

John 18: 1-9; "Whom are you Seeking?", A Palm Sunday Sermon
by Pastor Paul Rendall, Delivered on March 28th, 2010,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We find here in these verses the polite and almost eager willingness of our Lord Jesus Christ to enter in to His sufferings on our behalf. "Whom do you seek?", He boldly asks. Knowing that we could never have possibly kept God's Holy Law perfectly, the Lord Jesus worked out a righteousness on our behalf which would be pleasing to God the Father. It would be a righteousness by which His righteous work would be accepted in the place of ours, when we believed in Him. Knowing that we should be the ones who should be led away to trial and to examination and punishment for the sins which we have committed, our Lord at this significant point in time and history, willingly stepped up and said, I will go in your place if you will believe in Me." If you will believe in Jesus now, He is still willing to be the substitute for your sins. I am fully aware that His death took place almost 2000 years ago; but the effects of it, the power of it, and the wonder of His love in that situation are still as fresh, and just as real, as if you and I had been with the Apostles on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. The reality of the power of what the Lord Jesus Christ did on that night in the garden, is present here today for all who will believe. The reality of where His love led Him that night; I pray; will grow in your hearts to the place where you will know it so well, that it will be demonstrated in your life, because you desire to be more like Him. We cannot simply state this truth and let it pass this afternoon. We must rather draw closer and take a more careful look at what Jesus did for us, so that we may know more of the love of Jesus Christ that surpasses understanding. The Apostle Paul prayed in Ephesians Chapter 3, verse 17, "...that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend with all the saints which is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." This is what Christ's sufferings are designed to do for us now; even today. Christ suffered and died, not only that our sins might be forgiven, but that we might know His life and power working in our lives; and especially the greatness of His love. This will lead us to a more careful obedience, when we see His love for us. Then we will be able to be more thankful to God for the gift of His Son, and we will be eager, ourselves, to love the brethren. And because we see His perfect love, we will be made more willing to suffer for Christ's sake if need be.

So this afternoon we want to look at the fact that Jesus' love led Him, most definitely and deliberately, to move toward His sufferings and not away from them. (Verses 1-4a) Secondly, Jesus' love led Him to demonstrate His power to thwart the evil purposes of men and to secure the salvation of all of God's Elect.(Verses 4b-6)

Thirdly, Jesus' love led Him to seek the eternal safety of His disciples from their having to suffer. (Verses 7-9) Let us consider these things more carefully and pray to learn from them.

1st of all – Jesus' love led Him, most definitely and deliberately, to move forward toward His sufferings and not away from them. (Verses 1-4a)

It says in verse 1 that when Jesus had finished praying His high priestly prayer, "He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered." "And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples." What is really very amazing is the statement of verse 4, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?'" The Lord Jesus Christ went forward to what He knew was going to take place. He was in the place where He had often been together with His disciples. He did not even sit and wait for the detachment of troops to come and get Him. Instead He got up from His praying, and He went forward to meet them. He was fully expecting them. And He took the initiative to walk toward them. He was very willing to ask those who were coming to take Him, "Whom are you seeking?" He did not run; He did not hide; He did not argue and fight with those who came for Him; but He calmly and deliberately entered in to His sufferings on behalf of sinners such as you and I. It was His love for us, I am saying, that led Him to act in this way. Christ's love toward sinners, in the way that He lived His life, and His love which led to His sufferings and death, always took the initiative when He saw a need which must be met in order that God might be glorified. Fear would have caused Jesus to shrink back, but perfect love casts out fear. Let me ask you, this afternoon, whether you have learned something of the Love of Jesus Christ? Let me ask you whether you are praying to have more of His love working through you? Turn with me to 1 John Chapter 4 and verse 16. It says here, "And we have known and (have) believed the love that God has for us." "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment (involves the thought of punishment)." "But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." "We love Him, because He first loved us." You will notice that Christ understood the battle that lay ahead in the next few hours. He knew all that was going to happen to Him. He knew that His body would literally be tortured beyond recognition and all of His regal dignity mocked, and all of His physical features marred and lacerated; and yet this is the picture that He wanted His disciples to see and remember; how they would remember Him for the rest of their lives. It is the picture of Him going forward to stand between them and the mob, and could they have understood it as they would later on; His standing between them and an angry God, whose righteous wrath had to also be satisfied at the cross.

Perfect love casts out fear in the one who is imperfect in their love to begin with. But the perfect love of Christ blocked out all fear that might have tried to lay hold of

His heart. Fear is something that a believer has to cast out of his heart, time and time again. The Lord Jesus never had to cast it out of His heart; for he never let it into His heart; never had it residing in His holy breast. He was already perfect in love. The closest that fear got to Jesus was just before the soldiers came for Him there in the garden; when, as it is recorded in Matthew 26, verse 38, He turned to Peter and James and John, and said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." But it does not say that He said, 'My soul is exceedingly fearful, even unto death. Rather it says that He felt sorrowful. There is a great difference. There was distress in the heart and mind of Jesus, but there was no sinful fear. His love for God and His love for His disciples blocked the advance of fear to His soul so that it never laid hold of Him. Men would seize Him, but fear would not seize Him. If fear involves the thoughts of torment and punishment, the perfect love of Christ would keep it from coming to His holy soul. Jesus knew that there was nothing that He had ever done which deserved punishment. Jesus never sinned. In fact in John Chapter 8, verse 46, He could say to the unbelieving Jews who wanted to kill Him; He could say it with a with a perfectly clear conscience and with no pride working in His heart; "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" In everything that the Lord Jesus did in His words and deeds, He would move forward toward and into His sufferings for our sake. Because of His love, He was willing to be punished for our sakes. His love for fulfilling all the righteousness requirements of God's law; His love for us His people, to redeem us unto God; this love would impel Him forward to satisfy the righteousness of God and to face the mob of soldiers led by Judas, who were coming to arrest Him. He would surprise them by boldly moving forward toward them.

