

“Attention... GO!”

John 18.1–3

¹“When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. ²Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. ³Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. [NASB]

HOPE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Rev. Chris Robinson

7th March, 2010

I. Sweetest Songs

In the world of rock and roll music, the sweetest songs come from the most surprising places. It can be pretty humbling. It can lead one to wonder if the harsh judgments we levy upon “the world out there” might not be an indictment upon our own unwillingness to see that the gracious hands of the Lord open wide in the darkest places, ready—so very ready—to embrace those we would so readily leave behind.

Okay, so last time it was the Pretenders. This time it is... yes... Led Zeppelin, and the song from 1969 entitled “Thank You.” I would not generally commend the Zep to you. Maybe the contrast from their other songs makes the surprising sweetness of this one stand out. Maybe a seed of the way we think the world should be, is actually Planted somewhere in a group whose music more often reminds us of the way the world is. Maybe an echo of the way love came into the world reverberates through every corner of this universe to which love is offered.

Maybe you could say the same things about you and about me. There is a seed of the way the world should be, planted in us who more often remind the world of the way it is. And maybe an echo of the way love came to us... maybe it reverberates in their hearing, offering love to those in the corners of the universe where you and I live.

What I do know, is that when Jesus went forth with His disciples over the Kidron valley and entered the garden, He was so much as singing these words to you: “If the sun refused to shine, I would still be loving you. When mountains crumble to the sea, there will still be you and Me. Kind woman [or man], I give you my all; kind woman [or man], nothing more.”

Nothing more was needed. And nothing less would suffice. There was a turn at the beginning of ch13. ^{Jn13.1}“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” Now we begin ch18, having just heard Jesus praying to His Father. In the past four weeks we have heard Jesus praying that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—would love us to the end of eternity.

“Little drops of rain whisper of the pain, tears of loves lost in the days gone by.” The last time somebody went into the Garden, they did not love. Rather, they brought death to each and every one of us who descended from them. Tears of love lost in days gone by, the days of Eden. Ever since, pain has whispered and roared in our ears, in our bodies, and in our hearts.

But now One was going back into the Garden, One who could say, “My love is strong, with you there will be no wrong, together we shall go [because I shall] die.”

II. Starting to Finish

A lot of people have remarked to me lately how glad they are that the Olympics are over. Maybe watching the Olympics should be included as an Olympic sport. I wonder what the preparatory and start command would sound like.

The commands are different for different events, and the commands do evolve—or at least they change—through the years. Take the speed-skating for example. There was something compelling about the commands this year. I found myself repeating the commands over and over in my mind, to see if I could make it sound official. “Skaters to the line... *Rea’ diiiiii... GO!*” Seems to me that in some other events such as the snowboard cross, the command was, “Attennn’shun... *GO!*” At which time the gate would open like on a horse track and that peculiar event would commence.

At that very moment not many of the athletes were thinking or yet wishing that the race would be over already. John seems to indicate that Jesus was not just wishing at this point that His race was over already. To the contrary, Jesus was fully ready, and giving full attention to commanding the start of the finish of His race.

You’ve noticed that something appears to be missing between verses one and two. There are supposed to be some more of the prayer events taking place, aren’t there? Matthew, Mark, and Luke record three of them. These were not minor prayer events. (No prayer event ever is... let alone Jesus’ prayer events.) But these were the three prayer events during which the Lord Jesus sweat great drops of blood... and the disciples slept.

These were the prayer events where Jesus went from asking if the cup of His suffering might be taken away from Him... to declaring His firm intention to drink the cup to its last drop. And the disciples slept. These were the prayer events where Jesus faced and conquered His greatest temptation—to let the disciples perish in their sin... and the disciples slept.

Why did John—who was among the three who were *right there* when Jesus was praying—leave these prayer events out of his coverage? We don’t know for sure. But we do know the events already had a three-fold witness, so John didn’t really *need* to include them. We also know that John seems more focused on Jesus’ *control* of the entire proceedings.

