

## THE STORM OF SUFFERING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever seen a storm brewing. At first it is a bright sunny day. And you would think there is nothing but sunshine and pleasantness in the forecast. But then, a few clouds begin to come in from the west. And after a while the clouds are heavier. And you begin to hear a faint rumble in the distance. And you look at each other and go, “Uh Oh.”

Pretty soon things get ominous and the little rumbling becomes a big rumbling. And then, out of nowhere a loud boom of thunder. A few seconds later the lightning zings across the sky in the distance. Suddenly the wind begins to blow hard out of nowhere and the rain begins to spatter. But the full fury of the storm is not yet. You still have a couple of minutes to batten down the hatches.

Finally, the thunder and lightning are simultaneous and the wind is so noisy you can barely hear. And the rain beats down in buckets and it seems like all of God’s fury is poured right on top of your house.

There was a storm brewing during all of the ministry of Jesus. There was a cloud of jealousy here and a cloud of hatred there. There was always a wind of bitterness stirring among the Jews in general and the Pharisees in particular. And all through the three-year ministry of Jesus the clouds gathered. And as his ministry led him toward Jerusalem for the final time, the clouds became ominous and there was, you might say, a little rumbling and then the clap of thunder in the distance. And there was a great storm of suffering brewing for Jesus and it was about to rain on him in full force.

Now before we get into our text, I want you to know that this storm appeared to be generated by the evil plot of sinful men. For the Scriptures say,

*For of a truth against thy Holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.*

Acts 4:27

And so the suffering of Jesus was generated by evil men. This was an all-out evil conspiracy to rid the world of this man Jesus. Now Herod the king, and Pontius Pilate the governor, represent the Roman authorities. But you will notice that they were not alone in the conspiracy. The Gentiles and the people of Israel conspired.

You see,

*There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Romans 3:10-12

And so, the whole world of sinners was gathered together against this one righteous man, to do him evil. In a sense, all the sinners of all time, were gathered together.

You might say, not I. I would never come out to do him harm. But you too have pierced him through with your sins. You have in a sense taken up arms against him, haven't you? And even after you have known of his grace and love toward you, you have hung the crown of thorns on his head and you have driven the spikes into his hands and feet and by your sin you have mocked him.

So, this storm of suffering upon Christ seems to be brought upon him by the evil rage of the whole world of sinners.

But look more closely.

*For to do whatsoever thy hands and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

Acts 4:28

This was a storm of great suffering upon Jesus that was brought on not only by the world of sinners, but also and primarily, by the sovereign counsel of God. Though they were evil hands that drove the nails, there were also righteous and loving hands that did it. It was the hands of God himself that fastened Jesus to the cross. And though it was by the evil plotting and scheming of wicked men, it was also by the righteous counsel of God, a counsel which had long ago planned this suffering upon the Son. Evil hands were merely carrying out the righteous plan of God.

I love it that even the sins of men cannot overturn the plan of God. In fact, they carry it out.

Now a few days before, Jesus had told his disciples, *Now is my soul troubled.* John 12:27  
Matthew 26:36

*Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane*

No one dragged Jesus to his place of suffering, for it says, *Then cometh Jesus.*

Jesus had told his disciples: *I lay down my life for the sheep. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself.* (John 10:15, 17)

Jesus came voluntarily to his place of suffering.

*I come to do thy will O God.*

This was the moment in history in which Jesus would lay himself on the altar of sacrifice.

This moment was the focal point of the eternal Covenant of Redemption which God made with himself before the foundation of the world.

This moment was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises which in types and figures pointed to redemption in Christ.

This moment was when Christ's heel and Satan's head would be bruised.

This moment was spiritual Armageddon when the Captain of our salvation would march onto the battlefield against all the forces of Satan.

This was the moment when Jesus would prove his own saying, *He is greatest who is servant of all.*

And so our text says, *Then cometh Jesus.* That is, of his own will, voluntarily, he comes to his appointed place of suffering.

The place of his suffering. "Gethsemane"

- A. Matthew and Mark call it a place or, an estate. Perhaps its owner allowed Jesus and his disciples to use it on occasion.
- B. John 18:1 calls it a garden. Probably well kept and suitable for quiet reflection and prayer.
- C. It was a place often attended by Jesus and his disciples.

*And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oft times resorted thither with his disciples. (John 18:2)*

- D. The name itself means: An oil press. A place where olives were crushed and processed and sweet olive oil was harvested.

Note: How appropriate that this is the place where Christ was crushed and bruised. And just as when olives are trampled and crushed in the mill and sweet olive oil flows for pleasant nourishment, even so when Christ is crushed fresh spiritual oil flows to all believers for salvation and spiritual nourishment.

