

“Pray That You May Not Enter into Temptation” (Luke 22:39–46)

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Many people claim to be Christians. And if you ask these people questions about different issues, whether those are ethical or doctrinal, you’ll likely get very different answers. In fact, if you ask people who claim to be Christians some very basic questions about who Jesus is and what he achieved during his time on earth, you’ll likely get different answers, too. That’s sad.

There are many truths about Jesus that are quite clearly expressed in the Bible. It’s rather clear that he was a man, a human being. Though he was conceived in a unique way, he was born, grew up, ate, drank, got tired, slept, felt emotions, experienced pain and suffering, and he died. If you pay attention to what the Bible says, I think it’s also clear that he’s the Son of God. He claims to be divine and equal to God the Father, he claims to forgive sins not committed directly against him, he says that people will be condemned if they don’t believe in him and follow his words.

Yet there are some aspects of Jesus that are harder to understand. How is that he could be both God and human at the same time? How could Jesus be tempted if he’s God? If he’s God, how could he really suffer? What exactly did his death accomplish?

These issues aren’t just intellectual issues. These theological issues have an impact on how we live. Knowing who Jesus is and what he came to do will shape our lives in dramatic ways, particularly as we deal with issues of sin and suffering.

Today, as we continue to study the Gospel of Luke, we’ll consider some of the more difficult aspects of who Jesus is and what he did. We’ll be looking at Luke 22:39–46, the passage that describes Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before he died. We’ll think about why Jesus prayed, what he prayed for, and the results of his prayer. And we’ll consider his words to his disciples, that they should pray that they may not enter into temptation.

So, with that in mind, let’s read today’s passage. Here is Luke 22:39–46:

³⁹ And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. ⁴⁰ And when he came to the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” ⁴¹ And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, ⁴² saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”

⁴³ And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. ⁴⁴ And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵ And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”¹

Just to give us a bit of context: As I said, this is the night before Jesus will die. He is about to be arrested. He has already taken one last Passover meal with his disciples, he has told them something about the meaning of his imminent death, and he has warned them that one of them will betray him and one of them will deny him. Then, he and his followers left Jerusalem, crossed the Kidron Valley, just east of the city, and came to the Garden of Gethsemane, at the foot of the western slope of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus tells his disciples to pray that they may not enter into temptation, and then he withdraws a relatively short distance from them to pray on his own. In Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospels, we’re told that Jesus took his inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him (Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42).

Now, I want us to see why Jesus prayed. Why, at this moment, does Jesus pray? In fact, why does Jesus need to pray at all, if he’s God? Well, Jesus prayed throughout his time on earth because he was also a man. He came to live the perfect human life. Most of the time, he didn’t rely on his divine power. There were times when he performed miracles and didn’t pray beforehand. But as a human being, and as the perfect human being, he relied on God the Father’s provision. A perfect human being realizes that he or she isn’t God, that God is the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider of all things. So, a perfect human being doesn’t rely on his own strength, but instead he relies on God.

Prayer isn’t simply asking God for things. We’ve read through most of the Psalms on Sunday mornings, and in those poems, those prayers, you see that the psalmists often express emotions to God. They simply talk to God. They praise him. They tell him how they are feeling. They express their concerns, their sorrows. They confess their sins. They dare to command God to rise up and defeat their enemies. They ask God where he is and how long it will be before they are vindicated. Prayer is quite simply spending time with God. Prayer is taking whatever you’re going through and processing it in the presence of God. God already knows whatever it is that you’ll say. You’re not going to tell something new to God. He knows everything, even what is

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

going on in your heart and mind. God doesn't need your requests to act. But what prayer does is it helps us to focus on God. In our time of need, it reminds us that God is there, that God is in control, and that he is our ultimate source of help and hope. Prayer realigns us to God.

