

In the United States... mountain lions are the animal regarded as the number one human predator. ... Author and naturalist... Craig Childs... was on foot doing research on the lions... in Arizona's Blue Range Wilderness. ... As he approached a water hole from downwind... he spotted a mountain lion drinking water. ...At first... the lion did not notice his presence. When it finished drinking... it walked slowly away into a cluster of junipers.

After a few minutes... thinking all was safe... Childs walked to the water hole... to identify tracks in the mud... and to record notes. ... Just before he bent down to look closer... he scanned the perimeter... and **that** is when he saw it... .. Among the shadows of the junipers... 30 feet away... he saw a pair of eyes. ... He expected the lion to run away... but instead... it walked into the sunlight **toward** him. ... Childs pulled his knife and stared into the eyes of the lion. ... As a researcher... he knew what he **had** do. ... But even more importantly... he knew what he must **not** do. This is what he after it was all over... (Some of it I have edited... so as not to be **too** graphic):

Mountain lions are known to take down animals six, seven, and eight times their size. Their method: attack from behind, clamp onto the spine at the base of the prey's skull, snap the spine. The top few vertebrae are the target, housing respiratory and motor skills... Mountain lions have stalked people for miles. One woman survived an attack and escaped by foot on a road. The lion shortcut the road several miles farther and *took* her from behind....

I *held* firm to my ground and *did* not even intimate that I *would* back off. If I *ran*, it *would be* certain. I *would* have a mountain lion all over me. If I *gave* it my back, I would only briefly feel its weight on me against the ground. The canine teeth would open my vertebrae without breaking a single bone....

The mountain lion *began* to move to my left, and I turn, *kept* my face on it, my knife at my right side. It *paced* to my right, trying to get around on my other side, to get behind me. I *turned* right, staring at it....My stare is about the only defense I have.

Craig Childs **maintained** that defense as the mountain lion continued to try to provoke him to run... turning left... then right... back and forth again and again... now just ten feet away. ... Until finally... the standoff ended. The lion turned and walked away — defeated by a man who knew what **never** to do in its presence.

You know... God wants all of us to have a similar knowledge... He wants us to **know** how to defend ourselves against a great adversary – temptation - either from Satan... the world... or our fleshly desires.

Do you know what His strategy is... **and** are you using it regularly...?

“Every battle is won or lost before it is fought.”

—Sun Tzu, Chinese General and Strategist, in The Art of War, written in the late sixth-century BC

In our lives in the world, the temptation is always to go where the world takes us, to drift with whatever current happens to be running strongest. When good things happen, we rise to heaven; when bad things happen, we descend to hell. ... I know this to be true of no one as well as I know it to be true of myself. I know how just the weather can affect my whole state of mind for good or ill, how just getting stuck in a traffic jam can ruin an afternoon that in every other way is so beautiful that it dazzles the heart. We are in constant danger of being not actors in the drama of our own lives but reactors.

—Frederick Buechner

God wants you and I to know and to regularly use His strategy against temptation... so that we will not simply be **RE**actors... “Every battle is won or lost before it is fought.”

We find this strategy in the passage of our study this morning through Luke's Gospel. Today we are in the 22nd chapter... where Christ has just finished His Last Supper with His disciples and now goes with them to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas left the Supper... when Christ told him to go and do what he was going to do. The rest of the disciples thought that Judas was going out to get something. ... and he was – an angry mob to arrest Jesus.

Jesus knows that all of this is coming. ... He knows how devastating this will be to the rest of His disciples. So He tries to prepare them NOT to fall into temptation that would make things worse for them.

Giving into temptation ALWAYS makes things worse – even though the enticement tries to create an illusion... that things will be better! ... It always separates us in our fellowship with God... (And if that really isn't any big deal to you... if pulling away from Christ... losing your sense of closeness to Him... *isn't all that bad*... then let me suggest to you that you may never have been close to Him in the first place. If losing fellowship with Christ is tolerable to you... then I would encourage you to make sure that that you have a saving faith in Christ. ... You may not be a Born-again believer.) Whenever we are tempted by something that we know is sin... part of the temptation is a deception about its benefits. ... And even a true believer can sometimes yield to the lie... that this will be so much better than what we have now... and once we do - we are toast... the battle is lost! NOT THE WAR... just the battle – and our fellowship with Christ is temporarily broken.

