb. 5:7-8, Struggle With Loyalty In Prayer

41 1 And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, Prayer = Need For God/Strength/Consolation Solitude: Humility

42 a "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; Jesus Prays 3:21, 5:16, 6:12, 9:18, 9:28-29, 11:1-2, 18:1, 19:46. 23:34, 46, 24:30-31

b nevertheless not my will, 22:17, 22; Suffering, Petition For Relief From High Price

a' but thine, be done." Surrender, 11:2, Obedience Over Life Eph. 6:18, Only Way To Victory = Intense Union With God!

c) vv.43-44 Angelic Visitation And Prayer Of Agony. Fierce Struggle, Satan Deflects vv. 43-44 Not In All Manuscripts

43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. Corner Man! Dan. 10:18-19
44 And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground. 4:13 opportune time! Prayer Heard, Angel Comes Sirach 4:28

2 Macc. 3:14-16 (Martyr), Agon = Gk. Athletic Contest, Gladiators

b') vv.45-46a Disciples Response To Crisis: Sorrow/Sleep/Fear/Cowardice.

Luke Softens Failure, Not Go 3x For Disciples' Support

45 2' And when he rose from prayer, Decision Made, Victory Won, Face Future Obedient

46 1' he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow (grief), and he said to them, "Why do you sleep? Failure, Overwhelmed (Weakness) Drained! Unaware Of Forces, Question Not Answered, 9:32 Both Petitions Fail! Jesus Is True Philosopher

a') v.46b Prayer And Temptation: Command Of Jesus.

Lesson = Imitate Jesus, Not Disciples

Face Spiritual Darkness/Evil With Prayer, Calls A Second Time

Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

Immediate Challenge, vv.47-53, 18:1, 21:34-36

2) vv.47-53 ENTERING TEMPTATION NO. 1: JUDAS' BETRAYAL OF JESUS.

Control: Questions Judas, Stops Disciples, Heals, Exposes Leaders, Names Source

a) vv.47-48 Jesus Addresses Judas As A Betrayer: Question.

Abridged Version Of Mark

Immediate Intrusion Of The Power Of Death/Evil

47 While he was still speaking, behold, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. Jarring Contrast, Complete Hypocrisy, Kiss Of Death

48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" 22:21-22

Q Acts 1:18-20, Phony Gesture Judas Leads The Enemy: Apostasy/ Sold Out

b) v.49 Violence Offered In Word And Deed: Disciples Are Not Following Jesus.

49 And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" 22:36-38, What Zealots Do Deliberately

Jesus Does Not Counter Violence To Escape Martyrdom

b') vv.50-51 Violence Rejected In Word And Deed: Jesus Is Consistent Philosopher.

//6:27-36 On Treatment Of Enemies

50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. Jn. 18:10, Not Seditious
51 But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Last Healing Of Jesus

Overcomes Violence, Compassion For Enemies To End

a') v.52 Jesus Addresses The Jewish Leaders As Darkness: Question.

No Criminal

Only After Jesus Speaks Are They Able To Seize Him

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? Humor, Robber = Political Bandit, 19:46

53 When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." 4:6, 11:35, 20:19, 22:22, 23:44; Acts 26:18, Satanic Empowerment Jesus Never Loses His Head!

3) vv.54-65 ENTERING TEMPTATION NO. 2: PETER'S DENIAL OF JESUS.

Judas Did Not Pray, Peter Was Not Prepared

a) v.54 Actions Of The Guards: Seize.

Thursday Evening Of Holy Week

54 Then they seized him and led him away,
bringing him into the high priest's house.

No Night Trial In Luke, Initial Inquiry Before Annas
Acts 1:16 On Judas' Role As Leader Of Arresters, Not Following Jesus!

b) v.55 Peter Enters The Courtyard And Fulfills The First Half Of His Promise.

55 Peter followed at a distance;
and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together,
Peter sat among them.

"Go with you to prison" (22:33a)
Psalm 38:11
Cool, Mid-Spring Evening

c) vv.56-60a Three Direct Charges And Three Denials.

Self-Preservation, Or Overly Clever?

1) vv.56-57 With Him: Denial Of Jesus.

Prophecy, 22:34

56 Then a maid (female slave), seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said,
"This man also was *with him*."

57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him."

First Sifting

2) v.58 One Of Them: Denial Of The Other Disciples.

