

Gethsemane

by Robert Cummins

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CHAPTER TWO

The incarnation is a moral necessity. When GOD says, "**Be ye holy, for I am holy**," it is natural for me to reply, "Lord, it is impossible for me to be holy as long as I am in the body, surrounded by temptations, living among men and women who are weak and erring like me. When I get to heaven where Thou art, in that world where there is no fear, sorrow, hate, sin, temptation, or death, then I expect to be holy."

The question must arise, "If GOD were bound by the body and had to live where I have to live; if He had to do business with hard, cheating, and exasperating men; if He had nerves that are capable of feeling intense ache and pain; if He were liable to sickness and death; if He knew what it was, when hungry, thirsty, and in deep poverty, to be tempted by all the subtle temptations that come to men and women; if He were wronged and oppressed by injustice and cruelty, not only to self, but, more agonizing, by wrongs and injustices done to loved ones; in short, if GOD had to live in the environment in which I have to live, subject to the limitations of a body of bone and flesh and nerves like mine, would He then be as holy as He is in heaven? If GOD knew nothing about life in the body, lived in a world of sinful men and women, what right would He have to tell me to be holy as He is holy?"

Whatever other right He might have, He would not have the moral right to make this demand upon me.

Therefore GOD was manifest in the flesh in a real incarnation, beginning life as a babe, and passing through all the experiences of a spirit incarnate in a human body in a world like this. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.

Our Lord, who is one with the Father, gave an eternal "yes" to the important question, "Would GOD be holy if He had to live in that body where I have to live?"

His answer was that He was more than conqueror.

I will listen to a GOD who speaks to me from a cross, a GOD who has gone the way of suffering and death, and has lived a holy and victorious life in the place where I am called upon to live. Yes, I will listen to Him more willingly than to one who speaks to me from a heaven that knows no temptation, sorrow, sin, or death. It is wonderful to know that He has loved me and come to share my life and my environment, and has lived triumphantly. But when I try to imitate Him and fail miserably, I am more hopeless than before. And my heart cries out a still more important question, "Can GOD make ME perfect and victorious as CHRIST was perfect and victorious, in a world like this?"

The private life of our Lord in Nazareth and His public life in the temple, the synagogues, homes, streets, roads, mountains, and valleys of Palestine is the answer of GOD to the first question. In His life we see what GOD would do if He were in our place, because in that life we see what GOD actually did do in situations more difficult than those in which most of us are called to live.

The second question, and for us the all-important question, "Can GOD empower me to live a holy life here?" was answered at the table of our Lord's Passover, in Gethsemane, in the judgment halls of the Sanhedrin and of Pilate, on Golgotha, in the grave, on resurrection morning, in the forty days of fellowship with the risen Lord, in the ascension, and in the outpouring of the Spirit.

We shall look particularly at the place of Gethsemane in this answer, but each step of the Passion and the Victory has an essential place, which we must know in order to learn GOD's full answer to our need of power to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

The key to the answer to our second question is found in what our Lord says to His disciples at the time of the Passion. In John 13:1 we read that JESUS loved his own "**unto the end**". When He sat down to eat the Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:15), He said, "**With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.**" See Luke 22:14-21. For a long time He has looked forward to eating this Passover with His disciples because it is the fulfillment of His yearning and desire. He has undertaken to make Simon into Peter. He has come, not only to prove that GOD in a human body would live a life of holiness and perfection in this world, but also, and particularly, to make men perfect, and empower them to be holy as GOD is holy.

He has lived in hourly contact with twelve ordinary men for three years. In the same situation in which He has been victorious they have been defeated. While He has been the unchanging, unshakable Rock, no matter what storms have beaten against Him, Simon has been like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. All the disciples have been failures. Our Lord knows that the secret of this difference is not in differing environments; it is not because their bodies are different from His body. The difference is one of LIFE. In the eternal Son is the life which was with the Father from the beginning, and now has been manifested to the world. In the body of our Lord is GOD's life, expressing itself in the world. In the bodies of His disciples is a different life, the life of the human race descended from Adam. Therefore JESUS proposes to share His life with them, to make them partakers of His Spirit. He proposes to impart to His disciples that life which was with GOD in the beginning, the life which was the secret of His victory.

So we can imagine His saying to the twelve, "I have longed for this hour when I could eat the real Passover with you and share with you My life divine. This bread I now give you has been the medium of the expression of GOD's life; so now, to you who eat My body, will be imparted My life, and power to make your bodies the medium of expression of My life of victory and perfection. This fruit of the vine is My blood, My real life, pouring through My body, which now I pour out for you, that ye may have life that is life indeed. My life of victory and perfection, which I have shown to the world as a life that has overcome, is now to be yours. I am the true vine, and My life is now to be poured through you as through living branches of Mine."

