

1. The determination of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads together and I'll lead in prayer. And as I pray, let's all join in together in our hearts as we approach the Lord together and bring to him our thankfulness and also our sense of need for blessing and strength and encouragement and teaching from him.

No sinners find their freedom but by the gift unpriced, the Lamb of God unblemished, the precious blood of Christ.

Dear God, our Father, we think again of this great plan of salvation which you had thought through and purposed and decided upon from before the foundation of the world.

And we think of your plan to rescue needy and condemned sinners which you were determined to put into practice and to work out. We think of the way in which you asked your Son to obey your will so that he should come to the earth and be born as a weak human being and then to go to the cross to take our sins, the weight of them and the penalty of them upon his own shoulders and to die the death that we deserved.

And as the hymn writer says, we live by faith in Jesus to make his glory known. Behold the man of sorrows, the Lamb upon his throne.

[1 : 42] And dear Father, we look up by faith to him. He is the man of sorrows. And yet we know that the price of his sorrow has been our rescue, our salvation.

So we thank you today. We do pray, dear Father, for all of us who belong to Christ that you will strengthen us, that you'll equip us to serve you more deeply, more confidently, more truly in the days ahead.

And as we read your word now and listen to it, we do ask you to open our ears and to give us joy and understanding because of your message.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn, friends, if we may please, to John's Gospel, chapter 18.

John, chapter 18. I'll read verses 1 to 11 today. But what I'm planning to do and hoping to do, God willing, over these next few weeks, I think four Wednesdays in February, is to work my way through the whole chapter.

[2 : 48] And you'll see that we have John's account of the arrest of Jesus and Jesus before the high priest, Peter's denial, and then the fascinating conversation that Jesus has with Pilate just before Pilate hands Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified.

But it's the first 11 verses that I'd like to look at this afternoon. So verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus said to them, I am he. Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground.

[4 : 11] So he asked them again, Whom do you seek? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go.

This was to fulfil the word that he had spoken. Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

The servant's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, Put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?

Amen. May this word indeed be a blessing to us. Now, my question is, the question I want to raise and address this afternoon, my question is, what is John, the evangelist, the writer of the gospel, doing here?

What is he aiming to achieve as he presents his record in this particular fashion? Let me put it like this. Is he simply an unbiased chronicler of events?

[5 : 24] Is he simply giving us an unadorned record of the things that happened? The answer must be no. Because any historian, every historian, is going to write to present their material with some kind of agenda.

Now, I don't mean when I say that that John was being untruthful. Certainly not. All the four evangelists are very concerned with truth and historical accuracy. But what John is doing throughout his gospel is giving us the true facts, the true record, and his interpretation of those facts.

And we can take it that his interpretation is a true interpretation because he writes this gospel under the leading, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, God himself. Now, it's important that those of us who read the Bible should understand this principle.

When we read the narrative sections of the Bible, we're not just reading unadorned chronicles or series of events. We're reading these events through the eyes of a writer who has a particular and God-given understanding of them.

In other words, you could put it like this, that we are reading events plus interpretation. Now, it's not we who interpret these events. It's John the Evangelist or Luke or Paul or Moses or whoever.

[6 : 48] It's they who weave their interpretation of the events into their account of them. So we have the events plus the God-given interpretation. Now, this is a great relief to the Bible reader and also to the preacher.

Let me explain that. If I'm to give a series of sermons as I plan to do on John chapter 18, it's not my job to give you my interpretation of this chapter. My job is to discover John's interpretation of the events that he records and to help you to see this God-given interpretation of the approaching death of Jesus.

If I were simply to give you my interpretation of the chapter, it wouldn't be much use because, friends, I can assure you I'm a bear of small brain like Winnie the Pooh and you'd be really none the wiser.

But if we can discover John's reading of these events, we'll then begin to connect with him and to hear his message and discover it's God's message. Let me give you an extreme example of the wrong approach.

About 15 or 20 years ago when I was working down in England, I was asked to speak one Saturday at a Church of England training day for lay people who were training to be preachers and teachers. So I dutifully prepared my talk, my lecture, whatever it was, and gave it.

