

Pastor's Corner

Christ's Sufferings

April 4, 2007

Dear Friend,

As many Christians around the world take time to think about the death of Jesus this week, I like to use this time to read about Christ's death and the events surrounding His crucifixion. I was reading one account that really brought it to life, and made tears come to my eyes as I read about the suffering, not just the physical but also the psychological suffering, that Jesus went through for you and me. I'll share some of this account with you; and, as you read this, I know that you will be blessed with deeper insights as I was.

The Redeemer, in company with His disciples, slowly made His way to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had been earnestly conversing with and instructing His disciples; but as He neared Gethsemane He became strangely silent. His disciples were perplexed, and anxiously regarded His countenance, hoping there to read an explanation of the change that had come over their Master. They had frequently seen Him depressed, but never before so utterly sad and silent. As He proceeded, this strange sadness increased; yet they dared not question Him as to the cause. His form swayed as if He was about to fall. His disciples looked anxiously for His usual place of retirement, that their Master might rest.

Upon entering the garden He said to His companions, "Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Selecting Peter, James, and John to accompany Him, He proceeded farther into the recesses of the garden. Every step that the Saviour now took was with labored effort. He groaned aloud as though suffering under the pressure of a terrible burden; yet He refrained from startling His three chosen disciples by a full explanation of the agony which He was to suffer. Twice His companions prevented Him from falling to the ground. Jesus felt that He must be still more alone, and He said to the favored three, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me." His disciples had never before heard Him utter such mournful tones. His frame was convulsed with anguish, and His pale countenance expressed a sorrow past all description.



He went a short distance from His disciples-- not so far but that they could both see and hear Him--and fell prostrate with His face upon the cold ground. He was overpowered by a terrible fear that God was removing His presence from Him. He felt Himself being separated from His Father by a gulf of sin, so broad, so black and deep that His spirit shuddered before it. He clung convulsively to the cold, unfeeling ground as if to prevent Himself from being drawn still farther from God. The chilling dews of night fell upon His prostrate form, but the Redeemer heeded it not. From His pale, convulsed lips wailed the bitter cry, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

It was not a dread of the physical suffering He was soon to endure that brought this agony upon the Son of God. He was enduring the penalty of man's transgression, and shuddering beneath the Father's frown. He must not call His divinity to His aid, but as a man, He must bear the consequences of man's sin and the Creator's displeasure toward His disobedient subjects. As He felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that His human nature would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the prince of the power of darkness; and in that case the

human race would be irrecoverably lost, Satan would be victor, and the earth would be his kingdom. The sins of the world weighed heavily upon the Saviour, and bowed Him to the earth; and the Father's anger in consequence of that sin seemed crushing out His life.

During this scene of the Saviour's anguish, the disciples were at first much troubled to see their Master, usually so calm and dignified, wrestling with a sorrow that exceeded all utterance; but they were tired, and finally dropped asleep, leaving Him to agonize alone. At the end of an hour, Jesus, feeling the need of human sympathy, rose with painful effort and staggered to the place where He had left His companions.

But no sympathizing countenance greeted Him after His long struggle; the disciples were fast asleep. Ah! if they had realized that this was their last night with their beloved Master while He lived a man upon earth, if they had known what the morrow would bring Him, they would hardly have yielded to the power of slumber.

The evidence of the weakness of His disciples excited the pity and sympathy of the Son of God. He questioned their strength to endure the test they must undergo in witnessing His betrayal and death. He did not sternly upbraid them for their weakness, but, in view of their coming trial, exhorted them: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Then, His spirit moving in sympathy with their frailty, He framed an excuse for their failure in duty toward Him: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."



Again the Son of God was seized with superhuman agony, and, fainting and exhausted, staggered back to the place of His former struggle. Again He was prostrated to the earth. His suffering was even greater than before. The cypress and palm trees were the silent witnesses of His anguish. From their leafy branches dropped heavy dew upon His stricken form, as if nature wept over its Author wrestling alone with the powers of darkness.

A few hours before, Jesus had stood like a mighty cedar, withstanding the storm of opposition that spent its fury upon Him. Stubborn wills, and hearts filled with malice and subtlety strove in vain

to confuse and overpower Him. He stood forth in divine majesty as the Son of God. But now He was like a bruised reed beaten and bent by the angry storm. A short time before, He had poured out His soul to His disciples in noble utterances, claiming unity with the Father, and giving His elect church into His arms in the language of one who had divine authority. Now His voice uttered suppressed wails of anguish, and He clung to the cold ground as if for relief.

The words of the Saviour were borne to the ears of the drowsy disciples: "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." The anguish of God's dear Son forced drops of blood from His pores. Again He staggered to His feet, His human heart yearning for the sympathy of His companions, and repaired to where His disciples were sleeping. His presence roused them, and they looked upon His face with fear, for it was stained with blood, and expressed an agony of mind which was to them unaccountable.

He did not again address them, but, turning away, sought again His retreat and fell prostrate, overcome by the horror of a great darkness. The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. The awful moment had arrived which was to decide the destiny of the world. The heavenly hosts waited the issue with intense interest. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. The Son of God

might even then refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty men. He might wipe the bloody sweat from His brow, and leave men to perish in their iniquity. Will the Son of the Infinite God drink the bitter potion of humiliation and agony? Will the innocent suffer the consequence of God's curse, to save the guilty? The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus: "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done."

Three times has He uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world's Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish under the Father's displeasure. He sees the power of sin, and the utter helplessness of man to save Himself. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world arise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He accepts His baptism of blood, that perishing millions through Him may gain everlasting life. He left the courts of Heaven, where all was purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that had fallen by transgression, and He will not turn from the mission He has chosen. He will reach to the very depths of misery to rescue a lost and ruined race.

The Sufferings of Christ, pages 14-19.

I pray that you will take time this week to read and think about what Jesus did for us back there in the Garden of Gethsemane. I'm praying for you!

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