No one who has not been touched by the holiness of GOD can conceive the desire in the heart of GOD to make men holy. The holiness of GOD is not the holiness of the Pharisee that would keep all else at a distance, so that it would not be contaminated. GOD's holiness is the holiness that longs to transform others and make them holy. It is not the holiness that condemns, but the holiness that redeems. It is not the holiness that cannot bear contact with iniquity; it is the holiness of one who cannot endure the presence of sin and unholiness in those whom He loves, in those who should be holy.

There our question becomes this, "Is GOD's holiness of such a character that it not only cannot be corrupted by evil, but also that it can transform unholy beings into holy and perfect men?" Our Lord's answer in the symbols of the Last Supper is, "With a desire unto death I have desired to impart My holiness and perfectness to you. With a desire great enough to give My body to be broken and My blood to be poured out, so that you may receive My holy life, I have come to this hour to give My life a ransom for many."

In other words, His holiness is social, not solitary. It is a holiness that longs to share its perfection with others.

Underlying this principle of imparting His very life to His disciples, is the primary fact of a vital union, which must precede such impartation.

Our Lord offers Himself to be the source of life to mankind. He offers to take man into organic union with Himself, so that man may partake of His holiness and perfection through partaking of His life. This is in harmony with the whole New Testament conception of salvation. Vital union with CHRIST is the only possible way in which any person can obtain the benefits of salvation. **"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of GOD hath not life"** (I John 5:12)

Such a vital union necessitates an exchange of life. If I am to be united with CHRIST so that I may share His life and strength, then He must be willing to take my life. Operations have been performed whereby amputated members of human bodies have been again organically united to their bodies; and although such possibilities are very limited, they indicate what CHRIST wishes to do for us. Malchus' ear was severed from his body, but CHRIST restored it to its original position.

Sin amputated humanity from the source of its life in GOD.

GOD in CHRIST takes humanity back into His body, the source of true life, that man may eat the flesh of His body and drink the blood of His body and find life. Just as a sickly or infected part of my body can find life and strength only when it eats the flesh of my body and drinks blood supplied by my body, so it is only as we eat the flesh of the Son of GOD and drink His blood that we can have life.

This phase of the results of union with CHRIST is vividly presented to us in the Lord's Supper. For us this should be central, as CHRIST has made it so. This is His new covenant. This is the agreement, the union, the solemn league and covenant with which He binds us to make us one with Him, partakers of His divine nature, through His solemn promise.

The other part of the exchange is that He must partake of my life. His life must receive mine. If I am to be grafted into His body, if I am to become a branch of the living vine, a member of His body, then He must be able to take my life, accepting and filling what is of use, and doing away with what is not acceptable - pruning the vine.

Gethsemane is the other side of the picture of the Lord's Supper.

For the disciples, there is the broken bread that is meat indeed; but for the Master, "the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table."

For the disciples, there is the sweetness of the unspoiled fruit of our Lord's perfect and holy Spirit. For the Saviour there is the soured and selfish spirit of the quarreling, place-seeking, boastful disciples.

So in this atmosphere He arises from the table where He had in symbol fed His disciples bread that was bread indeed, and drink that was drink indeed, and He goes to the table where "**the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all,**" where the hands of betrayal, the lips of denial, the hearts of selfishness must be accepted and dealt with. Not for Him now is the sweet cup of divine Life. Not now for Him the fellowship of love and joy and peace and perfection with the Father. But the hour is come, and another cup is placed before Him.

Now He must be "**reckoned among the transgressors**" (Luke 22:37), and must partake of their lot. "**For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him**" (II Corinthians 5:21).

How great must have been His desire to make us partake of His holiness, His perfection, and His victory, if it could make Him willing to give His body to be broken and His life to be poured out in death. What love He had for us that He should be willing to come to dark Gethsemane; and I am sure that before you leave your Lord in the garden, if your eyes have been opened to understand the picture given us there, you will have no words to express the wonder of your heart that He should be willing to take your sin, pride, selfishness, uncleanness and iniquity, and drink its dregs to the full, that you might be holy and without blemish before Him in love.

Gethsemane is the revelation of GOD's horror at sin.

The holy nature of the Son and the holy nature of the Father recoil with infinite loathing and anguish in its presence. To see how repulsive sin is to Him, let us ask His HOLY SPIRIT to now take us to Gethsemane and open up the meaning of the divine record of the Son's agony, and the Father's anger.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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