

LESSONS FROM CHRIST'S PRAYER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Matthew 26: 36 – 46; Mark 14:32–36; Luke 22:39-46

INTRODUCTION

In **Matthew 26:36-46**, we read of the final hours to Jesus death. It was a testing time for Him. *It was easy to talk about bravery when the enemy was far away*; but with the shadow of the cross looming, Jesus went to the beautiful Garden of Gethsemane to pray. The path to Jesus death was becoming more difficult and dangerous. He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee. It is written that Jesus was grieved to the point of death, to the extent He prayed in the garden that He might be spared the cup of sorrow, suffering, and sin. **Verse 39** - ³⁹ *He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me...."* In a way, Jesus was asking the Almighty Father:

- ✓ if it was really necessary for Him to die
- ✓ if it had to be Him only who could die for the world
- ✓ if He really had to die a painful, shameful and humiliating death

To conclude His prayer, in broken-hearted agony, He had to give up His personal will and surrender to the will of God – **Verse 42** - ⁴² *Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."*

Indeed, Jesus was sorrowful and deeply distressed. He was in agony. He needed His disciples even the three that usually accompanied Him. The disciples were unable to keep awake and pray with Him even though He requested that they do so. The very men who had vowed their loyalty ran and hid in their Master's hour of deepest need for friends! In **verse 41**, Jesus cautioned them to ⁴¹ *Watch and pray, lest *they* enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* In **verse 45**, He was worried that they were ⁴⁵ *...still sleeping and resting?*

THE LESSONS

1. This event in the Garden of Gethsemane points us to the cross, the hurting death of Christ. It is so easy for us to forget the cross. Most times, our actions, lifestyles and behaviours do not show that the cross has brought transformation to us. We are such along way from Calvary. The cross does not have all that much meaning for most of us today. *In my teenage years, I have heard of people having serious health conditions or even spill out blood when (in the Catholic church) they take the Holy Communion in an unworthy manner or in sin.* But here we are, taking the Lord's Supper, every week, in a casual way, even as to satisfying our physical hunger and yet after the Sunday service or within the week, the negative lifestyles of the society (immodest dressing, alcoholic drinking, jealousy, pride, lying, backbiting, strife, immorality) are readily seen on members of the church.

Every time our minds rush back to that cross we should be reminded of the need for submission to God and allowing His transforming power manifest in our lives and in

everywhere we find ourselves (home, school, business centres, the church building and so on).

2. When Christ prayed that *if it were possible, let this cup pass from Him*, Christ admitted and expressed a reluctance to suffer, to show that He was *taken from among men*. No man is free from temptation and challenges. Our righteousness and faithfulness does not exempt us from oppression, injustice, disappointment, sorrows, pain or heartaches. But God has promised that in every temptation – He will deliver us - He will give us a way of escape - He can turn our night to day - He can do exceedingly beyond above what we think or ask.
3. When Christ prayed that *if this cup cannot pass away from Him unless He drink it, Let God's will be done*, it shows that He was willing to surrender to His Father's will. The greatest hindrance to the church today, as in every other day, is people who are determined to have their way. What a wonderful place the church of God would be if everyone were sold on the Lord's having His way.

Christ surrender gives us more meaning to the word – prayer. *Prayer is the offering up, not only of our desires, but of our resignations, to God*. Though we may pray to God to prevent and remove an affliction, yet our chief errand, and that which we should most insist upon, must be, that His will be done and He will give us grace to receive deliverance in due time.

