

The Illegal Arrest of Jesus of Nazareth

Matthew 14:43-52

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It is my joy tonight to return with you to Mark's gospel and specifically to the Passion Week. Just to remind you where we are, because it's been a few weeks since we've studied this together, we are on Thursday night of the Passion Week. It's probably around midnight. And specifically, we find ourselves in the context of a garden. A garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives out the eastern gate of the city of Jerusalem in the Temple Mount, a garden called Gethsemane.

Just to remind you this is the basic configuration we're looking from the southwest. The temple mount is still there although of course today the Dome of the Rock sits there. You see the Kidron Valley on the other side and at the foot of the Mount of Olives and over across the Kidron Valley is Gethsemane, somewhere in that area is where Jesus and His disciples were. This is a closer view across the Kidron to where Gethsemane would have been at the foot of the Mount of Olives there. Here, are there still some ancient olive trees in that area, these wouldn't have been there at the time of Christ. They would have come shortly after the time of Christ, but this may be very much what it looked like in that garden that night. So, that's the context, Thursday night of the Passion Week around midnight and in a garden just outside the city of Jerusalem.

With that in mind, I want you to look at Mark 14, Mark 14, and I'll begin reading in verse 43. Jesus has already prayed, already had the struggle of with His soul and with the Lord, we looked at that in detail and in verse 42, He says to the three disciples, the intimate circle,

“Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!”

[Verse 43] “Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now he who

was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.” After coming, Judas immediately went to Him saying, “Rabbi!” and kissed Him. They laid hands on Him and seized Him. But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you *would* against a robber? “Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures.” And they all left Him and fled.

A young man was following Him, wearing *nothing but* a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked

All four gospel records record the betrayal and arrest of Jesus of Nazareth in the Garden of Gethsemane. And that’s because this account is really an essential part of the gospel narrative, because it demonstrates again both the supernatural nature of Jesus, as well as His complete innocence before the law; before Jewish law and before Roman law. Because as the evidence we will examine together will clearly show, Jesus’ arrest was in flagrant violation of Jewish law.

Now the background of this account can be pieced together from three different passages, and I want you to look at each of these passages with me as we begin this evening. Go, go to John 13, John 13:27. This is during the Last Supper; this is back a couple of hours before what we just read. Jesus is in the Upper Room in the upper city of Jerusalem in the wealthy home of one of His followers probably, having the Last Supper, the Passover meal with His disciples. In the middle of that Passover meal, 13:27, Jesus in verse 26 had had given the morsel dipped into the bowl to Judas indicating to John that Judas was the betrayer. Verse 27,

“After the morsel, Satan then entered into Judas. Therefore Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel, he went out immediately;” [the middle of the Passover meal] “and it was night.”

Now where did Judas go? He hurried as will become obvious in the passage. He hurried to find the chief priest and to set in motion the plans that they had already worked out together the day before, on Wednesday. The chief priests had much to do. They had to notify the temple police; they had to notify Pilate; they had to get a Roman guard. Word had to be sent to all seventy members of the Sanhedrin to gather immediately at Caiaphas’ home for an impromptu secret trial or hearing of Jesus. That’s what happened once Judas left.

Now the other passage I want you to see is John 18, flip over a few pages. John 18:1, after Judas left, Jesus continued to teach His true disciples, He instituted the wonderful celebration that we know of as the Lord’s Table. And on the heels of that, in His great High Priestly Prayer, verse 1 of chapter 18,

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas ..., who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples.

Now with that in mind I want you to go back now to Mark’s gospel. Go back to Mark’s gospel, and you’ll remember the scene at the garden, verse 43 says, “Immediately while He was still speaking....” Again, back to what we looked at the last time we studied this book together. As soon as Jesus had entered the Garden of Gethsemane, He apparently left eight of His disciples near the entrance to the garden to wait for Him there. But He

took along with Him into the garden itself, three of His intimate circle, Peter, James, and John. There He left them, and He went yet a little farther Himself into the garden. Three separate times He left them and went farther in the garden alone to pray, poured out His soul to God, crying out that the cup might pass from Him. Not the cup of human suffering, not the cup of death, but the cup of divine wrath and with it, separation from the Father, the Father He loved.

