

John 18: 1 to 11

At the beginning of chapter 18 we read that Jesus and his disciples are crossing the Kidron Valley to a garden or olive grove called Gethsemane, and that this garden was well known to all his disciples.

It is clear from that, that Jesus was controlling the events which were about to happen, because it wasn't by chance that Judas, of all the places he could have chosen to entrap Jesus, chose the very same garden.

Now Judas came to the garden bringing with him both Gentile Roman soldiers and Jewish police from the chief priests and the Pharisees.

From that we can say that both Jews and Gentiles were ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus, or to put it another way, for God to achieve his ultimate purpose of the salvation of all his people he used both Jews and Gentiles in his plans.

It was probably a large body of soldiers and police who had come to arrest Jesus, because just a week before, large crowds had welcomed him into Jerusalem, and the Romans would have come prepared in case of resistance.

But instead of resistance Jesus went out to meet them, and to ask them, "Who is it you want." And they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth." And Jesus replied with the divine name, **I am**, in this short discourse is the assertion that Jesus was both human and divine.

We are then told that this had an unusual effect when Jesus said, "**I am**". We are told that they stepped back and fell to the ground. There are several instances in the Bible when human beings fall down when in the presence of God.

In Revelation chapter 1 verse 17 for example we read, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; **I am** the first and the last."

In this instance in the garden they were so stricken that Jesus had to tell them again that he was the person they were looking for, and therefore they could let all the other men go.

Here is another example of Jesus' care for other people, no matter what the cost, and his determination not to lose any that God has given him.

The cup Jesus is referring too in verse 11, is the cup of God's wrath, and in psalm 75 verse 8 the psalmist writes, "For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs." Jesus is saying, "Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me."

In saying that he will drink the cup of God's wrath, he is saying that he will take the cup from us and drink it himself, that he will take our sins upon himself, so that we might be set free to live.

John18:12 to 27

Jesus has been arrested, and we should note that while Jesus in fact gave himself up voluntarily, nevertheless they felt it necessary to bind him, I think they did this to stop people thinking that he went with them voluntarily, and they took him to Annas the father in law of Caiaphas.

It was Caiaphas who ironically said, “You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed,

We are then told that Peter and another disciple who was known to the high priest, followed Jesus, and when they got to the high priest's gate the other disciple went into the courtyard, but Peter stayed outside at the gate for fear of recognition as a follower of Jesus.

Now the disciple who was known to the high priest went to the woman guarding the gate, and spoke to her, and then the other disciple took Peter into the courtyard.

We now have two interrogations going on at the same time; we have Jesus being questioned by Caiaphas and by Annas and Peter being questioned by the woman who was the high priest's gate keeper and the contrast could not be different.

Jesus faces Caiaphas and Annas backed by the court officials who were even prepared to use torture to get the answers they wanted, whereas Peter faces a gentle maid who looks after the gate.

But Jesus who faces the greatest danger stands firm, whereas Peter resorts to lies; while Jesus' response to the arresting officers question was **I am**; Peter's response to the maid who looks after the gate was, **I am not**.

But before we think too badly of Peter we must remember that at least he didn't run away like many of the others, and that he did try to stay close to Jesus.

When Caiaphas asks Jesus about his disciples and his teaching, Jesus said that he had spoken openly and in the synagogues, and that if Caiaphas really wanted to know what he said then he should ask his disciples.

And that is true for us today, if we really want to know what Jesus said then we need to read the New Testament to find out.

And then we get the ultimate denial from Peter when he joins the very people who arrested Jesus, by standing with them by the fire warming his hands.

The last sentence of our reading is very poignant, because up to the moment before the cock crowed Peter had either forgotten Jesus' words about the cock crowing, or if he did remember thought that Jesus would never find out what he had been saying, but now hearing the cock crow, comes the realisation that Jesus does know, and he is mortified by his actions.

This passage is all about Jesus' faithfulness and our unfaithfulness represented by Peter, which is our human condition.

John 18:28 to 19:16a

The scene has now changed from the Jewish head quarters of Caiaphas to the Roman head quarters of Pilate.

In the following three verses there is a sequence; in verse 29, Pilate comes out of his palace and asks, 'why have you brought this man to me'.

