

## Lost Opportunities Luke 22:39-46

In our human condition, we are so accustomed to sin being present within us that we too often barely notice that it is there. It's tentacles have so cleverly embedded their way into our souls that they very often seem normal to us.

But that was not so with the Lord Jesus. He had existed for an eternity without any personal experience with the corruption and misery, pain and suffering that sin brings to a person's soul. And He brought that sinless perfection with Him into His earthly life.

But now here in the next steps of His journey towards the redemption of the sinful souls of mankind, He was beginning to experience an awful taste of sin's power and influence.

And no, as men and women of lowly flesh, we will never be able to truly know the sufferings our Lord was about to experience, but through His words here in these scriptures, He was offering His disciples then, and you and me now, the opportunity in some small way to join with Him as He began His travail.

And so, if we'll listen carefully as we read and as we study these words given to us here in Luke chapter 22, God will give us a deeper insight into the very intimate sufferings that our Lord was experiencing. And our hearts will be rebuked and corrected by them in ways that we would not otherwise know and understand, these words telling us about the deep intimate sufferings of our Lord as He agonized and wrestled with His own soul not just about the kind of death He would have to suffer. But very specifically about the very sins that are present within your and my heart right at this moment, sins that need to be redeemed and washed away from our souls.

And no, just from these few words we will not be able to fully comprehend the agonies He was experiencing, but if we will surrender up our souls to God's Holy Spirit as we study, He will surely give us at least a small glimpse of what our Lord endured on our behalf.

Oh dear Christian, as with His disciples then, within these words, you and I are being invited to join with Him in His sufferings by "staying awake" and praying with Him, a rare and precious opportunity that we dare not let slip past us.

Pause with me for a moment and listen to these precious words given in Luke chapter 22, beginning in verse 39. There we read,

<sup>39</sup> And he (the Lord Jesus) came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup> And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." <sup>41</sup> And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, <sup>42</sup> saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." <sup>43</sup> And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. <sup>44</sup> And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. <sup>45</sup> And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, <sup>46</sup> and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:39-46)

For clarity, may I also read about these same moments as they are described for us in Matthew chapter 26. Listen, beginning there in verse 36,

<sup>36</sup> Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." <sup>37</sup> And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. <sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." <sup>39</sup> And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." <sup>40</sup> And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? <sup>41</sup> Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." <sup>42</sup> Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." <sup>43</sup> And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. <sup>44</sup> So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. <sup>45</sup> Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. <sup>46</sup> Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Matthew 26:36-46)

Have you ever been face to face with a real and genuine "opportunity of a lifetime" and without recognizing exactly what you had in front of you, simply

went right on past it in favor of another thing that seemed more appealing or more convenient to you at the moment?

We can't usually know when such opportunities have taken place because often their real value does not become known to us at the time.

But sometimes, in the mysterious grace of God, He enables us to look back on some of those opportunities and to catch a small vision of the thing we missed out on. And on those occasions, our hearts grieve within us for our loss.

Choices and our ability to make those choices are a necessary part of the way that God made us. They are a part of the "freedom of the will" allowance He has given to us.

So yes, without doubt and most often without advance notice, we will be confronted with opportunities for choice, mostly very ordinary everyday ones. But sometimes those choices turn out to be very, very important ones. And if we are fortunate enough to make a good and right choice, our hearts are gladdened.

But unfortunately, it seems that the clear lines between the rightness and wrongness of many of our choices are not so plain. They are blurred and confusing, and in the rush of daily life, we find ourselves making choices we should not make.

And may I say that some of the worst of our wrong choices take place within the most ordinary of our daily circumstances.

So it was on this night, as the disciples accompanied the Lord Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane. This was something that they were very accustomed to doing. And so, in most ways this opportunity for prayer probably seemed to them to be much like all the many other similar opportunities for prayer.

But with that being said, we do have one inference given within these words that tells us that this visit to the Garden of Gethsemane had some difference to it. We are told here that the disciples were sorrowful, even to the point of exhaustion.

And they did have cause to be sorrowful, several reasons. They had just been told that one of them would betray the Lord Jesus. And also, they were no doubt remembering all the many times that Jesus had warned them that He might soon die.

But I also believe that the unseen spiritual kingdom that revolves all around us each day was and still is very real and very active within men's lives. And it was especially active there during those hours leading up to Jesus' death on the cross.

We can see it clearly in the way that the angel came to minister to Jesus as He suffered great sweat drops of blood and as He cried out to God the Father to let this cup pass from Him.

These words do not say that the disciples were also being ministered too by the spiritual kingdom. But I have to believe that they, through their deep feelings of sorrow, were being made aware of a very serious impending event.

And I believe that the spiritual kingdom ministers those same kinds of feelings to you and me when something very "big" and perhaps "ominous" is about to take place.

And for the lack of a better way of explaining our feelings, we call them "premonitions"! And those feelings cause us to respond in different ways.

With these disciples, their sorrow should have provoked them to a time of fervent prayer. But it did not! They were instead, "sleeping for sorrow", or as another translation words it, were "Exhausted from sorrow".

Sorrow, most often, would seem to be a form of distraction that would keep a person awake, tossing and turning. But here, their grief caused them to do the opposite, to become drowsy and to fall asleep.

And therein might lie evidence of the other participants within the spiritual kingdom, those sinister powers of darkness that tempt us to do things that we should not do, to make choices that we should not make.