[8 : 07] And after I'd given my talk, we had an open time for questions and discussion. And at that point, an intelligent-looking young woman stood up and she said to the assembly, there were 30 or 40 people there, she said to the assembly, of course, Jesus' death on the cross was a failure.

Now, this was a novel approach to me, so naturally, I took issue with her. But the point is this, that in saying Jesus' death was a failure, she was putting her interpretation on the events.

She couldn't possibly have read that interpretation out of the four Gospels. Because Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and all the other New Testament writers, never portray the death of Jesus as a failure.

Quite the opposite. To them, it's the high point of God's good and gracious purpose to rescue lost sinners. So if we're to understand the cross or any of the great events of the Bible, we must ask how John and the other Bible writers interpret those events and teach them to us.

And that's what I want to do here with John chapter 18. I want to ask, what is John teaching the reader here? How is John interpreting these events that took place on the evening before the crucifixion?

[9 : 21] What does John, the evangelist, want us to get hold of? Well, let me suggest two things. I've got two headings. Let me suggest two things that John is teaching in these first 11 verses.

First, John is teaching us that Jesus purposefully gave himself up to the will of his enemies. Purposefully gave himself up to the will of his enemies.

Let's just see how the account is written. Verse 1. When Jesus had spoken these words, that's everything in the few chapters beforehand, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley where there was a garden which he and his disciples entered.

Now that seems to be a very bland statement of fact, not terribly interesting at first sight. But it's more than that. The Kidron Valley, some of you will have been to Jerusalem, I haven't, but I've looked at the map, and I've seen that the Kidron Valley is a steep little ravine that separates the city of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

And this little valley runs along the east side of the old city of Jerusalem. So if you were on the old city walls looking eastward, you'd look down into the Kidron Valley through the Garden of Gethsemane and up to the Mount of Olives lying about half a mile beyond.

[10:44] Now here's verse 2. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, this garden, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So John is showing us that Jesus deliberately went to the Garden of Gethsemane with his disciples because that was their regular meeting place.

And Jesus knew that Judas would know where to look for him. So Jesus was putting himself into his betrayer's hands. If he had wanted at this stage for some reason to avoid the awful issue, there would have been a hundred different hiding places in Jerusalem that he could have gone to or else he could simply have melted away into the Judean countryside or gone up north again to Galilee where the authorities would hardly have pursued him.

But no. He goes to Gethsemane to make it easy for Judas because Jesus was determined that nothing should prevent him from being crucified.

of course at one level he shrank from the dreadful ordeal but he knew that he must do it. Remember how he'd been teaching his disciples again and again over the previous years that it must happen. So he says to them in Luke chapter 9 the Son of Man must notice the must must suffer many things be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

[12:11] Now the disciples didn't understand what he meant but he knew that he had come into the world for that very purpose. He says in Luke chapter 13 I must go on my way for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.

He's been teaching the same thing earlier in other parts of John's gospel. So in John chapter 10 he'd been saying I'm the good shepherd. the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

In other words the good shepherd is prepared to make the supreme sacrifice if in doing that he can rescue his sheep from perdition. Or think of John chapter 15 greater love has no one than this that a man lays down his life for his friends.

Now he was giving a general principle but he was the first and foremost exponent of it. So wouldn't it be strange if Jesus who had so often emphasised that his destiny was to die wouldn't it be strange if he were to shrink back and change his mind when the moment actually came.

So here in John chapter 18 he's deliberately giving himself up to the will of his enemies. Now let's read on. In verse 3 Judas Iscariot appears in the garden and with him there's a band of Roman soldiers and some of the temple police along with lanterns and torches and weapons.

[13:40] All that array soldiers, police, lanterns, torches, weapons, all that array just to arrest one unarmed man is a bit like taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut isn't it?

They had lanterns and torches presumably because they were expecting they'd have to search the dark hillside in case Jesus had gone into hiding. Quintus friend go and have a look in that thicket of rhododendrons over there.

Maybe he's hiding in there. Perhaps that's what they were anticipating. But there was no need for all that paraphernalia was there? Judas had greatly overestimated the difficulty of laying hold of Jesus.