58 And a little later some one else saw him and said,
"You also are *one of them*."

But Peter said, "Man, I am not."

Second Sifting

1') vv.59-60 With Him: Denial Of Their Galilean Ministry, Pleads Ignorance.

59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying,
"Certainly this man also was *with him*; for he is a *Galilean*."

Time To Reconsider!
Accent, 13:2 On Politics, 23:6

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are saying."

Did Peter Lie In Order To Stay Close To Jesus? Backfired?
Third Sifting

"Rock" Man Turns To Jello

b') vv.60b-62 Peter Fails At His Second Promise And Exits To Weep.

"Go with you to death" (22:33b)

61 And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed.

His Worst Moment Told And Retold

And the Lord turned and looked (straight) at Peter.

Jesus Is Not Through With Peter Yet

62 And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him,
"Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."

Prophetic Word (22:34)

And he went out and wept bitterly.

22:32 Strengthen Brethren, Beginning Of Repentance

a') vv.63-65 Actions Of The Guards: Physical Abuse Begins: Mock, Beat.

Irony = Prophecy Has Just Been Fulfilled In Peter

63 Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him;

//Parable Of 20:10-11, 12:47-48, 8:32, 18:32

64 they also blindfolded him and asked him,

Human Sin/Ignorance/Crowd At Its Worst!

"Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"

Miss Prophets, 7:29-30

65 And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him.

Is. 50:6, Blasphemy, 18:32

Jesus As A Model Martyr: The Unjust Murder Of Innocent Man By Authorities (Jewish/Roman)

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|----|--------------------------------------|--|
| a. | Innocent of charges | 23:4, 14, 15, 22, 41, 47 |
| b. | Delivered by priest, scribes | 22:66, 23:1-2, 10, 13, 18, 21-14, Acts 5:27, 30; 13:27 |
| c. | Death is parallel to prophets of old | 13:13, Acts 4:27 |
| d. | Silent before accusers | 23:9// 2 Macc. 7:2, 11; 4 Macc. 6:1, 10:23 |
| e. | Martyrdom due to devil | 22:3, 53 // Martyrdom of Isaiah |
| f. | Eclipse at death | 23:45 // Joseph Ant. 17.6:2-4 |
| g. | Demeanor leads to conversion | 23:40-43 |
| h. | Fulfills Old Testament prophecies | 23:25-27, 46; Acts 13:27-29, 2:33 |
| i. | Model for others | Stephen in Acts 6:8ff. (Talbert, Luke, 212-213). |

A Brief Treatment Of 22:39-65

Three paragraphs chronicle events just before Jesus’ trial. Throughout, Jesus is portrayed in the tradition of Jewish martyrdom (see chart on p.3) and as a true philosopher who lives with consistency; his life matches his words. As a true prophet, his predictions are fulfilled; as a spiritual athlete in *agony*, Jesus wins his contest with angelic aid. Multiple images are necessary to portray the true hero: innocent martyr, true philosopher, accurate prophet, spiritual athlete. His chief foe, the Evil One, is ever in the background. The disciples are warned in v.40b//v.46 about *temptation* which echoes Jesus’ desert testing by Satan (4:1-15). In v.53b Jesus names the occasion as, “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” Is this *the opportune time* of Satan’s fresh assault (4:13)? Yes. His strategy is the same as before: divert Jesus from embracing innocent suffering. He fails as Jesus’ overcomes natural reticence through intense prayer.

The first unit (vv.39-46) is a 5:1 concentric structure (a-b-c-b’-a’). At the center (vv.43-44) is the arrival of an angel who strengthens Jesus for further agonies. On either side (b//b’) Jesus removes himself and kneels in prayer, then rises and returns to sleepy friends. The outside components (a//a’) contain the command to pray, a clear inclusion. With a single center, the focus is the core in contrast with the frames. Jesus does not succumb because of prayer and divine aid; his followers fail because they sleep instead of pressing into God. The disciples continue to *follow him* (v.39), something Judas has now abandoned. Jesus alerts them to the crisis in his command to pray. That it is repeated at the end- after their failure- marks it as standing orders for the church. Jesus’ humble prayer is reflected in his posture. The substance of his prayer is summarized in intimate address (*Father*), a confession of God’s abilities (*if thou art willing*), a petition (*remove this cup from me*), then- in reverse order- the yielding of his will (*nevertheless, not my will*) to the Father (*but thine, be done*). Humility and honesty, struggle and surrender combine. An answer comes as Jesus is strengthened by an angel, then reenters another round of the fight. The summary of vv.41-42 reflects a deeper, longer struggle, as evidenced in profuse sweating that drips like blood.