Apparently, the period of time over which these three prayers took place was about an hour. Jesus refers to that when He says to His disciples, "... could you not watch and pray with Me for an hour?" After this happened a third time Jesus came and found Peter, James and John sleeping. Verse 41,

And He came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? It's enough; the hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. "Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" Immediately while He was still speaking...."

Apparently when the eight disciples who were near the gate saw Judas and this large crowd coming, approaching, they apparently came first to find Jesus, Peter, James and John. So, picture the scene then, in a garden like I presented to you, in a picture, a picturesque setting like the current celebration of the Garden of Gethsemane there in Jerusalem, Jesus, the intimate three, the eight have now joined them and a crowd comes. That's the scene in which the betrayal and arrest unfold.

Now as the divinely inspired narrative unfolds, we first see the unlikely members of the arrest party, the unlikely members of the arrest party. It was by the way, a cold spring night. We know its cold because you remember later Peter will warn him will warm himself by the fire. It was in early April, probably in the year 30 AD. That night, this happens. One of the twelve, Judas came up accompanied by a crowd, verse 43 "... with clubs and swords, *who* were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders."

Now notice, Mark goes to great lengths to explain who made up this unlikely group who came to arrest Jesus. Of course, at the front of the group was Jesus. In fact, one of the other gospel writers mentions Judas preceding the crowd. All of the gospel writers refer to Judas as one of the twelve. And by the way they never refer to any of the other disciples that way. This serves to illustrate the horrific nature of Judas' crime. He was one of Jesus' followers, but not just one of Jesus' followers, he was one of the twelve Jesus hand picked to be His representatives. He was an intimate familiar friend.

Have you ever thought about what Judas must have seen and heard and experienced during those two to three years he made initial connections with Jesus at the baptism of John, to be an apostle that had to be true? Imagine what he saw; what he experienced; what we've studied together through Mark's gospel. He saw it all. He experienced it all and yet he never truly became a follower of Jesus. He was driven instead by his expectations of a literal, physical kingdom in which he would have a throne and he was driven by his own greedy heart. He was a thief, and he was pilfering from the money box, John tells us. And when Judas saw that Jesus wasn't going to give him what he wanted, Judas turned on Jesus, and he sold Him out for 30 pieces of silver, the price commonly paid for a slave.

Can I just stop here and make a point as we witness this scene unfold? That is a startling thing. If you'd never heard about Judas, this would be shocking, horrifying to you. How could it happen? Listen, the history of the Christian church is littered with people who, (out of emotion or out of their own personal desires) attached themselves to Jesus Christ but when their desires and their expectations are later frustrated, when Jesus doesn't give them what they want, they desert Him. It still happens today. Let me just encourage you, if you doubt that? Go on the internet and do a search for people who are embittered against Christianity and Jesus. And if you do that search, you will discover that many of them who are the most angry and vicious foes of Christianity and of Jesus are people who grew up in Christian homes, who attended good churches, who graduated from Christian

colleges. Sadly, like Judas, they knew who Jesus was, but they never really knew Him. They claimed to be Christians, but they never really followed Jesus.

You see it is possible to outwardly associate yourself with Jesus and His followers with the church and to profess allegiance and respect and even intimacy with Jesus, but really to be pursuing your own lusts and your own desires. This is true of false teachers with their ulterior motives. The New Testament makes that very clear. It also includes false disciples, tares sown among the wheat. That's why Paul urges every one of us to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. But at the same time know this, none of us wants to be a Judas or a Demas, but both Judas and Demas knew they were frauds. Both Judas and Demas eventually reached a point where they both knew they were living a lie.

So, here comes Judas leading the way. And Mark goes on to tell us that Judas brought many others with him. Look at verse 43. "Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd" [Now Mark goes on to give us a little information about this crowd, he says they were] "with swords and clubs, *who were* from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders." It was a crowd. Matthew actually says, "it was a great multitude." Who made up this crowd?

Well, notice they were men with weapons, with swords and clubs. John describes them like this in John 18:3, "They were ... officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees..." The Sanhedrin, the ruling body of Israel had two groups of men at its disposal to keep the peace. One group was made up of Levites. Levites who were armed with clubs and who basically kept order on the Temple Mount. For those massive crowds that gathered at the feast time for the sacrifices.

The other group were a more general kind of police force that served throughout the city under the direction of the Sanhedrin. Apparently, both of those police forces, both the temple guard as well as the sort of city police were a part of this crowd, and they were there on official Sanhedrin business. Notice Mark says, "... they had been sent by the

chief priests and the scribes and the elders.” Together those three groups comprised the Sanhedrin.