Look at what actually happens. Verse 4 Then Jesus knowing all that would happen to him came forward and said to them whom do you seek?

He came forward he stepped out of the shadows he approached them he took the initiative to speed up what was certain to happen. And did you notice that very telling phrase in verse 4 knowing all that would happen to him.

[14:47] He wasn't surprised he wasn't caught off his guard he knew the end from the beginning and here he is facilitating the process. It's he who says to them whom do you seek?

It's not that he didn't know whom they sought he knew they were looking for him he knew they weren't looking for Philip or Peter or Thomas but he's oiling the wheels of the action he's making it easy for them he's really saying to them I know it's me that you're looking for so here I am take me I'm ready I'm not resisting I have long since settled it in my own mind that I'm about to lay down my life for my friends.

John then brings in two interesting details the first in verse 5 is that Judas the betrayer is standing there with the soldiers and the temple police and you might have expected him to be so perturbed so shame faced that he was hiding right at the back of the crowd but no there he is brazen faced in the front row in fact the other gospels tell us that at this point he stepped forward took Jesus' head in his hands and kissed him to identify him to the soldiers isn't John showing us that Judas was so completely sold out to Satan that he had no shame no sense of shrinking at this point in fact John has told us back in chapter 13 that Satan actually entered into Judas at the last supper so here just a few hours later we have the Satan filled Judas almost like an incarnation of Satan standing with the soldiers hating Jesus and showing his hatred with the horrible irony of a kiss and at this point in Luke's gospel

Jesus says to the assembled crowd this is your hour and the power of darkness so Judas is there Satan is there but little did Satan really understand who he had taken on now the other thing that John points out is the extraordinary reaction of the police and the soldiers when they realize that this man who is talking calmly to them is the very man they have come to pick up normally anyone they have been trying to arrest would be fighting like a wild cat or at least running away fast but look at the verses whom do you seek says Jesus they answered him Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus said to them I am he literally in the Greek he says I am I am and verse 6 tells us that when Jesus said I am they drew back almost in panic and they fell to the ground now it's impossible for us to know for certain why they fell to the ground perhaps some of the temple police because they were attached to the temple worship perhaps they recognized the name

I am and they were so overawed by the implications that they fell back or perhaps there was something so masterful so majestic about Jesus' presence and his manner that they were simply knocked off their feet we don't know the reason simply because John doesn't actually tell us but what is certain is that John is portraying the indomitability of the Son of God the mastery of this incomparable human being in the end his enemies must fall before his feet we may be seeing here a little foretaste of the sovereignty of Jesus over everything that stands up against him now verse 7 again he asks whom do you seek and again they say Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus answers I told you that I am so if it's me that you seek let these men my eleven friends let them go so again do you see he's hastening the process he's clarifying their understanding he's helping them in their task he's saying

[18:51] I know that you're only interested in one man and that man is me so let these other ones go and both Matthew and Mark at this point tell us that the eleven took to their heels and fled Luke and John don't mention that point but John adds at verse 9 that the sparing of the eleven was a fulfilment of what Jesus had earlier said that not one of the men given to him by the father would be lost so do you see the angle at which John is setting out his account of these events he's not just recording what you might call bare facts he's showing us Jesus' deliberate intention to hasten the process of his betrayal why?

because Jesus knows Jesus always had known that this horrific crisis had to be faced and got through it was the price of our salvation it was the price that had to be paid if he had sidestepped the agony of the crucifixion for us there would have been no forgiveness of sins no hope of eternal life all would have been lost so he was purposefully giving himself up to the will of his enemies now secondly from verses 10 and 11 he was deliberately submitting to the will of his father just look at Simon Peter's impulsiveness at this point he draws his sword he strikes out of the high priest this man Malchus cuts off his right ear all done in just a moment that sort of thing happens in about half a second doesn't it so loyal this Peter and yet he was about to be so disloyal just a few minutes later when he denied Jesus but it's Jesus' reply to Peter in verse 11 that tells us what Jesus' agenda really is look at verse 11 put your sword into its sheath he's saying to Peter no Peter no my friend not that way are you trying to prevent me from doing what I must do what I came to do it's very similar to what Jesus had to say to Peter a couple of years earlier get behind me Satan you don't have in mind the things of God you're not hastening God's purposes you're thinking men's thoughts and here in John 18 Peter is trying to resist the arrest of Jesus but Jesus is insistent

