

## THE GOSPEL OF BELIEF - Studies in John's Gospel - Part sixty-five

Sunday, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Teaching #1775 - Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church

### THE OTHER GARDEN - WHERE PARADISE WAS RECLAIMED

**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. [2] Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. [3] So 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. [4] Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" [5] They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. [6] When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. [7] So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." [8] Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." [9] This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." [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 its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

*Johann Sebastian Bach's "St. John's Passion"* begins with these wonderful words:

*"O Lord our Master,  
Whose fame in very land is great,  
Show us by Thy Passion late,  
How Thou the Son of God innate,  
Forever, though cast so far down,  
Hast won Thyself supreme renown."*

I think John the Apostle wrote his whole account to demonstrate the power of those final words of Bach's verse - **"Forever, though cast so far down, hast won Thyself supreme renown."** John's whole account is tailored - carefully stitched together in the details - to reveal our Lord strangely **in charge** when arrested and put on trial in chapter 18 and still in charge when hung on the cross in chapter 19.

Time is limited, but take just a few random slices of the gospel John has crafted together. Every account reveals our Lord's sense of sovereign mission. Nowhere is He out of control. John carefully paints the details of this in his account.

In the opening prologue of his account John, looking **back** at Christ's passion in the full light of His resurrection from the grave, reveals his prequel to Messiah's successful mission with the advance notice that, **"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it"** (John 1:5). And when John says the **"darkness has not overcome it,"** he means Jesus has, as John pens these words, risen from the dead.

Just verses later **John the baptist** announces his first glimpse of God the Son with words that are drenched with Old Testament imagery pointing to redemptive assignment and mission - **John 1:29** - **"....Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"**

John the Apostle never lets up on this theme as he continues to write his account. Early in his account John reveals Jesus **"cleansing"** the temple. And the disciples, sensing the **reaction** this would ignite in the crowd, are called to remember the Old Testament prophecy from the Psalmist, **"Zeal for your house will destroy (consume) me"**(John 2:17). And lest we wonder **how** this zeal would **"destroy"** Jesus, John tells us just two verses later - **John 2:19-22** - **"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' [20] The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" [21] But he was speaking about the temple of his body. [22] When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken."**

In the very first extended conversation recorded by John Jesus explains to a confused religious leader, Nicodemus, that, **"[just] as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up...."** And that **"lifting up"** means hoisted up on the cross (John 3:14). This would be a **triumphant** lifting up just as the lifting up of the brass serpent in the wilderness was triumphant over the sickness of those Israelites. The lifting up of Christ wasn't a defeat of Christ. It was His declaration of war and triumph over sin and death.

In **chapter 6** Jesus' broken flesh was the **"bread that came down from heaven."** His death brought life to the soul just as bread brought nourishment and life to the body. In **chapter 11** Jesus was the good shepherd who **"laid down His life**

for the sheep.”

This goes on and on. It is the central theme of John's gospel. Jesus, in the form of a very humble **servant**, is still never a **victim**. There is a mighty, sovereign outworking of a divine plan. Jesus is in control. And that sovereignty is still being manifested in our garden text.

1) **PARADISE WAS REGAINED IN A GARDEN JUST AS IT WAS LOST IN THE VERY FIRST GARDEN**

**John 18:1** - “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.”

John's account is theologically unique in so many ways. He includes no account of the last supper with Jesus, though we know he was in attendance from the other gospels. But John majors on the account of Jesus in the garden on the night of His betrayal.

John does a lot of theology in his account. John's gospel isn't just a **record** - like **Luke, the historian** gives his account. John doesn't give an account of Jesus' birth as do the other synoptics. John's theology takes him back **before** the birth narratives to that deep mystery of the **pre-incarnate** Christ - **John 1:1** - “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**” No other gospel writer does this. **John** is to the gospel accounts what **Paul** is to the letters to the churches.

I say this because I believe it is no accident John lingers in the **garden** on the night recorded in our text. John **begins** his passion account in a **garden** and he also **finishes** His passion account with the resurrection taking place in a **garden** - **John 19:41** - “**Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.**”

Significantly, John's is the **only** gospel telling us the tomb was in a **garden**. No one else catches this. And I think it fits with John's theological mind. Creation **fell** in a garden. God the Son **redeems** this same creation in a garden. Paradise **lost**. Paradise **restored**.

John's **garden theology** prepares our minds for Paul's words in **Romans 5:15, 17-19** - “**But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many....[17] For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. [18] Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. [19] For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.”**

So our opening point stands. Our Lord isn't a victim of circumstance in His death. He is in control. His death isn't **defense**. It's **offense**. He is winning back - in John's garden account - what man lost in the first garden of creation.

2) **THE BETRAYAL REMINDS US GOD'S MESSIAH WAS REJECTED BY THE WHOLE WORLD**

**John 18:2-3** - “**Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. [3] So 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.**”

There has to be a reason for the detail John marshals in these two verses. You'd think all we need to know is a **mob** came after Jesus. Jesus wasn't guilty of any crime. It was night. And a **mob** came to do Jesus in.

We've seen mobs on the news. We've seen crowds out of control. But it's just a mass of people. Why isn't that kind of information enough for John?

