

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 24 September 2000

No. T0129

Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Night Scenes of Scripture: A night with the Dependent Man

I well remember the feeling of utter exhaustion when I arrived in San Juan on my first ever visit to Puerto Rico. The day for me had started very early in the morning so that I could get an early flight from Newcastle airport to London, Heathrow. There I had to wait a few hours for my international connection to the east coast of the United States of America. After another wait in the USA, I flew on to Puerto Rico and landed in San Juan, very late at night. The hotel bus had long since finished operating for the day, and there was no alternative but to use the local taxi service. I had been forewarned by colleagues who had previously visited the island to take care because some of these were 'unofficial' services. However, just at that moment my body clock was telling me that it was about 7 hours past my usual bedtime, so I resigned myself to the situation. I had to rely on the goodness of God to protect me from the unknown dangers of the night in, what seemed to be, a long and tortuous journey to the hotel.

It was much more difficult and dangerous for the Lord Jesus Christ on the night of His arrest and trial that led up to his crucifixion the very next day. He knew all that would happen to Him. Yet He remained so alert and so much in control, despite the lack of sleep and the great pressures upon Him. All of that night He showed that unique dependency upon God which had so characterised His life of service.

All four Gospel writers combine to give us the complete story of this long night of all nights. We will draw upon each of them as appropriate. Take time after this broadcast to read the verses again.

Luke's Gospel portrays the Lord Jesus as the true Man. Seven times over in it He is seen praying to His God. This shows that He completely relied upon His Father's help. The final reference to Him praying is in Luke 22:39-42, in the Garden of Gethsemane. This story forms the major part of today's talk about "A night with the dependent Man".

The six other occasions when Jesus prayed which are mentioned in Luke's Gospel are:-

1. At His Baptism, in 3:21-22: "When all the people were baptised, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptised; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.'"
2. In the wilderness, after He healed the leper in 5:15-16; "... the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."
3. In the mountain before He chose the twelve, in 6:12 -13: "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles..."
4. In 9:18, when He was alone after feeding the 5,000: "And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'"
5. At His Transfiguration, in 9:29: "As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening"; and finally
6. In 11:1, when He taught the disciples to pray: "Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.'"

Now Jesus goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, situated in the Mount of Olives, immediately after celebrating the Passover Supper with His disciples. That evening had been filled with sorrow for both Him and them. To us today the highlight of the evening was when He introduced the Supper of bread and wine by which His followers can remember Him in His death. For the disciples, there were the shock announcements of His imminent departure, and the statement that one of them would betray Him. Jesus was also concerned about their safety and about giving them instructions for life on earth without Him. And whereas the disciples were disputing about which of them should be the

greatest, Jesus was interested in completing the will of God, including serving them. "...Yet I am among you as the One who serves", Luke 22:27. He knew that the events of that evening were reaching their climax, as He says in 22:37 of Luke: "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."

As late evening drew on, the Teacher, followed by His disciples, left the Upper Room to cross over the brook Kidron for the Mount of Olives. Judas knew that Jesus and His disciples were accustomed to going that place at night when they were in Jerusalem. It is probable that His habit was to pray to God there in the Garden of Gethsemane. We have already noticed that He had spent the whole night in prayer before the important task of choosing the Twelve. Now it was the work of redemption which had to be completed and Jesus needed strength for the coming hours of the long night through to the next day when He would be crucified.

He had lived His life in the spirit of Psalm 16:1: "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust." But in this prayer in the garden He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Matthew 26:36-44 tells us: "Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.' He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.' Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.' And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words."

Peter, James and John were willing to go with Him to pray, but they were unable to stay awake! Then they were embarrassed when Jesus admonished them. How often I am reminded of these words of His: "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?" when I weary in prayer, or when my thoughts wander at the Breaking of Bread service! They were privileged to be invited to watch with Him in the hour of His deepest sorrow. And so are we when we attend the Lord's Supper!

To show that He was relying only upon God, and not upon His chosen three disciples, Jesus withdrew from them about a stone's throw. The thought of being made sin distressed His soul so much that Luke records in 22:44: "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." His anticipation of the cross was so intense that it brought Him almost to the point of death. And the actual reality of anguish in death came upon Him on the cross as is prophetically stated in Lamentations 1:12; "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the LORD has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger."

Jesus had no thought of turning away from the task in front of Him. Had that been so, He would have avoided Judas, and arrest, by not going into the garden. His concern was to refuse His own human will: "O, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me;" was the request of the One Who was totally committed to the will of God. This was qualified with the words: "nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." His second request: "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it", was supplemented with the repeated acceptance of God's will: "Your will be done." In His third request, Jesus used the same words again, showing that prayers may, and can, be repeated.

We, too, may need to make urgent prayer in very trying circumstances of life. Whatever they may be, and whenever they occur, Jesus our Lord is not only the perfect example to follow, He is also our great High Priest. We know from this garden scene that He has passed the way before us and therefore He is able to help and support us. Unlike Him, we may not understand what the will of God is at such times, and we may feel overwhelmed, but we will find strength in knowing that He has been to the extreme, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death."

In Psalm 69:20, Jesus prophetically says that He did not receive any human help: "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." The angel who "appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him," Luke 22:43, was an indication to Him of God's readiness to help. In Psalm 91:2, His dependence upon God throughout the entire course of His life as the Messiah, is stated: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.'" This trust is answered with a promise in verse 11 of that Psalm: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." He is assured that He will be protected from every kind of danger in life, even those of the night of His betrayal.