Judas’ treachery- what it means for Satan to *enter him* (22:3)- is made clear as he leads the opposition, perverts the kiss of friendship, and is called to account (vv.47-53). Jesus reaches out with a question, but Judas does not flinch. He is hardened in apostasy, impervious to the grace of repentance. It will not end well. And if Judas has turned to darkness, the disciples remain in the shadows. Jesus stands in the center of God’s will and does not need their defense. One draws and strikes before the question of v.49 is answered, and- in a bit of poor swordsmanship- severs an ear. Jesus stops the heroics and- in his last healing- restores the man. The one who taught his followers to love and do good to enemies (6:27-36) acts it out in true philosophy. The earlier question to Judas (v.48) is paralleled in a question to his entourage (vv.52b-53a); both expect a *Yes* answer. That their actions are at night and away from the crowds demonstrates what Jesus now names, “But this is your hour and the power of darkness.” In the providence of God, the free choice of evil men is bent to the divine will. God does not cause but uses evil.

Jesus the prophet is highlighted in vv.53-65. His prediction of 9:22 begins its fulfillment as Jesus is seized and beaten. The promise of Peter’s denials (22:34) unfolds at the center of the paragraph. Peter’s loyalties unravel as he denies friendship with Jesus (vv.56-57), association with the disciples (v.58), and three years in Galilee (vv.59-60). While cowardice has been named as the vice, could it be Peter is overly-clever? Are his denials a way to stay close to Jesus? Either way, Jesus’ words remain true, and with a look from the Master, Peter crumbles. He arrives in courage (v.55) and departs in shame (vv.60b-62). As multiple fulfillments unfold, cruel ignorance continues (vv.63-65). They do not know who he is. Do we?

THE ONLY HERO

“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

Jesus acknowledges both human responsibility and the temporary power of evil.

LUKE 22:53b

Tradition has it he was a pupil of the Apostle John. His name? *Polycarp*, Bishop of Smyrna. Born around A.D. 59- less than thirty years after Jesus death- he died about A.D. 155, well into his nineties. A hundred and twenty five years after Jesus’ death a man like Polycarp could say, “I knew men who were the Lord’s first disciples, and these are the stories they told me!” In him the living oral tradition continued. As an old men he was called upon to renounce Christ and “swear by the genius of the Emperor,” an act of Roman civil religion, for him an act of public idolatry. The bishop answered his prosecutor: “If you vainly suppose I will swear by the Genius of Caesar, as you request, and pretend not to know who I am, listen carefully; I am a Christian. Now if you want to learn the doctrine of Christianity, name a day and give me a hearing.”¹ Holy boldness! Polycarp was martyred by fire, sealing his witness with death. How could he do that with such style? He had come to a place where loyalty to Jesus his friend was more important than life.

Martyrdom is not something we give much thought to. We still have our martyrs in America from time to time, those who die for the faith like Cassie Bernall at Columbine or Martin Luther King in Memphis. But most of the martyrs these days are elsewhere- in oppressive places like Sudan and China and Myanmar. But there remains within the church the deep conviction that this faith is worthy dying for if necessary, and if dying for then perhaps worth living for. The martyrs spend the capital of their lives in one lavish offering; we spend the capital of our witness a

¹ Edited, C. Douglas Weaver, *A Cloud Of Witnesses* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 5. To read *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, go to www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/martyrdom-Polycarp-lightfoot.

dollar a day. They go out in a blaze; we sing, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.” Our stories are much less dramatic but no less important. Whenever we speak up for Jesus in word and deed, whenever we challenge some injustice or evil and receive the scorn or resistance of others, we experience a little martyrdom, a little death. But when fear silences us when we should speak, and when prudence freezes us when we should act, and when sloth paralyzes our moral muscles, we experience a small betrayal and the guilt of it. We die another way, in painful knowledge we are not the people we ought to be. We feel a little of what Peter felt after he received the piercing gaze of Christ. Peter was undone, and his eventual restoration is a sign we are not thrown away if- when we fail and fall- we turn back.

