

Sermon – 10/09/2006 am

Arrest of Jesus

Study Text: John 18:1-11

Mango orchards in India are often surrounded by high brick walls with broken glass fixed along the top. This is to stop young thieves lured by tasty mangoes. Without a wall, or even with a wall, a watchman is also posted in the orchard during the fruit season. He sets up a little hut in the middle of the orchard and lives there day and night until all the mangoes are harvested.

After Jesus had finished the last supper with his disciples and prayed for them, he left the upper room heading for the Mount of Olives. *And when they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives* (Mark 14:26). It was late in the night, perhaps approaching midnight, but they knew the way well for Jesus often went to this place. The garden or olive grove was called Gethsemane which means ‘oil-press’.

Jesus never stayed in a house in Jerusalem, preferring to stay either in Bethany or in this garden nearby. Some suggest it was owned by a friend. There may well have been some sort of hut in the garden. It would have been a quiet place, ideal for respite and prayer.

On this night there would be no respite. Jesus fell on his face in earnest prayer for his betrayer was on his way. Judas Iscariot had left the supper early to go and betray his Master and Lord. Jesus knew that his hour was fast approaching. The clock was ticking inexorably. But as he prayed his disciples slept. He told them to watch, but sleep overtook them. These details John leaves us to glean from the other gospels.

Jesus the Prophet

Knowing all things that would come upon him Jesus went forward to meet his betrayer (18:4). Jesus was ready to *drink the cup which the Father has given me* (18:11). He was not surprised when a contingent of armed soldiers and police burst into this peaceful garden in the middle of the night. He knew his hour had come. He knew the will of his Father and submitted himself unto his Father’s will.

The Jewish authorities had attempted to arrest Jesus before. This time they were taking no chances. They came in force – probably over a hundred of them. Actually, it was not a good time with the crowds in the city for Passover celebrations. Just a few days before as Jesus entered the city he had been hailed by the people as the prophet from Nazareth (Matthew 21:11). Such volatile crowds made arresting this popular figure risky.

But Judas changed all that. He presented them with an ideal opportunity to capture Jesus. This agent of Satan committed the foulest deed ever man committed, betraying Jesus with a loving symbol, a kiss, on a sacred night, the Passover, in a sacred place, the Lord’s place of prayer.

It was full moon but these men of darkness came with lanterns and torches. They were prepared to search for Jesus, as if the Son of God would be hiding from mere men. In the Garden of Eden of course, man tried to hide from God. They came with weapons thinking

they could overpower the Son of God. Jesus had of course escaped from them a number of times before (7:30, 44, 10:39). This time he would be arrested because it was his time/hour.

Torches and weapons were not only futile but unnecessary. Jesus stepped forward to meet his betrayer and enemies. He was no common criminal. He had done nothing wrong that he would hide. He was without sin, unlike those arresting him. Jesus was in the temple daily during the feast, but they did not try to arrest him then (Luke 22:53).

They did not need weapons for Jesus was not going to defend himself with the weapons of men. If he wanted he could call twelve legions of angels to his defence (Matthew 27:53). They did not even need a person to identify him for he stepped forward to identify himself.

The Prophet knew the will of his Father. He told his disciples again and again that the Son of Man would be betrayed into the hand of sinners, that he must be killed and be raised again on the third day (Matthew 16:21). He told them as he entered Jerusalem, and again in the upper room that his hour had come and he was about to leave this world. He knew the exact place and the exact time when he would be arrested.

Jesus not only knew the will of God by submitted himself without reservation. God's will is perfect. Jesus said 'shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me'.

Jesus the King

I am he said Jesus when they told him they were seeking Jesus the Nazarene. When he spoke these words something amazing happened. These soldiers and police standing before him with swords drawn drew back and fell to the ground (18:6). They did not rush forward to arrest him but drew back and fell down before Jesus. How amazing! With such numbers and such a show of force we would have expected these men to be in control of the situation. But it was Jesus who was in complete control.

An image we saw in the news a few years ago comes to mind. Remember that young man who stood on top of a tank as it rolled into Tiananmen Square. One man stood against the mighty army of China. Jesus stood firm before the combined forces of Rome and the Jews. *Whom are you seeking* he asked them.

When they answered 'Jesus of Nazareth', Jesus said 'I am'. Was he just identifying himself as Jesus of Nazareth, or was there more to his answer? Was he taking on the divine name as he had done previously (note the NKJV has capitals in 8:58 but not here, although the Greek is the same). Even if there were overtones of the divine name in this self identification, it does not account for the reaction of the soldiers. Only the Jews would have perceived such overtones, and they were more likely to have taken up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy than fall backwards before him (*cf.* 8:59).

This was another miracle of the Lord. This was Jesus the King demonstrating his power and authority, even as he was being arrested by evil men. This was the King of Kings in complete control. No man, no army of men could arrest him except he allowed it. He had walked through their midst before and he could have done it again. They fell back powerless before the King.

After regaining their feet, Jesus asked these arresting officers a second time whom they were seeking. It was as if they had momentarily blacked out. Jesus maintained his majesty as King throughout his trial and crucifixion. *You have no power at all against me* he told the Roman governor, *unless it was given you from above* (19:11).

Saul of Tarsus was a zealot, ready to murder anyone who believed in Jesus of Nazareth. He got permission from the High Priest to terrorise Christians, but the King of Kings did not give such permission. The risen Jesus stopped Saul in his tracks. He fell down and was blinded by Jesus.

Does Jesus stop his enemies in their tracks today? Is Jesus still the King of Kings? If you believe this, does it make any difference to how you live? Or do you still react like Peter who sought to defend himself with the weapons of men? Peter drew his sword and struck the high priest's servant. Jesus rebuked him for such conduct.

Jesus the High Priest

Jesus' final act before his arrest (apart from healing the severed ear of Malchus), was that of a true priest representing his people. His final thought was for his beloved disciples. He said to his captors *if you seek me let these go on their way* (18:8). He did not want his disciples to suffer with him – not just yet anyway. They were not ready for such testing.

John tells us that this was in fulfilment of what Jesus had spoken earlier (6:39 and in his prayer 17:12). Such fulfilment is somewhat strange in view of the fact that Jesus' words point to a spiritual keeping or protection. He prayed that they be kept from the evil one (17:15).

'How can this saying be suddenly robbed of its precious import and seemingly 'degraded' into a reference to the manner in which Jesus provided for the physical escape of his disciples?' asked one commentator. He answers, along with Calvin and others, that 'had the disciples at this time been captured by these soldiers and temple guards, it would have been too severe a test for their faith. They were not ready for this extreme ordeal'.

The great High Priest made sure those he had chosen had a way of escape. He never lets his followers be tested beyond what they can bear (I Corinthians 10). Moreover, this physical escape pointed to the spiritual escape that he was going to provide for them. As High Priest he was going to offer a sacrifice for their sin – and ours. He was going to sacrifice himself for them that they would not be lost, but delivered from the grip of sin and death. *Jesus was made like his brothers in every way that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, and make propitiation for the sins of the people* (Hebrews 2:17).

Here in Gethsemane we see Jesus the Prophet revealing the will of God for our salvation. We see Jesus the King in full control, ruling and defending us, and restraining and conquering all his enemies. We see Jesus the High Priest making intercession for his people, offering up himself as a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God (Shorter Catechism).

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