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## GETHSEMANE: THE FULFILLMENT OF A PROPHECY

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WITH the exception of Calvary no other event in our Lord's earthly life has appealed more fully to the sympathy and interest of believers than that midnight scene in Gethsemane's garden, where in loneliness and distress the Christ, on the evening of His betrayal, offered up His thrice-repeated prayer, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Interpretations of this prayer have not been lacking, most of them being more or less influenced by the dread tragedy of the Cross so soon to supervene, and they vary chiefly as the prayer is taken to be an expression of the Manhood or Godhead of the Lord, in regard to His now impending death; interpreting it as either the shrinking of His manhood from the physical suffering of the cross, or the recoil of His sinless purity from being made sin. All such interpretations presuppose a knowledge far more intimate and exact than I believe any man has of that wondrous personality—Christ Jesus. God manifest in the flesh must ever present many mysteries that are incapable of solution, save when and where the enshrouding veil is drawn aside and the vision made clear by revelation. Nowhere else in the Scriptures do we find any confirmation of the assumption that our Lord's physical or spiritual nature either faltered or failed under trial; but that, on the contrary, with fixed and unwavering determination He walked the path that led to Calvary, and for joy endured the cross, despising the shame. And that Gethsemane was no exception to this great characteristic of His life I think can be proved from revelation.

In seeking the meaning of the prayer it is necessary to

remember that all the personalities in the scene are either divine or spiritual beings,—the Lord Jesus, His Father to Whom He prays, Satan, and an Angel. We must therefore turn to Scripture for the understanding of their motives, and the interpretation of their actions and language; carefully refraining from explanations that are based chiefly or only on what we think they might or must mean. The time in our Lord's life when He prayed this prayer is important to bear in mind. It was upon the eve of the accomplishment of His life's work, the great reason for His incarnation, the redemption of Man. The Father to Whom He prays, had sent Him into the world, had made Him under the law, subject to all its enactments and requirements, that, these having been kept in every particular both of letter and spirit, He might satisfy, by the offering of Himself once for all, the justice of God, and provide a righteousness for sinful men through faith in Himself.

Concerning Satan, the Lord had said, on the eve of His departure from the upper room for Gethsemane, that the prince of this world was coming unto Him, and that therefore He would not talk much more with them; a very remarkable statement, indicating as it does that He was to be engaged and occupied with him. The Angel, the last of the four, has his mission to the garden revealed by St. Luke, and therefore we have not to seek the reason for his presence, only to understand its significance. Any interpretation of the Gethsemane incident in our Lord's life, that does not take adequate notice of all four—the Father, Son, Satan, and the Angel—must fail to fully elucidate the meaning of the Lord's words addressed to His Father in prayer; it must also be in harmony with the prophetic and other scriptures that speak of our Lord's life and work.

Immediately preceding our Lord's going to Gethsemane, we have the institution of the Memorial Supper, the giving of the sop to Judas, and the command by the Lord to do the work of betrayal quickly. All was thus seemingly

prepared for, and the issue of events certain to culminate in, the Crucifixion.

The Lord and His disciples now go to Gethsemane, and there He enters the agony and prays for the passing of "this cup, if it be possible; nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." St. Luke tells us that being in an agony He prayed the more earnestly. *Agônia* has a meaning which is not by any means properly rendered by our word "agony," as used and understood to-day. It would be more literally translated by "conflict" or "contest." That Gethsemane was the scene of a conflict there can be no doubt, whoever the Lord's antagonist was. That it was Satan, the adversary of God and Man, we may be sure, for to the Father He prays, from the Angel He receives a strengthening ministrations.

The Lord's earthly life and many of the experiences He was to pass through had been foretold. But is there any prophetic statement that can be appealed to, which points to Gethsemane, and of which Gethsemane's struggle is an adequate and the only fulfillment thereof, recorded in Scripture of the prophecy? If we turn to Isa. liii. 3, we find the well-known words, "He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." In the R. V. the word "grief" is in the margin rendered "sickness." In ver. 10, also, the phrase "He hath put him to grief" becomes in the R. V. margin, "He hath made him sick." Young, in his literal translation of the Bible, adopts a similar rendering in both instances. Taking the two statements together, it is plain that the acquaintance of ver. 3 means the actual suffering of sickness in His own experience, not merely the knowledge of other's sufferings. Now this is just as explicit and definite a prophecy as any other of the many given us in that chapter, and it is possibly not without significance that it is the last of the humiliations and trials the prophet predicts in that section of his book, before mentioning His atoning death.

Now Satan is expressly stated to be in many cases the author of sickness and disease. The Lord said so in Luke

xiii. 16. Peter declares it in Acts x. 38. It is taught in the Book of Job, and in Heb. ii. 14 he is declared to have the power of death. With the Crucifixion arranged for, was there any reason for Satan to attack our Lord's body in Gethsemane? There was. In the law it was decreed that no imperfect priest could offer, nor could any blemished victim be accepted (Lev. xxi. 21; xxii. 20, 22, 24; Deut. xv. 21). And from Mal. i. 8 we learn that the offering of the sick was evil in the sight of the Lord.

That Satan knew that the mission of the Lord was to destroy his works, and break his power, is certain; for he knew that the Lord Jesus was the Son of God, and that the death He was to accomplish on the cross was to atone for sin, and set many of his captives free, breaking his power and triumphing over him. Satan, therefore, had every reason to put forth to the fullest possible extent any power at his disposal to render the Lord Jesus' sacrifice of Himself either unavailing through sickness, or impossible through death. How severe and determined the attack upon the Lord's body was, we may gather from one of the results mentioned. His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. A literal translation of *thromboi haimatos* would be "clots of blood." Surely such a departure from the normal indicates the intensity of the effort to sever the spirit of the Son of God from its earthly tabernacle, and how deeply he must have experienced in this affliction the possibilities of bodily suffering through sickness.

