

John Chapter 18

In chapter 18, we come to John's account of the garden of Gethsemane, followed from verse 28 to the end of the chapter by the beginning of the Lord's trial before Pilate. John's account of the Gethsemane experience is totally unique. It is just as interesting for what is omitted as to what is included. Thus the Lord does not pray in John, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me", or "If Thou be willing, let this cup pass from Me". There is no agony, no sweat as it were great drops of blood, no falling down to the ground. These omissions would all be in keeping with John's account of Calvary where there is no mention of Simon the Cyrenian, or of the two thieves, or of the mockery of men, or of the darkness, or the forsaking by God. Rather, in Gethsemane, as well as at Golgotha, the Lord is seen as the Son of God, with everything under His control, retaining His power as well as His majesty throughout.

Verse 1 begins, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron". "These words" refer us back to chapter 17 where He prays much to the Father about His desires for His disciples. Now as He approaches Gethsemane, events are about to unfold which will bring these desires to fruition. Only John mentions the crossing of the brook Cedron. This takes us back to the night when David had to cross the brook as he fled Jerusalem following the rebellion of his son Absalom. II Samuel 15:23 says, "The king also himself passed over the brook Kidron". That night David was overtaken by events which he could not have foreseen. Staying behind in the city was a man called Ahithophel, David's friend and counsellor. David was shocked when he heard that Ahithophel had betrayed him. He thus wrote about him in Psalm 41:9, "Mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, he that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me".

In the upper room in John 13, the Lord indicated to the disciples that one of them was going to betray Him. He waited till that very last night before He spoke about the betrayer in their midst. Indeed He had to do so for, although the disciples had been deceived by Judas, He had to say enough to show that He was not deceived. As He says, "That when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He". So, the Lord quotes from Psalm 41:9, but with one important difference. He omits the words of David which were true of Ahithophel, "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted". Judas was never the Lord's familiar friend, nor was he a man in whom the Lord trusted. So as the Lord crosses the brook, He is fully aware of what lies ahead of Him.

John continues in verse 1 with further information about the area - "Where was a garden". John in fact is the only one of the four gospel writers to tell us that Gethsemane was a garden. See the description of the place given to us by the other three writers :-

1. Matthew 26:36 "A place called Gethsemane"
2. Mark 14:32 "A place which was named Gethsemane"
3. Luke 22:39 "Went, as He was wont, to the mount of Olives"

The description of Gethsemane is therefore unique to John. So also is the fact, mentioned only by John, that the Lord was buried in a tomb in a garden. Thus we read in Chapter 19:41, "Now in the place where He was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden, a new sepulchre". We would never have known about the garden tomb were it not for John. So why does John tell us these things? If we think back to the first garden in the Bible, Eden, it was surely a place of beauty and fragrance, and abundant provision. It was a place where God could enter and communicate with Adam and have fellowship with him. It was a true paradise, but then that paradise

was lost because of sin. The Lord now comes into His garden – first Gethsemane, then Golgotha. It is now a place of betrayal, of suffering, of death, and of burial. God's garden has been brought into ruin. The only fragrance in these gardens comes from the Lord Himself, who has come to restore Paradise to the sons of men.

Verse 2 now tells about Judas. "And Judas also, which betrayed Him, knew the place". When Judas was sent out of the upper room by the Lord Jesus, John adds a little expression, "And it was night". It was night of course, but it was certainly darkness in the heart of Judas. The devil had already entered into Him. Judas, no doubt, went to meet the chief priests, who would then assemble the band of men and officers. The Bible does not say so, but I imagine that Judas would have led the soldiers back to the upper room, only to find it empty. Where could the Lord have gone? Judas would know – Gethsemane !! It was a familiar place, "for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples". Out of the 21 chapters of John's gospel, no less than 16 describe events that took place in Jerusalem. One would think from John's gospel that the Lord scarcely ever left the city. Yet it was a place that He could never call "home". We read once that "every man went unto his own home, but Jesus went with His disciples to the mount of Olives". Indeed, by the end of John chapter 11, it had become a place that was hostile to Him. "The Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where He were, he should show it, that they might take Him". The Lord either found refuge in the home in Bethany of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, or more frequently perhaps, He slept in the garden of Gethsemane. It would be a place of fond memories for the Lord and His disciples. How often, I wonder, at the end of a busy day, would the Lord discuss with the disciples the parables that had been spoken that day, or the meaning of some miracle that had been done. How often would the disciples have seen the Lord in prayer in this garden? But all this meant nothing to Judas. "Judas also knew the place".

