



## The Burning Bush - Online article archive

### THE SAVIOUR PRAYING IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

#### Did He show 'unwillingness' to go to the cross?

*"And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt,"*

*Matthew 26:39.*



Ancient olive tree in the garden of Gethsemane

It is not uncommon for preachers to explain the words of the Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane, quoted above, as the Saviour succumbing to a fear of the sufferings He would face on the cross and praying that He might be spared that suffering, though declaring His willingness to submit to it if it was His Father's will.

Such a view has always been an offence to me, as I believe that it impugns my Saviour's integrity, His love for His elect and His omniscience. It is a view that entirely contravenes the whole revelation of the Saviour's undying, unalterable love for His people and the numerous open declarations of that love in the gospels by Him.

Consider these few thoughts which I believe confute this offensive notion.

#### **1. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THAT THE SAVIOUR ENTERED INTO AN ETERNAL COVENANT WITH HIS FATHER TO GO TO THE CROSS AS THE SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS ELECT.**

Calvary did not come as a 'surprise' to Christ as it would appear some suggest. He did not come to a sudden realisation of the dreadfulness of what faced Him at the cross as He prayed in Gethsemane. He was not suddenly aware or confronted with the wrath that He must face if He was to take the place of the guilty sinner! After all, the wrath He would have to endure was His, as well as His Father's wrath against sin! The wrath that will be poured out upon wicked sinners, the wrath that the Saviour bore on behalf of His elect, is termed "the wrath of the Lamb" in Revelation 6:16. "And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

How can that wrath of which He is the author come as a surprise or be something about which He had not a full understanding until that moment in Gethsemane?

That would be entirely contrary to His omniscience, His awareness of what it was He undertook in eternity when He voluntarily became His people's surety.

#### **Dr Paisley**

I can recall Dr Paisley's explanation for the scene in Gethsemane in a message that he preached in the old Ravenhill church just after I was saved and it was sealed to my heart at that time. It was an explanation that exalted rather than demeaned my Saviour's unchanging and unchangeable love for His people. It honoured the deity of the Saviour rather than presenting Him as One succumbing to human weakness for a time. It fitted precisely in and dovetailed with the many statements in Scripture of His eternal and immutable purpose to redeem His people.

The Saviour's awareness of the sufferings He faced may be seen in the following verse.

"And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Revelation 13:8.



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The slaying of Christ in time took place at the cross but the exact nature of that event was known to Christ from all eternity. He submitted to the sufferings of the cross in eternity. He was "slain" in eternity. Are we to believe that in Gethsemane He, for a time, changed His mind?

I find that unthinkable and a dreadful insult to my Saviour's eternal love. After all, He said of His love for His people, all His elect: "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee," Jeremiah 31:3. The word "everlasting" means "perpetual". How, then can His eternal love diminish and for a time become subject to a desire to escape the cross?

I cannot for a moment entertain such a notion of my glorious Saviour.

### **2. WHEN WE CONSIDER THE UNQUESTIONING SUBMISSIVENESS OF ISAAC TO THE SUFFERING OF DEATH ON MOUNT MORIAH, ARE WE TO THINK THAT THE SAVIOUR FELL SHORT OF THE ONE, WHO WAS BUT A TYPE OF HIM, IN SUBMISSIVENESS?**

"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen," Genesis 22:9-14.

The silent acquiescence on the part of Isaac to what His father Abraham was doing is surely a picture of the Saviour's utter submissiveness to the sufferings of Calvary. Isaiah speaks of that yieldedness. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth," Isaiah 53:7.

If, as many say, in the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus balked at what lay ahead of Him then he fell short of the compliance of Isaac and certainly did not show that humble resignation spoken of by Isaiah!

I believe that Isaac would be in the front rank of those who would shout out in horrified rejection of such a notion.

### **3. LUKE'S DESCRIPTION OF THE SAVIOUR'S RESOLVE TO GO TO THE CROSS CONTRADICTS THE NOTION OF HIS TEMPORARY SHYING AWAY.**

"And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," Luke 9:51.

These words show a fulfilment of that spoken of by Isaiah. "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed," Isaiah 50:4-7.

John Gill says of the words, "The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" that "it is expressive of his voluntary obedience, as Mediator, to his divine Father, engaging in, and performing with the greatest readiness and cheerfulness, the great work of man's redemption and salvation."



