

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD SERIES

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Matthew 26, when our Lord Jesus Christ was in Gethsemane from verse 36 to 46
“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.’ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’ Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, a second time, He went away and prayed saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’ And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and He prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ‘Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.”

We have here Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, and He is struggling in His prayer. There was a struggle or war in His soul; He was having soul travail. He says, “Father God if it is possible let this hour pass away from Me. Let Me not need to go through all these. But if there is no other way then let me go through.” Many people don’t understand what Jesus is going through at this time here because they look at this passage from a human perspective. I have seen many films on Jesus and they show how our Lord Jesus Christ was about to go to the cross. Here He is at the garden of Gethsemane and most of the time they display

the physical suffering more than the spiritual and the soul suffering. Sometimes preachers use to preach the suffering of Christ by describing the crucifixion in the physical details. No doubt physically it was painful.

They used to talk about how they would take the rusty nails and they would put it on His hands, then they would take the hammer and they would strike it in. They talk about how He was whipped physically, how His skin peeled open at the back until it reveals His raw flesh and how He carried the cross on the very back where it just been wounded. When He was on the cross, they talk about how they nailed His feet and He was raised up the weight of the whole body was suspended on those nails and all kinds of physical description. They could really do it well and make you cry because Jesus went to the cross. Sometimes when we do all these we forget that crucifixion is a common way to kill criminals in Jesus' time. Jesus was not the only one crucified. There were two others that were crucified with Him and there were many others before Him and many others after Him whom the Roman government crucified. It was the common way they executed criminals and that kind of description leaves us with the impression that when Jesus was at prayer in Gethsemane that He was just anticipating that physical suffering and that was all that He was struggling about. However that was not the only area. It's only a small part of the suffering of Jesus. Physical suffering and physical death was only a small tiny part of what He bore for you and I compared to other more important areas of Jesus' suffering.

When Jesus was there in the garden praying, He was not afraid of physical death. There is no fear in His life of death. He Himself prophesies in Matthew 16 that in three days the Son of Man shall be raised from the death. He will be delivered, He will be crucified and He will rise again. If you know you will be raised physically you wouldn't be afraid. If you knew you would be raised in three days and they put you in the firing squad, there will be no problem for you. You know you are going to be raised. You will die with dignity.

So there is more than what we see in the physical suffering of Jesus but what Jesus experienced in Gethsemane was the spiritual separation from God and Him becoming sin and taking sin for our lives that He has never ever done before. Jesus lived a pure sinless life, He has never known sin, He has never yielded to sin but

He knew that on the cross He was going to be sin so that we can be the righteousness of God. He was taking the pain not only of our physical suffering; He has to take the curse of death, spiritual death. The curse of sin and all the curse of the law on Himself and to Jesus I believe the spiritual separation He experiences from God is the greatest agony that He would ever experience. For someone who walked close to the Father as He had, who has never been separated from God the Father before, who had never lived a life of disharmony, to be separated from the Father even for a split second is sure torture. And so Jesus Christ in Gethsemane began to take the sins of the whole world. He began to feel it upon His being. That is why just before His prayer in the garden, Jesus had the cup called the Lord's Supper. In Matthew chapter 26:26 Jesus had taken bread and broke it and said this is My body broken for you. After that Jesus took the wine and He said this is My blood shed for the remission of sin. Notice His concern was sin. He has come to do away with sin. Could you imagine that here in the Holy Communion, He took the cup and said this is My blood. Imagine when they were drinking it say this is Jesus' blood that they were drinking. They were drinking of His life and the agony He went through spiritually was very intense. He struggled within Himself as a man because of sin. He has never allowed sin to be upon Him. It is sure torture for Jesus to bear sin. In fact it was suffering for Him to live among us. All those 33 years that He had lived was suffering. He has to take sin upon Himself, be separated from God fully. II Cor.5: 21 tells us that He became sin for us. He literally took that sin upon Himself. None of us can ever know what it was like. We all were born in sin and then we were born again. None of us knew what it was liked to be sinless and to experience the awfulness of sin. None of us can experience the agony that Jesus experienced.

