

NT LESSON #25
NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE, BE DONE
(MATTHEW 26:36-46; MARK 14:32-42; LUKE 22:39-46)
by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: I wrote the following about an experience in 1980 during a visit to the Holy Land.

We left Bethany and climbed the east side of the Mount of Olives. The trail was steep and the early afternoon heat oppressive, but it made little difference to the members of our group. We were soon to have our first view of the Holy City.

About four o' clock we reached the summit of the Mount, looked off to the west, and there it was: Jerusalem!

We stopped just above a small Jewish graveyard. A group member sang "The Holy City" as we stood there absorbed with the view, the feelings, the history, the wonder. . . . A thousand Sunday School lessons and scripture stories crystallized before our eyes. We saw the wall, the temple mount, the gates, Kidron Valley, the golden Dome of the Rock, and El Aksa Mosque, a radiant silver in the afternoon sunlight. In our hearts we joined with the vocalist on the chorus of his song:

*Jerusalem! Jerusalem!
Lift up your gates and sing!
Hosanna in the highest—
Hosanna to your King!*

After a time we began the descent. I lingered behind a moment, unwilling to draw the curtain on this experience, restrained by this most tangible and visible symbol of the land where Jesus walked. Finally, reluctantly, I turned and followed the others. I was last in the group as we descended the narrow walled path toward the city.

Almost at once my feelings of reverence were shattered by the assault of the salesmen. We had seen them everywhere: hordes of small boys hawking belts and hats and bookmarks and prayer caps and postcards—any conceivable thing they

though might bring them American dollars. The clamoring was loud, harsh, disturbing. I wanted to listen to my heart and the Spirit. I could hear only the boys.

My attention was therefore on those youths as I followed the group to the bottom of the hill and then through a small gate. Our director had announced our itinerary that morning, but I had forgotten and was wholly unaware of where we were till I passed through the opening and a brown-robed monk closed the portal behind me. It was then as though a knife had sliced through the sound. The silence startled me. I turned to encounter a low, wrought-iron fence, a lovely garden, and the olive trees of Gethsemane.

It was the suddenness of it that surprised me. Not having known where I was going, I had not prepared. There were no expectations, no preconceptions. I was there, and the meaning of that place opened itself to me in the space of a breath. Without any guidance or longing, I was swept into the reality of the atonement and felt the very trees testifying. The power came out of the ground to infuse me and surround me and teach me.

Blood had been spilled in this place. The best blood ever shed fell here in response to a suffering which caused even the Son of God to tremble and shrink. And some of that blood was spilled for me. Some of that suffering was a gift to me. I knew Christ had paid for the sins of men. But standing there, in that holy place, I learned that he had paid for my sins. The Sanhedrin and the temple guards brought him to judgement and to the Antonia Fortress. Pilate brought him to the cross. But I brought him to Gethsemane—my life, my choices, my sins. (Ted L. Gibbons, *Misery and Joy*, pp. 8-10)

Scriptural and prophetic records make it clear that the Savior suffered for the sins of all mankind.

In Gethsemane and on Calvary, He worked out the infinite and eternal atonement. It was the greatest single act of love in recorded history. Thus He became our Redeemer—redeeming all of us from physical death, and redeeming those of us from spiritual death who will obey the laws and ordinances of the

gospel (*Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, p. 14).

He not only suffered for the people of this world, but for all the inhabitants of all the worlds created by the hand of God.

His Atonement is infinite—without an end. 29 It was also infinite in that all humankind would be saved from never-ending death. It was infinite in terms of His immense suffering. It was infinite in time, putting an end to the preceding prototype of animal sacrifice. It was infinite in scope—it was to be done once for all. 30 And the mercy of the Atonement extends not only to an infinite number of people, but also to an infinite number of worlds created by Him. 31 It was infinite beyond any human scale of measurement or mortal comprehension (Russell M. Nelson, “The Atonement,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 35).

