

# An Encounter with the Suffering Servant

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Friends, you meet people who affect, even change your life. Now that can be negative, leaving hurt and pain in your life, but it can also be positive, leaving you changed for the better. Suppose that you meet Jesus tonight, an encounter with him, the suffering servant, would it, has it changed you for the better, eternally better?

This chapter is full of those encounters, for example, Jesus meeting with Nathanael, a very skeptical person raising questions. Yes, young people, you may have questions about Christianity and Reformed teaching, but Nathanael, by grace, attested in the end, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." In meeting Jesus, he acknowledged it changed him, he acknowledged Jesus as his King, as the Son of God.

Or Jesus meeting with the Canaanite woman who was crying unto him, "Lord, help me!" And even when Jesus answered and said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs," she could not miss him anymore. She said, "Lord, true, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their Master's table." And then Jesus answered, he spoke to her, he spoke to her in meeting her and said to her, "O woman, great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It changed her.

Encounters with the Savior that changes life forever and one of these encounters I want to meditate with you this night is Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, after which we read in the gospel according to Matthew 26, and I want to meditate with you on the verses 36 to 45 with the help of the Lord, not only as we have entered the Passion season, a time of reflection and remembrance of the sufferings of Christ, the sufferings of the Savior, but that you may pause for a moment, pause for a moment this evening before we continue in this week and pause for a moment and meditate on the sufferings of Christ, in particular here in the garden of Gethsemane, and meet Jesus tonight so that it changes you and me, and reflect by God's grace to see for the first time, or afresh and anew what Christ's suffering is. And that is our first thought: what Christ's suffering is, and in the second place, I want to speak about how Christ's suffering ought to transform us, ought to change us.

So in the first place: what Christ's suffering is. We have read in verse 37, "began to be sorrowful and very heavy," very troubled when we meet here Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. And although Christ has been called by the prophet Isaiah, as we have read,

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and although in the scriptures very often we see that the Savior was weeping and sighing, there, for example, at the grave of his friend Lazarus we read, young people, the shortest text in scripture, "And Jesus wept." Jesus shed tears. Or in Mark 8, he was sighing deeply in his spirit, and that is also very practical tonight, that also reminds us in this Passion season and maybe even for those who are afflicted and tossed with tempests and not confident that there is an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, who is unable to sympathize with our weakness but what as in all points tempted like we are in every respect, also in your grief and in your weeping and in your sighing, but he yet without sin.

But here in Matthew 26 where Jesus is en route on his way to Golgotha via Gethsemane, we read he began. There is a change. Mark writes in chapter 14, verse 33, "And he began to be sore amazed," and the word in the original points to deeply moved, in an intense emotional state because of something causing great perplexity, we would say agony, a great agony. And this stress descended on him on his way to prayer here in the garden, the realization he was going to die, facing death. Yes, he had spoken of his death, about his death to his disciples from the moment he set his face toward Jerusalem. For example, in Luke 9, saying the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected of the elders and chief... Be slain and, yes, because most of you, I assume, went to Catechism and you could ask how could the second person of the Trinity who even in his humanity seems to anticipate every eventuality be so in agony, so sore amazed. But he is and he says of this great agony here to Peter and to James and to John, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." He is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. That differs greatly from the Christians in the first century who faced death. For example, Stephen in Acts 6, his face was like a face of the angels. Or from the accounts of the early church, those who faced death with poise and peace.

But Christ's suffering is exceedingly sorrowful facing death. What is the reason? What is the reason for Christ suffering agony? Friends, because Christ's death was far different than anyone else ever faced before or since. As we have read of the verses 39 to 44, "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." Verse 42, "He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." And verse 44, "And he left them...the third time, saying the same words." Do you hear central, central to in Christ's prayer as we see also in the parallel accounts in Mark 14 and Luke 22 is the cup, is the cup. The Lord says by Isaiah in chapter 41, drinking the cup of his fury. And Ezekiel in chapter 23 speaks of the cup of astonishment and desolation. Friends, it speaks here of the cup of God's wrath. When Christ prays here to his Father, it shows that he knows that he's facing not only a physical torture and death but is about to experience the full divine wrath of evil of the sin of all his people.

