

The Weakness of the Flesh

***Mt 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:
the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.***

To give some background to this text, Jesus and the twelve apostles had come into an upper room to observe Passover.

This was the day that Christ would be offered up as a sacrifice for sin before the Father. (An evening and the morning constitute the Biblical accounting of a day.) It was on this day that the judgment of God passed over all of the election of grace.

It was at the end of the Passover meal that Jesus revealed that one of them would betray Him into the hands of the wicked religious leaders of Israel. At this the apostles began to ask the searching question, 'Is it I?' When Judas asked this question, Jesus revealed to him that he knew that he was the traitor, and said to him, 'that thou doest, do quickly.' (Jn.13.21, 27) Immediately Judas left them all there to accomplish his wicked deed. (Jn.13.30) Then Jesus instituted the church ordinance of *His Supper* with the eleven remaining disciples. It was after this Supper, the Lord's Supper, that Jesus led them out to Mount Olivet where there was a garden and Jesus began to be sorrowful and very heavy. He took aside Peter, James, and John a little further into the garden to pray, but as he separated Himself from them about the distance of a stone's cast (Mt.26.37; Lk.22.41) and he said: *tarry ye here, and watch with me.* (Mt.26.38b). Our Lord then struggled in prayer for the things which He was to suffer.

Lk.22.43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Our text, Mt. 26.41, above was spoken by our Lord to the disciples the first time that He came to them after some time in prayer, then returning He found them all sleeping. Again, He went to pray and when returned the second time He found them all, as before, sleeping. But this time He didn't awaken them. (Mt.26.43-45a) And finally, the third time, when Jesus saw the mob coming in the distance to arrest Him He woke them all, saying:

Mt.26.46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

47 ¶ And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

In the text of Mt.26.41 we want to pay close attention to the word *weak*. ... *the flesh is weak* (ἀσθενής, a noun or adjective tss. in the KJV Bible as *sick, weak, impotent, without strength, & feeble; ἀσθένεια, infirmity, sickness, disease, weakness*; and the verb ἀσθενέω, *to be sick, impotent, diseased, weak*). This weakness refers to certain susceptibilities which are relative to a body of flesh and blood. We are weak in the flesh. Our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, second Person of the Holy Trinity, was made in the likeness of men by taking a body of flesh and blood.

Php 2:7 But made himself (Christ Jesus) of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

... *the flesh is weak*. What are some of those weaknesses, or, as it is translated in other places, infirmities? *Weaknesses* are such things as being *subject to death, to hunger, thirst, to sorrow, grieve, suffer pain, to become troubled, to suffer affliction and to become weary, need rest & sleep, etc.* Weaknesses in sinners also include disabilities. Disabilities, whether they are of our own making or from the Lord, are in the Bible called weaknesses. For example, we read of the woman that was *bowed together* and could not lift up herself for 18 years. (Lk.13.11, 12) Or, of the man so infirm that he was unable to do anything but be laid by the pool of Bethesda hoping that one day he might come into the waters during the time when an angel of the Lord stirred them with healing power. This was his condition in life for 38 years. (Jn.5.5).

Jn.5.5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

There was the man born lame that was daily set by the gate of the Temple called the Beautiful Gate. (Acts 3.2; 4.9) Timothy experienced recurring bouts of weakness in his health, particularly noting the trouble he had with his stomach. (1Ti.5.23) Still others that were *weak*, were prone to offense. (1Co.8.7, 9; 2Co.11.29) All flesh is weak to do what it ought to do, and what it needs to do, and but for the grace of God we would be locked up in this infirm tabernacle never able to accomplish the will of God. Our Lord Jesus took to Himself a body of weakness.

Isa 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

Mt 8:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.

2Co 13:4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

That He suffered our weaknesses was so that He could be tempted in a way that parallels our temptations. To what end? So that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest.

Not that He wasn't eternally merciful. But so that the children of God might know that He was merciful. (Ps.136; Ex 34:6, *And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers*

upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.)

Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

Reverently we say that His weaknesses were like ours in every way except that He had no evil principle of sin working in Him. It is important to distinguish that His flesh was not derived from the seed of Adam. Rather, God specially formed Him a body that was born of a sinner named Mary, a virgin. (cf. Lk.1.35) It was through this body that He could suffer the weakness of the flesh, be tried or proved to be the precious, holy, eternal Son of God, Who knew no sin, was without sin, could do no sin, and in Whom was no sin. (2Co.5.21; He.4.15; 1Pe.2.22; 1Jn.3.5)

Heb 10:5 Wherefore when he (the Son of God) cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou (God the Father) prepared me ...

*Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the **feeling of our infirmities** (weaknesses); but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

*be touched with the feelings of, συμπαθηῆσαι, aor. infin. of συμπαθέω, σύν with, fellow, together + παθέω to be affected; so, **he was affected with us in our weaknesses.***

By taking a human body like ours, yet He being without sin, Jesus Christ could show to us that He *sympathizes* with us in our *weaknesses* and that He is an able mediator for us to God. So, to be clear, it is not sinful to be weak in the flesh, but weakness appears to be the result of the present curse that is upon human flesh.

Ge 3:17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ...

Ga 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree ...

Now, unlike our Lord Jesus, we must be watchful against our weaknesses because they can lead to sin. That is because we have the corrupted principle of the flesh in us. We are sinners. Our weaknesses are like a door which opens to us avenues whereby we can commit sin. They are vulnerabilities to sin. When we become hungry, wearied, thirsty, sorrowful, troubled, angry, or suffer pain we can very easily slip and fall into sin. When I get hungry or tired, or have a headache I have a tendency to get grumpy. I am more prone to say or do something that I might not have otherwise. We are all affected like this. So, weakness is our soft spot to sin. This is precisely what Satan seeks to take advantage of in us. And Jesus warned us against this when He said, *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation ...*

No enemy, which has any wit at all, would direct an offensive at his foe's strongest points. Quite the contrary, he surveys his opponent for some weakness. And if he finds one it is certain that he will use it to try and gain the advantage over him. This is what the devil did to our Lord Jesus directly and through intermediate means. The Bible tells us that Satan waged his first, unmediated, vicious attack against our Lord soon after His baptism. Note it! Satan came to Christ when He was under the strong pains of hunger.

*Mt 4:2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.
3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

Satan mercilessly put Christ through several great tests at a time when He was weakened in the flesh by severe hunger. Satan attempted to appeal to Christ's weakness in the flesh to move Him to sin, but there was nothing in Christ that could be prompted to sin.

Joh 14:30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.

How did Christ withstand Satan? He could have called for twelve legions of angels to battle against Him, or He could have spoken the word and sent him immediately into the lake of fire and brimstone. He could have; but He didn't. Why didn't He? To show us, His elect, how we must learn to withstand Satan. What pattern did our Lord leave for us to follow? A pattern of habitually resorted to the word of God.

*Mt.4.4 But he answered and said, **It is written**, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

*Mt.4.7 Jesus said unto him, **It is written again**, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

*Mt.4.10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: **for it is written**, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

And what happened? The devil, Satan, Lucifer, that old serpent, the dragon, departed from Him.

Mt.4.11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

James says,

Jas 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Peter says,

1Pe 5:9 Whom (the devil, v.8) resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions (πάθημα, sufferings [1Pe.4.13]; affections [Gal.5.2]) are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

Our Lord Jesus took human flesh, not only to redeem us from every evil, but to preserve us from its corrupting influence.

Tit 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Christ set an example for His children to follow.

*1Pe.2.21 For even hereunto were ye called: **because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:***

22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously ...

In our present text, not only was the Lord Jesus in the midst of exceeding sorrow, but the disciples were as well when Jesus told them that one of them would be His betrayer.

Mt.26.21 And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

22 And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

The disciples were presently ignorant of the weakness of their flesh. It was only a little earlier that they presumed to be strong to defend the Lord. They joined with Peter as he said, *'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.'* But what did they really do? They were overcome by the weakness of the flesh.

Brethren, we cannot hope to do the will of God in a way that will produce fruit as long as we lean on the arm of our weak flesh. The sooner we forsake this false notion the better. Know this: mark it down: settle it in our hearts and minds: the flesh is weak. We should have no confidence in it.

Php 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

The Lord used the apostle Paul as an example to teach us about the weakness of the flesh. From the outset let me say this: the Lord directed Satan to afflict him with a thorn in the flesh. And whatever this thorn is, Paul seems to be of the mind that he could better serve the Lord if only his *thorn in the flesh* was removed. Whatever this thing was it *rubbed* him, and very likely provoked him to sin so that he distressed on account of it.

