

Lamps - drawing strength from Gethsemane

“Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”(Luke 22: 39-46)

The intercession of Jesus in Gethsemane has always been a powerful lesson to God’s people. But we, as lamps, have to look much deeper into what was going on there, so that we can draw strength from the whole experience which Jesus was having. So what are the deeper lessons, and how can they strengthen us?

1. Willingness to sacrifice

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (Philippians 2:6)

Here is the theology of this verse:-

Jesus was, by very nature, God. (Greek “morphe.”) But he did not grasp, (Greek harpagmos) that position, but “made himself nothing”, (Greek “ekenosen”). He did not give up his position as God, but “Christ gave up his environment of glory. He took upon himself limitations of place and of knowledge and of power” He took on the position of a servant (Greek “doulos”) and the likeness (Greek “*homoïōma*) of mankind. “Therefore, Christ’s “emptying” of Himself is simply His assumption of human flesh with all of its limitations without ceasing to be God.

Wow! In Gethsemane, Jesus displayed his willingness to sacrifice all that he was, for the future of his creation. The sacrifice he had made at his incarnation, which he had carried through his life, he was now about to complete. We see a pale shadow of this kind of faith in the life of Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his home and comfort to obey the voice of the Lord, and was even willing to sacrifice his only son to the command of God.

If Abraham reflects God's willingness to sacrifice his only Son, then in Gethsemane we see the almost completed purpose of the Father, who saw in his son, the willingness to be that sacrifice. Of course, it awaits its completion at Calvary.

Where does that leave the lamps? This teaching is not to discourage but to encourage us. Sacrifice is built into the fabric of our faith. It is genuinely hard to endure. We see this in the words "Father take this cup from me." We don't have to be ashamed or downhearted when we too cry out "Father I can't endure anymore!" But sacrifice brings victory. It is the one thing the enemy cannot counterfeit, or resist. Jesus won in Gethsemane. So can we.

2. To live the purposes of God.

***"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42)**

There is some profound theology in this verse:

"Father, if you are willing": How can the Father be willing? This was his plan from the beginning. But our Father is "abba", not Allah. Abba does not have a heart of stone. He shares the agony of his creation, being fought out in the heart of his son. The Bible opens the heart of God to us - Father, Son and Spirit. This in itself, should encourage lamps. We may be struggling, but Abba is struggling with us, as we reach out to do his will.

Was there a possibility of Abba changing his mind? The theological struggle between free will and a ruthless inflexible predestination has raged for as long as we have believed, and this isn't the place for a long discussion here. All we can say is that, from a lamps perspective, this opening of the compassionate heart of Abba to our struggles, and to be with us in them, is profoundly encouraging.

"take this cup from me." Is the Lord really giving up here? To think like this is to misunderstand what is going on. ***These words uncover the intense struggle between the will of God and the will of the enemy.*** Revelation chapter 13 uncovers this struggle for us. There we see that the beasts want to chain humanity, rob us of our freedoms, bind us, and through that process bring down Abba, and reign in heaven:-

"Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honour of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and

slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.” (Rev 13:14-17)

For us, as lamps, this will be our struggle. Our humanity will cry out to be released from the burden, and yet our spiritual being will want to serve the purposes of the Father, whatever the cost.

“yet not my will, but yours be done.” This is easy to write. We all want to do the will of God. But we have to be willing to say it within the agony of Gethsemane, with all the power of the enemy coming against us. There is, of course, no better place to assert our willingness to obey, and our guarantee of victory.

From the Old Testament perspective, Jesus is reversing the betrayal of Eve, and releasing the human spirit from the curse that her betrayal brought on all of us. We see this victory in the letter to the Hebrews:-

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Hebrews 2:14-15)

3. Breaking the enemy

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Col 2:14)

Gethsemane is about victory - but not the victory we see at football matches, when the victorious team parades around with a cup. ***The intercessory victory in Gethsemane was the strength to carry on with the battle.***

This is a hard lesson to absorb. We live in an age where success is exalted, and those who win enjoy the fruits of their success for all to see. Our intercessory victory is to survive the most bitter attacks of the enemy, and survive for the next battle! This is a difficult piece of theology.

If Jesus has won at Calvary, then surely we can live in victory, sweeping aside all opposition. Yes and no! Jesus did win at Calvary. Victory is ours (1 Cor 15:57) Yet it was an eschatological victory – in other words a victory now which still has to be realised, still has to come to pass in its fullness. We live in the theological gap between the victory, and the total realisation of that victory.

That's why we have to keep fighting - fighting until the Lord comes to establish that totality of victory which is his, and ours.

