

The Hour has Come - Betrayal

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 27th of February 2005.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled, The Hour Has Come Betrayal, and is based on John, chapter 18, verses 1 to 14.

Please turn in the Bibles to John's Gospel again, to the second of today's Bible readings, John, chapter 18, on page 880. This is part of our sermon series leading up to Good Friday from the accounts in John's Gospel of Jesus' final prayer, which we heard last week, and then his arrest and trial and crucifixion this week and the next few weeks up to Good Friday.

And then after Easter we'll look at the end of John's Gospel on the resurrection accounts. Let's pray. God our Heavenly Father, speak to us now, we pray through your Word, that we may not only understand but believe and obey for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

God our Heavenly Father, speak to us, the story. God our Heavenly Father, speak to us, and the story of God, the story of God. The bit in the film or the book that is the most tense usually is the chase. The chase either for the criminal, the baddie or perhaps it is the chase for the goodie.

[1 : 28] And the tension builds as the person is fleeing, hiding, and others are chasing after, trying to find and detect, arrest, kill, whatever the case may be in the story or the book.

It might be a car chase like those fabulous ones in the French Connection or the Italian Job. Or it might be Harrison Ford, who in whatever film he's in is always on the run it seems.

Sometimes it's just a detective novel where the police or the detective or whoever it is is closing in on the murderer. It might be Leonardo DiCaprio on the run in Catch Me If You Can from Tom Hanks.

Or it might be in that film The Pianist, that unrelenting chase to find the pianist in the Warsaw ghetto of the Second World War. And usually as the person is being hunted and chased after, the tension builds so that we find ourselves even breathless, tense, white knuckled, clutching hard the sides of the cinema seat or whatever it is, wondering whether the goodie will escape or the baddie will get caught.

In very great contrast to that, the arrest or the chase in a sense leading up to the arrest of Jesus is not like that at all, in any way at all.

[2 : 47] I think we're meant to notice that. We're meant to notice that there is no hint of hiding or fleeing, no hint of desperation or panic. Jesus willingly goes to his arrest knowing that it will lead to his death.

That's a very clear contrast from what we're used to when somebody is hunting somebody else to arrest them and put them to death.

From the moment that Judas left the upper room, back in chapter 13, to the point of his arrest, Jesus doesn't hide, he doesn't flee, he doesn't tell his disciples to arm themselves, he doesn't barricade the upper room, he doesn't call for police protection, he doesn't run away from Jerusalem to hide in an unknown place to try and escape their detection, nothing like that at all, no panic.

Indeed, Jesus does not shy away from what awaits him, he leaves the upper room after a lengthy discourse in chapters 14 to 16 and prayer that we saw last week in chapter 17.

He doesn't rush, he takes his time and he goes across the Kidron Valley, we're told in verse 1, to a garden that was well known to him and well known to Judas who was betraying him.

[4 : 08] Chapter 18 begins after Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas who betrayed him also knew the place because Jesus often met there with his disciples.

The Kidron Valley is not a great wide valley but it's a fairly sharp small valley that separates Jerusalem to its west with on the east the Mount of Olives.

You can almost throw a stone across it but it's fairly steep sided. Jesus would have walked down from the temple plates roughly with his disciples, crossed over the wadi, the river, Kidron and then up the other side.

We're not sure exactly where the garden is although if you go there today the rather crooked guides that you might end up with will tell you and plead with you that in the Garden of Gethsemane site today the olive trees are 2,000 years old.

Jesus would have touched those very trees, that's not true, they're less than that but they're very old nonetheless. It may well be the original site. The name Gethsemane though not used in John's Gospel is there in the other Gospels and it means an oil press.

[5 : 14] So probably it's a place where there were olive trees to get the olives and press them to make olive oil. So it may well be roughly the site on the side of the Mount of Olives looking back across to Jerusalem that Jesus goes.

We're told that he'd gone there many times with his disciples. Presumably he used that as a stopping off point, a resting point, a teaching point with his disciples on the times when they were in Jerusalem for the main feasts including the days perhaps leading up to this day where he's arrested in that garden.

In the other Gospels we know that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, late at night it is at this time. There's no mention of that prayer in John's Gospel, maybe because John's focused on the prayer that we saw last week, still in the upper room probably, the prayer of chapter 17.

