

I Am He

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- [0 : 0 0] There are some great chase scenes in films, aren't there? I think the best one I've ever seen was in The Italian Job, one of the great car chasers of all time.
- I think The French Connection comes in second and The Blues Brothers third. But there are some great car chasers. There are other sorts of chasers, of course. James Bond is always chasing or being chased, and every time I see Harrison Ford on television, he's either chasing or being chased as well.
- And even my favourite TV programme, The Bill, occasionally has a police chase of some sort on foot or in a car. I guess going back to when we were kids, or when I was a kid, I should say, chasers have always been exciting, even Scooby-Doo and other sorts of cartoons like that.
- People chasing, the goodies chasing the baddies, the baddies chasing the goodies, and so on. Sometimes the chaste person is the goodie, sometimes the chaste person is the baddie.
- Sometimes, regardless of who they are, they get away, but other times they're cornered, killed, or arrested. And whether innocent or guilty, it is often the fact that the person just flees when they're in danger.
- [1 : 1 4] It doesn't seem to matter whether they're innocent or guilty, they just flee when there is danger and or hide. Now, in the light of that, consider the arrest of Jesus.
- This is not very exciting. It doesn't really grip our attention. He's not racing around the hills of Jerusalem, hotly pursued by armies of Roman and Jewish police.
- In fact, it's rather anticlimactic. It's almost boring, except that it's so important. From the moment that Judas leaves the upper room, having had the last supper with the disciples and Jesus, there is never any hint of panic, never any hint of fear.
- There is no glimmer of a suggestion of fleeing or hiding. Jesus doesn't even ponder whether they should barricade the door so that when Judas comes back, they can't get in.
- When they go to the garden, in this passage, there's no suggestion of locking the gate or putting barbed wire around the fence or hiding in a cave or behind a tree or anything like that.
- [2 : 3 3] There's no call to arms. The opposite is true. And because Jesus is innocent, there's no search for police protection either.
- He doesn't go and find some heavy man to do his dirty work. He doesn't call in at the Sun Hill Nick to find some refuge. He doesn't go racing to the Jerusalem temple to place his hands on the horns of the altar there, which was a traditional Old Testament place of safety and refuge.
- There's no sense of desperation. Throughout all these events, Jesus does not shy away from what awaits him on the cross. He is predominantly calm, in control, and purposeful.
- So when he leaves the upper room, he goes to a place that is known. A place that is known by Judas.

The passage begins after Jesus has spoken these words of the preceding chapters in the upper room, after the meal, with his disciples, after Judas has left. He went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley.

[3 : 46] Literally the Kidron Wadi. It's like one of Australia's creeks that only flows when there's rain. The Kidron Valley is like that. It's dry most of the time. It rains. It becomes a sort of little rushing torrent.

He crossed it to a place where there was a garden. This is on the hillside of the Mount of Olives. John, in this Gospel, doesn't tell us the garden's name, though Matthew and Mark tell us that it's called Gethsemane.

It's only John who actually tells us it's a garden. The name Gethsemane means an oil press, so traditionally people have thought it would be an olive garden where you would get oil from. This is a place that's known.

Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place because Jesus often met there with his disciples. We're not told anywhere else of Jesus ever going to this garden, but presumably he did.

We're told here that he must have on several occasions. The main times Jesus was in Jerusalem were the feasts. It's sort of like being in Melbourne when the Australian Open or the Grand Prix is on.

[4 : 48] Every hotel's booked out, places teeming with people and foreigners and pilgrims and travellers and all those sorts of people. So this is probably a fairly quiet place that Jesus traditionally went to, maybe even stayed a night there.

It's a short walk. You couldn't walk very far on special feasts and Sabbath days. We know from Matthew, Mark and Luke that in the garden, Jesus prayed.

Prayed with a heavy heart about what was to happen. But in John's Gospel, we're told none of that, not that it contradicts it. It's just that John doesn't tell us everything like the other Gospels don't tell us everything either.

They select the events that are meeting their purpose. Judas, of course, knows where to come. There's no sense that Judas has gone searching the streets of Jerusalem.

