

The Arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

John 18:1-11

John 18:1-11 - *"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."*² *And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples.*³ *Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.*

⁴ *Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"*⁵ *They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am He." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.*⁶ *Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.*

⁷ *Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."*⁸ *Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,"*⁹ *that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."*

¹⁰ *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.*¹¹ *So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?"*

Background Notes

"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" (v1). The words Jesus had just spoken were the words of His High Priestly high priestly prayer (John 17). The Upper Room Discourses (John 13-16) may also be included in this statement.

Jesus and His disciples left the upper room, walked down to the Kidron Valley and over the Brook Kidron, east of Jerusalem. Then they entered the Garden of Gethsemane, that is located on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives.

Jesus often met there with His disciples (v2). The Lord and His disciples would often spend the night camping out in the area of the Garden of Gethsemane and the Mount of Olives. Luke 21:37 says, *"And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night He went out and stayed on the mountain called Olivet."*

So during this last week of our Lord's earthly ministry He spent His days in the Temple area and His nights on the Mount of Olives. Because of this, Judas knew that the Lord would be in Mount of Olives area that night, and he led a group of Roman soldiers and temple police out of the city to find Jesus. We know from the accounts in the other Gospels that it was here that Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss.

The Greek word used for "*detachment of troops*" (v3) refers to a Roman cohort, which could be anywhere from 300 to 600 men strong. This unit was probably dispatched from the Antonia Fortress, the Roman garrison that was adjacent to the Temple area. It may not have been the complete unit of that many men, but Matthew's account does say that it was a great multitude with swords and clubs.

This multitude probably included the officers from the Jewish Temple police who were dispatched by the chief priests and the Pharisees. The Temple police had failed to arrest Jesus back in chapter 7. Maybe this previous failure is why the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body, persuaded the Roman authorities to get involved. They may have indicated that Jesus and His band were plotting an insurrection against Rome.

The Roman soldiers probably expected some kind of guerrilla band to attack them in the Kidron Valley. They were likely thinking that this Jesus of Nazareth had a lot more than eleven followers hiding out there, armed and ready to fight. So when Jesus simply said to them, "*I am He*," they stepped back and fell to the ground! They had expected a fight! They were ready to put down a rebellion, so falling back was their startled reaction to the Lord's quiet, voluntary surrender.

On the other hand, a supernatural effect may have come over them when Jesus said, "***I am He***." Why do I suggest this? Look at verses 5-6 in your Bible, and notice that the word "He" (v6) is in italics. The italics mean that the word "He" was added by the translators to provide better meaning. Thus the Lord's actual statement was "***I am***." In the Old Testament, "**I AM**" was the name of God! "**I AM**" was the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. When the Lord Jesus used the name "**I am**" to identify Himself, He was making the same claim to deity that He made so often throughout the Gospel of John.

Doctrinal/Teaching Points

1. The Lord Jesus voluntarily gave up His life for sinners.

*"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" (v4). The Lord was not taken by surprise – He stepped forward and **voluntarily** surrendered Himself.*

*"...**knowing all things** that would come upon Him..." The Lord knew exactly what was going to take place: His betrayal, His arrest, His death by crucifixion. He could easily have escaped by not going the Garden of Gethsemane that night. But He went to the Garden, and He stepped forward.*

Furthermore, the Lord said, *"Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). But the Lord didn't pray for angels to deliver Him from the throng, and He didn't try to escape from arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. He voluntarily stepped forward and said, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He." The Lord Jesus surrendered voluntarily!*

Notice, by the way, that the Lord was not identified by a white robe or a halo! White robes and halos are all extra-biblical ideas. (Extra-biblical means “sources other than the Bible”). Halos and white robes are used to identify the Lord in medieval paintings, or movies, or TV dramas, but not in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Lord was identified by His own testimony that He was indeed Jesus of Nazareth, and Judas identified Him with a kiss.

