

## **“Even Mel Gibson Has to be Surprised”**

### **John 18:1-11**

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I began reading about it last summer. I recall seeing a preview for it at the theater in the fall. While it caught my attention, never did I believe it would capture the attention of the entire movie industry and country as it has. Mel Gibson's, "The Passion of the Christ" has taken the nation by storm. This movie that no one wanted to produce came close to breaking ticket sales and attendance records even before its public release. In the first twelve days, it has grossed over two hundred million dollars. Without a doubt, Lent will not be the same this year as previous years because of the attention this movie has received.

Gibson's movie portrays the last twelve hours of Christ's life. For the next few weeks, I'll select and examine passages from the same time frame and use them to guide our thoughts as we seek to understand the atonement and prepare to celebrate Easter.

We begin our journey this morning at the same point Gibson began the movie, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Follow along as I read the text, John 18:1-11.

*“When he had **finished praying**, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side, there was an olive grove and he and his disciples went into it. John 18:1.*

The time Jesus spent in prayer prior to going to the garden east of the Temple must have made an impression on John. Decades later he could still remember it as recorded in the previous chapter. I understand John's desire to preserve it, though. It is beautiful.

The prayers of others have always touched me. As a matter of fact, some of my favorite devotions are prayers, including John 17. Let me encourage you to keep a journal of your prayers. It could become your children and grandchildren's best devotional material and help them to get to know you even after you are gone. I know Jesus better because of his prayers and I am grateful for those that passed them on to you and me.

*“Now Judas, who **betrayed him**, knew the place because Jesus had often met there with his disciples” John 18:2.*

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Do you remember the feelings you had when you realized it? Shock. Horror. Unbelief. Confusion. Did you try to figure out what you had done to deserve their wrath? Are you still estranged from them?

Perhaps there is no messier word in our vocabulary than betray. It abruptly changes everything. The relationship is never the same after the act of betrayal and neither is life. Jesus understands. You might want to talk to him about it. It would be good prayer journal material as a matter of fact. Your children could benefit from the way you confronted and dealt with this problem.

*“So Judas came to the grove guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying **torches, lanterns and weapons**” John 18:3.*

Judas' actions were well thought out, weren't they? He betrayed Jesus at a most opportune time, in a secluded garden in the night. There would be no crowds around to interfere with what was getting ready to take place. The common folk had bedded down for the night, completely unaware of what was going to happen to Jesus. Evil is a meticulous planner, isn't it? Never underestimate it.

Perhaps John was thinking of this night and the darkness of evil when he wrote, “This is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it might be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” John 3:19-21. Surely this scene in

the garden also influenced John to write, “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” I John 1:5.

And there is more light and dark irony in John’s arrest account. The six hundred soldiers and religious authorities have come with torches and lanterns looking for the “light of the world” so they can snuff it out. They prefer their light to his. Don’t miss this Johannine twist.

The soldiers were also carrying weapons. Why? I think they fully expected to meet with resistance and engage in a skirmish. No one as prominent as Jesus would be captured without a fight, so they wanted to be prepared. They not only wanted to outnumber Jesus and his disciples but to overwhelm them with their weapons of mass destruction. They were ready for anything, or so they thought.

*“Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’ ‘Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘I am he,’ Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground”* John 18:4-7.

The soldiers and religious authorities were prepared to handle everything except the honesty, courage and boldness of Jesus. Comically, they fell to the ground when he took the initiative and confronted them.

I don’t think the world has ever figured out how to respond to non-violent resistance to evil. In some ways, I think it might threaten people more than evil. Most peacemakers are ridiculed and many are killed. Jesus was. Others have been. How ironic and tragic.

*Again he asked them, ‘Who is it you want?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ ‘I told you that I am he,’ Jesus answered. ‘If you are looking for me, then **let these men go.**’ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled. ‘I have not lost one of those you gave me’”* John 18:8-9.

Jesus knew he would need his disciples beyond this weekend. His work was not ending, but in some ways just beginning. It was certainly going to take a new direction on Easter and he would need the disciples’ help. Their safety was important to him and His Father. This is the reason he secured their release, careful to refer to them as “men” and not even disciples or followers.

*“Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, **drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear.** (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”* John 18:10-11.

Before the resurrection, Peter never fully understood Jesus’ identity and mission did he? This was obvious at the foot washing and even more so now.

The soldiers were not the only ones prepared for battle. Peter was, too. He was ready to fight and perhaps die for Jesus until Jesus rebuked him. After all, Jesus had carefully negotiated the release of the disciples that he would need after the crucifixion and he did not want Peter sabotaging that. Neither did he need Peter interfering with what he had to do.

*“Put your sword away! Shall I not **drink the cup** the Father has given me?”* John does not mention the prayer of Jesus to “take this cup away” that the other gospel writers do. Instead, he paints a picture of a man with a clear sense of identity and purpose and the resolve to be true to both.

What is the message John wants us to take away from the arrest of Jesus? I think it is this. **Jesus is in control.** He takes the initiative to go to the garden that Judas was familiar with, confront his accusers, negotiate the safe release of his disciples, rebuke Peter for trying to defend him and drink the cup the Father has given him. Without a doubt, Jesus is in control and is determined to remain loyal to God even when the price for doing so escalates. Faced with the choice of remaining faithful to God or escaping torture and death, Jesus chooses to accomplish the mission for which he was sent. Unfaithfulness is out of the question for him and should be for us, too.

We know what it is like to make a commitment to God and promises to others, don't we? We also know that the price of keeping those promises can get steep. Expectations can exceed our preliminary estimations and responsibilities can become very burdensome.

We have no idea how bad the "worse" can become in "for better or worse" when we make that promise at an altar filled with flowers and friends. We cannot conceive of what will be expected of us as parents of troubled adolescents while looking at them in a nursery filled with smiles and pride. We cannot imagine how adversely the economy can affect our business after we have made firm commitments to creditors and employees. Truly, the price of keeping promises can spiral out of control and drive us to look for loopholes or opportunities to run away. How we long for someone to rescue us and erase the promises we made. We even pray God will do this if no one else will.

And what do we hear Him say? *"Put your sword away, Peter. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*

How could Jesus be so determined and strong? How could he be faithful in the midst of adversity and stress? How could he stay the course when he had opportunities to do otherwise and associates willing to help him run?

Do you recall how John began this story? *"When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley."*

I see the link between prayer and identity, direction, confidence, courage and faithfulness. I hope you do, too. Maybe it is time, after all, to begin that prayer journal.