Just to remind you we’ve looked at this before, but the chief priests, that group was made up of the current high priest, in this case Caiaphas, and all the former high priests that were still living. The most notable of which was Annas, Caiaphas’ father-in-law, and leaders from the families in Jerusalem from whom the high priests could be chosen - the chief priests.

The scribes these were those who made their living their career from teaching the law. This was what they were paid to do, this was their livelihood. The elders were leaders of the tribes scattered across Israel. Leaders from cities scattered across Israel who had been chosen to serve on the Sanhedrin. It was an honor. And so, they moved perhaps their family to Jerusalem, and there they represented their town, their region, their city serving on this ruling body. That, those, these were the elders, they were laymen. They were usually well known and respected in their communities, and they were usually wealthy, independently wealthy.

So, understand then, that the temple police force was sent on an official errand by a nearly unanimous decision of the ruling body of Israel. I say, nearly, unanimous because there was at least one person who objected, you remember, later we’re we meet a man named Joseph of Aramathea, and it says “he was not consenting to His death” But a nearly unanimous decision of the ruling body of Israel. But Luke tells us, this is interesting, Luke tells us that the Sanhedrin didn’t just send representatives, the Temple guard, some of them actually came to the garden with this crowd. Here’s what Luke writes, Luke 22:52, after the crowd gets there, ... Jesus ... [spoke] to the chief priests and the officers of the temple and the elders who had come against Him.”

So, there were both chief priests and elders, some members of the Sanhedrin, that ruling body of seventy, who actually showed up in the garden that night to make sure everything went right, by their standards. But the multitude that came to arrest Jesus was not merely

made up of Judas and the temple police and the leaders of the nation. It was also made up of Roman soldiers. John 18:3 puts it like this, “Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and the officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.”

The Greek word translated “cohort” here describes a unit of the Roman army. Specifically, a cohort was a tenth of a legion. A legion was 6000 soldiers. In other words, a cohort then was usually comprised of about 600 men. Now there are times when the word cohort is used of a of a smaller part of the of the cohort, of a fraction of them, but never a small fraction. The smallest possible number of Roman soldiers that came that night is a couple hundred. And it may have been as many as a full cohort – 600 Roman soldiers. We can’t be sure, but all the gospels are clear that it was a large number. Matthew, “it was a great multitude.” So, don’t picture this little flannel graph picture of you know of 20 soldiers showing up to arrest Jesus. This was huge.

Now why? Well remember why the Jewish leaders had decided just earlier that week not to arrest Jesus during the Passover. It was out of a fear of a riot. Because remember, many of the people who came to the Passover celebration came from the Galilee, came from the area where Jesus was most respected and well known, and they were very much concerned that there would be a riot among the common people who had come to the feast.

And by the way, the Romans also were very concerned about riots during Passover, so every Passover without exception, the procurator, in this case Pilate, would come from their normal location over on the coast, most often the Roman procurator did not live in Jerusalem, he stayed in Caesarea, a Roman city, a beautiful Roman city on the coast of the Mediterranean, but within an easy day’s trip of Jerusalem. And at Passover, every Passover the procurator would come from Caesarea to Jerusalem and bring with him a large number of Roman soldiers who had who were normally stationed in Caesarea. There was always a Roman presence in Jerusalem because of the potential for a flare up,

a riot. But at Passover with several hundred thousand guests coming into the city there was a huge potential.

And you remember Passover celebrated a great victory by the Jewish people over Egypt, and so there was always this sort of nationalistic feeling, like our Fourth of July. And there was always a risk that that a spark would be struck, that a riot would ensue and so the Romans were very, very careful. And so, they brought soldiers with them from Caesarea who stayed in the fortress Antonia. This was a Roman garrison that overlooked the entire temple mount.

You can see it in the temple in the model of the city model of the ancient city of Jerusalem. It was literally overlooking the temple mount. That large flat open area is the temple mount, the building in the center is the temple proper where the holy place was and the holy of holies, the altar would have been just out in front of it. The court of Israel and the court of the women all in that center area. That huge platform was where the crowds would gather. Overlooking that platform in the red circled area there was the fortress Antonia where the Romans could keep a careful eye on what was happening down below.

