

GOOD >> BETTER >> BEST: (part-three of a three-part study)

After his three-year ministry of serving others, our Lord's earthly life moved beyond the realm of the better into experiencing God's best, when He gave His life a ransom for many by dying on the Cross, in order to pay the penalty of our sin. It was that sacrifice, and not His service, that fulfilled God's best plan for Christ's life; which in turn made salvation available to the whole world. How does that translate to each of us? It most definitely does NOT mean having yourself nailed to a cross like some lunatics do every now and then. It may not necessarily mean some obvious kind of suffering, whether physical or otherwise. But based on what we see in our Lord's transition from better to best, it will mean undergoing what I call a "Gethsemane moment." Just prior to the Cross, Jesus entered into the Garden of Gethsemane, with that event recorded for us in Matthew 26:39-42 –

“And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.’ And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour? Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass away unless I drink it, Your will be done.’”

In His deity, Christ knew what the Cross would mean in terms of the pain He would experience on every level. In His humanity, He recoiled at the very thought of such personal suffering. Yet He emerged from His Gethsemane moment, ready, willing and able to fulfill God's best plan and purpose for His life, as He prayed, not once, but three times (v44): “not My will but Your will be done.” Jesus viewed the Cross as a cup that He had to drink; not only to get the suffering of the crucifixion behind Him, but to enter into the realm of God's best in becoming the Savior of the world. Did you ever drink something that didn't taste good, but you drank it anyway because you knew it was good for you? That pales in comparison to what Jesus had to drink. But He drank it anyway, not because it would be primarily beneficial for Him, but ultimately beneficial for us.

In order to experience God's best, we must also enter into our own Gethsemane moment; probably alone with God, without the support of others, just as Jesus did. It will mean saying to God what Jesus said, “not My will but Your will be done.” It will mean facing some sort of circumstance which we regard as negative and unpleasant, one that we would rather avoid, but one that we know God wants us to go through; as part of His perfect will and best purpose for our life. Without such a prayer in facing the great challenges in our life, we won't emerge from our Gethsemane moment ready to live in the realm of God's very best. Instead, we will settle for something less. If you have faced such a moment and failed to emerge from it as Jesus did; just remember that Peter failed in such a moment immediately after Gethsemane, when he denied His Lord and Savior three times (Matthew 26:69-75). But Christ knew that Peter would fail and prayed for his restoration (Luke 22:31-32). Ironically, Peter's successful Gethsemane moment occurs at the Sea of Galilee, after a long night of failure at fishing. This is where Jesus confronts Peter and asks him three times, perhaps for each denial, whether or not Peter loved Him.

It is not too late for any of us, in spite of a Christian life that has settled for only that which is good, to begin the pursuit of something better, and eventually experience God's very best.