Behind the exterior of daily life are the same issues of faithfulness. *Like Judas* we are tempted to isolate ourselves from other believers and cooperate with darkness for the sake of money and influence. *Like Peter* we are tempted to promise more than we can deliver. *Like the disciples* we are often guilty of spiritual narcolepsy and find ourselves asleep on the job instead of awake to the Lord. When calamity comes we find we have not *prayed the price* and collapse like a house of cards. *Like the disciple with the poor aim of his sword*, we turn quickly to worldly means as if they fitted Kingdom ends. Lopping off an ear is not a great military feat! Jesus does not need our defending, and *Onward Christian Soldiers* can easily be misunderstood.

Temptation and testing do not make us do anything; they only reveal the quality of our souls.² Is the wood solid or rotten? Does the metal have integrity, or is it rusted through? Has the soul slowly incorporated the tough virtues of Christ, or is it undernourished, weak and easily overwhelmed?³ What kind of people are we? The *stress test* reveals it. Banks know it; so do Christians; it never ends.

How do we stay faithful to Christ amidst the pressures of compromise and the forces of deception which are all around us and who make their play to the worst that is in us? Luke says it is to pray as Jesus prayed, to pour out all that we are in honesty before God, to exert body and soul, will and emotions until we discern the divine will

² For a primer, see Maxie Dunnam, *The Devil At Noon Day: Battling Temptation in Daily Life* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1996).

³ For two good books on the theology and practice of spiritual disciplines, see Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1999); Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2006).

and are given strength to obey it. Jesus stood when everyone was falling. Only one hero in this movement, one captain, one star, and his double command that we should pray in order not to be overwhelmed still stands as his best offer.

What exercise is to muscles, prayer is to the soul, the place where strength of character is developed and where the capacity to endure is formed. It's where we catch glimpses of the divine perspective o that when the test comes- and it rarely comes with warning- the issues are already decided. When Jesus rose from prayer, as verse 45 notes, it was decided he would rather obey God than live; he will trust his Father and walk in the arms of those who hate him. He will reject violence and turn the world upside down. "Deliverance will be achieved by failure, victory by dying rather than killing, redemption by self-sacrifice rather than conquest, [and] life through death."⁴ Jesus won the *duel in the desert with the devil* just before his public ministry,⁵ and here at the end he wins *the match on the mountain*, the first by quoting Scripture at Satan and here in honest and surrendered prayer, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of two great weapons on spiritual combat: the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God and honest struggle with God in prayer.⁶ Jesus faces his enemies with courage and his future with confidence as a true philosopher, as one who lives and enacts his own lessons, even if it means draining the suffering cup to the dregs. This is integrity; this is fortitude. Spiritual testing shows what we are made of. "Pray," said Jesus to his friends, "in order that you may not be overwhelmed when the fiery test comes." Be strengthened by honest intimacy with God. Little did they know how soon and how severe it would be. I was moved while reading the prayer of W.E.B DuBois, one of the founders of the NAACP. It's a martyr's prayer:

"Give us grace, O God, to do the deed which we well know cries to be done. Let us not hesitate because of ease, or the words of men's mouths, or our own lives. Mighty causes are calling us... But they call with voices that mean work and sacrifice and death. Mercifully grant us, O God, the spirit of Esther, that we say, 'I go willingly unto the King, and if I perish, I perish.' Amen."⁷

⁴ R. Alan Culpepper, *Luke* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1995), 437.

⁵ 4:1-15.

⁶ The effect of these weapons is developed in Ephesians 6:17-18.

⁷ "To Quote," *Leadership*, Spring 1997, 73.

WHERE STRENGTH COMES FROM (vv.39-46)

Jesus was an innocent martyr who stood at the end of a line of faithful prophets who across Israel’s history chose to die rather than be disloyal to God.⁸ They spoke God’s Word and took the consequences, all too often at the hands of their own people, John the Baptist being the most recent example. Luke’s portrait of Jesus marks out the path of faithfulness; he shows the Christian how to live on the way to death and what to do when the end is clear. Now because it is unlikely any of us will face literal martyrdom- though the thought is not impossible in a culture growing increasingly hostile to our message and its moral vision- we must ask the question from a different angle, How is Jesus an example for us in our day-by-day witness?⁹

Where to find Jesus that week was no mystery. Camped out on the Mount of Olives *as was his custom* with other pilgrims, and it was there he went after his last meal Thursday evening.¹⁰ He came out as their leader, and the disciples followed. And what he commands in verse 40, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation,” he then enacts as a living example, “And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed,” again the true philosopher.

