



Six Sermons on the Olive

3. Christ in Gethsemane

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“And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane”
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Our Lord had been sitting at the table of happy fellowship with his disciples, talking to them, in a very solemn and impressive manner; he then delivered those choice discourses which are recorded by John, and offered that wonderful prayer which deserves ever to be called “The Lord’s prayer.” Knowing all that was to befall him, he left the upper room, with his disciples, and started to go to his usual place of quiet retreat, “a place which was named Gethsemane.” You can easily picture their descent into the street. The moon was at the full on the paschal night, and it was very cold, for we read that the high priest’s servants had kindled a fire, and warmed themselves, because it was cold. As Jesus walked along the narrow streets of Jerusalem, he doubtless still spake to his disciples in calm and helpful tones, and ere long he came to the brook Kedron, over which David passed when Absalom stole away the hearts of the people from his father. So, now, “great David’s greater Son” must go the same way to the olive garden where he had often been before with his disciples. It was called Gethsemane, “the olive-press.” As we think of Christ in Gethsemane, I want you who love him not only to adore him, but to learn to imitate him, so that, when you are called to “drink of his cup,” and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith he was baptized, you may behave as his true followers should, and come forth from your conflict victorious as he came forth from his.

At the very outset, there is one fact that I wish you to observe very particularly. Sudden changes from joy to grief have produced extraordinary results in those who have been affected by them. We have often read or heard of persons whose hair has turned white in a single night; such an extreme convulsion of mind has happened to them that they have seemed to be hurried forward into premature old age, at least in appearance, if not in fact. Many have

died through unusual excitements of spirit. Some have dropped down dead through a sudden excess of joy, and others have been killed by a sudden excess of grief. Our blessed Master must have experienced a very sudden change of feeling on that memorable night. In that great intercessory prayer of his, there is nothing like distress or tumult of spirit; it is as calm: as a lake unruffled by the zephyr's breath. Yet he is no sooner in Gethsemane than he says to the three specially favoured disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me."

I do not think that this great conflict arose through our dear Master's fear of death, nor yet through; his fear of the physical pain and all the ignominy and shame that he was so soon to endure. But, surely, the agony in Gethsemane was part of the great burden that was already resting upon him as his people's Substitute; it was this that pressed his spirit down even into the dust of death. He was to bear the full weight of it upon the cross, but I feel persuaded that the passion began in Gethsemane. You know that Peter writes, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree;" but we are not to gather from that passage, that his substitutionary sufferings were limited to the tree, for the original might bear this rendering, — that, he bore our sins in his own body up to the tree, that he came up to the tree bearing that awful load and still continued to bear it on the tree. You remember that Peter also writes, in the same verse, "by whose stripes ye were healed." These stripes did not fall upon Jesus when he was upon the cross, it was in Pilate's judgement all that he was so cruelly scourged. I believe that he was bearing our sins all his life, but that the terrible weight of them began to crush him with sevenfold force when he came to the olive-press, and that the entire mass rested upon him with infinite intensity when he was nailed to the cross, and so forced from him the agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In meditating upon this commencement of our Saviour's unknown agonies, let, us think, first, of THE CHOICE OF THE SPOT where those agonies were to be endured. Let us try to find out why he went to that particular garden on that dread night of his betrayal.

First, the choice of Gethsemane *showed his serenity of mind, and his courage*. He knew that he was to be betrayed, to be dragged before Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, to be insulted, scourged, and at last to be led away to be crucified; but (mark the words,) “he came out, and went, as he was wont to the mount of Olives.” It was his usual custom to go there to pray, so he would not make any change in his habit although he was approaching the supreme crisis of his earthly life. Let this courageous conduct of our Lord teach a lesson to all who, profess to be his disciples. Whenever some trouble is about to come upon you, especially if it is a trouble that comes upon you because you are a Christian, do not be perturbed in spirit. Neglect no duty, but just do as you have been wont to do. The best way of preparing for whatever may be coming is to go on with the next thing in the order of providence. If any child of God knew that he had to die to-night, I would recommend him to do just what he should do on any other Sabbath night, only to do it more earnestly and more devoutly than ever he had done it before. Blessed is that servant who, when his Master cometh, shall be found discharging his duty as a servant, waiting upon his Master’s household with all due orderliness and care. Then go and stand outside the front door, and stare up into the sky to see if the Master is coming, as some I know seem to do, is not at all as your Lord would have you act. You know how the angels rebuked the disciples for doing this: “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” Go and preach the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then, whether Christ come, soon or later, you will be in the right posture to welcome Him, all he will commend you for carrying out so far as you can his last great commission to his disciples.

