The Garden and the Cup
Luke 22:31-46

So you can get your bearings for this passage – it's Jesus' last supper with his disciples, and it's the night of the Passover feast – which, as we saw last Sunday, Jesus has said He is going to fulfill by giving His life as the ultimate Passover lamb. And as the meal draws to a close, He warns the disciples that trouble lies ahead:

Luke 22:31-46

Jesus predicts Peter's denial, and we'll look at that next Sunday. Today we're going to look at three things – be prepared for trouble; prayer is your weapon when trouble comes; and then finally, Jesus is more than your example.

Be Prepared for Trouble
One of my best friends is a guy called Jon, he lives in the UK, and Jon and I go back to university days, and Jon's rooms at college overlooked the famous Bridge of Sighs on the River Cam. And when we get together as two families, one of the things our girls love is when Jon tells these embellished tales of what we got up to as students. Like waiting for unsuspecting Japanese tourists to float by on their punts and then throwing water bombs at them; or the time when Jon came back one day to find his underwear hung all over the trees, or how we'd stay up to whatever hour listening to Keith Green songs at top volume; or how we'd gather around Jon's piano and sing all 19 verses of some obscure Charles Wesley hymn; or how we first met at a revival prayer meeting, and we'd hold one every week between pathology lectures, and the Holy Spirit would fall on us. And his kids and our kids, they just love hearing it all – because we can look back and say 'life was great, those were happy days'.

And Jesus and the disciples can do the same. He says to them in v35, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing."' And He's reminding them of those mission trips they went out on in the last three years – and they could look back and say, 'yes, like that one to that town in Galilee, and that woman got healed, or that one where all those crowds gathered and the demons fled, and the good news of the kingdom went out with such power. And remember how we didn't have to worry about where the next meal was coming from, because when they heard we were Jesus' disciples they couldn't do enough for us, and they opened their houses, and just poured out their generosity upon us. Sure we remember those days Jesus, they were great days, those were happy days, we never lacked a thing!'

Well, Jesus says, that was then and now's now and things are going to change: v36, 'He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one."'

You see in the past, Jesus' name was like a ticket that got them in places and people were only too happy to help. But that's going to change, and from now on they are going to need to learn to fend for themselves and stand together and provide for and defend one another. In fact, Jesus says, the kind of attitude they are going to need is that of a man who is willing to sell his cloak, the thing that

keeps him dry during the day and warm at night, they're going to need the attitude of someone who is willing to sacrifice his personal comfort to buy a sword so he can fight in the battle.

But, why are they are going to encounter hostility, where as before they met with welcome and kindness? Well, Jesus says why in v37, "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.'"

And Jesus is quoting there from Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 53, written some 700 years before Jesus, that spoke of the Servant of the Lord, who would be 'pierced for our transgressions… crushed for our iniquities' (v5), because 'the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all' (v6). And Jesus is saying 'I am that Servant of the Lord, the One who will 'be numbered [counted] with the transgressors'. The one who will take the guilt and the shame and the blame for all the stuff you've done that you shouldn't have done and all the stuff you haven't done that you should have done.'

And the irony of that prophecy is that despite the Servant being the Lord's servant, and despite him carrying the people's sins and iniquities – he will be 'despised and rejected by men' (Isaiah 53:3).

In other words, the reason the disciples are going to face rejection, is because Jesus is going to be rejected by the people. And the reason they will reject Him is because they're going to consider Him rejected by God. You see, for a Jew, crucifixion was an appalling end. To be crucified was the same as being hung on a tree – and as the Law of Moses says (Deut 21:23), to be hung on a tree was a sign that you were cursed by God. And what is worse is that Jesus would be crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem, and if you know your Old Testament, you'll know that to be put outside the camp of Israel was the ultimate sign of rejection, of being excluded, cut off, rejected by God and His people. So crucifixion, and crucifixion outside the city walls, had horrible implications.

