

**“Timothy McVeigh, Todd Beamer and Jesus”  
(The Arrest of Jesus)**

**John 18:1-11**

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The final hours of a person's life can tell us a lot about that individual. How a person dies or responds to the imminent reality of death can reveal much about his or her character and nature. I read with great interest the accounts of the last hours of Timothy McVeigh and Todd Beamer.

Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, slept, watched television and ate mint chocolate ice cream prior to his execution. Even though he was given an opportunity to speak before the lethal drugs were administered, he remained silent. Instead, he handed his executioners a handwritten copy of the poem titled, “Invictus.” This poem, written in 1875, concludes with the words, “I am the master of my fate and captain of my soul.” Moments later he died having offered no apology for his actions and showing no sign of remorse.

Todd Beamer, the hero of United Flight 93 on September 11, made a call on his cell phone as he and other passengers were forced to the rear of their plane. He reached Lisa Jefferson, a GTE supervisor, and told her what was happening. When Beamer realized the gravity of the situation, he made the decision to prevent his hijackers from crashing into the Capitol or the White House. Before storming the cockpit, though, Todd Beamer did two things. He prayed the Lord's Prayer with the telephone supervisor and then repeated the Twenty-third Psalm with his fellow passengers.

What a contrast between the way Timothy McVeigh and Todd Beamer used their final moments of life. What different messages they sent about their nature and character, too. McVeigh's final hours revealed that he was a defiant young man who had been blinded by evil. Beamer's actions revealed him to be a man of great faith and fortitude.

Do the actions of Jesus during his final hours shed light on his nature and character? They certainly do and during the season of Lent, I want us to examine these passages. We begin today by looking at his arrest as recorded in John 18:1-11. This story clearly revealed that Jesus was a man of **courage and compassion**. Let me show you why I think this is true.

When Jesus left the upper room that night with his disciples to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, he traveled through the Kidron Valley. In doing so, he crossed over the Kidron brook. It was down this brook that the blood of thousands of sacrificed Passover lambs flowed. A trough from the temple emptied into this tiny brook.

As Jesus crossed the Kidron brook that night, perhaps he paused and looked at the blood flowing beneath him. No doubt it reminded him of what was waiting for him the next day on Calvary's cross. Surely he cringed and even thought about fleeing before it was too late or at least going to a place other than the Garden of Gethsemane where he had gathered often with his disciples. However, he continued on his journey and stopped at the garden that was familiar to Judas and all his disciples. What courage this must have taken!

When the large contingent of soldiers and religious officials approached the garden carrying torches, lanterns and weapons, it must have been an intimidating sight.

How many would have hidden or run from them? What did Jesus do, though? He took the initiative to go to the entrance of the garden and ask for whom they were looking. When told they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, he immediately identified himself. Even after some of those closest to him fell down, which might have given him time to run, Jesus repeated the question and answer. What courage that must have taken!

Moments before, Jesus had prayed for the safety of his disciples. It was now time to help that occur. He appealed to the officials to let his disciples go, being careful not to identify them as such. Even though this meant that he would have to go through the trial and crucifixion alone, he still did so. What courage this must have taken!

However, I see in the way Jesus handled his arrest great **compassion**, too. Look at what he did not say to Judas. There was no rebuke or condemnation. There were no parting words of scorn even though Jesus knew that the officials would never have found him in that crowded city without Judas' help.

Why did Jesus refuse to rebuke him? After all, he rebuked Peter for cutting off Malchus' ear. Why not rebuke Judas for being a traitor? I don't think Jesus wanted to add to the guilt that Judas was going to have to carry from that place. He knew it would be hard enough for Judas to make it through the weekend as it was. He did not want to make it any worse.

I also sense his compassion by what he did for Malchus, the man Peter wounded. He healed him. Can you believe that? The last miracle Jesus performed healed the wound of an enemy while this man was arresting him. He talked about how to treat his enemies, didn't he? He really meant it.

Perhaps you find it difficult to believe that one person can be courageous and compassionate at the same time. You see these as competing characteristics. I don't. As a matter of fact, I think they must go together to maintain a healthy balance. For you see, courage without compassion produces a bully, tyrant or terrorist. Compassion without courage produces a benevolent coward. Neither is good.

Is it really possible to be courageous and compassionate at the same time? Let me share an excerpt from an Atlanta Journal and Constitution article by Lorraine Murray. She wrote of her gratitude for all that her mother taught her about life. She concluded with these words, "More than anything, my mom taught me about compassion. When she was in the final stages of cancer, I went with my dad to see her at the hospital. She brushed her lips against my forehead and worried aloud that I was running a fever.

I wanted to stay with her in the hospital, but she insisted that I go home and get a good night's sleep. For the rest of my life, I will remember that on the night she died, my mother's concern was for me."

Do compassion and courage go together? You bet they do.

How was Jesus able to be courageous and compassionate at the same time? How did he maintain that balance? Look at the way John began this passage? He told his readers that Jesus had been praying. That was his secret. Jesus was a deeply spiritual person who neither lived for himself or by himself. He relied upon God for wisdom and strength and so must we.

Yes, the final hours of a person's life can tell us much about him or her. I like what I learn about Jesus in his final hours. It reveals the kind of character that I admire. As a matter of fact, I want to be like him. I want to be courageous and compassionate and I hope you do, too, because our world is crying out for people who will be.