

Last week we suggested to you that the key of life and death and the solution to life's inscrutable mysteries is to be found only in the cross of Christ and the Christ of the cross. May I sum up what the New Testament says about that event? I'm reading from Romans 5:8-11 "But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since therefore we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by His life."

My dear friends, do you notice it says here that we were all reconciled by the death of God's Son? Whether you know it or not, you were legally reconciled to God twenty centuries ago. All your sins were paid for - past, present and future. And my friend, when you believe that good news, everything in life is different. The sky becomes bluer, the grass greener, the birds sing more sweetly. Life becomes filled with hope and promise and the assurance that God will never leave you nor forsake you. Nothing can separate you from the love of God, neither death nor life, nor principalities or powers, or things present or things to come. Nothing can separate you from the love of God that was manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord at Calvary. That's our ~~study these weeks~~, ~~my friends~~, the gospel revealed in the Holy of Holies in world history, The event of Calvary, Passion Week that reached its climax in the ebbing out of the life of the Son of God because of the weight of the sins of the world upon Him. In the same Romans 5:18 it says "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one Man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men." That Scripture tells us that as we were ruined by Adam without asking for it, we were redeemed, rescued, restored by the second Adam though we had nothing to do with that either. Acquittal has come upon all men and the whole purpose of the gospel ministry is to tell the good news that people might realise they have been reconciled to God and receive it and rejoice in it.

Last week we noticed that the work of redemption, of reconciliation, Christ's atoning sufferings, began in Gethsemane. We compared the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane—~~What~~ what happened with the first Adam who sinned by day, who fell when he took the fruit, who hid from God; and then the contrast with the second Adam Who in the Garden of Gethsemane instead of fleeing from God, sought His Father, Who, instead of taking the forbidden fruit, took the cup of wrath. [I would like to remind you today ~~my friends~~ that Christ had entered Gethsemane from Kedron on the east side of the city but in a matter of hours, He died on the west side of the city. That's where the cross was reared. So the Sun of righteousness does full circuit from east to west, just as the extended arms of the cross embrace the whole world. The sin offering was always destroyed outside the camp and Christ is, like David a thousand years before, rejected by His people, the rejected King, going into the wilderness garden. But now the Son of David has upon Him the weight of the sins of the world.

[I want to read to you from Mark 14 with its reference to Gethsemane. Beginning at verse 32: "And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane. And He said to His disciples "Sit here while I pray." And He took with Him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.'"

~~my dear friends~~, It tells us in Luke's gospel that "being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly and He sweat as it were great drops of blood." We will never appreciate this story if we think it was the fear of death that made Christ react in this way. It was not the fear of death, ~~my friends~~, it was the weight of the sin of the world, eclipsing the face of God, separating Him from heaven. That's what led to the horror and the terror of Gethsemane. We will not appreciate it, ~~my friends~~, until we see that He took our guilt there, our selfishness, our impurity, our spiritual sloth, our pride and vanity, our lying and theft, our irreverence and blasphemy, our discontent. All of it was upon Him, ~~my friends~~. ~~You see~~, [The passion story tells us not only the truth about God but the truth about man. One is good news but the other, bad.

Yet only acceptance of the truth about ourselves creates a hunger for the good news. For we are all much worse than we've ever dared suppose, though God is much better than we've ever dared to hope. As for you and me - we're capable of any sin, given the right circumstances. Each of us harbours within himself or herself, a madman, a savage, and a lawless criminal. They may be shackled or in repose but they're there, my friends, ~~They're~~^{are} there to embarrass and to lay waste and to kill, given the opportunity, given the right circumstances. Though they mainly sleep, they~~re~~^{are} there nonetheless. Sin is nearer to us than breathing. Its a burden upon us. Its a tyrant over us. Its a traitor within us. And our great need is to get rid of it, to be rid of its guilt, to be rid of its power, to be rid of its penalty. That, ~~my friends~~, was what the cross of Christ was all about.

