

Training Today for Battle Tomorrow

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The great difficulty for Christians who want to be effective in spirit warfare is that we face an enemy who is a master of the art of camouflage—in fact, he and his agents are entirely invisible. Many pastors and teachers have been neutralized by his camouflage to such an extent that they neglect training their people for spiritual battle; they have begun to doubt whether he even exists or is personally active. Others have the opposite reaction. They become preoccupied with some pretty fanciful theories about their invisible adversary. And because these ideas are not grounded in the Word of God, they distract their followers from the true dangers.

The Bible, however, recognizes that our hidden enemy is both real and personal, both powerful and crafty. Though his power is great, it is not as great as the power of Christ in us, and so therefore we can expect to overcome him. And though he is crafty, his methods are predictable and every one of his tactics can be met and defeated by the well-trained believer.

We can get a clear and realistic picture of our invisible enemy by watching our Captain Jesus in combat. In the wilderness temptations when He was being tempted to sin, we see him win conclusive victories by walking in the Spirit, by fasting, and by resisting the specific temptations with the Word of God (Matthew 4:1-11). When faced with demonized people, He had compassion on the afflicted person and won the victory by refusing to allow the demons to speak, refusing to engage them in conversation, and commanding them to come out. In this short booklet we do not have time and space to notice all of the lessons we could take from Jesus' conflicts with the devil and his agents. But I would like us to review together the most extended account of Jesus' combat with the forces of evil, His victory in Gethsemane on the way to the cross.

A Turning Point. It all began in the midst of Jesus' northern campaign as He reached the villages of Caesarea Philippi. He found a teachable moment with the Twelve and asked them to commit themselves, saying, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter

spoke for them all when he announced, “You are the Christ!” (Mark 8:29).

This turning point came after the first missionary sending of the Twelve (Luke 9) and before the second missionary wave of the seventy (Luke 10). It was just at this point that Jesus began to foretell his death and resurrection (Mark 8:31). It was just at this turning point that Jesus held a summit meeting with two of his faithful veterans and three of his current recruits upon the mountain. The summit meeting that the church calls the Transfiguration was not only a demonstration of Jesus’ glory for Peter’s benefit, but also an opportunity for Jesus to discuss his “departure” with proven men of faith who were able to comprehend the scope of the battle about to be fought. Jesus had attempted at other times to discuss with his band of brothers the conflict that He was about to endure, but they simply could not share his perspective. Command was lonely for Jesus, and his Father graciously gave him this one opportunity to hold counsel with Moses and Elijah, men who could understand his purpose and strategy.

In terms of that strategy Jesus was at the northernmost point of his campaign and would now begin making his way south toward the battlefield that would decide everything just outside of Jerusalem. He would repeat the prophecy of his death and resurrection as He progressed first through Galilee (Mark 9:31) and then with much greater detail when He formed up and led his column into the final ascent toward Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34). There was fear in the ranks and more than one case of pre-combat jitters, and Jesus took this opportunity for the third time to make sure his disciples understood that He was executing a carefully prepared plan.

Secrecy and surprise in the war of nerves. As He had done every Passover since 27 AD, Jesus made his way to Jerusalem ahead of the Feast. His enemies had the tactical advantage and were waiting for him, “planning together to kill him.” There was a lot of secret maneuvering ahead of the Battle of Gethsemane because of the crucial importance of timing for both sides. The chief priests sensed they needed to move quickly before Jesus gained too great a following in the capital, fearing that the Ro-

need to worry about techniques of persuasion, we have the right tool to reach the innermost part of the heart. But we are not the ones who wield the sword—it is not our sword. A Christian who steals the sword from the Spirit and starts swinging it around is a very dangerous soldier indeed, but not a threat to the enemy! Commit the keeping of the sword to its true owner and ask Jesus to wield it through you.

The sword of the Spirit is also a scalpel for the healing of our brothers and sisters. It can even differentiate the soul from the spirit as the great Physician makes his incision. Nothing is hidden from the eyes of the Holy Spirit as He performs surgery. But once again, He is the one who operates the scalpel. He is the only one who has been given the commission to convict every person in the world concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8). When we try to perform surgery on another Christian’s sin, we tend to inflict a lot of unnecessary pain and usually end up with a bloody mess.