Now because of the way English works, it sounds as if Jesus commands them to pray so they will not be tempted at all, but that is not the meaning. It is that they not *enter into temptation* in the sense that it not overwhelm them. They will be in rough waters; prayer is the life preserver. They will feel the heat; prayer is the fire resistant clothing. They will be exposed to virulent disease; prayer is the vaccine. It will come against them in fury; prayer to God and help from God through angels will give them the strength to stand. This was not a new prayer. Jesus taught them earlier to pray, as we do each Sunday, “and lead us not into temptation,” and the Greek word for *temptation* means fiery trial, something a little more demanding than whether to indulge in a bit of chocolate! This is not a prayer to avoid temptation but

⁸ Charles Talbert, *Luke* (New York: Crossroads, 1984), 212ff. His commentary on this section demonstrates the parallels between Luke’s editing of his Markan source and other martyrological themes in Jewish works of the time (see summary on p.3).

⁹ For a treatment of shifts in the culture, see David Aikman, *One Nation Without God: The Battle for Christianity in an Age of Unbelief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012).

¹⁰ 22:5-38 is the preceding large thought unit.

for strength to stand and press through it without caving in. Everyone's going to be tested. Evil will claw at your soul; only an attachment to God nurtured through prayer will keep you safe. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," are parallel petitions. It is a bold and desperate prayer because unless God intervenes you are lost! I found a marvelous quote that scans the life of Jesus and summarizes his practice of prayer. It is from S.D. Gordon:

"It was not only his regular habit, but his resort in every emergency, however slight or serious. When perplexed, he prayed. When hard pressed by work, he prayed. When hungry for fellowship he found it in prayer. He chose his associates and received his messages upon his knees. If tempted, he prayed. If criticized, he prayed. If fatigued in body or wearied in spirit, he had recourse to his one unfailing habit of prayer. Prayer brought him unmeasured power at the beginning, and kept the flow unbroken and undiminished. There was no emergency, no difficulty, no necessity, no temptation that would not yield to prayer."¹¹

Jesus' prayer is an honest struggle within the framework of a trusting relationship. *Father* is an address of absolute respect, trust, and affection. He was also honest; he did not want to die. Was there another way to accomplish God's will? "If you are willing, remove this cup from me. I do not want to drink the dregs of suffering and humiliation." His flesh recoiled; our Savior was authentically human.

But note that Jesus did not start his prayer with surrender but with petition. Much prayer suffers from a lack of honesty here. It does not bother God if we ask for what we want and make our case. You can say "Nevertheless" only *after* you have been honest about your desires. "Not my will but thine be done" is not the beginning of prayer but its end. And if the next verses about the angel and the agony and the sweat and the emotion mean anything, it's that this scene is more a heavyweight fight than a sweet stroll in the park. Jesus is *duking it out* with the devil's swirling presence, and in answer to his cry for strength, an angel is sent in as his *corner man* with a wet towel, a swish of water, and a whisper, "Your foe is a liar. Laugh in his face. Vaporize him with trust in your Father; fight on!"

So great was the stress of battle that sweat poured off Jesus like blood from an open wound. The 1974 Ali-Foreman *Rumble in the Jungle*, and the third Ali-Frazier

¹¹ *Christianity Today*, Vol. 30, No. 5.

bout, the 1975 *Thriller in Manila*, were nothing compared with this epic battle. The Evil One is offering Jesus a way out, an easier way that avoids suffering, and his struggle is to say *No* to the darkness which means relief and *Yes* to the light which means suffering. It is the cosmic battle on which the fate of every soul hangs. Here are images and voices we cannot hear nor see. All hell breaks loose against the humble humanity of Jesus, making every appeal possible to deceive him and turn him away from obedience to God. Subtle and seductive voices vie for his attention.