Maybe this is the first place he's tried, apart from the upper room. He brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

[5 : 50] Now you have to feel here the disproportionate response of Judas. A detachment of soldiers was up to 1,000 soldiers. That's what a detachment actually was, a block of 1,000 soldiers.

Now, it is probably unlikely that it's a full detachment. It's like saying I'm going to get the police. You don't mean every policeman in Victoria. You just mean some police. But on the other hand, it does imply that there is quite a number of these soldiers.

It's not just one or two. There is actually quite a few of them. They're Roman police. They're probably based on the coast at Caesarea where the Roman governor had his, well, the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, at this time had his palace and offices.

But at special feast times, they would come down to Jerusalem because that's the time when you could expect some sort of disturbance. But not only has Judas rallied together this detachment of Roman soldiers, there were also police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, that is Jewish police, temple police, people who officiated or judged or enforced the Jewish laws about what you could and couldn't do.

So here is an odd combination, an odd couple, Roman police or soldiers, Jewish police, traditional enemies, traditionally in hatred of each other.

[7 : 15] But because of the nature of Jesus, enemies united with a common purpose. Now in the usual films, there usually comes a point in the chase where, well, not every chase, but many times, where the person who's being chased finds what looks to be a place that is safe and they hide.

They cower down behind some boxes or filing cabinets or cars or tombstones or something like in the film *The Sound of Music*, you know, when all the family escapes behind all those tombstones and out come the torches and they're looking around and Liesl, I think it is, the girl who's 16 going on 45 or something, she sort of breathes in and tries to keep quiet.

But there's none of that here. When he hears the people coming, Jesus just goes out the gate of the garden. The words that are used about this garden imply that it's a walled garden with a gate.

He goes into it in verse 1, he goes out of it in verse 4. Judas and his soldiers and police, they don't even get inside the garden, it seems. Jesus actually goes out to meet them.

There's no hiding, there's no reluctance. Jesus is willingly offering himself up to them. Jesus is the master of the situation.

[8 : 38] He is the one who's in control. But nor is he acting ignorantly or naively. Jesus is not in the garden thinking, well here come the police but I know that I'm innocent so I'll just go out and justice will do its course and I'll be found to be innocent as I am.

He's not that naive. John has told us already three times in recent chapters that Jesus knows what is about to befall him. We're told that in verse 4.

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, whom are you looking for? That is, Jesus is not acting ignorantly thinking, well, if I offer myself up it'll show that I'm innocent and I'll clear my name.

Far from it. He knows exactly what will happen. He knows that he will die. Not only does he go outside the gate to greet those who've come to arrest him, but he initiates the conversation.

He walks outside the gate and says to them, whom are you looking for? As though he's trying to be of help to them. And they say to him, Jesus of Nazareth.

[9 : 47] And he doesn't shirk the issue. He doesn't say, oh, look, I saw him run up the road there about 20 minutes ago. If you run fast enough, you'll catch him. He says, I'm he.

He owns up. He's willingly offering himself to them. He's not in any way reluctant. But the reaction of those who come to arrest him is extraordinary.

They don't say, oh, great, well, come with us then. We've got you, Nick, Sonny Jim. Like they say in the bill, except with a better English accent than I can do. They all fall on the ground.

This is Keystone Cops type stuff, isn't it? He says, I'm he. They're about to arrest him and they all take a step back and all fall down. What on earth is going on?

Are they really that bumbling and bungling? Is this a sort of primitive version of Inspector Clouseau? Are they just surprised at Jesus' boldness?

[10 : 50] I mean, you don't really expect somebody that you're pursuing with a whole detachment of Roman soldiers plus Jewish police to just walk out and offer themselves up. But on the other hand, even if you were surprised, I'm not sure that you'd all fall down either.

There's something more going on here. In itself, Jesus' reply, I am he, is straightforward. It's virtually what you'd expect somebody to say.

When looking for Jesus of Nazareth, I'm he. Literally, Jesus actually just says, I am. But that's about all that you need to say. But behind what he says lies a significant undercurrent at least.

a veiled claim to divinity. I am is the name of God in the Old Testament.

