

## "HE WENT A LITTLE FARTHER"

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Matthew 26:39.

After the eventful moonlight walk from Jerusalem, Jesus came to a place at the foot of the Mount of Olives called "Gethsemane", where He entered upon a scene, the grandeur of which is only exceeded by that of Calvary. The sufferings of the Lord in the garden were purely mental; those on the cross were physical also.

How familiar we are with the names of the places associated with the life of Jesus! Just as Jesus immortalized the men and women with whom He spoke, so He has given enduring fame to the villages and the haunts He visited. This is another proof of the unique personality of Jesus. His presence in a place gave it an abiding name. The names of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Bethany, Olivet, Gethsemane, and Calvary are precious. Each place connotes some experience in the life of Jesus, and the mention of the name recalls it. Bethlehem is reminiscent of peace; Nazareth of dutifulness and toil; Galilee is fragrant with love; Bethany, of the tenderness of intimacy; Olivet is suggestive of prayer and faith; Gethsemane is full of agony and tears; Calvary speaks of the tragedy which was the triumph. The names are current in modern speech, and they carry with them the significance of the experience of Jesus.

Jesus can never be forgotten. His experience is embedded in the soul. His biography is in the very terms we use. But to Christian hearts no name is more sacred than Gethsemane. The heart is melted at the sound. The mind is saddened at the thought. In Gethsemane Jesus was in anguish. His heart was plowed with pain. He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. The heart is awed at the sight of the Son of God on His knees in the garden.

It would be comparatively easy to pass these words by without much notice when reading the graphic story of our Lord's agony in Gethsemane, except that on a more careful perusal they haunt one with their amazing pathos and tremendous implications. The time had come for Jesus to go farther than His disciples could ever go. The limit of that journey which they could make in company with Him had been reached. For many months He had gone to and fro with them, and He had delighted in it in spite of their shortcomings. But now He must go a little farther, while the disciples tarry behind, sleeping.

Our Lord's experience in the Garden of Gethsemane on that never-to-be-forgotten night is an experience as black as midnight; yet it is one as radiant as the sunlight. The agony He suffered is expressed in His own words, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Judas, one of the trusted, intimate Twelve, was out in the city betraying Him for thirty pieces of silver. Eight of the twelve were at the entrance of the garden, sleeping. The other three, Peter, James, and John, were just "a stone's throw" from Him and were sleeping. Soon Judas would enter and betray Him with a kiss. With Judas was a band of officers ready to arrest Him; all of the disciples would then flee, and a little later on in the night He was to sit alone in the judgment hall, with Peter denying Him with oaths. Blood stood on His body like drops of sweat. Was there ever a midnight so dark! Yet, in the very depth of His darkness He could pray: "The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide." It is out of this deep, dense darkness that almost brilliant light and heartening encouragement comes. Out of such darkness light shows up in all of its brilliance. "The blaze of noon" is seen in His demeanor, in His acts, in His purpose, in His steadfastness and unmovableness on that awful night. It was on that night that Jesus "Went a little farther."

Jesus here sets the example, paces the march, reveals the spirit and charts the course for us all. The "little farther" that He went was not far when measured by the tape-line, but what a distance when measured by the actual line of Christian experience. Jesus had taken with Him Peter, James, and John into the very garden of His impending crisis because He was eager for human companionship and sympathy. The disciples were sleepy; He was agonizing. They were dreaming of thrones and crowns, and who would be the greatest in the kingdom; He was thinking of the plan of salvation and how it was to be made possible by dying on the cross. This "little farther" marks the difference in the average, the ordinary, and the out-and-out Christian. This is the explanation why one is ordinary and another is a glowing success. In this "little farther" is seen the reason why one church is a dynamo of power for God and another is living "at a poor, dying rate." If each of us would do what Jesus did in Gethsemane, namely, go "a little farther," all of us as Christians would be happier, more joyous, and more useful.

When the cup of human guilt was held out to Jesus, His pure heart revolted from the pain and shame. He had the tenderest of human hearts. His feelings were exceedingly sensitive. He dreaded the ordeal and trembled to stretch out His hand to take the cup. He writhed in the thought of drinking its bitter contents. He longed to avoid the ordeal, but, having the redemptive love, Jesus saw that the cup was inevitable. To save, He must die. To find, He must lose. In His distress, He prayed, and His prayer was a cry. "O my Father! If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

The courage and simplicity, frankness and submissiveness, wisdom and humility of that prayer make it the most spiritual speech in human language. It is spirituality in a word. Jesus said a great deal about prayer, but the world has learned most from His own immortal prayer in Gethsemane.

Jesus "went a little farther" in every field that He touched.

