



# Go back to Gethsemane...

by Peter Pollock

**M**ANY years ago I was in Jerusalem as part of a Christian tour party. It was nearing the end of the trip and we were at the Garden Tomb. It was an emotional time! A plaque told us that “He Is Risen” and we shared communion as a group, breaking bread, sipping the red grape juice, praying for each other and of course wallowing in the glory of what Jesus had done for us. An emotional time, indeed. Very special!

But as we were celebrating God’s goodness and great love, I really felt a communication via the Holy Spirit. Simply, the message was “Peter, go back to Gethsemane. You have missed something.”

I truly felt it was God speaking, and as it worked out we had a free day available prior to our flight back to South Africa. On that final day a few of us in our group decided we were going to start in the Garden of Gethsemane and walk the whole route Jesus took that Good Friday so long ago – finishing, with another visit to the Garden Tomb.

I don’t want to go into all the intricate details of what happened that day and how it all conspired to make it perhaps the greatest day of revelation in my whole Christian walk. The crux of everything occurred not in the normal Garden of Gethsemane that all the tourists visit.

We were not allowed in because we had shorts and were obviously dressed too irreverently for access to this holy place! But we got in next door where there stands

a statue of Jesus depicting the time He sweated blood. We gathered around and shared communion – and while we were praying I happened to look up at the statue. Three great revelations hit me!

Firstly I realised that the Lord Jesus had not just died for the sins of the world but had, into the bargain, died very specially for me. He had sweated blood for me. He had gone through the extreme anguish of sweating blood for me!

The Bible tells us that “His soul was sorrowful even unto death.” These were not idle words or an exaggeration. The human frame can only take so much. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. Jesus had to get to the Cross! God’s whole plan was at stake. The ultimate conflict!

## Intensity

Jesus did not fear death on the Cross – it was His purpose. But He feared the ability of his body/flesh to survive the sorrow, anguish and agony of Gethsemane and Calvary. He fell, and prayed three times. What incredible satanic intensity!

Our tiny finite little minds cannot even begin to comprehend the sheer horror of it all as He who “loathed” sin had to bear my sin. Jesus was mocked by his own! He was spat at, a huge insult in that day and age. He was scorned, lashed, scourged! Those 12 thongs meant 468 stripes.

Isaiah 52:14 tells that His visage was marred more than any man. We all remember Mel Gibson’s *Passion* film and we were all abhorred by how gruesomely

it was portrayed. But in truth, it was worse than that!

In fact it was a prophetic and profound warning and reminder to us all to get us back to Gethsemane and the Cross. The crucifixion was horrid, painful and cursed. The nail in the wrist through the principal median nerve ensures maximum pain. An excruciating combination of cramp, suffocation and the severest asthma attack!

Deserted by His disciples. Forsaken by His Father. Yes, all for me!

The disciples slept! Indeed, we ask if modern disciples are not doing the same?

Secondly what came to me was that I had put Jesus on the Cross. Stop blaming the Jews, the Romans and Pontius Pilate. Jesus was wounded for my transgression and bruised for my iniquities.

My sin, my rebellion and my iniquity was all part of it – because when He died on the Cross He died for every sin committed up until then and everyone that was to come!

Finally, as I looked up at the statue, it was as if Jesus looked down at me and then looked up at The Father and said: “Father, Forgive him he does not know what he is doing.”

My life would never be the same again. Personal, intimate and profound! It would always be that because I had indeed gone back to Gethsemane. I had indeed missed something.

There is no Easter or Pentecost without Good Friday; death must precede resur-

rection; Sunday is coming – but first Friday!

In my early days as a preacher, I was seeking the ultimate Gospel message. Months and years went by until one morning I was sitting in a Baptist church waiting to bring the main message when, as I looked behind the pulpit I happened to notice three empty crosses lining the wall.

There it is. It's all there! That's what I felt the Holy Spirit said to my heart. The ultimate Gospel message – the three crosses – was written on the wall.

Immediately I thought of Daniel and King Belshazzar and that writing on the wall. The king was told that his days were numbered; they had been weighed and he was found wanting. The three words indicated clearly that God was in the "dividing" business – holiness is separation unto God – and that there is judgement on sin and dishonouring God.

I then read Luke 23:32-43 and it brought home the absolute centrality of Jesus in that passage that describes his interaction with the two criminals. Right in the middle was Jesus. Because He is the key, the core, the most crucial aspect in the greatest event in man's history!

