

People of God, in Mark's Gospel we have seen hostility toward Jesus rise to a fever pitch. The Scribes and the chief priests have conspired together with Judas to kill Jesus. History has entered into crisis time.

Our Lord knows, of course, about the plan, for it is the plan of God. He has told his disciples beforehand that the Son of Man must be betrayed in the hands of wicked men, be crucified, and third day rise from the dead. He knows this is the reason he came. He knows this is the only way the kingdom of God can come on earth as it is in heaven. He knows that His father has sent him for this very purpose, that by dying on the cross, he might be lifted up as king to reign over the world and open up the living and new way back to God.

Our Lord knew all of this, and yet, as he was about to be betrayed, our Lord's soul was very sorrowful even unto death. And here we read of the last hour before our Lord was betrayed and arrested, and how being tempted to flee from the will of God in a garden, he gave himself over to prayer.

We are presented here again, as in much of Mark's Gospel, lessons in contrasts and irony. We have Jesus of course, the faithful one, who is going to his death, preparing himself by praying. And we have the three chief Apostle's lead by Peter, falling asleep, abandoning Jesus in his most dire hour.

Remember, just a few verses before, and only probably a few minutes in time, Peter and the other apostles made a firm commitment to Christ, "Even if they all fall away, I will not" said Peter. And again, "If I must die with you, I will not deny you." So said all the disciples. Peter, James, and John are now with Jesus only minutes after that confession where they promise to die with him rather than fall away. But how quickly do they fall short of their own expectations.

Our Lord tells his willing but weak disciples to watch, that is, to be on guard. He goes to pray, and he comes back and they are asleep. He wakes up Peter, but he calls him by his pre-apostolic name, Simon. And he gave him the name Peter upon the occasion of the commissioning of the twelve, when we he chose them, as Mark says, **to be with him**. But now, Peter is reverting back to Simon, failing to be with Jesus in his most crucial hour.

“Are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray!” Jesus says. This command to watch and pray is reminiscent of Our Lord’s teaching about the end of the age in Mark 13, where he warns his disciples to be on guard, that is, to watch, and stay awake and pray. Three times he tells them to stay awake in that passage, and I think there is a connection to the three times Jesus finds them asleep here in the Garden.

The end of the age is indeed coming to an end, and the true temple is about to be destroyed in Jesus’ body, and his disciples need more than ever to heed Christ’s commands to watch, to be on guard, to stay awake, and to pray. And yet, Our Lord finds them fast asleep. He wakes them and says, “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus is faithful. He prostrates himself onto the ground before God in prayer. He begs God that this hour might pass from him, and that God would remove the cup from him. The cup and the hour are metaphors for his crucifixion and death. The cup has been invested with meaning at the Lord’s Supper, as the cup of the New Covenant in Christ’s Blood. And yet, even though he desires another way, he says, “Not what I will, but what you will.”

Being fully human, Jesus experienced the inner struggle of the will in which one part of you wants to do the will of God, and the other wants to do your own will. But in that hour of prayer, he refused to abandon the

will of God for him, and in this the last decision that needed to be made to overcome the temptations of the devil and follow the will of God has been made. And so he awakes his disciples for the third time, and he says Enough.

No more debating, no more trying to get out of doing God's will, No more battling with devil and doubts. "Enough! The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

There has to come a point when you stop praying and say enough. You have made the decision to follow Christ, come what may. Abandonment, crucifixion, death. For the comfort of God's promise is, that when you give yourself to the will of God, there is always resurrection on the other side.

Oh People of God, like the sleepy disciples, how often are we are unable, or even worse, unwilling to watch and pray our way through temptations, and thus foolishly enter into them, and sin? The disciples could not watch and pray with Jesus for one hour to resist entering into temptation to abandon him. And some may scoff at them for their weakness.

But if we are honest we will quickly see that neither can we stay awake and watch and pray with him for even one minute sometimes, before we lose all sense of our Christian duty to seek God's will and not our own.

We would like to think we could. We may even, like the disciples, tell ourselves before the hour of trial comes upon us, that we will stand fast no matter what. I will not fall away. I will not yell at my wife. I will not disrespect my husband. I will not punish my children in anger. I will not steal. I will not tell lies. I will not commit sexual immorality. I will not get drunk, I will not send another stupid email. I will not be harsh. I will not sin against God or my neighbor. I will not fall away.

Well, the spirit indeed is willing. The Spirit desires greatly to endure and watch and pray through the temptation. The human spirit says, when it is not the hour of trial, that even if I have to die with Jesus I will. I will choose to be obedient to God. I will not sin. Like Peter and the rest, the spirit indeed is willing... But let us face the facts people of God, the flesh is weak.

Not only do we not pray for one hour to ask God to help us do his will and not our own, we can barely pray for one minute. Most times, we have seconds to respond to certain temptations, and just as quickly as the temptation comes, so goes my loyalty away from Jesus. It's only seconds into the temptation and I am off lashing out at my wife, berating the children, looking a bit longer at that image, firing off that stupid email, slamming back another drink, or saying something that hurts my brother or sister, or taking something that doesn't belong to me.