### 1. In Prayer.

How far did He go in prayer that night? One gospel writer says that He went "about a stone's throw," and fell on His face and prayed. He first prayed that if it were possible the cup might pass from His lips. Then He prayed, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." When one goes that far in prayer, one is in the glowing light of answered prayer. There was no formality about that prayer of Jesus. It was burning with earnestness, blazing with desire, and baptized in blood. We need to go farther in prayer. If we will go farther in prayer, we will go farther in submission, in advancement, in consecration.

### 2. In Sympathy and Understanding.

In whatever sphere or situation that needed sympathy and understanding, Jesus at once entered into it sympathetically and wholeheartedly. If it was a case of sorrow or want, a circumstance of misfortune, a condition of handicap, a question of perplexity, an issue calling for deep discernment, Jesus was keenly alert and ever ready. People of all classes instinctively felt the warmth of His sympathy and the lift of His power.

You have been in trouble, in need of counsel, in deep and poignant sorrow. In that time of special need a friend or friends came to you, spoke words of comfort and encouragement, put their arms about you, or just looked sympathetically at you. Your heart was comforted, your burden was lifted, your cloud vanished. We should go farther in showing sympathy to those who are in need. Jesus went to Mary and Martha in the dark night of their trouble. How cheered their hearts were!

When it comes to a more sympathetic understanding and a more gracious spirit with reference to others, we can go much farther. When we see a man limping, we do not know what tack or gravel may be in his shoes. A North Carolina pastor told about a young woman, a telephone operator who belonged to his church, who came to him with tears in her eyes. She told him that a day or two before she was making a long-distance connection for a party; the connection was perfected, but the man could scarcely speak. He attempted, but it was a miserable attempt. The young lady operator became angry at the confusion and delay of this man and said cuttingly: "What is the matter? Why don't you tell the man what you want?" The man pulled himself together and said: "Please excuse me, Operator. I have received news of the sudden death of my son. I will soon get myself together so I can talk." "Oh," said the young woman to her pastor, "I was cruel. I can't sleep for thinking about it. He needed sympathy instead of scolding. Of course, had I understood the circumstances, I would have had a different attitude."

### 3. In Love.

Our Lord went farther in love than any of us have gone. It was love that caused Him to pray all night on the mountain, and to suffer the agonies of Gethsemane. It was love that led Him to Calvary. And He went far enough to open the door of salvation for every lost soul.

Love opened wide the door for me,  
Restored my soul, and set me free;  
His life He freely gave, my life to save,  
'Twas love that opened wide the door for me.

We should love Him "because He first loved us."

### 4. In Sacrifice.

He did not think of Himself; He thought only and solely of others. He was not selfish; He was magnanimous to the last degree. We speak of the sacrifices we make. How do our sacrifices compare with the sacrifice Jesus made? But for His sacrifice, we would still be in our sins; lost, wretched, and undone.

Going "a little farther" will solve our problems. It will solve our problems between individuals. It will solve home problems. It will help solve any problem. On a cold November morning a judge rose early to catch an early train to go to an adjoining county to hold court that week. When he got to the depot, the newspaper boys were crying their papers. One came running up to him, barefooted, cold, and shivering, as he said: "Mister, buy a paper." The judge, a student of human nature, asked: "What does your papa do, son?" "My papa is dead, Mister, my mother takes in washing. I help her mornings and evenings, before and after school, by selling papers. Mister, buy a paper." The judge, deeply moved, asked him how many he had. "Only eight; I have sold all but eight." The judge ran his hand in his pocket, got out a fifty-cent piece, and said, "Here, son, I will take them all." The boy's eyes danced and gleamed. To the judge's surprise, the boy did not make a dash for home, but inched up closer and closer to him. "Had you better not run home, warm your feet, get some breakfast and go to school? Aren't you cold?" said the judge. "I was cold," he said, his eyes softened by such kindness, "until I found you. I am not cold now." What that boy needed was the warmth of a big heart like that; a man who would go "a little farther" with him. Has someone gone a little farther with you? How sacred are the memories of such hours!

The spirit of going "a little farther" will settle church problems. If we want to win the lost, we can do it by going "a little farther." All of us need to go "a little farther" with Jesus.

True religion is the reverent acceptance of the Father's will. The Lord Jesus was prepared to submit to the will of His Father. "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The Father's will was the ultimate authority, the perfect wisdom, the consummate love. It is difficult for us to come to that. We know that it is right that He should rule, that all His decrees are wise, that all His ways are best. But it is hard to make the creed of the intellect the submission of the soul. Yet, this is the hall-mark of personal Christianity, or spirituality.