

July 17, 2005 by Steve Brandon



He Remains Faithful

Matthew 26:31-46

1. We are faithless (verses 31-35).
2. He remains faithful (verses 36-46).

Consider the following verse of Scripture: "It is a trustworthy statement, If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). This verse speaks volumes of theology. We are prone to faithlessness. It is our tendency to lose sight of God, and to have doubts in our souls, and to fail in our faithfulness to the Lord. In fact, if you would survey the Bible, you would find that the greatest men that ever lived had moments of doubt. Noah, though identified as a blameless man (Gen. 6:20), was guilty of drunkenness (Gen. 9:21). Abraham, though noted as the father of faith, feared the Egyptian kings and lied to them (Gen. 12, 20). Moses, God's chosen redeemer of Israel, had his moments of unbelief and disobedience to the Lord (Num. 20:11-12). David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), sinned greatly before God, committing adultery and murder.

The Bible is filled with people who exhibit moments of unfaithfulness. In fact, this is what is so encouraging about the Bible. It's not filled with those who have it all together. It's filled with those who don't have it all together, but who have a heart for God. These are the types of people that God uses. This is very encouraging for us, since we all are prone to faithlessness. One of the hymns we love to sing says this very thing, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above." Our only hope is to be helped by God.

Against the backdrop of our unfaithfulness comes the faithfulness of God. If we are faithless, He remains faithful. As Paul said, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). As Malachi says, God doesn't change (Mal. 3:6). As Moses heard, He has always been and always will be (Ex. 3:14). As the Psalmist says, "His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations" (Ps. 100:5). The Lord is faithful. He is faithful to His promises. He is faithful to His people. He is faithful to His purpose in this life -- which is to bring all glory to Himself!

This is why we sing, ...

Fear not, I am with Thee, O be not dismayed
For I am Thy God and will still give Thee aid.
I'll strengthen Thee, help Thee, and cause Thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

These two contrasts of our unfaithfulness and the faithfulness of God are nowhere better illustrated in our text this morning, Matthew 26:31-46. We will see the unfaithfulness of the disciples contrasted with the utter faithfulness of Jesus. There is a saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." And when the going got tough for these disciples, they failed. But when the going got tough for Jesus, He persevered until the end.

My outline will come from 2 Timothy 2:13,
1. We are faithless (verses 31-35).

In verses 31-35, we encounter Jesus telling His disciples that they will be fall away from following Him. In other words, they will be faithless. He says in verse 31, "You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered.'"

Think about the greater context to these words. These disciples had heard of His upcoming death. Jesus had told them this on several occasions. Matthew has recorded that Jesus predicted His death on four separate occasions (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:2). My guess is that Jesus even told them more times than this. So, they knew (at least in their minds), that Jesus would be killed in Jerusalem. But, it never quite sunk in, I suppose. These disciples had also heard that one of them would betray Jesus. Jesus told them these things during the Lord's supper. Several weeks ago we looked at their response to these things. When they heard that one would betray Jesus, each of them said, "Surely, not I, Lord?" (verse 22). None of them could fathom the thought of being the one to betray Jesus. They all thought that they could stand!

But, now, they hear for the first time that none of them would remain faithful to the Lord. One will betray Him. But eleven of them would fail to stand their ground. When the shepherd would be struck down, the sheep would be scattered. When Jesus would be crucified, each of His disciples would be nowhere in sight. In the hour of greatest need, they would all fail. This was certainly difficult for all of them to believe.

Matthew gives us a glimpse into Peter's response in verse 33. Peter said, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away." Peter knew that there was no way that He would betray Jesus. Peter knew that there was no way that He would fail being faithful to Jesus. But Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew Himself. He said, (in verse 34), "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a cock crows, you shall deny Me three times." When Jesus said this, it was already evening. The cocks would regularly crow in Jerusalem between 12am and 3am, which means that it would only be a few hours from Peter's pledge that he would fall. Still clueless of what Jesus was saying,

Peter boldly ventured out, saying, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (verse 35). Now, we all can admire his zeal. We can be encouraged with the boldness of Peter. He was ready and willing to be a martyr for the cause of Jesus. And yet, sadly, Peter did this very thing that he said that he wouldn't do.