But as we study this most majestic of all events, this *infinite* sacrifice, this suffering that reaches out to all the creations of the Father, we must not ignore the personal dimension. He suffered for you. He suffered for me. That was the lesson I learned in the garden. It is the lesson I hope we can all learn from the scriptural accounts of Christ’s agony in Gethsemane.

I. THE SAVIOR TOOK UPON HIMSELF OUR SINS AND INFIRMITIES

(Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46)

Following that Last Supper and a hymn (the Savior’s favorite hymn, no doubt) Christ led the apostles to the foot of the Mount of Olives to a place he liked to go (Luke 22:39)—a quiet garden called Gethsemane, a word that means “oil press.” He left eight of them and took three, Peter, James, and John, with him farther into the Garden. There he “began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” (Matthew 26:37) Is it possible that even the Savior was astonished by the intensity of what he there began to feel? He said to the three with him, “my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death . . .” (Matthew 27:38), and he asked them to stay awake (see footnote 38*b*) and to pray (27:41) with him.

There seem to be several lessons here. One has to do with the power of prayer. In his hour of greatest need, Christ asked his friends to pray with him, and, no doubt, for him. More than that, he prayed for himself. As the

anguish increased, he cried out to the Father: “And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and he sweat as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44, JST) This is worth marking in your own scriptures. The very Son of God, the creator of heaven and earth, the Beloved Son of God, when he was in agony, prayed “more earnestly.”

A second lesson is related to that agony. He was “sorrowful and very heavy.” He was “sorrowful, even unto death.” He was “in an agony.” Elder McConkie taught: “As near as we can judge, these infinite agonies -- this suffering beyond compare -- *continued for some three or four hours.*” (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, Preface, p.xiii, *emphasis added*)

Marion G. Romney said of this suffering, “The suffering [Christ] undertook to endure, and which he did endure, equaled the combined suffering of all men.” (C.R., Oct. 69, p. 57)

Perhaps there is a way to *begin* to understand something about this suffering, these “infinite agonies.” Imagine that *all* the pain, *all* the sorrow, *all* the suffering, the sickness, the misery that you have ever experienced in your life or that you will ever experience were to settle upon your soul in just one short period. What would you feel for those moments? Now add to your own suffering the suffering of your family members, immediate and extended, for those same five minutes. How will you respond? How will your body respond? Now add the suffering of the members of your ward and stake.

Do you begin to have the tiniest glimpse of the what Elder Maxwell calls the “awful arithmetic of the atonement”? (*For the Power is in Them*, dedication) Can you begin to comprehend what it cost our Redeemer to bear the “pains of every living creature”? (2 Nephi 9:21) Do you feel an increased understanding of the emotion behind the prayer the Savior offered? “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me . . .” (Luke 22:42)

And of course that suffering was more than a sacrifice for sin.

His empathy and capacity to succor us—in our own sicknesses, temptations, or sins—were demonstrated and perfected in the process of the great atonement. It was therein that He, though

sinless, came to know, personally and ‘according to the flesh,’ all of that through which we individually pass (See Alma 7:11-12.) (Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things*, p.99).

And thus he could say, speaking of himself in the third person, “In all their afflictions, he [Christ] was afflicted” (D&C 133:53).

I do not desire to draw any attention away from those unbearably sacred moments in the Savior spent in Gethsemane, but he took time to teach a rich and useful lesson to his apostles during his suffering, and we ought not to miss it.

After the Savior had asked for spiritual assistance from his three leading disciples, he went alone farther into the Garden and prayed. After some time, he returned.

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?
(Matt. 26:40).

On a warm summer day in a park in a nearby city I was reading this passage when my attention was drawn to a footnote. It was footnote *b*, located next to the word *could*. The footnote offered an alternate rendering of the original Greek text with this language:

GR are you so powerless that you could not stay awake with me
...

With the substitution of this text, the verse reads,

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, *are you so powerless that you could not stay awake with me* one hour? (Matt. 26:40).

