

“Whom Do You Seek?”

John 18: 1-9

Easter is only a few weeks away. Let’s practice our greeting. He is risen! [He is risen indeed!] This morning I would like to begin preparing our hearts for the most joyous and momentous event for Christianity, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. To get to that event we must pass through the gruesomeness of the passion week. This very pattern shows us God’s plan for this world and those of us who live on it---suffering before exaltation, grime before glory. To begin our preparation turn with me to John 18. READ JOHN 18:1-9.

John 18 opens with an account of the Savior and His disciples entering a garden. They have come to this garden after having a meal in a big upper room somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. It is after 9 p.m., maybe as late at midnight. It is dark except for the light of an almost full moon. They have made their way past the Temple, left the city, and walked out to this countryside garden. Here, nothing is said of Jesus taking Peter and James and John into its deeper recesses, that they might “watch with him.” Nothing is said of Jesus praying to the Father. Nothing is said of His falling upon His face, Of His awful agony, of the bloody sweat, or of the angel appearing to strengthen Him. Perfectly in place in the other Gospels, these details are passed over here as unsuited to the picture which John was inspired to paint. Here, other details are supplied—most appropriate and striking—which are not found in¹ Matthew, Mark, or Luke.

John, as one of the three taken aside by the Lord, was an eyewitness to all that happened. Yet, he alone, gives us the details found here. Why did he write so differently than the others? The major reason is explained by the purpose of his book. He wrote to show Jesus as God in the flesh not as the suffering Son of Man. It is from John we learn the uniquenesses of the Divine Person. Every detail in this text is rich with meaning. I want to spend most of our time looking at the **actions** Jesus took in preparation for the passion, probing, prosecution, and pounding that was to come. Then we will just note some of the **attributes** He displayed during this event.

I. THE ACTIONS JESUS TOOK IN PREPARATION FOR HIS PROSECUTION.

Chapter 18 is a continuation of what started about 3 in the afternoon. The text tells us that...

1. Jesus concluded His words. The events of this evening began in the upper room with a big meal. There Jesus spoke at length about servanthood, service, suffering, spirit-filled living, and separation. This is chapters 13-16 of this Gospel. When He had finished they walked past the Temple where He prayed the real Lord’s Prayer about our unity. This is John 17. When He had finished “these words” they walked on. He had finished His *prophetic message*, He now prepares to go forth to His *priestly work*.² Jesus had said all he had to say as a prophet, and now he equipped himself to the discharge of his office as a priest, that is, to *make his soul an offering for sin*; and, when he had gone through this, he entered upon his kingly office.

2. Jesus crossed the Kidron. To get a good idea of this, picture yourself leaving BC town square at midnight under a full moon without a flashlight, walking down dump road all the way to the creek, crossing the creek, and walking up to the center of Camp Sierra. That is what “over the ravine of the Kidron” was like. The Kidron has a fascinating history.

¹Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 969 Much of this sermon is taken from this source. Unfootnoted material will be from this source.

²Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 970

A. The name “Kidron” means *dark, turbulent waters*. It was into these waters the dirt of the city and the blood of the sacrificial animals eventually leached. These waters were dark, dirty, and disturbed. They were emblematic of that which was about to come upon Jesus.

B. **Crossing the Kidron fulfilled an OT type.** In 2 Samuel 15 (note particularly verses 23, 30, 31) we read of David, at the time of his shameful betrayal by his familiar friend Ahithophel, crossing the same brook; crossing it in tears, accompanied by his faithful followers. So now David’s Son and Lord, crossed the Cedron while Judas was betraying Him to His foes.³ It is interesting that David’s treacherous counselor Ahithophel hanged himself (2 Sam. 17:23), and David’s treacherous son Absalom was caught in a tree and killed while hanging there (2 Sam. 18:9–17). Judas, of course, went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3–10).⁴

C. **Crossing the Kidron made it easier for the arrest to take place without commotion.** The Jewish leaders had plotted a long time to arrest Him but fear of the people kept them from doing it in the Temple. Judas was looking for the perfect opportunity. Jesus set it up because He followed His usual custom of coming to this place after a meal in the city. *This is the first indication that Jesus was in control of the events of this night.* Being arrested here, quietly and secretly, would prevent a lot of difficulties with the people.