If we lose sight of this theological tension, as lamps, will lose our way. Jesus had to go from Gethsemane to Calvary - to another battle which he had to win. We intercede, to overcome, to go on and intercede again to overcome to go on and intercede, until the trumpet sounds and we are caught up in the air.

This is a balance we have to maintain as intercessors and as lamps. It was Jesus' route to victory, and it must be ours

From an Old Testament perspective, Jesus is continuing, in his victory in Gethsemane, the slow destruction of all that stands in the way of God's purposes.

- * The intercessory victory reflects the opening of the Red Sea, and a release into the promise.
- * The intercessory victory reflects the destruction of Jericho, and all strongholds which oppose the Kingdom.
- * The intercessory victory reflects the reversal of all Balaam type curses, all spirits of control against God's people.
- * The intercessory victory reflects the destruction of Babylon, and all its arrogance against God.

4. Vigilance

“ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8)

Intercession is a work of the Spirit. It has to be Spirit inspired, and Spirit led.

There is a work of the Spirit even before Jesus enters Gethsemane - “Watch and pray.” What are we to watch for?

* ***The manoeuvring of the enemy.***

The enemy has method. (Eph 6:11 Greek *methodeia*) He will manoeuvre around, attacking especially our emotions. This is a difficult attack, because intercession is an emotional experience. That's why we have to undergird it with good theology. There is no easy answer here. Only experience teaches us to recognise those feelings which are from God, and those which are not. A good beginning is to recognise and accept the emotional side of intercession. Have a look at Hannah. (1 Samuel 1 and 2)

Personally, I do not deny my emotions, but I try and keep them covered by the shield of faith.

* **The weakness of the flesh.** (Demas. 2 Tim 10:4)

Jesus got tired! (Mark 4:38) It's vital to recognise that his humanity is also our humanity. We are not machines, and it is vital that we watch over our humanity. In what ways are we vulnerable? We should take special guard over our sexuality, our inner thoughts, pride, anger, jealousy, our marriages and family relationships, and influences from our secular working/family life.

* **Discouragement.** ("For fear of the Jews." John 20:19)

Discouragement is a dangerous foe. It brings armies to a standstill, and as we know, in our army, we are either going forward or going backwards. Once discouragement sets in, and we stand still, we will lose the ground we have gained. How do we deal with it?

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."(Hebrews 12:2.).

* **Bearing the burden of isolation.** (Jesus: Matthew 26:39)

Jesus was alone in Gethsemane, and in this he gives us fair warning - being a lamp is going to be a lonely business. If we can't bear this burden, we cannot survive as a lamp. Take a look at Jonah, (Jonah 2) and accept this burden, which will then become a privilege.

* **Giving up.** (Disciples. John 6:66)

I have never met a Christian yet who starts out wanting to give up. But it is a real risk, especially when the pressures come on us. Apostle Paul warns us:-

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

(1 Cor 10:12)

5. Angelic support.

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (Hebs 1:14)

Angelic theology has always been a little confusing. Angels are a spiritual experience, and being supernatural, have attracted all kinds of foolish and erroneous speculation. However, in some way, which we do not fully understand, there is angelic support for us in our struggles. This isn't the place for a long teaching about angels. Let's just concentrate on what the New Testament tells

us.

*** Angels as messengers and helpers.**

Mary: (Luke 1: 26.) Joseph. (Matthew 1:20.) (Zechariah. Luke 1:11.) Empty tomb. (Luke 24:4.) Escape from prison: (Acts 5:19. Peter: Acts 12:7)

There are many more references, especially in Acts. Angels play a major part in the announcements of God's will in the book of Revelation.

*** Angels as support/protection.**

Jesus and the temptation stories: (Mark 1:13 and Matthew 4:6.) Gethsemane.

*** Angels are there partly for us to call on, use and command.**

“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

From this we can learn some powerful truths:

*** They certainly are there!**

*** They bring God's word** – but this is not superior to the revelation of the Bible. We have to use wisdom when we move in the angelic field.

*** They have a strong supporting function** - Gethsemane being the main, and for us, the most relevant.

*** We have the authority to use them in the service of the Lord.** This, of course is a wonderful but difficult area. Angels are there to help, but we serve the Lord, and it is the power of the Holy Spirit which releases the Lord's purposes. Yet we can command the angels!

The enemy is obviously very aware of angels, and afraid of them. A sure sign of this is that he counterfeits them:-

“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

(2 Cor 11:14)

Angels can become a deception, by becoming objects of worship. (Col 2:18)

As lamps, we need all the strengthening we can get. If Jesus was strengthened by an angel in Gethsemane, then we should look to the same strengthening in our struggle. But we must adopt an adult and watchful approach to this area of experience.