

Twass the Night Before

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It has been a blessed night and we're only half-way through. Let me encourage you this evening to open your Bibles to two respective places. We're going to be in Mark 14 for the majority of this evening but we're going to do something very unusual tonight, we're also going to spend some of our time in John 18. Now as you're finding those respective chapters, allow me to share with you why that's an unusual request. The gospel of Mark, as you've heard for many months now, is the shortest of the gospel accounts as far as the quantity of its words and verses, however it is found in the middle of what we often call the synoptic gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke, more often than not when you see a story in one of those gospels, you'll also see the same story, the same parable, the same miracle in either one or both of the other respective gospels that we collectively call the synoptics. They're very much synonyms of each other. Then there's the gospel of John. The gospel of John is unique for a multitude of reasons but one of which is that only between 7-8% of what is contained in the gospel of John is contained in any of the other three gospels. Tonight, thought, as we come to Mark 14, we have one of those very rare special occurrences where the story that's in Mark 14 also has a parallel in the gospel of John 18.

So this is one of those kind of rare moments and because we're walking into what we know as the Christmas season, I thought I would play off one of the most beloved stories of the season, "The Night Before Christmas. All through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." Well, tonight we're going to talk about the night before the crucifixion, a very different scene that that famous Christmas story for the night before the crucifixion everybody was stirring. The events that we're about to read are all happening at least after 10 PM and some would believe between midnight and 3 AM. It involves not only Jesus Christ, the disciples, at least 500 soldiers that are going to come to the garden of Gethsemane. I think we would all agree that there were many creatures that were stirring and more importantly than our respective family Christmas traditions, the next day or if it happened after midnight, technically the day of, is the most critical day in the history not just of humanity but the world.

Beginning in verse 43 of Mark 14 it says,

43 And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief

priests and the scribes and the elders. 44 And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. 45 And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. 46 And they laid their hands on him, and took him. 47 And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? 49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. 50 And they all forsook him, and fled. 51 And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: 52 And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. 53 And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. 54 And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.

The account that we've just read is one that we're very familiar with, particularly with what we know as the Easter season, the night before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and so I want to address this passage kind of from a multitude of angles. We'll get to John 18 in a moment but I want to begin with the aspect of the heartache. I understand, I understand that Jesus Christ said that all scripture must be fulfilled so nothing that took place in the garden of Gethsemane was a surprise to him but would you agree that even if you know what's coming in the flesh, even if you know it in advance, even if it doesn't take you by surprise, what takes place can often be a heartache to you when it comes to fruition. And so tonight, I want to address just the basic questions.

Obviously, the "who." Who was the culprit? Well, this is of no surprise to anybody who's done any level of biblical studies: it is Judas. Judas is this character. It's such a misnomer in scripture, he's the one that in John 6, Jesus at the beginning of his ministry said, "I have called you all and one of you is a devil." He's also the same one and the only one that according to scripture that Satan actually enters him when he goes to betray the Lord. So here we have an individual who had been with Jesus for over three years, every ministry opportunity he was a part of, we have evidence most likely Judas was there. In fact, every message or sermon that Jesus preached more than likely Judas was there. But what we're about to see and some of you are aware of is that Judas at no point in his life ever calls Jesus Lord, he only calls him Master. So, yes, Jesus Christ knew from the very beginning of his ministry, he knew that this event would take place, he knew who would be the culprit, he even knew the manner that it would take place, but it still in the flesh does not remove the heartache that this is the manner by which it would happen.

How many of us have been more frustrated not in what happened to us but how it happened to us? In other words, if you're going to do me wrong, I can handle that, it's how you did me wrong. Think about the heartache not just of the "who" it was but the "how" it took place. Now this is where John 18 is going to come into play. Again, kind of a rare occurrence that we go to the gospel of John to get a parallel color commentary here

but in John 18 beginning in verse 3, I'm actually going to read verses 3 through 15, we have another account of the same event. It says beginning in verse 3, it says,

3 Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches [notice this] and weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? 5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. 6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. 7 Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. 8 Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: 9 That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. 10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. 11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? 12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, 13 And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. 14 Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. 15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.

Now when we talk about the "how" here, this is one of those intriguing parts of scripture. When Jesus asked a question rhetorically, he knew the answer. "Who do you seek?" They say, "Jesus of Nazareth." And notice what he says, "I am he." Now I'm convinced that when he did so, it was very much a parallel of Exodus 3. Remember when Moses says, "Lord, I'm willing hesitantly to go to Pharaoh to speak on behalf of your people but I don't even know your name. What is your name?" Remember he said, "I Am that I Am." Jesus Christ elicited not just the phrase "I'm here" or "I'm the one," but I believe he declared unto him "I am him," much like in Exodus 3, so much so that when he did so, what did John 18 record? 500 men with swords, staves and weapons completely fall back.