Rather than standing firm, Peter wilted in the day of trial, like a flower in the heat of the day. When we get to the end of chapter 26, we will see the very thing that Jesus predicted come to pass. (See verses 69-75). But Peter wasn't the only one who protested to what Jesus said. Matthew tells us at the end of verse 35 that "all the disciples said the same thing too." We get the details with Peter, but each of them were affirming their commitment to be faithful to Jesus. Each of them were saying to Jesus, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (verse 35). John and Matthew and Thaddaeus and Bartholomew were all saying this. This was no band of half-hearted followers. These were men committed to the cause. These were men who were sold-out to following Jesus. They expressed it with their mouths. They are surrounding Jesus saying, "We will be faithful until the end!"

All of them fell away, just as Jesus had predicted. When we come to verse 56, we will see them all leaving Him and fleeing. Perhaps it was when they saw the "swords and clubs" (verse 47) that they realized that this wasn't a video game or a movie. This was the real deal. The day of reckoning was at hand. The Romans had finally caught up with Jesus and were coming to take Jesus by force so that they could kill Him. Such a realization was too much for these disciples. They fled for their lives, lest they too be swept away as prisoners.

Though their flight may have surprised the disciples, it didn't surprise Jesus at all. This was something that Jesus knew would take place. He didn't simply know it because of His foreknowledge (though He did know it by way of foreknowledge). But, He knew it because the Scripture foretold it. In verse 31, Jesus said, "It is written." Had he wanted to, He could have returned to the temple, picked up one of the many scrolls, scrolled over to Zechariah 13:7, and read these very words, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered" (verse 31).

Zechariah 13:7 is a prophecy in the Old Testament that describes how the True Shepherd of Israel is struck down, so that all the sheep will scatter. In the next few verses in Zechariah, the prophet tells how two-thirds of Israel will "be cut off and perish" (Zech. 13:8). But, one-third of Israel will be "refined as silver is refined, and tested as gold is tested" (Zech. 13:9). Though they all are scattered, Zechariah promises a return of some of them. During their trial, they will call upon the name of the Lord and will be saved from their affliction (Zech. 13:9). The same was true of the disciples. They fell down and were scattered. But, there came a point in which they repented of their desertion, called upon the name of Jesus, and were restored.

Jesus alludes to their restoration in verse 32 when he said, "But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." Just as Jesus knew that the disciples would fall away, Jesus also knew that He would be raised from the dead to restore these disciples. At the very end of Matthew, we find Jesus telling the women who found Him raised from the dead at the tomb to "go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me" (Matt. 28:10).

Jesus knew that the cross would not be defeat, but would be victory. After He had been raised from the dead, Jesus knew that He would spend some time with the disciples instructing them of "the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). He told them of how the Holy Spirit would come upon them and restore them into leadership. You can see this in the 21st chapter of John, in which Jesus commissions Peter to shepherd and care for the sheep (John 21:15-17). You can see this in the first chapter of Acts, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, alive from the dead, teaching them of their role in the great commission. Once restored, these disciples went out proclaiming the gospel and changed the course of this world forever! Though these eleven disciples all would flee from Jesus, it would refine them and test them for greater good later.

There are many lessons that we can learn from these disciples at this point. The first is this: "**Let him who thinks he stands, take heed, lest he fall**" (1 Cor. 10:12). It doesn't get much bolder than Peter said in verse 35, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." He wasn't attempting to deceive. He wasn't attempting to play the hypocrite. He was confident to the deep parts of his soul that he would stand firm.