That's what thorns do. They get our attention. And, spiritually thinking, they make us cry out to God for help.

I think all of us can relate to what Paul felt. Who among us hasn't thought that it must certainly be the will of God to remove something that rubs us so wrong and that provokes us to sin? But not only did the Lord direct Satan to work this in Paul's flesh (cf. Job 1.8; 2.3, *Hast thou considered my servant Job ...?*) but He ordained that it should remain with him throughout the rest of his life. (2Co.12.7) What did Paul

do about this thing when he began to be troubled by it? He did what every child of God ought to do: he took the matter to the Lord in prayer. The word of God reveals to us that he prayed three times asking the Lord to remove it from him. And the Lord in His faithfulness answered His prayers! But that answer was not as he had hoped.

2Co 12:9 And he (the LORD) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (So Paul submitted himself to the will of God and said ...) Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities (weaknesses), that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Paul's mind had to be changed from what he thought to what the Lord thought! He accounted that since it is the will of the Lord for this thorn to remain, then it must to shew through him, and for the benefit of those who come after him, that the grace of God was truly sufficient against every weakness he might have in his flesh. Rather than weaknesses becoming setbacks; rather than weaknesses dominating and dictating his life, he became confident in them. That thorn, and his other weaknesses as well, became the means of revealing the power of Christ at work in Him.

Phl.4.11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

What is the counter-part to the weakness of the flesh but a false sense of independence, self-sufficiency and pride. Yet the Bible tells us, *1Co 1:29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. And, 1Co.1.31 ... He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.* When we are weak and impotent in ourselves to accomplish the task before us, and yet for trusting the Lord and abiding faithful He works through us what we cannot do ourselves. Then we learn of the sufficiency of His grace and of His power to work through us by His Holy Spirit. Then we say with the apostle Paul ... *our sufficiency is of God ... (2Co.3.5)* Man naturally boasts about his accomplishments. But no flesh should glory in His presence. What have we, any man, that we did not receive from the above? (Jn.3.27) Man can till his fields, sow his seed, but if the Heavenly Father doesn't grant rain from heaven, and bless the seed with fruitfulness it is all in vain. It is the goodness of God upon the whole of humanity which provides for all men, every moment of every day. But we, the elect of God not only should know this, but we ought to talk like this, and live like this, that is, if we believe it is the truth of His word.

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Brethren, this is spiritual living. We shall never be without infirmity in this present life. It is certain that we shall sorrow, grieve, tire, hunger, thirst, fear, suffer pain, and die; some will be born with disabilities, some will become disabled, whether temporarily or permanently. By His grace the children of God are

not to let infirmities be setbacks and dominate their lives. They are to use them rather to the glory of God and manifest the sufficiency of His grace to work through them

Isa 40:31 But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Can we say with Paul, *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* (2Co 12:10)

Weaknesses are certainly a means, not for acquiring everlasting life, but for proving whether we have everlasting life and the forgiveness of sins. The natural man is repulsed from Christ and from the life that He would have us live. The world supposes that this is for the weak minded. It is for those who need a crutch. But this is the power of God at work in His people if they will subject themselves to the will of God!

The Christian life defies human reason. No man in his undone condition before God has any desire to come to Christ and to live like Him, according to His word. On the other hand, it is the goodness, the kindness, and the grace of God through Christ that draws and attracts the quickened sinner to God. Suddenly he is willing to fall prostrate at His feet. He was a 'want to' to do His commandments in his heart that had never been there before out of pure gratitude for who the Lord is and what He has done to save sinners. The harlot came and washed His feet with her tears. The demoniac suddenly sat at his feet, clothed and in his right mind. The crippled, the maimed, the withered, and the blind praised God with their whole heart.

Have you come to Christ? If not, it's because you don't know Him. You don't know who He is. You don't know what He has done. Seeing and knowing Christ as the sinner's substitute, the only hope of eternal life, the one who reconciles sinners to God is the impetus to Christ. Otherwise folks won't come. They haven't any notion about what sin is. They haven't any notion about how God views sin and the sinner apart from Christ. They haven't any notion about God's provision for the sinner. They haven't any notion about how God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son into the world so that those who believe might have everlasting life. Every sinner that understands these things about the Son of God come in human flesh will come to Christ. No question about it.

Isa 55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

file: bible studies/misc./New Testament/180820 The Weakness of the Flesh, Matthew 26, v.41– Craig Thurman