

A PLACE CALLED GETHSEMANE

Text: Matthew 26.36. "Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder."

A particular solemnity should fill our hearts and minds when we read of Gethsemane, although I know we cannot begin to understand what Gethsemane really means as the Saviour Himself did, Who had that solemn experience there which we have recorded in the Gospels; but if this day we shall be given a little lifting of the cloud, and if what Gethsemane really means should be brought home upon our hearts, I believe we should be humbled in the dust and feel a little like Peter did when he went out from the high priest's house and wept bitterly. It would be a great mercy if today we had grace enough, and were near enough to the Lord to mourn and grieve over our sins as seen in the light of Gethsemane, and were favoured to view what hope and comfort and consolation can arise to poor sin-troubled hearts from Gethsemane.

The verses before this record the institution of the Lord's supper which the Lord Jesus instituted in that upper room not very long before entering Gethsemane; this sacred ordinance or communion which He appointed has been observed in the churches from that day to this. With us, as you know, it is customary to observe this communion on the first sabbath day evening in the month, though this is not a vital point; in some places of worship it is observed more often, and sometimes on a week evening; I occasionally conduct it on week evenings when requested. It is not so much a matter of how often it is observed. The reason *why* it is observed is a more important feature, if but when we do observe it we have grace to discern the Lord's body and can reflect a little upon what is signified, and set forth by the emblems of bread and wine. The Lord very graciously instituted what in itself is quite a simple ordinance, literally speaking. We have not now to slay beasts or offer lambs every month, or make sacrifices of some kind or another in a material sense, but in this ordinance, beautiful in its simplicity, is a majesty only known to a believer in Jesus who views by faith a suffering Saviour there, and feels that it was his own guilty sins that necessitated Gethsemane. In the verses I have read it is said, "Then cometh Jesus with them *unto a place called Gethsemane*".

Before entering more immediately upon this I will notice one or two very sad things connected with this first observance of the Lord's supper. One of these sad things relates to Judas who was one of the twelve. Judas was no stranger to Christ and His disciples, he was not someone who had just come in among them who had no previous knowledge of events, he was one of the twelve, and we know the Lord had a purpose in appointing Judas. Yet the case of Judas is a solemn lesson for me and actually for every professing minister; for although Judas evidently preached the Gospel, he never savingly knew the Gospel that he preached. How

solemn is this. When we read about Judas we can usually see some ulterior, impure, fleshly motive lying behind all his pretences, and although he was there in the company, in his heart he was seeking opportunity to betray Him. What dreadful hypocrisy, what evil designs were lurking in the heart of Judas even when he was there with the Lord and the other disciples in that upper room ; and leaving the table he went out into the darkness and was soon at the head of a large company of men with swords and staves to apprehend and betray Him, identifying Him by kissing Him. This is one very sad event connected with Gethsemane, the terrible consequences of which you know well enough ; although Judas covenanted to betray His master for thirty pieces of silver, yet later the sight of that silver was so revolting to Him that feeling condemned, and filled with bitter remorse he hanged himself, as recorded in Matthew 27 and the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. What dark shadows from this point of view encircled Gethsemane as relating to what we can only term as far as I can see the case of a dead professor.

But there was something else connected with these events. This is the denial of Peter ; but what a different case is this to that of Judas ! Peter was left to fall, and a sad fall indeed it was. The Lord had said to Peter " Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat ", but Peter confidently said, " Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended ". " I am ready to go with thee both to prison and to death ". In this profession of loyalty he was sincere but had to prove he could not stand in his own strength. The Lord forewarned him saying, " This night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice ". There was no uncertainty about this prediction : Jesus said unto him " Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice ". The record we have of this denial indicates that Peter said it with a determination, even with cursing and oaths, " I know not the man ". What a sad fall was this ; but even so the issue in the case of Peter is very good. It was a painful, sharp and bitter lesson he had to learn; Peter never forgot it. In his 1st. Epistle we find him saying " Kept by the power of God ". How often he must have gone *back* to Gethsemane, and what followed, feeling his deep need of being " Kept by the power of God ". And Peter had denied his Lord these three times the cock crew. Then the Lord turned and looked upon him, as we have read in the Gospel by Luke, but did not say anything, did not say " What I told you has come to pass ", no, the Lord turned and *looked* upon him, and that was enough ; Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and he " went out and wept bitterly ". Never had he wept such tears as this before, and probably never after just the same ; but what a speaking look it must have been, and what tears of deep repentance, grief and sorrow they were. Poor Peter ; but we know these sad records in Holy Scripture, such as the cases of Judas and Peter are for our learning and warning, being kept only " by the power of God ".

