

From the Upper Room to the Mount of Olives

[Excerpt from a meeting held in Den Helder (Netherlands)]

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“Having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30).

“Jesus, having said these things, went out with his disciples beyond the torrent Cedron, where was a garden, into which he entered, he and his disciples. And Judas also, who delivered him up, knew the place, because Jesus was often there, in company with his disciples. Judas therefore, having got the band (), and officers of the chief priests and Pharisees, comes there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth and said to them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazaraean. Jesus says to them, I am he. And Judas also, who delivered him up, stood with them. When therefore he said to them, I am he, they went away backward and fell to the ground” (John 18:1-6).*

() Or a company of soldiers*

With regard to prayer, we find a summary exhortation in the Epistle of James: *“... let him ask in faith, nothing doubting.*

For he that doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed about; for let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

Thus, prayer is expressed in the deep conviction that God is powerful to do what we place before Him. Not that He will answer all our prayers. For that is His business. But with the firm assurance that He has all power to act, as the Epistle to the Ephesians tells us: we address ourselves “*to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us*” (Ephesians 3:20). We act in this way, full of confidence, knowing that what God does is good.

In the account in Acts 12 (*), it is indeed a disgrace for the believers in this story.

(*) *“Peter therefore was kept in the prison; but unceasing prayer was made by the assembly to God concerning him ... he [= Peter] came to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was surnamed Mark, where were many gathered together and praying. And when he had knocked at the door of the entry, a maid came to listen, by name Rhoda; and having recognised the voice of Peter, through joy did not open the entry, but running in, reported that Peter was*

standing before the entry. And they said to her, Thou art mad. But she maintained that it was so. And they said, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and having opened, they saw him and were astonished. And having made a sign to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison” (Acts 12:5 & 12-17).

The servant girl Rhode was convinced that their prayers had been answered. She was so happy that she even forgot to open the door. When she entered the inner room, she did not say, “It might be Peter”. No, she said, “Peter is at the door”. And when the other believers tried to make her doubt, when they tried to shake her faith, she stood her ground: “No, it is Peter”. And it was only when the believers saw him that they believed; it is even said that they “*were astonished*” (end of v. 16).

Unfortunately, this is the image we are given of ourselves!

One of our hymns says that it is with confidence that we approach God, even singing psalms during the night.

Further on in Acts 16, we do not find someone making grand statements about a series of truths, but rather Paul and Silas sitting in prison, who “*at midnight ... in praying, were praising God with singing*” (v. 25). Their backs had been whipped, and

their wounds were still bleeding, their feet fastened to the stocks, unable to remove them. Around midnight, we see them praying and worshipping God with songs of praise. That is what it means to pray with faith!

It is to a prayer such as James teaches (*), a prayer full of confidence, that God will respond favourably. How important this is.

(*) “[Let him who prays] ... *ask of God, who gives to all freely ... it shall be given to him ... let him ask in faith, nothing doubting*” (James 1:5-6).

We find many examples in Scripture where believers praised God before their prayers were answered. It is not that their problems disappeared, because then it would obviously be easy. But by praising Him in this way, what we expect is far less than what His response will be.

When we have prayed, do we thank Him and praise Him as we should?

That is what Paul and Silas did! They glorified God with songs of praise before they were delivered from prison. Their problems were just as great as before.

The difference between them and us was that they prayed with faith! Praying in this way enables the soul to sing songs of praise to God: singing psalms in the night!

Paul and Silas are powerful examples for us. They, in turn, followed the example of the Lord Jesus! This is what we are told in a very short sentence: “*Having sung a hymn, they went out to the mount of Olives*” (Matthew 26:30).

They were first in the upper room, where the Lord Jesus had eaten the Passover with the twelve disciples.

The Passover lamb, roasted over a fire, spoke of Him, the true Lamb of God.

It was after sending Judas away that He instituted the Lord's Supper.

First He took the bread and said, “This speaks of my body”, then He took the cup and said, “This is the symbol of my blood”. That is why He had desired that moment. He wanted to give the eleven this commemorative meal. Everything that evening in the upper room was about His death! And then, when they left the upper room, they went straight to the Mount of Olives, to the Garden of Gethsemane.

We know what Gethsemane means, where three times the Lord Jesus threw himself face down on the ground, imploring God about the cup he had to drink. The cup of judgement that the Father had to give him to drink.