So, why does Jesus pray? He knows what's happening. He knows he's about to die. He already has clearly predicted his death. He knows his body will be broken and his blood poured out. He knows Judas Iscariot is telling the Jewish leaders right now that where they can arrest him away from the teeming crowds in Jerusalem. Jesus knows that what he is about to endure isn't just physical suffering, as bad as that will be. He is going to experience something far beyond physical pain. So, he prays.

What does Jesus pray for? Here is his prayer: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Jesus is asking to be relieved of something. But what? He wants a "cup" to be removed from him. Since he's not literally drinking anything, this cup must be a figurative or symbolic reference. What is this cup? I've heard some people refer to this as a cup of suffering. It is that. But the cup refers to more than just suffering. You and I suffer in various ways. But the cup that Jesus had to drink wasn't just any suffering.

To understand what "this cup" refers to, we must go back to the Old Testament. As a Jewish man, Jesus was steeped in the Old Testament. He often quoted and alluded to the Old Testament, just as the early Christian writers like Paul did. The cup is a reference to something we find in the Old Testament. It's best to look at some passages that mention this cup to understand what Jesus is talking about.

First, we'll look at the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied over seven hundred years earlier, at a time when Israel was divided into two kingdoms. During his ministry, the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrian Empire, and later, the southern kingdom of Judah would be defeated by the Babylonian Empire. The division and defeat of Israel happened because the Israelites turned away from God. They didn't trust him and love him as they should have. They disobeyed him, broke his commands, and also started to worship false gods, idols. So, God gave them over to their sins and to their enemies. But God promised he would deliver a remnant, whom he would call back to himself and save.

In Isaiah 51, God says he would comfort his people, thought they had forgotten him (Isa. 51:12–13). Because they had forgotten him, God gave them over to punishment. Look at verses 17–23:

- 17 Wake yourself, wake yourself,
stand up, O Jerusalem,
you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD
the cup of his wrath,
who have drunk to the dregs
the bowl, the cup of staggering.
- 18 There is none to guide her
among all the sons she has borne;
there is none to take her by the hand
among all the sons she has brought up.
- 19 These two things have happened to you—
who will console you?—
devastation and destruction, famine and sword;
who will comfort you?
- 20 Your sons have fainted;
they lie at the head of every street
like an antelope in a net;
they are full of the wrath of the LORD,
the rebuke of your God.
- 21 Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted,
who are drunk, but not with wine:
- 22 Thus says your Lord, the LORD,
your God who pleads the cause of his people:
“Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering;
the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more;
- 23 and I will put it into the hand of your tormentors,
who have said to you,
‘Bow down, that we may pass over’;
and you have made your back like the ground
and like the street for them to pass over.”

Jerusalem had once drunk the cup of God’s wrath, the cup of staggering, the bowl of his wrath. But now God says he will take that cup from them and give it to their enemies. The cup symbolizes God’s judgment against sin, his righteous anger and punishment against rebellion. Sin is a destructive force, wreaking destruction in God’s creation. God has every right to get angry against sin and to cast sinners out of his creation. If someone came into your home and

started tearing things up and harming your family, you would want them to be removed and punished. So it is with God. To face God's righteous punishment against sin is a dreadful thing.

There are other passages that talk of this cup of wrath. Consider Jeremiah 25:15–16:

¹⁵ Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

¹⁶ They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them."

God told the prophet Jeremiah to give the nations, including Judah, the cup of his wrath. What he means is that Jeremiah was supposed to warn the nations of God's judgment. A day of judgment, the Day of the Lord, will come upon the whole earth. All who have rejected God and rebelled against him will drink this cup.

God sends a similar message through the prophet Ezekiel. In chapter 23 of that book, God describes in a somewhat metaphorical way how both Israel and Judah, the divided kingdoms of Israel, rejected him and went after other gods. He tells Judah that what happened to her "sister" shall happen to her. Here is Ezekiel 23:31–34:

³¹ You have gone the way of your sister; therefore I will give her cup into your hand. ³² Thus says the Lord GOD:

"You shall drink your sister's cup
that is deep and large;
you shall be laughed at and held in derision,
for it contains much;
³³ you will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow.
A cup of horror and desolation,
the cup of your sister Samaria;
³⁴ you shall drink it and drain it out,
and gnaw its shards,
and tear your breasts;

for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD.