In verse 30, the Jews say, 'if he were not a criminal we wouldn't be handing him over to you'. In verse 31, Pilate tells them to take him away and judge him themselves, and the Jews replied, 'we have no right to execute him'.

In effect the Jewish leaders are saying to Pilate, 'We don't want you to judge him, we've already done that, we just want you to execute him, and never mind what for, just do it, because if he didn't deserve to die we wouldn't have handed him over to you.

Pilate then goes back in to question Jesus, because for Jesus to die at the hands of the Romans, he must at least be a revolutionary plotting against the Roman empire.

And Pilate then goes straight to the heart of the matter by asking Jesus if he is the king of the Jews. Now bearing in mind the excruciating pain and humiliation of crucifixion Pilate must have expected Jesus to say, 'of course I'm not', which would have brought the whole thing quickly to an end.

But instead Jesus' reply was to say, 'Yes I am a king and I've come to testify to the truth'.

In Pilate's following question, "What is truth" I see Pilate beginning to see that perhaps there is more to this man than he first thought.

To which Pilate concludes that Jesus is just an idealist and no threat, and he tells the Jews that he finds no case against him and offers Barabbas as an alternative candidate for execution, but to Pilate's disappointment they refused.

So Pilate then has Jesus flogged, ridiculed and then dressed in a purple robe, with a crown of thorns, and then takes him out and holds him up as an object of contempt and derision.

In effect he was saying how could this pitiable person be viewed as a a king. Also seeing Jesus in that helpless state, perhaps the Jews would show some compassion, and have him released.

But instead of compassion they shouted crucify him, crucify him. And Pilate exclaimed to the crowd, "Crucify your king!"

But then the crowd answered, we have no king, and he also claimed to be the Son of God, and now Pilate was even more afraid than ever.

He again entered his headquarters and asked Jesus where he was from, but Jesus gave no answer except to say, that Pilate's power came from God.

Now when Pilate persisted to try and release Jesus the Jews threatened him by saying that if he did release him he would be no friend of the emperor, so Pilate caved in, and told them to take him away for execution.

John 19:16 to 27

The scene has again changed, Pilate has given in to the Jews and Jesus is carrying his cross to the place of the skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha, and there they crucified him with two others, one on Jesus' right, and one on his left.

Quite often the phrase, 'There they crucified him', slips of the tongue with no effort, and so often we lose sight of the fact that this was the most terrible and slow death that man had ever devised, death by crucifixion, even the Romans regarded it with a shudder of horror, it was an excruciating and demeaning way to execute people.

In verse 19 we are told that Pilate had an inscription placed over Jesus' head which read, "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews." There may be other possibilities for Pilate to have put that sign above Jesus' head, but I give you two possibilities.

The first is that this is a final mockery of Jesus by Pilate. But Pilate's earlier mockery of Jesus by dressing him up as a king may well have been designed to gain sympathy for Jesus when he showed him to the Jewish crowds who were baying for his blood, so that they might, even at this late stage, want him released.

The second possibility, which I think more likely, is that Pilate was subtly getting his own back on the Jews, who had pressurised and even threatened him into executing a man who he considered to be innocent.

Pilate got his own back by putting the sign over Jesus' head knowing full well that by affirming that Jesus was in fact their king, the king of the Jews, would really annoy them.

The sign was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek because Pilate wanted everybody to be able to read it, which ironically meant that the kingship of Jesus, denied so vigorously by the Jews, was being proclaimed to the rest of the world by the Gentiles.

Starting at verse 23 we have the soldiers at the base of Jesus' cross dividing his clothes among themselves and casting lots for his tunic. Here we have an illustration of the totally in humane and cruel nature that the human race can sink too.

Above the soldiers heads is a man suffering the most excruciating pain, and the soldiers who put him there totally unconcerned, and more interested in obtaining Jesus' clothes which they probably don't need, or would ever wear.

In verse 25 we are told that Jesus' mother Mary was witnessing this horror of crucifixion which was happening to her son, and when Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to John here is your mother, and to his mother here is your son.

Even as Jesus was approaching his death he was still more concerned about his mother's future welfare, than of his own pain and humiliation.