Christ experience is an indication that when we pray to and through Christ, we are confident that we are speaking to One who is always touched with *the feeling of our infirmities*. **Hebrews 4:15** ¹⁵ *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

4. Christ went to pray alone. Note, *our prayers with our families must not excuse us from our secret devotions. A troubled soul finds most ease when it is alone with God, who understands the broken language of sighs and groans. (Reference to Hannah seeking for child)* Calvin's remarked that ***It is useful to pray apart; for then the faithful soul develops itself more familiarly, and with greater simplicity pours forth its petitions, groans, cares, fears, hopes and joys, into the bosom of God.***
5. Christ, despite having powers within His reach, still took three of His disciples to accompany Him and keep awake with Him. He acquaints them with his condition; *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death*. He told them to watch. It gives some little ease to a troubled spirit, to have a friend ready to unbosom itself to, and give vent to its sorrows. *It is good to have, and therefore good to seek, the assistance of our faithful brethren, when at any time we are in an agony; for two are better than one.*
6. The very disciples who had vowed their loyalty to Christ ran and hid in their Master's hour of deepest need for friends! His three disciples at this time were so little concerned. They were so dull, that they could not keep their eyes open. Surely it was the unkindest thing they did. They added grief to His sorrow. Compare this to the case of Apostle Paul - **2 Timothy 4:16** ¹⁶ *At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.* Have you ever been betrayed by family, a Christian brother or sister, a friend, a colleague or a neighbour? It is when even those closest to us turn on us that we tend to want to give up. We can stand almost anything if we know that our friends and families are standing by us and they understand what we are going through.

7. The disciples were good men, but they were weak. They were subject to the same types of weaknesses that all humans are subject to, including fear and confusion. The sinfulness of man is horrible when we see it at its worst.

We do not have to be perfect to be followers of Jesus. The disciples probably failed to keep watching and praying with Jesus because they did not realize how much they needed to watch and pray. Like most of us, they overestimated their own strengths and underestimated the power of the flesh. Yet Jesus loved them. He stayed with them to the end. Jesus loves and forgives us as well - not because of our perfection, but in spite of our imperfections. Paul called that grace. Never give up on yourself! Regardless of your present failures, God can use you. Imagine how terrible the apostles must have felt that night after they had failed so miserably to stand by their Lord. They must have imagined that their part in the mission of Christ had ended in failure. Yet they were only a few days from the glorious experiences of Pentecost and after. God can use you, as weak and sinful as you may be. That fact is not to your glory but to His. If you deny that He can work through you, you are detracting from His power. If you put your life in His hands, seek His forgiveness, and ask Him to use you as His instrument, He can and will. True disciples do not quit following Jesus just because they fail. Judas failed and quit, for he went away and hanged himself. The eleven failed, too, but they still loved Jesus and did not abandon their ministry. They returned to their Source of life and power. Have you failed the Lord miserably at some point in your life? Do not give up! Come back to Jesus as the apostles did, and let Him forgive and strengthen you. The only spiritually fatal mistake that you can make is to give up as Judas did.

8. Prayer and worship times are the most vulnerable times in a Christian's life.

Sometimes, you see members of the church finding their MOUKA FOAM during service times but immediately lose the FOAM after the close of service. Is that not ridiculous? Do we take time to think what the devil could be doing to our souls when we are asleep?

Sometimes, in prayer time, we get lost along the way like as if we are making stops at physical bus stops and only to recover at another bus stop and incline our ear to hear the last alarm for the last bus top (Amen). In the worst case, we get lost all the way.

In prayer time, try to visualize God sitting in front of us listening to our spirits presenting our case to Him. Take the voice of the person leading the prayer as the voices of everyone. Visualize that we are all talking at the same time, suddenly one of us feel the case presented is of no value, not worthy of consideration as he/she stroll out of God's presence; suddenly one of us feel that God is no longer listening to us as he/she decides to abandon the case; suddenly one of us feel we should not have presented that case to God as he/she leaves God's presence, beckoned on a fellow to call him when the case is to be closed; suddenly one of us becomes irritated that the time we are using in presenting the case is just too long as he/she with frustration decline to further participate in the case presentation and so on.

In all these, God is watching us and wondering why we invited Him to sit in front of us and watch us display our pride, self-centredness, foolishness and faithlessness. Do we take time to consider if this may have an influence on the things happening around despite the prayers of the church?

CONCLUSION

We have seen that there are so many lessons in the prayer of Chris in the final hours to His death. Let's apply these lessons in our lives and enjoy a fruitful relationship with God in Jesus name - amen!