

In the name of Jesus, a man of sorrows, dear Christian friends:

Few knew the sorrows, "the agony" of Gethsemane. Only eleven disciples went to the Mount of Olives that last Thursday evening. And only three went into the Garden of Gethsemane itself--Peter, James and John. And even these three stayed at a distance from Jesus during this ordeal--as Luke says here: "a stone's throw." A garden, full of cool shade and inviting trees and flowers, may paint a picture of a spot of peace and serenity to us. Put

GETHSEMANE WAS NO ROSE GARDEN.

Rather, it is the place of Jesus' extreme agony. Yet I doubt that even the select three disciples fully comprehended all His agonies at this hour. Therefore, let us this evening let Jesus Himself, in His own words here in Scripture, give us access to the happenings at Gethsemane. Let this be our theme during this Lenten season: enter the Garden and let Jesus tell you His agony over your sin Himself.

St. John, in his gospel tells us that four days earlier Jesus had remarked, "Now is my soul troubled"(12:27), as Jesus could see the gathering clouds. Matthew and Mark describe Jesus' agony at Gethsemane in these words, "He began to be sorrowful and troubled"(26:37). And then Matthew and Mark record Jesus' own words, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death." Our sin that put him in that garden leaves no place for comfort to enter, and therefore our sin-bearer must be entirely immersed in woe. Luke describes it thus: "being in agony." No one has ever had the misery of Jesus which He felt in that garden. As Isaiah had prophesied of the Messiah, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."(53:4)

What caused His agony? First of all, the horror of His soul when it fully comprehended

you ever see Jesus was completely upset by distress, visibly filled with uneasiness and dread. Pitiful condition--all power seems to be gone, He is crushed, To see sin : whipped, beaten down. The Book of Hebrews even says he was crying (Heb. 5:7) saw that sin is a reasonable assault upon you. He saw that it is a murderous hatred of man to Himself--Jesus.) He saw how it was destroying mankind.

Another cause of His agony--Jesus now assumed more fully His official position with regard to sin. He was now made sin. In that night the words of Isaiah were fulfilled--"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all"(53:6). As Paul wrote, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God"(II Cor. 5:21). Now Jesus stood as the sin-bearer, the substitute accepted by Divine justice to bear the wrath of God against sin that we might never bear the whole of God's wrath.

A third cause of His agony--at this hour Jesus had a very clear view of all the shame and suffering of His crucifixion. He foresaw that His garden prayer would soon be interrupted by the traitor-disciple bringing officers to seize Him. He foresaw the mock trials before the Sanhedrim, Pilate and Herod, the scourging and clubbing, the crown of thorns, the shame, the spitting, the hounding through the streets of Jerusalem, the nailing to the cross, the fever, the thirst, and, above all, the forsaking of God.

But perhaps the most intense cause of His agony in the garden was the sever temptations of the devil. That hour above any time in His life, even beyond the forty days in the wilderness, was the time of Jesus' temptation. In the upper room, during the Last Supper, Jesus had told the disciples, "The ruler of this world is coming"(Jn. 14:30). Here Satan made his last, all-out, desperate attempt upon his great destroyer. Yet not once in the course of this onslaught did Jesus in any degree whatever submit to any temptation or sin.

There was the temptation to leave the work unfinished. Jesus prayed, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me." Satan probably tried to enter doubts into Jesus' mind about His mission: "What is in it for you, Jesus? You are already God, with all glory; by doing this you will not gain greater glory. Not only that, but see what worthless disobeyers and worldlings they are for whom you are to offer up yourself as a sacrifice. Even the best of them are sleeping when you most need them. One of them is tripping over his feet in such a hurry to betray you for the price of a common slave. And the whole world for which you die, it will persecute

your name, and your Church will be weak, hypocritical and full of betrayers. Why do you not just destroy this race of mankind and start all over, it is well within your power, and it would save you having to pour out your own soul unto death."