I wonder how often the Savior has watched my quick collapse into temptation and thought, “are you so powerless that you could not resist becoming angry at your children?” Are you so weak and feeble that you could not switch to another channel during that filth?” “Do you have so little control over your body that you could not help drifting off during a session at

the temple?" Of course Peter was tired. He had been awake since the early hours, and midnight must have passed already. But he had been asked to pray, and he went to sleep.

Now, one more note about that prayer to the Father for release from his calling. Orson F. Whitney had a vision of the Garden of Gethsemane. He recorded,

I seemed to be in the Garden of Gethsemane, a witness of the Savior's agony. I saw Him as plainly as ever I have seen anyone. Standing behind a tree in the foreground, I beheld Jesus, with Peter, James and John, as they came through a little wicket gate at my right, leaving the three Apostles there, after telling them to kneel and pray, the Son of God passed over to the other side, where He also knelt and prayed. It was the same prayer with which all Bible readers are familiar: "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

As He prayed the tears streamed down his face, which was toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I also wept, out of pure sympathy. My whole heart went out to him; I loved him with all my soul, and longed to be with him as I longed for nothing else. (*Through Memory's Halls*, Life Story of Orson F. Whitney, pp. 81-83.)

I had not thought of him weeping. The humanness of that outpouring has touched me deeply because it seems so right. In his immeasurable torment and distress, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he pled with his Father to remove the responsibility he had accepted in that pre-mortal council.

Jesus beseeched the Father to take the cup from Him "if it be possible" (Matthew 26:39). The agony—though anticipated by Him from pre-mortal times—apparently was so much worse than even Jesus had imagined . . . (Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine*, p.46 - p.47)

But shining with stunning brilliance through this entire experience is another lesson we must not overlook. It grows out of one word and the devotion--the

absolute commitment to obedience--behind it. Having pled to be excused from the most devastating pain the universe has ever known, he said, "nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt." (Mark 14:36)

This one word, *nevertheless*, is the greatest sermon on submissiveness in all of recorded history. *Father, I do not want to do this. It will be the hardest thing anyone has ever done in the history of the universe. Nevertheless, if you want me to--if there is no other way--then I will do what you ask of me.* This is a word we all ought to use more. When the road is hard and the ascent is steep and no relief is waiting anywhere, we might cry for peace and beg for another way, but we must always be willing to say what the Savior said: "Nevertheless . . ."

II. WE NEED THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

What sort of a list can you make of the blessings that come to you from the mission and the atonement of the Savior? How many good things are there in your life that you could take exclusive and personal credit for, independent of any divine assistance or heavenly preparation? Think of the following gifts:

- There is only one road back to the Father. "I am the way," (John 14:6).
- There is only one person to show us that way. "There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh . . ." (Mosiah 5:8; see also 3:17)
- He has the keys of hell and death, keys which cannot be duplicated! 18 I . . . have the keys of hell and of death.(Revelation 1:18). If he does not open that door, it will be forever closed to us.
- He is perfect in his love--"God *is* love." (1 John 4:8,16, *emphasis added*)
- His atonement frees us all from physical death. "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust . . ." (Isaiah 26:19)
- His atonement makes possible our freedom from spiritual death. "And

this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.” (2 Nephi 9:12)

- His atonement offers us relief from the burdens of mortality. “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4)
- Without the atonement, we would become subject to Satan, and be miserable forever. “And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself . . .” (2 Nephi 9:9)

Spend a few moments with your scriptures and the Spirit. If you teach, make a list on the board. How would our lives and our prospects of eternity change if there were no atonement?

CONCLUSION

I am overwhelmed with the magnitude of my debt to the Redeemer of the worlds, who is also *my* Redeemer. From the blazing glory of his heavenly mansion, he has reached out across the light years of space and time to offer me salvation. He has suffered for me. He has invited me to come with him and to follow him, first into the water, and then into glory.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism--yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and *then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.* (2 Nephi 31:13, *emphasis added*)

I want to speak with the tongue of angels. I have longed to shout his praises. But I am pretty sure, given the nature of his goodness and his gifts to me, that I will never be able to shout loud enough.

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