

“I Am He”

- I The Almighty God
- II. The Selfless Servant
- III. Our Loving Shepherd

*(John 18:3-9) So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. {4} Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?" {5} "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) {6} When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. {7} Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." {8} "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." {9} This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."*

Have you ever thought about how often, during his earthly ministry, Jesus didn't come right out and say who he was? I mean, for example, you think about the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jesus doesn't open the conversation with, “You know who I am, don't you?” No, he asks her for a drink of water, engages her in a conversation to show her where she is in her spiritual life, and finally when she says, “I know that Messiah is coming,” only then did Jesus say, “I, who speak to you, I am he.”

Or you think about how many times Jesus told the people he had healed, “Don't tell anyone what I did for you.” Or told his disciples, “Don't tell anyone that I am the Christ.” You see, because so many people in Jesus' day had this rather misguided expectation of what the Messiah would do—namely, throw off the Roman rule, fill their bellies with food, etc.—for the most part, Jesus tried to tamp down those false expectations. That's why he would sometimes say, in effect, “Quiet. Don't tell anyone who I am. Let's keep my identity a secret.”

By the time Maundy Thursday rolled around, however, all that had changed. When the soldiers came looking for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus knows that he will be taken away to be crucified, Jesus doesn't tell his disciples, “Don't tell anyone who I am.” Instead, he steps forward and asks the mob, “Who is it you want?” When they answer, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus responds with three words. Yes, Three Words of Truth. Jesus simply says:

“I am he”

Today, we want to take a little closer look at this confrontation between Jesus and the soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane. Will see that here Jesus reveals three things about himself. He reveals that:

- I. He is Almighty God
- II. He is the Selfless Servant
- III. He is Our Loving Shepherd

Can you picture the scene that John describes here in our text? Jesus had just finished celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples. He then led them out of the city, across the brook Kidron and up onto the Mount into a grove of olives where Jesus often met with his disciples. Jesus then asks his disciples to watch and pray with him while he wrestles with his Father in

prayer. Unfortunately, the disciples can't do it. Three times, Jesus finds them sleeping. Finally Jesus says, "*Rise. Let us go. Here comes my betrayer*" (Matthew 26:46).

That's where our text for today picks up. John writes, *So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.* In other words, they had all the tools they needed to make sure that Jesus would not escape into the darkness. But notice what John tells us next. *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"* Now, don't miss the impact of those words, "knowing all that was going to happen to him." It's a reminder that even in his state of humiliation, Jesus still is an omniscient God. Jesus knew everything. Even though the mob didn't know exactly which one was Jesus, still Jesus knew each one of them. He knew each one of them by name. He knew what was in their hearts.

And not only did he know them, he knew what they and others were going to do to him. Jesus knew the suffering he was about to endure. He knew exactly the number of stripes he would receive, the pints of blood he would lose, the hours he would hang on the cross. And yet in spite of that knowledge, Jesus still steps forward. He surrenders himself into their hands. He asks them, "*Who is it you want?*" Their answer? "*Jesus of Nazareth.*" Jesus' response? "*I am he.*" And what was the crowds' reaction to Jesus' words? John tells us. *When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.*

Again don't misunderstand what happened there. It's not that these men were taken aback by Jesus's honesty. It's not that they were simply surprised by how candid Jesus was. No, when Jesus said, "I am he," these Roman soldiers, these professional killers, we're all knocked on their...rear ends! This was not a natural reaction to Jesus' words. It was a supernatural action worked by Jesus himself. With those three words, "I am he," Jesus proved that he is the Almighty God. He proved that there was nothing that was out of his control. If Jesus was going to be taken into captivity by this band of mortals, it would only be because Jesus was allowing it to happen. Which brings us to the second thing we learn about Jesus in these three words, "I am he." By voluntarily surrendering himself into the hands of his enemies, all for the sake of God's Plan of Salvation, Jesus was proving that he is, in fact,

## II. The Selfless Servant

I mean, you think about it. Where in this account do you see Jesus thinking of himself first? If you or I were in his shoes, if we saw the torches coming from that direction, would probably be hightailing it in the other direction. Right? We'd be saying, "I've got to get out of Dodge. I've got to save my own hide. I have to look out for #1!" Or maybe, we'd take the opposite approach. If we're truly thinking "me first" we might say, "You're not taking me down without a fight!" Wasn't that Simon Peter's attitude? When he's confronted by Jesus' enemies, he pulls out his sword and tries to take off one of their heads. He cuts off Malchus' ear. What was Peter thinking? He was thinking of himself. Peter had already bragged that he would stand up for Jesus even if everyone else fell away. But he couldn't even stay awake when Jesus asked him to pray with him. Peter lost face by falling asleep on the job. Now Peter figured this was his chance to polish his tarnished image. He's thinking, "I'll save you Jesus!" But Peter wasn't really thinking about Jesus. He was thinking about himself. He was thinking about what he wanted. He was thinking about what he thought was right. He was thinking about what would make himself look good.