How many times have you given your promise to the Lord that you would do something, only to regret it later when you lacked the strength or courage to carry it out? I think about my Christian life and can think of many things that I have pledged to do, but have failed to do so. I have pledged to be bolder in my evangelism. But, when the moment came to be bold, I have lacked the courage I needed to speak out boldly. I have preached many things that I, myself, have failed to do. My prayer life is not what I have pledged God that it would be. Prayer has easily been squeezed out of my schedule in the business of the day. I don't know how many times that I have told Doug Sosnowski of my goal to finish my sermons up by Friday, so that Saturday could be spent with the church. I've failed miserably.

Perhaps you can relate to this as well. You have made some kind of promise to God to do something or say something to somebody. But, when the hour of testing came, you lacked the courage to carry through with your commitments. Be warned that pride often comes before the fall.

A second lesson that we can learn from these disciples is this: "**Power is perfected in weakness**" (2 Cor. 12:9). All of these disciples proved themselves to be weak. But, I believe that this was the very characteristic of these disciples that delighted the Lord to use them so mightily! In Isaiah 66:2, God tells us the characteristics of the ones to whom He looks. He looks "to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word." This was true of the apostles. When you read through Acts, you are amazed at their strength. But it's not their own strength. It is the Lord working through them.

When the lame man looked to Peter asking for something, Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!" (Acts 3:6). Peter possessed the power of Christ, not the power in himself. The religious leaders were amazed at their boldness, which could only be explained by them "having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). It wasn't their education. It wasn't their training. It was the power of Jesus working through them. When they were flogged for preaching the gospel, they went on their way "rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). The only way that you rejoice when you are being beaten is by a supernatural power working within you. I believe that their extraordinary power came about because of

their first-hand experience with their own weakness. When you know that you are weak, you don't trust yourself, but rather, you trust the power of Christ to work within you.

And so, church family, I exhort you to embrace your weaknesses and realize that it's the sovereign power of God working through you that will carry you through the trials that you encounter in your life. This is why Paul said to Timothy, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1). It's when God's grace works through you that you will be able to stand firmly. The song we sang today fits it very well, "Jesus, you're my firm foundation, I know I can stand secure." How can we stand? By trusting in ourselves? No. The song answers, "I put my trust in Your holy Word." That's how we make it through the trials of life. And when you have been beaten down to see your weaknesses, it's only then that you will fully realize how perfect His strength is.

2. He remains faithful (verses 36-46).

Verse 36 takes us to the garden of Gethsemane, which means "oil press." It's a great name that describes what happened to Jesus in the garden. He was squeezed to the uttermost. Gethsemane was a shady spot on the western slope of the Mount of Olives. The only thing that separated it from the city of Jerusalem was the Kidron valley. We learn from John's account of the life of Jesus that Jesus would often retire there with His disciples (John 18:2), which helps to explain how Judas was able to lead a band of Roman soldiers to that very location in the night to arrest Jesus.

As Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, He was accompanied by eleven of His disciples. To eight of them, he said, "Sit here while I go over there and pray" (verse 36). To the other three (Peter, James and John, who were her inner circle of disciples), Jesus took them "with Him." To these three, Jesus revealed the state of His soul, saying (in verse 38), "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

At this point, the reality of His crucifixion was sinking deep into His thoughts. Jesus was destined to die upon a cross. For years, Jesus knew clearly what the future held for Him. Before He came into the flesh, He knew what would take place. In fact, Jesus knew from eternity past what would take place. But now, as the hours draw close, His soul was grieved. It's one thing for a dreaded event to be taking place several years from now. But, when the dreaded event will take place in a few hours, our anxiety level naturally arises. As a pastor, there have been difficult things that I have needed to do. There have been difficult decisions to make. There have been difficult conversations that have needed to take place. And my experience is that if it is a week (or a month, or a year off), it doesn't cause too much anxiety in my soul. But, when the day arrives to take action, my stomach has often been filled with butterflies in anticipation of what will take place during that day.

