

Gethsemane

by Robert Cummins

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CHAPTER FOUR

In answer to my question asking for an explanation of the cup that caused such horror and revulsion to our Lord, the response was immediate and clear: "Do you not remember the terror through which you passed during the first months of your nervous breakdown? Do you not remember calling out, 'O GOD, it is impossible for me to endure another moment of this awful horror'? I was allowing you to taste a little, a very little, of the cup that My Son drank to its dregs, the cup of the world's iniquity and sin."

The experience to which the Lord reminded me was a severe nervous breakdown which I suffered in 1932. With many Modernistic leanings, I had gone to India in 1920 as a missionary of the United Presbyterian Church. During this first term of service in the Punjab, in Northern India, I began to realize my great need of real spiritual power. This awakening led me to seek earnestly the a deeper presence of His Spirit. As I thus sought the Lord, He dealt very definitely with my heart and life. I was given a new conception of Calvary, and as a result of it made a complete surrender to GOD. This was followed by what, to me, was a thorough cleansing. My whole being seemed to be so purged of sin and selfishness that for four or five months there seemed to be nothing in me that could respond to temptation. Then in 1925 GOD seemed to so overwhelmingly answer my prayer for a closer walk with Him.

Then in 1932, while I was engaged in several series of revival meetings in various parts of India, a nervous breakdown suddenly overwhelmed me. I seemed to lose all power of will, and became the prey of the most terribly vile and blasphemous evil powers. Night and day, for about three months, horrible and obscene suggestions and imaginations poured in an unceasing flood through my consciousness. I could not sleep, except when given sleeping potions, and as these vile powers would pour their unmentionable abominations into my mind it was utterly impossible to resist them, though my whole being shrank in indescribable revulsion and loathing that passed far beyond the point of agony.

These horrible things seemed to fasten themselves like slime upon my memory and my consciousness, till I felt as though I had been dragged through the very sewers of hell. It was then that I would cry out in intense agony of soul, "O GOD, how can you allow such horror to flood my being? My mind cannot bear such filth and devilish blasphemy. Far better that I be blotted out of existence than that another moment of this horror be allowed to flood my soul."

I seemed as if in those months the life of CHRIST in me, the new life that the Lord had caused to be born in me was being smothered out, and as if I were watching that life being smothered. Far better to have had some awful physical pain come over me then to feel the holiness, that divine life I had known in the Spirit, being drowned out by the floods of sin.

After all this, the devil himself seemed to say, "Do you think, after the Lord has filled you once, and now that I have trapped you and flooded your soul with all this evil, that the Lord could ever cleanse you and take you back again?" I said, "No, I can't see how it would be possible. How could GOD take me again and cleanse me? I have committed the unpardonable sin. There is no hope for me."

Then passages in Hebrews came to me with such tremendous power as it is impossible to describe. **"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance"** (Hebrews 6:4-6). **"If we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation"** (Hebrews 10:26, 27).

I believed the accusation of the evil one, that those verses applied to me, and after three months of such horror, I passed into a condition of hopeless despair and torment. The terrible, constant flooding of evil into my mind and consciousness stopped, but it left me in an agony of darkness and despair for the rest of two years. I couldn't pray. I couldn't have anything to do with the Bible, not because I didn't want to, but because I felt so unclean and separated from the holy things of GOD by this experience, that I couldn't bear the thought of association with those holy things again. I felt I was lost forever. For two long years I lived, it seemed to me, in the midst of evil spirits, evil beings, and evil memories. My soul seemed crushed under Himalayas of sin and guilt.

It is not altogether unprofitable for me to tell these things, for many of GOD's children have had to go through similar experiences. And right here let me plead with you not to speak of "insane asylums." A better and more correct name is "mental hospitals." Don't speak of losing one's mind, but of mental sickness; for there are mental sicknesses just as there are physical sicknesses. There is no more disgrace in sending a person to a mental hospital than in sending him to a hospital for physical sickness. I can look back on my own experiences in two such institutions without a shudder.

GOD has so entirely delivered me from the experience and its effects that I could revisit those hospitals today and none of the horror would remain.

Many people today who have had nervous or mental breakdowns do have to go to mental institutions. Personally, I think it is a splendid thing that they do so, provided the institutions are good ones. For usually it is exceedingly hard on the individual himself to remain at home, and equally hard on the family, too. I am glad that my wife was sensible enough to send me to a mental hospital. GOD had a definite purpose to work out in my life, and although it was not the physicians or their methods that brought about the cure which I desired, but which I thought would never come, still GOD used those things in the purpose He was working out in my life, and the lives of those concerned in the situation which arose because of my nervous breakdown.

To make a long story short, the Lord spoke to me after two years of agony, on the morning of October 4, 1934. He used three or four of His dear children to bring me this message, "**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**" Many people had previously tried to comfort me, but I would always refuse to believe. When my faithful wife or any of my missionary friends tried to encourage me by quoting GOD's promises, I could not believe that they were for me, and so would not listen. But this morning, for the first time in two years, I began to doubt my doubts, and I said to myself, "I wonder if I could be wrong?" Then -- and again for the first time in two years -- I slipped to my knees and began to pray.

"Lord," I said, "I am ashamed even to get into an attitude of prayer. I have been so resentful. My mind and heart and being have been so filled with things which must be repulsive to Thee than they are to me. I know now that there is no hope for me. I don't believe you could ever take me back. But, Lord, I wonder if I could be wrong? You see in what terrible darkness and hopelessness every moment of my experience is spent. Lord, if there is anything you can do for me, won't you do it? I would pray if I could, but I can't pray. There are no words to describe what I feel. Anyway, I don't even feel. My heart is like a lump of stone."

