



What did Jesus mean by, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,”?

This question came from one of the students in Confirmation class after we read about things Jesus said and did the week before He was crucified.

Jesus had gone to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His arrest and had asked the disciples to keep watch while he went and prayed. A little while later Jesus came back to where the disciples were and found them sleeping. It's at this point Jesus tells them to pray (as He had instructed in the Lord's Prayer) to not enter into temptation and makes the statement “The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” Matthew and Mark in their gospels record that Jesus addressed this comment specifically to the apostle Peter.

Jesus is here stating the truth that we often have good intentions about doing what He asks us to do, but our sinful nature (our 'flesh') is easily tempted to not follow through. On our own power we will not be able to do the things God wants nor resist temptation. Jesus knows that we will need God's help to accomplish both, thus He instructs His disciples (and us) to pray and ask for His help.

It's appropriate that this comment was addressed to Peter who had just made the claim, “Though all (the other disciples) fall away from you, I never will.” Peter had good intentions - his spirit was willing - but Jesus knew that when 'push came to shove' Peter's weak 'flesh' would cause him to deny even knowing Jesus!

Quite simply, Jesus comment is a great reminder for all of us to seek God's help in prayer for the power to do the things He's called us to do.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net