Satan... the world... and our own lusts... have at least five fiery darts in their arsenal to make us believe that sin is better Have you ever been struck by any of these fiery darts?:

- Fiery Dart 1: "God is against you. He is not really for you. Who could possibly believe God is for you if they could know the pressure or see all the things that are happening in your life?"
- Fiery Dart 2: "God is holding out on you. You are missing out on something good because God keeps telling you 'no.' He does not want you happy; He wants you miserable."
- Fiery Dart 3: "Comparatively speaking, you are a much better person than most people. You would have to do a lot worse before you need to feel any shame. (You're still a lot better than Rick over here...)"
- Fiery Dart 4: "What does it really matter anyway? After you have enjoyed the sin, just confess it afterward. Enjoy now, ask forgiveness later..."
- Fiery Dart 5: "Given your track record, what hope is there that you will persevere to the end? It is just a matter of time before you fall again, anyway. Why not now?"

God wants you and I to know and to regularly use His strategy against temptation... so that we will not simply be **RE**actors... "Every battle is won or lost before it is fought." So let's turn now to our passage... and equip ourselves for victory!

Luke 22:39-46

Luke's picture of the event is shorter than the more detailed accounts of Gethsemane in Mark and Matthew. ... Those Gospels describe Jesus

returning **three times** ... to find the disciples sleeping. They also record Christ's exasperated words to Peter. But Luke economizes the scene.

The reason for Luke's summary... is to intensify the focus on Jesus' relationship to his Father in prayer. ... In our passage this morning... we are taken into Jesus' heart... as never before. ... We find here... a Jesus Who has never before appeared in any of the Gospels. ...This is the *Sanctus Sanctorum* of Jesus' heart.

Up to **now**... Jesus has been absolutely fearless. ... We see this in the temptation in the wilderness... at the beginning of His ministry. ... During those forty days... face to face with Satan... Jesus remained totally **un**intimidated... and immovable. ...Also... at the opening of His public ministry... when His hometown people attempted to kill Him... He eluded them with fearless composure). ... Shortly after **that**... Jesus silenced a screaming demoniac... with an **un**flustered - "Be quiet!" ... His preaching was fearless... as seen in the six scorching woes He delivered to the scribes and Pharisees. ... And toward the end... as Christ taught in the temple... His repeated conflicts with the authorities... and His repeated slam dunks... were all done with unflappable composure.

Jesus was **always** in control... and in full power... whether quieting a demon... or calming a storm... or feeding a multitude... As we come to the end of Luke's Gospel... we have been watching Him fearlessly tell of... and approach His own death. ...After the Transfiguration... He said to His disciples... "*Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men*" (Luke 9:44). ... A short time later, "*As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus*

resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). And just before ascending the hill to the Holy City... Jesus told them: "*We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again*" (Luke 18:31-33). ... Earlier in the evening to our scene here... in the garden... in the Upper Room... He was fearless and eager to eat the Passover with His own — the whole time He **knew**... **He** was the Passover lamb Who was about to be devoured. ... All throughout the entire range of His dramatic life... Jesus knew **no fear**.

However... **NOW**... in the Garden... there is an abrupt change... a vast difference... We see Jesus overcome with a powerful emotion that we have not seen in Him before – a horrible dread. ... Mark's parallel account of this incident says:

Mark 14:33-34 (ESV)

And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch."

His expression "*greatly distressed*" ... bears the element of **astonishment**. Jesus' horrified astonishment... evoked the self-revelation, "*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*" ... It is hard for us to fathom this... but His dread of what was coming... **could** have killed him!

Then we see in our passage in Luke:

Luke 22:43-44

As Jesus poured out His heart... an angel strengthened Him. ...He was in so much agony... that His sweat fell like drops of blood from a running wound... and splashed on the ground. ... Jesus' body and soul were **racked** with dread-filled anguish.

Why all of this frenzied emotion...?

The answer is:

1) Jesus knew that death is the "wages of sin" (Romans 6:23) — and that He would pay the total wages for all of mankind in full.

2) He also knew that death is a result of the judgment of God (Romans 5:12) — and that He would bear the judgment for all mankind.

3) He knew that He would become sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

4) He knew that death would bring on Him the wrath of God (1 John 2:2) — and that He would propitiate... mollify... appease it to the full.

That is why Jesus was filled with such **unrelenting** anguish. ... This is why He was **so** emotional. ... This is why He could well have died *before* the cross.

And this dread... was the reason for His praying. *“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours be done...”*

What is prayer? ... Ray Stedman has written:

“The purpose of all faith is to bring us into direct, personal, vital touch with God. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and an acknowledgment of divine adequacy...”

So... if you ever try to pray to God with an attitude that somehow you are deserving... that you are worthy by some means to have Him grant your petition... that He owes it to you... .. You are not really praying.

I believe Ray Stedman was right. True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need. True prayer refocuses us on a right attitude... to any situation we find ourselves in. We are helpless... we have need... and only God can help. ... You know...God certainly knows all our needs... before we even pray for them. ... But praying for them changes our attitudes... from complaint to praise... it builds and maintains a right relationship with God... as helpless dependents... and it enables us to participate in God's sovereign plan – in... and around us.

