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## Tragedy Or Triumph?

**John 18:1-12**

**Intro:** The private ministry of Jesus with His disciples has now ended and the public drama of His work of redemption is about to begin. In this section of John, man will do his worst and God will respond with His very best. Last week we discussed the fact that while many in this world may die tragically, miserably or unexpectedly; the same can never really be said of a Christian. The God we serve is both omniscient and omnipotent so everything that happens to a believer must be filter through these divine attributes; meaning they're all foreseen and approved. This, then, begs the question: Is it possible to have a Christian tragedy? The mature spiritual answer is no for the simple fact that the reality of a sovereign and benevolent God ultimately overrides the tragic elements of the Christian life.

This, of course, doesn't remove the marks of tragedy in life. In fact, it can be argued that only Christianity of all the world's religions actually takes the tragedy of the human situation with all seriousness. Only Christianity recognizes the fall, the cross, the bondage of the human will to sin and the final judgment. But, beyond all these things stands the benevolent and wise purposes of a sovereign God in human history. Life may be dark. Tragedy may come. But this is not the end. In spite of all the tragedy, God still works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

This principle of triumph through tragedy can be illustrated countless times in the lives of believers over the ages but none of these examples dramatically illustrate this principle more than the events of the closing days of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. By any casual observation, the last few days of Jesus' life were filled with tragedy. A brilliant and compassionate young man is unjustly arrested, falsely convicted and executed. This execution was not "humane", it was the unbelievably cruel and agonizing death of crucifixion. What could be worse? Nothing! But this is not a story of a tragic defeat; it's a story of a victory! The outcome was far from despair and desolation, it's actually Good News!

As we make our way through this scene, we can't help but notice that John's account of the last few hours of Jesus' life is strikingly different than

that of the Synoptic Gospel's. In fact, from the very beginning of our study we have seen that John has included certain events of Jesus' life and left out others and he has done so for a purpose. He's done so to give the reader a different perspective of the life of Jesus. This literary tool continues in [ch18](#). John's not giving us a complete account of everything that happened; he's painting a picture. In his account of Jesus' arrest, John will stress certain aspects of Jesus' divine nature. Over this entire scene, John stresses the divine overruling; he emphasizes Jesus' complete mastery over the situation and shows that the outcome was always in God's control. Through it all, we see the purpose of God divinely worked out and the glory of Jesus Christ supremely displayed.

**1**- Right away, we can't help but notice that John's account of their time with Jesus in Gethsemane is extremely abbreviated; there's barely even a mention. This is curious because John was in the group that was closest to Jesus as He struggled in prayer in the Garden as we learn from the other Gospel. The other Gospels that it was here that Jesus became greatly agitated, depressed, and sorrowful in light of what was about to occur. Luke tells us that even though angels appeared and ministered to Him, Jesus was still in agony and prayed more earnestly ([Luke 22:44](#)). John was there and witnessed all that transpired that night, and yet, he fails to mention any of this. Why?

John's omits this part of the story for emphasis because in his account of these events, John doesn't want to stress the human weakness of Jesus; he stresses the mastery of Jesus over this situation as well as all others. Later, he will stress the majesty of Jesus by showing us that Jesus spoke and acted in a way that struck awe in the very soldiers who came to arrest Him ([v6](#)). John is painting a picture of Jesus as the all-powerful God who doesn't have His life taken from Him but who gives His life willingly and obediently as a sacrifice for sin. John paints this picture with the use of imagery and this imagery is presented to us right in the very first verse.

John is the only Gospel writer that tells us that Jesus and the disciples crossed over the Brook Kidron on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. This may seem like a needless, even a pointless geographical reference but it is filled with Messianic imagery. The Kidron was actually a small stream, easily crossed, but its significance lies in the fact that it was the drainage for the Temple run-off. During this holy day, it would be red with the blood of the

thousands of Passover lambs that were being slain for sacrifice at that very moment. This would have been a vivid reminder to Jesus of His own imminent sacrifice.

The Kidron also had a special historical significance. King David also crossed it as he escaped from Jerusalem after being betrayed by his own son (Absalom) and rejected by his nation. Jesus had been rejected by His people and at that very moment was being betrayed by one of His own disciples. The parallel runs even deeper when you consider that David's treacherous counselor Ahithophel hanged himself in the end and Judas would do the same. The point John is making by using this reference is that Jesus knew full well what horror lay before Him yet He crossed that Brook and went up into Gethsemane in full obedience to His Father's will.

