

## Prepare for Battle – Matt. 26:31-41

### Temptation #2

John Elway is a member of the professional football hall of fame. He holds every Denver Bronco passing record and led his team to 2 super bowl victories. In the last game of his professional career, Elway lead his Bronco's to a super bowl win and was voted the most valuable player of the game. But, interestingly enough, it was his last college game that was his most unusual one. In fact, it remains one of the most unusual college football games ever played even to this day.

Elway's Stanford Cardinals were playing their rival, the California Golden Bears. Elway had led his team on a drive that resulted in a field goal to take the lead 20-19. There were only 4 seconds left on the clock so it was assumed the game was over. All Stanford had to do was kick a dribble kick down the field and run the time off the clock.

But then an unusual thing happened. The California players began to lateral the ball back and forth. The Stanford players couldn't seem to get to them to tackle them and end the game. Most bizarre of all – the Stanford band, assuming the game was over, began filing onto the field for their postgame show. But the game was not over yet because nobody had tackled the California player carrying the ball. One poor trombone player got into the way of the Golden Bear trying to reach the end zone and he was leveled to the ground. In the end, California upset Stanford 25-20 in what has to be the most bizarre ending to a college football game ever. But you really have to feel sorry for the poor trombone player, don't you? Here was a band member who thought the game was over. He was unaware that the battle was still going on. So he was just strolling across the field and suddenly he is run over by the California runner desperately trying to weave his way through the traffic to the end zone.

Last week, we began a series on temptation. This is a very important subject for each of us because we all face temptations in our lives. And temptation is like a battle. It's an inner struggle that we have to follow the Lord and do what we know to be right. In order to be successful in facing temptation, we have to be properly prepared. Many times, we are defeated in temptation because we just aren't properly prepared, we are not ready. We are like the trombone player in the Stanford band. We are strolling along unaware that there is a conflict going on and all of a sudden we are blindsided by temptation. So as we begin our study on temptation, we want to take time to see the preparations that the Scriptures talk about so that we can be ready for it. Last week, we saw that our attitude is most important. Temptation can bring growth and maturity into our lives as we respond properly to it so the Apostle James commands us to consider it to be

pure joy when we face various trials or temptations because the testing of our faith produces perseverance and maturity.

Now this week, we want to begin to look at what the Bible says about proper preparation for temptation. We are not going to be able to cover this subject completely this week and will continue it next time, but we want to look at a most important preparation that Jesus taught his disciples during the most critical temptation that he faced in life.

It was right at the end of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior was facing the greatest temptation or trial of his life. Again, as we saw last week, both the devil and God were actively involved. The devil was doing his best to thwart God's redemptive program. His temptation of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane was so great that Jesus was sweating drops of blood. This shows the stress that Christ was under. Jesus was pleading with His Father so that he would not have to go to the cross and become a sacrifice for the sins of the human race. The devil was doing his best to derail God's redemptive plan. But God the Father knew the blessings and benefits of Christ's upcoming sacrifice. So God the Father was giving strength and grace to His son right during this great trial. It was right during this greatest of all trials that Jesus spoke to his disciples about the great temptation that they were about to face. The scene is recorded by one of those very disciples in Matthew 26:31-41:

MT 26:31 Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: " `I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

32 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

MT 26:33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."

MT 26:34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."

MT 26:35 But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

MT 26:36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

MT 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

MT 26:40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. 41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

1. The first preparation that we want to talk about is the need to watch and pray. Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that they wouldn't fall to temptation.

The word *watch* here simply means to be alert, keep your eyes open, be wide awake and vigilant of what's going on.

This word brings to our minds one of the most important jobs back in these Biblical times – the job of being a watchman on the city wall. In Biblical times, cities were enclosed by walls. In those days when the major weapons were swords and spears and fighting took place on foot or on horseback, a thick stone wall enclosing a city was an effective way to keep enemies out. Now situated on the city walls were watch towers. Watchmen were stationed in these towers to keep an eye out for approaching enemies. From this position, a watchman could see an enemy approaching miles away. If he saw an enemy approaching, the watchman would blow a trumpet alerting the city that an enemy was approaching. Soldiers would have plenty of time to take positions on top of the wall all around the city to prevent the enemy from putting up ladders to scale the wall and enter the city.

Now it's important to remember that the watchman's job was not to fight. He would likely join the battle after the other soldier's came, taking a position alongside of them. But while he was performing his duty as a watchman, his duty was not to fight but it was rather to be alert and watch. If he saw an enemy, he would call for help. He wouldn't just remain silent and decide to take on the enemy single handed. He would blow the trumpet and call for help. If the watchman performed his duty, there was no way that his city could be taken by surprise. It was still possible for a superior army to surround the city and siege it into surrender, but no army could ever take a city suddenly, by surprise if the watchman were doing his job. The only way a city could fall suddenly was if a watchman had fallen asleep and were not alert.

Jesus commanded his disciples to watch with him so that they wouldn't fall to temptation. Sadly, the disciples fell asleep, didn't they? When the soldiers arrived with Judas and the temptation suddenly happened, they were not prepared for the battle and they all ran from the scene leaving Jesus alone.

God desires that we be watchful for temptation. Keeping watch simply means that we expect temptation at any time. Temptation should never catch us off guard. We all have been promised temptations by God himself. Jesus told his disciples that they would suffer trials.

It's amazing how many Christians in our nation today think that there really isn't much of a spiritual battle going on. When they hear someone speak of spiritual struggles, they're response is *what struggle, what battle?* It's no wonder that so many are being silently swept down the current of a culture that is opposed to God's Word because they're not even attempting to swim against the current. They are not even aware that there is a spiritual battle going on.

