

## **GETHSEMANE - the terror that changed our destiny and demands our action.**

We know many fears, troubles and distress: Financial, social scandal, terminal illness, violence and crime, war and terrorism, abuse, to be the object of aggression. These fears are real for many people - even children - and are all terrible.

The Bible knows a feeling of horror, anguish and fear that is more distressing than any of these that we hear about or encounter: It is the anguish of being a lost sinner, a life long enemy of God - standing before the throne of judgment. The terror of understanding for the very first time what the eternal results will be of a life of sin and disobedience, when we are called to answer for these decisions, before a holy God and His resentment for His enemies; those who resisted His will and plan for their lives - consciously choosing impurity, hatred and disobedience, rather than love, faith, hope, sanctification, obedience.

The greatest fear I know about is the horror of those who are before the throne of God - and realise the consequences of not accepting the Lords invitation to receive His grace, mercy and redemption. To know the day of salvation passed and I did not accept God's offer of forgiveness. To fully comprehend the eternal consequences of my life-choices that excluded the almighty God and made me His eternal enemy. The greatest fear, distress and horror I know about, is the fear and sorrow and distress of the lost on the judgment day.

This is the sorrow, the fear and the distress that Jesus experienced in the garden of Gethsemane. This is why His sweat becomes like drops of blood in that garden of terror and anguish. He knows that soon the judgment of God for all the sins of the world would be upon Him! - Not because He ever sinned, or disobeyed or transgressed - but because of the sins of the whole world.

We read about this fear in the gospels. In (KJ) Mk 14:34 it says: And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch; and the NIV states in Mk 14: 34, My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch.

The original meaning for "exceeding sorrowful" or "overwhelmed with sorrow" means a lot more than these translations can capture. All of the following words together give a better indication of the feelings/emotions that Jesus had in Gethsemane: Fear, terror, horror, sorrow, grief, distress, anguish, troubled, disturbed.

But what is the cause of this extreme and overwhelming sorrow? Jesus is not overwhelmed, because He fears death; it is not Judas that instils this anguish in His heart; He does not fear the chief priests or Pontius Pilate. It is not even the horrors of the death on the cross that causes Him being in so much distress and being so troubled to death. ***It is the fear of God's judgment that brings the Saviour to this point of raw terror.***

Why did this episode of the deepest possible sorrow had to happen to the Saviour? What are we supposed to learn from it? What is the reason that this night of sorrow and pain is recorded in the Bible? I find 3 reasons - 3 sides to a message that we may never forget and that should influence the rest of our lives.

- 1. In the blood-sweat in Gethsemane - we discover who we really are. We learn to know who we are without the grace of God, without the redeeming work of Jesus and without the cross and the salvation and the forgiveness of God.**

We discover our own position before God, without the graceful intervention of Jesus, without God's forgiveness as a result of our penalty being brought onto Christ. In Jesus being overwhelmed by sorrow to the point of death - we see the character and the nature of our sins as it truly stands before God - an offence against God himself; a rebellion as terrible as that of the fallen angels and as real as hell itself.

No excuses, no rationalisation, no mitigating circumstances enters into the day when we have to stand before God - just as we are and without any plea on our behalf and without a Saviour carrying our burden and taking our penalty upon Him. When we find that there is no escape from the judgment of God. Didn't Jesus ask - Father, take this cup from me, and was the answer to this prayer of His only, His beloved Son not a "NO, I will not and I cannot". ***The bitter cup of God's judgment is the only outcome possible for Jesus - and it is the only outcome for me - without Jesus being my Saviour and my friend.***

When we see and hear Jesus in His terrible distress in Gethsemane, as our hearts squirm inside of us when we see this moment of terror - we need to understand the nature of our own ungodliness, disobedience and impurity before God; the magnitude and extent of the anger and the judgment of God because of our sins and our rebellion against His holiness and authority.

It is not ourselves that we have disappointed, or first of all our families and our neighbour against whom we have sinned and whom we owe apologies - it is against God that we rebelled; it is God that we defied and offended. In the sorrow of Jesus in Gethsemane, we see who we really are before a holy God.