John 19, 28 to 37

After taking care of his mother and when Jesus knew that all was now finished he said, (In order to fulfil the scripture) I am thirsty.

A very important word here is the word knew, Jesus knew what was going on; amid all the unimaginable horror and the pain, Jesus maintained control of all the events.

Then Jesus said “I am thirsty”. Dehydration would no doubt result from crucifixion, but John sees a deeper meaning he makes a connection to the Old Testament, (In order to fulfil the scriptures) John makes it clear that Jesus is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets and that we are now in a new era.

When Jesus received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

But the Jewish leaders were still not satisfied because they wanted to make sure all three were dead because of the approaching Sabbath. Now the way to hasten the death of a crucified man was to break his legs so that the victim could no longer push up with his legs to assist his breathing, and the victim would soon die from suffocation.

But we need to return to the Phrase, “It is finished.” because this phrase goes right to the root of the gospel. Jesus did not say, 'I am finished', he said, “It is finished.” St Matthew recorded in his gospel at chapter 27 verse 50 these words, “Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.”

What John heard was what Matthew reported, a loud cry, but

John managed to distinguish the words that Jesus' shouted out, they were, “It is finished.”

When Jesus cried aloud “It is finished.” It was a cry of triumph. Because it was of course Jesus' commission, given to him by God, to establish a new covenant with all his people throughout the world, that was finished.

No wonder his last words were shouted through the pain of crucifixion, he had completed a world shattering commission so successfully that God had declared him his Son in whom he was well pleased.

Even though, in his humanity he was suffering pain beyond description, he nevertheless died in triumph.

In verse 32 we read that soldiers broke the legs of the two other prisoners, but when it came to Jesus they found him already dead so they pierced his side with a spear and blood and water came out, water represents the spring of life which had been extinguished.

As for the blood, about 1,500 years before, God told Moses that the Israelites were to smear the blood of a perfect lamb on the door frame of their houses, in order to save them from the angel of death, which God was going to send over Egypt.

1,500 years later Jesus' blood spilt by the soldiers will save everyone who has faith and trust in the risen Christ.

John 19:38 to 42

We now come to the final scene of Jesus' passion. Jesus has died, and a little known character comes on the scene, Joseph of Arimathea; who St Mark tells us was a good and righteous man.

Joseph is a disciple of Jesus though a secret one, probably because of his position of leadership in Jewish society, being a wealthy member of the Jewish Sanhedrin.

No doubt it was because of his position in society as a leader of the Sanhedrin, that he was able to have an audience with Pilate and be able to ask Pilate to let him take away Jesus' body.

In Jesus' day the law was that people executed by the Romans became the property of Rome, and the bodies would be buried by them outside the city in graves reserved for criminals.

So Pilate in allowing Joseph to take the body away and bury it elsewhere than in the place dictated by the Romans was again Pilate trying his best to annoy the Jews.

Nevertheless, Joseph was now showing considerable courage to make himself known to both the Romans and the Jewish authorities that he was a disciple, especially in view of what had just happened to Jesus, and what could now happen to him, this was courage indeed.

Another man who showed considerable courage after Jesus had died was Nicodemus who went to see Jesus quite early in Jesus' ministry because he was intrigued by what Jesus was saying.

But at that time being a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council he went to see him at night under the cover of darkness, so that people wouldn't know about it. If you remember he was the one who said, "Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?"

Now, when it was even more dangerous to be seen as a follower, Nicodemus, in full view of everyone, brought a large quantity of Myrrh and aloes weighing nearly one hundred weight, which, due to its cost, would normally only be used for embalming royalty; so Nicodemus ensured that Jesus had a royal burial.

The body was then carried to a nearby garden where there was a new tomb; Q being unused, there could be no confusion as to who's body was missing.

Although it isn't stated it was almost certainly Joseph's own family tomb, which Joseph would have already planned to use should he manage to obtain Jesus' body. Rich men would have their own family tombs, which would usually be a cave hewn into the rock with shelves for family members.

We should also note that by now the Sabbath, which starts at Sundown, was almost upon them so everything had to be done with haste, so Joseph's family tomb would be an obvious place for Joseph to take him.

So concludes John's eye witness account of this traumatic and momentous day that has changed for ever the history of the world.