And that’s the image here. Jesus takes the initiative. In full command, Jesus goes forth. In full command, Jesus enters into the garden. Matthew and Mark call the place “Gethsemane”; Luke just speaks of the customary place on the Mount of Olives... John gives no names but simply calls it a “garden.” In full command, Jesus goes to the garden to conquer whereas Adam went into the garden and fell.

Jesus was not led into the garden. Jesus did not hide in the garden, from man or from God as did the first Adam. Jesus did not wish there was no garden. Jesus goes into the garden with full intention of finishing this event, of vanquishing His enemy and vindicating His glory. Jesus has been awaiting this moment from all eternity.

III. Poor Old Judas

The Kidron is not a valley associated with happiness. This ravine runs north-south on the east of Moriah, the mount upon which Jerusalem sets. It is a valley shadowed by images of death. It is a burying ground lined with tombs of commoners and kings, and it was a burning ground covered with ashes of idols cast out.^{1ki15.13;2ki23.6} It was the path of David in ignominious flight from the face of his rebel son Absalom. The Kidron was a valley of the shadow of death. And Jesus deliberately walked right through it.

Jesus was not sneaking out of Jerusalem. Jesus was not trying to avoid detection. Jesus did not look for some place to hide with the disciples. Jesus went straight to the place where He knew He would be found. In fact, the way John has it, it seems Jesus went there to find the betrayer rather than the betrayer going there to find Jesus.

²“Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.” Like the slalom course, Judas was merely a gate along the way to the finish line. It was the Father’s will. To miss the gate or avoid it would mean disqualification from the race. Jesus could have gone straight to the Pharisees. Jesus could have gone straight to Pilate. Jesus even could have gone straight to the cross. Jesus could have gone straight to the finish line... and been disqualified.

But Jesus went to Judas. Jesus could have denied Judas the satisfaction. But it was necessary for His close friend to complete his betrayal. The Scripture had to be fulfilled. ^{Jn13.18}“I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’ ¹⁹From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I AM.” This was for His Father’s glory and for His disciples’ benefit. Jesus went to Judas. In the future the disciples—and you and I—would by this believe that Jesus is I AM. Jesus is God. Jesus exercises complete, sovereign control.

Poor old Judas. But don’t think Judas was tricked into this meeting in the garden or compelled against his will. Judas had determined to betray Jesus, to hand Jesus over to the authorities. Up to the very last moment in the Upper Room, remember, Jesus had offered Judas opportunity after opportunity to repent and turn from his treason against the King. Judas chose the treachery and betrayed the Teacher of Righteousness.

IV. Passion Begun

The Passion has begun. In the previous chapter, Jesus prayed for God to glorify Himself by giving you eternal life... by giving His glory to you. Now Jesus has prayed for God to glorify Himself by giving Jesus eternal death... by taking your vainglory and mine to Himself. Judas would not give his vainglory to Jesus. Will you?

Judas did not want Jesus to be king. Do you? Judas thought lots of strong men and powerful weapons would serve him better than a suffering Savior. Do you? Judas thought God’s Law should be defined and dealt with on his own terms rather than on God’s terms. How about you?

Are you ready to climb the stairway to heaven on your own terms, or will you let Jesus take your stairway to hell so that He can *be* your stairway to heaven?

Soon the sun would refuse to shine on Jesus. Darkness would cover the land when nails pierced His feet and each hand. Jesus went to meet His betrayer because Jesus is still loving you. Never will you who rest in Jesus’ love ever hear Justice say, “Adam, where art thou?” For Jesus already said, “Here am I.”

The mountains would soon crumble to the sea. Earthquakes would shake and challenge the tide when spear arose and pierced His side. Jesus went to meet His betrayer, because Jesus will ever and ever say to you, “there will always be you and Me.” Thanks to Jesus it has been done; for our salvation He is the only One. Happiness, no more be sad; happiness—for yours and His, Jesus went to His betrayer... glad.