And the other Gospels record his praying in the Garden, in the Garden of Gethsemane itself. It's probably a walled garden because the language is Jesus goes into and out of the garden which implies some element of wall or gate through which he would go in and then later come out in verse 4.

So rather than a public park type area it's probably walled off maybe to keep animals out, maybe to keep other people out of a garden that had olive trees that were there for fruit.

[6 : 31] It may have been a private garden that Jesus had access to, we're not sure. But he certainly used it often, it's a place known to Judas, Judas presumably would know to go there. And probably that also implies that each night in this week leading up to his death as Jesus had arrived the Sunday before, Jesus would go out maybe beyond the garden to stay the night in Bethany but maybe the garden was a place where he'd stop, teach, pray, rest, whatever each day.

So Judas would know to go there and find him there. Jesus is not hiding, he's not fleeing but nor is he naive or ignorant. He knows what is going to happen to him.

That's very clear here as in earlier chapters as well. Judas comes after him, we're told in verse 3, with a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees.

And they came there with lanterns, torches and weapons. It is after all night, lanterns and torches to see. A detachment literally would be, and the writers argue a bit about the size, but 480 probably was a full detachment, maybe even up to a thousand in a detachment of soldiers.

These would be Roman and therefore non-Jewish, Gentile soldiers. That's a huge amount. It may not be that a full detachment is with Judas, all 480 of them, but the language does imply a significant number of soldiers.

[8 : 02] A disproportionate amount for what you would need to arrest this one unarmed man, Jesus of Nazareth. Along with those Gentile or Roman soldiers, there are also the police of the chief priests and the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders.

And here you get implacable enemies, Romans and Jews, united in a common cause to kill the Son of God himself. How dark evil is that it brings together such enemies.

For 60 to 90 years, the Romans had occupied Palestine, about 90 years at this time, and they were the enemies for the Jews. And yet here they are, calling on Gentile Roman soldiers to help them to arrest this man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the Saviour, who'd come.

Well, when they arrive, Jesus goes out, we're told in verse 4, to leave the garden again, and presumably out of the gate, and stands outside the walled garden to meet them.

He doesn't hide in the garden, he doesn't keep the gate shut, he doesn't barricade himself in, nothing of that. He himself takes the initiative, he's in control through all these events, and he goes out to meet his arresters, knowing full well what will happen to him.

[9 : 26] As verse 4 says, Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, whom are you looking for? Remember that in the other Gospels, in particular in Mark, three times Jesus predicts his arrest, betrayal, and handing over to trial and death and resurrection.

And in John's Gospel, the same sort of thing. Back in chapter 13, at the beginning of this very evening, before the last supper meal, we're told that before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.

So Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen. He knows that they will arrest him, he knows that it will be trumped up charges, he knows that he will be put to death, and he knows that beyond that he will rise and go back to glory in heaven.

But he doesn't shy away from the arrest, trial, and crucifixion that await him. He initiates it, he says, who are you looking for? And they say in verse 5, Jesus of Nazareth.

For that's what he was known as by many, and where he'd grown up, of course, with Joseph and Mary. And his reply to them simply is, I am he.

[10 : 47] Straightforward in one sense. I am the one you're looking for is what's implied by that little statement. I am he. The response, though, of the soldiers is astonishing.

For when Jesus says, I am he, Judas, who was betraying Jesus and standing with all the soldiers, when Jesus said to them this, in verse 6, they stepped back and fell to the ground.

Now, at one level, it could almost look like, you can imagine in your mind, something like the Keystone Copse. You know, this great detachment of soldiers, the chief priests, the Pharisees, their police, Judas at the front of them all, and Jesus says, I am he, and they all step back and they fall to the ground in a great big muddle and a heap.

And you can imagine them all embarrassed, getting up and dusting off their clothes and robes and uniforms and all that sort of stuff. Why on earth, when Jesus says, I'm he, do they make such an extraordinary response and fall backwards and fall to the ground?

Well, at one level, Jesus is simply saying, I'm the one that you're looking for. But it's more than that, significantly more than that. Literally, he says, and emphatically, I am.