And although his full wrath was experienced on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," here in the garden of Gethsemane that he began to be sorrowful, he began to experience what God's judicial wrath was about, a great agony of divine absence, divine forsakenness. No Father. No communion for the first time since

all eternity and the presence of wrath, a wrath that is just to be feared about sin, the sins of all his people. Your sins.

Jonathan Edwards sermonizes in a sermon of 1739 speaking about Christ's agony, he says, "The conflict in Christ's soul in this view of his last suffering was dreadful beyond all expression or conception. Here in the garden of Gethsemane," Edwards continues, "was the first time that Christ has a full view of the difficulties before him. The agony of Christ was caused by a vivid, bright, full, immediate view of the wrath of God and death. God the Father, as it were, set the cup down before him and might see where he was going and might fully enter into it and bear it for us, knowing what it was. If Jesus Christ," Edwards continued, "did not fully know before he took it and drunk it, it would not properly have been his own act as a human being, but when he took that cup knowing what he did, so was his love to us infinitely more wonderful and his obedience to God infinitely more perfect."

In his obedience to the Father, in his passive obedience, that means Christ took the penalty his people deserved, he died a death his people should have died, died a death that you and I deserve and should have died; in his active obedience, meaning Christ lived the life his people should have lived, lived a life that you and I should live. Friends, if my sins were forgiven but the rest depends on how well I was living, that was not only an imperfect but also an incomplete salvation. But Christ is a complete Savior. As the Heidelberg Catechism reminds us in Question 18, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has freely given unto us a complete redemption and righteousness." That is the comfort, freely given also tonight, also tonight this undeserved gift of salvation unto us. Can you say it: our Lord Jesus Christ who has freely given to me for a complete redemption and righteousness.

The sins of his people are forgiven and they receive the benefits of his obedience. I saw it in the entrance in a book by John Murray, "a salvation accomplished and applied." Friends, keep it together. Keep it together. Christ is a complete Savior. As Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote once, "Christ is not just a dying Savior, he is a doing Savior." And we confess it in the Canons of Dort, Article 2, that speaks about the death of Christ, since therefore we are unable to make that satisfaction in our own persons and to deliver us from the wrath of God. He has been pleased in his infinite mercy to give his only begotten Son for our surety who was made sin and became a curse for us in our stead, that he might make satisfaction to the divine justice on our behalf. As the apostle says in 2 Corinthians 5, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

Oh friends, do you begin to see it is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that we are seen as righteous? That we are seen as obeying? That we are seen in our advocate the Lord Jesus Christ? That we receive peace and pardon but also love and delights? As the old form of the administration of the Lord's Supper so fittingly states as we had the Lord's Supper this morning, I was reminded where he, where Christ was bound so that you might be free from your sins, his passive obedience. Where he suffered reproaches that you might be never confounded. Where he was innocently condemned to

death so that you and I can be acquitted at the judgment seat of God. Where he suffered his blessed body to be nailed on the cross that he might fix the handwriting of our sins, that he has taken upon himself the curse due to us but he filled us with his blessings, a result of the active obedience and where he cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," that we might be accepted of God and never, and never whatever you disobey in life and never be forsaken of him.

Christ's suffering. Oh, that we by grace may echo the words of Charles Wesley, "By thy fainting in the garden, by that dreadful death. I pray, write upon my heart thy pardon, take my sins and fears away, by thy agonizing merit, gracious Lord, remember me." That's Christ's suffering. Meditation upon Christ's suffering in this Passion season, friends, it comes down we can preach for hours, you can theologize for hours, you can lecture for hours, but it comes down to this: gracious Lord, remember me. Christ absorbed the wrath of God on behalf of all his people and he did it by suffering. The apostle says in Galatians 3, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Christ who bore our sins and purchased our forgiveness and he did it by suffering. As we have read in Isaiah 53, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the sins that should have crushed us under the weight of guilt were transferred to Christ and Christ provided a perfect righteousness for us that becomes ours in him, and he did it by suffering.

Did not the apostle say he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in a human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross? Yeah, Christ defeated death and he did it by suffering death. Hebrews 2. Since therefore the children share in the flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death. So Christ disarmed Satan and he did it by suffering. Colossians 2, blotting out the handwriting of the ordinance that was against us, that is contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross and having spoiled the principalities and powers of Satan and he made show of them openly triumphing over them in it. That is Christ's purchased, perfect, final healing for all his people and he did it through suffering. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed.

