

Front Page - August 2017

Gethsemane - The Participants

The Participants in Gethsemane

There were three peoples in Gethsemane, those who were of earth namely the disciples, one from Heaven, the angel who ministered to the Lord, and the Lord Himself. The disciples were in three groups, the eight who were left at a distance were Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James, Thaddaus, Simon (Matt. 10:2-3), the three who were taken with the Lord were Peter, James and John, and Judas was with the multitude who came to take the Lord.

- a) For reason or reasons we are not told, the Lord takes the three disciples, Peter, James, and John into unique experiences the others were not privileged to share. They were with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration, when He raised Jairus' daughter, and while the eleven were in the garden, the three of them went a little further with the Lord.
- b) While we cannot know the fullness of the purposes for things which God does, yet in bringing the eleven into the garden it meant there were lessons to be learnt from the experience. It seems to me that some of those lessons would be a continuum on the pathway of holiness, a theme He had begun in the upper room.
 - i) They would have learnt that when dark days are on the horizon, pray, and things are not always as they appear. For them, days were imminent when hopes would be dashed, confusion would agitate their minds, their future and purpose of life would never look darker. What then? Pray.
 - ii) They would have realized the need for watchfulness when his satanic majesty was about to work.
 - iii) They learnt how quickly boastfulness would be put to the test as it was with Peter. He had said, "Though all forsake thee yet will not I" (Mk. 14:29), yet flees like the rest of the disciples.
 - iv) They would have learnt the weakness of the flesh when it comes to spiritual warfare. They all slept, but the Lord singles out Peter, and it is recorded, "He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?" (Mk. 14:37)
 - v) Whatever the reason, there can be no doubt that for at least these three disciples, the sight of their prostrate Master wailing in petitioning, self-will and sin would never be the same again. They would understand ultimately the fullness of the love of God and Christ, the value God puts on His holiness, the genuineness of the yearnings of His heart for the blessing of man, and human beings could never be viewed the same.
- c) Very touching that, the man who was the epitome of sympathy finds none in His hour of need. The professors all slept.

The Lord tells the disciples to, "Watch and pray". Why? "That ye enter not into temptation" (Matt 26:41; Mk. 14:38; Lk. 22:40). Several observations are to be made. The Lord does not say, "That we enter not into temptation". This was a danger for the disciples alone. Again, He does not ask the disciples to pray for him, but for their own preservation.

Zechariah 13:7

It is of note that in Zechariah 13:7 it does not say, "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered". It does say, "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones". The Lord gives the divine commentary telling who the Smiter is for He adds the words, "**I will** smite the shepherd" (Matt. 26:31; Mk. 14:27) showing that the smiting would come from God. The smiting had not yet come, it would come at Calvary in the hours of darkness. Thank God the smiting did not come from the father of lies (Jn. 8:44) or from the hands of men, it was the Lord who, "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6), "He (God) hath made Him to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The Angel

The sending of the angel leads to at least two questions:

- a) What was the purpose of the angel being sent?
- b) How did He strengthen the Lord?

Front Page - August 2017

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Perhaps the experience of Daniel may give us some insights. Daniel is given an understanding by God of the future, part of which is the millennial reign of the Lord. However, the glorious days of the beginning of the millennium (Dan. 9:24) were a long way off, and dark clouds were on the horizon. Daniel was brought into a state of anguish and weakness (Dan. 10:8, 16-17), but in the kindness of God an angel then is sent to strengthen him, “Then there came again and touched me one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me, And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me” (Dan. 10:18-19). That which caused Daniel the second weakness (Dan. 10:16) was the knowledge of that which was to come on the people of God in days to come (Dan. 10:14). However, the Lord knew that the kingdom was a long time off when He would eat the fruit of the vine (Matt. 26:29) and had the knowledge of that which lay ahead of Him, His baptism of bearing the divine judgment for sins (Lk. 12:50; Jn. 18:11). Yet, being truly man, it resulted in great grief and anguish which caused weakness. Neither Matthew, Mark, nor John tell of the strengthening angel, it is only in Luke. Angels came to announce His birth (Lk. 2:9); they came after His temptations (Matt. 4:11); after His resurrection (Matt. 28:2); and after His ascension (Acts 1:10). After the temptations they (plural) minister unto Him, in Gethsemane one angel strengthens Him. How profound this is. He who is truly God is so completely human, going through experiences so deep, that no terrestrial being can help, but only one sent from God. Our Lord, having a human body, knew weariness and weakness. After He was scourged His body was so weakened, Simon was compelled to carry His cross (Matt. 27:32), then with amazement we read, “He was crucified through weakness” (2 Cor. 13:4).

There is very little said about the angel, for we do not know who he was, what He said, nor his rank in the celestial court. Some may suggest that it was Gabriel, whose name means “strength of God”, but there is no Biblical evidence for such. To my mind all these are irrelevant, for the matter is that in this angel coming, it showed the sympathy of Heaven. On earth the disciples were sleeping, unaware of that which was happening and going to happen. In the city the chief priests, elders, religious soldiers, and Judas were gathering together and coming to the garden. They were intent on that which they were determined to happen. They cared not nor had any sympathy for Him. In His loneliness, agony, and internal grief, heaven can hold back no longer, God sends an angel. The unspoken message is clear. All of those in Heaven care, those in heaven know what is going to happen, and heaven cares for you.

There is a parallel in the words of encouragement spoken by the man to Daniel (Dan. 10:5-21) as that which was spoken to Joshua (Josh. 1:9) on the eve of the great conquest of Canaan and the leading of God’s people into their inheritance. Thus, while the central subject is the same, a man strengthened by an angel sent from God, there are surrounding events that are both very similar and yet quite different. As our Lord went into the garden He was greatly burdened, not by that which was going to come on His people, but because of that which He was going to experience because of His own love for His people. The people of God would know, and in the future will yet know great affliction, but it is because of their own sin. The Lord was going to know affliction not because of His own sin, for He was without sin, but for theirs and ours.

. . . Rowan Jennings