Drinking from that cup sounds like a terrible thing, something that brings shame, horror, destruction, and pain.

Another passage that speaks of the cup is Psalm 75:6–8:

⁶ For not from the east or from the west
and not from the wilderness comes lifting up,

⁷ but it is God who executes judgment,
putting down one and lifting up another.

8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup
with foaming wine, well mixed,
and he pours out from it,
and all the wicked of the earth
shall drain it down to the dregs.

Again, the cup is associated with judgment.

There are a few other passages that mention the cup, but this is enough to see that the cup is something dreadful. It is a cup of God's judgment, his wrath against sin. It brings destruction, horror, pain. It's like drinking the worst poison that first makes someone crazy before killing them in the worst possible way. This is the cup that Jesus was referring to.

Why does this matter? Because there are some people who say that Jesus was referring to a cup of suffering. The cup does entail suffering, but it's not just suffering. Jesus didn't just suffer. You and I suffer, but we don't face what Jesus faced. He didn't just experience physical pain and death. He bore the wrath of God on the cross. Some people refuse to believe that. They say Jesus died as an example of how to lay down your life, or that he died because he was oppressed by a class of oppressors. There's truth to those statements. But Jesus' death wasn't just an accident. It was planned by God. And his death accomplished something. He died to pay the penalty of sin for his people. If his death didn't accomplish something, it wouldn't be a good example. But we know that Jesus came to save his people from their sin (Matt. 1:21), and that his death ransomed his people from sin (Matt. 20:28; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:17–19; 2:18–25).

So, why is Jesus asking for this cup to be removed? Jesus knows he must die. He has already predicted his death. He realizes that it is part of the divine plan. But Jesus also knows that experiencing the wrath of God is something he hasn't experienced before. He has to this point experienced unbroken fellowship with God the Father. He has only experienced the Father's love and approval. Now, he knows that the experience of the Father's love will be overshadowed by the experience of the Father's wrath. He will experience a psychological, spiritual torment—what can best be described as hell on earth—and this is not something that Jesus wants to experience.

To understand what's happening, we must first understand that Jesus has two natures. He is one person who has always had a divine nature. The Son of God has always existed as the Son. He is eternal. God the Father created the universe through him. But when Jesus was conceived, he added a second nature to himself. He also became man. Jesus doesn't just have a body. He

also has a human mind, a human soul, a human will. He needed to have these things in order to redeem them.

An early Christian theologian named Gregory Nazianzen wrote the following of Jesus:

If anyone has put his trust in Him as a Man without a human mind, he is really bereft of mind, and quite unworthy of salvation. For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole²

The point is that Jesus had a human mind as well as a divine mind. Jesus' divine mind knows everything, every fact, past, present, and future. But he often only used his human mind, which didn't know everything. Praying as a human, Jesus might have thought that there could be a way for him to avoid drinking that terrible cup of wrath. His divine will desired to go to the cross. But his human will, quite understandably, didn't want to suffer God's wrath.

We might say that Jesus was tempted not to drink this cup of judgment. We may wonder how the Son of God could be tempted. God, after all, has a perfect character. He can't be tempted. But Jesus, as a human being, could be tempted. Yet Jesus had a perfect character. We're often tempted to do the wrong thing because we want to do things that are inherently wrong. Jesus could be tempted to do the wrong thing—to do what wasn't the Father's will, or the divine will—but not because he desired to do things that were inherently wrong. Not wanting to suffer and die isn't inherently wrong. Wanting to kill an innocent human being or wanting to steal something is inherently wrong. But not wanting to drink the cup of God's wrath isn't wrong.

