

After the passover meal with His disciples (also known as the Last Supper), Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. As mere human beings, we cannot fully comprehend the struggle against temptation that Jesus faced that night before being arrested and crucified. Although He prayed “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me,” He also prayed “Nevertheless, Thy will be done!”

**Verses 1-16:** Jesus informs His disciples that in two days He will be betrayed on the night of the passover meal, a betrayal that will lead to His crucifixion. Some time later, when Jesus was in Bethany eating at the house of Simon the leper, a woman with an alabaster box came and poured the precious ointment it contained over Jesus’ head. When the disciples became indignant over the waste of such expensive ointment, Jesus defended the woman, saying she had anointed Him for His burial. After this Judas Iscariot goes to the chief priests and negotiates a deal with them to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

**Verses 17-35:** Time of the passover meal is arriving and the disciples make preparations so that they and Jesus can observe the passover. During the meal that evening Jesus reveals that one of the twelve disciples will betray Him and identifies Judas Iscariot. After breaking the bread and sharing the cup, they sang a hymn and left to go to the mount of Olives. As they go, Jesus tells them that they will abandon Him that night but Peter claims that he will never abandon Jesus. However, Jesus states that Peter will deny Him three times before the cock crows. Peter doubles down by pledging that he would not deny Jesus even if it cost him his life. The other disciples also make the same pledge but this is a pledge that neither Peter nor the other disciples will keep.

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36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

**“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane”** – Gethsemane was a garden of olive trees and a place where Jesus and His disciples frequently came, and thus Judas was very familiar with it (**John 18:2** “*And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.*”).

**“and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder”** – Jesus has the bulk of the disciples to remain behind while He goes a short distance away to pray. The next 18 hours or so will be the most trying of Jesus’ days on earth as He will be bearing the sins of humanity in addition to facing physical and verbal abuse, a scourging and crucifixion. The temptation to either avoid these things altogether or to respond to them sinfully must have been enormous and so He seeks strength from His Father to be able to face these things and fulfill what He came to earth to do. **John 12:27** (Jesus speaking of His coming crucifixion) “*Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*”

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37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

**“And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee”** – After leaving the other disciples behind, Jesus takes His inner circle (Peter, James and John) of disciples with Him as He sometimes did during some of His more private moments.

**“and began to be sorrowful and very heavy [to be troubled; in great distress]”** – Jesus knew that hours away He would be bearing the sins of the entire world on the cross. Even beyond the anticipation of the physical suffering that He would have to endure, the magnitude of the sin He would have to bear was no doubt repulsive to Him. There would also be a point when the perfect fellowship He had always enjoyed with His Father would be interrupted. As the Father would pour out His wrath for our sins upon His Son, He would have to turn away from His Son, the One who became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). This broken fellowship will cause Jesus to cry out from the cross “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Jesus seems to be going into an emotional depression.

**Luke 22:44** “*And being in an agony [severe emotional struggle; anguish] he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*”

**Mark 14:33** “*And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed [to be terrified or amazed], and to be very heavy;*”

*“No man, in sinful and mortal flesh, can understand the conflict in the holy soul of Jesus who had never experienced the slightest shadow of sin and had never known any barrier between Himself and the Father.” [Note #1482: Walvoord, Matthew: . . . , p. 218.]*

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38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Jesus shares with Peter, James and John how overcome He is with sorrow, to the point He feels like He could die. He apparently wants the companionship of these three men while He prays to His Father. He asks them to “watch with me,” implying that He wanted the disciples to also pray while He was seeking strength from His Father in prayer. Later, He specifically instructs them to pray in order to resist the temptations and weaknesses of the flesh (v. 41), which He was also fighting (v. 39).

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39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Going a short distance further into the garden, Jesus humbles Himself before His Father as He falls on His face and starts to pray. His sorrow and dread over what must come is apparent as He asks His Father to allow Him to avoid the cross if there were any possible alternative. However, the thought of disobeying His Father never crosses Jesus’ mind as He says “nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Jesus will point out the need to combat the weakness of the flesh with prayer shortly to His disciples (v. 41), but here Jesus has His own battle with the flesh before He is able to completely surrender Himself to what He must do. Note that this is not a battle against sinful flesh but against temptation not unlike Satan’s temptations of Jesus at the end of the 40 days in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). As human beings, we cannot fully comprehend the burden that Jesus was facing and judging by Jesus’ abhorrence for it we can only imagine the horrific nature of what He was preparing to endure. Luke mentions that an angel comes to strengthen Jesus for the ordeal He is about to face (Luke 22:43).

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.

**“And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep”** – We don’t know how late the hour was nor how long Jesus had been praying, but obviously the three disciples did not recognize the gravity of the situation. Perhaps they started praying but the weariness of the flesh took over or else they used Jesus’ absence as an opportunity to take a nap. These three had a tendency to fall asleep on the Lord since they also did this on the mount where Jesus was transfigured (Luke 9:32).

**“and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?”** – Jesus is disappointed that even with the weight of the burden He is about to bear, the three disciples are not able to watch with Him in prayer for even one hour. The “ye” is plural in Greek, so even though He is speaking to Peter, He is addressing the failure of all three disciples.

**“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak”** – There is a trial coming for the disciples as well, for they will also be tempted by the powers of darkness over the next hours and even have their faith challenged when they see Jesus crucified. Peter in particular will fail His test when He denies Christ three times (vs. 69-75). Even though the disciples’ spirits are willing to be faithful to Christ, the weakness of their flesh will be a hindrance in remaining so.

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

**“He went away again the second time, and prayed”** – Jesus apparently is still not fully prepared for what He must do and so He returns to His Father in prayer.

**“saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done”** – If it is the Father’s will that the only way for Jesus to get past the cross is to embrace it then Jesus is willing to obey His Father’s will.

43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

**“And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy”** – After the second round of prayer, Jesus returns and finds the disciples asleep again. However, He does not disturb them this time, likely because He is closer to victory in prayer than He was before.

**“And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words”** – Jesus goes for a third round of prayer, using the same words as He did in v. 42. The fact that Jesus needed to pray multiple times to fully submit Himself to His Father’s will shows us that we should also be persistent in prayer. To be clear: at no time was Jesus in danger of rebelling against His Father’s will. However, of all the things that His Father had commanded Him to do while on this earth it seems this was the only time that Jesus showed any aversion to what His Father wanted Him to do. It took three rounds of prayer for Jesus to fully surrender Himself to what was to come.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

**“Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take *your* rest”** – After the third round of prayer Jesus does not seem to mind the disciples sleeping or perhaps there is a bit of sarcasm here. The battle has been won and He no longer needed them to watch and pray with Him. Also, the time for prayer to prepare is now past because the time for the temptations that Jesus (and the disciples) must endure has come.

**“behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners”** – Jesus understood that the time had arrived for which He had come into this world (**John 12:27** [Jesus speaking of His coming crucifixion] “*Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*”). During the time in prayer the Father has strengthened Jesus so that now He is ready for what must come. The sinless Holy One of God, the Messiah, would be turned over into the hands of sinners who will find Him guilty and put Him to death. But He will be bearing the sins of the whole world as He does so.

**“Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me”** – Jesus is aware that Judas is on his way to betray Him, either because of His omniscience or because He sees the multitude entering Gethsemane with torches, swords and clubs. He now awakens the disciples so that they can be ready for what is happening. Jesus did not come to be a teacher, a healer, or even an example of righteousness, even though He excelled at all of these. Rather, He came to give His life as a ransom for many (**Matt. 20:28** “*Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*”). The reason for which He entered the world was now about to commence.