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Approaching Gethsemane (May 1963)

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What exquisite beauty is to be seen in the attitude of our beloved Lord as He approaches Gethsemane!

Matthew in his Gospel depicts Christ as the expected King of Israel and the ultimate King of Kings, from whose face the earth and the heavens shall flee away. When this King shall sit in judgment, the great and the mighty, the slave and the free shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from His face.

Yet this One, our Saviour King, had set His face toward Jerusalem in determination, knowing that His hour had come. Matthew tells us that, “He went a little farther,” farther than others who were His companions in the earthly walk, farther than any other had gone, in order that He might secure the redemption of His subjects who were sold under sin. “He fell on His face and prayed” in Gethsemane. What majestic submission is seen in this description, “He fell on His face.” The face of the King was once covered with sweat, blood, and tears in the contemplation of Calvary’s cross, in order that the redeemed, clothed in His righteousness, might behold His face in beauty. He hid not His face from shame and spitting, that it might be written of the ransomed in glory, “They shall see His face.”

Mark’s Gospel depicts Jesus as the perfect Servant of Jehovah. Throughout the narrative, He is seen faithfully moving among men, doing the will of the Father in Heaven, always the profitable Servant. Repeatedly,

Mark, in speaking of His progress through His ministry, uses the word, “straightway.” Never has there been a Servant who at all times walked the straight way of the centre of God’s will, with neither deviation nor failure!

Hence, we are not surprised when Mark tells of His approach to the agonies of Gethsemane with the statement, “He went forward.” No wonder we hear the voice of God through the ages, “Behold My Servant,” as we watch the dutiful and faithful Servant of Jehovah “go forward” in the path of God’s bidding.

Just as the servant who wished to serve his master forever, and would not go out free, had his ear pierced as a mark of his servitude, so God’s Servant said in prophecy, “The Lord God hath pierced Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.”

Mark says that “He went forward a little and fell on the ground,” the ground about which God had said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake.” The dust of a cursed earth clung to the form of the One who went forward to be made the curse for us, Many burdens have been borne both by men and beasts, but never a burden as heavy as was laid upon the Servant of Jehovah, the burden of sin and sorrow, the measureless responsibility of being called upon to answer for crimes not His own. Oh, the beauty of the steadfastness of God’s perfect Servant as “He went forward” in the path of obedience to God’s will!

Luke’s Gospel portrays the last Adam, the perfect Son of Man, in whom was no spot or stain. He infinitely surpassed Adam, even Adam in his sinless state. The first Adam fell at the first temptation, but the last Adam “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without

sin.” He was the holy spotless Son of Man in whom all the temptations of the Prince of this world could find no response. Not only was this perfect Man unstained by sins of committal, but He also measured up in every respect to God’s standard of holiness and righteousness. He not only completely abstained from the “Thou shalt not’s” of the law of God, but He also perfectly fulfilled every “Thou shalt.”

What a beautiful little phrase Luke inserts as he pictures Christ on His way to the Mount of Olives! “He went as He was wont.” This bespeaks His unbroken habit of withdrawing in prayer and sweet communion with the Father. This tells us of the Son of Man who found fellowship with God in prayer as natural as breathing. Never had the query been unanswered with regard to Him, “Adam, where art thou?” Not once had His communion with the Father been broken.

Luke tells us that the Lord “was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast.” There was once a woman within a stone’s cast of those who sought to carry out the letter of the Law which demanded her death. Jesus reminded them that in order to carry out the judgments of the Law, one must be without sin. There was only one present with this qualification, and He did not execute the punishment deserved, for He had not come to condemn, but to save. Little did this repentant woman know that her Deliverer would one day be withdrawn from His fellows about a stone’s cast. Little did she realize that the perfect Son of Man, who alone had fulfilled the Law and therefore should cast the first stone, would one dread day be the receiver of the punishment demanded by that Law.

How beautifully John summarizes the accounts of the other three Evangelists! In John 18:1, when describing the approach of the Son of God to Gethsemane, he tells that “He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron.” We are reminded of another king who had crossed the same brook in flight from the forces of his wicked son. What a contrast! While David fled in defeat across the brook, David’s Lord went forth in courageous majesty to face all forces of sin, evil, and darkness. David’s followers wept but Jesus’ followers slept. Despite the lack of support and sympathy from those He loved, our conquering King “went over the brook Cedron.”

John also reminds us of Christ’s character as the perfect Servant of Jehovah, who, “when He had spoken these words, went forth.” What words? The words of that prayer, often called the high-priestly prayer of our Lord, in which as Jehovah’s perfect Servant, the Lord Jesus says, “I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do.” It is no small wonder that Jehovah says of Him, as He goes forth to bear away the sin of the world, “Behold My Servant.”

John is the only Evangelist who tells us that there “was a garden, into the which He entered.” We are immediately reminded of the Head of the New Creation, the perfect Son of Man, who in all respects met God’s standards of righteousness and holiness. In answer to God’s question in the first garden, “Adam, where art thou?” here was One who could answer in prophetic language, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of Me) I delight to do Thy will, O God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.”