We are weak, people of God. We may be willing, but we need to come to the realization that we are just not all that strong. And you know what, thanks be to God. For that is exactly what we teach our children to sing.

*Jesus loves me, this is know
for the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong,
they are weak, but he is strong.*

Jesus doesn't love you because you are strong. Hebrews 4 tells us that Jesus' high priesthood is to help us in our weaknesses.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (And real quick, what is that confession? That Jesus is our Lord and Savior) ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence

draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Mercy to find forgiveness from our Savior for our sins and failures and abandonment of him in the hour of trial, and grace to help us through the next hour of trial.

People of God, you may be weary and tired that you are still afflicted by your sin. You may still have many instances per day where you sin and regret it, and have to apologize for it, and to ask forgiveness for it. I think we all desire to be more than what we are. That is the Spirit groaning within us as we eagerly wait for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

That is my experience at least. I fail and mess up everyday. And I hate it. I want to be strong for Jesus. I want to say, "Even if they kill me I will not deny you." My Spirit is willing, but my flesh is weak. But Jesus prayed in the Garden for you and me when we were sleeping. And God demonstrated his towards us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died on the cross for you to forgive you.

He prayed earnestly that the cup of God's wrath would pass from him, he prayed that his kingdom and our salvation could be established another way. But in the end, suffering in the flesh, he succeeded where we so often fail. He said, "Not my will be done, but Thy will be done." And in that moment, he shows us, People of God, How he is our merciful savior, and our Gracious Lord.

Jesus was only victorious over temptation through prayer. When the time of trial and crisis came upon him, he was only able to be victorious because he gave himself over to the will of God in prayer. We cannot expect to be victorious over temptation as Jesus was if we are not praying. Nor can we expect to be victorious during the time of trial and crisis that

is coming upon us if we are not praying. And what shall we pray in the hour of temptation? “Not my will be done, by Thy will be done.”

Praying that you may not enter into temptation, and praying that God’s will be done, are two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. And Jesus modelled it for us perfectly to give us an example, but he accomplished it for us perfectly, so that we would know he is our great and only savior.

Thanks be to God.

Let me turn your attention to one other issue concerning prayer. I want to look to the testimony of the Heidelberg Catechism.

117. Q. What belongs to a prayer which pleases God and is heard by Him?

A. First, we must from the heart call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word, for all that He has commanded us to pray.[1] Second, we must thoroughly know our need and misery, so that we may humble ourselves before God.[2] Third, we must rest on this firm foundation that, although we do not deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as He has promised us in His Word.

Do you know your need and misery? Then pray. Prayer is for those who are in need of mercy and grace and help. And prayer is for two kinds of people. First, prayer is for those who think they can pull themselves up by their own spiritual bootstraps and who do not need to call and depend upon God to help them, and deliver them.

If that is you, and you tend to put way too much reliance upon your own ability to obey and, then you are not acting as Christian, because you are not trusting in Christ to save you in those moments. You have become your own savior.

And second, prayer is for those who think that they are not deserving of God's grace and mercy, and so they refuse to pray. Well, As the catechism say, "we must rest on this firm foundation that, although we do not deserve it, God will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as He has promised us in His Word."

Of course you don't deserve it, you big silly head! That is why Jesus came. He accomplished God's will for you, because you cannot. That does not mean that you should not pray to him, it means you should pray to him all the more.

At the root of both of those attitudes, one that says, I don't need to pray, I got this. And the other which says, I am unworthy to pray, God hates me - is pride. Spiritually speaking, you are weak. Stop fronting as if you don't need a savior. And stop acting as if you are better than our Lord because you convinced yourself you need God less than he does. Pride will keep you from God and like the Apostle's it will make you think you are big stuff, but when the time of trial comes you will be humbled and you will see how weak you really are. God exalts the humble, but resists the proud. Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God and submit yourself to him in prayer. He will hear you and answer.

And for the other person, who thinks they are the scum of the earth and they are undeserving of God's grace and so you do not pray because you think God's hates you. Yeah, that is also pride. Your sins are not greater than God's grace. Your sins and failures and short comings and constant mess ups do not make you any less a candidate for the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ our great high priest.

Stop elevating your sins above the heavens. Stop acting as if God is so scandalized by your sins that he cannot handle it. Jesus Christ came and died to forgive you of your sins, and right now stands ready to intercede

on your behalf if you would repent of your pride for a moment and go to him in prayer and ask for forgiveness.

Of course you are unworthy, Nobody is. You experience temptation. So has Jesus. You give in to temptation. Jesus hasn't. He alone is sinless, and that is why He is our savior. And so, draw near to the throne of grace with confidence that he stands ready to receive you and hear your prayers, and to give you mercy and grace to help in a time of need.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.