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In His obedience to His Father's will, the Mediator, as Luke puts it, "stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem". Did that stedfastness falter in the Garden? I cannot accept that it could have been so. The word "stedfastly" means "to set fast." John Gill comments on these words in Luke: "He made a firm purpose, he resolved upon it, and was determined to go to Jerusalem, his time being up in Galilee; and though he knew what he was to meet with and endure; that he should bear the sins of his people, the curse of the law, and wrath of God; that he should have many enemies, men and devils to grapple with, and undergo a painful, shameful, and accursed death; yet none of these things moved him, he was resolutely bent on going thither, and accordingly prepared for his journey."

Can it be possible that His resolve faltered in Gethsemane?

Such a thing is unthinkable and blasphemous.

#### 4. THE SAVIOUR DECLARED HIMSELF BOUND BY AN APPOINTMENT AT THE CROSS.

"But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Luke 12:50.

The "baptism" here spoken of is His baptism of suffering at the cross. He declares Himself "straitened till it be accomplished" or held fast by a desire to have His sufferings at the cross accomplished.

Could it be, as suggested, that in Gethsemane He threw off this sense of being "held in on every side", as the word is translated in Luke 19:43, and sought to escape the baptism of Calvary's sufferings?

I just cannot believe this of my Saviour.

#### 5. THE SAVIOUR'S PRAYER ON AN EARLIER OCCASION IN WHICH HE REFERS TO THE SUFFERINGS OF THE CROSS, DISPLAYS AN ATTITUDE IN TOTAL CONTRADICTION TO THAT WHICH SOME WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE OVERTOOK HIM IN GETHSEMANE.

"And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." John 12:23-28.

The words we have highlighted stand in complete disagreement with the suggested inclination of the Saviour's heart when He prayed in Gethsemane. Here the Saviour plainly says that He does not pray to be saved from the hour of Calvary's sufferings.

Can such a contradiction be? To think such is rob the Saviour of His immutability!

#### 6. THE SAVIOUR'S ATTITUDE SHOWN IN HIS EXCHANGE WITH PETER ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF HIS DEATH AT JERUSALEM, STANDS IN CONTRADICTION TO THIS NOTION OF THE SAVIOUR SHOWING RELUCTANCE FOR A TIME TO GOING TO THE CROSS.

"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men," Matthew 16:21-23. Matthew Poole tells us that Peter's words, "Be it far from thee, Lord", may be translated, "Be merciful to thyself, spare thyself." The Saviour's reply to Peter is most powerful. The Lord indicates that what Peter is suggesting is not of God but of Satan! "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."



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Yet there are those who suggest to us that the Saviour did indeed succumb to Peter's thinking, Satan's thinking, and adopted the thinking of men and rejected the "things that be of God" for a time in Gethsemane.

Surely this tells us how wrong is such an interpretation of the Saviour's prayer in the Garden.

### **7. GETHSEMANE HAD COME BUT A SHORT TIME AFTER THE LAST SUPPER IN WHICH THE SAVIOUR INDICATED HIS FULL SURRENDER TO THE SUFFERINGS OF THE CROSS.**

Paul sets forth the significance of the commemorative feast instituted by the Lord just before going to Gethsemane. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come," 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

We are asked by those who hold to the view I am seeking to show is wrong, to believe that within minutes of setting up this feast, the Saviour for a time negates its whole meaning, while He seeks a way out of suffering at the cross.

Again I say, this view is utterly unacceptable!

### **8. CONSIDER THE SAVIOUR'S WORDS TO PETER BUT MINUTES AFTER HE IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE SHOWN THIS DESIRE TO TO AVOID CALVARY.**

"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:10-11.

If what some say of Christ is so, namely, that He showed a desire to avoid the cross when He prayed in Gethsemane, then these words to Peter are exceedingly deceitful and must be seen as a shameful act of swaggering boldness!

Can we possibly entertain such a view of our blessed Saviour? Of course we cannot, therefore we utterly reject the idea of Him showing a desire to avoid the cross and that this is what lay behind His Gethsemane prayer.

### **9. WHAT THEN WAS THE SAVIOUR ASKING FOR IN HIS PRAYER TO HIS FATHER WHEN HE SAID: 'O MY FATHER, IF IT BE POSSIBLE, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME.'**

If this was not the Saviour showing the weakness of His human nature, as some suggest, then what does it mean?

I return to the exposition given me by Dr Paisley so long ago.

First of all the "cup" referred to by the Saviour is not the cup of Calvary's sufferings. We read His words to His disciples in John 14:30-31. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."

The cup the Saviour refers to in the garden was the cup of death the devil pressed upon Him. Gethsemane was the scene of an attack upon the Saviour by the devil in order to slay Him before the cross and so frustrate the eternal purpose of God in redemption.



