

Whom Do You Seek?

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[0 : 0 0] John chapter 18. John chapter 18. The Bible class has just come in, so I want to read that passage again.

This is the first 11 verses. Our particular focus would be verse 4, but let's read again from the beginning. When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden which he and his disciples entered.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am he.

Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, Whom do you seek?

[1 : 0 9] And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he. So if you seek me, let these men go. Let his disciples go.

This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken. Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

The servant's name was Marcus. So Jesus said to Peter, put your sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?

And here we are at the night, the night before Jesus' crucifixion, that Thursday evening. It's a night that we see, you know, filled with so much darkness.

Not just physical darkness, but the darkness of enmity and betrayal against Jesus. But greater, much greater than the darkness around Jesus.

[2 : 0 6] And there is, is the light, the light of Christ's love for sinners. As we see here, central in this passage, we see the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world, even there, shining in his light, showing who he truly is.

In that contrast to the darkness around. And in that garden, and we know, of course, from other passages, the comparative passages and other gospels, this is the garden of Gethsemane.

And there in that garden, we see the control of Jesus, the sovereign control of Jesus. He knows what's happening. He knows, as we saw there in verse 4, he's knowing all that would happen to him.

And we see, of course, the claim of Jesus. He is claiming divinity in his saying to the people. When they ask him, look for Jesus of Nazareth, he's saying, I am the expression used of God as we read in the Old Testament.

And finally, we'll consider what Jesus means when he said to Peter, shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? What is Jesus saying about that cup that he's going to drink?

[3 : 22] And as I say, you know, as we gaze on this passage here, I think this is the first time we've actually together looked at this passage. It struck me just, you know, this concentration of light, the light of the Lord Jesus.

You know, his love for sinners that he should be willing to go to the place of crucifixion. And there, even before that place of crucifixion and Calvary, even there in the garden, to suffer.

To suffer the assault and the mocking and the betrayal of others. And we give thanks. We give thanks for him.

Last Lord's Day morning, we gave thanks in remembering the death of the Lord Jesus. Well, we backtrack a little. We're going to backtrack just a wee bit. We'll certainly backtrack just a day before Christ gave his life on the cross.

We're going to backtrack a little just to grasp the greatness of Jesus. And, you know, as we see that greatness, as we see his great love, as we see his compassion, as we see his grace there, the greatness of, as we said, his control over events that were happening and immediately precede, or just a wee bit immediately preceding the crucifixion.

[4 : 41] And as you recognize his greatness, as you see that, even here, bow in your heart. Bow in worship before him. He's the Lord who gave himself for you.

He's the Lord who, you know, at that time, at that crucial time, he didn't want to evade his captors. We read in John 8 that he hid from them. It wasn't his hour at that time.

But it is his hour now, his hour for giving his life. So he's not going to evade his captors. He's not going to call down the many legions of angels to deliver him. He's not going to turn away from doing his Father's will.

His face is towards the cross. And it's a drama. It's a real drama that we're reading here on that Thursday night. But the focus is on Jesus.

Now, of course, we've got Judas Iscariot here and his betrayal of Jesus. And yes, we've got the soldiers who arrest Jesus. We've got Peter and his rash behavior.

[5 : 43] But central to this passage, as he's central to the whole gospel message, is Jesus. And, well, of course, we have to see the immediate context, the immediate background for this passage, because Jesus has just finished praying to his Father in that great high priestly prayer.

And after he's prayed, he takes 11 of his 12 disciples. He crosses over that brook, that stream. He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane.

John doesn't give us here what other gospel writers give. John doesn't give us the agonizing in prayer that Jesus endured in the Garden. But what John's doing, he's focusing on these immediate events just after Jesus had prayed his prayer to his Father, just after he prayed, you know, not my will, but your will be done.

And so we're seeing Jesus fulfilling that will going towards the cross. He's obeying his Father fully. And Jesus is in full control of these events that Thursday evening.

And, well, let's look at that control. We're told, like at the start of that passage, that Jesus and his 11 disciples, the 11 disciples minus Judas Iscariot, they've gone to a place that we see was well known to them.

