

Intro

We're back to being watchful. A major theme in the past three chapters of Matthew. Previously Jesus instructed us to be watchful as we wait for his return at the end of the age.

Being watchful is kind of like how some of you approach deer hunting season. Being on the lookout. At a deer stand. Staying alert. You don't know when the deer will arrive. If you're nodding off, if you're staring at the trees, if you're daydreaming, you might miss your best shot. Likewise, if we're not spiritually alert we might miss the sin in our hearts. We might be blind to the temptation before us. We might be blind to the fact that we're falling into Satan's snare.

In addition to being watchful, Jesus adds be prayerful. Bring God and his resources into the situation. This morning we're commanded to:

BIG IDEA: Watch and pray

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Four reasons why we should watch and pray.

Point 1: Watch and pray because God's will can be hard

Explanation

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. – 26:41

Watch = to stay awake because alertness is critical. It's the word translated "stay awake" in Matthew 24:42-43 and "watch" in Matthew 25:13. There I said watching involves more than looking or searching. Watching is a way of life. The faithful and wise servant was found doing what the master expected while he awaited the master's return (25:45-46).

The word translated "watch" in 26:41 is also used in 26:38 and 26:40 ("watch"). There's a sense in which staying awake was literal (26:40). The disciples were found asleep. And there's a sense in which watching is a spiritual. Being spiritually alert when temptation is calling out to us. Being on the lookout. Like Bernie in his deer stand looking for a deer to enter his line of fire.

When temptation is calling out and you recognize what's going on, turn to God's resources. Here prayer is the remedy to temptation. Temptation requires drawing near to God. James puts it this way:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. – James 4:7-8

Jesus' temptation exists because **God's will was hard on Jesus:**

- 1) "he began to be sorrowful and troubled" – 26:37
- 2) "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" – 26:38
- 3) Jesus was tempted to forsake his mission.

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." – 26:39

- 4) Public mockery and shame, physical torture, taking the full cup of God's wrath for every sin we've ever committed (God hates sin so this wrath was intense!), abandonment by the Father.

In the divine plan it was necessary that Jesus, God the Son from all eternity, take on human flesh and die in our place as a substitute to secure our rescue from the punishment our sins deserve. Speaking of Jesus, the Hebrews author says:

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. – Heb 2:17-18

- 1) Had to be made like his brothers = had to become man like his brothers = believers.
- 2) Our sins had to be propitiated = appeasement of God's wrath through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus.
- 3) Jesus experienced temptation in these moments = he empathizes with us in our temptations to forsake God's will.

Illustrations of God willing the suffering of his people

As it was for Jesus, so it is often for us.

- 1) Joseph – rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery, imprisoned because of a false accusation

Joseph spoke of God sending him to Egypt as a slave, and God intending these events for good (Gen 45:5-8; 50:20).

- 2) In John 9 a man was blind from birth (9:1).

Jesus explained why that was the case:

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." – John 9:3

God intentionally had this man born blind so that years later Jesus' healing power would be on display before the religious authorities, and so that this man would believe.

- 3) In our passage the disciples themselves were about to face **God's hard will.**

They were going to witness Jesus publicly rejected, mocked, and crucified. Surely it was hard and confusing for them to see the one who raised the dead and stilled storms put to death himself. And they experienced guilt by association.

Application

God can and does will hard things in our lives.

Real life examples I've seen or heard about Christians experiencing: a man in his 30's with multiple young children sees his wife die of cancer; a wife in her 30's with multiple young children sees her husband die of cancer; a spouse has to separate from her husband and send him to a nursing home because the Alzheimer's is too severe; children raised in your home in the church living in settled rejection of your faith in their adulthood; my wife conceiving a child to find out he doesn't have a skull and will die shortly after delivery; losing your business prematurely to an unexpected fire. **Sometimes God's will is hard.**

When we find ourselves in a hard providence, Jesus says watch and pray. Be alert to the temptations you're experiencing. Be aware of what's going on in your heart. Draw near to God and his resources. Lean on his strength, not your own.

And draw near to God's people. Christianity is lived in community. One resource God provides when his will is hard is the local church. Brothers and sisters serving. Elders coming alongside with counsel and encouragement. Through the counsel and support of the local church the man and the woman who lost their spouse to cancer, with multiple young children, were able to move forward. The church stepped in to help. God provided each with a new spouse. And God used the pastors of that church to counsel the new couples through the engagement process. For example, how to maintain relationship with the in-laws of the former spouse.

God's will can be hard!

Point 2: Watch and pray because we're weaker than we think

Explanation

Jesus declares what will happen when he undergoes arrest, trial, and crucifixion:

"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.'" – 26:31

The shepherd = Jesus. The sheep = his disciples. The disciples will "fall away." In context, "fall away" = *"Then all the disciples left him and fled"* (26:56).

"Fall away" here ≠ falling away in Hebrews 6:4-6 where falling away = falling short of saving faith (Heb 6:9) and results in being cursed and burned = rejection at the final judgment (Heb 6:8). Falling away here = temporarily distancing themselves from Christ because of the possibility of punishment. Wilting under pressure in one instance, not settled rejection of Christ. The same phrase can be used in different ways. When Jesus says "fall away" he means something different than the Hebrews author did.