Here I have briefly sketched out a method that any serious Christian can practice. In just a few days of regular practice the Christian can increase his combat-readiness by several hundred per cent and become a much more effective soldier of Christ Jesus. But soldiers and athletes need more than just drills in order to become effective, they need these maneuvers and skills to be modeled in ways they can understand and follow. And nobody is more effective in the spirit war than our Captain Jesus.

I hope that by meditating on the example of Jesus’ warfare prayer in Gethsemane and his other famous spiritual battle in the Wilderness Temptations, you will gain a vision for what victory in the spirit war looks like and how it is to be achieved. It is also my hope that his example will motivate you and me to prepare ourselves by wearing the armor He has provided, that we may be able to withstand in the day of crisis. Let it never be said of us that we were so unprepared that we could not stand together in prayer with Jesus for even one hour.

firm my commitment to Jesus that I will give this message as often and whenever He gives me opportunity. Now I am armed with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Over top of all of this other armor you must take the shield of faith. There is much to say about the way Roman soldiers used their shields and the flaming arrows that they defeated in this way, but I prefer to concentrate on the spiritual reality of the shield. You know that you have received forgiveness of sin and eternal life through faith in Jesus' blood on the cross. Now you take the shield of faith by determining that you will live your life by faith in Him alone: you are not trusting your own common sense; you are not trusting your own financial assets; you are not trusting your self-discipline and work ethic. You live by the Spirit, so you must also determine to walk by the Spirit. Confess this: "Lord Jesus, all my faith is in you. In you I can do all things, but apart from you I can do nothing. You must stand between me and the flaming darts of my enemy; you are the shield about me."

When you take the helmet of salvation (6:17) confess that Jesus is your head and your Captain. If you are not living under Jesus' authority or if you are kicking against submission, then it makes no sense to pretend to put on the helmet of salvation. This salvation is not with reference to your new birth in Christ, but rather this is that ongoing work of Christ in your life by which He continues to sanctify and continues to rescue you. Don't allow yourself to spend another day out from under His headship and authority in your life—get under the helmet. Tell him, "Jesus you are my head and my Captain and I am following you. Be also the strength of my life and my salvation."

Finally, take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. When you take the sword of the Spirit, remember its two functions: first it is a weapon against any temptation of the devil, secondly it is a scalpel to perform surgery on hearts that need healing. Jesus is our example for using the sword as a weapon when He defeated Satan's wilderness temptations in Matthew 4 always by quoting the Scripture. Hebrews 4:12 gives us the picture of the other function of the sword of the Spirit when it says the word of God is "living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword... a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." When we are carrying the sword of the Spirit, we don't

mans would use Jesus as an excuse to throw them out of power. They felt their window of opportunity to be narrow and closing, because they knew Jesus would come to the capital for the Feast (John 11:53-57) but would probably return to Galilee soon after. They gave secret orders to gather intelligence on his movements, but with just two days left before the holiday began, they still did not have his location pinned down (Mark 14:1-2). The object of their maneuvering was to seize Jesus somewhere out of the public eye before Passover week or else as soon as possible after the Passover crowds dispersed, definitely "not during the festival lest there be a riot of the people."

Unfortunately for them, Jesus kept the initiative and the offensive throughout the week. On Palm Sunday He stole his famous surprise march on the city, winning over the entire populace so that the priests could fairly say, "You see, the world has gone out to follow him!" (John 12:19) While He had them off balance He pressed all the way into the Temple driving out the occupiers and reclaiming it for his Father's kingdom. His ringing declaration was "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." (Mark 11:17) Each day He would produce fresh and unexpected exploits, but every evening under cover of darkness, He and his men would withdraw, staying outside the city where they could not be pinned down.

For the first five days of the feast the priests had no information on the whereabouts of his base camp and were daily being foiled and routed in their verbal skirmishes with him until finally "they did not dare to [face] him any more" (Luke 20:40). Jesus then took over the Temple as his battlefield HQ while his enemies retired from the field, and He moved his quarters from Bethany to a bivouac He had earlier established in the open air above the city's eastern approach (Luke 21:37-38).

The move to Mt. Olive was a feint necessary to spare his civilian partisans in Bethany town, where He had been staying in the home of his friend Lazarus and (still more astutely) in the home of Simon the Leper. Simon's was the one home his religious enemies could not search for fear of leprous infection, or at the very least, ceremonial defilement. But the priests scored an intelligence coup in that very home on D-Day minus two.