[7 : 10] And, of course, to Judas Iscariot as well. Judas knew, somehow knew that Jesus was going to be in that particular place that night. And, you know, the temptation is to think that somehow, you know, Jesus fell into a trap.

You know, there's Jesus there, but Judas knows he's there. And Jesus, the victim of this scheme that Judas has hatched to make sure that Jesus is arrested.

But no, it's not a trap. Jesus knowing all that would happen to him. Jesus was no victim of these, you know, of a cunning scheme, a cunning plan. There wasn't any martyr who, you know, was caught unawares.

Jesus knew fully what was to happen. Because, well, this is the Son of God. He surrendered to his Father's will there in Gethsemane.

He's going to go to the cross, and he'll go to that cross via betrayal and arrest and trial and mocking. But he'll do it in full control of these events.

[8 : 15] He's not going to shirk from carrying out to the full his work of salvation. He knows he's going to face a disciple, a man whom for three years he taught and he preached to, and he'd given instruction to.

He knows he's going to face a large group of soldiers who'd come with weapons to arrest him. He knows he's going to be taken to the high priest for trial. He knows this is all going to happen within a few, space of a few hours, and then be nailed to the cross.

He knew that he's going to face the wrath of his Father in bearing the sin of his people. But he continues on that road, that path of suffering, in full knowledge of what's to come.

Doesn't that fill your heart with humble thanksgiving? Jesus knew what was to happen to him, but Jesus didn't, for one moment, seek to escape from those who were there who'd come to arrest him.

Jesus had that resolved there that Thursday evening, that he would continue in that road to the cross. Doesn't that fill your heart with praise and thanksgiving to him, that, you know, for the joy that was set before him, even before he endured the cross, that he'd endure even the direct hatred of man.

[9 : 40] But he's in full control of events. I mean, these people there, the soldiers, you know, that were there to arrest him, they thought that they were in control.

They thought that they won a victory over Jesus. It was Jesus, who's sovereign. Sovereign over his life, and sovereign over the lives of all, all who are his.

And so we take heart, we continue to take heart from that truth, from the sovereign control of our Lord and Savior, yes, over his life and the lives of those who are his.

You see, we live in a world that claims superiority over the Savior, over Jesus, over his church. We live in a world that rejects the Savior.

We live in a world that thinks that it's got preeminence over Jesus and over the Lord's people. And even these so-called little victories that we see from time to time over the Lord's people and the church, these aren't victories at all.

[10 : 49] These are failed attempts to silence the voice of our Savior. Why? Because he's sovereign. He's in control. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Lord Jesus and his church because he is Lord.

He's the divine Son of God. And you see that in this passage. You see that control expressed. Because notice, as we read there in verse 4, what does he do?

He comes forward. That's important. He comes forward to those who are arresting him. It sounds so simple to say it, but he doesn't go backwards. And as he goes forward, he's entering into their presence and he's asking them directly, who are you looking for?

Who do you see? As we said, up to this point in his life, he'd evaded his enemies. His hour hadn't come to enter into that darkness. But now the time has come.

And he will enter that deep darkness of sin-bearing, that bearing of sins for his people. He's about to enter the darkness of facing the wrath of his Father.

[12 : 00] He's about to become that curse for us. And he'll do it voluntarily. So he comes forward to his enemies. He's not going to go backwards in that garden.

You know, in the first garden, the Garden of Eden, when Adam sinned, you know, when God came looking for Adam, Adam tried to hide from God. But Jesus wouldn't hide.

Jesus wouldn't hide from those who are looking for him. He's going to face them with all the resolve, all the dignity of the Saviour. And he asked them a very simple question.

Who are you looking for? He knows. Of course he knows who they're looking for. But the fact that he asked this question shows he's not afraid of his enemies. He's willing to face their judgment.

He's willing to face the judgment of God against sin. So Jesus, on that Thursday night, asked that question. Because in revealing who he is, indicate who he is, he knows that that will mean that he'll be taken for trial, crucifixion, and death.

[13 : 12] You know, four days after this happened, the Sunday of the resurrection, Jesus asked that same question, whom do you seek? Who are you looking for? But he didn't ask it to his enemies.

