

"Who Is it You Want?"

Thomas Robinson, June 6, 2010

John 18: 1-12

¹ When he had finished **praying**, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was **a garden**, and he and his disciples went into it.

² Now **Judas**, who betrayed him, knew the place, because **Jesus had often met there with his disciples**. ³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of **soldiers** and some **officials** from the **chief priests and the Pharisees**. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "**Who is it you want?**"

⁵ "*Jesus of Nazareth,*" they replied.

"**I am (he)**," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, "**I am (he)**," they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Again he asked them, "**Who is it you want?**"

"*Jesus of Nazareth,*" they said.

⁸ Jesus answered, "*I told you that I am (he). If you are looking for me, then **let these men go.***" ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "*I have not lost one of those you gave me.*" [17:12]

¹⁰ Then **Simon Peter**, who had a **sword**, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, "**Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?**" ¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials **arrested Jesus**.

Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" "

John 8:28, 53-58

²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have **lifted up the Son of Man**, then you will **know that I am**, and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. ...

⁵³ **Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?**"

⁵⁴ Jesus replied, ... ⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of **seeing my day**; he saw it and was glad."

⁵⁷ "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and **you have seen Abraham!**"

⁵⁸ "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "**before Abraham was, I am!**"

John 12:27

"**Now my soul is troubled**, and what shall I say? '**Father, save me from this hour**'? No, it was for **this very reason I came to this hour**."

Psalms 75:7-8

⁷ It is **God who judges**: He brings one down, he exalts another. ⁸ In the hand of the LORD is a **cup full** of foaming wine mixed with spices; **he pours it out**, and all **the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs**.

Drama in the Garden

The long conversation is ended. The eloquent prayer finished. Now action begins. Clarity will come. Or will it? John knows that we can look at the events of the next few hours and see nothing but defeat, weakness, condemnation for Jesus as victim, the victory of Jesus' enemies. In another story it would be the end of all hope. But he also wants us to discern another reality. Each event is also an action by Jesus and the Father. Opposite wills, on vastly different scales, effecting opposite ends – all through the same events. The irony / paradox of God's glory entering this world. Jesus takes the disciples to a well-known garden. *"In the beginning..."* Human betrayal. Here unfolds God's intervention for humanity's problem at the oldest/deepest level. John has earlier described Jesus' human struggle to face these events. Now Jesus' strength. The betrayer brings massive force through the darkness looking for Jesus.

Looking for Jesus and Finding Him

Soldiers and officers with an informant – an ordinary arrest. Lanterns in case he hides. Jesus doesn't hide. He steps forward and questions the police: *"Who is it you want?" "Whom do you seek?"* Fundamental question for us. Do you want Jesus of Nazareth? Do you know who he is? Do you know what you get when you get him? *"I am!"* Jesus responds. Echo of God's name in Exod. 3:14. Betrayer and troops all stumble backwards. The dark, unlevel ground? For a tiny moment Jesus' reality/ glory flashed in those words. The light of the world steps out to meet the darkness. Jesus calls the police back to the ordinary meaning of their task. As he surrenders he gains the release of the disciples – pointing to the meaning of the whole story.

Peter's Struggle to Understand

Judas stands dumbfounded. Peter acts. He will not deny Jesus; he will fight for him. The massive odds don't matter. He sees only one level – impending dishonor for his beloved master. Jesus stops him, but his misunderstanding leads to denial. The name Malchus points to the future without being explicit: He is a person known to believers, a convert, like Nicodemus. Even in the darkest moments God is working.

Jesus Takes the Cup

As Jesus stops Peter, he draws him toward seeing the great decisions and events unfolding. Is this an arrest with weapons and fetters? Yes. But it is also Jesus' own decision to drink "the cup" – divine judgment against all the sin of the world – God's wrath condemning all the ways we abuse, oppress, betray, violate each other. The ways we distort and disfigure our own lives with greed, addiction, power-hunger, abused pleasures, self-deception. He condemns sin so as to save the sinner.

The cup is given by the Father, with whom Jesus is one: *"just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."* (17:21). This is no external imposition but a united action of God. God's just wrath against sin and God's self-giving love for the self-broken and rebellious people he has created unite in an action that embodies their blind sin.

Who is it you want? Peter is not sure. Can you serve a master who washes your feet. Can you be shaped by a mighty Lord who surrenders when he could win. Can you open yourself to one who takes your favorite sins on himself in order to set you free.