The companions of Judas are described in verse 3. "Having received a band of men and officers... cometh thither with lanterns, and torches and weapons". Some have estimated that this was quite a sizable number of men who came with Judas. They were expecting to meet twelve men, and they came expecting a fight. Note that the lanterns and torches are unique to John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make reference to "swords and staves", but only John mentions the "lanterns and torches". Again, is it not to emphasise the darkness, not only of the night, but the moral darkness in the hearts of these men?

Verse 4 now shows the deity of the Lord Jesus being manifested. "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth". Again, only John speaks of the Saviour "knowing", for John is the gospel which more than any other shows the Lord possessing the attributes of deity.

His omniscience

Ch 1:47 "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile"

2:25 "He knew what was in man"

4:18 "Thou hast had five husbands"

5:6 "And knew that He had been a long time in that case" (The man by the pool of Bethesda)

11:14 "Lazarus is dead"

13:21 "One of you shall betray Me"

His omnipotence

Throughout the gospel, the seven signs selected by John show the Lord's omnipotence. And now, even in Gethsemane, we see that He is God. Throughout this experience, the Lord is in control of every circumstance. "He went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?" In reply to their statement, "Jesus of Nazareth", Jesus saith

unto them, "I am He". The word "He" is in italics, so the Lord's reply was simply, "I am". This was how Jehovah introduced Himself to Moses at the burning bush. He was commanded to go and tell them that "I am" has sent you. Notice, the comment that ends verse 5. "And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them". John tells us in his account that Judas was a mere bystander at this point, and took no active part in the Lord's arrest. Contrast this with the first three gospel writers who all tell us how Judas identified the Lord with a kiss. But John, true to his purpose, shows that Judas is not in control of events here – it is the Lord Himself.

In verse 6 now, we see an example of the Lord's omnipotence. In reply to His "I am", "They went backward and fell to the ground". They were powerless to overcome Him, had He so wished. Later, He says to Pilate His judge, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above". Notice therefore the complete contrast with the Synoptics. There it is the Lord who is falling down to the ground. Here it is His would be captors – He is in control. In verse 8, the Lord identifies Himself again, but this time He adds, "If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way". This is the One of whom Paul will later write, "Who thought not on His own things, but also on the things of others". This was also to fulfil His earlier words in His prayer in chapter 17, "Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none". Now He is fulfilling His own words as He intercedes for the preservation of His own.

In verse 10, we come to the intervention of Peter. "Simon Peter, having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant....the servant's name was Malchus". John is unique in two respects here. He alone identifies Peter as the man with the sword, and he alone names the servant as Malchus. These details will be seen to be more significant as we move towards the middle of the chapter. So, what do the first three gospel writers have to say about this incident?

Matt 26:51 "One of them....drew his sword"

Mark 14:57 "One of them...having a sword, drew it".

Luke 22:50 "One of them smote the servant of the high priest"

So, why did John alone identify Peter as the attacker? Peter is the one who boldly confessed in John 13:37, "I will lay down my life for Thy sake". His self-confidence was at its highest. But soon this self confidence will be put to the test and his courage will desert him. The naming of Malchus will be explained later in verse 26.

Does the Lord encourage Peter in his aggression? Far from it!! "Put up thy sword into the sheath." And why so? "The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" People often speak of the Lord at this point as one who was contemplating His death on the cross. But in John's gospel, the Lord has already done so in chapter 12:27.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say, Father save Me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour". The Lord raises the question, "Save Me from this hour?", and He immediately dismisses it. "But for this cause came I unto this hour". So, why is there the apparent difference between the cup spoken of in the first three gospels, and the cup spoken of in John 18:11. In the Synoptics, He is heard praying, "If it be possible...". "If Thou be willing....let this cup pass from Me". Commentators would tell us that the Lord was here contemplating the sufferings of the cross, and because it was all so awful for Him, He is asking the Father if it was possible to avoid it. But would our Lord and Saviour ever make such a request? Is He really saying, "Let this cross pass from Me". Is He not the one who has been speaking about His death all through His public ministry?. As early as John chapter 2, we hear Him saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again". Does He not speak of His death and resurrection in Matthew 16? "The son of man must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and rise