Another, even greater use of imagery in vs1 is John's seemingly innocuous reference to a garden. This is hardly an outstanding reference to us since we are so accustomed to always speaking of the Garden of Gethsemane. But this was apparently not a common name in John's day and the truth is, the Bible itself never uses it. Notice that John doesn't use the word Gethsemane in his account while, even more significant, the Synoptic writers never use the word garden. The full name by which we know this place, the Garden of Gethsemane, never occurs anywhere. What is more, it's never referred to as a garden except in John's Gospel. If John's goal is to stress Jesus' mastery over this and every situation and to reveal His divine strength, why does he use this unique term for Gethsemane?

I believe John uses the term to suggest a contrast between the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus triumphed so clearly, and the Garden of Eden, where the father of the human race fell so miserably. Human history began in a garden and the first sin of man was committed there. To understand the full significance of John's reference here, we must look at the great contrast that exists in the events, decisions and results that took place in these two gardens.

Let's start by contrasting the circumstances of Adam and Eve as they faced their trial in Eden with those of Jesus in Gethsemane. Adam and Eve entered Eden at the peak of God's creative activity. They had a world without sin or death, perfect in every way. God made them vice-regents over creation, giving them explicit dominion over it all. Adam and Eve had all this

without any threat of a lessening of God's great favors. Yet, in spite all this, they sinned.

On the other hand, Jesus faced terrors Adam and Eve could never begin to imagine: physical death in the most excruciating form ever devised, and spiritual death, from which even His highly disciplined and divinely motivated soul shrank in deep horror. Still, Jesus did not turn from His task but embraced it willingly for our salvation.

There's also great contrast in Adam and Eve's conduct in Eden and Christ's conduct in Gethsemane in that our first parents spent their time talking to Satan while Jesus spent His time talking with God. Jesus clearly felt the need for prayer in the midst of His trial in Gethsemane but Adam and Eve, though on the brink of that sin that would condemn the entire human race, did not pray. Jesus prayed because He felt the force of the temptation to quit while Adam and Eve were quite oblivious to the danger as they parleyed casually with Satan. The key to His victory was prayer.

A 3<sup>rd</sup> contrast is seen in the consequences resulting from these 2 struggles: Adam and Eve fell but Jesus conquered!

Adam and Eve fell almost instantly, it seems. Satan presented his arguments and they quickly ate the forbidden fruit. Jesus, on the other hand, wrestled in prayer through the night and only was victorious at the end of a long struggle. This is a lesson on how we can prevail in prayer. To prevail in prayer doesn't mean we're to keep praying until God finally does what we desire. That's not how Jesus prevailed. He prayed until His will was conformed to the Father's will – that was the victory. We will have victory over our trials and temptations when we, through submitting our will to God in prayer, embrace with willing hearts whatever God has for us. Victory in the Christian's life is the power to reject the corrupting influence of the world around us, the devil beneath us and the flesh within us.

Another contrast is particularly instructive: Adam took the fruit from Eve's hand while in Gethsemane, Jesus received the cup from the Father's hand. This reveals a great biblical principle: it's always better to have the cup of life from God's hand, no matter what it contains, than anything else, however desirable, from the hand of another. Why? It's because of who God is. He's the wise, all-powerful, loving God of the universe, the One who truly wishes our good and the only One who knows what the good is and how to bring it about in our lives. Others can wish us well but the things they

recommend for us don't always turn out to be beneficial for us in the long run. What was offered to Eve seemed desirable but it brought misery and death to humanity. But, the cup offered to Jesus, though it contained both physical and spiritual death for Jesus – was actually life, wisdom and salvation for God's people.

Finally, Adam and Eve by their sin plunged the human race into misery. They fell and carried all their descendents over the cliff of sin into destruction. But Jesus stood firm. He didn't sin nor shrink from His work. As a result, He saved all whom the Father had given Him. In Adam all were lost but Jesus could say, "Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost..." That's the tale of two gardens, the meaning of Gethsemane. Sin, death, and judgment flowed from the act of Adam. Righteousness, life, and kingship flow from the cross of Christ.