Apparently, when the leaders of the nation met with Judas on Wednesday, they decided okay we have a way to arrest Jesus privately even during the Passover because Judas can tell us where He is when there's not a crowd around. But just to be safe they had pre-arranged with Pilate that at the proper time Roman troops would be available in order to ensure that there would be no trouble when Jesus was arrested. And so, apparently, when Judas left the Last Supper, he went to the chief priests, explained the time was now, told them this was the window of opportunity, they contacted the Roman garrison and the soldiers they had already apparently pre-arranged were released by Pilate, left the fortress Antonia, crossed into the Kidron Valley with Judas in the lead to arrest Jesus.

But not only did Pilate authorize a large number of soldiers, but John 18:12 tells us that the soldiers were even accompanied by a commander, is how it's translated in English. The Greek word is chiliarch. It's a man normally responsible for a 1000 Roman soldiers.

So, in other words, one of the leading commanders of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem for the time of the Passover feast came as well. No wonder Matthew calls this a great multitude. There were a lot of people who showed up because they didn't want to risk a riot.

There's a spiritual lesson in all of this because later after Jesus' resurrection, as the apostle's reflected back on this unusual agreement and consensus of men who often found it difficult to agree on anything, they saw it as an indication of mans shared rebellion against the one true living God and against His Son. You remember (these are different pictures of the fortress Antonia), you remember in in Acts 4:27, "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel...."

That's the point behind all of this. It illustrates the universal hatred by mankind of the true God and of His Son. You understand the implications of this for you and for me?

Just as we were all represented by Adam in the first garden, the Garden of Eden, so we were all represented in this second garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, by the crowd that came to arrest Jesus. We were in a very real sense, all there. You remember Psalm 2, describing the peoples of earth?

The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take council together
Against the Lord and against His Anointed,
against His Messiah, saying, "Let us tear their fetters
apart and let us cast away their cords from us."

Jesus put it even more directly in John 15:18 during the upper room discourse. He said if the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. And what we see in the garden is a picture of the world's hatred, Jew and Gentile all gathered alike against God and against His anointed.

So, the unlikely members of that party that arrested Jesus really make up a profound theological point. All humanity was represented in that garden that night – Jews and Gentiles, religious and pagan, wealthy and poor and in a sense every one of us as well. We would have all made the same choice, a choice driven by our rejection of God and of His Son. So those are the unlikely members of the arrest party.

But let's look secondly at the pre-arranged signal to the soldiers. Look at verse 44. "Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.'" Judas was evil, but he wasn't stupid. In fact, he was very shrewd. Although he had already his money in hand, he knew that he wouldn't be able to keep it unless he actually delivered Jesus successfully into the Sanhedrin's hands. And at some point, perhaps as he led the soldiers on their way to the garden, he was thinking ahead to what they would likely find.

As we already read from John's gospel, he had been there many times with Jesus before. And although he knew it was Passover and therefore it would be a full moon and apparently a clear sky because it was so cold. It would still be quite dark among the ancient olive trees. He knew that at least the eleven and Jesus would be there and it is possible there would have been other Passover pilgrims there as well. It was also possible that Jesus and the disciples would be scattered and separated from each other in this dark garden, as, in fact, would have been true if Jesus had not anticipated Judas' coming.

On top of all of that you have to think what Judas has seen. On two previous occasions during Jesus' ministry, Jesus' enemies had tried to seize Him, and He had escaped from them miraculously. And so out of an abundance of caution Judas has concocted a careful and devilish scheme. He pre-arranged at some point a signal with the Roman guard. Look again at verse 44, "Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard.'" Now obviously, I think this means that the Romans were the one who were going to

actually make the arrest. They very soon deliver the prisoner over to the temple guard, and He's taken to Caiaphas' house, but apparently the Roman's made the arrest.

Why do I say that? Because Judas needed to show them who Jesus was. The members of the Sanhedrin and the temple guard had seen Jesus up close and personal on many occasions throughout His life, and frankly, they had seen far more of Him than they wanted to see on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday of the Passion Week. This signal was for the Roman commander and the Roman soldiers. Apparently, Judas had set this up hoping that using this signal he could conceal his plan from Jesus or from the disciples until the very moment that Jesus was arrested. It was a plan that was at the same time the height of brilliance and the depth of evil.