Jesus was probably also tempted with the thought that perhaps He would not be strong enough to undergo all that awaited Him, (now that God had forsaken Him). This is hinted at when we read that the Father sent an angel from heaven to Him in the garden to strengthen Him. Satan probably tempted in this way, "You have already endured much reproach and unpopularity among the people by stepping on toes, and you have wept and had much sorrow over it. But that is nothing compared to the reproach that is coming tomorrow. How will you be able to bear being publicly put to shame and driven out of the city as an unclean leper? How will you be able to see your own broken-hearted mother standing at the foot of your cross? (As for your body, it is already emaciated by long fastings and you will probably die before your work is done. You will surely fail. How can you possibly undergo the full wrath of God in this weak, frail body?")

These temptations caused Jesus to be in agony; He wrestled with them. Yet He overcame these hellish temptations--He would not be subdued by thoughts of His human weakness, but withstood strong in the strength of His Godliness.

In addition, He had the temptation of knowing that all had forsaken Him--all were against Him--hell, all Satan's angels were not sparing any weapon of darkness, all but his few disciples on earth thirsted for His blood, and His disciples would leave Him alone and be of no help, heaven and its angels were withheld from interfering, and even His Father would forsake Him, in fact His Father turned adversary, the one who would inflict all His punishment upon Him because of His justice and wrath. He was solitary, alone. (Only by God sending one angel did this fear have any lessening.)

And Jesus was tempted in another way--"Even if you do succeed in dying for the sins of the world, hardly anyone will care, let alone believe and have faith

in you as Savior. So they will all be lost anyway." Perhaps this temptation is why Christ went three times to look at His disciples. He looked upon Peter, James and John as much as to say, "No, they are not all lost yet; there are three left, even though they sleep and are of a very weak faith, still there is a chance they will respond to my love, and I will die for even one -- even if just one would come to repentance and faith and not forget me, it is worth it."

(How sorely was our Savior tempted that night in the garden of Gethsemane that He advises His disciples twice, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation, for it is agony.")

No description of that garden ordeal better tells us of our Savior's agony than the phrase: "He broke into a sweat of blood, with great drops falling to the ground." This phenomenon, though somewhat unusual, is not unknown to be literally true. There are several cases on record of persons who after long weakness, under fear of death, have sweat blood. But in no recorded case were the drops of blood that pushed out through the pores of ever any size. Here, however, Jesus not only sweat blood, but it was in great drops--big, heavy drops. How tremendous must have been the weight of sin when it was able so to crush the Lord. (This also proves the mighty power of His love.)

Perhaps this blood, that given up by Christ spontaneously without nails, thorns or spears thrust into Him, is the sweetest of all the blood shed for us. Of the blood of Christ which we receive in communion, the purest is that shed in the garden of Gethsemane.

Have you ever withstood temptation to the point of cold, clammy, bloody sweat standing upon your brow? Or do you give in to temptation with little thought, except: "Well, it's okay, Christ will forgive me." Do you wrestle with temptation? Do you pray that you may not enter into temptation, or do you see Jesus as a cheap cure-all that we may serve the world willingly and then run to Him once a week with hardly a twinge of conscience? (What did Jesus do when he went to the garden--He

knelt down and prayed. If our Master and King knelt in humility, what should we do all the more daily before Him. What dust and ashes and sackcloth shall we put on? As we see our sin and our lack of wrestling with temptation, but rather our willing submission to it, how humble are we to be in approaching the altar of God?

"Rise and Pray," Jesus tells the sleeping disciples. Do not be a laying down, sleeping Christian. Pray, and flee temptation.

(Some have said that Christ paid more of the price in the garden than he did on the cross. Whether He paid more at Gethsemane or at Calvary is not the point, but rather that the atonement for our sins was not only at the cross of Calvary--it began at the Garden.) It was in the garden that Christ defeated Satan for us; that was the end of His temptation. After He left the garden He had yet to bear the absence and wrath of His Father and the revilings of the people, but Satan was through--His worst temptations had been beaten off. When Jesus rose from His knees after His prayer, when He lifted Himself from the ground where He had marked His stay in drops of blood, I believe the temptations of Satan were over and Christ had won--Now He was committed to go through with it all, even into death, for us. ~~Amen~~ May God grant that Jesus' agony at Gethsemane was not in vain for us. Amen.