

## **“SATAN’S ATTACK ON JESUS: IN THE GARDEN.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Matthew 26:36-46**

**Prayer:** Holy Father, open the eyes of our hearts now and enable us to see from your true and eternal Word what glorifies you, exalts Jesus, and benefits us. And may our wills be conformed to yours in all things. Your will be done in and through us, in Jesus name. Amen.

### **Introduction.**

Why are we in the garden on Palm Sunday?

Remember we have been focusing on Satan’s attacks and lies, first on us by saying “did God really say,” and twisting Scripture. Then we looked at Satan’s attack on Jesus in the three temptations where Satan was again twisting Scripture.

Now we are finishing with two other times when Jesus faced serious, strong temptations, last week from Peter telling Jesus He would never suffer as the Son of God. And now this week when the Son of God wrestles in a garden with the temptation to avoid suffering if possible.

Human history began in a garden. Human history was completely rewritten in a garden.

The first Adam ignored the will of God and results were disastrous. The second Adam sought the will of God and the results were hard but very good.

Adam ate of the fruit in the garden and plunged us all into sin and death. Jesus agreed to drink of the cup in the garden and raise us all to holiness and life.

In the first garden sin and Satan won and the curse was begun. In the second garden sin and Satan lost and the curse was about to be broken.

Adam was put to the test in the garden and failed miserably. Jesus was put to the supreme test of His life and triumphed.

We come to one of the most powerfully moving and emotionally charged scenes in the life of Jesus, certainly one of the most human scenes.

### **Jesus in the garden. The garden prayer.**

Compared to what Jesus is now facing, the temptation in the wilderness must look like child’s play. 40 days of fasting and then being assaulted by Satan must seem tame in the face of what is ahead. His hour has come.

The language here is strong. These words are not common words. They express the deepest emotions and feelings. They carry a sense of great alarm and distress, of being overwhelmed with sorrow and burdened with grief, despairing even unto death.

“He began to be sorrowful and troubled.”

“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.”

“He fell with His face to the ground.”

Luke says, “Being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

Hebrews 5 says, “Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death.”

Jesus is in a cosmic struggle, in a fight for His life. It is utterly overwhelming. “Would Jesus be overcome by death, or would Jesus overcome death?” (John Piper).

We know people who have faced death with greater composure and courage than this, more peaceful, without fear or dread. Why is Jesus so tormented?

There must be something more going on here. Jesus was facing something much more than His own death.

Jesus was human so what He was going to experience caused intense anguish and sorrow. To be executed by the most painful and torturous means devised and at the hands of wicked men would cause our human bodies and psyche unimaginable agony and stress.

This wasn't just fear of physical pain. This was a deep awareness of the unutterable and unimaginable weight of our sins and iniquity. He would soon be made a curse, He would be made sin who had never known sin. His holy nature was about to be shamed. He would be wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities, smitten by God and afflicted, as a lamb led to slaughter, and cut off from the living (see Isaiah 53).

And to suffer complete alienation from the Father, to be the object of the Father's eternal wrath. Who could bear it?

He wrestled in prayer facing the worst demons tempting Him with the greatest temptations. This was the worst kind of nightmare, a living hell.

Never was Jesus more clearly a man as in this garden, His sweat, His tears, His prayers. As a man this was the hour of His greatest weakness, when He showed Himself to be most like us. The entire purpose for Jesus coming to earth is on the line right here in the garden. Just as everything was on the line in that first garden, so now it is again.

The glory of God and the salvation of mankind are at stake. Everything depends on the answer the Father gives His Son. And when the Father gives the answer that His will must be done, then everything still hangs on the Son's obedience. What will He do? Will He obey the Father?

***Remove this cup.***

Three times Jesus pleaded with His Father. "All things are possible with you, Father. You can do anything. You can come up with another way, with another plan. Please, take this cup away, this cup of providence."

Maybe this was just a test like Abraham sacrificing his own son, and God would change the plan at the last moment.

You remember how I made a point of showing in Satan's temptations in the wilderness and Peter's rebuke, that Jesus was being tempted to seek glory without suffering, the crown without the cross.

Now with the suffering looming, Jesus asks the Father if there is any way possible in heaven or in earth, for Him not to have to drink this cup, to not endure this suffering? Anyway at all?

***Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.***

Do we see a difference in what Jesus prayed the first time and what Jesus prayed the second time? "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

In the midst of His greatest temptation and challenge, what does Jesus do? He prays. And God answers and sends an angel to minister and promises to deliver Jesus through death, not from death.

Jesus' desire to obey and submit was stronger than His desire to serve Himself and avoid suffering. Out of this greatest prayer comes the greatest obedience and the greatest gift.

**Hebrews 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

**Watch and pray.**

In the midst of His own utter agony, Jesus is not completely self-absorbed. Not once but twice He has the souls of His disciples in mind. Twice, emphatically, He urges His disciples to watch and pray. If Jesus prayed, how much more must they (and we, I might add).

"Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

A church member brought to my attention this week a quote from the great Christian French philosopher, Blaise Pascal.

“All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” (Blaise Pascal).

Pascal admitted silence and infinity frightened him. Who has put me here and why? What does this short span of time on earth mean in the light of eternity?

The Bible’s way of saying this is be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10). That is a favorite Bible verse, yet one of the least obeyed. Who of us does that?