**2. But in this terrible episode in Gethsemane, we also discover the depth of the love and the mercy of Christ for sinners, for me and for you. We discover, yes we see, how much He really loves us and what it took for Him to be our Saviour, to become our Lord, to be our salvation and our redemption!**

He is willing to be in Gethsemane - in our place. To submit fully and finally to His Father's calling to carry our penalty. To say NO to the temptations of Satan for the last, final time and YES to being our Saviour, at any cost. He is willing to go to Calvary in my place. His overwhelming sorrow to the point of death, because He understands the judgment of God, **is therefore overshadowed by His overwhelming love for us.** His love is bigger and even more intense, than His distress, coming from His understanding of the judgment of God. He loves us more, than He fears God's penalty for my sin.

Didn't He also say: **Not My will, but Your will be done!** Father - take this cup away from me - but if it is the only way to redeem these You have given me - let Your will be done! His sorrow as a result of us being lost - is even greater than His distress as a result of understanding the judgment of God that He would face so soon after this night of terror! *His love for us leaves Him no other choice than to drink the bitter cup for all our sakes. He truly loves us more than anything else!!*

2. There is a **third message** that comes across from the episode in Gethsemane. It is not without reason that the Bible records that **He asked His closest friends, the inner circle of His disciples - Peter, James and John - to keep watch with Him while He prays.**

It is not because any human being could help Him in this hour of overwhelming distress. He alone could walk this Via Delarosa - this road of pain and fear and humiliation - for us. He alone can be mediator between God and us. He alone is God and man and therefore able to save us. He alone is able to stand before the judgement throne of God in our place. And still - He asks His friends to keep watch with Him! Why? What difference could it make?

VERSE 38 of the same chapter 14 in Mark's gospel has an answer. In spite of the selfless sacrifice of Jesus - and the salvation we receive on the grounds of His atonement - **His inner circle of friends have a responsibility, in this world, towards the Lord who loves them so much!**

In a world filled with so much hatred for Him, where the enemy still goes about looking who he can devour and which lives he can destroy, the message comes clearly to His disciples: Keep watch with me and pray! In spite of My love for you, **your spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak!** On earth we remain the struggling church. In a struggle of life and death against the enemies of God, the persecutors of Christ, the hatred of the truth, the trap of false religion, the danger of pride and resistance of Christ's love and salvation. We are called to keep watch and to pray - and be inspired and motivated to do so, when we see the love of Christ for us in Gethsemane.

Moved by the overwhelming sorrow of Christ - and moved by the reality of what we are saved from and the cost of it all - yes, moved by the love of the Lord for us, we are called to keep watch and pray, to not fall into temptation again.

**But also called to keep watch with Christ for the sake of the salvation of the world.** When we have seen the distress of Jesus in the hour of God's judgment for our sake - and for the sake of the world - shall we not also be moved by the plight of those who will still be called before God's throne and to whom He will

say - I have never known you!! *Shall the judgement of the lost not cause us sorrow too?* Shall we not keep watch and pray with Jesus when we understand the predicament of those who will die without forgiveness??

**As we live - everyday - in a world provoking God's anger** - and we know that Jesus loves us, His people, more than anything - can we rest and can we sleep until everyone heard the good news of salvation and until everyone came to the safety that is only to be found within the fold of His flock? We should be in fear for the sake of the lost and the unreached. We should feel the terror of their judgment. We should keep watch and pray for the sake of the salvation of those in danger of being eternally lost. There is no time to waste. There is no time to sleep. After we saw Jesus in Gethsemane and after we saw the anguish of the lost before the judgment of God, shouldn't we keep watch and pray?

After we saw what Jesus did for us and after being allowed into the inner circle of His friends and after understanding what He did to save and to redeem us, how can we not remember His commission: Keep watch with me, and pray!! Go, He said - even to the ends of the earth - and proclaim the good news of salvation! Go, He said and make disciples of all!! After we saw His love and His sorrow and His distress in Gethsemane -- how can we not go!