again the third day". Did He not call Peter "Satan" when Peter took Him aside to rebuke Him, "This shall not be unto Thee". Was not His death the subject of that conversation that took place with Moses and Elijah at the top of the Holy Mount? "They spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem". When Peter speaks out again on this occasion, he is told, "Hear ye Him". And Right up to and including the upper room, the cross is before the Lord. "With desire, I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer". How then could this one who knew He must die "according to the scriptures", suddenly ask the Father "If it be possible...", or, "If Thou be willing...let this cup (cross) pass from Me". How could the Lord reconcile this statement with the rebuke He gave to Peter- "Get thee behind Me, Satan" – if He Himself had second thoughts about the cross. Would He not owe Peter an apology for His rebuke. And what about Peter in Gethsemane? Could he not say, "I tried to answer your prayer by attacking the servant. You wanted to be delivered from the cross. I tried to prevent it but you rebuked me yet again".

But if indeed the Lord in the Synoptics was not praying about the cross, what else was in His mind? Was it not rather the then present experience in Gethsemane? He was in an agony. He was sweating as it were great drops of blood. He was falling down to the ground. Why was this so? Could it not be He was enduring the full onslaught of Satan in Gethsemane? But is there anything to substantiate this quite different suggestion? In Luke 22, the Lord says not once, but twice, to His disciples, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation". He says also to His captors, "This is your hour and the power of darkness". Paul uses this latter expression in Colossians Chapter 1. God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son". The power of darkness is the power of wickedness, the power of Satan, and that power was present in Gethsemane.

Verse 12 continues, "Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews and bound Him". The fact that the Lord was bound is repeated again in verse 24. Is not the contrast between the Lord and Peter, who was free to speak and act, yet he denied his Lord three times in the circumstances.

Verse 13. "And led Him away to Annas first". This is the first of no less than six trials that the Lord went through that night and the following morning. Did He really have 6 what we might call trials? Well, He met with six people or groups of people, and in each instance the person or persons had the power to set Him free. Those involved were :-

1. Annas
2. Caiaphas
3. The Sanhedrim
4. Pilate
5. Herod
6. The people

1. Annas

The fact that they led Him away to Annas first suggests that, although he didn't hold the title, he still held the real religious power in the land. Our verse in John 18 tells us that he was father-in-law to Caiaphas. We don't know the history behind Annas but some have suggested that he was the high priest but fell out of political favour with the Romans, and was replaced by his son-in-law. In Luke 3:2 we read of "Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests". Whether through political interference or religious expediency, a situation then existed that was contrary to the word of God. It is obvious that there should only have been one high priest at any one time. So, how did they get round the problem? John in his gospel perhaps gives us man's solution. In

chapter 11:49, we read of "Caiphas, being the high priest that same year". Then in Acts chapter 4, we read of Annas the high priest, and Caiphas". These two men were making a mockery of the priesthood, apparently taking it in turns, a year about, to be the high priest of Israel. This is the true character of the men who were to sit in judgment upon the Lord Jesus. When they led Him away to Annas first, we have no record of what actually took place. Only that Annas sent Him bound to Caiphas. This visit to Annas is recorder only in John's gospel.

2. Caiphas

An interesting comment about Caiphas is added in verse 14 – "Now Caiphas was he which gave counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people". This refers back to chapter 11 – there in verse 50, Caiphas said, "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not". The word "expedient" means profitable. Caiphas spoke the truth of course, for it was profitable for the nation that on should die for it. He spoke this not through faith, but because, being high priest that year, he prophesied. The true motive of Caiphas and the Sanhedrim was that of self interest - "The Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation". The incident shows that men can prophesy without having faith.

The Lord also used the word "expedient" in relation to Himself in John 16:7 – "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not way, the Comforter will not come unto you". For us as sinners, we would have to say like Caiphas, "It is expedient for us that one man should die". But it is harder for as as saints, just as it was for the disciples when they heard it, to understand why it is profitable for us that He went away. Would we not have been better off had He stayed here on earth. Well, of course, the disciples had much blessing while the Lord was with them. But He couldn't always be with them. Sometimes, He sent them off two by two, and they had to cope on their own. Equally He was often there to explain His words to them, but even then there were things said which they were unable to understand. We, today, have none of these problems. We never lack either a Comforter or a Teacher, for the Spirit of God has come to reside in each one of us.