Be still and know you are not God, you are not in control, your life is not your own. Be still and seek God first rather than everything else first and God last. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else He will take care of.

How many of us are afraid to be alone, with nothing to divert us or distract us or keep us from having to just sit and think, reflect, meditate, contemplate, pray, talk to God, read?

Are we afraid of silence, of being alone, of being bored, do we need to be entertained, distracted? We desperately want to be occupied, amused, find a little excitement.

Are we afraid to contemplate that life is fragile and short, hard and filled with suffering?

We are all in a kind of forced time out, a time of forced quiet and inactivity without all our favorite distractions like sports, bars, restaurants, theaters, shopping malls, stores, grandkids.

God has stripped away everything away to expose the poverty of our souls, the shallowness of our thoughts, smallness of our desires, the pettiness of our lives. What are we living for? Why are we here?

Can we cease from senseless activity, from restless diversions, from soulless distractions, from mindless pursuits? Can we at least put down our electronic devices, our phones, our brain numbing activities for a few minutes and try to sit quietly alone somewhere?

Will this be hard? Of course it will be hard, like anything we aren’t good at or haven’t tried or practiced. Will your mind wander? Of course it will, all over the place, like a monkey, swinging from one thing to another to another.

Anxieties, distractions, thoughts, ideas, things to clean or fix, frozen peas that need to be thawed for dinner, why is there a crack in the ceiling, when will the Mariners season start.

The disciples fall asleep in the midst of the most important time in human history. They miss the point, they miss the significance of what is going on, something monumental, something life changing.

We are in the test of a life time. This is weapons grade temptation. This is not 101, this is graduate school. This is not just some people, this is the whole planet.

We need to wake up. But we aren't waking up. We are trying to keep business as much as usual. What are we doing that's spiritually different?

The virus is evil, no question, and the death and destruction is evil. But God is a God who also brings good out of evil. What is that for you? What does it look like?

What is our country in the middle of, why is God trying so hard to get our attention and what attention are we giving to God?

In this stay at home order, there is white space on our calendars and in our schedule books, there are gaps of time with nothing to fill them. There is quiet, no hurry, no noise, no crowds.

Talk to God, ask God questions, ask God about what is going on in your life and family right now and why and what He wants to show you, wants you to know.

There is not just an hour long Sabbath, there is a whole day of Sabbath, no sports to watch or go to, no even going to grandma's house. Don't get me wrong, we miss our kids and grandkids and time with them. But here we are, forced to be quiet, to rest.

Turn your Sabbath into a true Sabbath, a rest for your soul, a rest from distractions, from things that are trivial, temporal, temporary, cotton candy, worthless, mindless.

Satan waits and is ready to pounce on every opportunity to make us miss the spiritual moment, and see what God is doing.

And Satan is here tempting us, tempting us to not think about what is going on, tempting us to avoid any and all pain and suffering at any cost, tempting us to get diverted and distracted, tempting us to sleep through this.

Jesus shows us how to fight temptation and to fight fear and to fight doubt and weakness and inadequacy, the weaknesses and inadequacies of our flesh. How to take up our cross and obey and follow Jesus. Withdraw, seek silence, get alone with God and humble yourself before Him.

Somewhere in all of this God means for us to lie down in green pastures beside still waters for the sake of our souls.

Read and pray. Read and pray.

Don't give up, keep reigning your mind in, pull it back. Use whatever resources you have. Your Bible, a hymnal, a journal, a really good book, a classic, something written by a dead person.

Can you spare an hour a day, a half hour, fifteen minutes?

What is God doing? It affects us all, are we paying attention, seeking His wisdom and will? Our flesh is weak, we lack the Spirit, we are not strong in ourselves, we need prayer, God's help.

We are so dull, so complacent, so distracted.

Washing your hands, not touching your face, keeping your distance, and wearing a mask isn't going to do it. This is going to take serious prayer and repentance, even fasting.

Call to prayer and fasting this coming Friday and Saturday. Pick a meal or two on one or both of those days. Use the guide we will send you. Imitate Jesus and not the disciples.

In our darkest trials, in our longest hours, in our greatest fears, God is present, God hears us, God knows our prayers and our deepest desires and greatest longings, and when He answers, He answers out of His Fatherly wisdom with what is very best for us. When we ask for a stone, He gives us bread.

The road ahead for us as a nation is hard and just got harder and longer. But this coronavirus road is not the worst thing we face. Sin is the worst thing, because its consequences are far more deadly and permanent than this virus. We face a holy God. But He has come to us in love and has given us His Son and sustained His Son so He would be victorious for us when we could not. He is praying for us. Let's read and watch and pray now more than ever.

### **Prayer:**

Holy Father, wake us up to the serious realities and temptations around us. Don't let us sleep through this dark time. Draw us all further up and further in to yourself and your will and ways. Lord, this is all new and strange to us, we don't know what to do. We are all faced with the temptations of diversions and distractions, of seeking to Help us to worship you individually and as families, help us in our homes to honor you and glorify you and reflect you to one another. Help us to drink this cup you have for us, to not resist it, to not despise it, to not ignore it. Lord, your will be done in each of our hearts and homes.

May the fear of the virus give way to a deeper fear of sin and may that leads us to the greatest and best and most fruitful fear of all, the fear of the Lord.