Consider for a moment . . . could and should the disciples have fought off their drowsiness and continued with Jesus in prayer. Yes! They most definitely should have and could have!

How do we know that they could have stayed awake . . . because Jesus said so! He actually came back to them and woke them on three occasions, rebuking them and exhorting them to stay awake and to pray.

Listen to these words again given there in Matthew chapter 26.

<sup>40</sup> Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? <sup>41</sup> Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:40-41)

So yes, the disciples could have stayed awake!

But should they have stayed awake? Again, yes! And for many reasons. One of those reasons was given to them immediately by the Lord Jesus. He said to them . . .

<sup>41</sup> Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Our flesh, that part of us that has our "self", our soul within it is especially susceptible to temptation. There seems to be an open doorway with our "flesh", our "soul" by which the dominions of darkness, those powers and principalities of the demonic world can gain access to our soul and there bring about the temptations that will keep us from doing the things that God intends for us to do.

Here, it was not as if the demons provoked the disciples to do something that was blatantly sinful. No, they instead used one of the simplest of temptations, "drowsiness".

And that one simple temptation was enough to distract them from their appointed duty of prayer.

"Sleep" is such a simple thing, and so good for us when done at the appropriate time and place. But when misused, "sleep" can also be used to accomplish the will of the evil one, as it did here in the Garden of Gethsemane. And also as it

does often with tens of thousands, even millions of people who, each Sunday, choose to “sleep in” rather than get up and go to church and worship the Lord.

What a clever diversion by the evil one! And may I say, as those dear ones “sleep in”, often they are missing out on life-changing opportunities that they may never recover from.

Here, drowsiness and sleep kept the disciples from taking part in something that was so big and so important that even we, looking back and knowing what they missed out on, still can’t fathom the magnitude of its importance.

They missed out on joining with and being an intimate part of the provision that the Lord Jesus would make for the salvation of men’s souls.

Wow! What an opportunity and what a horrible failure and loss for these disciples!

But to say that such things are an “unforgivable lapse” in commitment would not be true. God can and does forgive such things, and many other things that are far worse.

But for these disciples, this was a very, very, very big loss of opportunity.

And the thing that Jesus was asking of them was so very simple, prayer, staying awake and joining with Him in prayer!

And may we again take the opportunity to address the nature of this very simple, but vastly profound matter of prayer.

As we have seen over and over again, Jesus gives us the full understanding that prayer is not just one of the essential parts of a relationship with God the Father. It is probably the very most important.

Why is that so? It is as simple as it appears to be. At its barest level, prayer is simply an intimate conversation between us and God.

I have said to you often that my mind thinks in a visual manner. And in this matter of prayer, I see myself walking along each day, with God walking beside me.

Now, consider a similar circumstance of daily life. On those occasions when my wife and I have gone for a walk through our neighborhood, it is normal for us to carry on a conversation while we walk. In that conversation, we talk about many of the things that concern us, both personally and as a family.

And it is in and through those and other conversations like them that we establish and maintain a deep, loving relationship with each other. During those conversations and others, we share very intimate concerns. And the more intimate we choose to become, the more trust and appreciation we gain in and for each other.

And folks, while yes, there are many, many other important things within our daily lives, "loving relationships" rise above them all, "loving relationships" with God and "loving relationships" with each other.

How do we know that "loving relationships" are so very important? Because God has said that it is! We are told clearly in the scriptures that all the most important things in life reduce down to just one thing and that is "Love" . . . "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind and all of your strength, and then love your neighbor as yourself." And Jesus would add to that, "Love each other as I have loved you".

Those words describe "relationship", deep, intimate and loving "relationship".

And that was what Jesus was asking from His disciples on this very, very difficult night, relationship!

These men, who were just a "stones-throw" away, were not just His disciples, they were His closest of friends. And He needed them to be "one" with Him in His sufferings. And they should have been! But they weren't.

And I can only imagine how many times afterward they looked back on this night and sorely wished they had done better.

So then, what shall we gain from being able to view the opportunities and the failures of these dear men? It is this!

It is our usual nature to make excuses for people in these kinds of circumstances, and to cut them some slack, but folks, we must not. Why? Because if we do, we are apt to provide them with an excuse that is not ours to give. And even further, we are apt to provide our own selves with a similar excuse when a similar time comes for us. And that should not be!

These scriptures tell us plainly to "make no provision for the flesh". And that was what Jesus warned these men about when He said to them,

<sup>41</sup> Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Those disciples should have stayed awake and should have prayed fervently. And if you and I were to have been in that same circumstance, we too should have stayed awake and prayed. It is as simple as that. Am I condemning them or us for failures?

No! Not at all! I am not allowed to be another person's judge! I am simply giving recognition to the most basic of requirements of our souls and that is that we be obedient to the righteous requirements of God, no matter how difficult they seem to be.

And also, for us to know that each time we fall short, we truly are hurting someone or perhaps even disrupting one of the greater plans of God.

What then should we do with what we know from these words? It is this!

Just as you and I are able to observe here with the Lord Jesus, we need to make firm plans for a daily time of prayer, and a daily time of relationship building, both with our Lord and with our friends and our families.

And we must follow through with those plans. We must develop habits and customs that provide for those opportunities and choices to become successful.

And it all reduces down to one thing on our part, and that one thing is "obedience".

May I close with some familiar words from Deuteronomy chapter 30 . . .

<sup>19</sup> This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live <sup>20</sup> and that you may love the LORD

your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.  
(Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Pray with me.