

The Word Became Flesh
(Week 55)
John 18:1-11
“InThe Garden”

Introduction

“This is why The Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down on My own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up gain. I have received this command from My Father.”
John 10:17-18

The time had come at last. Jesus had repeatedly spoken to His disciples about His “hour” that was to come. They had not understood His words, even though they had often heard the prophecies about the suffering servant of God from the book of *Isaiah*. They would come to understand later after the resurrection that everything The Christ endured was according to God’s plan and for their expediency.

But He was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on Him, and we are healed by His wounds. We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and The LORD has punished Him for the iniquity of us all.
Isaiah 53:5-6

Immediately after His High Priestly prayer in **John Chapter 17**, The LORD led His followers across the Kidron valley to a garden known as Gethsemane. It was a familiar site for them, for Jesus had often taken them to this place to rest and to teach them many truths. Judas, the betrayer, was all too familiar with this spot, and this is why he knew to lead a detachment of Roman soldiers, as well as, Jewish temple police to the place in order to arrest The Savior.

It is interesting to note that nearly a thousand years prior this had been the same exact locale that King David was forced to pass through, after he had been betrayed by His son Absalom. History had very much repeated itself, for here, now, we see Christ, the *Son of David* betrayed by His own disciple taking the very same road as His kingly ancestor. Make no mistake, this was a foreordained series of events orchestrated by God Himself.

The word “*Gethsemane*” actually means “*olive press*”. It was a place where olives were crushed in order to extract the all-important olive oil that was used for so many purposes in those days. Its primary purpose was to be used to light the lamps that dispelled the darkness in the homes of the people, as well as, to light the lamps of The Temple. Again, we must see the hand of God at work in so choosing this place. For it is here, in “the olive press”, that the Son of God was put under great pressure so that the anointing oil of The Holy Spirit could come and burn within every Believer and deliver us from the darkness of sin.

It is in this “olive press” that Satan would make one last attempt to discourage The Savior from fulfilling His Father’s plan. Jesus had always known what these next few days would mean for Him. It would be a time of unspeakable suffering. As God, He found joy in the cross, but as a man, he dreaded it. For only He and His Father knew of the horrors that awaited Him there. In His humanity, He prayed that if there were any other way, He would gladly take it.

Going a little further, He fell facedown and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.”
Matthew 26:39

Oh, the burden borne for us there in Gethsemane!! As we study together, this powerful passage today in the **Eighteenth Chapter of John’s Gospel**, let us do our best to truly feel what He felt; to understand His passion for His Father’s will, and to see *His Prayer, His Power, and His Purpose*. **For God so loved the world...**

His Prayer (vs. 1-2)

After Jesus had said these things, He went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, and He and His disciples went into it. Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. **John 18:1-2**

Judas knew the place all too well. He knew it as a place of prayer for The Teacher. It seems that Jesus never spent the night in the city of Jerusalem. He always left there when evening came to go to more welcoming environs, such as the home of His friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany a mere two miles away from the city. And I suppose when the weather permitted, He preferred to sleep under those stars that He had created. A preferred spot for this outdoor evening was a quiet little garden known as Gethsemane, in the Kidron Valley just a short distance from the noise of the city.

John doesn't say anything about the struggles of Christ that fateful night as His heart searched the heavens for a different path. The tempter was frantically doing his best to convince The LORD of glory that we, as a race, were simply not worth the cost. And to tell the truth, he was right. But **God so loved the world that He gave His Son**, despite the fact that we were not worth the cost. It's called "grace", and by all accounts offered up in The Scriptures, it is this one attribute that stands out among all others, when we think of our Great God. The word for it in Hebrew is "chesed" and in the Greek, it is called "charis" and without it, my friends, we would be forever lost, just as we so deserve.