But he was asking that question to someone who truly was seeking him. Mary Magdalene. But of course she was searching, not at that time for a living Jesus, but she was looking for the corpse of Jesus.

And you know the account, unwittingly she meets Jesus, the risen Jesus. She assumes he's the gardener. Remember, she's weeping. She thought that Jesus' body had been taken away secretly.

She's seeking not a living Christ, but in her weakness, she's seeking a dead Christ. And Jesus asks her that question, who are you looking for? And he asks her that question to bring out of her weak faith, strong faith in Jesus.

This is the risen Jesus. And when she realises it is him, her faith is strengthened. She believes in him. And she knows, yes, he is the risen Christ.

[14 : 22] You see, Jesus asking her that question, as it were, develop faith in her heart so that she might truly believe and know the Lord Jesus truly is risen.

But you know, go back these four days. And that same question that Jesus asked Mary Magdalene, you see the different response. Yes, they were seeking Jesus, but they were seeking a living Jesus in order to put him to death.

You see, when they hear Jesus speak to them of who he is, they don't put their faith in him as Mary Magdalene put her faith in Jesus. They remained hardened in not believing in Jesus.

You know, when Mary heard Jesus speak to her, she clung to Jesus. She knew it was her Lord, her Savior. Yes, the people in the garden would cling to Jesus, but they would do it to arrest them and to take him away for trial and eventual crucifixion.

That one question has very different outcomes. And that question that Jesus asked here, certainly here as enemies, it's the same question that Jesus asked Mary Magdalene, but it's the same question Jesus asked you.

[15 : 42] Who do you seek? Who are you looking for? Is it the Jesus to worship or Jesus to deny? In fact, are you seeking even a Jesus that's not the Jesus of Nazareth?

Back in the 1980s was a band called Depeche Mode and they brought out a single called Your Own Personal Jesus and Johnny Cash covered that song in 2002, but the original song actually wasn't a gospel song.

It wasn't actually about Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. It was about human beings being considered a Jesus, a God, a help for someone else.

In other words, a false Savior. It was a sign of the time, certainly there in the 80s, that, you know, people weren't looking for the real Jesus of Nazareth.

They weren't seeking the Lord Jesus, the one true Savior. but they were seeking that imitation of Jesus, a human-centered Savior that's actually no Savior at all.

[16 : 48] There's no human-centered Savior that can save and give what the Lord Jesus gives, eternal life. But, which Savior are you looking for?

Is it your own personal Jesus, who's no Jesus at all, but an imposter? whom do you seek? Whom do you seek for full, sure satisfaction in life?

Whom do you seek for that true peace that fills the heart of the person who trusts fully in the Lord Jesus? He's the one who is that very present help in time of trouble.

But if you're not seeking Jesus of Nazareth, you're not seeking the one who came to die for sinners, who is it that you're looking for? You see, there's no other Savior.

God's Word tells us there's no other name under heaven by which men and women are saved. It's only Jesus. And of course, that salvation made effective through the death of the Lord Jesus, Jesus who would go from Gethsemane to Golgotha to the place of the skull as we know as Calvary and he would do it by means of suffering.

[18 : 07] And he suffers there even that Thursday evening. But remember, as we said, he's in full control of the events and you see that further in, well, he's in full control because of who he is.

As we see there from verse 5 to 9, that the claim that Jesus makes of himself because when Jesus is told by the armed guards and the soldiers and he's told, when Jesus tells them that who he is, well, this reply is so direct.

The words literally are I am. Who are you seeking for? Jesus says, I am. And, you know, it's what we see in the passage.

When Jesus says, I am, the armed men fall to the ground. And Jesus again repeats these words, I am, when the armed men ask him the same question as before, whom are you seeking?

Jesus says, I am, or we sort of translate it, I am he. And, you know, John tells us here when Jesus speaks these words of himself, Judas Iscariot is standing with these armed men.

[19 : 15] What are we seeing in all this? Well, surely we're seeing, first of all, we're seeing the majesty and divinity of the Son of God and we're seeing his majesty, his holiness in contrast to the evil of all who are opposed to the Lord Jesus.