Christ’s courage is also evident from the fact that “Judas also which betrayed him, knew the place, for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.” Nothing would have been easier than for our blessed Lord to have escaped from Judas if he had desire to do so, but he had no desire to escape, so he went boldly and deliberately to the place with which “the son of perdition” was well acquainted, the very place, indeed, to which the traitor at once conducted the officers who had been ordered to arrest the

Master. May the Lord give to us similar courage whenever we are placed in a position in any respect like his was then! There are certain trials which, as a Christian, you cannot escape, and which you should not wish to escape. You do not like to think of them, but I would urge you to do so, not with fear and terror, but with the calm confidence of one who says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and I am straitened until it is accomplished. I have a cup of which I must drink, I am eager to drink it. I do not court suffering, but if it be for Christ's sake, for the glory of God and the good of his Church, I do not wish to escape from it, but I will go to it calmly and deliberately, even as my Lord went to Gethsemane, though Judas knew the place where Jesus often resorted with his disciples."

But, next, in the choice of this spot, our Lord also *manifested his wisdom*. For, first, it was to him a place of holy memories. Under those old olive trees, so gnarled and twisted, he had spent many a night in prayer; and the silver moonbeams, glancing between the sombre foliage, had often illumined his blessed person as he there knelt, and wrestled, and had communion with his Father. He knew how his soul had been refreshed while he had spoken there face to face with the Eternal, how his face had been made to shine, and he had returned to the battle in Jerusalem's streets strengthened by his contact with the Almighty. So he went to the old trysting place, the familiar spot where holy memories clustered thick as bees about a hive, each one laden with honey; he went there because those holy memories aided his faith. And, brothers and sisters in Christ, when your time of trial comes, you will do well to go to the spot where the Lord has helped you in the past, and where you have enjoyed much, hallowed fellowship with him. There are rooms where, if the walls could tell all that has happened within them, a heavenly brightness might be seen because God has so graciously revealed himself to us there in times of sickness and sorrow. One, who had long lain in prison for Christ's sake, used sometimes to say, after he had been released, "Oh, take me back to my dungeon, for I never had such blessed seasons of communion with my Lord as I had within that cold stone cell!" Well, if you have such a place, dear to you by many hallowed memories, go to

it as your Master went, to his sacred oratory in the garden of Gethsemane, for there you will be likely to be helped even by the associations of the place.

Our Lord's wisdom, in choosing that spot is also evident from the fact, that it was a place of deep solitude, and therefore most suitable for his prayers and cries on that doleful night. The place which is now called the garden of Gethsemane does not, according to some of the best judges, deserve that name. It is in far too exposed a position, and one always thinks of Gethsemane as a very quiet, lonely spot; and let me say that, in my judgment, there is no place so suitable for solitude as an olive garden, especially if it be in terrace above terrace as in the South of France. I have frequently been sitting in an olive garden, and friends, whom I would have been glad to see, have been within a few yards of me, yet I have not known that they were there. One beautiful afternoon, as two or three of us sat and read, we could see, a long way down, a black hat moving to and fro, but we could not see the wearer of it. We afterwards discovered that he was a brother-minister whom we were glad to invite to join our little company. If you want to be alone, you can be so at any time you like in an olive garden, even if it is near the town. What with the breaking up of the ground into terraces, and the great abundance of foliage, and the strange twisted trunks of the old trees, I know no place in which I should feel so sure of being quite alone as in an olive garden, and I think our Master went to Gethsemane, for a similar reason. And burdened as he was, needed to be in a solitary place. The clamorous crowd in Jerusalem would have been no fit companions for him when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.

