

## ***Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil***

***Mark 14:32-42***

***The first king rode; the Second stepped  
Across that bridge where water swept,  
Burnt black with blood: the sacrifice  
Of innocence for laws unkept,***

***For venal violence and vice.  
One King had come to pay the price  
For sin. Unlike that king who fled,  
My King was bound for paradise.***

***The first king mourned his palace bred,  
Rebellious son. The Second bled  
For just such arrogance and hate  
Then rose up from among the dead***

***To overcome the caliphate  
Corruption sows to amputate  
My soul from His: the King who wept,  
Crushed my failure's fatal weight.***

Walking across Jerusalem, the night air was cold and crisp. The streets were dark. And stars glistened like crystals of ice in the narrow slice of sky above the shadowed lanes.

But the Master paused on His way to the old olive garden. And there on the temple courtyard, there was nothing to stop the wind.

So the disciples wrapped their cloaks about them a little tighter. Then they stood back a few feet and listened. The Lord was praying.

***...lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come;" John 17:1***

The disciples had heard that word before. When they first started following the Savior, they attended a wedding at Cana, and the host ran out of wine. So the Master's mother came to her Son for help.

***And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come." John 2:4***

At an earlier feast, the ruling Jews sent soldiers, clattering out on the temple courtyard to capture the Carpenter. But they weren't able to carry out the ruling Jews' orders.

***...they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come. John 7:30***

But earlier the same night He went to Gethsemane, the Master was on His way to the upper room to celebrate Passover. And He sensed that hour was about to begin.

*Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come... John 13:1*

The disciples had no idea what that *hour* was. But after the Lord finished His prayer, He led them out the eastern gate and down the slope. And there they found out.

At the bottom of the hill a little bridge arched over a brook called the Kidron. This was the same bridge King David once crossed, on the run from his handsome, heartless son, Absalom.

Now another King crossed the Kidron. And as He did, something eternally important happened. The long awaited hour finally arrived.

## ***The Savior***

On the other side of the bridge, there was an old olive grove. But sometime in years past, someone had turned it into a little garden, a restful retreat from the bustling markets and busy streets of Jerusalem.

And whenever He was in the city, the Master made a habit of stopping there to pray beneath the gnarled old olive trees. So the disciples weren't surprised when the Master led them there that night or even that He paused at the entrance to the garden.

***They came to a place named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." Verse 32***

He left eight of His disciples at the entrance. He took the other three with Him deeper into the garden. As they had on the mountain when He was transfigured, they served as witnesses.

***And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. Verse 33***

The word *distressed* really means to be greatly amazed. Jesus wasn't just troubled. He was amazed and alarmed.

***And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." Verse 34***

The disciples had never seen the Master in such deep distress and sorrow. And in the garden that night, they didn't understand why.

But years later, Peter remembered that night and wrote about the load our Lord took on that night.

***He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross... 1 Peter 2:24***

The hour Christ knew was coming had finally arrived. And all the sins of mankind were poured into His pure and perfect body.

Guilt and grief so great it has driven numberless men to madness and suicide was within Him. It was just as Isaiah prophesied.

***Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Isaiah 53:4***

Our loving Lord not only paid for our sins. He also carried the full penalty for every sin human beings ever have or ever will commit. And the load of that darkness and despair was so crushing, it both amazed and alarmed Him.

The Savior told His disciples His grief was so overwhelming, it was like death itself. And that too was part of the terrible burden He carried for us.

In the green shadows of Eden, God told Adam he would die the very same day he disobeyed his Lord. Speaking through a serpent, Satan questioned God's warning. But it was and is eternally true.

The wage of sin is eternal death in the arching agony of Hell. But it is more than that. Sin also

poisons the soul and afflicts sinners with a walking, spiritual death.

And in another garden, Gethsemane, God's Son experienced the full force of that death for us. He carried all the death, darkness and despair my sins produce. And all those that poison your soul.

He loves us so much, He paid every penalty our sins justly deserve. And He bore every heartache they produce.

At Gethsemane, our Lord took on all the grief, the sorrow and death our sins cause. He carried that malignant mass all the way to the cross. And there He paid the full and final penalty of blood and death for each and every one of us.

So we never need to writhe in agony and guilt over the sins we have served and savored. Neither must we live as dead men walking, suffering spiritual death because of our willful, wayward hearts.

We can be free and fully alive just by trusting in Christ as our loving Savior. We can swim in oceans of peace and bathe in fountains of joy because the Lord who loves us has already paid the full and final penalty for our sin.

Dull and numb from lives of selfishness, sensuality and sin, we fail to feel the ugly edge of torment our sin causes. But in our Lord's agony at Gethsemane, we see all the horror and heartache our sin slices into our heart and mind.

And that is reason enough to turn away from temptation.

### ***The Supplication***

Mere moments before they left the upper room, Jesus warned His disciples that the prince of darkness would soon come.

***I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; John 14:30***

Three years earlier, Satan tempted the Savior in the blistering moonscape of the Judean desert. Then the devil left Him.

But he wasn't finished. He was merely biding his time for a better time, for the perfect hour to tempt God's Son one last time.

***When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time. Luke 4:13***

At Gethsemane the tempter's last opportunity to turn our Lord away from His eternal task as the Lamb of God finally came. And there in a dark garden, God's sinless Son faced the full force of the devil's dark power.