Now that brings us to the monstrous betrayal by Judas. Mark tells us that Judas carried out his evil plan with incredibly wicked precision, with pathos. He played the part brilliantly. He got caught up in the moment even went beyond his plan. Look at verse 45. "After coming, Judas immediately went up to Him saying, 'Rabbi!' and kissed Him." With an incredible amount of hubris and chutzpah Judas greets Jesus as his Rabbi. Do you know what the word Rabbi means? My teacher, my master. And then he kissed Him.

It's interesting that Mark uses two different Greek words for kiss in this passage. When Judas is explaining the signal to the Romans, he uses the normal word for kiss, that was the plan. I'll kiss Him, I'll greet Him as a friend, and you'll know that He's the one. But when Mark describes what Judas actually did, he uses a different word, an intensive form of the word kiss. It pictures Judas as sort of getting swept away in the moment with this huge multitude behind him, and all that he has now planned is coming to fruition. The idea is he embraced Jesus, and he kissed him fervently or with feeling. He is really into the part. Rabbi, Master, Teacher. It was this action that as William Hendrickson said, "... has caused all later generations to recoil with horror at the mere mention of his name."

It's possible as some commentators argue that the kiss was a customary way to greet a rabbi. We can't be absolutely sure. But we can be sure of this. The kiss is a nearly universal symbol of what? Affection, genuine friendship and affection. And this is what makes Judas' actions so despicable.

Think of what he could have done. He could have simply showed up in the garden and with disgust in his voice and written across his face he could have pointed Jesus out to the Roman soldiers and said there he is. But he doesn't do that, because to do so would risk the possibility of Jesus' escape and the loss of his precious money. And so, he walks right up to Jesus, he looks Him in the face, and he says, You're my Teacher, my Master and then he professes his genuine love and devotion to Jesus Christ with a kiss of affection and friendship.

Now Mark doesn't tell us how Jesus responded to Judas, but I think it's important for us to know. Remember now, Jesus knew Judas was the betrayer. He knew Judas had come at this moment to betray Him. He knew the respectful greeting was a fake. He knew the kiss was not only a charade, but because Judas initiated it as a disciple, it was actually, in that culture, a calculated insult as well.

Now let me ask you. How would you have responded if you had been in Jesus' place? You might have said, you scoundrel. How dare you pretend to be my friend and my disciple? You traitor! Is this how you return all the kindness that I've extended to you? Many of us know the feeling of betrayal, and that's the response that's normal. But listen to how Jesus responded. Luke 22:48, "But Jesus said to him, 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?'"

And Matthew tells us that Jesus then said, "friend, do what you've come for." Jesus' love and compassion is apparent in His tender response to His friend and now betrayer. I love this, He calls him friend, comrade. And just as He did at the Last Supper, I think Jesus is again confronting gently and graciously Judas with his sin. I think Jesus' point, as it was at the Last Supper is to call Judas to repentance. Jesus responded to His betrayer with tenderness and love and compassion to the end. You know Jesus told us,

we're going to look at this in a couple of weeks, in Matthew 5, Jesus told us to love our enemies, and here He models it to perfection.

This, by the way, is the last time Judas appears in Mark's gospel. He doesn't mention the rest of the story that we learn from the other gospels. We'll talk about that as we continue to work our way through the rest of Mark. But understand this, Jesus in His gracious tender compassion, again, and again, and again reached out to Judas even though He knew he was the betrayer. Understand that the pain and suffering Judas endures right now and has endured for 2000 years and will endure throughout eternity is entirely his responsibility.

After the greeting Rabbi, after the kiss of betrayal, verse 46 says, "They laid hands on Him and seized Him." One commentator puts it in these beautiful, picturesque words. He says of Judas, "A shameless, disgusting quizzling he had become, a wretched turncoat. One who for the paltry sum of 30 pieces of silver was delivering over to the enemy the greatest benefactor whose feet ever walked on this earth; even the Mediator, both God and Man, the Lord Jesus Christ." But to the very end our Lord was tender and compassionate and gracious toward Judas. But that compassion ended at his death.

Understand tonight, if you're not a true follower of Jesus Christ, if you've never repented of your sins, if you've never put your faith in His sacrificial death, His dieing to pay the penalty of sins, your sins if you will believe in Him. If you've never done that, then you have to respond, you have to respond to the gospel. You have right now to respond, and you will only choose one of two responses. If, again tonight, you respond like you probably have responded many times before, with not now, no, I have things I want to do; a life I want to live; I don't want to give that up; I'm just not ready. Then, like Judas, don't be surprised when someday his destiny becomes yours.