Now there is, of course, the other extreme that must be avoided if one is to be an effective watchman. Some Christians are always looking for a fight. They see a demon behind every tree and a fight behind every bush. They seem to live to fight. We must be reminded that the watchman's job was not to go out looking for a fight. If he saw an enemy approaching in the distance and left his post to go out looking for a fight with them, he wouldn't be doing his job and the city would be vulnerable. No, the watchman's job was to stay at his post and be alert and aware, ready for any advance of the enemy.

Now in this matter of temptation, it would be wonderful if we could set up certain individuals as watchmen for the whole church as the ancient Biblical cities did. But everyone must be his or her own watchman. Jesus didn't set up the disciples to watch for him – he watched himself. He was ready when the temptation came. The disciples were responsible for watching for themselves as well, but they slept instead. And they weren't ready when the temptation came. Even Peter, despite his self-confidence and resolve, fled just like the others because he hadn't been watchful.

If we are to be consistently victorious in facing temptation, we must be watchful. Every morning, we should wake up expecting that we will face temptations that day. Temptations should never surprise us. We should live our lives in a state of spiritual sensitivity. We should never be blindsided by temptation. If we do not watch, we are much more vulnerable to temptation. If we do not watch, we are much more likely to fall suddenly.

2. But we need to do more than just watch. Watching is important. But Jesus told his disciples not only to watch, but also to pray. *Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.*

Prayer in the Scriptures is always connected with our dependence upon God. When we pray, we are confessing our need for God's help. Perhaps that is why so many of us have difficulty praying. We are often tempted to have much more confidence in ourselves than we have any right to have. We often feel that we can handle most situations in life in our own strength. Peter felt that way, didn't he? He confidently informed Jesus that though all the other disciples might desert him, he would be faithful. But Peter didn't realize the severity of a spiritual battle. Spiritual battles cannot be fought with human strength. So when the spiritual temptation came, Peter ran just like the other disciples. He ran because he wasn't prepared. He had slept instead of praying.

Prayer allows us to tap into God's strength. It is through prayer that we exchange our human weaknesses for God's divine strength. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this process. Those who tarry in the presence of the Lord (and this is exactly what we do in prayer) will exchange their weaknesses for God's strength. They will mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. They will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

Earlier we used the example of the watchman on the city wall in visualizing the preparation of watching. We need to remind ourselves again that it was not the watchman's job to fight the battle alone. When the watchman saw an enemy approaching, he sounded the alarm, he blew the trumpet. The city's army would then muster and join him on the wall to fight the enemy. The watchman was not excused from the battle for he would then join in as one of the soldiers, but it was not his job to fight the battle by himself.

We need to realize that prayer musters all of God's resources to come to our aid in the spiritual battles of life. It is through prayer that we confess to God our dependence upon Him and our need for His help. It is through prayer that the spiritual armor for battle is engaged according to Ephesians 6 as we will see near the end of our series. It is through prayer that God makes available to his children His resources and strength. Prayer is an indispensable weapon in the spiritual battles of life. In fact, spiritual battles cannot be won without prayer.

Nowhere in the Bible are we commanded or even encouraged to face the enemy in battle by ourselves, in our own strength. But sadly, this is what we try to do too often. It's no wonder we so often make the wrong choices when tempted. We need to remember that it is our duty to watch and pray. It is our job to be alert, ready, watchful for temptations that will inevitably come our way. And prayer brings in the army needed to be victorious in the battle. Prayer musters God's resources to our aid, power that the devil cannot stand against. Watching and praying are positive preparations for spiritual battle. They are what we must do in order to be victorious. Now there are a couple of negative preparations that we must also be aware of – things that we are not to do in order to be prepared for temptation – and we plan to look at these next week.

I read an interesting observation from an ornithologist recently that I thought applied to the subject that we have been talking about this morning. An ornithologist is a person who studies birds. This specific person had been examining the patterns and habits of crows. Crows love to flock to farmer's fields. They gather in large numbers to feast on crops planted. They seem to think that farmer's go through all of the work of planting just for their benefit. A casual observer might wonder why they are so brazen in their thievery. Well, the ornithologist observed that while the hundreds of crows were down on the ground, feeding in the field, there were a couple of sentries sitting up in a tree by the field's edge watching for natural predators. One time as this specific ornithologist was observing a murder of crows (for that is what a flock of crows is technically called – and for good reason as we shall see). A predator somehow snuck by the sentries and attacked one of the crows on the ground killing it. The remaining crows suddenly rose in flight as can be imagined. But then they did an interesting thing. Instead of fleeing for their own safety, they turned as one to attack those sentry crows and pecked them to death. The crows instinctively knew the importance of the sentry crows watching for their safety. They knew they couldn't tolerate sentry crows who failed in their duty.

If members of the animal kingdom instinctively know the importance of keeping watch for their own safety, how much more should we realize the importance of watching for our own protection in the spiritual battles of life.

Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that they would not fall when tempted. We must do the same if we are to be victorious when tempted. We need to be alert and ready to face temptation. There is no reason why we should ever be blindsided by a temptation. Jesus Christ told us that the one thing in life that we can know for sure is that we will be tempted. And we need to realize that God never intended for us to face temptation in our own strength. That is one of the reasons why he provided prayer for us. Through prayer we call all of God's divine resources to our aid in facing the assaults of the enemy.

Let me encourage you to do something this week. Let me encourage you to begin each day by reminding yourself that sometime, somehow throughout that day you are going to be tempted and praying specifically at the beginning of the day that God would give you his divine strength in facing the temptations of that day. Perhaps you need to write a little note to yourself or put a card by your bedside or on the refrigerator or on your desk at work. Watch and Pray. Just a little reminder. But that reminder will help you to be alert to temptation and better prepared for it. You will find it much easier to face the spiritual battles of life if you are first prepared for the battles.