It's a name that we get the word Jehovah or Yahweh from. In our English Bibles, it's usually translated with capital letters Lord, L-O-R-D. But literally, it means something like I am.

[11 : 55] And in John's Gospel, Jesus has used a very emphatic I am several times. I am the bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the good shepherd. And so on. When you put all those together and they were made with one exception publicly, he is making some veiled claim to be God.

There are a couple of instances where the claim is not quite so veiled. In chapter 8, he says, you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am.

That's all. Just I am. And before Abraham was, he says, I am. And the Jewish listeners understood that he was making something that sounded pretty blasphemous.

So when Jesus says here, I am, there is at least a significant undercurrent of a claim to be divine. But more than that, in the Old Testament, where the name I am becomes important for its meaning, there are two places, but they both have the same context.

[13 : 15] In the original place where God reveals his name to be I am, it's in the book of Exodus, to Moses and then the Israelites. And the context is that the people of God are enslaved in Egypt, but God is about to act to bring them safety and salvation and redemption and bring them into the promised land.

That is, it's not just God saying I am, but God saying I am and I'm going to save you. And the other time in the Old Testament where the name I am in its meaning is significant is in the middle of the book of Isaiah.

And again, the context is where the people of God are in effect enslaved, not in Egypt this time, but in Babylon in exile and the passages in the middle of Isaiah are addressed to these captive people saying that God is about to act to save you, to bring you back to the promised land and back to himself.

So I think if you add up all those expressions in John's gospel, Jesus is not just making a claim to be divine, he's also saying I am God come to save his people and bring them back to himself.

That I think is the thrust of what Jesus is on about in those various expressions that use that expression I am. But that still doesn't quite explain what's going on here when all these people all fall down.

[14 : 41] One of the dangers I think of modern Christianity is that we take God too casually. We emphasize rightly God's love and friendship for us but sometimes that can be pushed to the extreme.

Sometimes we try and think in terms of prayer being like chatting to God on the phone or sending him an email or something like that. Maybe we like to think of God as my best mate.

Now those ideas are not bad. There is helpful truth in all of them. But it can be one sided because consistent throughout the Bible also in the New Testament is a sense of awe about God.

Who can see God and live? Who can stand in the presence of almighty God and live?

When Isaiah the prophet has a vision of God in the temple he doesn't jump up and down with joy and say God it's great to be with you. He falls down on the floor and says woe is me.

[15 : 55] When Saul on the road to Damascus has a vision of God in the form of the risen Lord Jesus Christ he doesn't jump up and down with joy he falls on the ground in awe of God.

And there are several other times when that sort of thing happens. These armed troops fall down because they unknowingly are in the presence of an awesome God.

And it's Jesus Christ the man they've come to crucify. Yes it is a veiled claim to divinity. It is an indication that he is God come to save his people.

But this is Jesus the awesome God. The same God as in the Old Testament. The same God whom the psalmist wonders whether anybody could ever stand in his presence and live.

This is God. And that's what John's writing this down for us to realise. no ordinary man being arrested here, no common criminal, no poor victim of injustice.

[17 : 09] It is God. And he is in control. Not the soldiers, not the chief priests, not the Pharisees, not Judas. Jesus is in control all the time.

Notice what Jesus' next words are. Notice the example of selflessness that is there. He says to them again when they all probably stand up, brush their uniforms down, full of embarrassment and thinking, oh dear, what a terrible thing, trying to straighten up their bent swords because they've crushed them or fallen on them when they've fallen down.

And then eventually Jesus asked them, whom are you looking for? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth, at least they haven't changed their mind. And Jesus says to them, I told you that I'm he. This time they don't fall down, they're learning.

But then what Jesus says is this, so if you are looking for me, let these men go. The disciples who probably have come out to the gateway of the garden, but they haven't come outside, I suspect that they're probably just inside the garden because it's a little bit safer, but they're there in earshot, if not in sight as well.