Still, we see in this passage that Jesus yields to the Father's will. He says, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." He's saying that his human will isn't to suffer God's wrath, but he realizes this is the divine will. It's the Father's will. But it's also the Son of God's will. The divine plan that is jointly held by the Father, Son, and Spirit, is that Jesus, the God-man, must be the one who drinks this cup of wrath. Jesus, in his humanity, yields to the Father's will, because Jesus is the perfect human being. A perfect human being is obedient. And Jesus was, as the apostle Paul says, obedient even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:8).

² Gregory Nazianzen, "Select Letters of Saint Gregory Nazianzen," in *S. Cyril of Jerusalem, S. Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 440.

Why is it the plan that Jesus must drink this cup of wrath? Why must Jesus die and suffer great physical and spiritual pain? It's God's plan to spare sinners from God's wrath. Jesus drinks the cup of wrath so that you and I don't have to. And that's the amazing thing. We deserve to drink that cup. We all have sinned. God would be right to let us receive that punishment for our sin. But God is merciful. He doesn't give us what we deserve. God is gracious. He gives us good things we could never merit. God gave us a way to be forgiven, to have someone else take our punishment. That way is Jesus. If we put our faith in Jesus, trusting that he is our hope and salvation, trusting that he is who the Bible says he is and that he has done what the Bible says he has done, then we are forgiven. We will never drink that cup of wrath. We are put back into a right relationship with God, adopted as his children, and we will never be disowned.

And that was made possible because Jesus didn't give into temptation in the Garden of Gethsemane. The first man, Adam, along with the first woman, Eve, gave into temptation in another garden, Eden. The last Adam, the one who came to redeem human beings, didn't give into temptation.

I'm sure many of us saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, which came out in 2004. The movie, made by Mel Gibson, famously depicts Jesus suffering great physical pain. I don't think it's a great movie. It doesn't contain a lot of theology. But there are some good moments. At the beginning of the movie, Jesus is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prays, but his prayers are met with silence. And he falls to the ground. Then Satan appears alongside of him. Satan appears as a woman, dressed in a dark cloak. Satan tries to make Jesus doubt that he can actually bear the sins of the world. Satan tries to get Jesus to doubt that God is really his Father. Then, a serpent comes from the bottom of Satan's cloak and slithers toward Jesus. But Jesus resolves to do the Father's will. He gets up and stomps on the serpent's head, crushing it.

That is sort of what Jesus is going through here. He expresses his reluctance to drain the cup of wrath, but he also says that he will do the Father's will.

What is the response to Jesus' prayer? Well, the Father did not take the cup from him. Jesus would have to suffer. But notice that something happens. An angel comes to strengthen Jesus. Something similar happened when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. (See Luke 4:1–13.) Jesus turned away Satan's temptations to receive a kingdom without first suffering. And after Jesus resisted temptation, angels came to minister to him (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13). Here, Jesus resists temptation, though he isn't spared the cup. But what God the Father

does is give him the strength to drink it. In fact, the angel apparently gave Jesus the strength to continue praying. He was in such agony that his sweat was like blood. Luke doesn't say that Jesus was sweating blood. But his sweat was like blood. Perhaps the drops of his sweat were heavy like drops of blood. Or perhaps he was sweating profusely: sweat was pouring out of him the way blood pours out of a wound. Jesus was doing battle through prayer, and God gave him the strength to do that. God strengthened him to suffer.

Now, you may be wondering what all of this has to do with you. If you're a Christian, it has everything to do with you. This is what Jesus endured to save you. He battled through temptation and agony. In distress, he cried out to the Father, asking if it were possible for there to be some other way. But he yielded to the Father. Jesus obeyed for you. He suffered for you. He died for you. It's important to be reminded of this.

And if you are not a Christian, I hope that you would see the beauty of Jesus' sacrifice. Look at what he was willing to endure. The weight of the world was upon his shoulders. The destiny of billions of people depended upon his actions. And Jesus triumphed by being willing to suffer so that he could save people. If you put your trust in him, you will be spared God's wrath. But if you reject Jesus, you reject God. And the reality is that you will have to drink that cup of wrath yourself, and it will be greater suffering than you can imagine.