So whatever the people thought of Jesus before, once He dies the death of an accursed one, everything changes. And the disciples are going to face all the stigma and the fallout of that. 'You're associated with him? The one who's cursed? And you're trying to tell me he's the messiah? Get out of my house, get off of my land.'

Now that was then, but what has this talk of trouble ahead got to do with you and me? Well, the truth is that if you decide to side with Jesus, you're going to face opposition and trouble as well, whether that's in the media, or on campus, or in the workplace. As one author has written, 'To everyone wanting a safe, untroubled, comfortable life free from danger, stay away from Jesus' (Platt, 167). And whilst the reasons you'll face opposition might seem different from the disciples, scratch below the surface and you'll see they overlap. You see, the news that there is such a thing as objective truth and right and wrong and that all of us must one day give an account to God for our lives, but that Jesus has died in our place for our sins as Isaiah 53 explains, so that we can stand in that

judgment, that news does not go down so well with our post-modern culture that thinks, 'Who are you to tell me how I'm to live my life?!'

Well, sometimes medicine is bitter, isn't it? And the good news of Jesus – and it is good – sometimes sounds bad. But that's because we don't understand the mess we're in. Now, I've never tried this, but apparently, if you put a frog in a pan of water and slowly bring it to the boil, the frog will just sit there and get cooked, because it doesn't understand the danger it's in. The temperature just keeps on creeping up slowly. And as that little frog is doing breast-stroke round the pan it might resent your kindly hand interrupting its little swim to try and rescue it, 'who are you to tell me where I can and can't swim?!' But he'd be thankful, if only he knew the mess he's in.

But people don't understand, and so Jesus is saying to these disciples and you and me, 'be prepared for trouble: if I'm going to be rejected, don't be surprised if you are as well. You're going to face a battle and you need to go into it armed.'

And the disciples take him literally. They hear news of coming trouble and the need for swords and so they start counting up the armoury. 'You got a sword Pete?', yeh, I've got one; 'What about you, Thaddeus?', 'sorry mate, left it at home.' V38: "Look, Lord, here are two swords." Now, I've said this before, but it bears repeating. The fact that the gospels are so open, they are so honest about the failings of the disciples, is one of the major reasons why you can trust them. There is just zero attempt to try and sweep their failings under the carpet, or make these first leaders look like the amazing spiritual giants they weren't. They're just men, with all their failings, like the rest of us. And they don't shrink from telling us that – because it's not about them, it's about Jesus and they want you to know the truth about Him.

And yet again, the disciples miss the point. They get the wrong end of the stick, or the wrong end of the sword. They're still thinking earthly kingdoms and physical battles and picking a fight. And Jesus does a face palm – v38, 'and he said to them, "It is enough."' Which means, just stop it. Just stop that kind of talk. Because when Jesus speaks of selling your cloak for a sword, He's not talking about chain mail and battle axes, is He? He's talking about an attitude of mind that's prepared to give up the comfortable life, that's prepared to sacrifice stuff for the cause of Christ. He's talking about being armed internally, not externally.

The question is, how can you do that?

Prayer is your weapon

Now as you read these accounts of Jesus' last hours, it's hard not to get a feel for Jesus' sheer loneliness. Judas, one of His own, is betraying Him. The forces of darkness and the political powers are ranged against Him. And the disciples repeatedly fail to understand Him. As we saw last week, the King is in command, but no one is marching with Him. He's alone. And as He leaves the upper room and walks with the disciples through the night to the Mount of Olives, and the Garden of Gethsemane, He begins to tread the path to the cross and He does so alone. And if you can sense that and see that, you can begin to see that when it

comes to our salvation, it was all Jesus' doing. The disciples, indeed all of us, simply bring nothing to the table.

And when Jesus gets to the garden, He gets on His knees and prays. But Luke doesn't tell us that right away. First he lets us in on something: v39 – 'And he [that's Jesus] came out [of the upper room] and went, *as was his custom*, to the Mount of Olives.'