[12 : 01] And in the Old Testament part of the Bible, I am, simple words though they are, was the meaning of the name of God. So when God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai, way back in Exodus, 1400 years before Jesus, he revealed his name to Moses and therefore to Israel.

I am who I am, he said. And hence we get the name Yahweh or Jehovah, which literally means I am, the great I am. And it's a common theme in John's gospel in particular to highlight Jesus' use of that name for himself.

I am the good shepherd. I am the bread of life. I am the truth and the way. I am the resurrection and the life and so on. And he also said, you'll die on your sins unless you believe I am.

Before Abraham was, I am. And though the word I am is, in a sense, normal, very common English, in a sense, it's loaded with significance and it's emphatic when it's used by Jesus in those senses.

You see, Jesus, in using those words and that language, is making a veiled claim to divinity. Not too veiled, but it's there. He's putting himself on a par with God.

[13 : 22] The God of the Old Testament known as I am. We also ought to bear in mind that in Jesus' day, it was becoming even more common not to even use the name of God, I am, for fear of blaspheming his name.

Like Jews today will not name Yahweh or Jehovah. They will say Adonai, which just means Lord, in its place because they don't want to take the name of the Lord in vain. So they don't use the name at all, which is an astonishing withdrawal from the privilege God gives Israel in Exodus 3.

So when Jesus says, I am, it's very striking. The claim to divinity and the use of the name of God that was probably not being used very often at all in Jesus' day.

And the response of all the soldiers and the police and so on in falling backwards shows that they appreciate the significance in a sense of what he's saying, even if their response is automatic or even unwilling.

In the Old Testament, where the name of Yahweh is given, it's not just a sort of general philosophical I am, but it's usually in the context of salvation. So when God revealed the name of himself to Moses and Israel, it was in the context of I am who I am and I will save and redeem you from slavery in Egypt.

[14 : 40] And the other time in the Old Testament where that name is used very frequently is in the last part of Isaiah the prophet. And again, the name is used frequently in the context of salvation. So too in John's gospel, when Jesus says, I'm the way, the truth and the life, the resurrection and the life, the bread of life, I am the good shepherd and so on.

It's always in the context of salvation. So here when Jesus says, I am, he's saying not only is he divine, God, but he's God come to save.

And their response shows awe, an unwilling kneeling before the name of God, in effect, as they fall before him. And all through the Old Testament, there is this expectation that you won't see God face to face and live.

Who can stand before God and live? When Isaiah had a vision of God in the temple, he fell prostrate and confessed his sins in Isaiah 6. And later on, when Paul has the vision of the ascended Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he falls down before him.

We often find that reaction to God, backing away in awe at the splendour of God. And so when all these soldiers and police and Judas and others all back away and fall over, even if unwilling, they are acknowledging that before them stands not just Jesus of Nazareth, but the divine Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour, the Lord of all, on a par with God himself.

[16 : 10] As Jesus knows, and Paul writes, for example, in Philippians 2, there comes a day when every knee shall bow before Jesus, before God, on his judgment throne.

And maybe here, there's an anticipation of that. Flipping the events on their heads so we actually understand what's really going on. Jesus is being placed under arrest to be judged, so they think.

But as they fall down before him, there is the anticipation that it is actually he who will judge them for their sins and judge us as well.

All the evil forces are arrayed against Jesus here. Not just humanly speaking, but from the evil one himself. And yet Jesus is calm, supreme and in control.

Always. I think we ought to draw some comfort from that. One of Jesus' last words in chapter 16 to his disciples before they left the upper room was to say that they would face persecution, but that he had conquered the world, anticipating his death.

[17 : 22] You and I, as followers of Jesus, sometimes cop flack for being Christian. Ridicule and mockery at school or university or in the workplace for our ethical standards.

Maybe even within our families, often very painfully so. Something that many of us have experienced over the years. There may be all sorts of places and situations where our Christian faith and our stand, our morals, our ethics, will mean that we cop some flack, some ridicule.

We ought to expect it. Jesus made it clear to his disciples. It's very clear throughout the scriptures. Here is Jesus facing all the evil and opposition mustered against him that will lead to his death and he is in control.

He is supreme. Evil will not win the day. Jesus does. And we ought to take comfort from that as he comforted his disciples in chapter 16.

