

## CHRIST ... AND HIS TRIUMPH IN THE GARDEN

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing. remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:41-44)

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. (Heb. 5:7)

When the Savior knelt to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, time stood still. Perhaps even angels were astonished when they saw blood upon the face of the King of Kings. It was difficult to comprehend something that defied understanding. The disciples, weary and despondent, had followed Jesus into the night and had recognized His desire to pray. Then they fell asleep. The night was extremely still; there were no sounds except for the desperate cries of the Lord. Christ writhed in pain, and suddenly an angel appeared to strengthen the Master. It was never revealed whether that miracle was performed by word or touch, or how new energy entered the Savior's body. His task completed, the angelic messenger returned to heaven, and the Lord continued His prayer.

"Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Even now, it almost seems sacrilege to tread upon that hallowed ground. Yet the fact that God permitted men to describe the scene might be an invitation to examine its details.

Proposition One... This was not an ordinary prayer.  
Jesus was a man of prayer. Often He arose before dawn to climb a

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mountain to commune with His Father. Prior to each major decision made, He spoke with God to make sure everything being done was in accordance with the divine will. He instructed His disciples in the art of intercession and emphasized that certain problems were only solved by prayer and fasting. Nevertheless, the ordeal in the Garden of Gethsemane was different from any other experience endured. Luke wrote, And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Another author wrote, "When he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears." Luke used the word *agonia* from which is derived the English word *agony*. Dr. Thayer says it means "severe mental struggles and emotions; to contend with adversaries; to fight; to endeavor with strenuous zeal to obtain something." During this prayer, the Savior suffered intense pain and shed tears. He was literally lighting for His life. Jesus had been threatened many times by His enemies but serenely overcame every obstacle and stilled the storms that threatened His existence. The menace confronting the Lord on that terrible night was something new. The onslaught was intense, deadly, and terrifying. It may never be known how great was His degree of anguish, but the Lord's desperate appeals for help were indications that the struggle was unprecedented. That an angel strengthened Christ in the midst of the ordeal suggests Jesus may not have survived if that help had not been forthcoming.

Proposition Two... Jesus was not seeking an escape from

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Calvary.

Unfortunately the prayer of Gethsemane has often been misunderstood. Some people consider it to be an outpouring of concern, the evidence that Jesus dreaded crucifixion. They believe that as a human being Jesus sought to avoid His forthcoming decease and did not wish to die. That is nonsense. The Lord knew before the foundation of the world that He would come to earth to die (Rev. 13:8) and each time He contemplated death, rejoiced: "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2, emphasis mine).

The Bible says that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5:7). The prayers of the Savior were always answered affirmatively because He lived in the center of the will of God, and

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consequently, His petitions were granted. He prayed to be saved from death and He was! His prayer could not have referred to the crucifixion. The Living Bible translates the verse, "Yet while Christ was here on earth he pleaded with God, praying with tears and agony of soul to the only one who would save him from [premature! death. And God heard his prayers."

There is reason to believe Satan knew his power was about to be destroyed through the death of the Redeemer. He therefore devised a diabolical scheme to kill Jesus before that could happen. When blood oozed from the temples of the Lord, His life was hanging by a thread. At that moment Jesus knew His physical strength was ebbing; death appeared to be imminent. If He died before His time, God's planning would be in vain, and the redemption that was so near might be lost forever. When the Lord spoke of "this cup" He referred to the frightening idea that without assistance His greatest task would never be accomplished. He therefore prayed that if it were the Father's will, the cup of human weakness might pass. His prayer was answered, but when the angel strengthened the Lord, He was able to complete what had been commenced.

That the Savior would say, "nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done" supplies food for thought. The redemption of a lost world would supply the fulfillment of His dreams. Yet to glorify and please His Father, Jesus was willing to sacrifice everything.

Proposition Three... Prayer can help in any situation.

The events that happened in the Garden of Gethsemane suggest questions that are difficult to answer. Why did God wait so long before dispatching an angel to assist the Lord? Luke divides the Savior's anguish into two periods. The appearance of the angel took place after the first one. When strength had been administered, Christ's appeals were continued. "And being in an agony he [Jesus] prayed more earnestly." It is difficult to understand how the Lord prayed more earnestly, for with Him there was no increasing nor decreasing degree of sincerity. Perhaps it would be better to read "more intently" or even "desperately." Jesus realized much could be lost and continued to seek God's aid. Regarding the delay in sending help, it might be advisable to consider what happened when Daniel prayed for twenty-one days without receiving an answer. Eventually, the prophet was assured that his prayer had been heard from the first, but evil powers in heavenly places had delayed God's reply (see Dan. 10:12-13). It is possible that

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Satan harnessed his forces both in heavenly places and on earth to prevent the necessary help reaching the Savior.

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It should also be remembered that Christ's public whipping had yet to begin. His flesh would be lacerated; He would suffer intense pain. The agony endured in the garden was unprecedented in His lifetime. The clots of blood that fell from His brow made the soil sacred. How can any person understand what Jesus endured? Elizabeth Clephane wrote,

But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed.  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,  
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.

Proposition Four... Satan cannot defeat anyone who continues to pray.

The statement "he was heard in that he feared" cannot be dismissed without investigation. At first glance it might be believed that fear overcame faith in the Savior's soul; that like other men, His vision of God had momentarily been impaired. The Amplified Version of the text says, "He was heard because of His reverence toward God—His godly fear, His piety [that is, in that He shrank from the horrors of separation from the bright presence of the Father]." The Greek word translated fear is eulabeias, which, according to Thayer, means "reverencing God; pious; to beware; fear." David said, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10). To fear God means to hold God in reverence, to be completely devoted to Him, to strive to do what pleases Him. Jesus exhibited all of these characteristics but mysteries remain. It is evident the prayer of the Savior overcame every attack made upon Him. The Lord said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). When people cease to intercede, they lose hope, and disaster is inevitable. Intercession maintains contact with the Almighty, and that fact saved the Lord's life when physical collapse threatened Him in the garden.

We have in the city of Santa Barbara one of the famous Mayo clinics. It is extremely popular, and patients from many countries go there seeking medical aid. The king of Jordan was recently discharged from a New York branch of the same institution. These world-famous clinics were founded by two brothers, Dr. William Mayo and Dr. Charles Mayo. The testimony of William was inspiring. He said, "I have seen

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patients who were dead by all standards; we knew they could not live. But I have seen a minister come to the bedside and do something which I could not do, although I had done everything in my professional power. But something touched some immortal spark in the patient, and in defiance of medical knowledge and materialistic common sense, that man lived." Prayer changes things—it always has!

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