Jesus is saying, let them go. The significance of that, Jesus is doing what he said he would do as the good shepherd, the one who would not lose any of the sheep that God had entrusted to him.

[18 : 34] Indeed, many times in John's gospel that's made explicit, that Jesus, whether in the form of the good shepherd or just as Jesus, God's son, he will not lose any of those that the father has entrusted to him.

Indeed, he's just prayed that sort of prayer in chapter 17, as we saw recently. And so verse 9 tells us, this was to fulfill the word that he had spoken.

I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me. He's kept his promise. He's done his job. He's the good shepherd who's protecting the sheep.

He's also the good shepherd who is laying down his own life for the sheep and nobody is taking it from him, but he is laying it down of his own accord. Another thing that's just worth a little sort of ponder as we go through verse 9 is that it's saying there that this was to fulfill a word that Jesus said.

Now often in the New Testament we get that sort of expression. This was to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah said. This was to fulfill what Scripture says. This is to fulfill what the Holy Spirit or God had said.

[19 : 43] Here is Jesus' words being put on a par with Scripture. And Scripture for Jews was held very, very highly. So here is even an early indication that Jesus' words were regarded with the same divine authority as the words of Scripture for the Jews, that is our Old Testament.

Well, Jesus' demeanor of control and calm and bravery as well is very different from that of Peter. In verse 10 we're told that Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear.

We're not told whether he aimed for the right ear or whether he aimed for the neck, but he got the right ear. And the slave's name we're told was Malchus. John was an eyewitness and probably Malchus was well known as the person whose ear got cut off in the arrest of Jesus and later of course miraculously healed by Jesus as well.

Surely that's a futile gesture of Peter to bring out his sword and swipe a slave's ear. Here is a detachment of soldiers, the chief priests and the Pharisees and their police and here's a slave of them.

There's probably many people around all armed or many of them armed we're told. And here is Peter with one little sword thinking he's going to save the day. The swash blackling hero to the rescue to save Jesus from injustice and arrest and death.

[21 : 11] The same Peter who just said earlier that evening that he was ready to die for Jesus. Here he is the kamikaze himself going to prove his words to be true but it's the same Jesus who in just a few hours will deny even knowing Jesus for the sake of his own life.

Now it's not the fickleness of Peter or his stupidity that's really the issue here but rather his misunderstanding about what's going on. He cannot comprehend despite Jesus telling him that Jesus must die.

he thinks a sword can defend Jesus but ironically it's Jesus who defends Peter when he says let these men go. But even more ironically it's in his actual death on the cross that he provides the ultimate defence for Peter for eternity.

Peter's got no idea. But the most significant thing of all is that Peter's act is a fiendish one. it seeks to prevent the cross from happening.

It's not the first time that Peter's made that sort of mistake. You may remember in early in Jesus' ministry though not in John's gospel recorded when Jesus speaks about his death Peter says no no way you'll never die like that and Jesus says get behind me Satan.

[22 : 31] Why? Not because Peter is Satan but because the temptation to avoid the cross is a satanic plot. Satan was desperate for Jesus to avoid the cross because he knew that the cross would be Jesus' victory.

So anything that would distract him from dying on the cross for the sins of the world Satan would applaud and encourage. So here is Peter waving his sword bravely and stupidly.

But ironically what he's doing is providing yet another temptation for Jesus to resist. So Jesus says to him put your sword away. Am I not to drink the cup that the father has given me?

Those words about the cup and drinking it sound almost Shakespearean as though this is some tragedy of a flawed hero drinking poison at the end of a Shakespearean drama.

But it's no tragedy. It is God's purpose and it's God's glory. Jesus is determined to be obedient to the end even death.

[23 : 44] Am I not to drink it he's saying? That is I am to drink it. I must drink it. I am determined to drink it. I will drink it because the father has given it to me to drink.

Oh he's not talking about a nice cup of tea on the cross. This is not sort of sweet earl grey tea type cup to drink. What is he going to drink? This is the wine of the fury of God's wine press.

