

The Ultimate Decision **Luke 22:39-46**

Did you ever have to go for surgery or to the doctor for test results when you knew something was wrong? Did you ever have to face a job change or some other inevitable thing? Maybe you are younger and a student. Have you ever anticipated a test or having to give an oral report or performance? You knew for months that this date was coming. It seemed far enough away at first, but now it is upon you. How do you feel? Let's take it one step further. Imagine your execution or knowing the time of your death. Doesn't this intensify the feelings and the urgency of the situation? How would you pray under such conditions?

Please turn to Luke's Gospel – Chapter 22 – verses 39-46 ...

Luke 22:39-46

39 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. 45 When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. 46 "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."

Jesus is finally in Jerusalem. We have been reading from Matthew's Gospel to portray the story for tonight, but Luke tells of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem in Lk. 19:28-40 – The Triumphal Entry. He comes riding on a donkey's colt – with people cheering and praising God for the One who was to free them from oppression. The crowd recited the words of Ps. 118:26 – **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."** They were praising God for the arrival of their deliver – they were convinced of His anointing. He must be the One! Yet, Jesus knew full well what He was walking into – what he was destined for:

Luke 13:31-35 - 31 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."

32 He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' 33 In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day-for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"

34 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 35 Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" That day was now upon them.

Though He was completely God, He was also completely man, and the stress of His destiny was beginning to take its toll on the humanness of our Savior. The praise ended in tears – Jesus' tears as He cried over Jerusalem – **Lk. 19:41-42 - As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes.** Many things have occurred in the short period of time... (teaching in the temple, Passover seder – His Last Supper with the disciples; institution of Holy Communion, etc.) We are now at the pivotal point of Luke's Gospel. Jesus is now in Jerusalem – the Goal – yet, everything seems to be going along normally. The battle is not being fought in the natural realm, but it is being fought in the spiritual realm. Jesus' torment was within His Spirit. The real battle was being fought within the soul of Jesus for the souls of humanity.

As benign as it may seem, this is a very crucial passage of Scripture. In fact, it is the key point in Luke's writings. Remember how Luke writes? He has been building this "orderly" account of Jesus' life and ministry. The order he has chosen is this progression toward Jerusalem. Now, at last, He has arrived at the appointed destination. Everything that happens here is of major significance. This is a place of danger, and He knows full well that His journey and mission is nearing the end. Yet, this is what He came for; this is what He has persisted toward.

Look at verses 40 and 46. This passage begins and ends with a warning about temptation, trial, testing. Why such an emphasis? Does this bring to mind another time in Jesus' ministry when temptation was an issue? Look with me at **Luke 4:1-13: 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God,...** . . . (There proceeds three temptations that offer Jesus another way to be glorified without the cross.)

13 When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

That opportune time has now come. When better to combat again against the Son of God than when He is about to fulfill His purpose and mission on earth. The devil knows who Jesus is. He tried to derail His mission in the beginning and failed. He is trying to derail Him again now! This time on the Mount of Olives is a time of battle, a battle for souls. If Satan can derail Jesus at this point, there would be no redemption, no reconciliation, and no salvation available. In the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, this is the opening scene, and my favorite scene in the whole movie. It powerfully showed the battle between Jesus praying and the devil reasoning with Him that this whole mission was impossible.

As He heads off alone to pray, Jesus leaves the disciples with instructions to pray so they don't fall into temptation, or come under trial, or be tested (this can be read any of these ways). He doesn't ask them to pray for Him in His hour of need. He asks them to pray for themselves here – He knew what was coming. Then Jesus goes off to pray – in His anguish. Notice the posture in this prayer time for Jesus. Verse 41 – He knelt down to pray. This was not the normal prayer position. Jews normally stood to pray, but Jesus establishes this kneeling position that we have adopted, for prayer. His reason was the stress and anguish of the situation that He was under. This is a climactic moment in Jesus' ministry, a decisive moment. This is an intense point in Luke's Gospel. In fact, if not for this moment in history, we would not be gathered together tonight at this service recognizing the death that bought our salvation. The tension is thick as Jesus prays for another way to solve the sin issue. Wasn't this exactly what the devil was trying to get Jesus to accept in the temptation experience we talked about earlier? However, Jesus resolves this issue by saying – "not my will, but yours be done." Jesus was willing to accept the torture that awaits Him rather than abandon the Father's will for Him and for the world.