There are some religious folks today especially in the Philippines who try to re-experience the cross in a small measure physically by undergoing the crucifixion experience themselves physically. But no human being on earth could experience what Jesus experienced in the soul realm and in the spirit realm, of a pure and undefiled spirit and soul coming into contact with sin. The cup that Jesus drank in the Holy Communion He took that cup symbolically right to the garden of Gethsemane. That's why in chapter 26:9 Jesus had that cup. That cup was a symbol of His whole life, His whole being, His blood and when He took that cup before God He says in verse 39, "*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.*" Now in the Holy Communion that cup for us represent the forgiveness of sins but for Jesus that cup represents Him becoming sin. In II Cor.5: 21 Jesus was

made sin so that we can be made the righteousness of God. It is symbolized in that cup during Holy Communion. When you and I partake of that Holy Communion we became righteousness but when Jesus partook of that cup He became our sin. There was an exchange. It was a covenant of blood. In the Old Testament they called that a Blood Covenant. In a sense it was an unfair exchange. We took His righteousness and He took our sins. He did it because He loves us.

When Jesus took that cup, He said this is My blood, it's shed for you and He took the same cup to the garden lifted it up to the Father and said Father take this cup from Me. I cannot imagine that Jesus was unwilling to die for us. Some people said that at that point Jesus felt unwilling to die for us. I don't think so. If He were unwilling to die for us, He wouldn't have come down in the first place. If He were unwilling, He wouldn't have emptied Himself in Philippians 2 and come down to this earth. Philippians 2 tells us He shed His glory and came down as human life and lived among sinful man. He was willing to come for us. But what He was struggling in the garden of Gethsemane none of us can comprehend. He had to become sin. To you and I who have known sin to a certain degree, we don't feel the pain of it.

Let me illustrate, if a father sees his children sinning, there would be hurt in the father's heart. See sin hurts. But for Jesus it was not just an experience of compassion for us, Jesus had to literally take that pain and experience it upon Himself. Jesus Himself had to contact with sin and know what it is like. That was the part, which Jesus agonized over. It was not physical death. He had no fear of physical death but Jesus had to see sin in others and get hurt by that sin. He now Himself had to take sin upon Himself; He had to be separated from the Father. The Father was His life, His love, His source and His everything. Now Jesus had to be separated. You can imagine the agony; the agony is more of the experience of separation. He wouldn't even want to be separated one second, but He had to be separated 3 days and 3 nights. That is why when Jesus was on the cross at the point of intense suffering He cried in Matthew 27:46, *And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* The most intense moment of His suffering had started already in Gethsemane and climaxed about the ninth hour, that is, between 12 noon and 3 pm. That was a cry from the depth of His being. Now what was He experiencing? The forsaking of God. He was experiencing extreme separation from

God, which is sin. Sin is separation from God. He was experiencing sin and separation to the fullest.

You never read that He cried when they whipped Him. You never read that He cried when they pressed the thorns on His head. You never read that He cried when they forced Him to carry that cross on His back that has been bleeding and wounded. You never read of His cry when they pierced His hands physically. But you read about His cry when He spiritually suffered for you and I. Let me emphasize that physical suffering is nothing compared to the spiritual suffering. All those films about Jesus have over emphasized the physical suffering of Jesus. If you realized that the spiritual is more intense than the physical, you can imagine what it's like. Even the world in that time when it was 12 noon when the sun was supposed to be at its brightest, it was the darkest in the spiritual realm for Jesus. Jesus started that area of suffering in Gethsemane. The moment He drank of that cup that represents sin, then all the evil started happening to Him. In a sense evil exerted its victory over Jesus for those three days and three nights. You must understand the laws of God. Unless you fall spiritually you cannot fall naturally. Until Jesus voluntarily yielded no one could touch Him. Do you know that in the Bible there is a law that says, unless a man dies spiritually he cannot die naturally.