These are the grapes of wrath crushed and fermented for Jesus to drink. This is the cup of which the psalmist spoke hundreds of years before Jesus saying it is God who executes judgment putting down one thing 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. It's the same cup that Isaiah the prophet spoke about when he said rouse yourself O Jerusalem.

You have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering. This is the cup of judgment.

[25 : 08] This is the cup of God's anger and fury and wrath at the sins of wicked people. And those passages and many more like them in the Old Testament make it clear that anyone who is a sinful person who fails the perfect standards of God's stands under the sentence of having to drink that cup of God's furious wrath.

So why is Jesus drinking it? The only one who need not drink the cup. The only one who is perfectly innocent. The only one who does not stand condemned by God the Father.

the only one who could avoid the cup of wrath. Why should he drink it? He drinks it for us. He's our substitute.

In films if you watch the credits they'll tell you who the stuntmen are. Usually the lead actors don't do anything dangerous. They don't get paid enough for that.

The stuntmen do the dangerous things. I saw a film a while ago and I couldn't work out what was dangerous in the film needing stuntmen but there must have been something. That is the stuntmen stand in in the dangerous parts for the lead actor so that Leonardo da Vinci won't get his hairstyle spoiled or something like that.

[26 : 34] Not da Vinci, DiCaprio, sorry. It's all the same. Jesus is our stuntman in effect.

I mean that's not a comedy but he's standing in our place. He's our substitute at the point of not just danger but death. He drinks it for us.

He drinks the cup of God's wrath that we should drink. He drinks it to die for us. But notice one other thing that says about his death.

Jesus' death does not just take away or deal with the penalty of what I do wrong. It averts God's anger as well.

Some years ago in the distant past I had a parking fine. It's hard to imagine I know but I did. I think it was about four shillings and six.

[27 : 39] But on the sheet, on the sheet, it was in England, on the parking slip it said to expiate this fine pay so many dollars to this office.

So I did. I expiated the fine. That is, I paid it off. I paid the penalty. I don't imagine for the first minute that when my check arrived in the office, a person who had been furious with anger because I'd parked my car illegally, was suddenly pleased and satisfied at receiving my check.

I imagine that Mr or Miss or Moose blogs received my check, knew nothing about me or what I'd done wrong, but put it in the appropriate place for the accountants to bank it and thought nothing more of it, was completely indifferent to what I'd done wrong.

So be it. that's all right. My fine was expiated. The penalty was paid. But Jesus is doing more than that when he dies for us on the cross because he drinks the wrath of God for us as well.

You see, God is offended by our sin. He's not an anonymous bureaucrat in a division of fines for the parking officers. God is offended and angry because our sin, any sin, is a personal affront and snub to him.

[29 : 11] And all of us do that. When we fail to love him with all our hearts or our neighbour as ourself. And so God is angry.

He is furious. He is full of wrath. Flying off the handle because he's got a bad temper. But a righteous wrath because we are unrighteous.

What will happen to that anger? Jesus drinks it. Jesus takes it. Jesus accepts it all. The very one who's never ever caused God to be angry about anything that he's done.

Diverts, attracts all the wrath of God, thus appeasing him, satisfying not only the penalty that should be paid, but appeasing or assuaging God's anger as well.

He drinks the cup of wrath so that we need not drink it. No wonder he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[30 : 20] He was being buffeted by the billows of God's anger at the time. As one of the hymn writers says, he turned not his face from our pain and destruction.

He drank the bitter cup to the end. He who knew no sin took the punishment for us, deserted by God, man and friend.

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin. In a short time we will drink wine around the Lord's table.

Think again of what that wine is. No longer the wine of wrath from the vat of God's furious wine press. That's been drunk for us by Jesus.

The cup that remains for us to drink is the overflowing cup of salvation that the psalmist also anticipated with joy. this is the wine of the new kingdom.

[31 : 24] The wine of salvation is ours to drink because Jesus has drained the bitter cup to its end. Thank God that he did that.

Thank God that he was obedient to the end. Thank God that he drank the cup that the Father gave him so that we might enjoy the wine of salvation.

worthy indeed is that lamb to receive our praise, glory, honour and power.

Amen.