There is another incident that is sad though not in the same sense. These poor troubled disciples followed their Lord into Gethsemane, apparently in a sad, perplexed and confused state of mind, not knowing what was about to take place. Those three favoured disciples could not understand the real position and what was involved when the Lord went a little further and fell on His face and prayed saying "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me". They must have been amazed, but even so they went to sleep. They were indeed sorrowful, it is said they slept for sorrow; they were very sad, they seemed to be going into an experience that bewildered them. They had many intimations that their Lord would be leaving them that He would be put to death but when He came to them He found them asleep. We read that the Lord "cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter: "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" What a tender reproof it was that He gave them, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak". "He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And He came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy". They were weary, sad and bewildered, sleeping in their sorrow. Sorrow usually keeps people awake, but they were heavy with sleep. And He "went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words." This was in the *place* called Gethsemane.

This place, as we read in John 18, was over the brook Cedron. This is where the Lord Jesus went with His disciples after He left the upper room; after those choice addresses, and that wonderful prayer recorded in John 17. It seems difficult to know just when that prayer in John 17 was uttered by the Lord. Some believe it was on the way to the place; in any case it is connected with Gethsemane. If you take John 17 and read that chapter with prayer you can picture in your minds the Lord offering up that wonderful prayer approaching or in Gethsemane. Gethsemane literally appears to have been a fertile vale or small village, with a few buildings or houses, with an enclosure, a quiet retired spot, abounding with olive trees; this was Gethsemane. It is said in the Gospel according to John that the Lord often resorted thither, so this was not the first or the second time that Jesus had been to Gethsemane. Judas also knew the place, but the Lord had come there on this occasion for something very, very impressive, vital and solemn.

"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane", It is said that there was a garden there. Not that Gethsemane was actually the garden, but that in Gethsemane there was a garden, that is this little enclosure, where the Lord had oft times resorted to pray. This little fertile vale, these olive trees were witness to one of the most momentous events that have ever been upon this earth. There in this sacred spot the Lord came with

His disciples taking three with Him into this enclosure for that sad and solemn devotion. In the Scriptures when we read about gardens we need not picture them in precisely the same sense as we have gardens, but as an enclosure or secluded spot. There it was Jesus went, "When from noise He would be free. Then He sought Gethsemane" (Hymn 802).

It is recorded in Isaiah 63 that He trod the winepress alone, indicating there His victory over sin, death, hell and all enemies. But, in order to this ultimate conquest, there must be Gethsemane.

"Gethsemane, the olive press!
(And why so called let Christians guess;)
Fit name! fit *place*! where vengeance strove,
And griped and grappled hard with love."

I would now desire to open up a little of what Gethsemane meant to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and then to speak a little of what Gethsemane means to us if we are His.

I ask you now to contemplate a little of what Gethsemane really meant to our Holy blessed Redeemer. He came with His disciples into a *place* called Gethsemane. This was a place of anguish, grief, pain and sorrow. We can have no question about this, for we read that He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death". Contemplate this. In Isaiah 53 it is recorded of Him that He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; never was an occasion when that was more true than it was in Gethsemane. He does not just merely say "my soul is sorrowful", or "my soul is a *little* sorrowful", but "my soul is *exceeding* sorrowful". This was grief that words cannot give full expression to. We cannot fully contemplate in our minds what Gethsemane involved as relating to the Lord Jesus Christ; it implied more to Him in suffering than to any other human being that has lived upon this earth. No other suffering will ever compare actually with the vicarious sufferings of the Holy Substitute in this place called Gethsemane. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful". "Behold and see if there be sorrow like unto my sorrow". No sorrow has been deeper than this. Many things bring us sorrow here, the loss of loved ones, afflictions, changing circumstances, many things are an occasion of sorrow and grief to us, but never has there been such sorrow as that sorrow the Lord Himself felt in this place called Gethsemane. What was the cause of that sorrow? We are left at no question about this. It was the sins of all His dear people that were laid upon Him. This intolerable burden, this inconceivable mass of guilt, the guilt of the whole elect people of God pressed upon Him in this *place* called Gethsemane. Contemplate what an awful load of imputed guilt pressed upon Him then as He stood a substitute in the place of poor guilty people who must otherwise suffer the vengeance of divine wrath in hell for ever. It was indeed a place of exceeding *great and bitter* sorrow. But it was something else beside this; it was a place of *real, earnest* prayer. It is said in verse 39, "He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let