Many writers have excelled themselves in discussing the meaning of Gethsemane. Such writers as the German writer F.W. Krummacker have written very beautifully on Gethsemane and I wish to share a little from his book THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR. On page 106 he says this: "Let us contemplate this mysterious conflict in Gethsemane a little more closely. Scarcely had Jesus with His three disciples penetrated a few paces within the Garden when He began there before their eyes to be very sorrowful and very heavy. In these words the history gives us a hint that something unheard of before now came over Him. At the same time, it intimates that the distress which seized Him was voluntarily endured by Him, after due preparation. Indescribable melancholy took possession of His soul. Mysterious apprehension oppressed His Mind. Mark, according to his peculiar manner of depicting the awful scene more in detail, gives us a clearer idea of the Saviour's distress by saying 'He began to be sore amazed.' He makes use of a word in the original which implies a sudden and horrifying alarm at a terrific object. The evangelist evidently intended to intimate thereby the cause of Jesus' trembling must be sought not in what might be passing in His soul but in appearances from without which forced themselves upon Him. Something approached Him which threatened to rend His nerves and the sight of it to

"Freeze the blood in His veins. Immediately after the first attack of agony, Jesus returns to His three disciples with words which cast a strong light upon His inmost state of mind. He says 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' We read in the sequel in Luke that He was in an agony, that is, He wrestled with death. It was in the horrors of this state that our Surety felt Himself placed. Not merely in the way of beholding them but also in that of a mysterious entering into them. Whatever men may say, without holding firmly by the idea of a Mediator, the horrors of Gethsemane can never be satisfactorily explained. A mere representation of the death of the sinner from which Christ came to redeem mankind, could not have laid hold of the Holy One of Israel so overpoweringly. He entered into much closer contact with the last enemy; He emptied the cup of its terrors. If in Gethsemane we have only to do with Christ as a prophet or teacher, His office as such there suffered the most complete shipwreck, since we cannot then avoid the conclusion that He must Himself have been at fault with regard to His doctrine and have lost the courage to die for it. If He is to be regarded in Gethsemane only as the model of unconditional resignation to God, we must say that He scarcely attained even to this. Stephen and many other martyrs appeared infinitely greater than the trembling Jesus with His bloody sweat and agonizing prayer that the cup might pass from Him. If we are to look upon Jesus only as a Man, desirous by His example of sealing the truth, that in the time of distress the Lord God is near His people with His help and consolation, the question again recurs: Where does such a tranquilizing fact appear? Since the very opposite shows itself and the Holy Sufferer languishes from being forsaken of God. If, finally, He must be viewed as a proof of that overcoming peace that never departs from the just but accompanies him in every season of distress, we look around us in vain even for such a testimony. Instead of peace, a horror seizes upon the Holy One of God, like that of a guilty malefactor which renders Him restless and fugitive and even gives Him the appearance of one who is on the brink of despair.

"We must therefore have to do in Gethsemane with something essentially different to these things I have mentioned or Gethsemane becomes the grave of the Lord's glory. If He were fighting a battle only similar to that which every martyr for the Kingdom of Heaven has fought before and since, then the scholars are superior to their Master and the latter is thrown by them far into the shade and all belief in the government of a Holy and Righteous God in the world must be stamped as a delusion if in the suffering of Jesus we apply no other criterion than that of an ordinary testing and purifying trial. Heaven must fall, the order of the divine government be annihilated and Christianity be forever destroyed if the Holy Scriptures compel us to regard the cup which Jesus drank as essentially the same as that which Job, Jeremiah, Paul and many others partook.

"In our view brilliant stars shine over the darkness of Gethsemane. We possess the key to its mysteries and the depth of its horrors and we find it in the sentiment which in every variety of form pervades the whole Bible. 'God has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' As long as Christ's position as Mediator is not acknowledged, the events in Gethsemane continue a sealed mystery. Every attempt to explain them, otherwise than by the fundamental article of His vicarious mediation, must be forever unavailing. Only through the light which it affords us, is everything rendered clear and intelligible to us in that appalling scene. The most striking contradictions are then reconciled and that which is strange and apparently incomprehensible, disappears, ^{and} seems perfectly natural. The Divine Sufferer in Gethsemane must be regarded not as that which is abstract, but in His mysterious relation to sinners. He appears as the second Adam, the Mediator of a fallen world, the Surety on Whom the Lord has laid the iniquities of us all.