Jesus knew He had a spy in his company and had known the identity of the spy, Judas Iscariot, for at least two years (John 6:70-71). Nevertheless He allowed Judas to travel in his company and even sent him out to represent him on mission work and commissioned him as the company quartermaster. It was in his role as quartermaster that he was able to pilfer funds and material, and this corruption in him led to a fatal break in his relationship to Jesus.

At the fateful dinner in Simon's house (Mark 14:3-9), a woman came into the house during the meal with "an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard, broke the vial and poured it over his head." The extravagance of this woman's gift caused quite a stir among the dinner guests who estimated the value at about a year's wages for a laborer, perhaps \$30,000 in today's economy. Because of Jesus' perspective on his upcoming battle, death and resurrection, He did not share the consternation of the other guests. He pointed out that there would be no opportunity for his own next of kin to anoint his body for burial and He graciously accepted this woman's gift in place of the burial service that would normally have been performed by his mother.

Judas not only shared the general disapproval of such waste but had the additional frustration of seeing a great opportunity for personal profit evaporate literally before his eyes. He left the company in secret and opened a channel to the chief priests, negotiating with them for a cash bounty if he could give them information on Jesus' movements that would lead to his arrest. This was exactly the kind of intelligence the chief priests had been trying to find, and they were thrilled with the opportunity, but they impressed on Judas the importance of finding the appropriate time during the 48 hours they had left before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread began.

Seizing the initiative of time and place. Jesus was quite aware that Judas had now gone over from being a passive spy to active betrayal, and He began to employ him for the final maneuvers as He chose the exact time and location for the great battle. At the very time when his enemies felt they had finally established initiative and surprise, Jesus began to bend them to his will.

Before we consider how to put on the pieces of the armor of God we should consider what it means to "put on the whole armor of God," since that is what we are commanded to do. The parallel passages are Colossians 3 in which we are to put off the old man and to put on the new man (read "new Man") and Ephesians 4:20-32. These passages can all be summed up in one verse in Romans (13:14) "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts." As you put on the armor of God you are actually putting on the new Man, that is you are putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is only possible as you put off the old man and stop making provision to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. It makes very little sense to take up the shield of faith after the flaming arrows are already searing your heart—first remove the arrows, then take up the shield.

Ready? Begin. When you take up the belt of truth (6:14) first put off lies. Allow the Spirit to convict you regarding lies, hypocrisy or exaggerations; then repent these sins. At this point I mentally recite John 14:6 where Jesus says, "I am the truth". When I put on the belt I am putting on the Lord Jesus who is the truth. Forsaking lying, I am all about the truth which is in Jesus.

When you take up the breastplate of righteousness (6:14) first confess that your own righteousness is filthy rags, not enough to stop a sunburn let alone a flaming missile. At this point I mentally confess 2 Corinthians 5:21, that Jesus became sin for me so that I could become the righteousness of God in Him. I confess the exchange that has already been made, my sin for His righteousness. That's the breastplate I'm putting on—Jesus!

The shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace should require careful thought. I change my attitude about my purpose in all that I am about to do today. I have no personal business; I am an ambassador of Jesus Christ with the feet of one who brings good news. "I determine not to know anything [to declare] except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2). I rehearse the facts of the gospel in my mind; I remind myself that this is my only message. The message that I review is the gospel that I myself received: "that Jesus Christ died for my sins according to the Scripture, and that He was buried, and that He rose again from the dead according to the Scripture" (I Corinthians 15:3-4). I recon-

the skills that will be most often needed in time of crisis. So also, when we are training missionaries and disciplers, we concentrate on the skills that will be needful on a daily basis in spiritual combat. One of these skills is the proper wearing of the armor of God. When the Christian soldier is fully armed, he has set himself up to succeed in combat.

How to wear the armor of God. When I train missionaries to wear the armor, I begin not by teaching how, but why to put it on. The first reason for putting on the armor is “so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). The devil has a finite set of strategies in his arsenal, but you have no idea which of these weapons he is going to use on a given day; therefore you need to put on the whole armor of God. Realize that the devil is crafty and that if you come to battle unprepared, he will know exactly what area of your mind is unprotected and that is where he will concentrate.

