

Connecting Minds

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31)

The Gospel of John

Chapter 18:4-9

"Then Judas, having received a dispatch of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?' They answered Him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am He.' And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, 'I am He' they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, 'Who are you seeking?' And they said 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus answered, 'I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way'"

"Having a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests..." William Barclay elaborates on this: "The officers would be the Temple police. The Temple authorities had a kind of private police force to keep good order... But there was a band of Roman soldiers there too." He then explains that the word used could mean a cohort (600 men), a cohort of auxiliary soldiers (240 cavalry, 760 infantry) or a maniple (200 men).¹ It is a mixture of Gentile Roman soldiers and of Jewish religious guards that come to arrest Jesus.

Even if we take this to be the smallest group of soldiers, it still doesn't seem warranted. But they felt the need to send such a detachment to arrest Jesus, who incidentally was not hiding, because the Jewish guards themselves had failed to arrest Jesus before (John 7:45,46). They had certainly seen the miracles and the power of Christ. They had seen the love that the crowd had for Him. They would have anticipated great trouble.

"Whom are you seeking...?" We're not told who answered the question but it was probably one of the chief priests or Pharisees. When Jesus identifies

¹ The Daily Study Bible: Gospel of John, vol. 2, William Barclay, pg. 222

Himself to the arresting group they all "drew back and fell to the ground..." It was the revelation of the divine name upon the lips of the divine Son of God. Jesus said "I AM" and they fell backward. Alexander Maclaren puts forward the idea that perhaps "there was for a moment a little rending of the veil of His flesh, and an emission of some flash of the brightness that always tabernacled within Him."² Could it have been a split second mini transfiguration. It is pure speculation.

In other occasions when a group of people had attempted to seize or injure Christ, Jesus would simply leave (John 6:15) or pass through their midst and leave (John 8:59). However, now that His hour has come things are different. Jesus has identified Himself. But this has caused the soldiers to fall backward. Does Jesus then leave, as in previous times? No. This time Jesus asks them again, "Whom are you seeking...?" He is ready, the hour has come, there is no leaving this time.

The answer that the leaders give is the same as before. They still have not been able to determine that Jesus is the one asking them the question. Here they are, they've come with their lights and at full moon, they've fallen to the ground at the mere words of Christ, but all the light of the world will not be enough to reveal Christ to hard, unrepentant hearts.

Now Jesus makes His identity even plainer to His would-be captors. But He adds "If you seek Me, let these go their way..." It must be remembered that Christ has just demonstrated His power over the army that has come against Him. Jesus is in full authority in His own arrest. He says "If you want Me to come with you, then you must let these go." The words are more a command than a request.

TableTalk

"If you seek Me, let these go..." Were the disciples in danger? Read these verses: Mark 14:51,52, John 12:10,11 and 20:19.

Even in Jesus' greatest trial He was protecting His disciples. How much more, now that He is fully invested with all power and authority will not protect His people?

²Expositions of Holy Scripture: John, vol. 3, Alexander Maclaren, pg. 222