But there's something else to see in this passage. Jesus twice tells his disciples to pray that they may not enter into temptation. At that moment, they would be tempted to abandon Jesus. Next week, we will see how Jesus is arrested. Judas and some soldiers and officers of the Jewish leaders were on their way to arrest Jesus. The temptation would be to run away, to abandon Jesus, to deny every knowing him, all to save their own skin. If they were coming to arrest and kill Jesus, they might do the same to Jesus' followers.

Now, we will likely not be put in such a difficult situation. But there will be temptation to deny Jesus in situations that aren't full of so much pressure. We may be tempted to abandon Jesus when our friends and family members don't follow him. We may be tempted to abandon Jesus when it seems like the way of the world is more fun and satisfying. In other words, we may be tempted to abandon Jesus in order to pursue sin, to do things that Jesus forbids us to do. We may be tempted to abandon Jesus when we suffer, when things in this life don't go the way we want them to go. When we endure physical pain, perhaps an injury or a disease, we may wonder if this God of the Bible really exists. When we suffer in our relationships, we may be tempted to

give up on Jesus. There are many different situations that might lead us into temptation. And Jesus tells us to pray so that we wouldn't give into temptation.

When you're suffering, don't run away from God. There's always the temptation to ignore that suffering, perhaps to numb your pain with drugs or alcohol or to just avoid it through things like entertainment. Instead of dealing with the problems of our lives, we may tune them out by turning on the TV or binge-watching shows and movies on Netflix. Jesus asked the disciples to stay awake with him, but we're told that they were "sleeping for sorrow." They were so emotionally spent that they slept. That could literally be what happens to us. Instead of facing our problems, we might just want to sleep. I think that's what people who commit suicide believe. It's better to have to "sleep," to be done with this life, than to deal with the sorrows and sufferings of this life.

But Jesus asks us to wrestle with God in prayer. When we suffer, we should cry out to God. When you're hurting, talk to God. When you're in distress, express your emotions to God. You can do that through tears and even shouting. Prayer doesn't have to be done in this hushed, polite, "religious" tone. Jesus prayed with great emotion. This is what the author of Hebrews writes: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence" (Heb. 5:7). It's perfectly acceptable to pray in loud cries, to pray through your tears. You can tell God how you really feel. You can ask him questions. You can beg him to spare you suffering.

But when we pray, we must realize that God may not answer us the way we want him to. When we're hurting, our first instinct is to ask God to remove the thing that's hurting us. That's not a wrong thing to ask of God. Jesus did it. Paul did it, too (see 2 Cor. 12:1-10). Bringing that request to God makes us aware that God has the power to remove suffering from our lives. It reminds us that God is in control. And that's a good thing. But we must also be willing to say, "Not my will, but yours." God's answer might very well be "no." His plan might be for us to continue to suffer. But if that is the case, God will give us the strength to endure that suffering. God strengthened Jesus through the help of an angel. Luke doesn't tell us what the angel did to strengthen Jesus. We're not even sure that Jesus could see the angel. Perhaps when we're suffering, angels minister to us in ways that we can't see. I don't know. But if God plans for us to suffer, then he will give us the strength to suffer.

So, if you're facing something difficult today, something you wish were different in your life, tell God about it. Cry out to him. Tell him how you're in pain, or you're confused, or you don't know what to do. Wrestle with him. Cry, shout, wail. Tell him what you would like to happen. But then be willing to do God's will. When you pray, you will more than likely never hear an audible reply. You have to wait and see what God's answer is. There are times when he removes the suffering, when he improves our situation, when he heals us. But there are many times when our circumstances don't change, when we continue to suffer. If that is the case, take heart. God will strengthen you, perhaps in ways that you can't sense, ways that you don't see. He will give you the grace to endure. God will not ask us to bear the weight of the world on our shoulders. Only one person could do that, and he already did. But you will bear some weight. Just know that God will strengthen you to bear it. As Jesus told his disciples on that same night, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).