

Rays of Glory Christ's Act Of Repelling His Captors

Text: John 18:3-6

1) The importance of this act

Suggested Hymns:

2) The lessons drawn from this event

59T469, 351T270, 73T170, 85T412, 48

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 18:3-6, ³ *Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.* ⁴ *Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"* ⁵ *They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth."* *Jesus said to them, "I am He."* *And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them.* ⁶ *Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

For our Services during Lent this year we will be following the general theme of *"Rays of divine glory that can be seen in the suffering and dying Christ."*

The general history of Jesus' holy Passion, as read in the Lenten season, does not present the Lord Jesus to us as we are used to finding Him at other times of the year.

All the year round, in the Gospel lessons of the Church Year, we see in Christ the great miracle-worker, the almighty Son of God, who, by His simple word, heals all types of diseases, who tells the blind to see and the deaf to hear and the lame to walk.

Jesus multiplies the bread a thousand-fold and feeds the hungry. At the command of Jesus the waves subside and the storm ceases. Before Jesus the demons must crouch and shrink. Lastly, we saw Jesus calling forth the very dead from their tombs.

But when Lent comes the Lord is presented to us in an altogether different form. His divine power seems to have left Him entirely. He seems altogether helpless in the hands of His blood-thirsty enemies. They do with Him just as they please and are not punished for their vile acts on His sacred person.

They buffet Him, strike Him, abuse Him, spit upon Him, scourge Him, mock Him, and crucify Him. They even urge Him to do some great miracle now, if He could, and promise to believe that He is the Son of God and the promised Messiah if He would descend from the cross.

And Jesus does nothing to show that He is the Son of God. He is silent most of the time. He allows Himself to be *“led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”*¹

Still, if with devout attention we read the history of Jesus’ holy Passion, we shall find that there are many instances showing forth His divine glory. Even in His deepest humiliation the Son of God revealed His divine majesty.

As the sun’s rays break through the clouds so did Christ’s glorious divinity occasionally manifest itself most brilliantly in His suffering and death.

One such a manifestation has been recorded in our text in which we are told how His captors, looking for Him in the garden, were sent reeling back and fell to the ground, when Jesus confronted them and said, *“I am He.”*

Let us consider with the help of God’s Holy Spirit the rays of glory in Christ’s act of repelling His captors and the lessons to be drawn from what happened. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Importance Of This Act.

After Jesus celebrated the Passover in the city of Jerusalem in the evening, He left the city in the dead of night through a gate on the east side. It was a short walk from the gate over a little brook to a garden named Gethsemane, where He usually stayed the night with His disciples when in Jerusalem.

All His disciples were with Him except Judas. Most of His disciples He left near the entrance. However, three of them, Peter, James, and John, went along with Him to the rear part of the garden where He prayed and by prayer prepared Himself for the great struggle which was to come. The reason why Judas was missing was that he was in the act of betraying his Master.

³ *Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.* The disciples at the entrance, most likely, hid themselves and lay behind the trees and bushes. The troops, headed by Judas, penetrated into the depth of the garden.

And what was done? Jesus, the very man whom they are after, steps out and faces them, saying, ***“Whom are you seeking?”*** The answer is ***“Jesus of Nazareth.”*** Judas is standing with them, but he is dumbfounded. For the moment he can not summon courage to rush forward and give them the promised sign of a kiss.

Jesus is standing before the troops and calmly says, ***“I am He.”*** Scarcely is the last word spoken when, as if by some unseen power, they are driven back. ⁶ ***Now when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.*** They stagger and reel, the whole group, including Judas fall prostrate on the ground, their lanterns, torches, and weapons going down with them. There was no mistaking who was really in charge of the situation. At the force of Jesus’ words, they fell helpless.

Jesus’ response was the same Greek phrase that occurs before, ***“I AM.”*** At His words the men reacted as if God (Yahweh) had spoken.

We would expect that their hearts would be filled with fright at such an occurrence. We would expect that they would change their minds from their contemplated wickedness. Judas, above all the rest, should be filled with remorse.

However, great is the power of darkness and evil. As the enemies of Jesus tried to regain their composure, Jesus asked again whom they wanted and told them He was the Man. But this time Jesus added, ***“I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,”*** ⁹ ***that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”***² Jesus cared for His disciples even in this cruel hour. He intended that His promise given previously would be kept and He would not lose one of His disciples, which the Father had given Him.³

They are scarcely on their feet again when Judas steps forth and gives them the promised sign.