3. **Jesus came into the garden.** They were all familiar with this place. This olive grove was the place they came each night to bivouac when they were in Jerusalem (Luke 21:37).⁵ This olive orchard, complete with its press, the Gethsemane, belonged to someone in Jerusalem, who had given Jesus permission to use it whenever He wanted. Many well-to-do people had their private gardens out here. Space in Jerusalem was too limited for private gardens, for it was built on the top of a hill. Further, there were ceremonial prohibitions which forbade the use of manure on the soil of the sacred city. That was why the wealthy people had their private gardens outside the city on the slopes of the Mount of Olives.⁶

Judas knew that Jesus would be coming here after the meal in the upper room because he himself had participated many times before. The Scripture says “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). So it is not surprising that **Judas . . . betrayed** Jesus for money (John 12:4-6; Matt. 26:14-16). Judas was not an unusual monster but a common man caught in a common sin (greed) which Satan used to accomplish his purpose. Judas knew the habits of **Jesus**, and his deed stands out in black contrast with Jesus’ unselfish love.⁷

Here’s the question for us: how often does money ruin or betray our relationship with Jesus? But there is another thought for us here. When people today pretend to know and love the Lord, they are committing the sin of Judas. It is bad enough to betray Christ, but to do it with *a kiss*, a sign of affection, is the basest treachery of all.⁸

4. **Jesus confronted the mob,** 3-4a. It was not a small group of men who came to arrest Jesus.

A. **Just count the mob.** The “band” which Judas “received” . . . signifies a detachment of Roman soldiers, which Pilate had granted for the occasion; the Greek word means the tenth part

³Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 971

⁴Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 18:1

⁵Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:334

⁶Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of John : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 221

⁷Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:334

⁸Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 18:2

of a legion, and therefore consisted of six hundred men. Some have questioned this, but the words of **Matthew 26:47**, “a great multitude with him”—strongly confirms it. The “officers from the chief priests and Pharisees” refer to the servants of Israel’s leaders. **Luke 22:52** shows that the heads of the Nation themselves also swelled the mob”.... As Christ was to die for sinners both of the Jews and Gentiles, so God ordered it that *Gentiles* (Roman soldiers) and *Jews* should have a hand alike in His arrest and in His crucifixion!⁹

Here’s a good idea: Let us... *not follow a multitude to do evil*, nor fear a multitude designing evil to us, *if God be for us*.¹⁰

B. Look at the conflict they anticipated. This mob came ready for a fight. The lanterns and torches were to hunt down the disciples if they should seek to disappear into the darkness. The weapons were to subdue or kill them if they offered any resistance. They expected conflict, but it never happened.

C. Meet the Champion they encountered. Jesus knew what was coming. He had known since eternity past that this night would eventually arrive. These were “all the things” decreed by God, agreed upon by the Son in the eternal covenant of grace, predicted in the Old Testament Scriptures, and foretold, again and again, by Himself; namely, all the attendant circumstances of His sufferings and death. Now it was time. By His two-hour-old sermon He had prepared his disciples for this hour of trial, and by his just finished prayer He had prepared himself for it, he now courageously goes out to meet it.¹¹ The scene in 18:4 is one of intense drama and irony. Judas came with soldiers and religious leaders to take Jesus by force. But Jesus stood alone.... He was in command. In the darkness of the night, He could have fled as all the disciples would soon do (cf. Mark 14:50). But instead¹² Our Lord Jesus, like a bold champion, takes the field first¹³ and issues a challenging question.

5. Jesus clarified a challenging issue, 4b-8a. It is the first of two questions to focus the attention on who He is. With His questions Jesus is searching their hearts. With their answers they indicate they don’t have a clue as to who He is.

A. A challenging question: It is simple, direct, and revealing. Because He is in control of this night, He speaks first: **Whom do you seek?** That which the Holy Spirit has here emphasized is the *willingness* of Christ to suffer, His *readiness* to go forth to the Cross. He knew full well for what foul purpose these men were there, but He asks the question so that He might reveal who He is and then solemnly and formally surrender Himself to them. Once, when they wanted to take Him by force and make Him a king, He departed from them (John 6:15); but now that He was to be scourged and crucified, He boldly advanced to meet them.¹⁴

Let His question come to you. Whom do you seek when you go looking for Jesus? Do you look for a baby in a manger? Do you look for a mild-mannered teacher of morality? Do you look for a controversial figure? Do you look for a myth? Do you look for a “hidden” Jesus only

⁹Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 973

¹⁰Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 18:1

¹¹Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 18:1

cf. *confer*, compare

¹²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:334

¹³Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 18:1

¹⁴Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 974

now revealed in scurrilous documents? Do you look for Jesus the Nazarene? Or do you look for the Divine-Human person He presented Himself to be? Whom do you seek?

B. A careful answer. “They answered him, **Jesus of Nazareth**. Why did they not answer, “You!”? Jesus of Nazareth stood before them, yet they did not say, “You are the one we have come to arrest.” It is plain from this circumstance that they did not recognize Him...even though they had seen Him many times. Their eyes and minds were blind. They had no clue who He was.

How solemn the lesson! How forcibly this illustrates 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4: “**But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.**”...The natural man is spiritually blind: the Light shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:5)! It is only as the light of God shines in our hearts that knowledge is given us to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6)! It takes more than natural light to discover and discern the person of the God-man!