In the Garden of Eden when God told Adam and Eve, don't eat of this fruit, for in the day you eat it you will die. You and I know that Adam and Eve ate it but they didn't die immediately. They died some 900 over years later physically. But God said in the day you eat it you will die. What was God referring to was spiritual death. The day you disobey you die spiritually and then the physical death follows. From that day Adam and Eve died spiritually, sickness came into the Garden of Eden. Imperfection came in; the process of ageing came in. They could have lived 1000 years and still look the same as God created them but when they died spiritually every part of their being, spirit, soul and body begin to experience the aging and destruction process. For the first time physical body began to decay. The process of decay took 900 over years in Adam's time because there were a lot of other reasons. The climatic situation was different before Noah's flood. But we see the main point that he died physically.

If Jesus did not die spiritually, do you know He will never die physically? It must

take place in the spiritual realm first. By spiritual death I want you to understand that the definition of spiritual death is merely separation from God. It does not mean annihilation and it does not mean non-existence. It means existence separate from God. So from the moment Jesus took of that cup, He has voluntarily chosen to take spiritual death upon Himself. Here is where you see the love of Jesus Christ. He went in by His choice. Every step of the way at anytime if Jesus had said I cannot take it anymore, everything would have stopped. At any step during that time from the betrayal, the trial and the persecution and the crucifixion if Jesus said, "No, I am not going further with this", everything would have stopped. The marvelous thing about the love of Jesus is that He still went ahead.

Even right there at the garden of Gethsemane, remember after His prayer, He came to His disciples because He knew that the betrayer was at hand. So all those soldiers came in the garden looking for Him led by Judas and when they were there, they identified Him. They captured Him. Peter took his sword and he cut somebody's ear. Jesus said put your sword back, don't you think that I can call to God now and He will send me twelve legions of angels. In Matthew 26:52-53 *"But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels.'" We know from the Old Testament one angel is enough to wipe a whole army. Jesus said I have twelve legions. Jesus said I have $12 \times 6000 = 72000$ angels anytime at My disposal. What is that compared to your sword, He told Peter that. Jesus said, put it off. If I want to come out of this I will just tell My Father. You know what caused Jesus to surrender Himself? His love. You and I won't understand if Jesus went through without the power to be free. Many of us claim to be suffering for Jesus but do you know that suffering is something you can get out anytime you want. Not something that circumstances forced on you. Some people say I am suffering for Jesus. Sometimes when people make mistake they are persecuted for their mistake not because of their life for Jesus. If you are persecuted for your mistake, that is not persecution. That is repayment for what you sow. But true persecution and suffering for Jesus is when you live righteously, you live right with God and you chose to bear the evils of the world especially human imperfection against you. But the most glorious part is this, that you are not a victim of circumstances. You have a choice to come out anytime.*

Paul said in the book of Corinthians he went through hunger, he went through shipwreck, he went through fasting, he went through all those suffering. Do you know that anytime if Paul wants to stop those suffering he can. He could have an easy life being a rabbi. After all he was taught by one of the best teachers of that time, Gamaliel. He could have made tents and taught the rabbinic schools. But what make Paul willing to forsake that and go and preach the Gospel? Paul he says I am constrained by the love of God, so I chose to suffer inconveniences, I chose to be without something that I could easily obtain. I chose to give up something so that for the love of God I could bring the Gospel to those who are lost. He could have stopped the whole process. Paul was not a victim of circumstances. Some people today say they are going without, they are hungry, they are thirsty, and they are in poverty. Not so much they say they are suffering for Jesus but they are victim of circumstances. Paul was not when Paul says that he went without, hungry at times, shipwrecked. Do you know Paul was able to support himself anytime he wants. He was able to enjoy prosperity anytime he wanted but he went without so that the Gospel could go on. He says this is the suffering of Jesus.

