

Gethsemane

by Robert Cummins

Copyright © 1944

by Robert Cummings

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage ministry of a century ago

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

No Evidence of a Current Copyright for the Printed Book Found

CHAPTER THREE

My own interest in Gethsemane began in my first years of missionary service in Northern India. One of the most frequent objections raised by our non-Christian audiences to the New Testament portrait of CHRIST was His seeming unwillingness to do the will of GOD, as He prayed in the garden that the cup might pass from Him. Our Moslem hearers would constantly bring this forward as an argument against CHRIST's deity and atonement. In order to answer their arguments and objections, I read and listened to many interpretations of the Gethsemane scene. But none of them satisfied my mind or did justice to the details of the Gospel record.

Accordingly I began to pray earnestly that GOD would give me an understanding of the agony in the garden, and of the cross, so that I might be able to answer the questions of inquirers. I believe it was in answer to these prayers that GOD allowed me to pass through a nervous breakdown, and immediately after delivering me, illuminated my mind to picture and understand something of our Lord's experiences in the garden, and their bearing on the nature of redemption's victory.

There are two notable features of the scene in Gethsemane that have not taken into sufficient consideration by those who have attempted to explain its meaning. The first is the fact that it is the strong, victorious Son of GOD who is presented to us in this astonishing picture of crushing agony. The second is the fact that here, and here alone, an almost indescribable depth of horror and sorrow and anguish is portrayed. Therefore any adequate explanation of Gethsemane must answer two questions:

- (1) How is it possible that any power could bring the mighty, majestic Son of GOD to such depths of sorrow and agony as are portrayed here by the Gospels?
- (2) What was the force or power that could wring such anguish of heart from JESUS, making Him sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground?

Let us consider first the greatness and power of Him who is here presented to us as crushed in Gethsemane's oil press.

He is no ordinary, strong, courageous hero. He is head and shoulder above all human majesties. Calm, masterful poise is one of His outstanding characteristics. The Gospel narrative presents Him in one scene after another of difficulty and storm; yet in every situation He is master of Himself, in control of the forces that are inimical to man, and undisturbed in the midst of the most distressing circumstances.

As a lad of twelve He stands perfectly at ease, unabashed and unafraid, in the midst of the doctors of the law, answering their questions and engaging in their discussions with simple and natural dignity. This quality characterized His spirit throughout His life. After forty days of fasting in the barren wilderness, with the beasts and the tempter as His companions, He is assailed by hunger. How quickly would ordinary men have been disturbed and even panic-stricken in similar situations, thus making an ideal atmosphere for the attack of temptation! But CHRIST's calm faith in His Father makes Him master through every temptation, and He comes out more than conqueror.

He is brought face-to-face with human need of every description. All the powers that have defeated men and driven faith and courage from their hearts, He has to meet. A man full of leprosy throws himself at His feet. Others, aware of their lack of vitality and power to resist such a disease, would shrink and ask the leper to keep his distance. But CHRIST knows that He not only has life sufficient for His own protection, but life so full of divine power that before it leprosy must disappear; so He places His hand upon the leper and cleanses him.

****BBB Note: When did JESUS cleanse the leper? After touching him or before? It is my belief that the leprosy was cured as soon as the leper touched the hem of the Saviour's garment. Likewise, many ask the question. When did we get saved? Was it after we prayed the sinner's prayer, or the instant in our heart we wanted to pray that prayer. The answer is so obvious, is it not?*

Disease of every kind finds in Him a victor. Confronted with men possessed with raging demons, His word alone suffices to overcome their power and cast them out. In the presence of death not only is He undisturbed, but He treats death as a conquered foe, and delivers its prey.

The storm that drives His apostles into consternation, produces not a vestige of fear in Him. He calmly sleeps. When awakened by their cries for help, He finds Himself in the midst of a tempest and, still more disturbing, in the midst of friends all panic-stricken and filled with terror. He arises and rebukes the storm, bringing a great calm, which is but the reflection of His own peace-filled life.

Cruelty and injustice seem to overwhelm Him in the judgment hall, but His mastery of Himself and His majestic poise tower above His accusers and judges like a great mountain. Even upon the cross, mocked and scorned and railed upon, suffering excruciating agony of body and soul, His majestic self-control and courage overshadow all else, causing the centurion to call out, "**Truly this man was the Son of GOD!**"

Only once does the anguish of His soul find expression -- when darkness hides His Father's face.

The Gospels present one situation after another in which ordinary men have exhausted their human resources; their wine has failed, their food has failed, their strength has failed, their remedies have failed, their courage has failed, their faith has failed, and even their hope is extinguished. But into each situation comes JESUS of Nazareth, aware of exhaustless resources, undaunted and unafraid; and no matter what demand is made upon Him, with sure and masterful power. He vanquishes every evil and destructive force, and brings life and health and victory to the crushed and defeated. Matchless picture of the Son of GOD, the Prince of Peace! Who but a fool would believe that Galilean fishermen had concocted it from their fertile imaginations.

To the reverent student it is this very characteristic of simple, immovable, majestic power that makes Gethsemane so perplexing; for He who bows in dread agony and in fearful struggle, whose sweat becomes as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground, is none other than this same mighty Son of GOD. How shall we explain this picture of wrestling, horror, and sorrow? Let us look carefully at the Gospel records and ask the eternal Spirit, through whom CHRIST offered Himself a perfect sacrifice to GOD, to lead us into an understanding of the holy of holies of Gethsemane.