It is intriguing to me that they apparently didn’t recognize Jesus, but John had no trouble recognizing Judas standing among them. Men can recognize men but men do not often recognize Jesus, the God-man.

C. A curious happening. Something really unusual happens at verse 6, which is nowhere explained. Here is my guess at what happened to make them recoil and recline. When He said “**I AM,**” for a brief moment a flash of the same shekinah glory that appeared in the burning bush to Moses appeared on Him and it frightened and flattened them. Remember, *He is in control of this night!* But look what else happened. It seems to me that Judas did not fall down. He was left standing. Judas was now apparently standing alone, eye-to-eye, so to speak, with Jesus. It was only a few more moments before Judas identified Jesus with the betrayal kiss.

A.W. Pink adds his thoughts: They were there to arrest Him, but instead of advancing to lay hands on Him, they retreated! Among them were six hundred Roman soldiers, yet they retired before His single “I am.” They fell back in consternation, not forward in worship! All He said was “I am”; but it was fully sufficient to overawe and overpower them. It was the enunciation of the ineffable Name of God (Ex. 3:14)...It was a display of His Divine majesty. It was a quiet exhibition of His Divine power. It was a signal demonstration that *He* was “the word” (John 1:1)! He did not strike them with His hand—there was no need to; He simply spoke two monosyllables and they were completely overcome¹⁵

But why, we may ask, should our Lord have acted in such a manner on this occasion? **First**, that it might be clearly shown He was *more* than “Jesus of Nazareth”: He was “*God manifest in flesh.*” **Second**, that it might appear with absolute clearness that He *voluntarily* delivered Himself up into their hands—that it was not they who apprehended Him, but He who submitted to them. He was not captured, for He was not to (passively) *suffer*... , but to (actively) *offer* Himself as a sacrifice to God.... If none had power to take His life from Him (John 10:18, 19), none had power to arrest Him. He here showed them, and us, that *they* were completely at *His* mercy—helpless on the ground.... How easy for Him then to have walked quietly away, unmolested! ... they failed to recognize Him; now they were prostrate before Him. What was to hinder Him from leaving them thus? Nothing but His Father’s will, and to it He submissively bowed. Thus did the Savior give proof of His willingness to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin.

Vividly does this forewarn sinners of how utterly helpless they will be before the Christ of God in a coming Day! “What shall He do when He comes to judge, who did this when about to be judged? What shall be His might when He comes to reign, who had this might when He was

¹⁵Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 975

at the point to die?” (Augustine.) What, indeed, will be the effect of that Voice when He speaks in judgment upon the wicked!¹⁶

D. A certain Scripture. This incident is a divine fulfillment of Psalm 27:2, which says *When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to devour my flesh, they stumbled and fell.*”

E. Contrasts in this scene. There are a number of interesting contrasts in this scene.

- Here in the Garden, instead of Christ falling to the ground before the Father, we behold those who came to arrest the Savior falling to the ground before Him! Nowhere does the perfect supremacy of the Lord Jesus shine forth more gloriously....¹⁷

- Judas is the only one of that group left standing while the others are quivering on the ground.

- Weapons vs His Words. They came with all kinds of weapons, yet He just spoke a word to them. There has always been some form of confirmation of His Deity in His humiliation. When he lay in a manger, he was pointed out to the Eastern Magi by an extraordinary star; when he agonized in the garden, there came an angel from heaven to strengthen him; and when he was apprehended as a thief, he beat down the whole band of his enemies by a word of his mouth.¹⁸

They came with weapons to apprehend the good shepherd as if He could be taken with swords and spears. They did not understand His readiness as the sacrificial lamb to be taken to the slaughter. Significant too is the symbolism here. The weapons are what the world uses to attack the Truth. We see here how useless and vain they are when employed against the Son of God.

- Lanterns and torches vs the Light of the World. What a silly thing! Seeking out the Light of the World with torches and lanterns! All of man’s best to discover Jesus is useless until you come by faith and let His light shine into your darkness.

- The entrance of Christ into the Garden at once reminds us of Eden. The contrasts between them are indeed most striking. In Eden, all was delightful; in Gethsemane, all was terrible. In Eden, Adam and Eve parleyed with Satan; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought the face of His Father. In Eden, Adam sinned; in Gethsemane, the Savior suffered. In Eden, Adam fell; in Gethsemane, the Redeemer conquered. The conflict in Eden took place by day; the conflict in Gethsemane was waged at night. In the one Adam fell before Satan; in the other, the soldiers fell before Christ. In Eden the race was lost; in Gethsemane Christ announced, “Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none” (John 18:9). In Eden, Adam took the fruit from Eve’s hand; in Gethsemane, Christ received the cup from His Father’s hand. In Eden, Adam hid himself; in Gethsemane, Christ boldly showed Himself. In Eden, God sought Adam; in Gethsemane, the last Adam sought God! From Eden Adam was “driven”; from Gethsemane Christ was “went forth.” In Eden the “sword” was drawn (Gen. 3:24); in Gethsemane the “sword” was sheathed (John 18:11).¹⁹ Eden was the Garden of disobedience and sin; Gethsemane was the Garden of obedience and submission;²⁰