It seems to me, also, that there is about an olive garden, either by day or by night, something congruous with sorrow. There are some trees that seem conducive to mirth, the very twinkling of their leaves would make one's heart dance with delight; but about the olive there is always something, not suggestive, perhaps, of absolute melancholy, but a matter-of-fact soberness as if, in extracting oil out of the flinty rock, it had endured so much suffering that it had no inclination to smile, but stood there as the

picture of everything that is sombre and solemn. Our dear Master knew that there was something congenial to his exceeding sorrow in the gloom of the olive garden, and therefore he went there on the night of his betrayal. Act with similar wisdom, brethren; and sisters in Christ, when your hour of trial is approaching. I have known some people rush into gay society to try to forget their grief; but that was folly. I have known others, in seasons of sorrow, seem to surround themselves with everything that is sad; that also was folly. Some, who have been in great trouble, have tried to hide it in frivolity; but that was still greater folly. It is a good thing, in times of grief, not to let your surroundings be either too sombre or too bright; but to seek, in your measure, to be as wise as your Master was in his choice of Gethsemane as the scene of his solitary supplication and subsequent betrayal.

Now, secondly, let us consider THE EXERCISE OF THE SAVIOUR UPON THAT SPOT. Every item is worthy of attention and imitation.

First, he took all the precautions for others. He left eight of his disciples at the entrance to the garden, saying to them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation." Then he took Peter, and James, and John a little further into the garden, saying to them "Tarry ye here, and watch with me." There ought thus to have been two watching and praying bands. If they had all been on the watch, they might have heard the footfalls of the approaching band, and they would have seen in the distance the lights of the lanterns and torches of these who were coming to arrest their Lord. Probably our Master took these precautions more for the sake of his disciples than for his own sake. He bade them pray as well as watch, that they might not be taken unawares, nor be overcome with fear when they saw their Master captured, and led away as a prisoner. From this action of our Lord, we may learn that we also, in our own extremity, should not forget to care for others, and shield them from harm so far as we can.

Next, our Saviour solicited the sympathy of friends. As a man, he desired the prayers and sympathies of those who had been most closely associated with him. Oh, what a prayer-meeting they might have held, — watching for the coming of the enemy, and

praying for their dear Lord and Master! They had a noble opportunity of showing their devotion to him, but they missed it. They could not have kept Judas, and the men who came with him, away from their Lord; but they might have let their Master know when Judas was coming. It was almost the last service that any of them could have rendered to him before he died for them; yet they failed to render it, and left him, in that dread hour of darkness, without even the slight consolation that human sympathy might have afforded him. In our times of trial, we shall not do wrong if we imitate our Lord in this action of his; yet we need not be surprised if, like him, we find all human aid fail us in our hour of greatest need.

Then, leaving all his disciples, and going away alone, Jesus prayed and wrestled with God; and in our time of trouble, our resort must be to prayer. Restrain not prayer at any time, even when the sun shines brightly upon thee; but be sure that thou prayest when the midnight darkness surrounds thy spirit. Prayer is most needed in such an hour as that, so be not slack in it, but pour out thy whole soul in earnest supplication to thy God, and say to thyself, "Now above all other times I must pray with the utmost intensity." For consider how Jesus prayed in Gethsemane.

He adopted the lowliest posture and manner. He fell on his face, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." What an extraordinary sight! The eternal Son of God had taken upon himself our nature, and there he lay as low as the very dust, out of which our nature was originally formed. There he lay as low as the most unrighteous sinner or the humblest beggar can lie before God. Then he began to cry to his Master in plain and simple language; but, oh! What force he put into the words he used! Thrice he pleaded with his Father, repeating the same petition; and Luke tells us that, "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He was not only in an agony of suffering, but in an agony of prayer at the same time.

