

Watch and Pray

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[0:00] The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26. Sometimes the disappointment of what someone does or says to us hurts us so much.

! Not so much because of what was said or done, but because of who it was said or done. that said it to us or did it to us. An insult or a thoughtless word or a missed appointment is easier to shrug off when it comes from a little known co-worker or something of a passing acquaintance.

It's harder to stomach when it comes from a close and dear friend or from your spouse. And so when Jesus takes His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane with Him, and then takes that inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John, further into the Garden, and just makes one request of them, stay here and keep watch.

That was all at first. Stay here and keep watch. One simple request. When they failed to do that, the sting was greater to our Savior because of their closeness to Him.

And such an incident also highlights for us the absolute helplessness of man and the perfect work of the God-man. If these three couldn't cut it there in the Garden of Gethsemane, then who could?

[1:23] And so we're reminded of how much we all need the Savior that we've gathered to remember tonight. Notice a few verses from Matthew 26 with me.

Just verses 36 to 41. Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane. And He said to them, sit here while I go over there and pray.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with Him, and He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Stay here and keep watch with me. Going a little farther, He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, yet not as I will, but as you will. Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping. Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? He asked Peter. Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

[2:27] The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak. And from these verses tonight, we want to see three things. The offense, the offenders, and the offended.

And the offense is simply failing to keep watch. Jesus asked but one thing of these three. Stay here and keep watch with me. They just had to keep watch.

I suppose they kept the stay here portion of the request. But the keeping watch they failed at. That was woefully absent in their doing what their Master required of them. And we would think that they should have been moved by the urgency of their Master's request for them that night.

That they should have been moved by His obvious agony. When His soul was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death, it should have tipped them off to the importance of what was going on there. It was no ordinary stroll in the Garden.

They often went there with their Master. They often retired there to have a time away, we find out in the Gospel of Luke and John. But this was different than all of the other times.

[3:37] Never before had a trip to the Garden of Gethsemane been preceded by Jesus offering to them His body and blood. Never before had been preceded by a warning that they would all fall away.

Just before He says, keep watch, He said, tonight all of you are going to fall away. The shepherd is going to be struck and the sheep are going to scatter. Warn them. They should have known this night was different.

And so when their Master says, keep watch, they should have seen the importance of it. Should have put them on high alert. Even without their Savior's plea to keep watch.

They should have already been able to see by the agony in His face, being troubled unto death and the warning that He had given. But apparently not. Their sin is compounded by that warning that

they had received.

And especially more so for Peter, who had not just been warned that they would all fall away, but that they would all abandon Him, but that He would deny Him three times that night. So Peter especially should have been on the guard, on watch.

[4:42] But with respect to the warning, they must have either forgotten, or didn't think it was serious, or just didn't heed the warning. And so instead they sleep. Understandably so.

Overcome with exhaustion. It's late. They've been enduring long hours of ministry and service with their Master. And they gave in to the natural human impulse for needed rest.

They sleep. But sadly, that's just the tip of the iceberg of the offense that they gave to our Savior.

Finding them sleeping, Jesus comes and expresses His dismay that they would be doing that, when He's asked them to keep watch.

And He makes a more pointed command. Watch and pray, so that you will not fall into temptation.

He adds praying to the watching. And adds the reason, because temptation is near.

And as if there wasn't enough riding on the evening already, He makes even clearer the significance of their midnight vigil. In the garden, temptation is lurking at the door.

[5:47] You're going to fall away tonight. Remember the warning. And so in the face of temptation, should have been keeping watch and praying, but again, they sleep. And then, in the hour when the temptation comes, the disciples flee.

They abandon their Savior, just as He had warned them. Peter manages to follow at a distance, but only slips further into infamy and disgrace by doing just what Jesus said He would do.

Denying His Savior three times. In some ways, this is shocking. Given the circumstances of that night, the magnitude of the Savior's distress, and the importance of what was happening there.

But when I think of my own heart, it's not so surprising. Are we not guilty of the same? Failing to keep watch when temptation is lurking at the door?

How many times have we slept when we should have been praying? How often do we let our guard down, unconcerned about the ensnaring dangers all around us in the world? The temptations that are lurking?

[6:52] And hasn't God warned us? Like He warned His disciples. He's told us there's a lion roaming about. He wants to devour you. He wants to destroy you. You've been warned, people of God.

And so we should always be on the alert, but how often are we not? We're surprised when temptation comes. And we haven't been watching, and we haven't been praying, and so we give in. Like the disciples. We tend to think they were warned. How could they fail like that? But we've been warned as well. I wonder if we often live for the moment that we're in instead of watching and being ready for the day when Jesus will come again.

Watching. Being ready for when the temptation appears at our doorstep. Like the disciples, do we miss the obvious importance of God's calling on our lives and sometimes get caught up with what we want instead of what He wants?

If Jesus was physically walking on the earth today, how many times would He say to you, couldn't you keep watch with me just for one hour, Aaron? And we have an advantage over the disciples.