Now here's the interesting "how" to this. How did they get back up? You say, "What do you mean how did they get back up?" This is one of those passages that to me shows that we can never underestimate the stupidity of humanity. Now I realize they outnumber Jesus 500 to 1. I get it. And this is the same Jesus that said, "I can call the legions of angels down and take care of all this." But if a man with just his words can speak and 500 men with weapons fall backwards, the ability to get back up and say, "Oh, we're still coming after you," just marvels me, their willingness to go after him, their willingness to capture him no matter what.

Now I realize Jesus said that the scripture must be fulfilled but notice what he said in the gospel of John. He said, "You know, why don't you just leave this between Judas and I?"

It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "Guys, you don't need to be here. I'm willing to do this of my own free will. I'm willing to go to the cross. You're not going to have to force me to do this. Why are we doing it with weapons?" It's not what took place, it's the manner of how it took place which leads to the "why." The manner in which Jesus was betrayed was nothing short of simple deceit, disguising one as an entity and then revealing one's self as another. No marvel that Judas is called a devil from the beginning, no marvel that Satan enters him because when you get to 2 Corinthians 11 it says, "Do not marvel that Satan himself disguises himself as an angel of light." He actually transforms himself to appear as something that he is not.

He betrayed him with a kiss, that which traditionally is a means of affection. Traditionally that is a means of showing favor to somebody and yet this act of favoritism, this act of being affectionate was actually the token for these individuals to take him captive in a very hostile manner. Not only does he do so with a kiss but twice he calls him Master but not once does he refer to him as Lord, his proper title, but simply one whose name is Master. Now that is the heartache of the passage, not the fact that it did happen, not even the fact that the principle character that was involved in it happening but the manner in which it took place.

I want to transition to the heartbreak. Notice it said in verse 50 that all would forsake him. It's enough heartache the manner in which Judas betrayed him but the heartbreak is how the disciples handled the situation. I mean, think about it, these men were there at every miracle that Jesus performed, they were there when he walked on water, they were there when he calmed the sea, they were there when he multiplied the food, they were there when he healed the blind man, they were there when he healed the withered hand, they were there when he absolved the woman caught in adultery. They were there for everything and yet now in the garden of Gethsemane the night before which, by the way, you do understand chronologically he's already washed their feet. They've already sung together. He's already told them, "Guys, it's about to get rough. Just hang in with me just a little bit longer." And where do they go? They flee.

Who were the principal characters as far as the heartache is concerned? I know it's no shock, it's Peter. You know, we joke about Peter, that he oftentimes opens mouth, inserts foot. Well, in this case he opens sheath and takes out sword, is what he does. The gospel of John gives us more clarification that Malchus, the servant of the high priest, was the one that he got into an altercation with. Now can I give Peter a little bit of credit here? There's 500 soldiers with swords and he's willing to take them on. I mean, if we give Peter any credit, he's not shy and he's not scared. He's willing one man with one sword to go at them. Now we know that he makes contact with Malchus. We know that he inflicts an injury. We also know from another gospel account that Jesus heals Malchus' ear right there in the garden of Gethsemane. These same 500 men that go backwards, they get back up, one of their fellow servants is brutally injured, Jesus heals him and they still take him captive.

Interesting to me the "how" here, the ear. Now this may be just one of those things that you consider a rabbit trail but I find it fascinating. Do you find it fascinating that Peter

gets in a violent altercation with Malchus with a sword and he cuts off his ear? Now that's an interesting item. Why his ear? You know Peter was a brash man. We know he was a fisherman by trade. I'm willing to say that this was probably not the first altercation Peter had ever gotten in. I kind of get the idea that Peter got in a lot of altercations particularly as a young man. In fact, he was probably the young man, if you'll allow me to contemporize it, he was probably the young man that when a schoolteacher got their list of next year's students, when they saw Peter's name went, "Oh boy, I've got him." Just one of those young men that was kind of known for his brashness, his vocalness, and most likely his physicality.

Why is that critical? When's the last time somebody who knew how to fight took a sword and swiped it from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock? I mean, think about that. We're talking about somebody standing in the garden of Gethsemane, facing him, obviously within reach enough to hit with a sword. You would never take a sword, and for those listening on the radio, I apologize you can't see what I'm doing, you would never take a sword in a fight and do this. That would be a foolish move. 1. Most likely if you're going to do that, you're going to hit the skull, one of the hardest places of the body, to little to any impact at all. 2. All of you've got to do to miss it is do this, just step out of the way. What was Peter doing? I'll tell you what he's doing, he was going for the head. I mean, that's what Peter does, right? I mean, Peter goes big or goes home. I mean, that's who he is. I fully believe with all my heart that he was going for a full blown decapitation because that's how you fight with a sword. You go after from 3 to 9 or 9 to 3, whichever way you're looking at the clock. And what happens to Malchus? His ear is cut off. He did exactly as you and I would do. If somebody came and he swung a sword at me, I'm going to duck and get my ear removed.