But we are not in a defensive battle but an offensive one. Remember that Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” Hell is on the defensive, but Jesus is breaking down the gates in order to establish his church. We are on the attack against “principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual [squadrons] of wickedness” (6:12). In what sense are we attacking? Well the whole purpose for putting on the armor is that we may pray “always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (6:18). We do not put on the armor so that we can sit on the sidelines; we wear the armor because we fully intend to wrestle in prayer against God’s spiritual enemies. We are not praying for our own needs (it hardly requires heavy equipment to ask our Father to please meet our daily needs), rather we are committed to the spirit war of intercession. In particular we are wresting from spiritual princes and cadres the war booty they most lust after: the souls of men. First we are praying for “all the saints” (6:18) protection from the enemy of their souls and then we are praying for our comrades to open their mouths “boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (6:19). The enemy’s chief strategy is intimidation, but by prayer we defeat that strategy and pray even greater boldness for our comrades who are speaking the Word.

In order for Jesus to win a complete victory, He not only needed to overcome the final temptations of Satan and defeat death, but He also had to completely fulfill every biblical prophecy regarding his time and manner of death. Whereas the Jews were thrilled with the prospect of killing him at any opportunity, the one time they did not want to arrest or kill him was during the Passover. For his part Jesus was determined that his crucifixion would take place exactly at the time of the Passover sacrifice. In order to accomplish this, He took advantage of the fact that there was a religious discrepancy regarding the exact date of the New Moon that year and that there were two possible dates for Passover. He determined to celebrate Passover with his friends on the first possible day, and to make his historic sacrifice on the second.

The morning of this first Passover day, Jesus stayed outside of the city for most of the day keeping Judas pinned down with him. As long as Jesus stayed out of the city Judas could not inform the priests, and if he left to inform the priests, Jesus would be able to move to a new location. Then He sent his two lieutenants, Peter and John, into the city to prepare their Passover meal (Luke 22:8). In his orders to them, He was careful not to identify the place where they were going to eat, but He used a man carrying a water pitcher as a cutout. This further insured that Judas would not be able to transmit any useful intelligence, because he did not yet know the location of the meal.

“When the hour had come” and not an hour before, Jesus entered the city with the rest of the company, went directly to the guest room where Peter and John were waiting and presided over The Last Supper. John was given the pillow just in front of Jesus, but Judas took a place very near, perhaps just behind him. Judas had spent the past 24 hours looking for an opportunity to pass his information to the priests, but John recalled that it was actually Jesus himself who gave Judas a bite of bread and told him, “What you are doing, do quickly.” Judas went out immediately into the darkness of the early spring night. Jesus had made it so easy.

But in fact, Jesus continued to press the initiative. By sending Judas away after dark, he left his enemies very few options to exploit their supposed element of surprise. They would

have to move immediately in order to capture Jesus before He left the city for the night. Judas must have brought them straight to the guest room that he himself had just left a couple of hours before, but to their chagrin, the evidence of the seder celebration remained but Jesus and his company had moved to higher ground.

Jesus accomplished this maneuver by giving the order “Arise, let us go from here” (John 14:31) right in the midst of his final instructions. He gave much of what we call The Upper Room Discourse while on the move out of the eastern gate of the city, down the slope of the Kidron valley and up again climbing toward their bivouac on Mt. Olive. Matthew recalled that Jesus gave the prophecy of Peter’s threefold denial at some point during this final march (Matthew 26:35). What John recalled most vividly were the many promises of a Comforter and the promises of answered prayer (John 15-16). Luke reports that this was one time Jesus permitted his company to travel under arms, though his reason for this was not for operational security but so that Isaiah’s prophecy could be fulfilled (Luke 22:32, cf Isaiah 53:12). The prophecy was that Christ “was counted among criminals,” picturing the fact that the disciples would use these weapons to commit felony assault, the only crime they could legitimately be accused of.

Pausing at the Kidron watercourse itself, Jesus gathered his men about him and prayed for them in their hearing for the last (and probably the only) time. He had prayed for them at other times, but they had not been privileged to hear these prayers as Jesus regularly prayed in secret. He told Peter on this very night that He had prayed for him to defend him against Satan (Luke 22:32). He had prayed for them all night before issuing their call to apostleship (Luke 6:12); He had likewise prayed most of the night while they rowed over the stormy sea (Mark 6:46-48), and finally He rose from prayer and came to their rescue, walking on the water. In each of these cases, the Lord Jesus prayed for his disciples out of their hearing, but on the eve of his great battle, He wanted them to hear how He prayed.