that he must be arrested and go through with his death so he's saying to Peter put your sword away my friend you're trying by violence to stop me from doing what I have to do but I'm determined Peter to drink the cup that my father has given me to drink now what is this cup this cup in verse 11 if fathers human fathers give their children a cup to drink normally it contains something wholesome a cup of water or perhaps weak tea but this cup which God the father is asking commanding his son to drink this is nothing less than the cup of God's anger poured out against human sin there's a lot of Old Testament background to this cup

I'll just give you one example in Isaiah chapter 51 God tells his people that he has punished them fiercely for their sins he has sent them into exile and through the long years of exile he has chastised them for their rebellion against him and in chapter 51 in Isaiah he brings them great comfort and he tells them that their punishment at last is over and he says thus says your Lord the Lord your God who pleads the cause of his people behold I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more God exhausted the cup of his anger against the people of Israel then through the dreadful events of their exile to Babylon back in the 6th century BC but when Jesus came some 600 years later his task was to drink the final and most toxic cup of God's anger

God's righteous anger poured out upon the whole human race because of our endemic rebellion against him that cup of God's wrath back in the 6th century BC that was partial and temporary and limited but the cup that Jesus had to drink on the cross was the ultimate poisoned chalice it was the full indignant expression of God's righteous anger God's fury as Paul describes it against our sin our sin in choosing autonomy self-rule rather than the loving rule and leadership of our heavenly father so Jesus is saying to Peter here in verse 11 don't try to stop me Peter these events dreadful as they are have to be played out how can I not drink the cup that the father has given me I came for this very purpose you foolish Peter if I don't go to the cross if I don't in my own body bear the death dealing anger of God against the human race then there is no salvation for humanity

[24 : 13] I've got to go through it it's why I came so do we see how John is describing these events in the garden of Gethsemane first Jesus purposefully gives himself to the will of his enemies and second he deliberately submits to the will of his father interesting that both of those things should happen at the same time you'd think they were opposing forces but it's true both to the enemies and to the will of his father well let me finish in a couple of minutes friends just by saying why this is such a comfort and such a help to all of us this passage shows how masterfully Jesus was executing his father's plan to save all who turned to him nothing was left to chance Jesus knew exactly what had to be done and he did it just look again at verse 4 Jesus knowing all that would happen to him he knew it all he knew that he would be arrested that he would be flogged mocked crucified killed but also raised and then taken back to heaven so these verses here in John 18 are showing us the calm determined saviour setting about his ultimately difficult task difficult yes but not impossible because he achieved it his death was his supreme accomplishment it had to happen and he made sure that it did happen listen to these wonderful words from

John chapter 10 where Jesus is speaking no one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again so friend if you have trusted your life and your eternal future to the Lord Jesus you have put yourself into the only safe pair of hands nobody else has died for you purposefully nobody else could possibly bear the penalty of your sins nobody else has drunk the cup of God the Father's anger for you and for me and nobody else has been raised triumphant over the power of death so Jesus' cross it was no failure it was the most glorious triumph in the history of the world and he went through with it he was determined to do it so as to bring us to eternal life and for that we praise him let's bow our heads and we'll pray our Lord

Jesus we praise you indeed today that you went through all of this for us and we think of you there seated now beside the throne of power beside your father your human glorified body still bearing the scars of your crucifixion we remember that we shall always see those scars our dear Lord even in the new creation they will remind us of the price of our eternal salvation so we pray Lord Jesus that you will fill our hearts with enormous thankfulness again this afternoon and that because of what you have done for us securing our salvation you will give us a fresh joy and confidence in our walk through life that you'll build us up that despite what the world may say about the cross or about the Bible you will confirm in our hearts our knowledge and understanding that you are our saviour and we pray that you'll give us grace as well to share this confidence this understanding with many

others and we ask it dear Lord
Jesus for the sake of your honour and your name Amen Amen