I. The company that he had with him. (*then cometh Jesus **with them***) v.36

A. He brought his disciples with him, all but one. Judas was otherwise employed in an evil deed.

B. He left eight of the disciples at some distance and said to them:

*Sit ye here while I go and pray yonder.*

a. Jesus often prayed **with** his disciples and he prayed **for** them and he instructed them how to pray.

b. But this was a time for private prayer for Jesus. And so he instructed them to *sit here while I go and pray yonder*.

c. This teaches us that prayer is essentially a personal communion with God and private prayer is often more useful than public prayer. Public prayer is often formal and general in nature suitable to matters of interest to the group. Private prayer is more intimate, more open, more passionate and more given to real communion with God. Public prayers should not be with much speaking. But private prayers may be as long as necessary and as long as desired. And so Jesus said, *sit ye here while I go and pray yonder*.

C. He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee to a corner of the garden where he suffered. The two sons of Zebedee were brothers, James and John. (v.37)

a. Peter, James and John were at various times privileged among the disciples, which demonstrates once again that God is sovereign over the dispensing of his favors. Peter and James and John were no better or worse than Andrew, Phillip or Matthew for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But on one occasion Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain and was transfigured in their presence *and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as light*. (Mt. 17:1,2) Peter, James and John were shown the very glory of God and the other disciples were not.

b. James and John of Zebedee, if you remember, they were the ones who once asked Jesus if they could sit with Jesus in his glory, one on his right and one on his left. (Mark 10:35) Jesus told them you don't know what you are asking. But,

- c. James and John did get to sit with Jesus during his suffering in the garden. And so, he took Peter and James and John a little further into the garden with him than the other disciples.

II. The agony of Jesus. *He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.* (v.37)

Luke 22:44 says Jesus was in agony.

A. This was not pain from without. No one was there yet to hurt him or to bind him or to slap him or beat him.

B. This was pain from within.

- a. He began to be sorrowful. Deep sorrow unto consternation. This type of sorrow is not your every day type of sorrow and regret. This was overwhelming sorrow such that no man has ever suffered.
- b. He began to be very heavy. It was like he had a weight of lead upon his heart and in his spirit. If you have ever been burdened down with extreme anxiety you may be able to relate. It affects me as a feeling of extreme pressure on my chest.

And so, it says that Jesus *began to be sorrowful and very heavy*.

And in so doing, the Scriptures are fulfilled:

*I am poured out like water, my heart is like wax, it is melted.* (Psalm 22:14)

*He was sorrowful and very heavy* because:

C. This was spiritual warfare.

- a. When Judas came to kiss Jesus a little later, Jesus said to Judas, *This is your hour and the power of darkness.* (Luke 22:53)
- b. Earlier Jesus had told the disciples: *The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.* (John 14:30,31)

What Jesus was saying was: Satan and his forces will attack me with full force with one last attempt to dissuade me from my mission. But I will do my Father's will.

And so, wrestling with the powers of darkness, *He was sorrowful and very heavy*.

*He was sorrowful and very heavy* because:

- D. This was Jesus bearing the iniquities of us all. The sufferings he was entering into were for our sins. He was sorrowful and very heavy because our sins weighed upon him. Now **you** know that just **your** sins were heavy on him indeed. And mine surely burdened him down. And the sins of the world multiplied that by the millions. They were so heavy on him that they crushed him to the ground. For it says: *He fell on his face.* (v.39)

This reminds me of the Scripture in Isaiah which says:

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

(Isaiah 53:6,7)

*He was sorrowful and very heavy* because:

- E. He had a very clear picture of the sufferings that were before him.
- a. He foresaw the betrayal of Judas -- which might be understood since Judas was a devil.
  - b. But Jesus also foresaw the denials of Peter, a most cherished disciple.
  - c. Jesus foresaw that he would go to the cross alone -- his friends in hiding and his enemies in full rage.
  - d. Jesus foresaw that in a few hours his flesh would be removed with a scourge, that they would spit upon him, crown him with thorns and hang him on a tree.
  - e. Jesus foresaw that he would bear these cruel torments with the Father's back turned against him. This is why he lamented while hanging on the cross:  
*Father, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Note: Other Christians have died cruel deaths in martyrdom, but they all were given grace and comforts in so doing. Like Stephen who when he was being stoned looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And so he was comforted. Not so Christ. He was not comforted in his moment of death but when he looked up he saw the anger of the Father against him. But he willingly died without comfort.

For the Scriptures say: *My soul refused to be comforted.*

And so our text says: *He was sorrowful and very heavy.*

But then let's note:

F. The extent of his sorrow. It was exceeding sorrowful (v.38) No man ever suffered so.

What man ever suffered like Jesus?

- a. Job? Though Job lost all and suffered much, his torment was only so much as God would allow Satan to inflict. Job was finally comforted and restored.
- b. Paul? Paul suffered much. He was stoned and left for dead. He was beaten and imprisoned for Christ. But even Paul could say that his sufferings were but light afflictions and only for a moment.
- c. Jesus. No man ever suffered such despair as Jesus. That's why he told his disciples that his sorrow was *exceeding*.

G. The duration of his sorrow. It was unto death. (v.38) It would not end until he died. From this point forward Jesus would be in spiritual agony and his sorrow would not subside, no, not for a moment, until he would finally cry in a loud voice, *It is finished*.

III. The prayer of Jesus. (v.39)

A. The place where he prayed. *He went a little further.*

- a. What little comfort Peter and James and John may have been, Jesus now forsook that comfort for solitude with his father in heaven.