Now consider the depth of agony portrayed. And they came to an enclosed piece of ground named Oil Press; and He says to His disciples, Sit here, while I pray. And He takes Peter and James and John. As they go He begins to be horrified and greatly troubled. (See Mark 14:32, 33) Something falls with crushing weight upon the heart of CHRIST, increasing as He advances into the garden. A horror of great darkness settles upon His soul. Something more terrible than any foe He had ever met before in His life of constant battles now presses upon Him. He seems to be appalled and very greatly disturbed.

The three disciples notice His troubled, perplexed eyes, and their hearts are filled with dread and sorrow, for their Master had seldom before shown them anything but loving, majestic mastery of every situation. Seeing the effect of His sorrow and perplexity and distress reflected in their hearts, He says to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, crushed to the point of death; please remain here and watch and pray." Then He goes about fifty yards farther, and suddenly falls to the ground on His knees.

"And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:35, 36).

"Father," He prays, "ABBA Father! Father Beloved! Thou art Lord of heaven and earth. All things are possible unto Thee! Thou art Almighty, infinite in power and wisdom; remove this cup from Me. Hold it not to my lips. Father, My lips are clean and holy. My life has never let anything abominable or unholy find any entrance. This cup is too loathsome, too unclean, too abominable! Surely there must be some other way than this! Father, in Thy infinite wisdom and power, Thou art able to bring Thy purposes to fulfillment without My having to drink this cup. My whole being revolts and unutterable loathing fills My soul. Dear Father, let this cup pass from Me! Howbeit, Father, I desire more than all else to do Thy will, not My own. If it is not Thy will for the hour to pass, then let Thy will be done."

The record given of the prayer in Scripture is very short, but considerable time had elapsed since JESUS had left Peter and James and John. Forgive a little poetic license above as I somehow make it seem clearer to us the great anguish of soul our Saviour endured. The apostles were deeply affected by their Master's state. Sorrow and discouragement possessed them. They talked for a while wondering what was the explanation of this utterly strange sorrow and heaviness that seemed to be crushing their beloved Teacher. Then they tried to pray, but after half-hearted attempts all three of them fell asleep. These events occupied quite a little time, and as we consider it we realize that the first prayer was indeed a prolonged struggle. The words used in the prayer itself reveal an intense conflict of soul. On the one hand the will of His Father, the great love of the Son for His perfect, holy Father, the desire to carry out His Father's program of redemption, His delight to do His Father's will - these forces are very strong. What could dare to oppose such powerful motives in the soul of CHRIST?

When CHRIST says to His beloved disciples, "**My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death,**" we must remember that it is not an ordinary man making an exaggerated statement. Something is overwhelming Him. Something is crushing His soul. He is indeed being pressed out of measure in the Oil Press of Gethsemane. The sight of my Lord falling to the ground, praying with strong cries and tears to His loving, tender Father, asking to be delivered from the horror of the hour of darkness, shrinking from the loathsome cup of iniquity and sin -- all these things bear witness to the reality of the great crushing in Gethsemane.

One phrase in particular, which is found in Mark's account, is of terrible import. This is it: He "**prayed that... the hour might pass from Him.**" He who had set His face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem for this very hour, now prays that it might pass away from Him. He had constantly spoken of "the hour," and it was vividly in His consciousness. To the owner of the upper room He had sent the message, "My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples." Luke says, "**When the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.**" John says, "**Jesus knew that His hour was come... having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.**" Just before Gethsemane, according to John, JESUS had said, "**Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour.**" And just after His discourse in the upper room, in His high-priestly prayer, He had turned to His Father with the words, "**Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee.**"

I do not suppose the human mind can grasp the import of the prayer that the hour might pass away from CHRIST. This was the hour for which He had left His throne and come into the world. This was the hour to which the eternal counsels of the Almighty had pointed when the LAMB had been slain from the foundation of the world. This was the hour of the redemption of GOD's whole creation, the central hour of the ages, the hour when the holiness of GOD would meet the sin and unholiness of a rebel world, and redeem it from destruction. But when the hour actually comes and its force strikes against Him, JESUS falls to the ground and prays to His Father that the hour might pass away from Him.

What if the hour had passed away from Him!

What if the cost had proved too high! What if He had not been willing to drink the cup! The heart can hardly conceive the infinite loss and disaster that would have come to mankind if He had been saved from that hour, if the very hour for which He had come into the world had been allowed to pass from Him, and He had been unable to drink the cup. And JESUS knew this. Then what was facing Him in that hour that caused such a prayer? What did that cup contain to make the STRONG Son of GOD shrink from it in sorrow and amazement and horror?

I confess that when the reality of this description of the horror and anguish of our Lord first dawned upon me, I was greatly perplexed.

I had risen early to pray. As it was cold, I had gone to the cellar of the Mizpah Missionary Home where we were living. While I was praying it seemed as though GOD took me by the hand into the garden of His agony, and showed me His Son there. My mind was astonished at what I saw. The Son of GOD appeared to be crushed. It seemed that He could not stand the horror of the thing that confronted Him. Almost involuntarily, from my heart arose the question, "Father, what could have been in the cup to make Him shrink so? What is the meaning of the hour to Him that He asks Thee, with His soul so sorrowful and horrified, to allow the hour for which He had come into the world to pass away from Him?"

~ end of chapter 3 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