The appearance of the angel for strength is a reminder this is a cosmic battle, that angels good and fallen are involved. This kneeling man is the center of the history's greatest struggle. So Jesus in agonizing prayer moves past his desire to survive to a place of surrender, "Not my will be done, but thine." That is not a cop-out for not praying and adopting a stoic and fatalistic approach to life. It's not a wimpy prayer. It is not the equivalent of *Whatever* said with a shrug. It was a prayer Jesus earned the right to pray after working through all the personal implications of what the Father was requiring of him. To say *Yes* too soon may mean you haven't faced the cost. To say *Yes* with your lips without a surrendered heart is to guarantee failure. The only way to face this kind of spiritual assault is by a fresh and deep of surrender. Not fatalism, but the deep and God-given conviction that though others may hurt me deeply, they cannot harm me in any ultimate way because I am cared for and guarded by my heavenly Father. The resurrection proves Jesus' trust was not misplaced! The will of the Father was for his ultimate and permanent good, even if between here and there stood the cross. Phillip Yancey put it this way, "When Jesus prayed to the one who could save him from death, he did not get that salvation; he got instead the salvation of the world."¹² It was from Bedford Prison that John Bunyan-author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote his definition of prayer:

"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."¹³

At some point we have to say that if it's not a struggle, it's not prayer. If it

¹² *Christianity Today*, 2/9/98.

¹³ R. Kent Hughes, *1001 Great Stories* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 1998), 326.

doesn't tax body and emotions, it's not prayer. If your life and that of others is not at stake, it's not prayer. If you cannot continue without God's help, it's not prayer. If it is not a battle of wills and alternate futures, it's not prayer, at least not of the serious variety. If it is not a struggle with the darkness around you and the darkness within, it's not prayer. Jesus struggled mightily like a great athlete, and he was sinless, so how could we- sinners that we are with so many mixed motives- expect it to be easy for us? The reason we don't pray more is that it's simply the hardest and highest and most taxing work of which we are capable. Eugene Peterson is right, "Anything creative, anything powerful, anything biblical, insofar as we are participants in it, originates in prayer."¹⁴ Preaching and teaching are easy for me when compared with honest prayer, and I know why. Jesus rose from prayer committed to the will of God; his disciples were not. They were out of touch with the tremendous battle fought and won only a few yards away from their slumber party.

Jesus sweats; the church sleeps! Jesus wrestles; the church relaxes. Jesus needs an angel to strengthen him; we need one just to keep us awake in church! And these are the best he has after three years of training. Not a very impressive bunch, is it? Sort of like us clergy, not much of an army, not the best or the brightest! That is the humility of the church and its pastors. None are very impressive, but Jesus is! We don't pray so good, but he does! We are not so alert, but he is! I'm glad he's on our side. Jesus is a pretty impressive guy. Even in our failure he continues to encourage us to try again, "Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." So keep on praying, church. It's the tool of dependence God uses to keep us weak in the right places and strong in the right places. It's our weapon against darkness. If we want to see this church and town transformed, it will be by prayer, by men and women just like us who go to prayer and then rise knowing and committed to doing the will of God whatever it costs us. Real prayer is dangerous. It's why we avoid it.

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS (vv.47-53)

Before the words were out of Jesus' mouth, "While he was still speaking," writes Luke, "there came a crowd," and at their head Judas, *one of the twelve*. He leads the arresting officers and in an act of hypocrisy attempts to give Jesus a sign of affection. They spent years together, traveled the roads together, shared ministry together, prayed together, been friends; Judas was an insider, but he has turned. The Evil One entered him, and his treachery is so deep that even the personal challenge of Jesus

¹⁴ Ibid., 315.

does not turn him around, “Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?”

It is a sure sign of spiritual naivete to be surprised by evil. I heard Wednesday of gang members who put five slugs in a six month old baby. We are rightly horrified, but should not be surprised. Evil erupts and rips the fragile fabric of life. This is what human beings are capable of. This is what happens when evil festers in the human mind and heart. From a holy apostle to an unholy apostate, from a colleague of Jesus to the devil’s dupe: this is the fall of Judas, and it tells us we are all capable of great treachery and grand self-deception.

When done a large scale like Milosevic and Saddam and Hitler and Stalin with government power we call them moral monsters and console ourselves we are not like them, but the same treachery happens on a small scale. A trusted Christian counselor engages in bizarre, sexual behavior. An employee steals from a family friend. A man beats his wife. A black family is denied a loan because of race. A rural community is infested with crack dealers. A little girl is molested by her mother’s live-in boyfriend. A business declines because of neglect and poor management so that thousands lose their jobs. Darkness is woven into our lives, and we must battle it with the gospel and with a church that knows how to fight with the spiritual weapons Jesus as entrusted to us: radical honesty, constant truth telling, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, the cross and resurrection, the sacraments and the Word of God, hope for all God’s children and a love so tough and tender it wakes people up to the one in whose image they are carved. Verse 39 is not just a transitional travel report. It distinguishes those who continued to stumble after Jesus from the one who quit following, “And he came out, and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, *and the disciples followed him.*” They did, Judas didn’t. Never quit following.

