



John 18:1–6

18 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it. 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying

torches, lanterns and weapons. 4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?' 5 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I am he,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground.

Reflection

It's Friday – likely the very early hours of the morning on the day that Jesus will die. The Eleven are still shell-shocked as they quietly follow Jesus out of Jerusalem, barely managing to put one foot after the other. They're emotionally exhausted and their minds are still reeling, unable to properly process what Jesus has just re-

vealed to them. In a surreal experience, amidst their trauma, they catch glimpses of mirth and merriment through candle-lit windows all around them, as Jerusalem, teeming with religious pilgrims, celebrates the Passover. Candles flicker, they jump at shadows; nerves already shot and it hasn't even begun yet. It's Friday. The day Jesus will die.

Jesus is resolute. His face is set. He leads them east past the great looming shadow of the temple and out of the city gate. They travel about a mile, down first, then across the Kidron valley and up the side of the 'Mount' of Olives (more a hill really), that affords a nice vista of Jerusalem. To Gethsemane. A familiar place. A garden. An olive grove. They come here often. Judas knows this place.

There is a poetry about it; a completeness. Humankind fell in a garden. Humankind's redemption begins here in this garden. The first Adam, through whom the world fell, sinned and went and hid in the garden ashamed. The last Adam, through whom the world is saved, is not one to sin or hide. Reading about him, from today's passage, John 18:1–6,

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Who leaves a house near midnight and goes out to a remote garden? Someone who is going out to meet their betrayer. Judas knows the place, and he's brought with him a whole detachment of Roman soldiers, as many as 200 armed men, and some of the Jewish leaders. They're

carrying torches and lanterns – because they're expecting that Jesus will flee and hide in the bushes.

But Jesus isn't one to run and hide. He's known about this moment since before the beginning of time. All week he'd been teaching in broad daylight, in the centre of the temple courts in Jerusalem. They daren't lay a hand on him. But this is their hour, when darkness reigns. It's Friday. It's 200 against 12. Jesus steps out in front, he's the one in charge:

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them.) 6 When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.

In the Old Testament God reveals his name as Yahweh – which in Hebrew means ‘I am who I am.’ ‘I am he’ the divine name, a glimpse of his glory, and do you notice verse 6:

‘they drew back and fell to the ground’

A word from Jesus and they were literally pinned to the ground. 200 hundred seasoned soldiers momentarily pinned to the ground at a word from Jesus; the word become flesh.

Think

Step back for a moment and contemplate this scene. We see humanity at its worst. Jesus' closest companions on earth are about to flee like cowards. The Son of God is about to be murdered by the leaders of God's people on earth. This villainous deed is being done under the cover of darkness in a secluded garden outside of the city. The Romans are complicit, the Jews are complicit; bitter enemies united for a time by their evil. And at the heart of this treachery is the betrayal of one who was closer than a brother, who betrays his former master and Lord with a kiss. And again, here must be the sharpest warning for all who meditate deeply over this passage.

J C Ryle says,

From the highest degrees of privilege to the lowest depravities of sin there is but a succession of steps.

Let us both, both you and I, examine our hearts very closely today as we consider this passage. Paul warns in 1 Cor 10:12,

12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Judas' downfall was his secret sin; a chink in his armour, a crack in the dam, a foothold for the devil. Judas loved money. He was worldly. And step by step Satan lured him from the highest degrees of privilege to the lowest depravities of sin and eternal damnation. This means that above all, we need to beware of cherishing within

our hearts any secret besetting sin, such as love of money or love of the world or any other idol that Satan can so easily use to ruin everything.

Do you love money like Judas? Does your mind often wander there, like his did? Constantly checking your shares or margin account or self-managed super? Constantly worrying that you'll never be able to afford the house you want? Or forever renegotiating home lending rates and thinking over pathways to your next investment property? Fixating on how much or how little you earn? If the love of money is your secret besetting sin why not pray this prayer from the book of Proverbs,

7 'Two things I ask of you, Lord;
do not refuse me before I die:

8 keep falsehood and lies far from me;

 give me neither poverty nor riches,

 but give me only my daily bread.

9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you

 and say, “Who is the Lord?”

Or I may become poor and steal,

 and so dishonour the name of my God.

It is a brave prayer, but it is also how Jesus taught us to pray. Not ‘give us today our thirty pieces of silver’ but give us today our daily bread.

Prayer

Spend some time now in honest reflec-

tion and prayer with our God. Confess your sins to him and be frank about any long term persistent sin that you might casually and regularly indulge. Repent with your whole heart. And pray that it might become dead to you. It might be pride. It might be alcohol. It might be a flirtatious nature. It might be a short fuse. Whatever it is pray for God's help to put this sin to death and work actively with him to eradicate it from your life. The stakes are that high. Just look at Judas.