Note: When we are in agony, there is comfort in being with our brothers and sisters in Christ and we should seek their fellowship and counsel in such times. But there may also be times when ultimately nothing will do but to be alone with God and to pour our heart out to him. This is what Jesus did for: *He went a little further* leaving the company of Peter, James and John.

B. His posture when he prayed. *He fell on his face.*

- a. This showed his great agony. Have you ever been in such emotional pain that you doubled over or fell to the floor? I hope not. And I hope you never will be in such distress. But Jesus was and it says, *He fell on his face*.
- b. This showed his great humility in his humanity. Though he was God in the flesh, he cast himself face down in the dirt. This was our Lord, our master, the one on whom we depend to sustain the universe by his power and *He fell on his face*. The book of Mark tells us that he fell on the ground. Not on a soft bed of roses, nor on a blanket spread for his comfort, but on the ground, in the dirt. *He fell on his face*. Sometimes humility can be measured by how far we

bow. Here we have the creator of the universe, the one to whom all homage is owed, to whom every knee shall bow and *He fell on his face* on the ground.

Is it too much to ask that you and I should humble ourselves and pray, when Jesus himself cast himself in the dirt in prayer?

C. The prayer itself. (v.39)

- a. *O, my father.* Even though the clouds of suffering were now thick and ominous, and the storm was imminent, Jesus nevertheless saw through his pain and remembered to go to the Father. Even though the Father would turn his back on Jesus later, still, Jesus prayed to the Father.

This should encourage us that:

Note: When storm clouds of life come our way, and God seems far off, it is still good to seek him.

As Job said, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*”

Even more so did Jesus cast himself into the hands of the Father.

**Better to be slain in the arms of God than to live in the clutches of Satan.**

- b. *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*
  - i. He called his sufferings a *cup* of suffering. Though the sorrow and the agony overwhelmed him like a flood, and though his suffering was deep like an ocean, Jesus called it merely a *cup* of suffering. Compared to the infinite joy he got from doing God’s will, his great suffering was merely a cup of suffering. How different is that from us many times who by our much whining and complaining often call a mere cup of suffering an ocean.
  - ii. He asked that the cup might pass from him.

It seems odd that Jesus would utter these words because we know and he knew that he was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. But,

This was a suffering that was not humanly tolerable. And Jesus demonstrates with this request that he was in all respects a man with a strong aversion for pain and suffering. He did not want to have his flesh ripped by the scourge, nor his brow pierced by the thorns, nor his body nailed to a tree.

And so he says, *let this cup pass from me.*

But he qualified his request by saying,

- iii. *If it be possible.* That is, if it is possible to save my people any other way besides this excruciating suffering and agonizing death, let this cup pass from me.

But there was no other way under heaven whereby a man may be saved.

Jesus himself had taught: *I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh to the Father but by me.*

And again, *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*

Jesus had taught them in more comfortable times, *I lay down my life for the sheep.*

But now, under duress, Jesus says, *If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*

But, there was no other way to appease God with respect to man's sin—only by the suffering of the Son.

Isn't it ridiculous that if God says there is no other way and Jesus submitted to this great suffering because there was no other way, that sinful man thinks there are other ways. But every other way leads to hell.

1. The Jews had no interest in Jesus' sufferings. They preferred to rely on the fact that they were the physical descendants of Abraham. Why, we don't need the sufferings of Jesus on our behalf.
2. The Jews preferred the Mosaic Law to the sufferings of Christ. They would rather die trying to establish their own righteousness, than to accept the sufferings of Christ on their behalf.
3. Every religion known to man except true Christianity has devised some method of salvation that excludes the sufferings of Jesus.

But, there is no other way. Without the sufferings of Jesus, we would still be in our sins. God frowned upon us until Jesus paid it all. And now, through his sufferings, God smiles on us. God is propitiated. That is, he is made able to justly forgive our sins by the sufferings of Christ.

The book of Romans puts it this way:

*That he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Romans 3:26)*

The Father's countenance has changed toward us that are in Christ. God can now justly forgive us, because retribution in full was poured out on Jesus for our sins.

Jesus said, *If it be possible . . . let this cup pass from me.*

It wasn't possible.

iv. *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thy wilt.*

There are two reasons why Jesus was willing to suffer:

- i. He loved the heavenly Father.
- ii. He loved us.

*I lay down my life for my sheep.*

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

So, Jesus said, *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thy wilt.*

## CONCLUSION

When Jesus hung on the cross, the book of Mark tells us that it was noon and the skies darkened. And there was darkness over the whole land until three o'clock. And at three o'clock, Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? And Jesus cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. And the vail of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom. And there was a great earthquake and rocks were broken in pieces. And then there was quiet. The storm was over. The clouds passed on. And the great suffering of our Lord was finished.

There was a centurion who was watching Jesus on the cross and who saw the earthquake and those things that were done, and he feared greatly and said, *Truly this was the Son of God.*

What say you, tonight? Was this the very Son of God? Did he suffer such great things for you? If so, then bow the knee unto him and more importantly, bow the heart.