Evil is ultimately and always violent; it loves death. It seeks to destroy what God made good. That is why Jesus refuses to use the devil’s weapons when requested to do so, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” And when someone does, he heals the wound in a final healing; Jesus loves his enemies. On an individual level, the Christian is forbidden to use violence to defend the faith.¹⁵ Jesus will have nothing to do with it, “No more of this!” But this does not rule out the use of force by nations to stop evil on a large scale, as the Christian tradition of just war theory teaches. Saying No to Hitler was a moral choice. The war fought on our soil by my

¹⁵ For an alternative reading to the standard anti-Western line, see Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009).

great-grandfather and others was not. It was in defense of the violence of slavery, and it was wrong. When I go back and read there was not a Methodist bishop in the South after 1846 who was not a slave owner and that 1,200 ME Church South preachers were slave owners,¹⁶ and when I read the arguments they used to defend the practice in our pulpits, it makes me wonder, What current evils we are blind to?

What will it be in a hundred years that our great-grandchildren condemn us for and question our faith? Pollution of the environment, our toleration of sexual immorality and the breakdown of the family, our embrace of convenience abortion, our national arrogance, our lack of health care for the poor, our embrace of gambling, our colossal greed, the monetary corruption of our political system, our love affair with violence, our foolish levels of debt, our unreformed prison system, our neglected schools, our tolerance of human trafficking, what will it be? What about our lives now will make them ask then, “Were they really Christians?” May God have mercy on us, because, you see, you cannot carry out the really big sins without the support of some larger system, in this case religion, as in verse 52, “Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, ‘Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me.’” Then that chilling sentence, “But this is *your* hour, and the power of darkness.” Judas perverted the kiss into a sign of betrayal, and here the keepers of the temple become a lynch mob against an innocent Jesus. This is the human face of the demonic, and still with us.

This is why we need a Savior. We are trapped in darkness. Our need is not shallow but deep, unending and capable of turning us into moral monsters. The forces of darkness conspire to crush Jesus. He openly acknowledges their power. This is their hour and the pinnacle of influence, but he will have his. That the early Christian martyrs did not resist the violence against them is a testimony to their understanding of this passage of Scripture. Speak truth to power, but do not take up the sword. Do good to those who persecute you. Vengeance belongs to God. Violence as self-defense against persecution is renounced. It is a hard teaching, and not all can receive it. But if in prayer we have come to the place where obedience to Jesus and his way is more important than life, then it makes perfect sense to face evil the way he did and to trust God for vindication, whether in this life or the next. This is the capture of the king. They may seize and shackle his body; they cannot diminish

¹⁶ Michael O. Emerson, Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 36.

his dignity. Jesus surrendered control to them only to come more deeply under God’s control. In him God is engaging the depth of the human problem, sin and suffering, evil and death, and showing us just how far the love of God will go to bring us home.

FRAILITY EXPOSED (vv.54-65)

I cannot speak for women, but I believe in the heart of every man is the desire to be a hero, to do something noble and costly for the benefit of others. We channel this dream into climbing ladders of success, watching lots of TV sports or taking up a hobby that keeps us in touch with the adventuresome side of life. Men without a dream become dreary and predictable, boring to women and of little use to the cause of Christ. The light has gone out in their souls. It’s why we tell old war stories, brag about exploits real and imagined, and love to talk sports. Our theme song is Bruce Springsteen’s *Glory Days*. Sorry ladies, it’s just *guy stuff*.

It is this deep masculine dream that Peter portrays so pitifully and wonderfully. After three years he wants to be loyal, even if others are not, so he rises to the occasion, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”¹⁷ Prison? Yes. Jesus is bound, and there sits Peter in the courtyard. But death? No. Peter vastly overrated his reservoirs. He dreams Jesus needs him. This is bravado, and it will have to be exposed; it is not the same as courage. The dream will live on because it is from God, but in a chastened form. It is not the naive form of the dream that has never failed; it is the dream that has failed miserably and been restored by grace. It is the male dream and masculine strength surrendered to Jesus Christ.