My friends, isn't that so often the way we think and act as well? "What do I want? What makes me feel good? What can I do to look good in the eyes of others?" So often it's not, "God, what would you have me do? How can I serve you?" It's "What do I want? How can I make the

situation serve my best interest?"

But isn't that what makes Jesus' action so remarkable? So selfless? Jesus doesn't think of himself first. He doesn't say, "My personal safety must be protected at all cost." He doesn't say, "Why don't want a few disciples go out there and say that you are me so that I can get away safely?" No, as Jesus told his disciples earlier, "*The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). And so, when the mob comes looking for Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus steps forward and speaks those three words of truth. "I am he." In so doing, he proves that he is a Selfless Servant.

And yet, maybe the most remarkable quality that Jesus displays in this account is the loving concern that Jesus showed to the people that God entrusted to his care, whether it was his disciples back then, or his believers today. With these three words, "I am he", Jesus proves that he is also,

### III. Our Loving Shepherd

Isn't that the truth? You think about how Jesus, who calls himself the Good Shepherd, kept watch over his flock that night. When the guards confront Jesus, Jesus steps forward, identifies himself and then says, "*If you are looking for me, then let these men go.*" It's kind of ironic, isn't it, that even as Jesus is being captured, he still is the one who is in charge? He's the one who's giving the orders. "You can have me, but you can't have them." In fact, John tells us why Jesus said this. John writes, *This happened that the words Jesus had spoken would be fulfilled, "I have not lost one of those you gave me"* (John 18:8-9).

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus had made a number of statements about the importance of protecting the disciples that God had entrusted to him. That's what Jesus was doing here. He was protecting his disciples from physical harm. If the disciples had been captured along with Jesus, it's very conceivable that they would have been subjected to some of the same physical abuse that Jesus received at the hands of his enemies.

But even more important, Jesus was protecting his disciples from spiritual harm. Jesus knew that if they were to witness everything he endured, the absolute humiliation, the mocking, the beating, the spitting, the flogging—all that may have been more than their faith could handle. And so, he spared them of that (just as he sometimes spares us of the things that our faith is not yet ready to handle). In the end, Jesus enduring the cross all by himself. As Scripture had foretold, the Shepherd was struck and the sheep were scattered.

But now, maybe you are thinking, "Yeah, but what about Jesus' promise that he wouldn't lose any of his disciples? I mean, he lost Judas, didn't he?" No, he didn't "lose" Judas. Rather Judas lost Jesus. Judas walked away from Jesus—mind you, in spite of everything Jesus did to keep Judas close by his side. You think of how, in the upper room, Jesus, in effect, pleaded with Judas to rethink what he was plotting to do. Jesus told Judas, in love, "*Woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man*" (Matthew 26:24). And even here in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus the Good Shepherd shows his love for Judas. Jesus calls Judas his "friend." He allows Judas to come close to him and asks Judas, "Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Both of those statements were invitations for Judas to turn away from sin and instead turn back to the Lord who loved him enough to die for him. But Judas refused to turn back. Even after the fact, when Judas recognized the horrific thing he had done, he still refused to repent. Even though Jesus stood with open arms, ready to forgive Judas, still Judas refused to turn to Jesus and instead turned to a hangman's noose.

My friends, is there a warning there for us? Yes, there is. Judas was once one of the 12. There's no reason to believe that he was not once a true believer, like you or me. Yet somewhere

along the line, Judas allowed something to become more important to him than Jesus. He allowed something to seize control of his heart. And in the end, instead of turning toward Jesus, he turned away from Jesus. He is so doing, he lost his faith. And now he is lost forever in hell.

Again, is there a warning there for us? Yes, there is. Saint Paul said it well. *If you think you are standing firm, be careful you don't fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)*. When those words cut you to the heart, when you realize, along with me, “I could do exactly what Judas did,” then I want you to look back at Jesus here in the garden. I want you to ask yourself, “Who is the one who knows everything I’ve ever done? The one who knows what's in the dark places of my heart—and yet, still loves me?” Who is the one who, when you are weak, has the power, with his word, to knock your greatest enemies to the ground? Who is the one who, even though he knew exactly what's coming, even though he knew the unspeakable agony that he would endure, still thought not about himself, but thought about you, about your physical and spiritual welfare? Who is the one who after protecting his disciples from harm, now promises you that no one can snatch you out of his hand? Who is the one who is your Almighty God, your Selfless Servant, your Loving Shepherd? There in the Garden, Jesus answers all those questions with the simple words, “I am he.” May those three words of truth keep your faith and mine alive and growing until that day when Jesus takes us all to our home in heaven. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.