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This was not the first attack upon the Saviour that the devil had mounted. Was not the slaying of the innocents in Bethlehem just such a strike against Christ and God's eternal plan? Then what of the temptation of Christ upon the pinnacle of the temple? "Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," Matthew 4:5-7. This was an attempt by the devil to kill Christ before the cross. Matthew Poole says: "The thing to which the tempter solicits our Saviour, was the throwing himself down from a precipice, a temptation, in effect, to destroy himself."

We could go back to the beginning of time and trace the attempts of Satan to frustrate God's purpose in Christ. The slaying by Cain of Abel from whom it might have been supposed the Redeemer would come, the slaying of the seed royal by Athaliah, the many attempts upon the life of David and the numerous other instances in which the forebears of the Saviour came under attack from the devil as he sought to quench God's redemptive love toward His elect people.

### Final attack

In the Garden of Gethsemane the devil, "the prince of this world" who was to come (John 14:30), made his last and final attempt before the cross.

The wrestlings of the Saviour in prayer indicate just how terrible was that battle. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground," Luke 22:44.

It was not the thought of His sufferings on the cross that caused those great drops of blood, immeasurably terrible as those sufferings would be. No, it was His wrestlings with the devil, a "murderer" from the beginning, as he sought to stop Calvary by slaying the Saviour in Gethsemane. Thus Christ, ever willing to do whatsoever His Father willed, prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." He was not pleading that He might be spared from Calvary's sufferings but rather, and this is to the Saviour's eternal glory, that He might be spared from death in the Garden in order that He might suffer for His people at Calvary's cross!

Can we support this view from other scripture?

Yes, apart from those scriptures already quoted which clearly indicate as wrong that which some suppose the Saviour's words to have meant, I believe we can show positively that the cup the Saviour sought deliverance from was the cup of death proffered by the devil and that He was, as ever, successful in His praying!

Paul writes of Christ, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared," Hebrews 5:7.

### 1. We have clearly indicated to us here the occasion to which Paul is referring.

"When he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears."

I think that undeniably this takes us to the Garden of Gethsemane. He had desired His disciples to wait with Him in prayer at this time. It would seem strange indeed that He should wish them to witness His time of weakness and withdrawing from the cross, if that was indeed what was taking place. Rather, I believe that he was seeking their fellowship in prayer as He battled against the devil. But, as ever, He was failed by men and left to battle alone.

### 2. What he sought in prayer God gave Him!

" . . . and was heard in that he feared." If Christ was asking to be relieved from going to the cross He was





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not heard. But, as I believe, He sought to be delivered from the attack of the devil that He might go to the cross. He was indeed heard!

### 3. Note exactly what He sought in prayer and to which He received an answer.

" . . . unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."

It is clear that He sought to be saved from death and "was heard in that he feared." He could not have been praying to be saved from the cross in the light of these words! The death from which He prayed to be saved He was indeed delivered from since He was heard or "listened to" as the word means.

What happened in the Garden was the Saviour wrestling to be delivered from the devil's attempt to stop Him going to the cross and there suffering and dying for the sins of His people, that which He had so gloriously stated as the purpose of His coming to earth : "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many," Matthew 20:28.

Could it be that He Who uttered such a statement had stumbled and hesitated at the end just before He was due to fulfil that which He came to accomplish.

NO, a thousand thousand times NO!

### Rewriting history

Rather the view adopted by many is but the devil's attempt to besmirch the Saviour's blessed name and testimony and stain Him with last minute hesitation and a desire to withdraw from the eternal plan of redemption. Like all liars, the devil would thus seek to rewrite history and hide his defeat and deny the Saviour's victory over him in the Garden.

We in Ulster have witnessed a modern manifestation of just such satanic lying. The IRA and Sinn Fein have presented to the world the image of a successful military campaign here in Ulster in which they battled the army, the police and the local security forces to a standstill and forced a peace agreement in which they were granted high political office.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The IRA was a broken terrorist machine on its last legs, riddled with informers with its back to the wall. It sued for peace and a compromising British government led by that arch political scoundrel, Tony Blair, yielded to their demands and pressurised Unionist politicians into accepting those terms, by playing on their greed for political power and so power-sharing with Sinn Fein government came into being and with it the myth of an IRA victory!

The exposition of the Saviour's prayer in Gethsemane's garden in which He is depicted as cowering away from the cross was born of the same evil scheming and chicanery.

Sadly, all too many preachers are prepared to spread this wicked lie amongst their people!

Ivan Foster.

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