"Much of the trials to which our Lord was subjected in Passion Week, not only Gethsemane, but all the later events, must be regarded only as the reflection of incomparably more real and inward states and situations. His being taken

"Prisoner, His being brought before the judgment bar, His condemnation by the Sanhedrin, His passage to the cross, are only symbolical representations of infinitely more exalted events which were behind the veil in the relations of the Mediator to God, the Supreme Judge. He who is unable to regard the individual scenes of our Lord's passion from this point of view, does not penetrate through them and will never find his way in the labyrinth of the history of our Saviour's sufferings."

My friends, that's the clue to the whole thing. We must see Jesus as our Representative, in our place, as our Surety; that all the things that happened to Him should be happening to you and me. We deserve to be taken before the judgment bar, we deserve to be scourged, we deserve to be crucified, we deserve to be forsaken by all men. My friends, that's the clue to the mystery of Calvary. The cross is not only a revelation of the love of God, but its a revelation of the hate and sinfulness and the guilt of those for whom God died. Not a soul knows what God is, till he sees himself in the light reflected from the cross of Calvary and ^{detests} ~~attests~~ himself as a sinner in the bitterness of his soul. Our Lord told us in John 16 that when the Spirit of truth is come, he would lead men into a knowledge of their sin. He would convince men of sin. Unless we are thus convinced, we will never find salvation. So see in the cross, first of all, my friends, and in the sufferings of our Lord from Gethsemane on, what we all deserve.

Now let us think of the perfections of the events that followed. The number 7 is stamped again and again on the events of Passion Week. We find for example, that there were 7 trials of Christ - before Annas, then before Annas and Caiaphas, before the Sanhedrin at night and then before the same Council at dawn, next before Pilate, then before Herod, and the 7th trial with Pilate again. Seven trials - the perfect trial of our Representative and Surety. We find that there were 7 accusations made against Christ. We read them in the gospel record: He was indicted for threatening to destroy the temple, being a malefactor, perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, stirring

up all the people, claiming to be a king, and making Himself the Son of God. These were the 7 accusations. They show the completeness of ^{the} human rejection of Christ. We will find too as we study the record of the trials that there are 7 references to Pilate's acknowledging of Christ as being without fault and there are also 7 separate confessions of Christ's innocence from various individuals. Later we will find that there are 7 wounds of Christ and finally, the 7 sayings from the cross prior to His entering into rest on the 7th day's dawning. And so, my friends, the perfections of the Atonement are underlined by this use of the sacred number 7 which stamps all Scripture in its symbolic passages from the very opening record of the 7 days of creation. The perfections of Christ are underlined that we might have confidence that He was a perfect Substitute and Surety and we will find the pattern even in very unexpected places. For example, there are 7 questions of Pilate and we find our Lord answers ~~7~~ ^{four} times. And our Lord's last word to Pilate is the word "sin" - "He that delivered Me to you hath the greater sin". Our Lord even and ever seeks to make excuses for the most guilty. And we see His perfection in His ~~7~~ answers to the 7 questions of Pilate *indicating by His last word "sin" Pilate's real problem.*

Everything about that sevenfold trial was illegal. It took place at night. False witnesses were employed. The Jewish judges had made up their minds beforehand. And as for the Gentile judge, he was swayed by fear of the people. Christ was scourged though there was nothing proved against Him. Indeed, the judge himself repeated "I find no fault in Him". We must see ourselves, ~~my friends~~, in these trial scenes. We must see ourselves in the Jews who rebel against Christ's accusation of them by His pure life; we must see ourselves in Judas who sold his Lord; in vacillating Pilate; in Herod who pretended to be religious but denied the True One and the Just. Most of all, ~~my friends~~, let us see ourselves in the prince of the apostles. I read in Luke of Peter's repeated denial of his Lord. Let me read to you the record and may I remind you that every time the twelve apostles are listed in Scripture, Peter is always listed first. He was the one to whom especially was given the keys of