But the other response happens just a few hours later with one of the thieves on the cross, who turns in repentance to Jesus and experiences complete and comprehensive forgiveness for a total life of sin and Jesus in a moment of time says to that thief, today

because of your repentance, because of your faith you will be with Me in paradise. That promise can be yours as well. But it's your choice. How are you going to respond to Jesus?

What about for the rest of us? We're going to finish this account next week, Lord willing. But what about for us who're in Christ. I want you to look again at Mark 14:43, because between verse 43 and verse 44 something else happened in Gethsemane that night that Mark doesn't record. And as we finish our study tonight, I want us to look at it together, because it's a powerful encouragement to us who are in Christ. Turn with me to John's gospel, John 18. John 18 and John picks up the story in verse 3.

“Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came to the garden of Gethsemane with lanterns and torches and weapons. [So] Jesus ..., knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I am.” And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, “I am ...,” they drew back and fell to the ground.”

There're a lot of theories to why this happened, the most common one, (or I should say the second most common one) is that they were driven back by the force of Jesus' moral character. I doubt that. I don't think the Roman soldiers were moved by the force of Jesus' moral character. This is a miraculous intervention. Jesus uses the divine name. He uses that name that was revealed to Moses when Moses said whom shall I say has sent Me and God out of the burning bush, Jesus Himself in pre-incarnate form, says, “tell them, I AM has sent you.” And here for a moment as at the transfiguration in a sense the power of Jesus is manifest, as He says, “I am.” And they fall back this huge multitude of people. Verse 7,

“Therefore, [He said again, or] He asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am; so if you seek Me, let these go their way;”

Notice what Jesus is doing with this series of questions. He’s saying, I want to know who is your search warrant for. We’re going to talk about the search warrant next time. Who is your search warrant for? It’s for Jesus the Nazarene. Well, I am Jesus the Nazarene. Twice He reaffirms that, and He does so in a powerful way. And He says verse 8, okay, I am Jesus the Nazarene, I’m the one, so if you seek Me, let these go their way. Why? Why was all of this done? What was Jesus doing here? It’s explained in verse 9. “to fulfill the word which He spoke, “Of those whom You have given Me, I lost not one.”

Wow. You see what Jesus was doing? He was protecting His own. He was protecting His own. Because Jesus knew what, if it had come into His follower’s lives, would cause their faith to fail. He knew they were on a precipice. He had seen their weakness. He knew that they were going to flee. He knew that if they were arrested, it may be more than their faith could stand. And so, He stages this display of His power where the whole multitude falls back when He says, I am. And twice He asks them who’s name is on the search warrant, and He says I’m the one so let these go their way, and the reason all of that took place was so that He wouldn’t lose one of His true disciples.

Same is true for us. Jesus knew what would cause their faith to fail and he absolutely would not allow that to happen. So, at the most difficult time of His life, He is protecting His own. That is true for us. Jesus knows what we can stand, and He protects us so that we will not be put into circumstances where our faith will fail. This is the concern Jesus has for you as His follower. This is the love He has for you. He will preserve and protect you until He presents you faultless before the presence of His Father with exceeding joy. That’s one of the powerful lessons of the garden. We’ll look at the rest of the garden next week.

Let's pray together.

Our Father we are amazed at Your love for us. We are amazed at our Lord's love for us as evidenced by His love for the disciples.

Thank You that in the moment of His greatest trouble, His greatest difficulty His mind was on them, and guarding them and protecting them and preserving them. And thank You Father that the same is true in our lives as we encounter temptations as we struggle with our own corruptions as we are put through suffering and trouble and even persecution. Thank You, O God, that our Lord still intercedes for us, He still guards and protects us every bit as much as He did the eleven in the Garden of Gethsemane that night.

We bless You, O God, for Your divine love, the love of a Father's heart and for the love of Your Son who would go to such extremes for us who were His enemies. Thank You. We praise You; we love You; we adore You; and we want O God to live our lives in a way that honors that love.

Not to pay You back, that's impossible. But Father to express our love in return. Empower us to do so, to be faithful to our Lord until He comes.

We pray in His name, Amen.