

(Awake! Series): Prepare by Prayer

by A.W. Tozer

To succeed in life and faith, we must practice anticipatory prayer, preparing ourselves spiritually and emotionally for the crises that are sure to come.

Duration: 34:31

Scripture: Matthew 26:31-46, Matthew 26:56, Matthew 26:69-75

Topics: "Preparation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses the analogy of pugilists and their preparation for fights to illustrate the importance of taking care of oneself spiritually. He emphasizes the need to not let the day creep up on us and to always be prayerful and prepared. The preacher also highlights the significance of anticipating and being prepared for spiritual crises, using the example of the disciples' failure to anticipate Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion. He concludes by emphasizing the irregular and unpredictable nature of the devil's attacks and the importance of having faith as a shield of protection.

Transcript

In the twenty-sixth chapter of the Gospel as recorded by Matthew, verses thirty-one to forty-six. Verses thirty-one to forty-six. I wonder if we couldn't read that responsibly, too, so we'd all have a part in it.

Beginning with verse thirty-one of Matthew twenty-six, and going down to and including verse forty-six. Matthew twenty-six, thirty-one to forty-six. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night.

For it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. Peter answered and said unto him, All men should be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Peter saith unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.

Likewise also said all the disciples. And it took with him Peter the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my father, if it be possible that this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And he came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.

Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. And now the forty-first verse, Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation, because the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Now in the passage which we read, and that which immediately precedes it and follows it, we have the record of the most critical event in the history of the world. I think there can be no doubt of that at all, that it had about it and upon it more mighty historic significance, greater human weight of weal and woe, than any other event or series of events in the history of mankind. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of men, was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

He was about to offer his holy soul, to have poured out upon that soul the accumulated pure perfection and moral filth of the whole race of men. And to carry it to the tree and die there in agony and blood. Now there was one present, the one most brightly concerned, who anticipated this crisis and prepared for it.

That one of course was Jesus. And he prepared for it by the most effective preparation known in heaven or in earth, namely prayer. Our Lord prayed in the garden, Let us not pity our Lord, as some are inclined to do.

Let us thank him that he foresaw the crisis and that he went to the place of power and the source of energy and got himself ready for that event. And because he did this, he passed the cosmic crisis triumphantly. And I say cosmic crisis because it had to do with more than this world.

It had to do with more even than the human race. It had to do with the entire cosmos, the whole wide human earth. For the Lord was dying that all things might be united in him.

And that the heavens as well as the earth might be purged. And that new heavens and new earth might be established that could never pass away. And all this rested upon the shoulders of the Son of God here this night in the garden.

And he got ready for this, I repeat, in the most effective way known under the sun. And that is by going to God in prayer. But over against that were his disciples.

They approached the crisis without anticipation. Partly they didn't know. Partly they didn't care.

Partly they were too unspiritual to be concerned. And partly they were sleepy. So carelessly and prayerlessly and sleepily they allowed themselves to be carried by the rolling of the wheel of time into a crisis so vital, so significant, so fortentious that nothing like it has ever happened, I repeat, in the world and never will happen again.

And the result of their failure to anticipate was that one betrayed our Lord, one denied our Lord, all forsook our Lord and all fled away. And then Christ gave them, here in the text read, Christ gave them these words. As the sword of a little diamond set in this great ring, he said, Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.

For the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And this is what I want especially to talk about now. And I want you to know that this prayer that Jesus made that night in the garden was an anticipatory prayer.

That is, he prayed in anticipation of something that he knew was coming in the will of God. And he got ready for it. Now this is what I want to emphasize and relay upon your conscience this morning that you practice anticipatory prayer.

Because battles are lost before they are fought. Now you can write that line across your heart or across your memory and history of the world and biography will support it. But battles are always lost before they are fought.

It was true and is true of nations. It was true of France in the Second World War. There are those of us who date back, were grown up at the time of the First World War and we remember how the cry electrified the world, they shall not pass, and pass they did not.

When France in her strength rose and opposed herself to the hordes of the Kaiser. But only 25 years and a little more, 26 at the most, later the hordes of Hitler came down and France surrendered almost without firing a gun. And to this day men don't know why, only last week I saw that some angry Frenchman has written a book flailing his own country and lashing his people that they surrendered with scarcely a fight.