This was taking place in the life of Jesus. He knew full well that Judas would come and betray Him in the garden, shortly after He finished praying. Judas didn't surprise Jesus and His followers. In verses 45-46, Jesus told His disciple that Judas was about to arrive. Jesus knew that His hour had come. Jesus knew that His life would soon be over. Jesus knew that He was about to experience some great suffering. And as Jesus looked forward to what He would face, he was "deeply grieved" (verse 38). Luke tells us that the stress upon Jesus was so great that "His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44).

At this point, Jesus wasn't doing well. The situation weighed heavily upon His mind. He was greatly distressed. When Jesus said, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death," I believe that Jesus meant that He would die from grief apart from the sustaining grace of God. The pressure was so heavy upon Him that Jesus thought that He might never make it to the cross. Thus, He needed to pray.

At the end of verse 38, we see Jesus instructing Peter, James and John, "remain here and keep watch with Me." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Let me be alone. If anyone comes to wants to talk with me, please keep them away until I am finished praying. I need some time to deal with my troubled soul."

Think about the disciples at this point. Jesus had always been their courageous leader! When massive opposition came, Jesus had always stood as a rock! Jesus was Brett Favre in the huddle saying, "I know that we are down seven with 1:30 to go in this game. I know that we have the full length of the field to go. But, trust me. We will win." But at this point, Jesus was acting more like Bob Avelini (a former quarterback for the Chicago Bears in the 1970's, of whom you may not have heard because he didn't come close to reaching legendary status). Bob Avelini's confidence was certainly not like that of Brett Favre's. I'm sure at this point that the disciples began to understand the severity of the moment. "If this situation is shaking Jesus to the core of His soul, what will it do to us?"

In verse 39, we see Jesus going "a little beyond them" to be by Himself during this hour of great trial. He "fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will'" (verse 39). Though Jesus was shaken, He still stood firm. The cup is clearly symbolic of the suffering of the wrath of God that would come upon Him. Many references in the Old Testament use this metaphor. Consider the following: Psalm 75:8, "A cup is in the hand of the LORD, and the wine foams; It is well mixed, and He pours out of this; Surely all the wicked of the earth must drain and drink down its dregs." Jeremiah 25:15, refers to the "cup of wine of wrath." (There are many more such references found in the Old Testament).

At this moment, you need to realize what Jesus was facing. Upon the cross, Jesus wasn't simply facing His own death. He was facing a billion deaths. From time to time there are stories that come across the news wire of a mass murderer who finally gets his day in court. Through the testimony of the court, it become plain, beyond a reasonable doubt, that this man murdered four people in cold blood on a night of rage. Due to the particular state in which the crime was committed, the death sentence is not allowed. And so, the murderer is punished to four life-sentences. I've always been confused at how exactly that works itself out. Each of us have only one life. How can you serve four life-sentences? But, such a sentence, it does do well to communicate the punishment that is deserved: one life sentence for each murder committed.

But when Jesus suffered upon the cross, He suffered death for all of those who would believe in Jesus. We certainly don't know how many people this is. There are currently in this world 2 billion professing Christians. In previous centuries, there have been billions others who have professed their allegiance to Christ. Accounting for the many false professors of faith as Christ told us that there would be, I'm throwing out a

number like a billion to give you some sense of the magnitude of the suffering that Jesus would face. Perhaps the number is in the hundreds of millions. There is no way of really knowing. But, we do know that upon the cross, Jesus would face the fierce wrath of God, for every person who would believe in Him.

It caused Him much anxiety. In His humanness, Jesus was looking for a way out. He knew that there was no other way, but the cross. But, so distressed He was at the incredible suffering that He would experience, that He pleaded with the Father for another way. Perhaps there was something else that He was missing. You need to catch what Jesus was doing. He was praying for something that was contrary to the will of God, hoping that it would allow Him not to suffer.

