Jesus Was Tried in Our Place

John 18:1-27

Key Verse:18:5 “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)”

 Yesterday one of our missionaries told me that in the time of crisis our faith is tested to see if it is true or false, strong or weak. The fact is, we don’t know how much we believe in God during ordinary days. But in the time of crisis or danger our faith is tested to be true or false and to be strong or weak. So there is a saying among Korean Christians: The faith of an unmarried woman is tested when she chooses a husband, the faith of a young man is tested when he is in the army, and the faith of a student is tested in the time of a midterm or final. How is your faith? Is it true or false, strong or weak?

 Today’s passage teaches us about Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s denial, and Jesus’ trial. Here we learn that there are three kinds of people, and three kinds of responses toward crisis and danger. According to your responses, you will be a person like Judas, like Peter, or like Jesus.

First, Judas’ betrayal (1-3) When Jesus finished praying, he left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden named, “Gethsemane”, and Jesus and his disciples went into it. (1) The Garden of Gethsemane was on the slope of the Mount Olive where many olive trees were growing. It was a good resting place for travelers to avoid heat in summer and a quiet place for villagers to have a towns meeting. It was like the Garden of Eden for all of them. Jesus often went there to pray with his disciples. Look at verses 2-3. “ ***Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons***.” Judas came into the Garden of Gethsemane like Satan entered into the Garden of Eden. Jesus said in John10:10, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*” Judas came to the garden with soldiers to kill and destroy Jesus. We wonder how Judas Iscariot, who was once one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, became a betrayer. I found two reasons; first he loved money, and second, he did not repent. Judas rebuked a woman who broke a jar of perfume and poured it out on Jesus as her expression of love and devotion. John said that Judas rebuked the woman not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief who loved money. (Jn 12:6) Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. So Jesus repeatedly warned him to repent and turn his heart to the Lord. Jesus even illustrated his betrayal saying this, “*It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.*” (Jn 13:26) Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judah, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. (Jn 13:27) When Judah did not repent, Satan entered into him. If we love money more than Jesus and if we do not repent even though God warns us, we will become like Judas. We will sell Jesus for small material benefits or momentary pleasure. We will allow Satan to enter into our hearts. What was the consequence of Judas’ betrayal? Later he regretted his betrayal and committed suicide. He ended his life in tragedy. Jesus said that it would be better for Judas if he had not been born. (Mt 26:24, Mk 14:21)

Look at verses 4-9. “***Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they said. Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.***” Here we learn two things from Jesus: first Jesus was not afraid of death; second, he followed God’s will. Jesus knew that if he said that it was he, he would be arrested right away. Still, he identified himself clearly saying, “I am he.” “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are looking for.” Jesus was not afraid of arrest because he was determined to drink the cup of suffering and death. Jesus said in verse 11. “***Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?***” When we determine to suffer and die for the sake of Jesus, we are not afraid of death. This was the reason many Christians in the early church were not afraid of the mouths of lions and the flames of fire. This is the reason many missionaries go to China, the Middle East, and other dangerous places in the world with the good news of Jesus Christ. When Esther in the Old Testament was determined to die for her people, she said, “*If I perish, I perish.*” God saved not only her life, but also the lives of all the Jews in Babylonia. (Es 4:16) If you are ready to die for Christ, you will live. Jesus said in Mark 8:35, “*For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it*.”

Verse 4 says that Jesus knew all that was going to happen to him. In Matthew 26:54 when Judas came to arrest him with the soldiers, Jesus said, “*But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way*?” Jesus acknowledged that the hour had come for him to be arrested by the soldiers. Jesus accepted the betrayal and trial as the will of God. He had already determined to obey the will of God, not his own will. In the Garden Jesus prayed, “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will*.” (Mt 26:39) Jesus won a spiritual battle through his prayer and resolved to obey the Father’s will. God provides us with courage and faith when we decide to obey God’s will.

Second, Peter’s denial (10-18, 25-27) Peter was an interesting person. People call him ‘erring Peter” because he made many mistakes due to his abrupt character. Still, he was known as the top disciple of Jesus and the leader among the Twelve. Jesus accepted Peter’s weak points and blessed his loving heart. Look at verse 10. “***Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus***)” We are amazed by Peter’s skillful blow of the sword. How could he cut off the right ear of the servant in darkness? But, he almost killed that person by chopping off his head. Jesus did not praise his skill or loyalty, but opposed his violent action. He commanded Peter, “*Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?*” (11) In Matthew 26:52 Jesus said, “*Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.*” Jesus said those who rise by the sword will fall by the sword. He meant that Peter could not win over the power of death by his will power. He could overcome death only by the power of God.

