

Two Warnings and an Example

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of learning from the experiences of Jesus, Peter, and Judas to understand the powerlessness and wretchedness of the flesh and the need for dependence on God through prayer.

Scripture: Matthew 26:41, Luke 22:31

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Overcoming Temptation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the contrasting examples of Jesus, Peter, and Judas in the context of trials and temptations. He highlights Peter's weakness and Judas's wickedness, illustrating how both failed to fully depend on God, while Jesus exemplified perfect obedience and reliance on the Father through prayer. Darby warns that without a conscious awareness of our own weaknesses and the necessity of prayer, we risk falling into temptation, just as Peter did. He encourages believers to learn from these examples, recognizing the worthlessness of the flesh and the importance of maintaining a close relationship with God to withstand trials. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a life of prayer and dependence on God to navigate the challenges of faith.

Transcript

TWO WARNINGS AND AN EXAMPLE

Being the Substance of a Lecture on Matthew 26

WE have here an example in the case of Jesus, and two warnings in Peter and in Judas. In Peter we may learn the weakness, and in Judas the dreadful wickedness, of the flesh. We get in Jesus what we should aim after. In Judas we see the mere professor, in Peter the saint sifted. All three are before us in a time of searching trial, and the result of trial is seen in each. We ought to remember that we have received the Holy Ghost, which Peter had not when he denied the Lord; yet, having the Holy Ghost, we may still learn a lesson from Peter's flesh. And is not the entire worthlessness of the flesh among the last things we learn? In Peter we see what the flesh is. There is no real living upon the hope of the glory, except in measure as the flesh is mortified and brought under subjection.

I would dwell, first, upon Judas's apostasy. He had all the appearance to men of being as the other disciples; he had companied with the Lord, he had been one of those sent forth to preach the gospel and work miracles; but his conscience never was before God. He might have truth in his understanding (and,

indeed, the understanding does not generally receive truth so readily where the conscience is affected). Again, Judas could not have walked three years with Jesus, and seen His grace and love, and not have had his affections moved. But then his conscience had never been brought into exercise before God. So it is with many. If we watch the saint receiving truth, we shall often find him slow of apprehension. There is something to be judged before God; something which condemns him, and which involves sacrifice. For instance, we see most clearly that the precious blood cleanses from all sin ; but only let us commit sin-and how slowly do we apprehend that blessed truth so as to get the comfort of it! In the latter case the conscience is at work. In like manner the affections of the unconverted may be moved -a great company of women followed Christ at the crucifixion, bewailing and lamenting Him! So we read of " anon with joy " receiving, and " by and by " [or anon, for it is the same word], when tribulation arises, turning away.

The natural man wants something to satisfy self before God; and, until he has done with himself, he will be looking for a certain measure of righteousness before God. He may have been, in connection with this want, instructed in the gospel, and thus the understanding may be clear, and the affections moved : but, unless the conscience be bare before God, there is no life. Here was Judas betraying his Master! After all, what was this ? Nothing more, at the bottom, than what was in every heart. Judas loved money-no uncommon lust. And the love of money in a saint nowadays is as bad, or worse, as being done more in the light.

There was sin in Judas's nature: which sin shewed itself in the shape of the love of money. The next thing was, Satan suggesting a way of gratifying this lust, for he loved money more than he loved Jesus. And now we find the result of outward nearness to the Lord while the conscience is unaffected-it was to make Judas reason upon circumstances. He thought, probably, the Lord would deliver Himself, as He had done before; for, when he found it not so, he threw down the money, and said, " I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." He continues in this nearness to Christ, until, thirdly, we read that " after the sop Satan entered into him." In the condition of hypocrisy he gets his heart hardened ; and then Satan gets between his conscience and all hope of pardon. Many a natural man would not betray a friend with a kiss, as Judas soon after did. His nearness served to harden him ; and he actually took the sop from the hand of the Lord! Even natural feeling was silenced. So it is when the unconverted man gets into a similar position. He becomes more vile than ever. His heart is hardened. Hypocrisy, and at length despair, ensues. Such is the flesh and its end. And the flesh cannot be bettered by ordinances, even where Christ Himself is. Such is the flesh - I can hardly say, when left to itself, for man is never left to himself he is never really independent. He has the will to be so ; therefore he is perfectly a sinner, but if disobedient, he is servant to his lust, " disobedient, deceived , serving divers lusts and pleasures," and slave to Satan. A natural man has a conscience and shame. He will not do in the light what he would do in the dark. But the outward form of Christianity, where it has not touched the heart, only makes this difference, that his conscience is seared, and he is only more subtly the slave of Satan.