And yet, through it all, He entrusted Himself to the will of the Father. With those famous words, "yet not as I will, but as You will" (verse 39), we are given an example of how we all ought to face our trials. Jesus was hours away from being mocked (Luke 22:63), from being beaten (Luke 22:63), from being blindfolded and hit by soldiers, who ridiculed Him, "Prophesy, who is the one who hit You?" (Luke 22:64), and from being blasphemed (Luke 22:65). Worst of all, Jesus was hours away from being abandoned by God Himself (Matt. 27:46). And through it all, Jesus gave Himself over to the will of the Father. He remained faithful. His trial was far more difficult than the trial of Peter. Peter fell when only his own death was at stake. But Jesus stood firm with a billion deaths upon His shoulders.

"Not as I will, but as You will" give us great application. When difficulties come in your life, plead with God for a way out! Certainly, pray for a way out of the difficulties. Pray for a solution that you can't see. I encourage you even to pray for the impossible! Pray for miraculous healing! Pray for repentance! Pray for someone's change of heart. And yet, say at the end of your prayers, "Yet not as I will, but as You will." And when you pray that way, entrust yourself to His will. You may not be too thrilled with it. You may not be excited about it. It may even cause you much hurt and pain and distress. But, accept it! And realize that the end of God's will is worth any difficulties that you experience while going through trials.

This was true of Jesus. Why did Jesus willingly endure the cross? The writer to the Hebrews say that it was "for the joy set before Him [that He] endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). Jesus willingly suffered the shame of the cross, because He was convinced of the joy on the other end. The same is true of your life. You will be more joyful in suffering in the will of God that you will be when you are outside of the will of God, due to your own unfaithfulness. God's will is always better than the sufferings that you endure. Paul said it well in Romans 8:18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." In another place, Paul wrote of how our "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). Church family, be like Jesus and throw yourself upon the kind will of God and trust Him in the direst of circumstances.

For Jesus, this was the dark night of His soul. You may very well come to a similar crisis in your life. When you do, throw yourself upon God, who is able to sustain you. This is what Martin Luther did in his greatest hour of need. Luther had been summoned to stand before Charles, the Holy Roman Emperor. He was accused of heresy, which would bring forth the sentence of death. On April 17, 1521, he was asked to recant of his writings. On this day, Luther failed to stand firm. Instead, he claiming to be only a monk, he asked for one more day to think. Enclosed in his room, all alone, some have called this night "his Gethsemane." Luther wrote out his prayer of humble dependence upon the Lord. I include it here as a model for you in your day of crisis. Luther wrote, ...

O God, Almighty God everlasting! how dreadful is the world! behold how its mouth opens to swallow me up, and how small is my faith in Thee! . . . Oh! the weakness of the flesh, and the power of Satan! If I am to depend upon any strength of this world—all is over. . . . The knell is struck. . . . Sentence is gone forth. . . . O God! O God! O thou, my God! help me against all the wisdom of this world. Do this, I beseech thee; thou shouldst do this . . . by thy own mighty power. . . . The work is not mine, but Thine. I have no business here. . . . I have nothing to contend for with these great men of the world! I would gladly pass my days in happiness and peace. But the cause is Thine. . . . And it is righteous and everlasting! O Lord! help me! O faithful and unchangeable God! I lean not upon man. It were vain! Whatever is of man is tottering, whatever proceeds from him must fail. My God! my God! does thou not hear? My God! art thou no longer living? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou dost but hide Thyself. Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it! . . . Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will! Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defence, my buckler, and my stronghold.

Lord—where art thou? . . . My God, where art thou? . . . Come! I pray thee, I am ready . . . Behold me prepared to lay down my life for thy truth . . . suffering like a lamb. For the cause is holy. It is thine own! . . . I will not let thee go! no, nor yet for all eternity! And though the world should be thronged with devils—and this body, which is the work of thine hands, should be cast forth, trodden under foot, cut in pieces, . . . consumed to ashes, my soul is thine. Yes, I have thine own word to assure me of it. My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee forever! Amen! O God send help! . . . Amen! [\[1\]](#)

The very next day, the Lord strengthened Martin Luther. Boldly declaring to those who had the power to kill him, he said, ...