If you don't know, every Tuesday evening some of us guys get together for men's sport and for the last however many weeks we've been playing touch rugby. And I have to say, it is good for the soul. In fact, I think everyone should be yelled at by Jonathan Schuler at least once a week, it does wonders for your humility! And you realize just how bad you are at the simplest of skills. But if you watch the pros – in rugby or American football, they seem to pull off these amazing tactical moves out of nowhere and you think, how on earth did they do that? Well, the truth is it wasn't out of nowhere at all – they've been practicing it hard for weeks. Or if I think of my old job – we would routinely, every six months, put our staff through resuscitation drills, so that when it's for real, and the adrenaline's flowing and there's a baby who's going to die unless you get this right, you can and do get it right.

You see, in the heat of the battle, it's what you've put in beforehand that comes out. It's the moves, it's the skills, it's the habits you've put in when it's just training, that come out when it's the real thing, because they've become second nature to you. And so when the horror of the cross is less than 24hours away, and Jesus faces His hardest trial, He can pray because He's made it His habit to pray. At the moment when the emotional turmoil and the psychological stress and the adrenaline could have shut down prayer – He can come out in the night to speak to His heavenly father, because that has been His custom.

But it's not just Jesus who needs to pray. V40: 'And when they came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation."' Now you can't avoid temptation can you? It's all around us. But as Martin Luther said, whilst you can't stop a bird landing on your head, you can stop it building a nest. And facing temptation and falling into it are two different things. And Jesus says to the disciples, pray that you don't enter temptation, because temptation is coming. The temptation to deny him and flee. The temptation to chose safety and security and comfort over Jesus. He knows, v31 that satan wants to 'sift you like wheat.' He knows, v53, that this is the 'hour and the power of darkness.' The disciples may be oblivious to all that – but Jesus isn't. So He tells them to pray.

But what do the disciples do? They sleep. Whilst Jesus is sweating in prayer, they're sleeping. Now, if you are anything like me, you know what that feels like. Because fighting temptation and sin in your life can be hard. And there are times when you just want to quit, when the desire to just give in and leave the field, and check out, and just get some rest from the battle, seems so strong. Because it feels like life would be easier if you gave in to the temptation. It's ironic isn't it? As one commentator says, they were keen to fight God's war with man's

weapons, but here they fumble the one weapon – prayer – that counts. And instead, they sleep.

But look at why they're sleeping. V45: 'And when [Jesus] rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow.' These men are emotionally and physically drained, they're done in by the emotional intensity of the last week, and of this night, and maybe the penny is beginning to drop that Jesus really is going to be rejected and die. And they just want some sleep. They just want a rest from all this.

You know, Satan's attacks never come when you're at your best, do they? The powers of darkness and the temptation they bring, know better than to try and take you out when you're at your best. He has a modus operandi, and he'll try and take you out when you're vulnerable - when you're tired, or lonely, or alone or down, or on a high – whenever the time is ripe for you, for what will make you stumble. That's why the apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:11, that we don't need to be outwitted by satan, because we're not unaware of his schemes.

And Jesus says, when that battle comes, don't be passive, fight it, and fight it by prayer, because that's where you'll get your strength from. When Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesians that our battle is not against merely human powers, but against the powers of darkness, he tells us to stand strong. But not in our own strength. Ephesians 6:10, 'Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.' You see, as these disciples discovered, we just don't have the strength within ourselves to fight or stand against darkness and temptation. We need the Lord's strength. In ourselves, we're weak, but God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9) and we lay hold of that and draw that power and strength down, by prayer. That's why James, Jesus' brother says in James 5:13, 'Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.'

And when it comes to temptation and the battle and prayer, Jesus is our supreme example. But He's also more than that.