When Jesus Christ was suffering, the first thing started when He was captured. He was not a victim of circumstances; He was not incapable of setting Himself free. What kept Jesus there? It was not the soldiers, He had angels to destroy the soldiers anytime. What kept Jesus there in the trial? What kept Him meek and quiet as a lamb? When they slapped Him, when they pulled His beard, when they tortured Him, didn't He have the power to be free? But love held Him there. Every time they did all those things, He knew He was doing this because of love. Because of love He was willing to be slapped, because of love He is willing to be beaten. Because of love He was willing for people to just bruise Him and mock Him and even when He was at the cross, when they nailed Him to the cross and they were challenging Him, I believe Satan was speaking through them when they said, if you are the Son of God come down from the cross and show us. Did you know that at that point He could have come down? When they were mocking Him, to the whole world He looks like a failure. Right there hanging on the cross, do you know they really sound like Satan when they said if you are the Son of God come down from the cross. If they only knew Jesus had the power to come down. But if He did the plan of God would have been upset. When He was hanging on the cross, I wonder how He felt? It was not the nail that kept Him to the cross. He was stronger than the nails; He was stronger than the whole Roman army. It was the

love of Jesus Christ that says, "I am doing this for you Father and I am doing this for them. They know not what they do. They don't understand but Father I am right here because I love You and I love them." And His love kept Him on the cross. His love for you and I, the love of Jesus Christ.

What kind of love do you have? People hurt you a bit you give up. You are confronted by sin and difficulty and you get upset. Then you rebuke and hurt others unnecessarily. But Jesus never at one time throughout His whole crucifixion cause any hurt. Jesus never at one time spoke an unkind word because His love was flowing out, the love of Jesus Christ. After all He came to love us. If you understand the love of Jesus Christ you will realize that those difficulties you are going through, those relationship that you find it hard to exercise love is nothing compared to what Jesus had to relate to. He had to love those who don't love Him. He had to love those who hated Him. He had to love those who cause the crucifixion and He did love them. He says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." This is the love of Jesus Christ. It's a powerful love and it is this love that Jesus said that we have to love one another. And it is with this love that it's more powerful than any force on earth. Faith, hope and love but the greatest is love. This love of God can do what human beings cannot do.

Human beings sometimes try to rehabilitate a hardened criminal. Sometimes criminals who have killed people, who treat human beings like playthings, for them human lives are worthless. Some of those hardened criminals in prison where human psychology could not change them, human efforts cannot change them, and human punishment also did not change them. Some of those criminals who are punished in prison, when they come out they are worse. It looks like nothing in the world can change these hardened crooks. Some of them when they met Jesus, the love of Jesus Christ conquered them. What the world cannot do to change them, Jesus in one split second through His powerful love changed them into people who love others and who love humanity. It's a powerful love that can change a human being. It's a powerful love that can change you and I. None of us will be here today if it were not for the love of Jesus Christ. Many people tried all kinds of method to reach others but love never fails. Everyone of your method will fail. You tried rebuking, it didn't work. You tried scolding, it didn't work. You tried punishment, it didn't work. Try love, the love of God. All you have to do is just keep loving.

There is one wonderful book called Agape Love. The author talks about his experience in love. He says many times he confront people who have not been loved and they don't know how to react to agape love. They run away. He talked about how he handled some of the most difficult children and he started loving them. They run from him. He talked about how there was one particular child he recorded in his book. How the child keeps scorning him and all he keep saying was I love you. And the child spitted at him and walked off. The child keeps coming back and mocked at him. Every time he sees the child he says I love you and he kept loving, day-by-day, month-by-month. One day the child was sitting all alone by the corner. The parents had given up on the child. The parents couldn't handle the child anymore. He came to the child and put his hands on the shoulder and said I love you. The child kicked him and walked away. He came back again, and he said John I love you. The child could not stand it and he broke down and cried. For the first time that steel curtain was broken. From that day onwards they began to see a change in that child.

Love is powerful, love never fail. Your love and my love, our human affection may fail but do you know that is how God changed our life. Some of us have ran away from God, some of us have fallen into some weaknesses and sins and the world tells us and sometimes Christian tells us I don't love you anymore. But God literally gets on your back. You may have done the worst thing in the world, you have backslidden, and here comes God and He says I love you. You could hardly stand it. You run and finally He finds you again and He says I love you. You cannot run from His love. Heaven and earth cannot separate you from the love of God. He keeps coming and say I love you. That is how He changes us. Finally one day in our backsliding, in our weaknesses, in our imperfection we turn and say God I love you too. That's the day you changed.

