

Prayer for Relief

(Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1)

By Larry Winn

As Jesus and his disciples approached Gethsemane, Jesus asked most of the disciples to wait while he proceeded further into the garden with Peter, James, and John. The name Gethsemane means “oil press.” Seeing that it was located on the Mount of Olives, this area was probably once used for the growing and processing of olives. Luke mentions that Jesus commonly came here (Luke 21:37; John 18:2).

Once alone with his closest disciples, Jesus revealed the anguish he was feeling. The wording is that he sorrowed to point of nearly being overwhelmed with grief. It crushed him nearly to death (Psalm 116:3). He asked the three to watch over him while he prayed and told them to pray in the meantime that they would not be tempted. Going a bit further, about a stones throw, he fell on his face and prayed that this tribulation might be taken away, but knowing it could not, he submitted himself to God’s will. It is a prayer that Jesus mentioned before (John 12:27; Hebrews 5:6-8). Jesus knew that God could accomplish anything, including removing the need for his death. His reference to this “cup” is alluding to cup of God’s wrath (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17). Luke’s account records for us “Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him”. His trial was not removed, but he was given the encouragement necessary to face the trial that was upon him.

Though the prayer recorded is short, when Jesus returned to the disciples, he reprimanded them, Peter in particular, for not being able to watch for one hour. Luke mentions that their sorrow had worn them out and made them sleepy. Waking them, Jesus told them to watch and pray that they aren’t led into temptation. He understands they want to be obedient, but their bodies are not as strong as their will. Peter was probably the focus for this rebuke because of his earlier claim that he would never forsake the Lord (Mark 14:29). The warning is that if he could not resist the temptation to sleep now, how will he stand in the time of real trial.

Jesus returns to pray in greater earnestness. Luke mentions he began to sweat and drops fell like blood to the ground. And when he returned, he found the disciples asleep again, for Matthew mentions they were unable to keep their eyes open. Again he awakens them and they had no excuse to offer for their laxness (neglecting their responsibility and lacking concern).

For a third time, Jesus returns to pray. On his third return he awakens them again with a warning. While they were sleeping, the enemy had not. The time for betrayal had come and it was time to meet the betrayer.