I turn now to the contrast afforded by what is seen in Pete with what we see in our blessed Lord. In Jesus we see th obedient, the dependent One, expressing His entire dependance by His praying. And there was seen an angel from heave strengthening Him. He felt the weakness which He ha given Himself up to bear; He was " crucified in weakness. " All my bones," He says, " are out of joint, my heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death ; tarry ye here an watch with me." So in the earlier temptation, we hear Him answering the devil out of the word of God. Jesus might have sent Satan away by divine power, but this would have bee no example to us. So, in this chapter, we see the Lord praying!

If you compare what Peter is doing with what the Lord is doing, you learn the secret of Peter's weakness and the Lord's strength. What was the effect of trial upon the weakness of Peter's flesh? He had said, "I will go with thee to prison and to death"; but the Lord has to say to him, "couldst thou not watch with me one hour?" They were sleeping for sorrow. Here was neither prison nor death! "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation" (not merely that there be no transgression). Peter entered into temptation; Jesus never did at all. Yet the trial was far greater to Jesus. Jew and Gentile were against Him, and behind them the power of Satan. "This," said He, "is your hour, and the power of darkness"; and again, "my soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Where does He take all this? The Lord does not sleep and seek to forget His sorrow. He goes and prays to the Father. His eye rested not on the circumstances to think of them. He looked to His Father. Not that He did not feel; for He said, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." It was weakness here as man, and that is real strength.

Remember, if we are in entire dependence, the temptation does not meet us at all. Jesus does not say, 'shall I not go through all these trials?' but "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" He does not see Pilate or Judas in it; it was not Satan that had given Him the cup, but His Father. So with us; if in a frame of entire dependence, temptation does not touch us at all! Trial comes; but, like Jesus, we can say of it, "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Every trial becomes a blessed occasion for perfecting obedience, if near God; if otherwise a temptation! Jesus was walking with God. It was not that He did not feel weakness. "Tarry ye here, and watch with me," shews the weakness of human condition fully felt. As in Psalm 22:14, referring to the cross, He says, "I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint: my heart is melted like wax in the midst of my bowels." And yet He shrank not from suffering alone when love to His disciples called for it "If ye seek me, let these go their way." But being in an agony, He prays the more earnestly; it drives Him to His Father; and that before the trial comes. Then what is the next thing? When the trial actually comes, it is already gone through with God! He presents Himself before them saying, "whom seek ye?" as calmly as if going to work a miracle. Whether before Caiaphas or Pontius Pilate, He makes a good confession; owns Himself Son of God before the Jews, and King before Pilate.

How comes this difference? In the first place with Peter the flesh is sleeping; he goes to sleep to get rid of the pressure of circumstances. Peter has not gone through the trial with the Father. At the moment when Jesus is going to be led away, the energy of the flesh wakes up, and Peter draws the sword. The flesh has just energy enough to carry us into the danger where it cannot stand—that energy deserts us then. How little real communion is here! When Christ was praying, Peter was sleeping; when Christ was submitting as a lamb led to the slaughter, Peter was fighting; when Christ was confessing in suffering, Peter was denying Him with cursing and swearing. This is just the flesh: sleeping when it ought to be waking; in energy when it ought to be still; and then denying the Lord when the time of trial comes. With Christ it was agony with the Father, but perfect peace when the trial came. Oh, if we knew how to go on in all circumstances in communion with the Father, there would be no temptation that would not be an occasion of glorifying Him!