6. Jesus had a commanding presence, 7-8. Jesus now asks them His second question. *Whom do you seek?* I wonder if He expected a different answer after what had just happened or was He just reinforcing their ignorance. I think this was their opportunity to come to faith and they

¹⁶Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 976

¹⁷Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 970

¹⁸Simeon, Charles: *Horae Homileticae Vol. 14: John XIII to Acts*. London, 1832-63, S. 148

¹⁹Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 971

²⁰Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 18:1

missed it. This second question carries more weight and a mighty victory. They had been taught by woeful experience who He was, when He blew them over, flung them down with His breath yet they were not willing to change their minds. They would not own Him as *the Christ*, but continued to speak of Him according to the name of His humiliation—“**Jesus of Nazareth**.” It seems no outward means will soften those who are resolved on wickedness. No miracles, however awesome, will melt men’s enmity: *nothing* will suffice except God works *directly* by His Word and Spirit.

“**Jesus answered, I have told you that I am**” (John 18:8). The dignity and calmness of our Lord are very noticeable here. Knowing full well all the insults and indignities He was about to suffer, He repeats His former declaration, “I am”; then He added, “if therefore you seek me, let these go their way.”²¹ This brings us to the last thing Jesus did.

7. Jesus covered His own, 8b-9. When Jesus said **let these go their way**, it was not a whimpy request, it was a strong command.

In John 13:1 we are told of Christ that “**having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end**.” How blessedly this is seen here. Christ’s chief thought is not of Himself and what He was about to suffer, but of His disciples. It was the Shepherd protecting His sheep. “The tender sympathy and consideration of our great High Priest for His people came out very beautifully in this place, and would doubtless be remembered by the Eleven long afterwards. They would remember that the very last thought of their Master, before He was made a prisoner, was for them and their safety” (Bishop Ryle). He speaks as Conqueror, and such He was; for He had thrown them to the ground by a word from His lips. They were about to tie His hands, but before doing so He first tied theirs!

This action has strong ramifications. He demonstrated to the disciples and to us just how competent He is to protect and preserve through the greatest of dangers. Most of the time we don’t even recognize it. Christ sometimes brings his people into difficulties, that he may magnify himself in their deliverance.²² Thus did Christ give another signal proof of His power over the spirits of men to restrain them; and thus did He again make manifest His Deity.²³

II. THE ATTRIBUTES JESUS DEMONSTRATED.

1. Complete **obedience** to the will of the Father.
2. **Courage** in the face of great danger.
3. **Confidence** and **authority** over men because of who He is.
4. **Concentration** on His purpose. He knew what needed to be done and He was willing and ready to get on with it.
5. Covering **love** for His own. He protects, guards, guides, and delivers those who are His.

May this text prepare your heart to appreciate more fully what has been accomplished for you on the cross. Because it was so thoroughly complete He could say ‘It is finished!’ and have the stamp of approval placed on it by His resurrection from the dead.

He is risen! [He is risen, indeed!] Amen.

²¹Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 980

²²Henry, Matthew: *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible : Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody : Hendrickson, 1996, c1991, S. Jn 18:1

²³Pink, Arthur Walkington: *Exposition of the Gospel of John*. Swengel, Pa. : Bible truth depot, 1923-45, S. 980

For Lesa

With Love,
Your SS

Congregations were affected much as congregations are to-day. Caesar of Heisterbach, who himself was a preacher, tells of a congregation that went to sleep and snored during a sermon. The preacher, suddenly turning from the line of his discourse, exclaimed: "Hear, my brethren, I will tell you something new and strange. There was once a king called Artus." The sleepers awoke and the preacher continued, "See, brethren, when I spoke about God, you slept, but when I began to tell a trivial story, you pricked up your ears to hear."²⁰⁶⁶ Caesar was himself present on this occasion.²⁴

The sermons that have come down to us are almost invariably based upon a text or paragraph of Scripture and are full of biblical instruction, doctrinal inference, and moral application. It was well understood that the personality of the preacher has much to do with the effectiveness of a discourse.²⁵

²⁰⁶⁶ *Dial.*, IV. 36.

²⁴Schaff, Philip ; Schaff, David Schley: *History of the Christian Church*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997

²⁵Schaff, Philip ; Schaff, David Schley: *History of the Christian Church*. Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997