But while our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane was thus earnest, and intense, and repeated, it was at the same time balanced with a ready acquiescence in his Father's will: "Nevertheless not, as I

will, but as thou wilt.” So, suffering one, thou whose spirit has sunk within thee thou who, art depressed and well-nigh distracted with grief, may the Holy Spirit help thee to do what Jesus did, — to pray, to pray alone, to pray with intensity, to pray with importunity, to pray even unto an agony, for this is the way in which thou wilt prevail with God, and be brought through thine hour of darkness and grief. Believe not the devil when he tells thee that thy prayer is in vain. Let not thine unbelief say, “The Lord hath closed his ear against thee.” “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.” Yet mind that thou dost also imitate thy Lord’s submission and resignation, for that is not acceptable prayer in which a man seeks to make his own will prevail over the will of God. That is presumption and rebellion, and not the cry of a true child of God. Thou mayest beseech him to grant thy request “if it be possible,” but thou mayest not go beyond that, but must still cry, with thy Lord, “Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

I have already reminded you that our Lord sought human sympathy while in Gethsemane, but I want again to refer to that fact, so that we may learn the lessons it is intended to teach us. In our little griefs, we often go to our fellow-creatures, but not to God, that habit is apt to breed dependence upon man. But, in our greatest griefs, we frequently go to God, and feel as if we could not go to man. Now, although that may look like honouring God, there is a good deal of pride mixed with it. Our Lord Jesus Christ neither depended upon men nor yet renounced the sympathy of men. There were three of his disciples within call, and eight more a little further away, but still probably within call. He prayed to his Father, yet he asked of his disciples such sympathy as they might have shown to him. Still, he did not depend upon their sympathy; for, when he did not get it, he went back to his praying to his Father. There are some who say that they will trust in God, and use no means; others say that they will use the means, but they fall short in the matter of trusting God. I have read that one of Mahomet’s followers came to him, and said, “O prophet of God, I shall turn my camel loose to-night, and trust it to providence;” but Mahomet very wisely answered, “Tie your camel up as securely as

you can, and then trust it to providence.” There was sound common sense in that remark, and the principle underlying it can be applied to far weightier matters. I believe, that I am following the example of my Lord when I say, “I trust in God so fully that, if no man will sympathize with me, he alone will enable me to drink all that is in this cup that he has placed in my hand; yet I love my fellow-creatures so much that I desire to have their sympathy with me in my sorrow; although, if they withhold it, I shall still place my sole dependence upon my God.”

When our Lord came to his disciples, and found them sleeping instead of watching, you know how prompt he was to find an excuse for them: “The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” His rebuke of Peter was very gentle: “Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?’ Art thou sleeping, thou who, so recently boasted that thou wouldst go with me to prison and to death, and that, though all others should deny me, thou wouldst not? Ah, Simon! thou hadst better watch and pray, for thou knowest not how soon temptation may assail thee, and cause thee to fall most grievously.” Yet Peter was included with the rest of the disciples in the excuse which their Lord made for the willing but weak sleepers who ought to have been watchers. What a lesson this is to us! We do not make half the excuses for one another that Jesus makes for us. Generally, we are so busy making excuses for ourselves that we quite forget to make excuses for others. It was not so with our Lord. Even in his own overwhelming trouble, no sharp or unkind word escaped from his lips. When we are very ill, you know how apt we are to be irritable to those about us; and if others do not sympathize with us as we think they should, we wonder what they can be made of to see us in such sorrow, and not to express more grief on our account. Yet there was our Master, all bestained with his own blood, for his heart’s floods had burst their banks, and run all over him; in a gory torrent; but when he came to his disciples, they gave him no kind word, no help, no sympathy, for they were all asleep. He knew that they were sleeping for sorrow, so their sleep was not caused by indifference to his grief, but by their sorrow at his sorrow. Their Master knew this, so he made such excuse for them as he

could; and, beloved, when we are suffering our much smaller sorrows, let us be ready to make, excuses for others as our Lord did in his great ocean sufferings.

Now, thirdly, let us consider THE TRIUMPH UPON THAT SPOT. It was a terrible battle that was waged in Gethsemane; — we shall never be able to pronounce that word without thinking of our Lord's grief and agony; — but it was a battle that he won, a conflict that ended in complete victory for him.

The victory consisted, first, *in his perfect resignation*. There was no rebellion in his heart against the will of the Father to whom he had so completely subjected himself; but unreservedly he cried, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." No clarion blast, nor firing of cannon, nor waving of flags, nor acclamation of the multitudes ever announced such a victory as our Lord achieved in Gethsemane. He there won the victory over all the griefs that were upon him, and all the griefs that were soon to roll over him, like huge Atlantic billows. He there won the victory over death, and over even the wrath of God which he was about to endure to the utmost for his people's sake. There is true courage, there is the highest heroism, there is the declaration of the invincible Conqueror in that cry, "Not, as I will, but as thou wilt."

