

**John 18: 1-14; “The Majestic Love of Christ”, A Sermon on Christ’s Passion
delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 21st, 2021,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

It is my intention today and next Sunday to preach on some of the marvelous things that were said and done by our Lord in the time before He went to the cross. For we should understand that these things are just as much a part of His sufferings on our behalf, as the crucifixion itself was. At this hour, I would like us to think together about the majesty, the glory, and the power of the love of our Savior in His willingness to undergo severe sufferings on our behalf.

The question that I would ask is this: What did Jesus know that night, in the garden, that demonstrates to us the majesty of His love for us as sinners? Our text says in verse 4 – “Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?” He knew who they were seeking for. He knew the reason they had come. It was His love as the Savior which led Him to stay and not to run away. Consider with me now, the things that Jesus knew then, which show forth His love for us as sinners.

1st of all – Jesus knew that when they came for Him, He would have a golden opportunity to demonstrate His love. (verses 1-7)

“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.” So, people were seeking the Lord Jesus for various reasons in that day. Some were seeking Him to be loyal to Him and to follow Him, and others were seeking Him to do Him harm. But no one could remain neutral to Him. It is the same with His cause and His truth today. There are people who are loyal and there are people who are treacherous. On that evening, Jesus knew the treacherous heart of Judas, that he was seeking Him to betray Him. Here was His own close friend, he who had taken sweet counsel with Him in times past.

The Lord Jesus also knew that this whole detachment of troops who Judas was leading had been sent by the chief priests and Pharisees, to seize Him. The leaders of Israel had tried to seize Jesus at various times before this, but He had escaped their hands. “His time was not yet come” to die, but He knew that this time was theirs. It was their hour, and the power of darkness. Christ’s love is seen in His going with His disciples, on the night of His betrayal, to the place of prayer and communion where they had often gone before. He did not run away from what He knew was going to take place. He went toward it. He went with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, and into a garden.

This brook, in the days of Hezekiah, was a place where the priests, after they had cleansed the inner part of the House of the Lord, they brought out all the debris that they had found in the temple, and they carried it outside the city, and they threw it in this brook. (2nd Chronicles 29: 16) They also cast out the altars of the false gods that they removed, into this brook. (2nd Chronicles 30: 14) In Jesus’ taking His disciples over this brook, He was showing them that this was the place where He would have to deal all of His fears; that He would have to overcome them for our sakes. This was the place where He was going to begin bearing our sins and sorrows, everything related to our guilt and shame.

This deep valley, this dark brook, where it seemed that everything defiling and polluting ran, was something that Jesus had to go over, so that He would be better prepared for the intense sufferings that were coming. The disciples had heard from their Lord that He was going to suffer and die, but they did not exactly realize until later, that He was going to die for their sins as a sacrifice offered up to His God and Father. This brook that He went over pictures well, all that Christ would encounter that night, when it says in Matthew 26: 36 that, “ He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” It says that He said, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.”

Jesus knew that He had to go forward to meet these sufferings on behalf of all of sinners in all generations, not just those disciples there in the garden with Him at that time. In the Garden of Gethsemane He “offered up His prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to the One who was able to save Him from death.” (Hebrews 5:7) He knew that Judas had betrayed Him, He knew that the soldiers were coming to find Him there. The majesty of His love is, that He knew all this and yet He stayed! He knew what was coming, and yet He boldly went forth to meet them. They came towards Him with lanterns and torches and weapons. They were a great multitude with swords and clubs coming to take Him, and what does He do? He goes forward to meet them!

But there was Someone else who had come to meet the Lord Jesus that night; Someone much greater than any of the men who were coming to take Him that night. It is not mentioned here in John, but it is mentioned in Matthew’s gospel. He met His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. He met His Father while on His knees in prayer. His Father would have Him drink a cup of wrath. In the mind of the Lord Jesus He was clothed in righteousness and Justice, and ready to avenge our sins. Our Lord in His great love for us, stepped in between us and the Father. He said in Matthew 26: My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.” He said – “O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will. This was the majesty of Christ’s love.

He showed His willingness to be taken away and unjustly treated for our sakes. We deserve to be taken away to God’s bar of Justice and be tried for our sins. But Jesus steps forward, to be taken away in our place; to meet charges and punishments that were totally undeserved by Him. This is well pictured by the men who came to take Jesus. It was according to His Father’s purpose that He would meet this group of men, being led by Judas. And He asks them, “Whom are you seeking?” They answer Him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” They had heard that He was a very bad man. They were willing to believe that He had committed blasphemy in saying, “I and my Father are One.” (John 10: 30) But Jesus answers their question immediately, and He says – “I am He.”

What is amazing in that when Jesus said, “I am He,” we find that all of these men who had come to take Him, drew back and fell to the ground. You would think that this would have stopped them. You would think that this would have given them pause. They are pushed backward by an invisible hand, as if God the Father is saying, “I would never permit you to lay a hand on My Beloved Son were it not my purpose to deliver Him into your hands that My wrath against sinners might be satisfied. But the meaning of this miracle does not come into their carnal minds; so depraved are they, so intent on taking Jesus and supposedly bringing Him to justice.