[7:58] We get to see their failings. And that's a further warning to us in our Lord's disappointment with them. And we think, I don't ever want Jesus to be disappointed like He was here.

We have this set down for us so that we know the importance of watching and praying. We're closer to the return of Christ. Should be more on our guard.

Ready and watching. But too often we're lazy. Unconcerned. We think we're good. We're Christians. We've got it in the bag. We're safe. We're going to make it. Big deal. I stumble every now and then.

And we just assume that all will be okay. And so when Jesus expects to find us standing for the truth at school or at work, how many times has He had to say to us, so under that one moment of pressure, Aaron, you couldn't stand up for me then?

Or when we've snapped at our wife, or children, He asks, couldn't you keep watch over your tongue and your temper just for a moment?

[9:03] You know that you're prone to that, so shouldn't you have been watching and praying? And when we should be anticipating the coming of His glorious kingdom, must He rebuke us because we've been so consumed with our insignificant worldly pursuits?

Would He have to marvel and be disappointed that we lost it over a video game? Or a basketball game?

Letting it ruin our day? What? Could you not keep? In that moment, could you not keep before you and see the eternal glory of the kingdom of God that you're a part of? And see how insignificant that thing is that you're so upset?

Just for a moment, couldn't you keep watch, Aaron? Have you found that after a season of failing to watch and pray, you're more susceptible to temptation? It's true generally speaking, but also when we know we're going to face peculiar temptation.

If you know your struggle is with the loss of your temper, then shouldn't you be on special guard when facing situations when you know you're prone to lose that temper? However, you know it's when you're dealing with your children or you're driving in heavy traffic or at a basketball game, you know and you just think to yourself beforehand, these are the situations, Lord, in which I am tempted to sin.

[10:22] Help me to watch and pray and be strong against that temptation. Instead, we don't even think about it. We plunge right ahead and we lose it because we haven't watched and prayed.

If we know that lusting after food and overeating is a challenge and we take care to watch and pray before approaching the dessert table or this snack cupboard or whatever, if we've been warned by Jesus that the last days will be difficult, extremely difficult for God's people, shouldn't we be watching, praying for God's strength to endure those days and the trials that come in the midst of them instead of living only for the moment?

Asking the question calls to mind just how far short we fall. We're little or no better than the disciples. We need every bit as much as they did to partake of the meal that we've gathered around tonight.

We need our Savior. Our offense is perhaps even greater than theirs because we sin against greater light. But let's think for a minute. That's the offense. But it's made all the more offensive when we think about who the offenders are.

Peter, James, and John. The three closest disciples. And Hugh Martin, who's so helpful in thinking about the Garden of Gethsemane, his book, *The Shadow of the Cross*.

[11:41] He says, could not you, you, Peter, James, and John, my closest, could not you watch with me? You who have sojourned with me and suffered with me and been interested deeply in me and are interested more than you know in my sorrows and my trials and my successful endurance of them.

You who have cast in your lot with me, who have forsaken all and followed me, who have periled all your hope and all your happiness in me. Oh, who could be expected to watch with me if it be not such as you?

You know, closeness of these three to their Lord makes their failure in His time of need all the more painful. Of all, they should have been able to keep watching and pray.

And yet, how much more blessing do we have than they? And we fail to keep watch with Jesus. We are a blessed people. We talk about how we have right doctrine and good worship and practice. And I believe it is that way. If I thought there was somebody doing it better, I'd be with that group, not here. But if we do have it so much better, then our lives should show it all the more.

[12:57] Little gap between what's required of us by our Lord and what's actually there in our lives. We sit under clear, pointed, and profound preaching week after week. We understand the truth of the Gospel and we get to hear it each week.

We have God's Word. We have as many good books about God's Word to read as you could like. And we have sweet fellowship. And we have opportunity for accountability with one another. And we have brothers and sisters to pick us up and help us along the way on the road to maturity in Christ.

And we have brothers and sisters to see what might be in our blind spot to show us our sin and who do it with gentleness and love. And we have the right observance of the Lord's Supper and baptism. And we have joyful unity as a body of believers. And many of us here have had Christian homes to grow up in going back generations. In other words, we're Peter and James and John.

We have such great privilege. We're so close. We should be so close to our Lord. And so when we fail to do what He asks, it makes it all the worse. They had no excuse and neither do we.

[14:07] And it just goes to show the weakness of men in our complete insufficiency to do anything that would be able to contribute to our salvation.

Hugh Martin again says, it would seem as if the three chiefest of the apostles had been selected on this occasion expressly in order to prove how inadequate for such an hour was the utmost human strength.

Jesus was engaged in a work in which none could aid Him. The three most eminent believers on the earth, far from being able to partake with Him in His sore travail in redeeming His brethren, failed.

Even in the commanded vigilance that was necessary if they were even to be mere spectators of this scene. There's not a one of us here who could keep watch like we should, apart from the power of God.