Away down deep in my consciousness a chorus began to sing. I did not know there was anything so deep within. The Word says, "Deep calleth unto deep." GOD's deeps called to the deeps in me, and down in the depths of my heart He himself started the second verse of that hymn written by an infidel after he had found the Lord. The hymn was found on his desk after his death. The name of it is "In JESUS." I had not sung it for years. How could I sing, for I had lost my song? He began singing it within my being -

"My heart is night; my soul is steel;
I cannot see, I cannot feel;
For light, for life, I must appeal,
In simple faith to JESUS."

As the last word sang itself out in the silence of my heart, I knew HE stood with me. He gathered me in His arms and brought me into a place of nearness that I had never known before. His precious blood cleansed away all the stain and sin, all the feeling of evil, all the effect of that terrible experience. I had been under a great mountain, and that mountain, at His Word, was buried in the sea. I had been bound with all the fetters of hell, but at His word the fetters snapped and I was free. Oh, the unspeakable joy of that deliverance!

Perhaps some of my readers are going through mental difficulty and darkness. Don't listen to the accuser of the brethren. I listened -- GOD had a purpose in allowing it -- but I ought not to have listened to him. Trust your heavenly Father. He is true to His Word, "**I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**" (Hebrews 13:5). His blood and His cross have utterly answered every claim of evil powers over you.

How could I forget such an experience? How shall I ever forget! But it was that experience which helped me to understand to some extent CHRIST's agony in Gethsemane. When my mind grasped a little of the impurity and the wickedness and the foul loathsomeness which He faced in that hour when He bore our sin, my question was answered; and it changed to deep, adoring wonder that He had been willing to face that cup for our sakes. I found myself exclaiming, "Father, if He had not shrunk from that unspeakably detestable cup, if His soul had not been filled with sorrow even unto death, and with infinite aversion and abhorrence when 'the hour' brought before Him the shame and impurity and wickedness and iniquity of 'us all' that 'was laid upon Him,' then He could not have been Thy most holy Son, sharing Thy holy nature."

Obviously, one who is sinful, impure, and accustomed to the presence of unclean, selfish, and wicked thoughts and desires, is unable to appreciate the recoil of a spotless and perfect soul in the presence of sin and vice. We must partake of the holy nature of GOD if we would understand the things that are repellant to Him. If GOD had not given me an experience of cleansing from sin and of filling with His HOLY SPIRIT, I could never have understood the Spirit's explanation of Gethsemane's horror, nor my heavenly Father's purpose in allowing me to pass through my nervous breakdown.

This experience taught me that there is no anguish to compare with spirit anguish. There is no suffering like the suffering of holiness when confronted with unholiness and sin. Imagine the introduction into a pure and godly home of some person who insisted on giving expression to impurity and profanity and vileness. Plunge a chaste and virtuous woman into an environment where nothing but pollution and lust and selfish strife could find expression, and no suffering would be more unbearable.

When GOD answered my question concerning Gethsemane all this came back to my mind. How I had recoiled in terror and loathing! How I had prayed constantly for only one thing, that I might be blotted out of existence, so that these foul, devilish powers might not find expression in me!

Reminding me of this, the Lord seemed to continue His explanation thus: "If you, sinful by nature, imperfect, and far from being holy, as I am holy, recoiled in such revulsion from the thoughts, imaginations, and feelings of the unmentionable sins that you thus experienced, what do you suppose was the effect of the actual sin and degradation of the world upon My Son's holy soul? He who know no sin was made sin on your behalf. There was an actual transfer of your sin to Him, for only thus could there be a transfer of His righteousness to you.

Becoming the last Adam, the head of the new race, necessitated His taking sin-cursed humanity into organic union with Himself, for only thus could humanity find a new source of life in His blood and His broken body. He became the vine and made sinful men the branches.

Taking humanity into union with Himself, making men and women members of His Body, meant the drawing of all their corruption and iniquity into His blood, or life, for there was no other way of dealing with it. Just as the blood not only provides food and moisture for every tissue of your physical body, but also draws off into itself the waste, infection, and corruption that come through disease or wounds, so CHRIST offered His body and blood to be the source of life for the diseased and corrupted human race, gave Himself to provide food and drink to all mankind, and not only so, but also drew into His own blood the disease, the infection, the curse, and the corruption of sin-ridden men.

He had given Himself for this purpose from the foundation of the world. He had been dedicated for this, and for this had been sent into the world. Yet when the actual poison and corruption of sin came into His life's blood; when actual contact was made and He took the cup of corruption and actually began to drink its contents, it so repelled Him that His whole soul shrank from its corruption and uncleanness in unimaginable abhorrence. How could it be otherwise in One who partakes of the holiness of the divine nature?

Sin is the Great Crusher. There is no power in heaven or on earth or in hell that could bring my mighty Lord to such straits of sorrow and anguish as He faced in Gethsemane, except sin. To Him who is the Son of the Thrice Holiest, the ultimate sorrow is sin. One whose very essence is holiness can never be overwhelmed with physical or mental pain. The only thing that can overwhelm and crush Him is unholiness.

"The floods of ungodly men made me afraid," is the cry of the HOLY SPIRIT of the perfect moral CREATOR. Love fears nothing, shrinks from nothing, loathes nothing -- but SIN. But sin shocks Love, fills Love with horror, overwhelms Love with sorrow, crushes the very life out of Love. To Love, Sin is the ultimate, unutterably appalling horror. Sin is the death of Love -- GOD is Love. Therefore, wherever Sin floods in, and finds expression, that which is divine is crushed and broken unto death.

Gethsemane's prayer is Love's agony in the face of Sin!

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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