

Man of Sorrows

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane . . . And . . . he began to be sorrowful and troubled. (Matthew 26:36, 37)

The statement in Matthew 26:36, 37 is significant. Christ has known sorrow before this, but the assertion that in Gethsemane he *began* to be sorrowful and troubled indicates a sudden steep descent into the billows of distress. Now, as never before, all God's waves and billows began to sweep over him (Psalm 42:7). What a contrast to the sweet calm and peace of the upper room! He and his disciples had just sung from that wondrous Passover hymn, the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) and Christ sang that hymn as it had never been sung before and as it never could be sung again, for he was about to fulfil it as he went to his cross...

After the feast Christ was suddenly plunged into an abyss of anguish so intense that he declared himself overwhelmed to the point of death. Calvin says, 'Though God had already tried his Son by certain preparatory exercises, he now wounds him more sharply by a nearer prospect of death and strikes his mind with a terror to which he had not been accustomed'...

It is true that Christ in his sinless human nature recoiled from the prospect of death and shrank from it with horror, for death came with sin. It is also true that he sensed the approach of Satan who after the temptation in the wilderness 'departed from him until an opportune time' (Luke 4:13). It is also the case that he anticipated the approaching wrath of a holy God. But none of these facts can account for the distress and sorrow that were to prove too much for unaided human nature (albeit sinless) to bear. There must be something deeper and *more actual* to account for our Lord's struggle in Gethsemane.

Gethsemane means 'the oil press'. David could say, 'I am like a green olive tree in the house of God' (Psalm 52:8). Israel in her long history could say the same. But the suffering Saviour could say it best of all, for there in Gethsemane—the oil press—he was crushed and bruised without mercy. But *how* and *why*? How is the

sudden and dramatic change of atmosphere between the upper room and Gethsemane to be explained, even in measure? Christ knew all along the death that awaited him. He had grappled with Satan and his legions more than once. He had repeatedly spoken of his death to his disciples, telling them what that death would accomplish. He had prayed with the utmost confidence in his high priestly prayer (John 17). Why, then is there this sudden plunge into such awful agony, why this shuddering horror? Why is *this* fruit of the olive tree so severely crushed? Why does the divine record say that in Gethsemane our Lord BEGAN to be sorrowful, sorrowful in a new and terrible way? Was it not because *God began forsaking him then*? How else is this sorrow unto death to be understood?

'Jesus wept', but never like this. No previous sorrow of his could match this. At the time of his arrest he declared, 'Shall I not drink the cup which the Father *has given me*?' (John 18:11). That cup was constantly in view as he prayed in Gethsemane. What cup? 'THIS CUP'—not some future cup. The cup that was symbolized in the feast (Matt. 26:27, 28) was now *actual*: God was placing it in the Saviour's hands and it carried the stench of hell. But stop!

Schilder is right.¹ 'Gethsemane is not a field of study for our intellect. It is a sanctuary of our faith'. Lord, forgive us for the times we have read about Gethsemane with dry eyes.

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¹ Dr. Klaas Schilder wrote a trilogy on the sufferings of Christ.