We're reminded of how helpless we are and how desperately we need the One that we've offended. how much we need His grace, His strength, His forgiveness for all the times we failed Him.

[15:08] We should be so much closer to God than we are. So much further along in our walk with Him, in our growth in grace. So we're reminded of how much we need Him.

We can't do it in our strength, but only in His strength. We can't save ourselves, only He can save us. And we come to see the offended one.

It's Jesus our Savior. And that's why we're here tonight. Because the One who was offended did not fail us.

You see, Jesus that night, He wanted, He requested, He asked for, He commanded the help, the watchfulness, the prayer of His disciples, the support of His closest earthly companions, and He didn't receive it.

And on the cross, He craved the warmth of the smile and embrace of His heavenly Father, and He didn't receive it. And instead, there on the cross, He received the wrath that Peter and James and John deserved for abandoning their Master for sleeping when they should have been watching.

[16:28] He received God's wrath against us for all of the times that we have failed Him. Jesus, hurt by His disciples' failure and our failures, did not return the favor.

He didn't say, if you're going to abandon me, I'm going to abandon you. You couldn't watch with me, I won't watch over you. He didn't walk away from the garden to refuse the cup of God's wrath.

He went willingly with His accusers. He drained that cup of wrath down to the dregs for the very people who had just failed Him. For us who would one day so painfully fail Him.

Who would let Him down. Who would not watch with Him. And the offended one is the one that we remember tonight. It is His pierced body and shed blood that is our hope.

It is His perfect, once for all, sacrifice for our sin and ongoing intercession before God that gives us confidence to even come into the holy presence of our God tonight.

[17:31] It's His faithfulness in the face of our unfaithfulness that shames us. Shouldn't we of all people be faithful?

And so we're shamed, but it's that same faithfulness that even in the midst of our shame gives us hope at the same time. The Lord's Supper for me is always such a study in contrast.

I'm conflicted when I come to this table. I feel the weight of sin and what we've done to our Savior and how we've offended Him.

And that's painful. As you prepare your heart and you think of the ways that you've offended your Savior, it hurts, it stings. And yet, at the same time, my heart swells with joy when I come to this table.

Because the one that we've offended has not failed us. We see just here in stark relief how despicable and ugly our sin is, but how beautiful our Savior appears in light of that.

[18:41] And so we fall down and wonder and love and praise. And so, close follower of Jesus tonight, one who has walked with Him closely, one who loves Him, one who's like Peter, James, and John, one who has enjoyed such great privilege, do you feel the sting of His rebuke tonight?

Couldn't you keep watch with me for one hour? But do you also feel the relief, the burden being lifted as you're reminded that He hasn't treated us as we have treated Him?

It's much like Hosea and Gomer that we'll see in the book of Hosea. God faithful to His people who have been unfaithful to Him. 1 Peter 2.24 says, He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness.

By His wounds, you have been healed. So, remember as well tonight that He died for our sin, not that we should continue in it. And think, oh, well, I've got to sacrifice for sin so it doesn't matter if I sin.

No, He died for our sin, Peter says, in order that we might die to it. And now live for righteousness. You know how different Peter, James, and John were on the other side of the cross and resurrection?

[20:00] How bold they were for their Savior? How they didn't abandon Him? How they stood for Him? How they were persecuted for Him? Well, we live on the other side of the cross and resurrection.

And our lives should reflect that radical change so that we keep watch with our Savior and so bring honor to His name in everything that we think and say and do. We have great privilege.

We know that we failed greatly in the light of that privilege, but we also know tonight that we have a greater Savior in whom we delight. And so, as we come and partake of this supper tonight, may we be moved to greater faithfulness to our God, greater holiness, greater pursuit of righteousness, a greater and deeper love for Him.

May God warm our hearts as we partake of this gift that He has given to His church as we come and remember that offended Savior. Yes, our wretched offense against Him, but His faithfulness to us, He's given it, as Pastor John just said, that we might remember.

And so as you partake tonight, you remember what He's done. And as we partake, our faith will be fed as we receive Jesus Himself and His love, His faithfulness to us.

[21:19] And some here tonight will not partake because you've not trusted in Christ. Your offense against Him is great. It's not any greater than mine is.

It's not any greater than Peter or James or John's was. And you can come and trust in this Savior tonight. And you can find that the offended one will receive you with open arms.

And He will save you. And you can come and partake of this supper as well, enjoying the forgiveness of sins, being reminded of our Savior's death and all that He's accomplished for us.

So praise God tonight for Jesus, who though He was greatly offended, you see the hurt in His words. Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour? And yet He loves us anyway.

And in hymn 142, we sing of what Jesus bears from us. And in this one verse, we see the offense and the offended and the offenders.

[22:23] Could we bear from one another what He daily bears from us? Yet this glorious friend and brother loves us, though we treat Him thus. Though for good we render ill, He accounts us brethren, so we've offended Him.

Yet we find forgiveness in Him. So let's delight in our Savior tonight as we sing hymn 142, our true friend and brother. Amen. Amen.