That is Christ who brings his people home and he does it by his suffering. The apostle says in 1 Peter 3 Christ also suffered once for sin, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God. Fellowship with him who has loved them with an everlasting love. That is the gospel this night, for those, for you and me who deserve the wrath of God, deserve eternal death, but he came and he began to be exceedingly sorrowful and suffered. It's very remarkable Jonathan Edwards preached the same sermon at the end of his life just a couple of months before he died himself, but then he added a couple of sentences in this sermon on Christ's agony and he says, "Christ's sorrows abounded but his love did much more abound. Christ's soul was overwhelmed with a deluge of grief, but this was from a flood of love to sinners in his heart sufficient to overflow the world, and to overwhelm the highest mountains of its sins. Christ's drops of blood that fell down on the ground were a manifestation of an ocean of love in Christ's heart."

They were a manifestation. That is the gospel of this night. Whatever condition you came to church in this day, but the preaching of the gospel and the preaching of the suffering servant here in the garden of Gethsemane and Christ's drops of blood that fell down on the ground, they are a manifestation also this night of an ocean of love in Christ's heart. Oh how shall you then ask him if we neglect such a great salvation? Should it not be. Hearing of Christ's suffering for sinners, for such a one as you and me, should it not lead us to say once it was a blessing but now it is the Lord, once it was the feeling, now it is his word, once his gift I wanted, now, now himself alone. Should not that transform, change us meeting Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane?

Our second thought: how Christ's suffering ought to [unintelligible]. And in the light of this gospel passage that we have read together of Matthew 26, I leave you tonight with five considerations.

First, when we have heard of Christ's suffering for the salvation of his people, or may I say this night, for your salvation, that he was exceedingly sorrowful, that he was troubled, that he was sore amazed, that he was overwhelmed, that he was in prayer and with great patience, does that reflect in your and my life? Does our life, our daily life, is it transformed? Does that reflect in our life, spending time in prayer? Having great patience with those around us and with yourself? And at times be troubled and pressed down and even suffer for the salvation for those that are entrusted to you, your children, your grandchildren, your friends? If those that we come in contact with also this week, the church and the unchurched, the saints and the skeptics, are we troubled and pressed down and even suffer for their salvation? The apostle writes in Galatians 4, "My little children of whom I prevail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Does this gracious suffering Savior change your daily life also for this new week?

Secondly, Christ's sufferings leaving us an example to imitate him. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return. When he suffered, he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly, and he bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. Friends, how is our life? How is our life? The Apostle Peter writes for even here until you are called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps. Follow his steps even in the face of suffering. And where I teach at Puritan Reformed Seminary, for some of the students that is not theory, that is a reality, and they come from Egypt or China or Venezuela or other countries and they are persecuted, facing suffering. Or maybe for you here tonight, maybe physical suffering or pain or mental suffering or anxiety or depression or overwhelmed with the challenges of life, Christ also suffered for us, the Lord reminds us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps. See you do not forget it this week, follow his steps.

Thirdly, Christ in the garden of Gethsemane shows an unparalleled uprightness and integrity in the obedience to his Father. In Genesis, we also read about a garden and a comment, that the Lord put the first Adam in the garden of Eden and told him and Eve not to eat of the tree. But they disobeyed and we with Adam. And here is another garden

where there is the second Adam, Christ, on his way to the cross, another tree. The Father says, "Obey me," about that tree, "and you will be forsaken," facing abandonment by his Father. But he obeyed. In his life and in his death, in his teaching during the day, and in prayer in the darkest hour, he's the same in public as in private and therefore let me ask you: are you and I the same person in the dark as you are in the light? The same person, young people, in private as in public or do you have a double life? It can be. It's very honest. David, Peter, the Canons of Dort, we confess this. The Canons of Dort reminds us when we deviate from the guidance of divine grace so as to be seduced by it and to comply with the lust of the flesh, we must therefore be constant in watching, in prayer, that we are not led into temptation. And young people, you know which temptation you are thinking of or struggle with. And when these are neglected, we are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world and flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into this evil as is the lamentable fall of David and Peter and other saints described in holy scripture. And by such sins, they very highly offended God, incurred deadly guilt, grieved the Holy Spirit, interrupted the exercises of faith, very grievously wounded their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for the time. Friends, don't step over sin.