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen." [\[2\]](#)

In your greatest hour of need, be like Jesus and Martin Luther and cry out to the Lord for help. He will strengthen you to accomplish His will, despite the difficulties that lie in the way. The glorious news that comes as a result of Jesus standing firm in His trial is that Jesus knows our weakness. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). This is point of our passage in Matthew 26. Jesus remained faithful. We can trust Him. We should follow His example. He is able to come to your aid in your trouble. The same thing is communicated in Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

Getting back to our text, we find Jesus finishing His prayer. In verse 40 we read that Jesus "came to the disciples and found them sleeping." Earlier, Jesus had told them to "keep watch with me" (verse 38). But, they failed in their task. This brings us back to our first point: we are faithless. Here was Jesus in His hour of greatest need, being left alone by His uncaring disciples. The true friend can stay awake! The true friend can help at all hours of the night. But, they were sleeping like babies.

The response of Jesus is amazing. He rebukes them. He warns them. And He gives them an excuse for their sleep. He said, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? [That's the rebuke]. Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; [That's the warning]. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. [That's the excuse]." Jesus said, "I've been praying for an hour. It's really not very long! You should have been able to stay awake for an hour. I know of your frailty. I know that you are weak. I am mindful that you are but dust. But, here, this will help you. Pray that you might be vigilant and stay awake in this most crucial hour."

Have you ever fell asleep when praying? I know that I have. In fact, even this week I fell asleep when praying with my wife. She continued on praying and I was sleeping. I was awakened when she said "Amen" and stopped talking.

Have you ever tried to pray for an hour? It's difficult. And yet, with a bit of practice, it is possible to do. One of my most memorable classes that I took in seminary was a class on prayer. The homework for the class was an hour of prayer every day (along with reading a short book and writing a short paper). Over the course of the semester, it did a great job of helping me experience the discipline necessary to pray for an hour.

I read the story this week of J. Sidlow Baxter, who knew the battle of praying. He spoke of the battle that raged in his mind. The Spirit of God was calling him to pray. But, another voice within his head was telling him how unpractical it was to pray. His intellect wanted to pray, but his emotions didn't. Baxter explained the situation using these words in Bunyanish language:

As never before, my will and I stood face to face. I asked my will the straight question, Will, are you ready for an hour of prayer?" Will answered, "Here I am, and I'm quite ready, if you are." So Will and I linked arms and turned to go for our time of prayer.

At once all the emotions began pulling the other way and protesting, "We are not coming." I saw Will stagger just a bit, so I asked, "Can you stick it out, Will?" and Will replied, "Yes, if you can." So Will went, and we got down to prayer, dragging those wriggling, obstreperous emotions with us.

It was a struggle all the way through. At one point, when Will and I were in the middle of an earnest intercession, I suddenly found one of those traitorous emotions had snared my imagination and had run off to the golf course; and it was all I could do to drag the wicked rascal back. A bit later I found another of the emotions had sneaked away with some off-guard thoughts and was in the pulpit, two days ahead of schedule, preaching a sermon that I had not yet finished preparing!

At the end of that hour, if you had asked me, "Have you had a 'good time'?" I would have had to reply, "No, it has been a wearying wrestle with contrary emotions and a truant imagination from beginning to end." What is more, that battle with the emotions continued for between two and three weeks, and if you asked me at the end of that period, "Have you had a 'good time' in your daily praying?" I would have had to confess, "No, at times it has seemed as though the heavens were brass, God too distant to hear, the Lord Jesus strangely aloof and prayer accomplished nothing." Yet something was happening.

For one thing, Will and I really taugth the emotions that we were completely independent of them. Also, one morning, about two weeks after the contest began, just when Will and I were going for another time of prayer, I overheard one of the emotions whisper to the other, "Come on, you guys, it is no use wasting any more time resisting: they'll go just the same." That morning, for the first time, even though the emotions were still suddenly uncooperative, they were at least quiescent, which allowed Will and me to get on with prayer undistracted.

