

Take a Stand Against America's Devastation With This Sacred Assignment

America will either seek God from a place of desperation, or we will find ourselves crying out to Him from a place of devastation!

We are watching America morph before our eyes. The reality is without a transformational revival and true spiritual awakening that impacts the culture, our grandchildren will not enjoy the freedoms we have experienced. The church will be shackled with regulatory governmental chains and a secularized, atheistic culture that will drive her to her knees.

With this in view, I believe we have been given an awakening assignment that echoes Christ's words to His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, "So, could you not keep watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:40-41).

The Setting and Context

The setting and context of this narrative is after Jesus had been teaching in Jerusalem during His last week. His parables were focused on accepting or rejecting Him as Messiah. No doubt, Jesus could relate to Isaiah's dilemma following his impassioned answer to the call of God: "Here am I. Send me!" (Is. 6:8). Anticipating the response the prophet would receive from the people, God's warning for Isaiah was rather grim, to say the least. "Their hearts will be calloused, their ears

dull, and their eyes closed.”

The New Testament religious leaders, who also served as national leaders in the Jewish culture, had become dull of heart, hard of hearing and blind to the very truth they should have been teaching others. Jesus’ audience was missing the promised Messiah their Jewish festivals and traditions foreshadowed, even as He stood right in front of them. Eight times in Matthew 23, Jesus referred to them as hypocrites. Still, He mourned their rejection and warned them of the coming tribulations. What was their response? They plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. Can we relate in our contemporary setting?

The reality is that we will always have hypocritical national and religious leaders—Judases selling out and betraying the Savior, disciples fleeing because of fear, and Peters denying Him in the face of persecution. Yet God will always have a remnant that is not blinded by the enemy or insensitive to the Spirit of the Lord. They will not be fearful but bold in the face of persecution, willing to give their very lives at the hands of cruel executioners in black hoods. Thank God for modern-day Pauls and Polycarps, Deborahs and Esthers, John the Baptists and Peters, French Huguenots and George Washingtons, Mother Teresas and brave Guatemalan, African and Syrian pastors or even children.

The context surrounding Jesus’ time in Gethsemane (literally meaning “oil press”) was one of corruption in the religious world and nation, combined with persecution and betrayal outside and inside the kingdom of God—even by His closest friends and followers. The heavy weight of the sin and iniquity of all humankind was pressing upon Him to the point that His soul was “exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38).

Still, He was not deterred from His mission and destiny!

The Assignment

We know the assignment Jesus was facing, but what was the disciples assignment in this deeply sorrowful and pressing time?

Luke's account indicates going to the Mount of Olives to pray in this particular garden was not a new thing for Jesus or even the disciples. "According to His custom, He came out and went to the Mount of Olives. And His disciples followed Him" (Luke 22:39). Luke then uses a definitive article, "When He came to the place" rather than "a place." It was "the place" God had ordained for the Lamb, who was slain from the foundation of the world, to gain the victory over Satan through submitting to the will of the Father to become the supreme sacrifice, once and for all!

Always unselfish, always loving unconditionally and caring for them beyond their own personal care and self-preservation, Jesus knew one of their greatest trials was on the horizon. They were about to be tempted to deny and forsake the One who had loved them to the end. Their only hope of resistance and victory over temptation was persistent prayer and watchfulness. In their present condition, their love, faith, perseverance and resistance were not equal to the strain they were about to face. It was in "this place" that He instructed and warned them of the absolute necessity of praying so they would not "enter into temptation" (22:40).

The place where you may have found yourselves at times is not by happenstance. God is doing a work in your life that if you could have planned the agenda, you might have avoided it altogether. He knows our hearts better than we know ourselves. God understands what is required to move us to a new level of boldness and trust that will propel us and our ministry forward in a way that we would never achieve if we avoided the Gethsemanes in our lives.

Jesus knew the disciples were going to fail in their initial assignment and test. They were going to sleep instead of pray. They were going to desert and deny Him, but still He instructed and warned them. In contrast, He wasn't too proud or embarrassed to admit His struggles and ask for their intercession on His behalf. Did His human heart long for sympathy and understanding? Was Jesus the Son of Man longing for someone to pray "with" and "for" Him?

Is Jesus' heart grieved with bearing the weight of our nation's rejection and denial? Is He longing for someone to stay awake and intercede with Him today—someone who will not just warm themselves by the fire, but boldly acknowledge our relationship with the One who's on trial in the world!

The Assurance

The good news is God's people are never left without hope! The promise to Isaiah continues to bring us assurance from the Lord today: "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be burned, as a terebinth tree or as an oak, whose stump remains when it is cut down, so the holy seed is its stump" (Is. 6:13). Yes, Cyrus later allowed a remnant to return and repopulate the nation in 583 B.C. Following the Roman destruction and occupation, another remnant re-established the nation of Israel in A.D. 1948.

We know the Holy Seed, who was prophesied to bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). We are His body—the body of Christ—in the world today. We may feel like we are only a remnant, but we have this assurance that still echoes from the lips of Jesus:

"Look, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. And nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19).

We have one significant difference in our Gethsemane or

pressing times. Jesus told His disciples to “sit here while I go and pray yonder,” and He went deeper into the garden to wrestle with the enemy one final time before the cross. That victory is won! The enemy has been defeated! The powers and principalities of darkness have been put to an open shame! He has triumphed over death, hell, and the grave!

Jesus still tells us to stay here and pray while He goes yonder, but that place is at the right hand of the throne of God where our risen and ascended Lord is ever interceding for us! {eoa}

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