Jesus is the "Saviour" because God has ordained it. It's not God's love that saves us, it is all tied up in Jesus. Jesus is the mediator, the redeemer, the Lamb of God. Only Him!

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## God has made it that way

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All authority lies with Jesus because God ordained and bestowed that fact and that truth. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and nobody comes to the Father except by Him. And, yes, one day every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord. And all because God has made it that way!

"Jesus has unfortunately been portrayed as a figurehead of a religion, a mere example. He is infinitely more than that. He is salvation itself! He is the Gospel of God!" – so writes Oswald Chambers.

The middle cross is the absolute essential truth – because as in Adam we all died, even so in Christ we all shall be made alive. In the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation they died spiritually and separated themselves from God. Jesus came and died on the Cross to pay the price for that sin and restore the spiritual link.

Spiritual death occurred due to Adam, rebirth is ours, thanks to Jesus!

And so now: "I have been crucified with Christ," says Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

The next verse actually says "I do not set aside the grace of God" – which highlights that it's not an anti-grace message when we preach the Cross and Gethsemane and Calvary. In fact, it actually highlights grace. We are saved by grace. Only God dispenses His grace. His grace is Jesus Christ. God's love is Jesus Christ.

"We are united, first in His death and then in His resurrection. If we died with Christ we will also live with Him (Romans 6:8)." "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires," is a statement of fact and fruit in Galatians 5:24.

This is how Oswald Chambers describes what has, or should have, happened to us when we are truly born again: "I have signed the death certificate of my sin nature. I take my emotional opinions and intellectual beliefs and I turn them into a moral verdict against my sin nature. I give up my independent right to myself."

Jesus did not say we should make a determination to imitate Him. Or that we should make a jolly good effort to follow Him. He told us categorically that we should "be identified with him in His death."

The Cross and Holy Communion symbolically and constantly remind us of this key and basic element of the Christian faith. Lest we forget. Do this in remembrance of Me. Take up your Cross. Daily! Follow Me, not anyone else. "It is no longer I who live." I have been radically changed. Its not by faith in faith but faith that transcends all imaginable limits – a faith that comes only from Jesus.

Our access to God's love only comes in Jesus and here we need to also know that God is a jealous God and a consuming fire, along with the fact that He is awesome, sovereign and immutable.

God lays it down straight and firm: We are not to forget the covenant He made with us; we are not to make an idol in the form of anything the Lord has forbidden, for God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. Do not worship any other God, for the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God – straight from His mouth.

Elsewhere God tells that He is a jealous God whose anger will burn against us. He is a jealous God who punishes... but shows

love to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Joshua said that God is jealous. David asks whether God's jealousy will burn forever, while Paul writes about being jealous with a godly jealousy. Hebrews 12:28: "Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire."

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## Fiercely protective

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The dictionary defines jealous as fiercely protective, resentful of rivalry and intolerant of disloyalty. All God wants from us is everything. Yes, God is a jealous God! A consuming fire, fiercely possessive and protective of His own. He does not tolerate rivals and His Grace is what keeps us acceptable and blessed in Jesus Christ.

He does not particularly love what we are but we are "acceptable" to Him because we are covered by the blood of Jesus. God's wrath and judgement is upon all that does not come under the protection and authority of His Son. God will not share you with anyone! How incredible is that. How awesome is that.

Finally, back to those three crosses. Jesus central, then the other two. And those two represent the rest of mankind. You and me. Two sinners! We are all sinners.

The one mocked, scored and rejected. He said No! But what we need to understand is that even indifference, apathy and passivity is rejection of The Christ. Jesus warned that even if we are lukewarm, He will spew us out.

The other said Yes and interestingly enough there was a process involved. First, he feared God, asking the other criminal why he didn't even fear God; secondly he recognised his own unworthiness in stating that he was getting what he deserved, thirdly he believed that Jesus had done nothing wrong, and finally he addressed Him in repentance and respect as Lord.

There has to be a decision. We have to accept to reject. There is no sitting on the fence. There is no neutral ground. Life is a decision-making process and there is no more important decision than the decision we make about Jesus. It is about eternity. It is about heaven and hell. It is about blessing and damnation!

And it is all that because God has ordained it that way. "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses. I set before you life and death! Now choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19)." 