He knew it! Between the moment when, in the upper room, he spoke of the signs of his death, and the moment of his supplication in Gethsemane, the Lord Jesus sang a song of praise!

This is our Saviour!

It would have been understandable if he had sung a hymn evoking suffering, such as Psalm 22.

We know that the 150 Psalms were in fact a collection of hymns sung by the Jews. They are written in rhyme, and their melodies were well established.

We could have understood if, on the evening in the upper room, the Lord had said to his disciples, “We are leaving, let us sing Psalm 22 or Psalm 69 or Psalm 88, one of these Psalms that speak of his suffering!” But what does Scripture say? They sing a Psalm of praise!

One day, I read that it was customary among the Jews, during Passover, to sing from Psalm 113 up to and including Psalm 118. Note that at the end of Psalm 118, they sang that “*the*

stone which the builders rejected hath become the head of the corner: This is of Jehovah; it is wonderful in our eyes” (v.22-23)!

This is what the Lord Jesus made a reality, by placing himself in the hands of his God and Father. Singing a song of praise in the night, because he had complete trust in his God and Father.

How moving it is to see how things unfolded in Gethsemane.

As they stood at the entrance to the garden, how much he cared for his disciples. It was night-time, and that is where they slept. The custom of sleeping outdoors was more common in those days than it is today.

He then took three disciples with him, Peter, James and John, and told them to watch with him. He moved away a stone's throw. It was not a great distance, they could not hear what he was saying, but they could see him clearly. Even though it was dark.

It was there that the Lord Jesus knelt three times.

The first time, He asked the Father if it was possible to remove the cup that the Father was giving Him to drink. It was a question.

The second and third times, He said, “Father, if this is not possible, may Your will be done!” It was no longer a question.

From the second time onwards, He expressed His submission to the Father's will.

When He returned to the three disciples for the first time, He found them asleep. He woke them up. He said to Peter, “Could you not watch with Me for one hour?” Yet in the upper room, Peter had said, “I am ready to die with You”. Yes, he had claimed that, but staying awake for a single hour was too much! That's man for you! That's what we are! So the Lord Jesus said again, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”.

When the Lord Jesus returned the second time, they were asleep again, and he woke them up again. And the third time, they were asleep too.

But what is very touching is that he does not wake them up. He says to them very tenderly, so as not to disturb them: “Sleep now, rest!” One of the Gospels says that they had fallen asleep out of sadness.

Yet the Lord Jesus knew what awaited him.

Although it cannot be compared, what the eleven had to face was just as difficult. They had difficult days ahead of them. And we see the Lord's love and compassion for the eleven, not waking them from their sleep so that they could gather strength for the difficult days ahead.

His disciples are lying there on the grass, and the Lord Jesus sits down beside them. Like a shepherd, he watches over his flock. How touching it is when we try to imagine the scene! It does not say how long this lasted. Half an hour, an hour, two hours?

This probably did not last very long, until the Lord Jesus heard the sound of the approaching troops in the distance.

Judas had taken with him a company of soldiers and servants of the chief priests and Pharisees. It was a large troop, numbering at least dozens, or perhaps even hundreds of men. A company of soldiers numbered 600 men. It was like when the Philistines came to take Samson prisoner. There must have been a thousand men. That is what you do when you want to fight someone more powerful than yourself. You don't come with such overwhelming force to take a single man! So they knew the power of the Lord! But they were so blind that they be-

lieved they could overcome him with 200 or 500 men. It was truly madness from the Devil.

But when such a large troop of men advances in the middle of a quiet night, with no noise to disturb them in the distance, then it can be heard!

The Lord Jesus was sitting there, hearing this noise in the distance, and he woke his disciples: “Get up, let's go”.

We must compare the Gospels with each other, and the scene becomes completely clear.

It was dark and the Lord could not be distinguished among the eleven. If you cannot recognise faces, you cannot do anything. That is why, as we know, Judas, who obviously knew him (he had been with him for three years), said to these men, “I will show him to you by greeting him with a kiss!” This is how the Scriptures had to be fulfilled.

And when we compare the accounts, it seems that Judas had detached himself from them, going ahead of them a little, but in such a way that the men of the troop could see him. Judas went alone to the Lord Jesus. Once again, we see the infinite love of the Lord Jesus. He allowed Judas to approach him and greet him with a kiss.