Verses 15 to 27 describe now events that took place within the palace of the high priest. John focuses our attention on Peter's conversation with the servants, and the Lord's dialogue with the high priest.

The first four gospels all record the fact that Peter followed "afar off" ie at a distance. He would have been OK if he had stayed at a distance but John records the fact that it was he who was responsible for letting Peter in. Indeed we read not just once but twice that "that disciple was known unto the high priest". This gives us a suggestion that perhaps John was of a higher social standing than Peter. Certainly John had no problem gaining entrance whereas he had to speak to the damsel that kept the door to allow Peter in. If we go back to the call of the disciples, we read how that John and James left their father in the ship with the "hired servants". The business was large enough to hire servants in the ship. Also, when they drew in the miraculous draught of fishes, they beckoned to their "partners" in the other ship to help them. It is most certainly true that John had no difficulty in maintaining his testimony in the palace whereas Peter did not. The maid seemed to know that both were disciples, for she asks Peter, "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples". The lesson is that we might come into circumstances in the world in which we personally feel comfortable but the same circumstances would be a stumbling block to another. The Lord warns severely against being a stumbling block to other disciples, even though, like John here, we might do it inadvertently.

So, in Luke's gospel, we read that the first maid looked "earnestly" or intently at Peter. The third person "confidently affirmed" that Peter was one of the disciples. They knew he was a Galilean by his accent. "Thy speech betrayeth thee". In spite of all this attention, Peter continues to deny. John also tells us twice over that "Peter stood and warmed himself". It was the warmth of compromise, and it will always get us into bother in the world. But John adds another little detail unrecorded by the others. He also tells us that Peter stood by a "fire of coals". This is a seemingly irrelevant detail until we come to chapter 21, when the Lord meets Peter beside a "fire of coals". Thus the Lord brought Peter back to the same place where he denied His Lord.

The trial before Caiaphas begins in verse 19. "The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples and His doctrine". The high priest asks Jesus about two things – first His disciples, then His doctrine. Caiaphas was interested in His disciples because as even Pilate later perceived, it was because of envy that they had delivered Him. In John chapter 12, as the Lord rode in triumph into Jerusalem, the Pharisees said among themselves, "perceive ye how ye prevail nothing. Behold the world is gone after Him". Their words were literally fulfilled in the very next two verses. Certain Greeks who had come up to the feast said to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus".

Here in verse 20 of chapter 18, the Lord ignores the comment about His disciples and goes on to speak about His doctrine. He does not defend it in detail but states rather that He always spoke openly in the world, in the synagogue and in the temple. He says, "In secret have I said nothing". Why not then ask them which heard Him. The Lord was always open in His dealings with men. When He met the man in the synagogue with the withered hand, all eyes were upon Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath day. What does the Lord do? He says to the man, "Stand forth in the midst". He brought him out to where every man could see him and performed the miracle before all. Contrast how the Lord worked and spoke with those men that Paul wrote about later. In II Timothy 3:6, he speaks of those who "creep into houses", to lead women into false doctrine. In Galatians 2:4, he also speaks of "false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty". In verse 4 of his epistle, Jude combines both ideas when he writes, "There are certain men crept in unawares".

So, how are the Lord's words received? Verse 22 says, "One of the officers....struck Jesus with the palm of his hand". The Lord had spoken no evil, so did not deserve such a response. We can contrast this incident with one involving Paul and the high priest in Acts 23. When the high priest commanded someone who stood by to smite Paul on the mouth, Paul replies with, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall". Paul is rebuked for his comment. "Revilest thou God's high priest?" Paul then finds himself having to retract his statement, even quoting from Exodus 22:28, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people". The Lord, however, never had to apologise, never had to retract a single word.

John does not describe the third trial but in the other gospels, the Lord was brought before the whole council at break of day. Here was His main "religious" trial. We find, however, that at least 2 scriptures were broken during this trial. The law had said that someone should be accused only "in the mouth of two or three witnesses". This council brought forward false witnesses, men prepared to lie and to distort the Lord's words, not about a temple of stone, but about the temple of His own body.

The other scripture which was broken was Leviticus 21:10. There it was expressly forbidden for the high priest to rend his clothes.