Gary Thomas posted on his Facebook on Monday a quote of Charles Spurgeon... and I had to repost it. It said:

“You misjudge Jesus if you think He wants to be argued with and persuaded to have mercy; He gives it as freely as the sun pours forth light.”

Prayer realigns us in our relationship with God... our criticisms and protests turn to admiration and celebration... as we come to see – though **often**... it is a **struggle** to get there – that God is **always** right... His ways are best. When we pray... we are **not** trying to change God... **we** MOST OFTEN are in need of the change. Indeed... the purpose of all prayer is to bring us into direct... personal... vital touch with God. ...He wants us to be in right relationship with Him... which sees that He gives mercy as freely as the sun pours forth light.

Ralph W. Sockman describes the true intention of prayer: "We use prayer as a boatman uses a boat hook: to pull the boat to the shore and not to try to pull the shore to the boat.

As a result of our prayer... God **might** change the circumstances... He might change **our attitude**... or He might assure us that He is in sovereign control and will sustain us while bringing about His highest good.

Certainly this kind of a realignment... this readjusting of our selves before a Holy and omnipotent God... is the best defense we have against any and all temptation. ... There is no greater defense... than to pray all throughout the day. Pray for **whatever reason** during the course of the day... pray for your own needs and the needs of others... because it adjusts you with God... and keeps your protection high against temptation in your own life... for whenever it may strike. ... Stop and acknowledge to Him your dependent need on Him... for whatever happens to be on your mind at the moment... again and again... all day long.

Why...?

Because - "Every battle is won or lost before it is fought."

What an important passage for every believer we are studying this morning! ... We find – here - so many important truths.

We learn from it that prayer is more than **content** — it is a process of **relationship** with God. ... True... we often get things we ask for. ... But most of all... prayer gives us God Himself... and being in right relationship with Him... He gives us increased faith and obedience.

We have also seen the importance of praying... "*yet not my will, but Yours be done.*" ... Expressing our desires in the context of submitting to God's will — God hears all such prayers!

Thirdly... that prayer is the **secret** of not caving in to temptation. It is pro-active... rather than re-active. The Scriptures promise,

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

You know what...? ... So often we miss the "way out"... ... because like the disciples in our passage today... **we too** are asleep!

Luke 22:45-46

As we get ready to close here... there is one other thing that popped out of the passage to me as I studied it this week. It is too important for me not to mention... and it is simply this:

We are left here on this earth to become increasingly more like Jesus. The reason God did not snatch us into Heaven the moment we gave our lives to Him... is that He wants us to go through a process called "sanctification." That means we are to become more and more like Jesus.

Our passage this morning provides us with a powerful tool for us to measure our progress. Are you more like Jesus... than you were a year ago...?

Now... our passage today shows that Jesus is committed to God's will – even above His Own desires. That is our measurement! ... Are you committed to God's will ABOVE YOUR OWN DESIRES...?

What desires in your life... are holding back the perfect implementation of God's will in your life...? ... Is it... personal fame... a lot of friends... a desire to be respected... loved... or a desire for comfort...? A desire to feel secure through a well-funded retirement account...? or a relationship... maybe a habit that you know is not right but you don't want to give up... because it is familiar and brings you fleeting satisfaction (but later, guilt)...? What cravings do you have... that stifle God's perfect will in your life...? A desire to shield yourself against all personal risk...?

The fewer of these you have... the more Christlike you are. Is there any evidence that you are more committed to God's will – above your own desires... than you were ONE... maybe TWO years ago...?

We are being told... that to maintain good health... we need to purposefully drink ... (what is it?) ... 16 glasses of water a day. ... There are occasions (whenever I happen to remember) ... that I bring to my office large cups... and sometimes a pitcher ... filled with water. ... Or I will go buy a bottle at the Convenience store. ... Throughout the day that cup... or pitcher... or bottle on my desk will reminded me of my need... and I'd pour some more water into my system. Overall... it is usually a positive experience — other than having to go to the men's room 27 times in a period of two hours. ... But here is my point: remaining hydrated... I have learned from experience... requires **intentionality**. ... I have to stop

periodically... in the midst of my busyness... become aware of my body's need for liquid... and pour some water down my gullet.

In a similar way... to drink deeply of Jesus... is to build into our lives frequent moments... in which we **intentionally** stop... and become aware of our dependent need of Him... and His presence with us... allowing Him to "hydrate" our soul... no matter where we are... or what we're doing. ...
... Some have called this kind of intentionality... "practicing the presence of Christ." ... We can practice it anytime... anywhere — while standing in a crowded grocery line... driving to Bend... working out on exercise equipment... waiting for some medical test results... or lying awake at night. Pull up close to God – Pray! ... And find yourself growing more committed to God's will – above your own desires.