Human history began in a garden; human redemption was settled in a garden and human history will ultimately end in another garden: the heavenly city that John describes in [Rev 21-22](#). In that garden there will be no more death or curse of sin. The waters of the river of life will flow continually and the fruit of the tree of life will produce bountifully. Eden was the garden of disobedience and sin, Gethsemane was the garden of obedience and submission and heaven will be the garden of eternal delight and satisfaction to the glory of God.

**2-3** – John now introduces the antagonist of the story, likely the greatest example of and most widely known villain in all of human history and literature: Judas! We know very little about the personal history of Judas but what we can glean from John's account here is that, despite the fact that Judas had lived with Jesus for at least 3 years and had listened to nearly every sermon and lesson Jesus had delivered during that time, Judas still knew very little about Jesus. We can deduce this by the fact that he brought a company of some 600 men to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus. If Judas had believed the claims Jesus had made about Himself and had fully recognized Him for who He truly was, he would have known that 100 times that many men would not have been enough to take Jesus against His will. On the other hand, if Judas had been listening when Jesus prophesied His own upcoming death and the great purpose behind it, bringing 6 men would have been overkill to arrest Jesus. Of course, if Judas had listened and believed anything Jesus had said over the last 3 years, he

wouldn't be playing the ignominious role of treacherous betrayer.

Judas and his band of scary men came prepared for trouble and were equipped to meet it. They even brought torches because they thought Jesus might try to hide away in the dark recesses of the garden. Judas even expected some deception of Jesus' part so he arranged ahead of time to identify Jesus by kissing Him. All this was completely unnecessary. It was the normal practice of Jesus and His disciples to spend a little time in the evening in the garden before climbing over the Mount of Olives and going to Bethany to spend the night. Why didn't they do it now? Jesus was clearly waiting in the garden for Judas and Co. to come and arrest Him. Jesus had nothing to fear and no reason to hide. He would willingly lay down His life for His sheep.

Jesus was in control of these events from the beginning. They didn't come upon Him by accident, He willed them to happen. John emphasizes the fact that the arrest was under the control of Jesus. For one thing, Jesus initiates the actual confrontation, going forward to the soldiers, asking, "Whom are you seeking?" rather than waiting for the kiss of Judas. John also shares when the soldiers and officers fall to the ground as a result of Jesus introducing Himself to them with the majestic name of God: Jehovah ("I am"). Finally, even at the moment of the arrest Jesus is dominant; He issues a command—"I've told you I am He. If you're looking for Me, let these men go" (8)—and it's followed.

All these anecdotes are given to show that it was no meaningless and unanticipated tragedy that overtook Jesus at the end of His otherwise promising ministry. This ordering of events was set forth by God to fulfill His purpose and to be filled with great blessing, not just for Jesus but for all those who would decide to believe in and follow Him.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this study: there is no tragedy for Christians. God's plans cannot be thwarted by His enemies or His children. God has the unique ability to even take the horrendous consequences of our own sin and turn them into something wonderful for His glory. But, that's not to say that there isn't real tragedy to be found in this story. The greatest tragedy of this account is found in the life of Judas. Just think of all the privileges he rejected and all the opportunities he wasted.

So, our final lesson concerns Judas, someone who was so close to Jesus and yet was unsaved. Think how close he was. He had been with Jesus for at least three years. He had heard his teaching. He had even understood his teaching; for although he hadn't quite understood the meaning of Jesus' death, he'd at least understood His warning that He was going to die. Judas was so close to Jesus; he understood His thoughts. Yet he was unsaved.

Is it possible to be close to Christ, to sit in a Christian church listening to good sermons, to hear good Bible teaching by radio, even to understand what you hear, and yet fail to make that personal commitment to Christ that is the necessary human response to God's work of salvation? Apparently so, and I believe it is more common than we would like to admit. There are millions of people in America that profess to be Christians but if that is true, why does our society not reflect it? If there was that much true Christian faith in our country, it would be impossible to contain it or even deny it but, the truth is, in American society, Christian faith is almost impossible to identify.

There has never been a country blessed with the proclamation of the Gospel and the study of God's Word on a constant, regular basis that this country has been. How foolish (tragic) it is to come that close to truth and still be lost. How much wiser and easier it would be to simply put your faith in Jesus who willingly died to affect your salvation. 😊