The Gospel of John, written many years after the other gospels were circulated, focuses solely upon the deity of Christ, while the other gospels also give us insight into His humanity. We know from reading them, how mightily He struggled within the confines of "the olive press", but He chose to do the will of His Father, knowing full well the suffering that this course of action would entail. He chose it, because He loved us, and because He loved His Father. To this day, we can still hear the echos of His words: **"Yet not as I will, but as You will."**

He had pleaded with His disciples to pray with Him, but instead, they had fallen into slumber, completely unaware of the danger that lay ahead, and oblivious to the cosmic struggle that was going on just a few feet away. The outcome of this spiritual wrestling match would determine the fate of the entire world, and yet, the disciples slept through the worst of it! I am reminded here of the time when they were all at sea during a great storm. They had thought they were in great peril, and yet, The Savior was asleep, knowing all was under control. How ironic that when the true peril was taking place, these same disciples had slept through it!

Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with Me one hour? Stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came again and found them sleeping, because they could not keep their eyes open. **Matthew 26:40-43**

After The Savior had resisted the devil's temptations, after He had steeled Himself to what had to be done, He woke His disciples and told them that the betrayer was on his way.

"...See, the time is near. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up; let's go. See, My betrayer is near." **Matthew 26:45b-46**

At this point, Jesus did not shrink from His calling. As Judas led approximately 500-600 soldiers (the Greek "speira", meaning "a tenth of a legion" makes this distinction) toward the Garden, their torches aloft and swords drawn, The Son of God went out to meet them head on.

His Power (vs. 3-9)

So Judas took a company of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees and came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing everything that was about to happen to Him, went out and said to them, "Who is it that you're seeking?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they answered. "I am He," Jesus told them. Judas, who betrayed Him, was also standing with them. When Jesus told them, "I am He," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, "Who is it that you're seeking?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they said. Jesus replied, "So if you're looking for Me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the words He had said: "I have not lost one of those you have given me."

John 18:3-9

Some have speculated that the detachment of soldiers, along with the temple police, were not in as large a number as John has stated. The claim that just because he used the word "speira" doesn't necessarily mean that he meant it literally. It could be, they say, just a figure of speech. As one might say "the police department came to the scene of the accident." Obviously the entire police department would not have been dispatched for a traffic mishap, but it could be stated that way. However, I disagree with this logic in this case for a couple of reasons.

First, the Romans were known for their excessiveness in matters of what they considered the security of the empire. As a result they had the reputation for using a sledge hammer to swat a fly. And second, this was no ordinary Man they were planning to arrest. The Jews had undoubtedly stirred up the local Roman officials with stories of a great insurrection in the making, and that the leader of this band of rebels had the ability to perform great miracles. So, with this in mind, I can definitely see why a large group of soldiers would have been dispatched.

When The LORD went out to meet this group, He simply asked them Who they had come to arrest. According to the other gospel accounts, Judas had run ahead of the column and greeted Jesus with a kiss on the cheek as a means to identify the One they were seeking (**Matthew 26:48-49**). What a wicked man was this Judas Iscariot. To kiss a friend on the cheek was a sign of deep devotion and admiration in their society. To give away the location of an enemy in such a way would be inconceivable to any decent human being!

When Jesus walked over to the group of armed soldiers and asked Whom it was that they were seeking, they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." This was yet another smear upon The LORD'S character for it was widely considered that anyone from Nazareth was the lowest of the low. The soldiers were about to get the surprise of their lives, when this so called peasant upstart from Nazareth displayed His power to for all to see. **"I AM He." Jesus told them.**

At this point in this study, I probably do not even need to point out to you that the word "He" is not in the original text. Jesus answered them simply **"ego eimi"**, which simply means **"I AM"**. And at the sound of those words, this group of so-called "warriors", along with Judas who had returned to join his new found friends (**vs. 5**), all fell to the ground. Perhaps it was in this moment that the betrayer realized what a horrible mistake that he had made. But it was at this point... much too late.

When Jesus briefly revealed with two small words that He indeed was The Great I Am Incarnate, The Son of The Living God, the whole world around Him was frozen in time for an instant. He waited for the fallen soldiers to recover and asked the question once more, **"Who is it that you are seeking?"** I imagine this time the answer came with much less bravado. "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. What happened next was, to say the least, amazing.

As the soldiers responded for the second time, The Savior took full control of the entire situation. In fact, He started giving orders to the troops! He commanded that they were to take Him alone and to leave His followers to go their own way. And the entire detail of soldiers did not once question the command that He gave them!! For you see, no one **took** His life, He gave it willingly. These heavily armed mortals had no authority over Him whatsoever.