The Lord was **not** captured by **force**, and the Lord was **not forced** to stand trial, and He was **not forced** to go to the cross. No! He went **voluntarily**! In John 10:17-18 the Lord Jesus said, “...*I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.*”

Why did the Lord voluntarily surrender and give up His life? He did it for **us**! He gave up His life for us, while we were yet sinners. Mark 10:45 says, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” He died in our place, so we wouldn’t have to suffer the penalty for our sins. He died as our Substitute.

The Lord Jesus voluntarily gave up His life for sinners.

2. The Lord Jesus resolutely "took up the cup" for sinners.

In verse 11, after Peter had cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant, the Lord said to Peter, “*Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?*” The Lord was determined and purposeful. He was resolved to take up the cup that the Father had given Him.

What was that "cup"? It included His coming suffering and death - but that was not all it entailed. In Matthew 20:22-23, the Lord Jesus asked James and John, “*Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink...?*” They said to Him, “*We are able.*” So He said to them, “*You will indeed drink My cup...*” And James and John did indeed experience suffering and death for the sake of Christ. But the cup that the Lord referred to here, the cup that the Father had given Him, was more than a cup of suffering and death. It was the **cup of God’s judgment!** It was the terrible and bitter cup of God’s wrath against sin. Our Lord drank the bitter cup of God’s wrath against sin - on our behalf!

That’s the cup that the Lord prayed about in the Garden of Gethsemane. “*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*” The Lord didn’t fear death, even death by crucifixion, but anticipating that He would have to “drink the cup of God’s wrath” against sin was an awful and agonizing thought. In essence the Lord said, “Father, if there is any other way for the problem of sin to be settled, let this awful cup pass from me!” **But there was no other way!** So the Lord continued, “***nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done.***”

The Lord drank the cup of God’s wrath against sin, our sin. He drank the cup of God’s wrath against sin so that we would not have to drink that cup. He didn’t turn away from that cup; He drank it completely. The Lord Jesus resolutely took up the cup for sinners.

Practical Applications

1. Let's think of others during times of personal crisis.

In verse 8 the Lord said to the soldiers and the guards, *"I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way..."* What a picture of the coming substitutionary work of Christ on the cross for us! The Lord was about to be crucified, having been betrayed by one of His own disciples, but He was thinking about the safety of the others.

How different that is from our attitudes! During times of personal crisis, we usually think of ourselves first. **My** problems and **my** needs take priority. If we think of others at all, often it is to blame them - or to demand help from them.

When you've been in a time of crisis, have you ever looked around to help someone else? Or do you just concentrate entirely on yourself and your own problems? I was encouraged this past week by a Christian man who is currently in the midst of a crisis. He's out of work, and he has a family to support and care for. Not only that, he's suffering from a painful sinus condition – and it's not easy to deal with a sinus infection. But in spite of his personal problems, this man sacrificially and willingly came to the rescue of a ministry project that was facing a deadline.

He didn't think only of his own problems and needs, even though he's going through a lot of personal difficulties at the present time. So let's think of others - even in times of personal crisis!

2. Let's not cut off ears that need to hear.

The other Gospels tell us that when the soldiers arrived, the disciples were sleeping. When Peter woke up he rushed into the situation, and with gutsy religious zeal, he whipped out his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. (He probably was aiming for the whole head, but missed!) Peter meant well - but he was very wrong! We know from Luke's Gospel that the Lord healed the servant's ear. What a testimony to the compassion and grace of our Lord!

I wonder how many ears the Lord has had to heal because we have "cut them off"? How often in our religious zeal, we act too quickly – and people get hurt. Sometimes they're the very people who need to hear the gospel!

When I was a teen, the first Sunday school class I ever taught was a group of lively fifth grade boys. One Sunday I lost my patience and temper with a kid who would not sit still or be quiet. I kicked him out of class - and he never came back to Sunday school. I'll never forget that lesson. So let's not cut off ears that need to hear.