In this High Priestly Prayer at the base of Mt. Olive, Jesus made five specific requests for his men: that the Father would protect them from death and perdition at the hand of the evil one;

over Satan in every temptation in Gethsemane and his prayers were heard and answered. Can we say the same about his disciples on that night? When they were tested, they did not have the spiritual training to continue in prayer for even one hour. In the moment of crisis they reacted not with mighty weapons of warfare, but with the weapons of the flesh—two puny swords with which they managed to cut off some poor guy’s ear. When the time came for putting their confident boasts into selfless deeds, it was every man for him self, running away from the battle as fast as their legs could carry them!

Could they have done better? Even though Jesus knew they were going to fail this test, He prescribed a way for them to prepare themselves. He instructed them: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.” If they had followed Jesus’ instructions and if they had followed Jesus’ example, they could have served their Captain as He intended.

I hope that as you read over the account of Jesus’ spiritual Battle of Gethsemane, you were stirred to desire to make a stand with Jesus when the time of your testing comes. The men of his original band learned from their experience of defeat and in their future assignments and tests became true heroes of faith. Simon Peter who behaved so shamefully on Passover night distilled the lessons he learned in just a couple of sentences: “Humble yourselves...be sober; be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him!”

If you desire to press through to victory in the spirit war, and if you desire to stand with Jesus in the day of testing without running away, then I would like to share with you a simple practice that God has given us to help.

Athletes spend the bulk of their time drilling the sub-skills that they use on almost every play. Soldiers constantly refresh their training by drilling the military skills that will most likely save their lives and the lives of their comrades when the crisis of battle comes, and by constant practice they are able to respond correctly to unexpected emergencies without conscious thought. The principle that they follow is to spend the most time drilling

Jesus were fulfilled in the very order in which He envisioned them when He prayed on the way to Gethsemane.

Jesus' fourth specific request was for unity among his followers, and this began to be fulfilled even before Pentecost. Acts 1:12-14 records the names of the disciples and the fact that they and the other believers "continued with one accord in prayer" during the days leading up to Pentecost. This remarkable unity deepened and broadened as the church grew so that they not only continued in one accord in prayer but also in their material possessions (Acts 2:42-47).

The fifth request in Jesus' prayer was that his disciples should be with him where He is [in heaven] and behold his glory. When Stephen was stoned to death he testified that he saw heaven opened and the Lord Jesus in glory with his Father, and it is the testimony of the apostles who have been given a vision of heaven that this is the daily experience of those who have "fallen asleep in Jesus," that they are with Christ and behold his glory.

All five of the specific requests that Jesus made on the night He was betrayed were heard and granted. So what about his sixth request: "If it is possible let this cup pass from Me"? This is a singular request, because it is the only time in history when Jesus' will was not the same as the Father's will. Jesus here gives us an example of how to pray when we know for sure that our desire is contrary to the will of God. He knew for sure that He was going to die on the cross and that this was the Father's will, but He prayed out his own desires anyway, subjecting them to the will of his Father. In this way his disciples were able to see and to testify that Jesus "learned obedience through the things that He suffered." Jesus is our example for how to win prayer victories even when we know that God's will is not something that is personally attractive to us. We are at liberty to express our desires to our Father who loves us, while at the same time submitting ourselves to what He knows is best.

An after-action report on the disciples. Jesus won the victory

that they could experience fullness of joy; that they would be made holy in the truth; that they would be unified; that they would be reunited with Jesus (John 17:9-24). The timing of this prayer was crucial to Jesus, because it was a singular opportunity to pray for the whole company while excluding Judas, whom He had known as a traitor from the beginning.

Once upon the high ground that Jesus had chosen, He formed his men into an order of battle: eight men upon the approaches to the garden called Gethsemane and his three lieutenants deeper into the garden and himself about 30 meters ("a stone's throw") deeper still. Without reading too much into his final instructions, it seems that He intended the forward element to serve as a picket line and the rear element to actually serve alongside him in the spiritual battle. His order to this rear element was, "Remain here and keep watch with Me!" (Matthew 26:38) He also told them to "pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40-46).

