

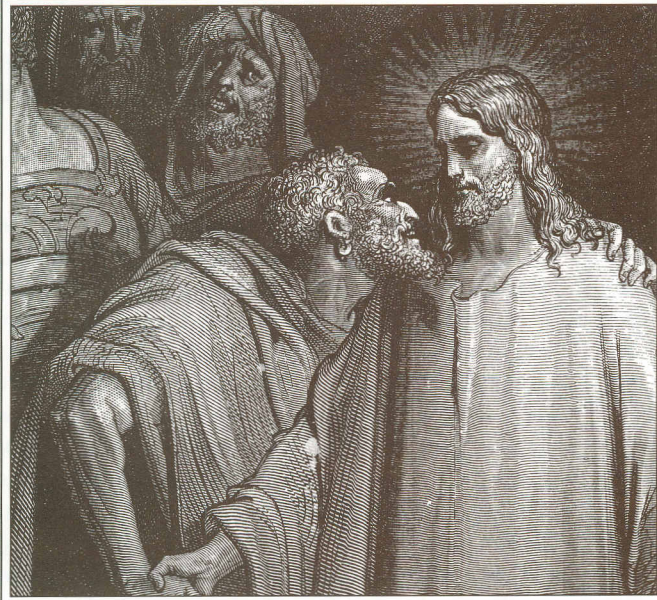
God with Us

CHRIST IN ALL THE GOSPELS

The Crises of Christ: Gethsemane

by Desmond Ford

Every detail of the closing events of Christ's life reverberates with the Atonement. Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane is revealed as the Sin-bearer. Jesus took upon himself the sin of the world—your sins and mine.



To value this picture rightly—Moses and Elijah disappearing, and only Jesus remaining—we need to compare it to Gethsemane:

Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. When they got there, he told them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Jesus took along Peter and the two brothers, James and John. He

was very sad and troubled, and he said to them, "I am so sad that I feel as if I am dying. Stay here and keep awake with me."

Jesus walked on a little way. Then he knelt with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, don't make me suffer by having me drink from this cup. But do what you want, and not what I want."

He came back and found his

disciples sleeping. So he said to Peter, "Can't any of you stay awake with me for just one hour? Stay awake and pray that you will not be tested. You want to do what is right, but you are weak." (Matthew 26:36-41 CEV)

This is just a portion of the story.

Mark's version of the story is even more stark. "He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and

troubled” (Mark 14:33 NIV).

The Greek word here gives the idea of a horrible shock, a traumatic emotional upheaval, as if you had suddenly been confronted by a specter!

Gethsemane Reveals the Gospel

To understand Gethsemane is to understand the gospel. Moral influence theologians never discuss Gethsemane. It is an affront to them. “Why, other men have faced martyrdom with greater courage than this! Why is this man so distressed? After all, he is only going to die—and millions of people have died.”

Ah! They miss the boat. The reason that Gethsemane is so terrible is that Jesus here becomes the sin of the world. The Scriptures say, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The whole burden, the weight of our guilt, is pressing on the Savior.

As soon as he enters the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ whole demeanor changes. He is terribly, emotionally distressed. He senses a grinding separation between himself and God that culminates in the blackness of Calvary. Nature then testified to the darkness of Jesus’ soul when “at noon the sky turned dark and stayed that way until three o’clock” (Matthew 27:45 CEV).

On the cross, Jesus endured the second death. He suffered the real penalty for sin, which is separation from God. No one has yet experienced that—except Jesus.

In this world, we die an “anesthetic” death. We quietly rest from our labors (Revelation 14:13). But at the end of time, after the great judgment, the wicked will die “the second death” (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).

This is why the resurrection of Christ is so unexpected, and unique from all others. Lazarus (John 11:1-44) and Jairus’s daughter (Luke 8:40-56) were raised from the first death. But Jesus returns from the second death! This is impossible!

Now we see why Gethsemane is so terrible. Jesus faced, for us, the second death of eternal separation from God.

Contrasts and Parallels

Notice the contrast between Gethsemane and the transfiguration.

The transfiguration is on a mountain and glorious. Gethsemane is in a valley and terrible. His face is illuminated with glory on the mountain. His face sheds drops of blood (like the rest of his body) in the valley. His face is marred more than the face of any man.

*To understand Gethsemane,
we must compare it
with the transfiguration.
To understand the
transfiguration, we must
contrast it with Gethsemane.*

His face is contorted and distorted with agony and pain.

Notice the parallels between Gethsemane and the transfiguration.

The same three disciples are with him on the mountain and in the valley. On the mountain, Peter did not know what to say, but he spoke anyway (Mark 9:5-6). In the valley, none of the disciples knew what to say when Jesus found them asleep a second time (Mark 14:40). On the mountain and in the valley, the disciples sleep while Jesus prays. On the mountain, God sends a message to Jesus, “This is My beloved Son.” In the valley, God sends a messenger to help him drink the cup of God’s wrath (Luke 22:43).

To understand Gethsemane, we must compare it with the transfiguration. To understand the transfiguration, we must contrast it with Gethsemane.

Reverberations of Atonement

Luke’s Gospel says that Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus on a specific topic (Luke 9:31).

The KJV says they “spake of his decrease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” The NIV says, “They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”

The Greek word can be translated ‘on his exodus,’ or ‘on his going forth.’

It refers to his death, but it is interesting that the word used is tied in with Moses, and the history of ancient Israel.

As we read this we know we are nearing the crescendo of Christ’s life on earth. Everything reverberates with the Atonement, and echoes with the sound of Christ’s agony as he assumes my guilt and yours.

Tale of Two Gardens

Scholars have often pointed out the parallel between the Garden of Gethsemane and the Garden of Eden. Arthur Pink does a magnificent job of this in his commentary on John’s Gospel.

Think of the contrasts and parallels between the first Adam, and the last Adam (Christ). Gethsemane is Christ’s last great temptation to avoid Calvary.

In Eden, Adam’s conflict with Satan was by day; in Gethsemane, the conflict is by night. In Eden, all is beautiful; in Gethsemane all is terrible (because of the shadows and fears).

In Eden, the human race is lost. In Gethsemane—where Christ’s ‘probation’ closes—the race is saved. In Eden, Adam and Eve take the fruit at Satan’s request; in Gethsemane, Christ accepts the cup from his Father’s hand.

In Eden, God sought Adam; in Gethsemane, the last Adam seeks God. From Eden, Adam is driven out; from Gethsemane, the last Adam is led out by the mob. In Eden, Adam falls before the Tempter; in Gethsemane, the soldiers fall before Christ.

In Eden, the sword is unsheathed to bar the way to the Tree of Life; in Gethsemane, Christ tells Peter to put his sword back in its scabbard.

One of the evidences of the inspiration of the New Testament is this marvelous system of parallels. If I were writing the New Testament, I would write a note in parenthesis for the reader. “Read Genesis chapter three, and be sure to draw the parallels between the Garden of Eden and the Garden of Gethsemane.” But the New Testament never does that. I’m sure most people have never seen this parallel.

The Bible is filled with riches like that that show it is of divine design, not human contrivance. ❖