But why did they lose the battle? Why did France surrender? She surrendered because between the hour, her finest hour when she cried they shall not pass and her disgraceful surrender she had gotten rotten and decayed, politically decayed and morally decayed and spiritually decayed and like an old tree filled with dry rot when the tanks of Hitler came sweeping down like a stormy wind France went down and she's never risen since and she still manifests the same spirit in her politics and in her social life that caused her to lose the Second World War.

Now my friends if that can be true, nations and history will support it it's also true of feudalists they say of fighting men that they leave their victory in the nightclub and oh while I've never seen a fight and I don't attend them they still do illustrate and Paul used these games to illustrate and so can I they do illustrate the fact that a man to be at fighting peak must take care of himself and when a man as some have done gain world acclaim and become very popular they find themselves going to the nightclubs and drinking and staying up all night and sleepfully loafing in the day and then it comes the time when they're to fight again and though they try desperately to get ready by what they call training the nightclubs have taken too much out of them so they go into the ring

collapsed in the fifth round and people say how could it be that this mighty world beater should go down so disgracefully before a man who was not rated who wasn't supposed to be good the answer was not, is that he lost the fight before he went into the ring not when they counted him out there on the floor face down and unconscious but as he drank wine and stayed up and danced half the night or all of the night he left his victory in the nightclub they say it was also true of Israel up on a higher level back yonder in the Old Testament times you will find that when Israel went in righteous and prayed up she never lost a battle and when she went in filled with iniquity and prayerlessly she never won a battle Israel never lost a battle the day she fought it and she never won a battle the

day she fought it she always lost her battle when she worshipped a golden calf or sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play or when she intermarried with the nation or when she neglected the altar of Jehovah and raised up a seed altar under some tree it was then that Israel lost her battle and so it was by anticipation you see it was before it happened that she lost and it was true of the disciples here as I've already mentioned they didn't lose the day that in the morning when one of them cursed and said he was not a disciple and another one kicked Jesus and said here's the man go take him and when even John

who loved him pursued him and fled and they all sneaked away and melted into the night that was not when the collapse came the collapse had started the night before when tired

and weary they lay down and slept instead of listening to the voice of their Savior and staying awake to pray if they had stayed awake and prayed alongside of him and heard his groans and seen his bloody sweat it might have changed the history of the world and certainly it would have changed their history not only are battles lost before they're fought battles are also won before they're fought look at David and Goliath everybody knows the story we tell it to the children and the artists paint it and it's got a place in the thoughts and literature of all the world how little David with his ruddy cheeks went out and slew the mighty roaring breast-beating giant eleven feet tall and with a sword like a weaver's beam and yet tiny little stripling David went out and with one stone lay him low

and with his own great sword which David could hardly lift cut off his head and carried that huge head by the hair and spray lay it before shouting triumphant Israel when did David win that battle when did he win that fight when he walked quietly out to meet that great boasting giant no, let somebody else try it and the words of Goliath would have been proved true I'll tear you to pieces and feed you to the birds he said and under other circumstances he'd have done just that but David was a young man who knew God and he had slain the lion and the bear and he had taken his sheep as the very charge of the Almighty and he had prayed and meditated and lay under the stars at night and talked to God and had learned that when God sends a man that man can conquer any enemy no matter how strong

and so it was not that morning on the plain there between the two hills that David won, it was all down the years to his boyhood when his mother taught him to pray and he learned to know God for himself then there was Jacob, you remember that after 20 years he was to meet his angry brother who had threatened to kill him he'd never seen him, he'd gotten away so that Esau couldn't kill him and now he was coming back and the Lord revealed that the next day they would meet there on the plain beyond the river Jabba and the next day they met by on the plain and they threw themselves into each other's arms and Esau forgave Jacob and Jacob conquered his brother's ire and his brother's murderous intent when did he do it? did he do it that morning when he walked out to meet his brother and crossed

over the river? no, he did it the night before when he wrestled alone with his God it was then he prepared himself to conquer Esau Esau being the sulky, sullen, hairy man of the forest who had solemnly threatened after the oriental oath that he would slay Jacob when he found him how could he cancel that oath? how could he violate the salty oath taken after the manner of the east?

God almighty took it out of his heart when Jacob wrestled alone by the river always it so and Jacob conquered Esau the night before not when they met, but the night before they met and so it was with Elijah Elijah defeated Ahab and Jezebel and all the prophets of Baal and brought victory and revival to Israel and when did he do it? did he do it that day on Carmel?