Paul the Apostle said in Ephesians 6:12 that our battle is a spiritual battle, not a physical battle. Let us read Ephesians 6:10-12. “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*.” Jesus asked Peter to fight a spiritual battle through prayer. Jesus said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, “*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*.” (Mt 26:41) Jesus knew Peter’s weakness. So he asked him to pray. He asked him to fight a good fight against evil through prayer. Prayer is our best weapon to resist the devil. Prayer is the source of strength and courage for us to overcome our weakness and win our spiritual battle. This was the reason why Jesus had prayed all night in the garden. But what did Peter do while Jesus was praying in the garden? He slept. He slept while Jesus was praying all night. If we fail in our prayer life, we will lose our spiritual battle. How can we fight a good fight if we don’t pray? How can we expect miracles without prayer? Even Jesus, the Son of God, prayed.

When Peter didn’t pray, he became fearful when the crisis came. When Peter was not prepared with prayer, he tried to solve the situation with violence. When we don’t pray, we easily become emotional and violent like Peter. When we don’t pray, we become slaves of fear and do many strange things that even we can’t expect. In Ephesians 6 Paul asked us to put on the full armor of God for our spiritual battle. After we put on the full armor of God, what did he ask us to do? He said in Ephesians 6:18. “*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.*” Paul asked them to pray for himself, too, “*Pray also for me*,…” (Eph 6:19) Prayer is participating in daily spiritual battle. No one likes to join this spiritual battle because we are busy or lazy. But without this spiritual battle, we become fearful and mess up by making things from bad to worse.

In verses 15-18 Peter’s first denial is recorded. After Jesus was brought to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest, Peter also followed Jesus with another disciple, John. John went into the courtyard with Jesus because of his acquaintance with the high priest, but Peter couldn’t. Peter had to wait outside at the door. He was anxious and fearful because Jesus was arrested by his enemies and sent to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. One of the servant girls asked him, “***You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?***” Peter replied, “***I am not***.” (16) Peter denied Jesus in front of the servant girl. He denied not once, but three times. (25-26) The other synoptic gospel says that when he was asked again, Peter called down curses and swore to them that he did not know Jesus. (Mt 26:74)

Wow! We are surprised by Peter’s denial. How could the top disciple of Jesus deny his master three times? Peter failed in following Jesus through his repeated denial. Judas also failed in following Jesus through his betrayal. How was Peter’s denial different from Judas’ betrayal? Why was Peter restored, but Judas not? Peter repented and turned to Jesus while Judas regretted and turned to Satan. Repentance and regret seem to be the same, but are quite different in its essence. Repentance is grieving over our sin which brings us the forgiveness of sin and the peace and life. But regret is grieving over our wrongdoings which bring us God’s judgment. In regret there is no decision or change for restoration. When Peter remembered Jesus’ words, “*Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times,”* he went outside and wept bitterly. (Mt 26:75) Peter remembered Jesus’ words and wept bitterly because he knew that he had done wrong. Later when Jesus visited him again, he followed Jesus to the point of his death. But Judas was different. He didn’t remember Jesus’ words when he came to realize that he was wrong. He did not turn to Jesus, but to the suicidal site. He hanged himself and died. It is important for us to choose where to go and to whom we follow after we repent. Go back to Jesus, not to somewhere else!

Third, Jesus’ trial (19-24) According to Matthew’s gospel the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin looked for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. (Mt 26:59-60) In John18:19-24 they questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. (18:19) Jesus knew that they questioned him to find false accusations against him. He did not need to answer them. When Jesus answered them, one of the high priest’s servants slapped him in his face. Jesus did not keep quiet about this unjust violence. He rebuked him saying, “***If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?***” (23) He was not withdrawn in a hostile and death-threatening situation. He identified himself clearly as the Son of God and stood on the side of truth.

Someone said that Jesus could do so because he is the Son of God. They said that Jesus is God who makes all things possible. That is true, but not for this case. Jesus shared our humanity as the Son of Man. Hebrews 5:8-9 says, “*Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*” Even though Jesus is the Son of God, he struggled to obey God’s will through prayer. He took a human form like one of us. He went through pain, sorrow, sadness, and loneliness as we did. Hebrews 2:14-18 says, “*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death---that is, the devil---and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*” Here we learn that Jesus struggled to fulfill his duty as the Messiah. He suffered in order to save us from our eternal suffering.

The sinless Son of God was tried in our place. He did not need to be tried because he was sinless. But he stood before the Sanhedrin in order to take over our sins. We are the ones who should be tried and condemned because of our sins. But Jesus did in our place. Praise Jesus! The prophet Isaiah prophesied about this in Isaiah 53:4-6, “*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” These verses teach us the purpose and meaning of Jesus’ trial.

Today’s passage teaches us that we become three different kinds of people: Judas- like people, Peter- like people, and Jesus- like people. Judas betrayed Jesus, regretted his wrongdoing, but he did not repent and became a stool of Satan. Peter denied Jesus, but repented and became a saint. Jesus was tried, but retrained and became the Savior. Here is a formula: Judas’ betrayal- regret-Satan, Peter’s denial-repent-Saint, Jesus’ trial-restrain-Savior. What kind of person are you? Let us win this spiritual battle with prayer and obedience so that we may grow into Jesus-like people. Let us praise Jesus who took our place, was tried, and died for our sins. Amen.