Jesus is telling them they're going to fail him. Specifically, Peter will deny Jesus three times (26:33). Since they're going to experience temptation to deny association with Jesus, they need to watch and pray (26:41). But he assures them crucifixion isn't the final word:

"But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." – 26:32

Note Peter's brashness:

Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." – 26:33

Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same. – 26:35

Overconfidence. Ignorance of weakness within. Peter was weaker than he thought. He overestimated himself.

Application

One way we ought to think of ourselves is as child of God. Like a needy child depends on their parents for food, shelter, clothing, guidance, etc., we must depend on God for spiritual strength/protection in the heat of temptation.

Ask yourself, am I so overconfident in myself that I don't watch and pray? If so, you're vulnerable to temptation when it strikes. 1 Peter 5:8 says:

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. – 1 Pet 5:8

Peter uses the same word Jesus used when he says, *"be watchful."*

We're weaker than we think.

Point 3: Watch and pray because we're prone to selfishness

Explanation

Jesus was tempted to forego the divine plan. The suffering to come was calling out, "forsake God's plan and save yourself. Choose personal ease rather than obedience."

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." – 26:39

It wasn't possible for the cup to pass from Jesus. The cup being the suffering of divine wrath for our sins. God planned to redeem us before time began. It was necessary that the Scriptures be fulfilled (26:54, 56).

Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." – 26:42

Jesus is submitting to the Father's will. Whatever it takes, even at great personal anguish, I will do your will. Jesus *"prayed for the third time, saying the same words again"* (26:44). Through prayer Jesus moved from "is it possible to avert this?" to "your will be done." In other words, **prayer helps us to submit to God's will!**

Was Jesus actually tempted? Yes. Could Jesus have sinned? No. How are these truths reconciled?

- 1) Jesus had no predisposition to sin like we do.

- 2) Jesus successfully resisted temptation because as God he is holy, and his desires conform to his character. He only desires what is good.

In the weakness of human flesh, Jesus desired to escape the cup of divine wrath. On the other hand, he would never desire to disobey his Father's will. When push came to shove, Jesus desired the Father's will.

- 3) The painful threat of the suffering the cross would entail was truly weighing on his soul. A real threat hung over his head. He didn't desire the suffering.
- 4) The pain was agonizing because he didn't always make use of his divine rights and powers (e.g., didn't know the day of his coming).
- 5) Jesus truly suffered in his human nature. Jesus wasn't supernaturally shielded from the pain of crucifixion.

Application

Jesus was tempted to forsake his mission for personal ease. Are you tempted to forsake obedience to God's will because of personal ease?

- Not having that hard conversation with an erring brother or sister, or failing to address the hostility between yourself and a brother or sister.
- Not correcting a child or grandchild because you want them to like you.
- Not engaging in gospel conversations because you fear that might make things uncomfortable (the fear may be more imagined than real!).

What kills selfishness? Being watchful. Asking yourself, where is selfishness manifesting itself in my life? Praying. Bringing your cares to God, asking for his empowering grace, and declaring your allegiance to God's will. Follow Jesus by submitting to God's will. Better yet, delight in God's will. Delight in the God who wills such things. Jesus cast aside selfishness and personal rights and gave of himself, submitting to the Father's will that we might be rescued from the penalty and power of sin.

we're prone to selfishness.

Point 4: Watch and pray because we're prone to wrong reactions

Explanation

Situations can be misunderstood. Jesus warned his disciples what was coming. Peter declared his unswerving loyalty and bravery. Then the moment came. Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss and the delegation from the Sanhedrin (chief priests and elders) seizes Jesus by means of Roman soldiers (John 18:3, 12). A disciple strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear (26:51). From Luke and John we learn that Peter cut off Malchus' ear and Jesus diffused the situation by healing his ear (Luke 22:51; John 18:10). Jesus rebukes Peter:

"Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" – 26:52-54

The kingdom of God isn't advanced by violence and military domination. Jesus could have rescued himself if he so desired. 12 legions = 72,000 angels. Jesus didn't need to be rescued. He needed to fulfill the Scriptures. Didn't Peter understand that Jesus had to be crucified to rescue sinners and obey the Father's will? Jesus had just said he would be raised = death was necessary.

Application

There's a flaw within us. **We're prone to wrong reactions.** We might misunderstand our situation. Thus the need to watch and pray. Know your situation. Know your surroundings. Think soberly about how God wants you to respond in the situation in which you find yourself today. Ask the question, what is God's will in this situation? Use Scripture! Where am I being tempted to resist God's will? Use Scripture! And while doing so turn to God in prayer.

To the non-Christian

You're asking, "what should I get out of this?"

- 1) God the Father willed that Jesus' suffer on the cross so that we could be rescued from the penalty and power of sin. Jesus died in the place of sinners such that whoever repents and believes comes into reconciled relationship with God. If we don't trust in Jesus as our substitute, we'll take the punishment ourselves.
- 2) We humans think too highly of our moral ability. We're afflicted by a sinful nature. We need God's help to fight our natural inclinations. God is willing to help us if we respond to him on his terms.
- 3) If this is making sense, respond to God with faith and repentance. Turn from rebellion to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Conclusion

Watch and pray because God's will can be hard.

Watch and pray because we're weaker than we think.

Watch and pray because we're prone to selfishness.

Watch and pray because we're prone to wrong reactions.