I counted as I sat here not that I wasn't enjoying the service for I certainly do enjoy every second of it all the singing and all the rest but I counted the words do you know how many words there were in Elijah's prayer? after Baal all day long had prayed and leaped on the altar and cut themselves till they were bloody then Elijah walked up at six o'clock in the evening at the time of the evening sacrifice Elijah walked up and prayed a little prayer was it a prayer that took him twenty minutes as we sometimes do in prayer meeting and shut others out was it a long eloquent prayer no it was a blunt, brief, brittle little prayer for exactly sixty-six words in English and I would assume fewer in Hebrew so there was your prayer did that prayer

bring down the fire? yes and no yes because if it

hadn't been offered there would have been no fire no because if Elijah hadn't known God all back down the years and hadn't stood before God during the long days and months and years that preceded Carmel that prayer would have collapsed by its own weight and it would have torn Elijah to pieces for it was not on Mount Carmel that Baal was defeated it was in Mount Gilead for it remembered that it was in Gilead from Gilead that Elijah came and I always feel I'm a better man after reading this story how that great shaggy hairy man dressed in the simple rustic garb of the peasant came down boldly staring straight ahead and without any court manners or any knowledge of how to talk or what to do walked straight in smelling of the mountain in the field and stood before the shrinking timid cowardly

henpecked Ahab and said I'm Elijah I stand before Jehovah and I'm just here to tell you there'll be no rain until I say so that was a dramatic moment a terrible moment a wonderful moment but back of that was long a long years of standing before Jehovah he didn't know he was to be sent to the court of Ahab but he had anticipated it for long prayers and waitings and meditations in the presence of his God now my brother there are crises that wait for us out there as there was a crisis that faced Jesus and his disciples and David and Israel and Daniel and Elijah and all the rest there are crises that wait for us I want to name a few of them briefly one of them is acute trouble now I hope it doesn't come to you but the history of the race shows that it comes to us all at some time and when

sharp trouble with its shocking weakening steam comes to us some Christians meet it unprepared and of course they collapse but is it the trouble that brings the collapse yes and no it is the trouble that brings the collapse in that they wouldn't have collapsed without the trouble but it is not the trouble that causes them to collapse because if they had anticipated it and prepared for it they would not have collapsed the man who goes down under trouble says the proverb his strength is small and his strength is small because his prayers are few and lean but the man whose prayers are many and strong will not collapse when the trouble comes then there is temptation temptation that comes unexpected and subtle and it is too unexpected and too subtle for the flesh but anticipatory prayer gets

the soul ready for whatever temptation there may be was it the day that David walked on the rooftop that he fell into his disgraceful and tragic temptation no it was his long gap that the historians say was in between and they don't know what David was doing I know one thing David wasn't doing he wasn't waiting on his God he wasn't out lying looking at the stars and saying the heavens declare the glory of God he did that but that's the time he wasn't doing it and so David went down because the whole weight of his wasted weeks before bore down upon him so temptation can't hurt you if you have anticipated it by prayer and temptation will suddenly tell you if you have not and then there is Satan's attacks now Satan's attacks are rarely anticipated because Satan is too shrewd to be uniform

you see if Satan established a pattern of attack we'd soon catch on to his pattern if I could go to the games to illustrate I've lost one ball game in 20 years and no prize right but if you'll allow me to illustrate if the devil were to be uniform and regular in his attacks the human race would have found him out a long time ago and the poorest old church member would have known how to avoid him but because he is not uniform but highly irregular and mixes things up he is deadly if we haven't the shield of faith to protect ourselves take the pitcher for instance he doesn't start throwing when the first inning begins and throw the same ball in the same place for 9 innings if he did the score would be 128 to nothing but what does he do he says he mixes them up the batter never knows where

they are going to appear first up then down then in he mixes them up it is the absence of uniformity that makes the pitcher effective and you think the devil isn't as smart as Dizzy Dean or Billy Pierce you think the devil doesn't know that the way to win over a Christian is to fool him by irregularity never attacking twice the same way in the same day keep coming in from one side one time another side another side like the boxer you think that boxer goes in there and gets himself rigidly stereotyped he leads with his left he strikes with his right he moves back two steps he moves forward two steps why the commonest stumble bum would win over a fighter like that a fighter has to use his head too and first he attacks from one side then from another then dashes in then backs away then

