

Facing the Darkness

By Ginny Larsen

“Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Peter said to Him, ‘Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You!’ And all the disciples said the same.”

(Matthew 26:34-35 ESV)

“And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.’ 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.’” (Matthew 26:37-39)

Jesus knew sorrow and grief that I don’t think we can fully grasp. He knew pain and suffering (Isaiah 53:3-11) and knows how to share in ours. He knew, as man, what it was like to face the worst kind of evil. He knew the powers of darkness that were about to come against Him and the unspeakable agony He was about to face as He took on our sins, even *“becoming a curse”* for us (Galatians 3:13) — He Who knew no sin, so that we might become *“the righteousness of God”* in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Even Jesus, being both God and man, knew the weakness of human flesh and that there was no power in the flesh alone, no matter the strength of the human will to do right. No matter the determination to stand, He knew only dependence on the power of God would enable us in the frailty of our flesh to stand against the evil and darkness of this world. A concept very difficult for us to understand is that Jesus was both fully God and fully man. I don’t think I completely understand all that that means, but what struck me about this portion of Scripture is the sorrow of His soul, knowing that He, being God, would take on something so repulsive to Him, so unbearable—something that was repulsive to the Father and would cause the Father to turn His face from Him as man (Matthew 27:46).

Thomas Constable (Expository Notes of Dr. Constable) writes: “Jesus cried out the words of Psalm 22:1 because His Father was abandoning Him. It was out of a similar sense of abandonment that David originally wrote the words of this psalm.

“Separation from the Father must have been the worst part of the Cross for Jesus who had never before experienced anything but intimate fellowship with His Father. Jesus became the center of God’s judgment on mankind’s sin (cf. Romans 3:21-26; 2 Colossians 5:21).”

This was so grievous and caused so much sorrow *“even to the point of death”* for our Savior. He cried out, *“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”* If there were any other way at all to obtain our salvation, surely the Father would not have sent His only begotten Son to the cross. If there was some way we could earn it ourselves, if there was some other sacrifice that would do it, or if there was any other remedy at all for our sin, Jesus would not have died for us. And so, He prayed, *“Not my will but Yours be done.”*

Peter was fully determined to go as far as to die for His Lord. His spirit was willing—even boldly determined! But Jesus knew the flesh. He knew, even He, the Son of God, though in the form of human flesh, must fully depend on the Father, on the power of the Spirit to overcome the flesh. *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41).

Having a willing spirit is not enough to face the darkness and evil in this world. No matter how determined we are to stand against evil, it is not enough. We must learn to know our own flesh and see it for what it is. Once we do, we will never again trust it.

Thomas Constable (Expository Notes of Dr. Constable) states: “The contrast between the flesh and the spirit is not between the sinful human nature and the Holy Spirit (as in Galatians 5:17) but between man’s volitional strength and his physical weakness (cf. Matthew 26:35). We often want to do the right thing but find that we need supernatural assistance to accomplish it (cf. Romans 7:15-25).”

In a day when we are facing the darkness of human depravity, as we see it seeming to abound more and more and seeking to overcome all that is of God and all that is good in our world, how much we need to think on this portion of Scripture. What a blessing it is to meditate on what our Lord endured, how much He loved us, and the sorrow and grief He bore for us. And what a sober reminder that if the Son of God Himself walked in such utter dependence on the Father, how much more do we? How little we should trust ourselves or put any hope in our own strength—our own determination or will power. It is never our willpower or faith in our faith that will keep us in the hour of trial. It is only our being “*strengthened in the power of His might*” (Eph-esians 6:10-11) and dependence and trust in His provision, His promise, and His power indwelling us. Our will, our faith, our hope may all fail us in the darkest hour, but He will never fail us. Christ alone is the strength of our salvation and the strength of our hearts. We must look to Him and never trust in ourselves, neither for obtaining salvation nor to keep ourselves as we face the darkness (1 Peter 1:5).