The normal course of action, when it came to crushing a so called “rebellion”, would be to round up the entire group in order to make an example of any who might go against the empire. These soldiers were well aware of their duty, and yet, they took orders from the very one they had come to arrest! For you see, the will of God cannot be overridden by men.

Jesus had prophesied in His prayer just a few hours earlier that “...not one of them (The Father had given Him) is lost, except the son of destruction (Judas), so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.” (John 17:12b). The mighty LORD Jesus forever protects those whom The Father has given Him. If you belong to Jesus my friend, you can rest assured that He will keep you by His wondrous power. That is what He does! When The Great I AM speaks, the devil and all those who are allied with him shall fall to the ground. **Our God reigns.** If you have been saved by Him, then *He* will keep you saved.

His Purpose (vs. 10-11)

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear (The servant’s name was Malchus). At that, Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword away! Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given Me?”

John 18:10-11

Now let’s face it. Peter had had a rough night. First, he was rebuked by Jesus for his refusal to allow The LORD to wash his feet. Then He had claimed that it did not matter to him what the others did, he would follow the LORD even unto death. Jesus had responded by rebuking him once more saying:

...“Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly I tell you, a rooster will not crow until you have denied Me three times.”

John 13:38b

I really believe that Peter’s actions in the Garden of Gethsemane were to prove to himself and to Jesus that He was better than that. In his heart, he wanted to believe that he was a good a loyal servant of Christ. The problem is, in our own strength, we aren’t able to do anything that will stand the test when it comes to spiritual matters.

Perhaps Peter became emboldened, when he saw the soldiers shrink back in fear before His Master. Whatever the reason, his impetuous actions could have endangered the entire group, had Christ not intervened. The brash disciple took his small sword and attempted to strike down the servant of the High Priest. He proved in his efforts that he was a fisherman and not a soldier, for instead of slashing the man’s throat he cut off his ear instead!

The other gospels tell us that Jesus defused the situation by healing the servant’s ear on the spot. This servant, whose name “*Malchus*” means “*of the kingdom*”, was a representative of Satan’s earthly kingdom. And yet, The Savior graciously chose to heal him. He will do the same for all sinners who are wounded and weary and come to him. For we all, like sheep, have gone astray.....

The Bible never tells us what eventually happened to Malchus. I wonder if that touch from Jesus made a difference in him. Did he realize in that moment that he had been on the wrong side all along? Did he later repent and find The One True God that he had thought he had been serving by arresting The Savior? Like the Apostle Paul who once persecuted the Church, was this healing a “Damascus Road” experience for him? We will never know until we are in glory, but I cannot help but wonder in the here and now.

Only John’s gospel identifies Peter as the assailant. More than likely the reason for this is that Peter was dead and gone after this particular account was written. It is quite possible that the other gospel writers left out his name, so that he would not face any reprisals from Rome, while he was still living. Again, all we can do is speculate. I do believe, however, that John rather enjoyed pointing out his older friend’s reckless nature. It seems that there was always a bit of competition between the two. After all, John also would later point out that it was he who outran Peter on the way to the empty tomb!

Jesus, once again, rebuked Peter that evening as He healed Malchus’ bleeding ear. He reminded Him that it was His very purpose to “drink the cup” that The Father had poured out for Him. He

had already settled this in His prayers from earlier. Jesus would go through with all that God had required of Him. It was pointless to attack those who would unknowingly be participants in the Father's plan. These soldiers were simply fulfilling God's purpose for His Son. **For God so loved the world....**

There is a lesson for us in Peter's actions. He mistakenly thought that in his flesh he could serve his master. Later, after he had denied The LORD, he was devastated to learn what a disappointing failure he had become. But Jesus returned to him and restored him. Peter, this impetuous man that often responded with the first thing that came to his carnal mind, would become arguably the greatest preacher of his time. How is this possible? Because he stopped relying on his own strength and started depending upon His Savior. And this is a spiritual truth worth remembering. It is only when we realize how worthless we are in our own strength that we are ready to be used by God in a mighty way. For our LORD has told us:

"Apart from Me, you can do nothing."

John 15:5b NIV

So let all who are in Him say... TRUTH!!