Would we have had the strength to do that? I think we would have kept him at a distance and said, “Don't touch me, traitor!” But the Lord Jesus allowed him to kiss him and said, “Friend, why have you come? Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

How the words of the Lord Jesus must have pierced Judas' heart like burning arrows. It gave him pause for thought, but not for self-reflection or repentance.

So, once the Lord Jesus was identified in this way, the men of the troop, the soldiers, the servants of the Jews, knowing that it was him, advanced.

But we are then taken to chapter 18 of John. We see the Lord Jesus again, in his greatness, advancing towards them.

It would have been humanly understandable for him to turn away, fleeing from such an enemy power advancing upon him.

The Lord did not flee, for he had said, “Father, thy will be done”. He knew that this had to happen! So he steps forward and takes the initiative. This is a distinctive feature of John's Gospel. Jesus has everything in his hand! He is presented in this Gospel as the Son of God! It is John who reports that the Lord Jesus sent Judas away. During the Passover meal, before

instituting the Lord's Supper, he said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly". Judas betrayed him, but the Lord Jesus "held the leash in his hand", saying this with the necessary propriety. He sent Judas away as soon as the facts became clear.

Here he is not taken prisoner! No! He takes the initiative, and it is he who speaks and says, "Whom are you seeking?" How impressive! They answer him, "Jesus the Nazaraean!" That is to say, the man from Nazareth.

There is an important distinction to be made between 'Nazaraean' and "Nazarite".

First, there is the meaning "Nazarite" as applied, for example, to Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, namely: separated and consecrated to God. Someone who does not cut his hair, so that at the end of his Nazirite vow, he shaves his head completely, as a sign of his consecration to God, to whom he offers his hair. He did not drink wine or alcohol, did not eat grapes, or anything that came from the vine. This is not the meaning found here in John 18:5, but it is also what the Lord Jesus was. He was the 'great Nazarene', consecrated to God!

The other meaning, ‘Nazaraean’, that of John 18:20, simply means a man from Nazareth, a town located in the north of the country in Galilee.

He was the one they were looking for: “This man from Nazareth”. Among the Jews, this phrase expressed contempt, as we will show.

Nazareth, located in the north of the country in Galilee, had been the possession of the ten tribes of Israel. And the Jews belonging to the two tribes of Judah, in the south around Jerusalem, despised everything that came from Galilee, the northern part of the country. For them, it was the two tribes that were the kingdom, but the northern tribes were not part of it, because the temple was not located there. The Lord did not dwell there!

The ten tribes had been largely deported and replaced by people from foreign nations, who then intermingled with what remained of the ten tribes. That is why Isaiah refers to them as “Galilee of the nations”. They were half-nations. And the true Jews of Judea, Jerusalem and the surrounding areas looked down on them.

What's more, there was a town in Galilee that was not particularly well liked, and that was Nazareth. If it had only been Ca-

pernaum or Betsaida, but no, He was from Nazareth. We learn from Nathanael's words: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

This thought was clearly implied in the expression 'Jesus the Nazaraean', this man from that much-despised town, Nazareth in the north of the country.

This is where we see the blindness of man and the blindness of the Jews.

It is remarkable that the Jews, the Pharisees, who knew the Old Testament inside out, and sometimes even by heart, did not understand this, as we are reminded at the end of Matthew 2, when Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt with the Lord Jesus because Herod had died. Speaking of Joseph, it is said: *"Having been divinely instructed in a dream, he went away into the parts of Galilee [not to Bethlehem where he had previously lived], and came and dwelt in a town called Nazareth ; so that that should be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets, He shall be called a Nazaraean"* (v.22-23).

Thus, the prophets of the Old Testament had said that the Messiah was a Nazaraean. The Christ of God comes from Nazareth! How is it that Nathanael could say, "Can anything good

come out of Nazareth?” The prophets had said so! Yes, but this was not understood by the Jews.

In the J.N. Darby translation there is a small footnote for the word ‘Nazaraean’ in Matthew 2:23: ‘perhaps a reference to Isaiah 11:1, where the Hebrew word for “branch” is “*netser*”.’