In this encounter with Satan our Lord meets the attack in an entirely different way to that in which He met the trial in the wilderness. There every temptation was to transgress the written commandments of God, and the quotation of them and the refusal to break them, was a sufficient answer to Satan. But here in Gethsemane we hear no pleading of the word or promises of God; and why? Because the Lord knew that His Father had determined beforehand that He was to be made sick; and so, in submission to His Father's will, He prays that it

may be removed. His prayer is answered, He is strengthened by the Angel, meets Judas and his armed bands, and the progress to the cross begins.

As, in the temptation in the wilderness, the ministration of the angels is stated to be subsequent to the departure of Satan, and therefore after his defeat by our Lord, the only possible inference is that it was His physical nature that they ministered to. It is also inconceivable that any created intelligences could have strengthened the spiritual nature of Him Who was Himself their Creator and God; but He, having been made flesh and like unto His brethren, was granted in the hour of His physical trial and distress the services of those who are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.

Those who see in the prayer a cry for deliverance from the cross, or the revolt of His pure nature from being made sin, endeavor to minimize the apparent shrinking of the Lord from these trials, by saying that, notwithstanding His knowledge of all the cross implied, He of His own free will endured it. All such explanations ignore the presence of Satan and his part in the events of the scene in the garden as well as that of the Angel strengthening the physical nature of the Lord. The same ministry of angels is also related as having been granted to Him after the only other recorded assault of Satan upon Him; which very strongly corroborates the other evidence of Satan having been our Lord's antagonist in Gethsemane.

There are two other portions of Scripture that must always be considered in connection with our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane. In Heb. v. 7-9 we read:—

“7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him who was able to save him from death, and was heard, in that he feared.

“8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

“9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”

Here we have first the statement that there was an oc-  
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casation when the Lord Jesus prayed to be delivered from death, and His prayer was granted, for such is the force of *eisakouō*. We are next told that, having learned obedience by the things that He suffered, He became the Author of eternal salvation. As in Isa. liii. 10 we have sickness predicted, so in Heb. v. we have deliverance from death and obedience perfected recorded immediately before the declaration of His becoming the Author of salvation. Is all this not something more than a series of undesigned and unrelated coincidences?

The second Scripture that must be taken into consideration with Gethsemane is our Lord's rebuke of Peter, who but a few moments after the Lord had ceased praying, and certainly while yet in the garden, had drawn his sword to attempt His deliverance. In Matt. xxvi. 52, 53, 54, the Lord first commands Peter to sheathe his sword, and then adds, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" These sentences prove conclusively that the prayer in the garden could not have been inspired by any unwillingness to suffer anything required by His predicted atonement for sin; for He tells Peter He only had to pray to be delivered from His enemies and Calvary, but that the necessity of the Scriptures being fulfilled precluded the doing so. The thrice-repeated prayer of the agony, therefore, could have had nothing to do with anything He came to earth to accomplish, and which had been predicted by the prophets He would do. We are therefore compelled to believe that "the cup which my Father hath given me," the removal of which He refused to pray for, could not have been the same as that cup the removal of which He thrice prayed for so earnestly in the Agony.

Some have thought that the Gethsemane prayer was for resurrection, because of the words *ek thanatou*, "out of death," in Heb. v. 10; but this cannot be the explanation, for there were prophetic promises in the Old

Testament Scriptures, as well as many declarations on numerous occasions by the Lord Jesus Himself, that He would rise again. He had also appointed His disciples a trysting place whereat to meet Him subsequently to the event. Moreover, a prayer for resurrection would imply doubt of the prophecies, and of His own oft-repeated statements.

It, however, yet remains to understand, if possible, the Lord's willingness to drink the cup He prayed to have removed. In Heb. v. 8 we are told that He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, and in Heb. ii. 10, that the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through sufferings.

The Lord had emptied Himself of His glory, and come to earth to seek and to save the lost. He had walked amongst men, understanding, but misunderstood by all, for love He had received hate, and, in return for blessings, persecution. Through all the humiliating and distressing incidents of His life, He had walked unscathed, untouched by sin; rendering ever, and under all circumstances, a perfect obedience to His Father's will and law. But this obedience to be perfect must be to the end, to the very last act and breath of life.

But, now, in the garden when just about to accomplish the great redemption, the supreme passion of His heart, He finds Himself assailed and so pressed by His greatest Adversary, that unless He is delivered by the Father, all must be given up, and redemption foregone. Must not the cry, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done," be taken as proof that He always lived in absolute dependence upon the Father; that every trial and affliction foretold to come upon Him, was accepted as the will of the Father for Him; and that therefore He Who had healed so many could not heal Himself. He therefore prays that prayer of supplication and confiding submission. His prayer is answered, its petition granted, and He begins His progress to the cross.



Have we not here the supreme test of obedience applied, and the perfecting of obedience completed? With reverence, I think, we may ask the questions, Could the Father have subjected His obedience to a more exacting test? Could the Lord Jesus have responded more perfectly? All was demanded: all was surrendered.

The above interpretation seems to be in accordance with what has been revealed concerning our Lord's perfect character, and the character of His Adversary in the garden, and, moreover, does not require us to transgress the limits of revelation to reach it. It also emphasizes the perfection of submission that God demands; and, as we realize how impossible it is for us to attain to such a standard, should make us the more thankful that His perfect obedience can be ours through faith in Him.