pedals backwards then charges then duck then weave then bob then you know how they do it you don't believe this because I used to fight when I was a kid you wouldn't believe that would you you'd think that anybody big enough to lift a boxing glove would be able to knock me down but I never knocked off my feet I was too fat and my brother that's the way they do it the devil doesn't in the same way every one of us any of us could figure him out but he'll come after you today like a wild bull of Beijing and tomorrow he'll be as soft as Ferdinand and the next day he won't bother you at all then he'll fight you three days and let you alone for three weeks remember it's said after the three temptations he left him for a season why? to get the Lord to drop his guard of course and so the devil

fighters like a boxer he pitches them in like a skilled pitcher he uses strategy now I say that's why it's pretty hard to anticipate you don't know what he's going to do next but you can always put a blanket of anticipation down you can always figure that the devil is after you and so by prayer and watching and waiting on God you can be ready for his coming when he does come and you can win not the day he arrives but the day before he arrives not the noon he gets to you but the morning before the noon and the only way to win then consistently my brethren is to keep the blood on the doorpost keep the cloud and fire over you keep your fighting clothes on and never allow the day to creep up on you never get up early in the morning and look at your clock and say I'll miss my train and dash away

if you must dash away take a New Testament along instead of reading the Tribune read your New Testament on your way to work then bow your head and talk to God get ready I don't recommend that it's too fast and too uncertain but I say rather than not pray at all grab prayer somewhere in the morning I met God in the morning and the day was at its best for the Christian and so I recommend never let the day creep up on you never let Thursday pour you because you didn't pray on Wednesday and never let Tuesday get you down because you were prayerless on Monday and never let 3 o'clock in the afternoon flurry you because you didn't pray at 7 in the morning see that you get prayed up somewhere now I have 1, 2, 3, 4 little recommendations and I got 8 minutes that means 2 minutes a piece and I will

turn you loose go out into the sunshine and think over these things you want to take down these 4 little thoughts that I'm going to leave you to close a little conclusion all sermons should have conclusions never act as if things were alright now if the devil lets you alone a while and you're not in much trouble and you're reasonably happy and reasonably spiritual you're likely to develop a complex that says well, things are alright and you'll neglect your prayer life and you don't watch and pray remember, as long as sin and the devil and disease and death are abroad in the land like barren like a contagious disease things are not alright you're not living in a healthy or wholesome world healthful world a world that is geared to keep you spiritually healthy this vile world is not a friend

of grace to lead us on to God it's the opposite so instead of assuming that things are alright assume that they're always wrong and then prepare for them and anticipate them from whatever direction they come

that's number 1 number 2 is never trust the devil and say things are alright this devil business is overdone and I won't pray today I'll wait till Wednesday just as you can't trust a communist you can't trust the devil because it's from the devil the communists learn their technique and get their psychology and just as no statesman worthy of your vulgar trust ever ought to trust a communist as long as he's a communist so we never must trust the devil never imagine that he's smiling never look at a picture of him by Doré or somebody and say oh he's not a bad looking devil perhaps all

this is more or less a man he claws and Jack Frost is only imaginary never trust the devil always anticipate any possible attack by watching and praying for the spirit though it's willing the flesh is terribly weak again never become over confident for the very reason I stated that our Lord stated the flesh is weak never become over confident many a man has lost the fight and many a business man has lost a business because he was over confident and for never underestimate the power of prayer watch and pray said Jesus and he wasn't talking poetry watch and pray said Jesus and he practiced it and won because he did practice and caught the spinning world the sin had thrown out of gear caught them in the web of his own love and redeemed them of the shedding of his own blood he did it I say

because he readied himself for that awful event and that glorious event by prayer the night before and by prayer in the mountains at other times and by prayer down the years to his boyhood never underestimate the power of prayer and remember that without it you cannot win and with it you cannot lose granted of course that it's true prayer and not saying of words granted your life is in harmony with your prayer if you pray you cannot lose and if you fail to pray you cannot win for the Lord gave us the example of anticipatory prayer getting ready for any event by seeking the face of God in watchful prayer at regular times then no matter what happens like Jesus Christ our Lord like Daniel and Elijah and the rest you can go triumphantly through for prayer always wins

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