In the prophets, we find five texts that mention this. Isaiah 11:1 is one of them. The Lord Jesus is also called “*a sprout of Jehovah*” (Isaiah 4:2).

When a tree is cut down, the trunk remains, the stump, from which shoots can grow, starting as small buds or sprouts. Branches form from these sprouts. So each branch is a sprout.

Now the tree is Israel. And this tree was cut down because Israel was unfaithful. But as the prophets foretold, from the stump, from the branch of Jesse, from the royal lineage, the King of kings, the root of the Lord, will spring forth! The Jews understood this. But in Hebrew, the word ‘shoot’ or “branch” has a double meaning, and refers to Nazareth: “Jesus the Nazaraean”, ‘the Sprout of Jehovah’. We could say ‘the Nazaraean of Jehovah’. The man of God, from Nazareth.

When they say, “We are looking for Jesus the Nazaraean”, it shows their contempt, which comes from the blindness of un-

belief. The Spirit of God had said in the Old Testament, “He comes from Nazareth”, but the Spirit had also spoken of Bethlehem: “*Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall he come forth unto me who is to be Ruler in Israel*” (Micah 5:2). The Pharisees knew this: Jesus came from Bethlehem. That is where he was born, but at the same time, he came from Nazareth: “the sprout of Jothovah”.

We can see how wonderful the Scriptures are. In this single verse, in the response given by these men, but also in the reaction of the Lord Jesus, we see both his humanity and his divinity.

The enemies say, “We are looking for Jesus of Nazaraean”. the man who is despised. But what does the Lord Jesus say? “I am he!” I am the “I am!” And that is precisely his name in his deity.

We read in the preceding pages: “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am*”. (John 8:58). The literal translation in the original is: ‘before Abraham came into existence, I am the “I am”’. He answered in this way because they had said to him: “*Thou hast not yet fifty years, and hast thou seen Abraham?*” Yes, the Lord Jesus saw Abraham, he also saw Noah,

and Adam too! He is the First, he is the beginning. From all eternity, he is the Eternal One, he is the 'I am.'

Let us consider the scene in the Book of Exodus where the name "I Am" is introduced, when the Lord calls Moses to deliver the people from Egypt.

At the age of 40, he was too energetic to be God's instrument, but at the age of 80, on the contrary, he had become a little too passive. He was always looking for excuses, but finally came to his senses. He simply said that he was willing to go to the Israelites, but they would not receive him. They would not believe that you had sent him. "*Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?*" (Exodus 3:13). And God's answer was: "*I AM THAT I AM. And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you*". (Exodus 3:14). He is the Lord: He is what He was and will always be what He is. He is eternally what He is. He is the "I am"; He is not "I will be" in the future, or "I was" in the past; no, "He is"! "*In the beginning was the Word*" means that He was there then. And if we look back 6,000 years, He was there too. If we go back 6 billion years, He was already there too! No

matter how far back we go, He is always there. This expresses His eternity. He is the Eternal One, the One who is eternally and does not change. This is His divinity! This is obviously not His humanity, because as a man, He “became flesh”. “*The Word became flesh*”, but He never became the Word. He never became the Son of God! He has always been, from eternity! ‘I AM THAT I AM!’ “I am” who is the “I AM WHO I AM!” is the Lord Jesus' response to those who were seeking “Jesus the Nazaraean”.

In a sense, a correction is made, or an addition is added, which unbelievers cannot understand, but they say in effect, “We are seeking the man Jesus Christ”. Then the man Jesus replies, “I am he, who is the eternal God”. He refers to the two aspects of his person, “God and Man in one person”. And this is found precisely in the Gospel of John. It is truly remarkable.

We know how many times the Lord Jesus says “I am” in this Gospel! I am the way, the truth, the life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the gate of the sheep. I am life, the resurrection: “I am”! I am the eternal Son of God! That is his name, and we can understand it.

When they hear this name, without understanding its meaning, the mere utterance of it causes them to recoil and fall to the

ground. And in this, without understanding it, they pay homage to him.

This reminds us of the verse: *“At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of heavenly and earthly and infernal beings, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to God the Father`s glory”* (Philippians 2:10-11).

Here is a little preview!

As for us, when we see the Lord Jesus, when we hear his name, the true man and eternal God in one person, we do not shrink back, we kneel before him, we bow down before him. Then it is a joy to praise him!