Then, another couple of weeks later, what do you think happened? During one of our prayer times, when Will and I were no more thinking of the emotions than of the man-in-the-moon, one of the most vigorous of the emotions unexpectedly sprang up and shouted, "Hallelujah!" at which all the other emotions exclaimed, "Amen!" And for the first time the whole of my being-intellect, will, and emotions-was united in one coordinated prayer-operation."

We all have need to learn this lesson. The disciples had great need to learn this lesson. They needed to have a talk with Will so that they might pray that they might not fall.

At this point, you need to notice that the solutions to the problems of life are prayer. This is what Jesus instructed His disciples to do when they were facing temptation. This is what Jesus modeled in His own life.

In verse 42 we read that Jesus "went away again a second time to pray." Perhaps He prayed for another hour. We really don't know. We know that the thrust of his prayer was exactly the same as the first time. He said, "My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done." Rather than referring to the cup, He refers to drinking. Rather than saying, "not as I will, but as You will," He says, "Your will be done" (verse 42). Again, He prays for the impossible and resigns Himself to will of His Father.

Sadly, the disciples were just as faithless as before. Look at verse 43, "And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy." Though Matthew doesn't record it, Mark indicates that Jesus had awakened them and confronted them with their weakness. And "they did not know what to answer Him" (Mark 14:40).

Jesus was fully aware of what was taking place. He was faithfully praying for the Lord's strength, with the weight of the world's sin upon His shoulders. But the contrast is these disciples, who couldn't even lift an ounce. (I assume that our eyelids weigh about an ounce).

This whole cycle of prayer and sleeping is repeated again in verses 44-46, "And He left them again, and went away and prayed a third time, saying the same thing once more. Then He came to the disciples, and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!'"

Jesus certainly prayed something very similar to what He had prayed before. "Father, please, I know that you can do all things! The thought of going through these things are killing me. I know that you are concerned for your Son. Is there anyway out of this?"

People debate how it is that Matthew recorded these words of Jesus' prayer, especially since the three closest disciples were sleeping when Jesus was praying. There are really two possibilities. First, these disciples could have asked Jesus what he prayed in the garden during the forty days that Jesus spent teaching them after the resurrection (Acts 1:3). Second, Jesus may have prayed loudly enough to hear Him. The writer to the Hebrews said that "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety" (Heb. 5:7). The agony was so great that the sheer volume of His prayer could be heard a long way off. This writer is describing passionate, repeated prayers, that were heard by God. If you are ever in doubt as to whether or not you should pray repeatedly for something, let Jesus be your model and be assured that you should. If you are ever in doubt as to whether or not you should pray to the Lord with passion, let Jesus be your model, and be assured that you should. If you are ever in doubt as to whether or not God hears your prayers, let Jesus be your model. He was heard "because of His piety" (Heb. 5:7).

There are passages in the Bible that indicate that an unrighteous life will offer up vain prayers before the Lord. For instance, Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." In 1 Peter 3:7 we are told that a husband's prayers will be hindered if he fails to grant proper honor to his wife. But, if you are living righteously, you may be assured that your prayers will be heard and answered.

The question rightly comes, "How is it that God heard the prayers of Jesus, but let Him suffer upon the cross?" I think that it is just like Paul. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul described the thorn in his flesh that he prayed to be removed on three occasions. The Lord answered the prayer, not by taking away the thorn, but rather by affirming to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Perhaps this is the answer that Jesus received. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" During His prayer in Gethsemane, Luke mentions that "an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him" (Luk 22:43). Perhaps this angel was whispering in Jesus' ear, "Jesus, His grace is sufficient for You. Trust Him." Jesus did this very thing. Over the next few hours, abundant grace was poured out upon Jesus, who was faithful to the end.

In an of ourselves, we are weak. But, we have a great Savior, who remains faithful!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 17, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Quoted by R. C. Sproul in his book, *The Holiness of God*, pp. 110-111.

[2] Quoted by Roland Bainton in his book, *Here I Stand*, p. 144.

[3] Quoted by R. Kent Hughes in his book, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, pp. 105-106.