The importance of this wonderful occurrence in Gethsemane cannot be overestimated. It was only for one short moment that Jesus manifested His divine power, but it plainly shows what Jesus could have done if He intended to do it. He could have sent the whole *detachment of troops* to the ground so that not one of them could rise any more.

Jesus could have escaped from their hands so that they could not have touched Him. He could have saved Himself now, just as well, as He did on previous occasions when they were about to stone Him and to cast Him down a cliff.⁴

This wonderful occurrence is so important because it goes to prove that the Lord willingly went into suffering and death. The time was now fulfilled which was appointed by the Father that, as the Lamb of God, He would lay down His life for the sins of the world, as He Himself says to His captors, *I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me.*⁵⁶ *“But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”* *Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled.*⁵

Freely and willingly the Lord brought the great sacrifice of His life, and He suffered and died, not because He was helpless and powerless in the hands of His enemies, but because of His own will He refrained from using His divine power.

When, therefore, Peter wielded the sword in defence of His master, Jesus sharply reprimanded him and said, *“Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”*⁵³ *“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?”*⁵⁴ *“How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”*⁶

2. The Lessons Drawn From This Event

Let us briefly consider the lessons to be drawn from this occurrence.

The first lesson is that the hearts of some people are so hardened in sin that they do not take notice of the greatest judgments of the Lord when they come upon them.

Was not this a most extraordinary thing when the *detachment of troops* who came to apprehend Jesus were repelled and made to go backward and to fall to the ground? Must not this strange experience have given them a shock and

frightened them? Surely they must have been impressed with Jesus' almighty power!

Yet why do they not withdraw from their wicked purpose? Why do they not leave innocent Jesus in Gethsemane and return to Jerusalem? It is because their hearts are so hardened in sin that they simply do not care.

We are expressly told that chief priests, captains of the temple, and elders were among that *detachment of troops*. We read in Luke 22:52, ⁵² *Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs?"*

These men could not deny Christ's miracles. They had to admit to them. Even in these last days they had seen and spoken to Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. But what was their explanation? How did they account for Jesus' wonderful and miraculous deeds? They claimed that Jesus was in league with the devil and that the devil gave Him the power to perform these deeds.

Therefore they undoubtedly ascribed the unseen force which made them stagger and fall to the ground before Jesus to the evil spirit with whom they thought Jesus in league and were thereby rather all the more incensed against Jesus than drawn to Him.

And to this day, are not the hearts of some people so hardened in sin that they do not take notice and heed the greatest judgments of the Lord when the Almighty strikes them with His powerful hand? God smites them, but they do not seem to feel it.

Jesus manifests to them His divine power, but they pay no attention to that. He permits misfortunes to come upon them, illness, reverses, and various troubles, and all is aimed at their own eternal welfare, that they should begin to set their affection on the things that are above and make provision for their immortal souls, but they do not look at these things from such a point of view. O let us always heed the warnings when the Lord manifests His divine power in the rulings of Providence!

The second lesson to be drawn from our text is that it is in vain for man to fight against God. That *detachment of troops* had come out against the Lord as against a thief with swords and clubs and lanterns and torches. But what use could they make of their weapons? They were no better than straws in their

hands when they stood before the Lord's Anointed One and heard His majestic words, *"I am He."*

The enemies of God may concentrate all their strength and do all in their power to fight against the Lord and His Anointed, but they can get only so far as the Lord permits them to go. The prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 40:17, ¹⁷ *All nations before Him are as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.* To His church the Lord has given the promise, in Isaiah 54:17, ¹⁷ *No weapon formed against you shall prosper ...* Says the **LORD.**

Blessed is every one who has cast in his lot with the Lord and His Christ. Although with Christ we must suffer in this world, nothing shall be done to us against the will of our gracious God and Lord, and *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*⁷

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁸

Gethsemane can I forget?
Or there Thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember Thee?

When to the cross I turn mine eyes
And rest on Calvary,
O Lamb of God, my sacrifice,
I must remember Thee: Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isaiah 53:7

² John 18:8

³ John 6:39; 17:12

⁴ John 10:31, Luke 4:29

⁵ Matthew 26:55-56

⁶ Matthew 26:52-54

⁷ Romans 8:18

⁸ Hymn 85 v2,3