Why or how is this critical to the story? It's one thing that Judas betrayed Jesus, it's another that Peter, the same one who said, "Jesus, I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you." The same one who said, "We believe you're the Christ, the Son of the living God." The same one who time after time said, "Jesus, we've got your back." When it all came to fruition, he was the one that acted out the most. He was the one that enacted violence. He was the one. He was going after Malchus' life and Jesus healed his ear.

Why is this important? Notice over and over verse 49 and others, so that the scriptures must be fulfilled. We addressed it a little bit this morning, that within the gospel accounts from the birth of Jesus to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, you've got 48 specific prophecies that were written hundreds of years in advance that all came to fruition exactly as the scripture said. Now I'm going to give you a little bit of math tonight and some of you may be familiar with these figures but they're important. The odds of 48 specific prophecies coming to pass in somebody's life exactly as they were spoken hundreds of years in advance, the odds are 1 x 10 to the 157th. In other words, write a 1 and then 157 zeroes after that 1, those are the statistical odds. Yet every single one. Why did Jesus say over and over again, "so the scriptures must be fulfilled."

Now I think in the flesh, we all want to give Peter a high-five, don't we? "Atta boy, Peter! Go for it, baby!" But Jesus said, "You don't understand, Peter, as much as you are willing

to take on these 500 guys, the scripture has to be fulfilled. I have to be betrayed. I have to go to the cross. I have to shed my blood. I have to come back from the grave. I have to give myself as the means of redemption."

So it was a time of heartache, it was also a time of heartbreak. Why? How would you feel if you took 3 ½ years of your life and you poured every waking moment into a select group of people and at the most critical, most pivotal time in that relationship nobody was to be found? These 500 guys show up, Peter fights back, Jesus corrects him, and then according to what we just read in verse 50, they all forsook him. This is where I want to talk about the heartbeats that were and were not there. I want to talk about the personnel that stuck around for the following event.

It says in verse 50 that all forsook him and fled. It's interesting because according to what we just read, that means that as soon as all the melee happened, they were gone. I mean, it was like roaches when the light comes on, they were out of there. However, we do have testimony and we're going to go to John 18 again in just a moment, that within a few hours one of them returns, we'll talk about that in a moment, and we do know that the next day in John 19 at the foot of the cross when Jesus was there surrounded by the scribes, the priests, the Pharisees, those mocking and scourging, the Roman soldiers that were inflicting all the pain, the Bible does say there were five individuals that were at the foot of the cross. There were four women and there was one man and that man was whom we know as John the apostle. So, yes, all forsook him that night but yet we do know that one returned and we'll address that in a moment.

The next issue is the "how" this played out. Now did any of y'all chuckle when I read Mark 14 a little bit earlier? Anytime that the Bible uses the word "naked," it just brings a little chuckle to us. How about when it uses it twice in three verses? This is one of those great passages in the Bible that everybody takes off and then all of a sudden in verse 51, it says there's a certain man who had a linen cloth about him that fled naked. Now some of you know what I'm about to share with you, if not, just endure with me. You do know there's a difference between nekkid and naked? Nekkid means you don't have clothes on, naked means you don't have clothes on and you're up to something, all right?

This guy was just simply nekkid is all he was but notice it says that having a linen cloth cast about his naked body, the young man laid hold, he left the linen cloth and he fled from them naked. Now I cannot put in concrete what I'm about to share with you but I'm not opposed to using a ballpoint pen. I do believe that this was Mark, the young man who the Lord used to give us the gospel of Mark. Why is it that he would refer to a certain young man? We do know that John Mark was the youngest of the gospel writers. We do know that he had been there for the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ. And most likely, at least in my opinion, the fact that he referred to a certain young man as if everybody else would know him, and twice he referred to his condition.

Why is this critical? Because when it says "all forsook him," they didn't just take off running, in fact, some of them took off in such a manner that they were willing to leave their clothes to flee the scene. Now the only other person I know of scripture that's

willing to do that is a man by the name of Joseph with Potiphar's wife. Remember that story in the book of Genesis? Potiphar's wife comes up with this scenario to entrap him. She makes sure that none of the servants is in the house, it's just the two of them. He has that very strategic coat that was given to him by his dad. She lays ahold of him. He was willing to leave nekkid in holiness, righteousness and innocence than to be an accomplice to or an act of sin against God and his supervisor, whom we know as Potiphar, the husband of the wife who did such in the home. He was willing to flee with nothing on his body because it was more important to be absent than to be present.