Even the best of human help was unreliable as the Lord Jesus found with His three companions. They were asleep each time He returned from prayer! He alone was aware of the dangers, and He was ready for the betrayer's kiss:

"Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand'", Mark 14:41-42. Jesus' reliability contrasts with Judas turning against Him. Addressing Judas personally, Jesus showed He had not changed: "Friend, why have you come?" Matthew 26:50, and, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Luke 22:48. What hurt must the Lord have felt, reflected in Psalm 41:9 by David when he was betrayed: "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me". Jesus knew the motive of Judas was not to greet Him with kisses, but to identify Him to the band of troops and officers from the Jewish authorities, so that they could arrest Him.

The immediate reaction of the disciples was to resist and to fight. Peter used a sword to cut off the High Priest's servant's ear. Jesus rebuked him: "...Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" John 18:11. He healed Malchus' ear with a touch. The disciples had missed the point of the discussions about swords and money in the Upper Room. It was for their protection, not the Lord's. Jesus knew that He could rely on God. As He says to Peter, more than twelve legions of angels were available to Him at that moment by a prayer to His Father. But His overriding desire was to complete the task given to Him by His Father: "How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" Matthew 26:54. This reminds us that when He came into the world He had quoted from Psalm 40:7-8: "...Behold, I have come - In the volume of the book it is written of Me - To do Your will, O God.", as we are told in Hebrews 10:7. The attitude of the Lord Jesus we see here during His arrest in the garden is of total surrender to the will of God. This helps us to answer to the exhortations of Romans 12:1-2, where we are required to prove the will of God in our lives.

It's amazing that the people who came to arrest Jesus were found helpless upon the ground before Him as the great I AM. John records in 18:4-6: "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He. And Judas, who betrayed Him, stood with them. Now when He said to them, 'I am He,' they drew back and fell to the ground." Then what care and concern He showed for His disciples at that time, as He goes on to say in verses 8-9: "...Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way, that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none'".

However, the disciples immediately deserted Him, and He was left alone in the hands of the rough mob, angered by those conscience-piercing words: "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness," Luke 22:52-53. Jesus knew that He was not alone, but that the Father was present with Him, so He allowed Himself to be bound. In doing so, He was again depending entirely on God's support for the events which followed.

Peter and John followed the Lord at a safe distance into the high priest's courtyard. Although Peter denied his Master three times, he learnt many lessons when he observed the impeccable behaviour of the dependent Man. Many years later he wrote about it in 1 Peter 2:21-24: "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth'; Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live by righteousness- by whose stripes you were healed." The words "committed Himself" fully describe Him as the dependent Man. He knew that God would answer this disgraceful treatment from men, when He was so physically and verbally abused; and that He would answer also the injustice of that trial. So much so, that He did not answer a word of accusation, and it was only when He was placed under an oath by the high priest that He spoke to confirm that He was the Son of God. He was obliged to do this to remain obedient to the law of God, as given in the Old Testament.

As Christians we are called to follow the Master, as these verses already quoted from 1 Peter remind us. It may be God's will for us to suffer wrongfully, in an unfair and hurtful way; it was so for Christ. We can partake of Christ's sufferings if we, like Him, commit ourselves to God. Peter goes on to say in 1 Peter 4:19: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator". And he tells us in 2:25 that we are under the guardianship of the Lord during such experiences: "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls".

Not only was Jesus betrayed by a friend, and deserted by His disciples, but Peter also denied Him. Peter had boasted of his commitment to his Lord, even to prison and death, in an open and public way. He tried to remain loyal in his own strength, but he soon failed amidst the hostility of those in the high priest's courtyard. The Lord knew that even the best intentions of a zealous disciple like Peter would fail Him. Luke records in Luke 22:61: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to Him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So Peter went out and wept bitterly." If like Peter, we turn away from self-reliance back to the God of all grace, we will find strength for every trial.

The Lord's reliance upon His God remained constant throughout that night and into the early hours of the next day. This enabled Him to endure the mockery and abuse from men. He was silent as He stood before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and before Herod. He then was treated with contempt by the Roman soldiers, and rejected by the crowd, before finally being crucified. On the cross, He was abandoned by the God He had relied upon, when, in the three hours of darkness, He was made sin. But let's read again from Luke's Gospel, the Gospel of the Dependent Man, from 23:44-46: "Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last." We know that He was heard because of His godly fear, as expressed in Psalm 31:5, from which He used these remarkable words at the end of His separation from God: "Into Your hands I commit my spirit." Three times over in this psalm, the Psalmist repeats his confidence in God: in verse 1, in verse 6, and in verse 14. The total dependence upon God by the Lord Jesus Christ can thus be traced through this psalm, a confidence which God in His faithfulness answered in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: "...Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You", verse 22 of the same psalm. We can take encouragement this morning from the end of this psalm of trust in God, from verses 23 and 24: "Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful ... Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD."

Let's pray:

Our God and Father, we thank You that the Lord Jesus showed those characteristics of godliness when He depended on You through that night in which He was delivered up to death. Such a scene cause us to worship You. Help us to say, like Him, and the Psalmist, about all of life: "But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in Your Hand..." [Psalm 31:14 -15]. We ask this in His Name, Amen.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.