Central to this whole passage is the topic of prayer! Verses 40 and 46 – the disciples are commanded to pray, and verses 41, 44, and 45 refer to Jesus praying. In His prayer Jesus mentions the "cup." This was a symbol of God's wrath in the O.T. (Is. 51:22 and Jer. 25:15 refer to this). Jesus knew of the meaning of this cup. He asked the disciples in Mk. 10:38 – if they can drink of the cup that He was to drink from. With all this going on in His mind and spirit, verse 43 tells us that an angel is sent to strengthen Him. This further shows us that the battle was taking place between two worlds. There was a physical battle and a spiritual battle, a battle between heaven and hell. But heaven sends reinforcements. **God is aware of the struggle, and sends help to strengthen when the situation is committed to Him in prayer.** The struggle is real because Jesus is a real human being. He faced the same struggles you and I face. He knows the Father's will and wishes it could be different, but complete obedience to the Father triumphs in the end. Jesus is not just praying for Himself here, but for the salvation of all humanity! What will be the outcome?

The text tells us that He prayed more earnestly (v. 44). In His anguish, He prayed all the more. Jesus is the only one who speaks of praying and the only one who prays. Luke reveals this battle of the ages taking place in the quietness of these few verses. Jesus is genuinely concerned about the next step here. He is faced with the decision of all time – **THE ULTIMATE DECISION**. Will He save His own hide, or will He be obedient and accept the torture that awaits Him. He has the same free will to choose as each of us has, given to us by God. What will He do? Even though He said, “not my will, but yours be done,” there is still a struggle to carry out that will. Verse 44 bears this out. In His anguish and stress, He succumbs to the Father’s will and resigns Himself to total obedience – thank You Lord. The events that follow are inevitable. The decision that Jesus made in the Garden is what seals the future. This is the place where the battle was fought and won. This is the place where our salvation was sealed. As we look at Jesus’ struggle to submit to the Father’s will, we can see our own struggle with submission to God. Just as God sent an angel to strengthen Jesus so He could choose to obey, so God lends His help to us in our struggles when following His will is difficult. Jesus is our Savior and our example of obedience and prayer.

Verse 44 tells us that “He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” The image here is that of a battle wound, where the blood just drops onto the ground from the wound – a vision that would be fulfilled in a few hours as Jesus dies on the cross and gives His blood as the sin offering for our redemption. You see the anguish did not come to Him merely because He was about to die – even for a good cause. Even the word translated “anguish” here in Luke’s Gospel is unique in the whole N.T. The work Jesus was about to accomplish was unique too. He wasn’t so much stressed about dying as He was about dying for sin. This was foreign to Jesus. Yet, He accepted the challenge. He would go to His death as the suffering servant of the Lord – the innocent suffering for the guilty. This was the crucial moment. Jesus chose wisely – He chose God’s will, not His own desire! Salvation can be ours because of this decision. And just as He wanted to be spared the cross, He also wanted the disciples to be spared the confusion and failure that the crucifixion would bring to them. Jesus prayed for one thing, but had to accept God’s will regardless. We too, may have to face what we do not like for the sake of Christ. As we continue reading Luke’s story in Acts, we see many examples where the Christians had to embrace the message of the crucified Christ, no matter what the cost – even death. Jesus demonstrated surrender – a term we think negatively upon. Surrender is a term of humility, and that’s exactly what Jesus demonstrated as an example to us. Jesus made the Ultimate Decision on the Mount of Olives that evening and the Ultimate Victory was secured there also. When Jesus knelt down to pray, the struggle entered its final phase. When He got up from prayer (v. 45) – it was over! Jesus made the Ultimate Decision and it bought us our freedom, our salvation, eternal life, and peace with God.

What decisions are you facing? Are they spiritual in nature or physical? Either way you are faced with a choice. Will you obey God and choose to follow His will for your life, or will you look for another way? Your decision could affect you and many others down the road. How will you know what to choose? The battle for the souls of the world was fought on His knees. Our battles must also be fought on our knees. Prayer is the key to victory. The disciples fell asleep because of their sorrow verse 45 tells us. Jesus instructed them to pray, but they slept instead. We read later that they were overcome by the situation and all deserted Jesus at His arrest and were scattered. Peter even denied knowing the Lord. The emphasis of this passage is the battle that takes place in prayer. Jesus prayed and was strengthened by an angel. He chose to obey and was victorious in defeating the devil, the enemy of our souls. He was able to face His sacrificial death knowing He was doing the will of God because he prayed it through. Jesus’ instructions to his disciples are His instructions to us today – **Pray that you might not fall into temptation.**