This is the only other account I know of somebody leaving their clothes there and running off. In other words, the scene, the "how" here was so dramatic. Think about young John Mark. James isn't there. Peter's not there. Simon's not there. Judas has just pulled what he did. All of those men who most likely were a step or a half-step generation above that he would have admired, that he would have been impressed with, they're all running and he's sticking around until somebody grabs ahold of him and he takes off running. He saw more value in running through the streets without any clothes on than sticking in the garden of Gethsemane in that manner.

Which leads us to the "why," this whole night before the crucifixion. I want to focus on verse 54 then we're going to go back to John 18. What a poignant statement, "And Peter followed him." I want you to imagine there's a period there. We'd make Peter an instant hero, wouldn't we? And here's the guy that was willing to fight, here's the guy that took off Malchus' ear. If there's a period after that phrase, he's a hero. But it doesn't end there, it says, "he followed him afar off." Notice that Peter kept just enough distance between him and Jesus that nobody could identify him with Jesus. Now we know the proverbial rest of the story. We know of the three times that he denied the Lord. We know about him arguing and fussing, even denying that he existed.

So I want to end tonight in John 18:15 and I want you to see what the Apostle John gives us in more detail not just with Simon Peter but with somebody else. It says in verse 15, "And Simon Peter followed Jesus," we know from afar, "and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest." Now I'm going to be very transparent and very honest, we do not know kind of like the young man in the linen cloth specifically who this specific disciple is. There are many that believe that this was the Apostle John, this was the beloved apostle, this is the one he's kind of identifying him as a certain man much like Mark may have earlier in his gospel account. Many people believe that because he was the only one at the foot of the cross, that it was him that was there as everything was happening. But the thing that intrigues me is that disciple was known to the high priest. John the apostle probably knew the high priest but was he in favor with him? We don't know and so there's others that have speculated who that might have been. Some believe it could have been Nicodemus, after all, Nicodemus was one of the inner circle. It was Nicodemus who earlier in John 7 said, "Can we really prosecute this guy without evidence?" Again, you and I will probably never know this side of heaven conclusively who the person is, but here's what I want to call your attention to: Simon Peter was on the porch. Simon Peter was denying his relationship. Simon Peter ended up cursing, cussing and running off. This other one

was willing to go where Jesus was being falsely accused. You see, earlier in Mark 14 it said all forsook him, they took off. Some had swords, some did not, some had clothes, some did not. But there's one person, we don't know his specific name, we can't conclusively say who he is, but he was willing to go inside the palace when nobody else was.

On the night before Christmas, all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. On the night before the crucifixion, not a person was in the palace except one. Tonight, in spite of whatever may lie ahead of us, before us, or whatever perspective you want to give, who would you rather be, the one who was afar off or the one who was in the palace? In the immediacy, it's an easy answer but long term I think we both know that he that was in the palace gained a greater benefit, showed the greater loyalty, and ultimately had a better epitaph written of their life. We do not know conclusively who nor do we know exactly what happened but tonight I want to challenge each of us not to be the one who was afar off, be the one willing to go into the high priest's home. Be the one willing to identify. Be the one willing to say, "Even if this causes me harm or detriment, I cannot deny him, I will not betray him, I will identify with him." May we be found as that one who was willing to go to the palace.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Tonight, as we come to our time of decision, you may be that person even in this place or watching online who's yet to come to that place of confessing one's sin condition and asking Jesus Christ to save them. If that's who you are tonight, we encourage you just to call on the name of the Lord. We would love to celebrate with you. Maybe tonight the Lord's impressed upon you a specific decision in regards to this specific church or whatever it may be, we would love to discuss and to pray with whatever that is. But tonight, I know that each and every one of us has a very important decision to make because in a few moments we're going to walk out of this place and we're going to turn off the tv, the podcast, the radio, we have a decision to make: are we going to stay afar off or are we going to be willing to go into the palace not knowing what that could mean?

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, Lord, that palace is different for all of us. For some of us it's the workplace, for others it's the home place, for others it's the community, it's a friend group, it's whatever it may be. Lord, help us tonight, help us to be willing to identify with you whatever the cost. Help us to not be like Peter and join up with the ways of the world and just jumping on the latest bandwagon. God, may we be found faithful as men and women, even boys and girls, may we be willing to go into the palace with and for you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.