Lamentable fall. Lamentable fall. Don't point to other people. Lamentable fall. Offend God, grieve the Holy Spirit, your conscience is wounded, the exercise of faith is interrupted, and sometimes, sometimes you lose the sense of God's favor until, until and that is also what we confess, until on their return in the right way in serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them. Also, it's also what we confess, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them. Oh, living a double life, let that bring us on our knees before God and fleeing for refuge to Christ who showed an unparalleled uprightness and integrity in the obedience to his Father.

Fourthly, Christ's suffering here in the darkest hour of his life is found in prayer. It was an honest prayer. Honest prayer. God-centered prayer and yet so human. Three times the Son of God, Christ asked his Father, "Remove this cup from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done," so records Luke. The purpose of our prayers, the purpose of our prayers not to bend God's will to mine but by grace to mold my will to his. Ah, it can be so difficult at times. It can be so difficult at times but be encouraged. Thomas Watson wrote in 1663 when a Christian is weak and can hardly pray for himself, Jesus Christ is praying for him and he prays these three things. First, that the saints might be kept from sin. John 17, "I pray that thou shouldst keepest them from evil." Second, Christ prays for his people's progress in holiness. He prays in John, "Sanctify them." And third, he prays for their glorification, "Father, I will that those which thou hast given me be with me where I am." Christ is not content until when he has his [unintelligible] in his arms. And then Thomas Watson writes what a comfort when Satan is tempting, Christ is praying. Should that not change, should that not change your life, to take refuge in him, having a life of prayer? And lastly, five, Christ's suffering here in the garden shows a loving patience with his children. In Matthew's account, Jesus comes to his disciples and says, "Could you not watch with me one hour?" In the depths of his agony, he still finds something affirming to say to his friends. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Do you see, do you see maybe tonight again or for the first time, how too the words of John

are as he recorded in chapter 13 speaking about Christ having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. To the end.

Friends, how do we relate to people around us? With loving patience? With loving patience? Christ's suffering for the salvation of his people, for your salvation, meeting Jesus tonight, to whom else shall you then go? If your sins and your shortcomings, if your challenges and cares and concerns facing in your life, dealing with criticism and failures, do you still scramble for reputation or approval or significance or importance? Oh friends, look to him. Don't look who we are in ourselves but by grace who you are in him as Christ looks on you, his people. This suffering, dying Christ, a willing, an able and loving Savior, as Christ sees you in the busyness of your life and invites you also in this Passion season, also at the beginning of this week, "Come to me and I will give you rest, rest for your soul." When he sees you, maybe for those in our midst in their loneliness, even now and he offers, "There is a place by me," and he promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And when there are sorrows and shadows in your life, he humbled himself here in the garden of Gethsemane, he lowered himself to meet you where you are tonight, to bear your griefs, so Isaiah wrote, to carry your sorrows so that you can go on. Christ even now sees your challenges and cares and concerns and invites graciously and generously this evening to cast all your anxieties and worries and cares on him because he cares for you. Christ, this suffering servant, presents mercy and grace, provides comfort and hope, and provokes courage and faith. Oh meeting Jesus and seeing him also tonight, offers a safe anchor for the storms of life, offers perseverance for the battles of life, offers patience for the cares of life, offers strength for the burdens of life, and provides life for the shadows of life and extends hope for the end of life. And friends, Christ in all of this is not just a model, an example, but he is a Savior and a substitute and therefore to transform by grace through Christ and him alone, remembering his suffering and death, that we are called to show true thankfulness to God in our life and walk uprightly before him. As the apostle pleads, "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Oh friends, seeing such a dying, loving, suffering Savior, when you survey that wondrous cross, should that not transform you? Change you? And to give you to pause and to praise, "Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God." Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. Amen.

Let us pray.

*Lord, that that might be the fruit of thy word of this day, seeing Christ, love so amazing, so divine, demands our soul, our life, our all. Lord, be with us this night [unintelligible] truly might be a shabbat to rest in thee, that we may meditate upon thy word, what we have heard this morning and this evening in this new week that lies before us, that we truly may look unto thee. And again we pray be with our friends tomorrow night that they may experience thy presence, that thou will take them by heart and head and that Christ*

*is in the midst of this congregation to lead, to guide them as the King of the Jews who has promised, "I will never leave you, never forsake you." Lord, we ask all these things in the forgiveness of our sins that are many but that we rest in that finished and complete work of the Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.*