Meanwhile Judas realized his time had run out. He assumed that Jesus would return to the Mt. Olive bivouac rather than jeopardize any of the partisans in Bethany. Jesus had made sure that "Judas knew the place" so that he would be able to bring his detachment of troops directly to the field of battle, but by shifting location at the last moment, He kept Judas off balance and ensured that He had time to give his final instructions to his comrades privately out of earshot of the traitor.

Three waves of attack. Matthew and Mark recall that the attack seemed to come to Jesus in three waves. Their details are sketchy because they were posted further away from Jesus, and because they kept falling asleep on their watch. Their impression of three waves comes from the fact that Jesus patrolled the lines twice after He placed them in position and both times had to wake them up. What they remember of Jesus' prayers during these waves of attack was that He asked the Father to "take this cup away from Me" (Matthew 26:39; 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). They also recall that He prayed that "not what I will but what You will" should be done.

The physical arrest of Jesus followed the spiritual battle and just as He had predicted "the Son of Man will be betrayed to

the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again” (Mark 10:33-34). These resulting events are carefully chronicled in the gospels, but the question remains whether and in what sense Jesus won a victory in the Battle of Gethsemane. Certainly every man present at the arrest felt at the time that Jesus had been thoroughly and finally defeated.

Let this cup pass. Our assessment of the spiritual battle Jesus fought must take into account that his prayer to “let this cup pass” was the last of six prayers that He made in the hearing of his disciples that night on the mountain. The first five prayers at the Kidron watercourse were all intercessory prayers on behalf of his men, but the sixth prayer was made on his own. The first five prayers were recorded by John and the last prayer was recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. This last prayer was that the Father would “take this cup away” or that “the hour might pass him by” (Mark 14:35-36).

We know much of what He meant by “the cup” because this is the same imagery He used in replying to James and John’s request just one week earlier (Mark 10:37-39). He had asked the two brothers whether they were able to drink the cup He was drinking, and when they affirmed that they were able Jesus prophesied that they would indeed drink the cup He was drinking. From this we know that during the week before his battle in Gethsemane, Jesus was already drinking “the cup” and that eventually both James and John would also drink it. The “cup” for Jesus was not crucifixion (which James would not drink) nor was it martyrdom (which John would not drink) but it was the severe test of obedience during suffering that had already begun for him and would only increase in its intensity.

Did the Father answer “No”? The Bible’s own interpretation of the Son’s request and the Father’s answer is found in Hebrews 4:14-5:11. In this passage we are told it was necessary that we should be able to see a time that Jesus had to obey against his will, so that we could realize that He “was tested in everything as we are, yet without sin.” It was not that Jesus was actually pray-

ing that God would let him out of the cross, since He himself had taken care to explain to his disciples exactly how He would be betrayed and suffer. It would be very strange if Jesus were looking for a way around the cross at the eleventh hour, when He had just revealed to his men at supper that He was about to die for their sins. Rather, Jesus was saying out loud in the hearing of his disciples that “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience through the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). His garden prayer is part of what qualified him as our High Priest, because it proves to us that He knows what obedience feels like. We would not be able to fully trust his priesthood if we did not know for sure that He can sympathize with this fact of our lives.

Hebrews 5:7 says that the Father did not answer “no,” to his Son. Rather, “when He had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, He was heard because of his godly fear.” The biblical view is that especially in the Battle of Gethsemane, Jesus’ prayers were heard and answered.

John reports that Jesus’ first specific prayer of this night was answered immediately (John 18:8-9) when the arrest was made. In spite of the fact that his men were armed and in spite of the fact that they resisted arrest by committing felony assault, every single one of them escaped including an inexperienced teenager who was initially caught in the dragnet (Mark 14:51-52). John says that this amazing deliverance happened as a direct fulfillment of Jesus’ prayer at the Kidron.

Jesus’ second specific prayer had been for the disciples to experience fullness of joy (John 17:13), and his third request had been that they should be made holy (17:17). During their last march Jesus had predicted that they would see him again soon and they would have joy that no one could ever take from them again. John records these prayers were answered on the evening of Christ’s resurrection day when He appeared to the disciples. The disciples received the fullness of joy that would never be taken away from them when they saw the Lord (20:20), and they received the sanctifying Spirit from the Lord Jesus at the same time (20:23). Notice that another theme of Jesus’ prayer, the fact that He would send the disciples in the same way that He had been sent, is also fulfilled at the same time. The prayers and sayings of