Even when we're told that Judas Iscariot was there, we're seeing Jesus in contrast to one who had, yes, for three years claimed allegiance to the Son of God, but in his heart was never with the Savior.

Well, Jesus tells his army, I am he, I am. And we sort of alluded to this a wee bit earlier, that designation that God used of himself that we read off in the Old Testament.

You know, for example, when Moses asked God, whom shall I tell the Israelites who sent me, who sent me to lead them, God says to him, I am has sent you.

That I am of eternal being. the I am that tells us that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The I am that we derive the word Lord.

[20 : 29] You know, when you see Lord in the Psalms or expressed in Scripture in capital letters, well, I am is the words that we get in the Hebrew language for Lord.

The I am, of course, that we read in John 8, the I am that Jesus said when he said to his opponents before Abraham was, I am, and that I am that caused the Jewish opponents to pick up stones to throw at him and were told that Jesus escaped from their midst.

He went out of the temple without being arrested. But here he is being arrested. He's not going to hide himself. He's the I am that goes to the cross and will bear the sins of his people.

And, you know, as the divine son of God, even there he's revealing his divine power. You see that in verse 6 when he mentions, you know, the words I am, what are we told?

We're told the armed men fall backwards. And we can assume that Judas was with the armed men falling backwards as well. What are we seeing here? Well, we see other examples of this in Scripture.

[21 : 48] You know, when others came before God, when others came before God's revelation of himself, there was this response of falling.

You go to Daniel, for example. Daniel 10 verse 9 where Daniel says, Then I heard the sound of his words. As I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in deep sleep with my face to the ground.

Or think of Saul of Tarsus. Remember, we saw a week or so ago when he saw the light of the glory of God shining around him and we're told that he fell to the ground.

And this falling to the ground that we read of here in John 18 surely tells us that these people were powerless against the Lord Jesus, against the one true power and the people that had the true power.

Not these people that came to arrest him. But, you know, even the compassion of Jesus. Jesus doesn't leave these men in the ground. He must do his Father's will.

[22 : 53] He must be arrested and, as we said, taken to the high priest, be condemned, hand over to the Romans and be crucified. And we might say that we're seeing grace in the midst of evil.

The evil of the betrayal that we see here in Judas Iscariot. Just moments before, Judas had actually eaten with Jesus.

He'd had a meal with Jesus, that Passover meal. And remember, even at that meal, none of the other disciples suspected that Judas was the one, you know, when Jesus said one of the number will betray him.

Jesus said that that meal would be better if that man weren't born. No one suspected Judas Iscariot who'd eaten with Jesus just a few moments before this incident when he's standing there with Jesus, but not with him, but against him.

The betrayer. Judas the betrayer. And he's standing before sinless purity. You see, Judas the betrayer, he fell with the others.

[24 : 04] He wouldn't repent of his sins. And you see the contrast between Judas and Jesus. Because there's Judas on the side of the world that hates Jesus.

And then there's Jesus himself. You see Judas who sided with Jesus' enemies. But in contrast, there's Jesus standing alone there, standing, resolute his faith towards Calvary.

He'll reveal his glory as the once for all sacrifice for sin. And you know, the world of war and conflict, betrayal, it's a capital crime because it's so offensive.

I'm sure you know some of the World War II traitors. Lord Haw Haw William Joyce executed for his crime, capital offense.

Carl Kurda, the Czech traitor who betrayed three of his fellow Czechs to the Nazis. He was executed for his crime. And traitors, they received their due punishment for their capital crimes.

[25 : 14] They betrayed nations, they betrayed individuals in time of war. But we can say this, that such crimes were as nothing compared to the betrayal of Jesus and that extreme offense against the sinless Son of God.

Because there's Judas and of his own free will, he's remaining there with Jesus' enemies rather than coming alongside Jesus in repentance of what he's done against them. I mean, even there when those who arrest him come to arrest him fall back, Judas again has seen the power of Jesus.

But he's not repenting. He's going to remain with those people that sought to put Jesus to death. And we see that tragedy of his offense against the righteousness of Jesus.

I pray there's no one here, you know, who witnessed the power of Jesus to transform lives. You've witnessed the power of Jesus but you're not submitting to his authority.