***And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by. And He was saying, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will." Verses 35-36***

Several days earlier on the temple courtyard, Jesus spoke of the struggle that was mounting within Him.

***Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, "Father, save Me from this hour"? But for this purpose I came to this hour. John 12:27***

We must never be misled or mistaken. Our Savior wasn't so stunned and stricken by the full weight of our sins that He changed His mind the last minute.

He still wanted to bring salvation and spiritual life to sinners. But the task of carrying a whole world of sin, of horror and heartache was an unimaginably monumental task. And He loathed and despised the sin that festered within His pure and perfect soul.

***...Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, Hebrews 12:2***

It was much more nauseous and disgusting than cleaning a septic tank with a small sponge. In

fact, the load of our sin was so horrendous and horrifying, Jesus asked His Father if there was any other way men could be delivered from sin and death.

But there was no other way. If the Savior stopped short of bearing our sins, no one else ever could or ever would. And we would be lost forever, doomed to live and die in darkness.

Satan saved his strongest temptation for this last attack. It was an echo of the words he whispered in the ear of Job's wife and she bitterly spat at her husband.

***Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job 2:9***

That was the real last temptation of Christ. Satan whispered that the Savior should curse God for the weight of sin that crushed His pure and perfect soul. Complain and rail against God that He had to bear the eternal penalty for disobeying God's Law, he urged Jesus. Accuse God of being unjust and unfair.

But our Lord would not and did not. Instead, He came to His Father as His *Abba*, His loving eternal Papa. Proclaiming that all things are possible with our great eternal God, Christ begged that the cup of wrath pass Him by.

Yet even in the very depths of despair, our Savior submitted to His Father's perfect will. Both His love for us and His commitment to God were even greater than the sorrow and despair of all mankind.

And in the end, He declared his determination to walk in His Father's perfect will. When we face terrible times and temptations beyond what we believe we can bear, we are too tempted to accuse our God of being unfair, unkind, and unjust.

In those hours, we must remember our Redeemer's prayer. Although our God allows pain and problems, sorrow and suffering to come our way, He is still our *Abba*: our loving Father. And even when He is silent, He is still all wise and all powerful.

Our Lord's naked honesty with His Father in this garden prayer is also a reminder. We must never be afraid to open up our heart and tell our God how we feel about the trials that come our way.

In fact, we simply cannot obtain God's strength to withstand Satan's attacks if we aren't completely honest with Him.

Jesus came to Gethsemane to pray because He knew the tempter would press Him with all his might. And He knew prayer was the only way to gather strength to withstand Satan's onslaught.

If that was true for the sinless Son of God, it is immeasurably more true for us. It isn't merely that we should pray when we are faced with temptation. We must.

## ***The Servants***

In the upper room, our Redeemer said Satan was coming to tempt and try Him. But the adversary wasn't only attacking Him.

***Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; Luke 22:31***

That hour of darkness and despair was also coming to the disciples. In a few short hours they would be overwhelmed by powerful pressures and terrible temptations.

Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray. He brought His disciples with Him because He knew they needed to prepare for temptation by praying, too. And at the entrance to the garden, He told them so.

***When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." Luke 22:40***

God's Son walked so close to His heavenly Father, He could feel the hour of temptation was coming. But His disciples couldn't. So after our Lord left them, the disciples wrapped their cloaks tighter round their necks and settled down on the grass to wait.

Satan doesn't always come to us with bared fangs. Sometimes he tempts us just as he did the disciples, with a sweet serenade: a lullaby to lull us to sleep.

Deep in the darkness of the garden, Jesus offered agonized prayers to His Father. But His mind wasn't only on Himself.

He was also concerned about His disciples. So He returned to remind them once again to join Him and prayerfully prepare for the terrible temptations to come.

***And He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not come into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Verses 37-38***

Our Lord didn't heap ridicule and reproof on His sleeping disciples. He understood that, even though they wanted to stay alert and spend time in prayer, their human nature was weak.

So He repeated His command to stay alert and pray against the temptation that would soon swallow them in sorrow. But as soon as the Savior left, they drifted off into slumber once again.

***Again He went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him. Verses 39-40***

This second time, the disciples were so ashamed they had drifted off to sleep, they were couldn't even offer Him an excuse. But they still went back to sleep. And one last time, Jesus returned, worried and concerned about the men who had followed Him so faithfully.

***And He came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" Verses 41-42***

This time, the Master didn't return to the depths of the garden. The time for prayer had passed. The hour of trial was upon them.

There is a time to prepare for the temptations that accompany the sorrow and suffering that come our way. And that time had passed for the disciples. That is why Jesus said, "*It is enough.*"

From that moment on Christ was calm and collected throughout all the interrogations, the beatings and horror of the cross. He used those quiet moments in a dark garden to prepare Himself for the trials to come.

But the disciples didn't do that. Now the time for preparation was past. So they were left to face their trials in the weakness of their human flesh. And we are like those drowsy disciples.

We cannot foresee the trials and troubles that are sure to come. So we must stay alert at all times.

And we must give ourselves to prayer in a constant, consistent pattern. After all, only our great, eternal God can give us the strength we need to face powerful temptations.

Satan would tempt us to settle into a sleepy pattern of selfishness. He would have us pretend that no trials will come. He would have us face trials and temptations without the powerful preparation only prayer can produce.

The disciples learned a painful lesson when they slept instead of praying that night. And we must learn from their mistake.

We must be people of prayer. The only alternative is failure.