

Introduction

In 1956, a film was released titled *Death in the Garden*. Tonight, I'm going to tell you about *near death* in the Garden.

Near Death in the Garden of Gethsemane

The garden to which I'm referring of is the Garden of Gethsemane, which is at the foot of the Mount of Olives a short distance from Jerusalem. After His Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus went there and began to pray. Verse 33 reveals what happened as He did. He became **"very distressed and troubled."** He Himself described it even more vividly in verse 34, **"My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death."** Please understand that He wasn't exaggerating or speaking metaphorically. His struggle was so acute that He almost died of it on the spot. I don't know about you but I've never been distressed to the point of death. But Jesus was.

The question is, **"Why was He?"** He Himself explained it during the Last Supper. In John 14:30, He told His disciples, **"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in me."** Do you grasp what He was saying? He didn't have much time to talk with them because He was soon going to be engaged in a terrible spiritual battle with the ruler of the world, Satan.

That battle occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane. We know from the Book of Job that Father God restricts Satan's ability to try people. Few would survive physically or spiritually if He didn't. But Father God didn't restrict his ability that night. He set Satan free to try Jesus as strongly as he possibly could, which he did. He struck at the very core of His mental, emotional, volitional, and bodily processes in every conceivable way. The ferocity of his temptation here in the garden far exceeded its ferocity in the wilderness three years before.

Satan had a purpose in it and the words of Jesus in verse 36 imply what it was. Father God clearly willed Him to go to the cross despite the

unthinkable physical and spiritual pain and shame He'd experience there. He, understandably, willed not to if there were any other way to save mankind. So, He would have to trust Father God that this was the only way and it's that to which Satan's temptation was directed. He did everything within his power to destroy that trust so that Jesus would say "**No**" to Father God – that He'd be faithless to Him.

Victory in the Garden

But he didn't destroy it. Jesus prevailed in verse 36 and there was victory in the garden. He implicitly trusted Father God and did what He willed. The rest is history as we say it. He despised the pain and shame, endured the cross, and saved His people from their sins.

Satan was obviously no match for Jesus and the verse I quoted a few moments ago, John 14:30, reveals why he wasn't. Notice the very last line in the verse, which is one of the most instructive things Jesus ever said. He prevailed because, "**He (Satan) has nothing in me.**" Satan, in other words, didn't have anything to work with in tempting Him. Or to say it another way, there was nothing *in* Him that was on the side of Satan. Dallas Willard explained it well: "**It was, finally, what was *not* in Jesus that made him invincible, that kept Him safe.**" He was absolutely right. It was what was not in Him – ego, anger, jealousy, envy, malice, pride, and all the other vices – that made Him victorious.

The Cause of Temptation

It's the same with us. Let me ask you a critical question in that regard. What is the root cause of temptation?

Many answer that it's Satan. As did Flip Wilson, they say "**the devil made me do it.**" But most say it's the "**world.**" Something in the world made me do it. So, I lusted because someone dressed suggestively. Or I resented because someone wronged me. Or I got mad because someone "**acted stupid.**" Notice the point of view here. It's something external to us that tempts us.

But that's a cop out. What I've said tonight about Jesus in Gethsemane reveals why, and this is a million dollar insight. Temptation isn't something that's external to us. It's something that's internal to us. Being tempted to do what is wrong isn't primarily a matter Satan or the world. It's primarily a matter of our inner condition and the fleshly desires that define it. Without those desires, nothing and no one, including Satan, can really tempt us.

I once counseled a young man who blamed his sexual sins on the way the women around him dressed. But as I told him that day, his problem wasn't what was outside him, but what was inside him, lust. What was external to him, scantily dressed women, tempted him only because of what was internal to him, lust.

Do you and I want to conquer evil? If so, we absolutely have to understand and believe this. Evil is internal to the self, not external to it. Satan and the world can tempt us only if they have something inside us with which to work.

The Cure for Temptation

So, let's not give them anything inside us with which to work. Let's not permit things to be inside us that allow things outside us to tempt us. Notice I said "**permit.**" Most Christians think that lust, anger, scorn, envy, and other evils are in them because it's normal for them to be – because they're "**only human.**"

But that isn't so. There's something we need to know about those conditions of evil. They're habits. We're born with a fallen nature, one that's egocentric. We're inherently self-centered, in other words. And because we are, we cultivate particular habits over the years, which are the very conditions of evil I mentioned: lust, anger, scorn, envy, and all the rest.

But the power of those habits can be broken and so that's what we do. We break them. They aren't like gravity. Falling when we step off a platform isn't a habit. It's a law. We cannot, therefore, change that. In

contrast, lusting, getting angry, scorning, envying, and so on aren't laws. They're habits. We can, therefore, change them.

We can because we're disciples of Jesus. And as His disciples, we aren't "**only human.**" We're human plus something more – inhabited and empowered by Him. Make no mistake about it. He can and will assist us in rooting out the evils that are in us.

But He won't do it for us. We ourselves have a part to play, which is two things. First, we intend root out the habits of evil that are in us. We then complete our intention by deciding. And second, we try and train to root them out. We do things that redirect how we think and feel in the moments of temptation. We call those things spiritual disciplines, which our Disciples 'R' Us curriculum thoroughly explain.

So let's do those two things. With Jesus' help, we'll be able to root out the habits of evil that are in us if we do.

Conclusion

The next time you see a picture of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, recall what it represents – near death in the garden, the most terrible temptation in the history of the world. But He prevailed because there was nothing in Him that was on the side of His tempter. May the same be so of us.