

ALLIANCE BIBLE CHURCH

You're Never Alone

Jesus' experience at the Garden of Gethsemane offers strength to believers in their sorrow.

By Mitch A. Schultz

NOT ALONE! (Mark 14:32-42)

Written the day after our family received news that our sons ten month battle with brain cancer was taking a turn for the worse. - May 1999

Yesterday my family faced the overwhelming realization that our son Travis, outside of God's intervention, might have only some months to live. The surgeon who met with us earlier that day was tender but firm in telling us there was nothing further that could be done for Travis. Travis's tumor had begun to expand further into the brain stem and would, in time begin to shut down his system.

My wife and I sat on our swinging bench facing the driveway, absorbing all that this meant. Wiping tears from our eyes, I looked up to see a car pulling into the driveway. As it came to a stop, our daughter and youngest son ran toward us. They knew something was not right. My daughter, Breanna, sat on my lap and asked how it had gone that day. "Not well," I told her. "Travis' symptoms will get worse because the tumor is growing again." Brett our five-year-old asked if this meant Travis will die. "Yes," I replied, "Travis will die unless Jesus changes what is happening in his body."

We all wept together on that swinging bench and for some minutes, just held each other. I was touched to see a nine-year-old and a five-year-old so full of emotion and able to cry so easily. *This will help them*, I thought. Then, with tears streaming down my face and with a

heavy lump in my throat, I looked at each of them and together we pledged that we would face this. "We will be a happy family," I told them. "We will serve Jesus together." "God will use this pain to achieve what he wants and we will be exactly the family he intended us to be." We then prayed together and the children ran into the house to find Travis.

Studying this section in Mark's Gospel, that recounts Jesus praying at Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42), has given me a surge of courage. I find myself standing here longer than I have anywhere on this journey with Christ to the cross. This section records the loneliest and most agonizing moment in the life of our Lord Jesus. All sufferers, anyone faced with illness or loss, need to come here to the garden and allow the tears of Jesus to wash the pain away.

The Lord Jesus needed to be at the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. His heart was heavy, and he needed a place to pour out His pain to His Father. He took His closest three friends with Him so that they might support Him in this moment of human agony. Mark picks up the mood with such a vivid phrase; "*He began to be deeply distressed and troubled.*" (vs.33). The presence of Peter, James and John allowed Jesus to share the depth of His pain. He told them, "*my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.*" (vs.34) The presence of the three friends with Jesus was valuable, but we find that it was insufficient. There was something about all this that the disciples could not fully share and Jesus

would have to carry it alone. He asked of them that they might stay where they are and “*keep watch*”, or pray with Him and for Him. He went further ahead as though to suggest that the full agony of this moment is one that he can only experience on His own. The weight of His burden was so heavy, Mark explains, that Jesus fell to the ground. (vs.35) There in a posture of helplessness he spoke to His Father. If there was a way out of this that would still accomplish God’s purpose, then, at that moment that is what Jesus preferred. “*Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*” (vs.36)

Years ago, I completely surrendered my life to the Lord Jesus Christ and in doing so gave Him the right to do whatever he wanted with me and through me. At that time, I also dedicated my children to God and accepted that they, too, are His to do as he wants. In these last months I have agonized over Travis's illness and have cried out to God that if there were some other way for Him to accomplish His purposes, then that is what I would prefer. My cry is an echo from the Garden of Gethsemane. “*O God, is there not some other way for you to do what you have in mind? Does it have to involve the sickness and possible death of my son? O Lord, could you not take this cup from me? I plead with you Lord that it would be another way. But Lord, not my will but yours, is what I ultimately want to subject myself to!*” You see, we endure pain when we accept that a particular trial is necessary for God to achieve what he has in mind. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus “*for the joy set before Him endured the cross scorning its shame*” because he accepted that it was the only way

for God to carry out His purpose of bringing salvation to mankind.

Jesus returned perhaps to share with His disciples His new-found courage but he found them sleeping. Disappointed with them, he again left to be with His father. He poured out His heart again to the One who “*does not sleep or slumber.*” (Psalm 121:4). It is Abba Father who lifted from Jesus the unbearable pain of what he must go through. Christ now had the courage to face the cross.

Finding the disciples sleeping again, Jesus with perhaps a sigh of disappointment said, “*Enough! The hour has come.*” (vs.41) The word *enough* to some commentators, implies that the matter is settled or dealt with. Jesus had come to terms with what he must go through and he was ready for it. In that moment of solitary pouring out of pain through prayer, God granted Him the grace to face what was inevitable.

Those of you who have suffered know that there is only one place where that grace endures and can be received. That deep well belongs to our Abba Father, and what he provides can only come in solitary moments when we have poured out our agony before Him. I am overwhelmed with the support and presence of so many that have *stayed awake* and are *watching* with us. In this trial, I have had many to lean on when the pain seems unbearable. Yet many have confessed that they can not fully share the trial to the extent we as a family will have to experience it. There are certain aspects to family pain that must be experienced only by the family.

Still, it is God alone who provides the grace reserved especially for the moments of our deepest agony. This grace enables us to go back to those who want to be our pillars of support and declare, *Enough, it is settled. I will go through with this because it is from God and necessary for God to achieve what he has in mind.*

A SERVE-ON resource... providing encouragement and motivation to those who have suffered loss or pain. For information about other SERVE-ON resources, contact Alliance Bible Church.

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