And realize that danger to your soul if that's the case, if you're not submitting to his rule. But turn, turn to him, turn from siding with those who delight to oppose the Saviour.

[26 : 29] Turn to the Lord Jesus and you'll know his grace. You'll know that grace that saves, that grace that keeps saving, that grace that preserves your life for all eternity. and we see Jesus even in his grace here when he says for a second time that he's Jesus of Nazareth and he asks that his companion disciples that they be allowed to go free.

That's what Jesus had prayed just a few moments before in that prayer when he offered his father. You read in John 17 verse 12, not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that the scripture might be fulfilled.

Jesus will face his accusers alone. He's going to go to the cross and he's going to be on that cross himself bearing the sins of his people.

But surely there's more than just the physical freeing of the disciples there. When Jesus says that they'd be allowed to go free, surely there's a spiritual element here that they not be lost.

Surely you know Jesus is telling us that those who are with him have that eternal security. I mean there's Jesus about to die for his eleven disciples who's going to he's about to die for all who are his and not one is lost for whom Jesus gave his life.

[28 : 02] You who are in Christ have that assurance you are not lost will you will not be lost because Jesus went to the cross and died for you. He bore your sins.

He bore the sins of his people. And you're safe, you're free free from the chains of sin, the power of dominion of sin. You're free from the power of Satan because of the power of the Lord Jesus.

And give him the glory that Jesus went to the cross. Even the very circumstances in which he went to that cross so that you might not endure eternal suffering.

So that you might not be lost. Well Jesus suffered even there in that garden. And you know that suffering and just a few more moments but you see that suffering that Jesus refers to in verse ten and eleven where he speaks of the cup that his father has given him to drink.

Well what do we see here? Of course Peter and his rash behaviour. He actually wants Jesus to be, not to be arrested. He's trying to prevent Jesus from being arrested.

[29 : 15] And he's got what would be a small sword with him. And of course it's dark so he's just lashing out with his sword. And in so doing he cuts off the right ear of the high priest servant.

And does Jesus commend him for you know trying to prevent his arrest? No Jesus doesn't commend him at all. Jesus has to go on that path and continue on that path to the cross.

Shall I not drink the cup that the father has given me? That's a metaphor of course. You know drinking the cup that tells of bearing the wrath of God. Jesus will face that wrath.

He must face that wrath. He must take the place of sinners on that cross. Jesus must obey his father fully and obey in love.

And he will and he did drink from that cup. And he drank the full measure from that cup so that not one of you who are his would be lost. And he will face the full wrath of God against sin so that you don't drink from the cup of God's wrath.

[30 : 26] And what's our response? Well again as we've said so often when we consider what the Lord Jesus did in paying the price for our salvation even in his suffering before the cross we give him the glory we give him the praise.

I mean these are moments before Calvary and you know really it should arrest your attention as you gaze in the Lord Jesus gaze on his grace gaze on the beauty of Christ remember he was willing to face what he faced for the sake of all who are his.

He drank that from that cup it was a bitter cup but he drank it for your sake. And yes even in the quiet of your hearts give him praise give him thanks because you know the cost of your salvation was paid fully by the Lord Jesus.

Those who had come to arrest him they fell backwards when Jesus said I am. We can fall and we can fall at his feet but you can fall in reverent fear before him you can fall before him in faith and in falling before him you can worship him you can worship the Lamb of God who offered himself up for you our Lord our Saviour.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord we thank you for your word we praise you that you have revealed to us all that we need to know of Jesus even before the cross and we pray Lord that we will know that as he revealed that control over every aspect of his life that he is sovereign in the lives of all who are his and so Lord we pray that we will know that blessing in serving the Lord Jesus who came and gave himself for us.

[32 : 34] Lord hear us as we continue in worship before you. Bless us each one in that worship. May you have all the praise and the glory. we pray these things in Jesus name.

Amen. Let's close in Psalm 68 on page 301.

Page 301 Psalm 68 we'll sing from verse 1 down to verse 4 and the tune is Milton. Let God arise and scattered let all his enemies be and let all those that do him hate before his presence.

We 1 to 4 Psalm 68 comment Who eats out the law on