The Bible tells us in I John we love God because He first loves us. I John 4:9-10 *"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."* You never know what is like until you know the love of God. Right now every one of you have different capacity to love.

Your capacity to love is proportional to your capacity that you have allowed yourself to be loved by God. Noel Hayes says at one time he was with Jesus and shaking over in His presence and Jesus said, "I want to love my people but they never let Me love them. They never stay in My presence and allow Me to love them." Don't see it the wrong way. Don't demand love from others. You love others. Don't go to others and say, "You'd better love me or else.." That is wrong. You should be the one loving others. But how can we love others until we have come to God and receive His love and experience His love? Up till now you have only tasted one drop in the great ocean of God's love. There is so much more of His love that Paul talks about. He says that I may know God and the fullness of His love to be loved by God.

I remember one time when I was in a Baptist church, I was fasting 40 days and nights and it was in the middle of my fast that God woke me up one morning about four something in the morning. I woke up and it was still dark. Then suddenly there is a presence, which I recognized to be the presence of God and seemingly out of nowhere comes a sweet voice. That was the first time I heard Him speaking in that manner. That voice said, "Son, I love you." When Jesus tells you He loves you, He does something to you. There laying on my bed wide awake, when I heard Him tell me that, I started to cry and I got up and I wept in His presence. We cannot stand His love; it's too great, too powerful. You may not have heard His audible voice but I want you to know that the words of God run all over the world today through the Holy Spirit and God is saying countless and million of times I love you. He is telling you He loves you. And the day you would stop long enough to appreciate His love, to receive His love, is the day God will change your life.

You may say that I never had a father's love. It doesn't matter. I never had too. My father brought me up in the same oriental style. We never know closeness. We never know what it is to kiss our parents. In fact all through my life I have never heard my father say, "I love you." I knew he did of course he must have but he never said that word to me. Only when I went to the seminary God dealt with me and told me, "I want you to go and tell your father you love him." So in one of our vacations we went back and I told my father, "Father, I just want to let you know that I love you." He said 'hum'. That's the only response I got. But I didn't know it, slowly his heart began to open to me and he began to open

things to me. It took him time. He had to humble himself too to the love of God. You know people react to love. Most of the time when another person comes to you and eyeball-to-eyeball, say, "I love you with the love of the Lord" all of us start feeling uncomfortable. Why is that so? We are not used to being loved. We are not used to the love of God. But that's the way God's love is. It just keeps flowing through you and to you. Every time when somebody comes to you and the person look you eyeball to eyeball and say, "I love you with the love of the Lord." - if you feel uncomfortable, that's something wrong with you. That's something in your being that could not receive love. Why? Privately you have not received God's love for there is no fear in love. Love cast out all fear.

I feel uncomfortable when people tell me I love you with the love of the Lord in my early days but when God started changing my life and I began to understand His love and see His love then when people say I love you with the love of the Lord, I say yes, I love you with the love of the Lord too. At first when I started saying it, it was a bit artificial, it was almost like I don't like you but I love you with the love of the Lord. Remember you may have the power to get out of some suffering; you may have the power to free yourself from relationships.

There is a sister I know in the ministry; she finds it hard to handle certain types of people. From time to time she had left churches from early days. She will leave one church when a problem starts and she will run to another. The marvelous thing is that the same cycle of troubles starts, only with different actors. She kept running to other churches and it was like a wandering in the wilderness for her. Everywhere she goes the same cycle gets repeated and it was like God wanted to promote her but she could not get through that stage. So she keeps running round in circles. See she had the power to be free and she chose to be free from troubles instead of sticking to love others in the midst of troubles. Every time when you are not able to love, there's something wrong with you, not with the others. That is why I believe a Christian can only grow spiritually by linking up with brothers and sisters in the Lord in a local church. Christians can never be perfected if they run from meeting to meeting, seminar to seminar. We call them the convention Christians.