The great thing was, Peter had not learned what the flesh is: he did not keep in memory the weakness of the flesh; and thus the condition of dependence was hindered. He seems to be sincere in wishing to own the Lord Jesus and not deny Him. There was more energy of natural and very true affection in Peter than in those who forsook the Lord and fled. He really loved the Lord. Peter fails, not from self-will, not from willing to sin, but through the weakness of the flesh. In Christ there was no possible moral weakness, because He always walked in the place of weakness in communion with His Father. Jesus goes-through

agony itself-with the Father. Peter fails, though but the shadow of temptation comes to him. All Peter's fall began by want of dependence, and by neglecting prayer. We must be watching " unto prayer " ; not merely ready to pray when temptation comes, but walking with God, and so meeting it in the power of previous communion and prayer. Without continual prayer, and constant sense of entire weakness in self, the more love to Christ, and the more good-will to serve Him are in a saint, the more certainly will he, by that very good-will, be led into the place in which he will dishonour Christ! The other disciples that fled did not so much dishonour the name of their Master as Peter did. It was thus Peter had to learn the evil of the flesh. Jesus, on the contrary, ever walked in the confession of dependence always praying. And what use did the Lord make of His knowledge of Satan's purpose to sift Peter? He prayed for him! The more knowledge, dear brethren, the more prayer! " I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." As the result of this intercession, Peter learnt the evil of the flesh more deeply than the others, and was able to " strengthen his brethren."

We are incapable of ministering truth to our brethren unless we are conscious of weakness in ourselves. Without the prayer of Jesus, where would Peter have been? He was running nearly like Judas. Oh, what a blessed thing to be kept in entire consciousness of weakness, instead of running on like Peter into a place where we cannot stand! How good to be afraid to take a single step without the Lord's guidance! The flesh is ever playing us false-it is good for nothing. The effect of keeping it in the Lord's presence is to have done with it-to be cast on the Father. There is no wisdom that will stand us in any stead but the wisdom that is from above. The Lord knew what the flesh was, and what Paul needed, when he had been caught up into the third heaven. To be taken up to a fourth ? No ; but a messenger of Satan to buffet : that is, he needed to be brought down. There is the thorn in the flesh given him ; there is to be the consciousness that the flesh is worth nothing.

We may notice that there are three ways of learning the powerlessness and wretchedness of the flesh : prior to peace, often in desperate struggles (for knowledge and conscience are distinct things); when we have peace, before the Lord in prayer and communion, not daring to take a step till He leads us, and then He is glorified in us in grace and obedience, whatever the trial ; or in the bitter experience in which Peter learned it, when flesh is not judged in communion with God. This last will be the way, so long as we are judging of things instead of judging ourselves. When we are faithfully judging ourselves and walking with God, we shall enter into no temptation. Trial may come, but there will be full preparation to meet it; not that we may be able to say, Now I am prepared for this or that temptation. We are in no certainty from one moment to another as to what trial may be coming; but we shall have the strength of God with us in it. Therefore our only safe place is watching and prayer-yes, prayer before the assault-prayer that may amount to agony; for so Jesus prayed!

We must expect to have our souls much exercised; often, it may be, when trial is there, casting about as to why this trial is sent. It may be for a fault ; it may be for some careless or hard state of soul. It may be, as Paul's, to keep down the flesh; it may be preparatory to some coming conflict. But in these exercises of soul we must keep before the Lord : then, when the trial comes for which the Father has been training us, there will be perfect peace. The Lord will make you bear in spirit with Him, when exercised, the burden which He will make you bear in strength in the battle. Do not shrink from inward exercise; settle it with Him. There is no limit to our strength for obedience when our strength is the Lord's.

" If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." None of our souls can estimate what that cup was for One who had dwelt essentially in the Father's love ; but the most spiritual will most acknowledge it. Then the Holy One was made sin; no gleam of light on the soul of Jesus. At the thought of it, when pressed by

Satan on His soul, we see Him sweating as it were great drops of blood. He did not think lightly of sin! The Prince of life was brought into the dust of death "all thy billows passed over me." At the cross Jesus bore what you will never be called to bear. Beware of denying Him. Many do so in detail who in the main acknowledge Him. Our happy privilege is, not to be occupied with the trial as a trial, but to see in every trial an opportunity of obeying God, and to say of each, as Jesus did, " The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ? "

" Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only God, our Saviour, be glory."

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