He's conquered the world. We may face lots of flack from non-Christian friends, colleagues, family members, whoever. But God is sovereign.

[18 : 27] Jesus is Lord. And he has won and evil ultimately will not win. We ought to be comforted here. Well, presumably after they've picked themselves up and dusted off their robes, Jesus again asked them, whom are you looking for?

And they said again, Jesus of Nazareth. And he said, I told you that I'm he. So if you're looking for me, let these men go. He's referring to his disciples, presumably standing behind him in the gateway of the garden or wherever they are.

But notice here what Jesus is doing. He's protecting them. They've come for Jesus of Nazareth, so he says, well, take me, but let them go.

Here is the good shepherd protecting his sheep as he promised to do back in chapter 10. Here's the good shepherd willingly laying down his life for the sheep as he promised to do back in chapter 10.

Here indeed is Jesus not letting anyone of his followers go. As he promised to do in the preceding chapter when he prayed that prayer that we saw last week in chapter 17.

[19 : 37] Here is Jesus fulfilling his own word of promise to protect those who are his own. Verse 9 says, this was to fulfill the word that he had spoken.

I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me. Now, fair enough, in a sense, Jesus is saying, or what's been commented here is that Jesus is keeping his promise.

But all through the New Testament we keep finding words like that. This was to fulfill what had been spoken, sometimes in Isaiah the prophet or in the Old Testament or something. It is always referring to the word of God in the Old Testament.

So here we get the language of fulfilling something that had been spoken, but what it's referring to is Jesus' own words. What it's doing is putting Jesus' words on the same level as God's words in the Old Testament.

Now, we ought not to be surprised by that because we know Jesus to be the Son of God. But here's the writer making it very clear that Jesus is no less than God at all. His words are words full of divine prophecy that are being fulfilled as he protects his disciples here at his own arrest.

[20 : 46] Well, in contrast to the calmness of Jesus, we have the rashness of Peter. Peter so often who misunderstands what is going on, drawing out his sword in verse 10, striking the high priest's slave, cutting off his right ear, and in this gospel alone we're told that that slave's name was Malchus.

And Jesus said to Peter, put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me? What Peter cannot understand is that Jesus must die.

Yes, it's true that he dies through injustice, the injustice of his arrest and trial, but what Peter doesn't understand is that it's part of God's plan. Jesus must die for the plan and purpose of God to be fulfilled for the universe.

He thinks somehow a sword can defend Jesus, which is a bit of a futile gesture because there are so many soldiers in front of him, all of whom, it seems, are armed. But the irony is that Jesus is actually protecting Peter, as we've just seen, not Peter protecting Jesus.

A sword is not what you need for protection. The divine word of God, spoken through Jesus, is sufficient to protect us as well as Peter.

[22 : 07] What Peter is actually doing, maybe unknowingly really, by pulling out his sword, chopping off an ear, which probably suggests a mis-aimed sword thrust, is he's trying to avert the cross.

It's something Peter's already tried to do. In other Gospels, we read that when Jesus first predicted his death to come, Peter said, no, no, no, no. And Jesus' response then was, get behind me, Satan.

That is, there is temptation for Jesus to avoid the cross. Not just because it's death, but because it's death carrying sin.

Peter, in drawing out his sword, thrusting it at the slave's ear, is in a sense trying to avert the cross again. And Jesus responds, am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?

In effect, by asking the question, he's making the statement, I must drink the cup that the Father gives me. I must die, is what he's saying. I can't avoid that.

[23 : 16] It's the divine plan. He's rebuking Peter here. Now, he uses this metaphorical language of drinking a cup to refer to his death. The cup that he's referring to, again, comes out of the Old Testament.

So often in the New Testament, these allusions are found very clearly in the Old. Know our Old Testaments well, much of the New will become even clearer to us. So, for example, in Psalms, we read in Psalm 75, it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.

For in the hand of the Lord, there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed. He will pour a draft from it and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs.

That cup of wine is the judgment of God against sin. Or see how Isaiah the prophet puts it in Isaiah 51. Rouse yourself, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.

The cup of God's judgment again. The wrath of God, the anger of God poured out against the sins of the world. That's the cup that Jesus must drink.