With Christ's perfect resignation, there was also *his strong resolve*. He had undertaken the work of his people's redemption, and he would go through with it until he could triumphantly say from the cross, "It is finished." A man can sometimes dash forward, and do a deed of extraordinary daring, but it is the long-sustained agony that is the real test, of courageous endurance. Christ's agony in Gethsemane was broken up into three periods of most intense wrestling in prayer, with brief intervals which can have given him no relief as he turned in vain to the sleeping disciples for the sympathy that his true human nature needed in that hour of dreadful darkness. But, as he had before steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem though he well knew all that awaited him there, he still kept his face set like a flint toward the great purpose for which he had come from heaven to earth. It is the wear and tear of long-continued grief that has proved to much for many a truly heroic spirit, yet our Lord endured it to the end,

and so left us an example that we shall do well to follow.

A part of our Saviour's victory was that he obtained angelic help. Those prayers of his prevailed with his Father, "and there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." I know not how he did it, but in some mysterious way the angel brought him succour from on high. We do not know that angel's name, and we do not need to know it; but somewhere among the bright spirits before the throne, there is the angel who strengthened Christ in Gethsemane. What a high honour for him! The disciples missed the opportunity that Christ put within their reach, but the angel gladly availed himself of the opportunity as soon as it was presented to him.

Last of all, the victory of Christ was manifest *in his majestic bearing towards his enemies*. Calmly he rose, and faced the hostile band; and when the traitor gave the appointed signal by which Jesus was to be recognized, he simply asked the searching personal question, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" How that enquiry must have cut the betrayer to the heart! When Jesus turned to those who had been sent to arrest him; and said to them, "Whom seek ye" he did not speak like a man whose soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; and when they answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth," he said, "I am;" and at the very sound of that great Jehovah's name, "I am," "they went backward, and fell to the ground." There was a majestic flash of his Deity even in the hour of the abasement of his humanity, and they fell prostrate before the God who; had thus confessed that the name of Jehovah rightly belonged to him. Then he went with them quietly, and without the slightest resistance, after he had shown his care for his disciples by saying, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way;" and after he had healed the ear of Malchus, which Peter had so rashly cut off. Then, all the while that Christ was before Annas and Caiaphas, and before Pilate and Herod, and right on to the last dread scene of all upon the cross, he was calm and collected, and never again endured such tossings to and fro as he had passed through in Gethsemane.

Well now, beloved, if the Lord shall bring us into deep waters, and cause us to pass through fiery trials if his Spirit shall enable us

to pray as Jesus did, we shall see something like the same result in our own experience. We shall rise up from our knees strengthened for all that lies before us, and fitted to bear the cross that our Lord may have ordained for us. In any case, our cup can never be as deep or as bitter as was his, and there were in his cup some ingredients that never will be found in ours. The bitterness of sin was there, but he has taken that away for all who believe in him. His Father's wrath was there, but he drank that all up, and left not a single dreg for any one of his people. One of the martyrs, as he was on his way to the stake, was so supremely happy that a friend said to him, "Your Saviour was full of sorrow when he agonized for you in Gethsemane." "Yes," replied the martyr, "and for that very reason I am so happy, for he bore all the sorrow for me." You need not fear to die, if you are a Christian, since Jesus died to put away your sin, and death is but the opening of your cage to let you fly, to build your happy nest on high. Therefore, fear not even the last enemy, which is death. Besides, Christ could not have a Saviour with him to help him in his agony, but you have his assurance that he will be with you. You shall not have merely an angel to strengthen you, but you shall have that great Angel of the covenant to save and bless you even to the end.

The most of this sermon does not belong to some of you, for you do not belong to Christ. O dear friends, do not give sleep to your eyes or slumber to your eyelids till you do belong to him! As surely as you live, you will have sorrows at some time or other, you will have a bitter cup of which you must drink, and then what will you do if you have no divine consolation in the trying hour? What will you do especially when you come to die if you have no Christ to make your pillow soft for you, no Saviour to go with you through that dark valley? Oh, seek him, and he will be found of you, even now! The Lord help you to do so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

