



“THE CUP THAT THE FATHER HAS GIVEN ME”



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John 18:1-27
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In our study of the gospel of John we have come now to the central events of the salvation story—Jesus’ arrest, trial, execution, burial, and resurrection. In our context, very few who read John’s account are unaware of how the story turns out. This ‘prior awareness’ was also true for most of the first recipients of this document. Primarily, they were church members who had access to one or more of the synoptic gospels. They had heard the message of Good Friday and Easter, so John is adding an additional perspective to the familiar facts. More than the others he writes about what Jesus was thinking as events unfolded. And he adds fuller portraits of some of the individuals who were present on that fateful Passover weekend.

Let’s place ourselves back in context. In John 1:4-5 we read of darkness opposing the light, *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* ⁵*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

Beginning with the Passover dinner (13:1) on Thursday evening, the darkness has deepened as the hours pass. Satan is determined to extinguish the world’s light with Judas as his henchman, 13:27, *Then after he [Judas] had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” ...* ³⁰*So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.*

We turn now to chapter 18 to read of events that occurred later, in the middle of the night. There are two scenes to consider. The first takes place in a garden on the Mount of Olives. It is the sinister story of Judas’ betrayal. Jewish and Gentile forces are led by a failed apostle who had entered the service of the evil one; Roman soldiers and temple guards, swords and torches, marching at midnight, come to extinguish the light of the world.

The second scene unfolds in the residence of Annas. It portrays the darkness of decayed religion, godless priests and warped justice.

Peter plays an important, though negative role, in each scene. We can be instructed and warned by his example.

John 18:1-11:

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ²Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰Then 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.) ¹¹So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Jesus’ control of these events is unmistakable. Judas had arrived in the vanguard of a large contingent of violent men—Roman soldiers and Jewish temple guards, “with lanterns and torches and weapons.” Jesus then “came forward” and took command of all present, beginning with a firm question, *Whom do you seek?* And they answered, *Jesus of Nazareth.*

Jesus response, simply *I am* in Greek, is filled with significance. On many other occasions the same subject and verb were followed by a predicate—*I am the bread of life*, or *I am the light of the world*. Here Jesus’ powerful declaration clearly recalls the divine voice speaking to

Moses from a burning bush. The Lord of heaven and earth named himself *Yahweh* which means *I am* or *I am who I am*. Jesus is here recalling that name and applying it to himself. No wonder the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground. Then Jesus, still in command, gave orders as to how his arrest would proceed. He protected his friends as he promised he would.

What are some things we can learn from this? First, note that Jesus took his disciples with him into dangerous circumstances knowing full well what was coming (verse 4). And he protected his own in the midst of these dangers. We should not be surprised when he treats us similarly.

Second, we might recall John 10:18, *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord*. Jesus could not have been arrested unless he chose to be arrested. He had no need of Peter's sword because he had already chosen to submit to capture—*I must drink the cup the Father has given me*.

So what do we make of Peter in this scene? We can imagine two thoughts that had occurred to him as events unfolded. First, Peter clearly thinks the Lord has taken leave of his senses and cannot see how desperate the situation is. How often do you and I react similarly: as if the Lord doesn't know what he is doing; doesn't quite understand the gravity of the situation; reasoning that if we don't do something drastic the cause of Christ will suffer irreparable damage?

We don't really believe that the Lord's commitment to sacrificial love will work. Such a strategy plays into the hands of evil men. It takes too long, costs too much. Yet we do well to recall 2 Corinthians 10:4, *The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds*.

The weapons of our warfare are not intended to cut off ears, but to penetrate hearts where the real strongholds exist. If anyone would be made new in Christ, it is not because they are going to be forced to act against their will, but it is because they will be persuaded by the truth. How often do we strike out at opponents and leave scars that make the good news hard to hear?

There is another reason for Peter's wild sword strike. He had claimed to be the best of Jesus' followers—*others will fail but I will not*. I recognize this dilemma, the hope that some grand, stupid gesture will cover up how inadequate I am on the inside. In the end such gestures are of no use

to the Lord and only accomplish the opposite of the face-saving we hope for.

John 18:12-14, 19-24:

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Skipping down to verse 19:

The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. ²⁰Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." ²²When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" ²⁴Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

This is not the darkness of betrayal and violence as we saw on the mountainside. This is the darkness of religion that has decayed and rotted. We encounter Annas and Caiaphas (verse 15) who cut deals with Roman authorities. Judaism's high priesthood (a lifetime responsibility) had become a revolving political office which served to enrich this corrupt family.

The judicial proceedings are a farce. Jewish law forbade accusers to hold a trial at night, to render judgment without proper witnesses or evidence, and to conclude a serious matter in a single session. Jesus' captors had predetermined a guilty verdict and acted accordingly. Jesus' insistence, *I have said nothing in secret* (verse 20), is a scathing indictment of actions of his enemies. The light of the world had been arrested and bound—the darkness was determined to extinguish his life.

And we come again to Peter as a negative example.

John 18:15-18:

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”

Peter’s answer is the precise counterpart to the statement Jesus made to the soldiers. They were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, and he replied *I am*. Peter, being accused of being a disciple, replies, *I am not*.

¹⁸Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

John 18:25-27:

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You also are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed.

The night is now as dark as it is going to get and Peter gave in to cowardice. He vehemently denied the Lord and sank into a pit of personal despair.

We read twice in verses 18 and 25 that Peter warmed himself by a charcoal fire—but to no avail. His cold discomfort proceeds from the inside. He loves the Lord, but he can’t do anything to save him, and he cannot save himself. The other Gospels record that he departed and wept bitterly.

We should remember that Jesus wasn’t surprised by Peter’s failure. In fact, he predicted it. And Peter’s failure is not the end of his story—Peter is destined to be forgiven, strengthened, and made into a courageous gospel preacher and leader of the church. The outburst with the sword and denial of the Lord should serve as a warning to our pride and his renewal a source of hope for our failure.

A charcoal fire is remarked on twice in Chapter 18. And in chapter 21 we will read of another charcoal fire lit by the risen Lord, burning on beach in Galilee. On that morning Peter was assured that he had been forgiven and raised up by Jesus. The same welcome, the same restoration, awaits all failed disciples. The darkness cannot overcome the light.