Jesus: more than your example

Now, have you ever stood in an airport, or on a train platform and had to say goodbye to someone, and you really don't want to part, and it's painful and it hurts and you drag it out, but then you pull yourself away, because they've got to go? Well, in v41 Luke tells us that Jesus 'withdrew from [the disciples] about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed.' And that 'withdrew', literally means he pulled away. It's as if Jesus longed for the human comfort of His friends, but He knows He needs His Father more and so pulls away from them, and gets on His knees, and prays.

And what a prayer. He pours out His heart to His Father. This is not unemotional, perfunctory praying. This is raw, honest, full of emotion, opening His heart up praying. V42, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Jesus doesn't have a death wish. If there's another way, He'll take it. But above everything else, He wants to do His Father's will. His human frailty might shrink back from what lies ahead, but greater still is this desire – Father, I want what you want. Not my will, but yours be done.

Now, like the disciples, sometimes when we face trials we can succumb and just sink in the exhaustion and the emotional pain of it all. But here is Jesus, knowing He needs strength from on high and He's bringing it all before His Father in prayer. And it's not about getting the words all right; it's about pouring out our need for God. It's about praying that His will in our lives, be done: that we'd rather have that than anything else, even comfort and security. Because Jesus isn't spared the trial is He? Jesus doesn't get a free pass through life – and neither will we. Sometimes the gospel is presented as if it's 'Come to Jesus and your life will be a bed of roses.' But the Garden of Gethsemane doesn't look much like a bed of roses, does it?

Instead, we see Jesus, in all his humanity, a man like us, turning to His Father. And heaven responds by strengthening Him. Not by taking Him out of the trial, but as God promises to do for us, by strengthening Him for the trial.

But there's a danger here. And that is that we can think we need to be more like Jesus, - He's our example after all - and then get on and try and do it. And on the one hand that's right. He is our example and we do need to be more like Him. We should make prayer our habit like He did. Above everything else we want, we should want God's will to be done in our lives. But the whole reason He is going through what He is going through in the garden is that you can't do this yourself. You can't clean up your life, or get your act together and be more like Jesus on your own, you just don't have it in you.

You see, ask yourself, why is Jesus in such agony in the garden? V44, 'And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' Why this agony? Is it just that He's scared of death? Hardly – I mean plenty of martyrs have gone to their deaths, even painful deaths with poise and peace. What is it that's bothering Him, what is this cup that He wants His Father to take from Him if it is possible? What's inside this cup that He is shrinking back from drinking?

Well, the cup is a metaphor that runs right through the Old Testament. The Psalmist says of the wicked, 'Fire and sulphur and scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup' (Ps11:6). Isaiah describes the judgments that God sends upon Israel and their being sent into exile as 'the cup of his wrath' (Is 51:17). Jeremiah says the judgment that is going to come upon the nations is 'the cup of the wine of wrath' (Jer 25:15.) Ezekiel calls it, 'the cup of horror and desolation' (Ezek 23:33). And Zechariah calls it, 'a cup of staggering' – staggering under God's judgment (Zech 12:2).

And that's the cup that Jesus is going to drink. That's the cup that He drains to the dregs at the cross. The cup of the wrath of God for your sins and my sins and the world's sins. And the reason for the agony is that He feels the weight of a world

of iniquity and guilt and shame that is going to press down upon Him. He sees and knows that He will become sin, that He will become a curse for us. He sees that He will take the full force of God's wrath, and be rejected by the Father, for our failure to make the grade. It will all fall upon Him.

He takes the cup, so you never have to. He takes the cup so that rather than drink that, you might drink long and freely of God's forgiveness and grace and mercy and power and strength. He takes the cup, so that rather than you having to make the grade and clean up your act, He makes the grade for you. He takes the cup and is rejected by His Father, so you never have to experience what that is like. He takes the cup, so that the doors of heaven might be flung open and you might have free access to the Father now and for all eternity.

Ultimately, it's not about you standing strong in the battle. It's about Jesus, who has won the battle for you. And when we see it's what He's done for us and not what we do for Him; then we'll want to stand in the battle, through prayer, not sleep.