



CAPITOL COMMISSION

On Being Strengthened – Matthew 26:30-34

8 – 1 - 2014

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If you knew you only had an hour of freedom left before you were taken into custody for your faith, honestly, what would you do? How would you use those last precious 60 minutes?

If your close friend was experiencing a particularly difficult moment and was experiencing emotions that you hadn't really seen in him before, how would you respond?

And then something out of the ordinary happens! The worst you can imagine. Your day and your world is turned upside down. When the going gets tough, how do you roll? Do you dial up the intensity and plow through the "to do list?" Do you assume the fetal position until the storm is past? Do you go into total meltdown with resulting fractured relationships?

Consider the following of how to be strengthened for tough times and how not to:

Matthew 26:30 – 46

(30) And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (31) Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' (32) But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." (33) Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." (34) Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." (35) Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

(36) Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." (37) And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. (38) Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." (39) And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (40) And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? (41) Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (42) Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." (43) And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. (44) So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. (45) Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. (46) Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand."

What are the facts of the passage? List some observations.

Why do you think Peter and the others were so adamant in their willingness to stand with Jesus even to the death? (33 - 35)

Why did Jesus single out Peter when the others were sleeping as well? (40)

Does it seem harsh that Jesus addressed only Peter when finding the others sleeping also?

What was the temptation that was at the doorstep for the disciples? For Jesus?

In considering possible answers, the passage context helps. After Peter "declared" he would never fall away, Jesus responded and told Peter he would deny him 3 times in verse 34 (in Luke 22:31 Jesus added that Satan had "demanded to sift him like wheat!"). However, Peter still retorted he would never deny Christ even if he were to die!

So after they all went to the garden, Jesus took Peter, John and James a little farther and specifically asked them to "watch" (or keep awake) with him. Amazingly, while Jesus displayed a troubled and sorrowful spirit because he knew he would die, Peter (and the others) fell asleep! In addition to knowing that Satan had "demanded to sift him like wheat!" (Luke 22:31) Peter and the others had most likely never seen Jesus with a troubled and sorrowful spirit. And they fell asleep...

Thus, Jesus' statement to Peter: "So, could you not watch (keep awake) with me one hour?" Keep awake and pray that you may not enter into temptation (to deny me, the Christ) ...because although your spirit is willing (to die with me), your flesh is weak (you slept when you should have been watching and praying for the strength to follow me).

Thus, as events unfolded, Peter succumbed to the temptation to fight and resist arrest and cut off the servant's ear. And with a reprieve as he followed Jesus and the soldiers, when he could have asked for the strength to resist additional temptation, he went on to deny the Holy One 3 times. Peter didn't understand his need to be strengthened by spending what precious time he had left in the presence of the Lord in prayer.

Jesus, we know from later text, resisted temptation. He had asked the Father to remove the cup before him, yet He overcame the temptation to call upon the Father to send down 12 Legions of Angels (Mt. 26:53), to defend himself before the Jewish leaders and Romans, or to do anything other than the Father's will, and to walk obediently to his gruesome death by the cross. How was he able to resist? Luke 22:43 provides insight; there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. Although the worst was yet before Him, he was still able to humbly submit to the Father's will, not his.

How are you strengthening yourself? Are you sleeping? Or are you keeping awake? Are you praying to be strengthened in the presence of the Lord in order to resist the daily and difficult temptations in the world or do you have heavy eyes? Are you in tune with the will of the Lord or is your mind spiritually dull?

The Lord asked Peter for an hour. He wasn't even able to do that. Can you? When the next big crisis approaches, how will you be spiritually prepared to overcome your flesh?

Jesus and Peter: A valuable lesson on being strengthened to resist temptation and those who aren't!