How wonderful is Peter’s promise and how pitiful his fall. He slept while Jesus prayed. He is not prepared. His strength is still in himself and not in God, and so when the test comes- when the Evil One arranges a little lesson in cowardice to sift his soul- he falls into the same trap not once but three times. It’s not a momentary slip; this is Peter’s character revealed for generations to reflect on. He gives me hope.

The first to challenge Peter was *a maid*; the Greek means *young female slave*, no social standing, no power. The word of a powerless girl makes Peter crumple. How utterly humiliating. His first denial is of Jesus. “This man was also *with him*.”

“Woman, I do not know him.”

The second denial is of the other disciples, “You are also *one of them*.”

¹⁷ 22:33.

“But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’”

Between denials two and three is about an hour, time to think about what he’s has just done and dig deep for a last residue of loyalty. The third denial has to do with Peter’s origins and with the ministry he shared with Jesus up north. First, Peter denies Jesus, then his friends, and finally three years of his own history. “Certainly this man also was with him, for he is *a Galilean*.”

“But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are saying.’”

To put the whole in psychological terms, to sever ourselves from Jesus is to cut ourselves off from supportive community and ultimately from ourselves. Giving into lies- what Peter did- is alienating. We seek to save our skins and lose our lives.

It was a *wake-up call*: a rooster throwing back his head for a *cokka-doodle-do*. A rooster issuing a *wake-up call* to a fisherman who’s become a chicken. That same wake up call comes to men in our day in an affair, a failed marriage, an addiction to alcohol or cocaine or food or pornography, being fired, boredom and depression, the death of a parent or a child, a sense their youthful dreams have died and how did they end up in such an awful place as this. There is one hope for such men, for Jesus Christ to catch their eye and deliver a searing look into the depths of their soul, a look that opens the floodgates of grief over what they have become, “And Peter went out and wept bitterly.”

It is an unpleasant and little discussed fact that those whom Jesus uses he first exposes and crushes. The worst about us is displayed; we learn the truth. This Christian thing is not about *looking good*, so if you see the faith as an item for your resume or one more tool for success and self-esteem, forget it. The lesson Peter earlier slept through, the one about “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” was now highly relevant. The sweat of Jesus became the tears of Peter. Jesus knew truth about Peter he did not know about himself. It hurt deeply; it was also the doorway to restoration and usefulness as the shepherd of Christ’s flock.

Before I close I want to make a distinction between human frailty, sin, and evil. They are not the same. Human frailty we never get rid of. We are created by God with limits, and that is good. The eleven followed Jesus to the Mount of Olives; they also slept. They could not do what he commanded at this point; it was beyond them, even after three years of close association. God is not embarrassed or offended by our

frailty. But sin is something else. For Peter is was the typical male sins of pride and self-confidence and bravado. He said things that were not true and made promises he could not keep. He denied Jesus, his friends, finally his own life. God exposes sin and offers the grace of repentance. That’s what the gaze of Jesus and tears of Peter are about. And then there is evil with Judas, the crowd and the guards as exemplars of a terrible darkness that drives them as a mob. If sin is a dangerous but benign growth, then evil is cancer, and both can kill. Sin degrades and humiliates, but evil corrodes and destroys those who toy with it. Frailty we acknowledge, sin we confess and repent of, but evil we expose and cast out. We must be able to spot it and name it. Jesus did, two times in fact: 1) “Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?.... 2) But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

A little girl was once disciplined by her mother for kicking her little brother in the shins and pulling his hair. “Sally,” her mother scolded, “why did you let the devil make you kick your brother and pull his hair?”

“The devil made me kick him,” she said, “but pulling his hair was my idea.”¹⁸ She was just beginning to understand the difference between what we can do on our own, thus sin, and what we need the help of darkness to carry out, which is evil.

CONCLUSION

We need a Savior who looks and smell and prays and acts like Jesus. And since there no other, it’s him that we need to follow and copy and imitate and welcome and listen to and trust and seek. We need strength that comes from serious, prolonged, bluntly honest prayer. We need to have our sins and deceits exposed. We need protection from the darkness of evil. We have a witness to live out before the world, one worth dying for, one worth living for. Our martyrdom, our witness, our holy Christian jihad, is a day at a time. This is serious business because your life is at stake, not just a matter of taste or preference.

“Pray that you may not be overwhelmed and swallowed by the test of the fiery trial.” How are you doing with that assignment? Join us for prayer on Thursday evening?

¹⁸ Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations, & Quotes* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2000), 685.