John takes his time. He lists **Judas** (a disciple of Jesus), a “**band of soldiers**” (those would be **Roman** soldiers), there were the “**officers from the chief priests**” (those would be employees of the Temple - Temple **police**, if you will), and finally, there were the “**Pharisees**” (these were the highest and most outwardly devout religious leaders of the day).

So who does John have coming after Jesus? Who wants Him out of the way? Romans, Jews, disciples, Gentiles, police, and scholars. This is a picture of John's world. This cuts across all boundaries. This mob is the fulfillment of John's telling words in **John 1:10-11** - “**He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the**

**world did not know him. [11] He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”**

There is no difference between the rejection of the **“world”** and the rejection of **“his own people”**(the Jews). This is John showing us how **human sinfulness** effects human response to a **redeeming Christ**. The problem can't be localized or marginalized. We would all like to think there was some **other** reason for that crucifixion. People have tried to rewrite the history of Jesus' death in dozens of ways.

But John won't allow our Lord's death to be just a political issue or a Jewish issue or a Roman issue. There is something revealed in every human heart in the cross of Christ. That's what John is picturing in that second garden. There is something going on that is bigger than human misunderstanding.

In Luke's betrayal account Jesus makes this even clearer with a very direct statement - **Luke 22:52-53** - **“Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? [53] When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”**

And John wants all to know Jesus **defeated** the power of darkness. Which leads into our next point:

### 3) **WHAT IS GOING ON WHEN JESUS RESPONDS TO HIS CAPTORS?**

**John 18:4-6** - **“Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” [5] They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. [6] When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.”**

I've always found these some of the strangest words in the New Testament. I never knew quite what to say when people would ask me what was going on here. Jesus just says, **“I am he,”** and this would crowd falls over to the ground. What is that all about? Is there some purpose in Jesus' words? Is this just some sort of power stunt? Or is there some deep meaning being revealed in John's account?

And the more I looked into these words the more confusing things got. Some commentaries simply understand this mob to be falling backward in sheer surprise. They weren't expecting Jesus to so freely admit His identity and so were **“floored”** in surprise when He told them so plainly, **“I am he”** (15).

I've been surprised before. But I've never literally fallen over onto the ground. And the entire crowd? This seems like a stretch to me.

Then there's a whole other bunch you use this text as some kind of theological ground for screaming **“Fire!”** at the top of their lungs and having a wave of people fall over backwards in some meeting. Scream if you want, but please don't use this text as some kind of explanation of what you're doing. Jesus wasn't in a revival meeting and these people weren't slain in the Spirit.

So what is this text all about? And then I came across some very old words from **Saint Augustine** written around 400 A.D. Here are words - 2100 years old - that made the most sense to me in 2015:

***“With no other weapon than his own solitary voice uttering the words, “I am,” he knocked down, repelled and rendered helpless that great crowd, even with their ferocious hatred and terror of arms. For God lay hidden in that human flesh, and eternal day was so obscured in those human limbs that he was looked for with lanterns and torches to be slain in the darkness. “I am,” he says, and throws the wicked to the ground. What will he do when he comes as judge, who did this when giving himself up to be judged? What will his power be like when he comes to reign, who had this kind of power when he came to die?”***

So here's what I've come to see happening in this strange text. Jesus isn't just grandstanding here. This isn't just a raw display of power just for sensational thrill. Jesus is showing love here. He is making it clear that it is **not for lack of power** that He is being taken to His death. He is now, as John has repeated over and over, **laying down His life when no one could possibly take it from Him by sheer force**. Right to the end Jesus is still laboring to plant redeeming truth into the most calculating and stubborn hearts. **To this day, how persistently merciful is our wonderful Lord!**

### 4) **PETER, THE SWORD, AND THE EAR OF MALCHUS**

**John 18:7-11** - **“So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” [8]**

Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." [9] This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." [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 its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Only John tells us it was **Peter** who cut off the servant's ear. No one else names him. John also gives the name of the usually anonymous victim. He is anxious to remind us these events **happened**. There was a real man minus one ear until - as only Luke records - Jesus "**healed**" it. Again, these events didn't happen in **Narnia**. A news crew could have filmed these events had they been present.

But it was **Peter**, says John, probably harkening back to Peter's proud words - "**Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.**" "**Everyone else might desert you Jesus, but not me!**" John **recorded** those proud words from Peter in **John 13:37**. So now John wants us to see Peter - trying to fulfill his pledge of loyalty - hacking off the ear of Malchus. **That's** why John is the one to reveal the sword-wheeling disciple as Peter.

But for all Peter's pride he is missing the heart of what's going on. Pride always does. The person who rest in his own will and energy can never see spiritual truth. And that leads us to our closing point:

5) **THE WORK BEING DONE THAT DARK NIGHT WASN'T IN THE HANDS OF THE MOB TO ACCOMPLISH AND IT WASN'T IN THE HANDS OF PETER TO PREVENT**

**John 18:11** - "So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; **shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?**"

Years ago, in **Lesslie Newbegin's commentary on John, "The Light Has Come,"** he wrote these profound words: "***In the strange mercy of God the cup of God's righteous wrath against the sin of the world is given into the hands, not of his enemies, but of his beloved Son.***"

That's what Jesus is saying in those words, "***....shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?***" And to this day the central message of any church worth its salt is ***Jesus drank the cup of the world's deserved wrath. He took the punishment and paid sin's price in our place.***

This is the glory of the cross.