this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Linking the two verses together we hear Him saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death". "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:"; again the second time He prayed saying the same words. Leaving His poor sleeping disciples He went away again and prayed the third time saying the same words. This was no vain repetition. We may assume that the fact that He prayed the same words the third time indicated the bitter ingredients in that cup He was about to drink, and yet later, as in John 18 we find the Holy Sufferer saying to Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? This is a sweet point, "O my *Father*, if it be possible". He did not pray to be delivered from the cross for He knew what was before Him when in this place called Gethsemane. It seems as far as we can follow this to open up the fact that the weight that pressed upon Him and the bitter ingredients of that cup brought Him to a place, as Hart expresses it, where "He had strength enough and none to spare". "Backwards and forwards thrice He ran, as if He sought some help from man". He trod the winepress alone. "If it be possible". "Nevertheless". But Gethsemane was not only a place of profound grief and sorrow, it was also a *place of holy subjection*—as a suffering man, as mediator, we see Him submissive to His Father's will. "Nevertheless", not as *I* will, but as *Thou* wilt". Gethsemane was a place of *submission*, as well as *suffering* and *prayer*. It was also a place of *intense conflict*; O what a battle it must have been, what an assault, what a violent onslaught by all the powers of hell appears to be let loose upon Him. It was a place also where "Vengeance, with its iron rod Bruised the harmless Lamb of God;" where "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief." Isaiah 53. Satan made two fierce and violent attacks upon the Saviour first in the wilderness and then in Gethsemane. It was a place where the like experience has never been before or since in the soul of another man. It was also a place of *victory* over all opposing powers, for none could gain upon Him. He undertook, He must go through, He gained a complete victory. In this place called Gethsemane the battle was fought; there the blood oozed through the pores of His sacred body so that He was bathed in blood, as expressed in the hymn, under the weight of imputed sin. This is just a brief word of what Gethsemane means, did mean, to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I was looking at this a little this morning at home, it opened to me what Gethsemane means to us, that is if we are His dear people. Gethsemane is to us, in our view of it, a place where sin discovers itself in such a way as to fill us with wonder and amazement, not only in relation to the awfulness of sin but in the tremendous cost of redemption, and what a cost indeed it was. As humbled in repentance and godly sorrow, we might well join in confessing:

"Sins against a holy God ;
Sins against His righteous laws ;
Sins against His love, His blood ;
Sins against His name, and cause ;
Sins immense as is the sea—
Hide me, O Gethsemane!"

Gethsemane is to us that refuge a poor sin-convicted sinner needs.
Gethsemane is to us a place of *hope* as in verses 21 and 22

"Here's my claim, and here alone ;
None a Saviour more can need ;
Deeds of righteousness I've none ;
No, not one good work to plead ;
Not a glimpse of hope for me,
Only in Gethsemane."

"Saviour, all the stone remove,
From my flinty, frozen heart ;
Thaw it with the beams of love,
Pierce it with the blood-dipt dart ;
Wound the heart that wounded thee ;
Melt it in Gethsemane."

Gethsemane is to us a place that calls for deep repentance, as the conscience is wounded on account of sin because of the wounds those sins gave to Christ ; Gethsemane is to us a place of holy trust, confidence, faith, love and peace. Well might we join in the last verse of Hymn 802,

"Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
One almighty God of love,
Hymned by all the heavenly host,
In thy shining courts above ;
We poor sinners, gracious THREE,
Bless thee for Gethsemane."

Amen.

2,10.66