the kingdom because he opened the gates of heaven to the Jews at Pentecost and to the Gentiles as recorded later in Acts 10. I'm reading from Luke 22:54 "Then they seized Him (Jesus) and led Him away, bringing Him into the high priests house. Peter followed at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said 'This man also was with Him'. He denied it saying 'Woman, I do not know Him'. Then a little later someone else saw him and said 'You also are one of them'. But Peter said 'Man, I'm not'. After an interval of about an hour, still another insisted saying 'Certainly this man also was with Him. He's a Galilean'. But while he was still speaking the cock crowed and the Lord turned and looked at Peter and Peter remembered the word of the Lord how He had said to him 'Before the cock crows today you will deny Me three times'. And he went out and wept bitterly."

~~my friends~~, Each one of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tells this story of Peter. Each one gives a good deal of space to it. Why so? Its to tell us about that depraved human nature for which Christ died. Its to warn us that the best men are only men at the best. Its to tell us that you and I need a cross if ever we're going to be given the crown. Can I remind you of a few things about this Peter who ~~do~~ denied his Lord? He was the one who declared "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He was the one upon whom, along with his fellow disciples, the church was built, as living stones into the great rock foundation of Christ. He would have been told by Christ, along with the other apostles "Your name is written in Heaven." He'd been told after that most touching sermon at the last supper "Ye are clean." And he'd been warned, my friends, of the coming trial. But how weak we all are. Peter stumbled and stumbled and stumbled a third time. He stumbled at the word of a servant girl. Satan came to him unexpectedly. Had it been a soldier with drawn sword, Peter would have fought. But he was taken by surprise and so are we all. And then our Lord looked upon him. It was like months before when

Peter was sinking in the waters and Christ, walking in the storm, extended a hand and lifted the sinking disciple. Now He does it by a look of love that tells Peter that he's forgiven. Forgiven even before he's repented. And so Peter went out to Gethsemane. His heart was broken as he wept. There'd have been another suicide that night like Judas' but for the loving look of Christ the Saviour.

And so we look at all these men in the passion story and see ourselves. Take supercilious Pilate. Think of his questions: "Art thou King of the Jews?" - sarcasm. "Am I a Jew?" - Haughty contempt. "What hast thou done?" - Pompous authority. "Art Thou a king then?" - Growing perplexity. "What is truth?" - contemptuous pity. "Whence art Thou?" - Uneasy and perplexed. "Speakest Thou not unto me?" - Proud imperious spirit. ~~My friends~~, Pontius Pilate manifested the same symptoms, the same characteristics, that you and I have been guilty of times without number. And yet our Lord plead with him, presented Himself as the Truth in order that Pilate might buy the truth and sell it not. But Pilate washed his hands of the truth. His wife sent him an impossible message - "Have nothing to do with that just Man." That's impossible, ~~my friends~~. We're either with Christ or against Him. Its not possible to have nothing to do with Christ. That not possible.

As we draw to a close our meditation for today on the passion of Christ, may I take the liberty of warning every listener that this whole story tells us not only of what happened for us, but it tells of what will happen to us if we behave like Pontius Pilate. We should see in this story what will be the terror of the punishment that will ultimately befall all who reject the atonement of Christ. Christ Himself is a Sign and Prophecy to all such. It will not be in a Garden at last but outside the New Jerusalem where with exceeding pain our remorse will become very heavy and we'll be sore amazed. We'll see our darling sins have betrayed us with a kiss as Judas betrayed Christ. And as our Lord appeared before Pilate, so one day we must appear before the highest tribunal.

The witnesses then will not be false but true. And we'll stand speechless as Christ was speechless, though for another reason. Then will conscience and despair buffet ~~you~~ ^{the sinner} until we hear the words "Behold the man, the sinner" and the condemnation follows and we hear the sentence "Depart ye cursed", even as then was heard "Let Him be crucified." My friends, let us take warning. It need not be so. He loved and died for us that it would not be so. My friends, receive His atonement, and receive it today. God bless you.