Verse 24 seems out of place and we might think should have come in after verse 14. But is it not rather brought in later to show that the Lord, though bound, was able to resist the reproach of Caiaphas, while Peter was not bound, yet failed miserably. The

third and final denial by Peter is in verse 26. "One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith "Did not I see thee in the garden with Him?" Now we see why John identifies Peter as the sword bearer and Malchus as the injured party. Here now is an eye-witness from Gethsemane, who took careful note of Peter because it was Peter who attacked his kinsman. Though backed into a seemingly inescapable corner, Peter denied yet again. In other words, he tells a bare-faced lie.

From verse 28 through to verse 15 of chapter 19, we have John's account of the Lord's trial before Pilate. This is the fourth trial which the Lord had to face, and was the first of the "political" trials. John adds the little comment in verse 28, "And it was early". These men cannot wait to get rid of the Lord Jesus. In their hatred, they came early to the judgment hall. John gives a similar little comment about the time that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She came to the sepulchre, and it was "early". She came out of her deep love for the Saviour to do what she could for Him. I suppose the Jews brought the Lord early to the judgment hall because they feared the people. If the trial had been delayed for a few more hours, then word might have got quickly round the city and perhaps a more sympathetic crowd might have assembled outside the hall.

Even in their very worst hour, however, the Jews maintained their religious scruples. They "went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover". The Lord and His disciples had already eaten the Passover as we know. So also would almost all the people of Israel, for after sunset, the Passover would have been eaten that night. The exceptions were the chief priests and rulers who had spent the night in the arrest and trial of Jesus of Nazareth.

One might have thought that Pilate would not have gone along with all this. Wakened out of sleep when it was scarcely dawn, he finds himself having to go back and forward no less than three times from his judgment hall to the waiting Jews outside. The trial begins with the opening question by the judge, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" This is the question that opens every trial – the accusation or charge is laid before the court. How strange then the reply, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee". Could you imagine that being said to a judge today. Without a charge, the case would be dismissed out of hand. Pilate, indeed, attempts to dismiss the case in verse 31. "Take ye Him, and judge Him according to your law". At the end of this trial, Pilate will take water to "wash his hands" of this affair. He tried to do this at the start but did not succeed. The Jews replied to Pilate in verse 31, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death". I wonder what they meant by "lawful". Certainly the law of Moses instructed them to put to death the murderer, the adulterer, the blasphemer, and even one found to be disobedient to his parents. Did they mean instead some Roman law that placed constraints upon the Jews right to carry out the death penalty. If this was the case then it didn't prevent them from stoning Stephen to death in Acts chapter 7. But as we know, the cross happened for two reasons – to fulfil the Lord's own words, and also the words of scripture. The Lord had to die by means of a cross. This was the only form of execution in which the victim died so slowly after hours or even days of suffering. Only with such a death could the Lord lay upon Him the iniquity of us all. Only the cross could fulfil the Lord's own words, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die". (John 12:32,33). But the scriptures also had to be fulfilled. "Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures", said Paul in I Cor 15. Those scriptures described one dying on a cross. "They pierced my hands and my feet", wrote David in Psalm 22:16. "All my bones are out of joint". There was only one way for the Lord to die, and it was the Roman way - by means of a cross.

Pilate had the power and the authority, as we said, to instantly dismiss this case, but

in verse 33 he goes back into the judgment hall again and asks the Lord, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" It is obvious that Pilate knew nothing regarding this stranger. Religious fervour amongst the Jews would be of little interest to Pilate unless it threatened the authority of Rome. But what if this man were a king? Was this a threat? The Lord dismisses this thought in verse 36. "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight...but now is my kingdom not from hence". The kingdom of God was about to go into mystery. The king would be in heaven and there would be no visible evidence of His kingdom on earth. But the Lord adds the little rider, "Now is my kingdom...". One day, He will reign on earth, "from the river to the ends of the earth". This is obviously not understood by Pilate who knew only of earthly kingdoms and empires. He seeks further clarification in verse 37. "Art thou a king then?" The Lord's response to this question is to say, "To this end was I born and to this end came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth". Grace and truth came by Him. He is the truth (John 14:6). How remarkable Pilate's reply, "What is truth?". Here is the judge asking the accused, "What is truth?" In the world of men, there is no such thing as absolute truth – everything is relative and changing. Only with God is truth a certainty.