[24 : 37] To take the anger and punishment of God for the sin of the world. That's why it's a temptation to avoid the cross. Because the cross is the place of God's judgment against sin.

And Jesus will drink that cup. He will drink it as our substitute. He will drink the cup that is actually meant for us. To receive the judgment and punishment and wrath of God for our sin.

Just like a stuntman in a film does all the dangerous bits so that the heroes, the Harrison Fords and Tom Cruises and others don't get their hair out of order and their clothes dirty. So there's some unknown stuntman who does it all, the dangerous bits.

Jesus is like that person. Not that it's just a stunt, mind you. Deadly serious stuff. But he's there in our place. On the cross, drinking the cup of the wrath of God against our sin.

Instead of us as our substitute. In my place, condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood. But he doesn't just die to pay the penalty for our sins, death, but he dies also to take away God's anger for our sin.

[25 : 57] Often in modern Christian circles, people dismiss, often with ridicule, the idea that God is angry at sin. They think that's sort of a barbaric or primitive idea.

It's not. It's thoroughly biblical. I think we actually lose significant amount if we try to belittle the idea that God is angry at sin. Some years ago, I got a parking fine for parking in the wrong spot, misreading a sign.

And the parking fine said, to expiate this fine, pay whatever it was. So off goes the cheque. And presumably, some clerk in some office received the cheque, put it into the accounts, wiped off the fine.

My record was clear or whatever happens. I can't imagine that that person, when they opened my cheque, seeing that I'd parked in the wrong place, was filled with anger at this anonymous Paul Barker for his sin of parking in the wrong spot in the city.

It was just their job. Open the letter, take the cheque, put it in this tray. You can imagine the sort of humdrum job that that might be. When we sin against God, he's not indifferent.

[27 : 04] He's not just sort of collecting fines in his heavenly empire and banking them and wiping slates clean. He's angry because he's offended by our sin.

When we don't love him, when we don't love each other, God's angry. We've offended him, the holy God of all. So in order to deal with sin, not only does the fine have to get paid, that is death in the case of sin, Jesus dying for us as our substitute, but more has to happen.

God's anger has to be dealt with and Jesus takes God's anger on him so that we don't receive his anger, but rather his mercy and love.

Expiate was the word used on my parking fine. It applies in the case of Jesus' death. It is expiation because it deals with the penalty that we should pay, death. But it's a weaker word than what is the full case of Jesus' death.

And without wanting to complicate the matters, but I might as well give you a new word for the day. It is Lent after all, so here's a word. It's not fattening. Propitiate. That is, God's wrath is propitiated and our penalty is expiated when Jesus dies on the cross for us.

[28 : 22] Soon we will drink some wine as part of our celebration of the Lord's Supper when we remember Jesus' death for us. We'll drink from a cup, but it's not the cup of God's wrath. The reason that we can drink from this cup, a cup of salvation and righteousness in the Passover feast, from which it originates in a sense, is because the cup of wrath was drunk.

By Jesus for us, so that we can celebrate with a cup of salvation. Now in a sense, this passage and the passages we'll see in the weeks to come are driving us to the very heart of the Christian faith.

The death of Jesus for us, the taking away of our sin, the averting of God's wrath, so that you and I can have a relationship with God for eternity. It's a familiar story.

We're well used to it. Probably most of us are. But as we approach these events of Good Friday, hear again the words of John's Gospel week by week.

It may be that personally we've drifted away from personally acknowledging our sins forgiven through Jesus' death. It may be that we've never actually handed over our sins asking God for forgiveness and thanking him for Jesus' death for us.

[29 : 42] If not, we need to do that. Our response of faith means that we trust the divine justice of God which is focused on Jesus dying on the cross for our forgiveness of sin and the taking of God's wrath.

Have you ever thanked God personally for those events? Asking for forgiveness, repenting of your sin and trusting the forgiveness of God in Jesus.

There's no better day to do that than now, today, these weeks leading up to Good Friday and Easter. If you personally have not come to that point but now perhaps want to, please talk to me or Rod afterwards.

We'd be very pleased to help you further. These solemn events encourage us to place our sins on Jesus, to thank God for forgiveness and to trust him for eternity.

There's nothing more important in the whole of eternity than responding aright to these events. Amen. Amen.