



## **Matthew 26:40–41**

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. 41 “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

### **Reflection**

Jesus and his disciples are in an olive grove on the western slope of the Mount

of Olives, just across the Kidron valley from Jerusalem. The grove is known as Gethsemane. It's where Jesus spends his last moments as a free man. Those moments are spent in prayer. Jesus withdraws from his disciples to pray. Nine of them are at a distance; but Peter, James and John are close at hand. They're Jesus' inner circle, his closest friends, he's asked them to stand by him, to stay close by as he pours out his soul in anguished prayer to his Father. In less than an hour they'll arrest him. At 9am the next day they'll drive nails through his hands and his feet, pinning him to a wooden cross. How many times as a young carpenter had he driven nails into wood? Tomorrow those nails would be driven into him. Thoughts like these come to you in times like these. And then there's the wrath of the living God

that's about to be poured out on him for the sins of humankind. The prospect is enough to make Jesus sweat blood. It's enough for him to fall face down in the dirt, overwhelmed with sorry to the point of death, and pray,

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

With the anxiety, the overwhelming sense of despair, the weight of the entire world being carried on his shoulders, Jesus, fully God but also fully man says what any of us would say, and does what any of us would do,

My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.

He begs his Dad to spare him. 'Please don't hurt me Dad ... unless it's the only way.' Can you imagine how these words made his Father feel? To see his precious, one and only Son, lying face down in the dirt, the one he loves more than life itself imploring him to hold back his devastating wrath? 'Please don't hurt me Dad.' Can you imagine how God the Father is feeling at the prospect of pouring out his full and righteous wrath, fair and measured punishment for every sin ever committed – past, present and future – by every believer ever to walk the earth, on his completely innocent Son. I'm a father. I'm not sure whose anguish is greater in this moment, the Father or the Son's. I suspect they're one in this, as they are in everything, with the Holy Spirit who's led Jesus

every step of the way to this terrible fate grieving just as much as they are.

The disciples however have fallen asleep. Which is hard to understand and yet also not hard at all. Luke helps us by adding that they were exhausted from sorrow. They simply weren't coping. And yet, just think about what Jesus has told them that evening. 'I'm going to be betrayed, by one of you; your courageous leader Peter, he'll deny me three times, and all this before dawn; in fact, just as Zechariah prophesied I'm about to be struck down, and you'll all be scattered. And to cap it all off, there Jesus is, before them, lying in the dust, sweating profusely, visibly distressed in a manner they've never seen before. Jesus their rock is praying like they've never seen or heard him pray. He's asked Peter,

James and John just to be there with him, their presence his only comfort in this his darkest hour – and they’ve fallen asleep. Verse 40,

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

There’s sadness in his question, perhaps resignation, after all he’s used to this. He addresses Peter. It must have stung. Earlier that evening Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny him three times, Peter said right back,

“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”

He hasn't started well. He's fallen asleep. There's sadness in Jesus' question, but there's also grace. Hear him in verse 41,

41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Jesus must have felt let down. Emotionally, psychologically he's at his lowest ebb, and yet even here there is grace. And loving warning.

41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He's told Peter that he'll disown him but Jesus is batting for him, supporting him, encouraging him, showing him how it

needn't turn out this way. Watch and pray if you want to avert disaster, watch and pray if you want to make it through this disaster, watch and pray if you want to make the most of this disaster. Like I am. You've got it in you. I know you Peter. Your spirit is willing, but your flesh is weak. Follow my example in this, in my weakness lying here in the dust, I am strong through prayer. Watch what I am about to accomplish through this prayer.

You know one of the things I love about Jesus is that he practices what he preaches. He doesn't say one thing and do the other. In fact, he often doesn't say anything at all, at least to begin. First he does it, and then he says follow me in it. He practices before he preaches. Watch and pray, like you've seen me just doing. That's



how we'll get through this. Take up your cross and follow me, right after I take up my cross and am nailed to it for the sins of the world. Love your enemies, just as hanging on that cross I'll pray over the Roman soldiers who've just put down their hammers and nails with these words,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34

## **Think & Pray**

Take some time to think back over this passage. Drink it in. Empathise with Jesus. Learn from him. Perhaps you're suffering and someone close to you has let you down, fallen asleep to your pain. And

it hurts. How have you reacted? How are you tempted to react? How does Jesus react? With grace. He thinks the best of them. He sees the best in them. There's no filing it away to bring it out next time, there's no grudge, just grace and forgiveness. Just like with everything, Jesus does it and then asks us to follow him in it. Can you follow him in this?

Are you practicing before you preach like Jesus did? You might be struggling at the moment with disobedient children, or with a husband who nods and agrees and doesn't change. Have you tried practicing before you preach like Jesus? Have you tried showing them how you'd like them to be before asking them to follow you in it?

Or you might like to meditate over Jesus' prayer-life. Do remember when Jesus taught us to pray in the Matthew 6? The Lord's Prayer. Here again, he's not asking us to follow him in anything that he hasn't done first. Yesterday during his darkest hour Jesus prayed, 'Yet not as I will, but as you will.' Does this sound familiar? 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.' Today Jesus teaches his disciples about prayer, 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.' Again, from the Lord's Prayer 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us'.

Are you watching and praying so that you will not fall into temptation? Perhaps you're suffering psychologically, emotionally and physically like Jesus was – are you praying like he did in this moment? Or it may

be that you're simply not coping, like the disciples in our passage. Instead of trying to sleep it off, block it out or pretending that you don't have a problem, why not pray? Jesus is speaking directly into your situation in today's passage, these words are for you,

‘Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’

Our spirits are willing but our bodies are weak, so let's follow Jesus in this by spending a few moments now in prayer to close.