And so we find our Lord saying to them, gently once again, “Whom are you seeking?” He does say, “Don’t you fools understand that you can never take Me, the Son of God, without the Father’s permission?” “That’s why your all lying on the ground!” He knows the hardness and the desperate wickedness of their hearts. And so He patiently says again, “I have told you that I am He.” Do you see how great and gentle and patient the Lord is; how willing to suffer in the place of sinners, in His bearing what we deserve to suffer, in His demonstrating in this majestic way his willingness to be arrested so unjustly?

2nd – Jesus knew that He alone must led away to suffer, in order that the glory of His love might be demonstrated to sinners. (verses 8, 9)

He says in verse 8, “I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way.” This is the glory of the love of the Lord Jesus for sinners, that He becomes their substitute. The disciples are in danger of being taken along with the Master, but the sacrificial love of Christ must stand alone, stand by itself, because these actions that He was taking were to be done on behalf of all that the Father had given Him. They must be allowed to go, to leave,

and be free, while He remains. This reminds me of John 10: 11, 12, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.”

The Lord Jesus would not only not leave, and not flee, but He would make sure that He was the only one who would be taken that night. Now we can see why He asked these men twice, who were coming to take Him, “Whom are you seeking?” He is saying, that if they had come for Him alone, then all the rest with Him should not be taken. In John 17: 12 we find Jesus praying and saying, “While I was in the world, I kept them in Your name.” “Those who You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” In our text in verse 9 it says, ...“that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You gave Me, I have lost none.’”

The glory of Christ’s love is that He keeps His people, who are the sheep of His pasture. He is concerned with the disciples’ physical preservation at this time because he knows that the keeping of their eternal souls is involved in it. Many of them would die martyr’s deaths later, but that would only be by His leading and appointment. The Lord Jesus knew that the understanding and faith of His disciples at this time was not strong enough to bear up under, what was coming upon Him. Indeed He knew, as I said before, that it was absolutely essential for their eternal salvation to be secured that He face and endure the cross alone; that He lay down His life for His sheep.

They could have no part in it, for He must purchase their souls, their lives, their bodies, their future inheritance, all of it, at this time! Their salvation must be all of His doing, to be all of grace. He would keep them from the immediate danger of being taken and tried. And He would keep them from the eternal danger of losing their souls, by doing all for them as their Good Shepherd. Will you not believe, then, that if He did this for them, that He will do this for you? Jesus had to be taken in your place. Jesus had to be bound so that you would go free. Jesus had to be tried, and found guilty. He had to stand condemned, for you to be acquitted. He had to lay down his life for you to be His sheep, and not to be lost.

3rd – Jesus knew that the purposes of God go beyond the best intentions of men.
(verses 10-14)

How well we see this portrayed in the life of Peter at this point. Peter is not going to let His Master be taken. In Matthew 16: 21-23, we find Peter trying to keep Jesus from the cross and death. This was after Jesus had specifically said, that, “He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” Peter takes Jesus aside and says, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” Now here in John 18: 10, we find Peter putting his strong determination to work, to prevent Jesus from having to do what He knew that He must do, and go through what he knew that He must go through. It says, “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear.”

“This shall not happen to you Lord,” is still uppermost in his mind. His intentions are good but they are human, they are fleshly; they are well-meaning, but they are not of grace. This is often what human nature will try to do in relation to the Lord Jesus. It will say with Peter, “Lord, I can solve problems related to my sin and other people’s sin, by self-determination and force.” “I will not submit to this. I will not let this happen to You, and I can keep it from happening to me!” However, we must consider, that God’s purpose is to allow and to permit certain sinful acts to take place, to show His people the power that there is in Christ to triumph over the worst sins of men! It was the worst sin ever committed by men that they put the Lord Jesus to death, but God not only permitted it, He ordained it. Acts 2: 23 – “Him, being delivered

by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death..." And Acts 4: 28 – "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gather together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done."

You see, God ordained this terrible sinful act to take place in order that His higher purpose could be fulfilled; the saving of Peter's soul! And it will save your soul as well if you will trust in Christ. It is His being taken to the judgment of the cross that is meritorious in God's sight. You will not solve the problems of your sin or other men's sins by carnal methods or weapons. But you will triumph by faith in Christ and find working in yourself, the power of His love. "Put your sword into the sheath, Peter, Jesus says to him; "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" And so He must, and so He did, for Peter and for all His people. Jesus has drunk the cup of the Father, and since He drank it to the dregs, you and I will never be taken to the Judgment Hall, never be punished for our sins, and we will always know the care of our great shepherd, even in our worst moments.

He will not lose one of you who trust in Him. By His love He has shown you the way to conquer. It is by His grace that this same love, majestic, glorious, and powerful, is found in you. Put away your sword, which you have taken out against the Lord's enemies, and take up the cup that the Father has given you. It is not the cup of His wrath, which Jesus had to drink. It is the cup of salvation he gives to you, because you have taken Christ. And you are able to drink it because Jesus said, "Therefore if you seek Me, let these go their way." If God punished Christ, then He will not take you in judgment. If wicked men took Christ and bound Him, and put Him to death on the tree, it was because Christ was willing to stand in your place that night in the garden. He was willing, so will you be unwilling? I pray not!