Now 2ndly – Jesus' love led Him to demonstrate His power to thwart the evil purposes of men and to secure the salvation of all of God's Elect.

(Verses 4b-6)

It says here in verse 4 that when Jesus said, "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 , 'Whom 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, that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" You can see that after Jesus spoke and said, "I am He", that He also used His supernatural power in conjunction with the will of the Father and the Spirit, to teach these men something about Himself. The lesson was this; that He did have the power to thwart their evil schemes immediately and entirely if God would have purposed that He do so. "They all drew back and fell to the ground," it says there in verse 6. This great demonstration of power was the Father's saying to them, in effect, "You could never take My Son unless I had first determined in love, to give Him for sinful men." "You could never do it, unless I first purposed that it should be done." The Lord Jesus, Himself, was saying to them in this act, that He could have easily foiled their plans by His physically keeping them from doing so. He said in

John 17: 2, that "He had been given power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him." Now we see a practical demonstration of His power toward unbelieving and hostile men. He was showing them, by this miraculous use of His power; in throwing them to the ground, that their plans and purposes to unite together in their wickedness would never ultimately succeed. They would triumph for a time, but the triumphing of the wicked is short. And ultimately, He was saying, they would fail, and unrepented of; these wicked acts would land them in hell. He could have pinned these men to the ground and He could have called the angels in, to haul them away to hell. Instead, He politely asks them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they again say to Him the same thing as they did before, "Jesus of Nazareth." It was His great love that enabled Him to be taken as lamb to the slaughter of the cross.

See the power of sin to blind men and hold them to their wrong conclusions. You would think that Jesus' use of His power to throw them down on the ground would cause them to pause and say, "Why are we doing this?" "We will never get away with this crime." But instead they continue on in their mission of wickedness. These men were being taught something about the power of God, and they were being warned about their sin. But it did not change them one iota in regard to their evil purposes, to take the Lord Jesus and to bring Him to trial and to death. Miraculous acts of power and grace will never, by themselves, change the heart of a single person unless God in His mercy purposes to do so. His power to change a heart is in accordance with His eternal purposes, and it must be directed specifically to the heart of a sinner with the purpose to save them, before anything will actually happen. The only way that you will most certainly know if your heart has been savingly changed is when you come to know and believe the love that God has for you in the gospel. When you see that you cannot save yourself, and when you understand that God is showing you this truth in His mercy; it is then that by His grace you will come to love the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord will keep all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy," it says in Psalm 145, verse 20. When You truly love the Lord Jesus, you will love everything about Him, of His person and His works. And your eyes will have been opened to see your need of the Lord Jesus, specifically, as the only One who can save you. You come to love Him as you see your need of Him, as a sinner, to continually receive His righteousness, and His help, and His grace, in order to please God, and truly help other people. The Lord knows those who are His. Judas had seen all the miracles of the Lord Jesus, and had even been given power to do some of them; but He did not love the Lord Jesus. Instead, He betrayed Him. His heart was filled with covetousness, pride, and malice; and he hid it well for a time. He would even betray our Lord with a kiss. Let us take care to examine ourselves to see if we be in the faith. Or do you not know that you must have Jesus Christ there, or sin will prevail? (2 Corinthians 13, verse 5) I would urge each one here to examine their hearts to see if Christ is there; dwelling richly. If you have believed Him you will know His love filling your heart for what He has done for you, and for all of His brethren.

Then 3rdly, and finally - Jesus' love led Him to seek the eternal safety of His disciples from their having to suffer. (Verses 7-11) Jesus again shows His willingness to suffer for God's Elect when He again says in verse , "I have told you that I am He." "Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way." The whole purpose of Jesus' being arrested, arraigned, charged, condemned, and crucified, was so that we might go our way; so that we might not be arraigned, and charged, and condemned at God's bar of justice, and sent away to eternal punishment. The proof that Jesus is speaking spiritually about His intention to save everyone who believes in Him is found in the comment which John makes here: "...that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" Jesus is the perfect Savior and Keeper of His people. If you believe in Him, you will go your way, free from the condemnation of sin; and all because He, back in the days of His flesh, went to trial and to the cross in your place. He did this, having you specifically, and all of God's Elect specifically, in His mind. If the Father has purposed your salvation, the Holy Spirit will most certainly be sent to call you and to regenerate your heart. You will know nothing of this, however. You will only understand that someone has confronted you with the gospel, and you are very troubled over your sins. You are convicted of your sins and you know that you need a Savior. And then you found someone speaking to you, the word concerning Christ. And then you knew; that way back at the cross, He died there for you; and so you believed. Are you troubled that your heart is so deceitful? Are you troubled that your obedience to God's word is not more consistent? Do you sometimes doubt your own conversion and wonder whether your salvation is real or true? Take heart, dear believer, from these verses. He will not lose one of those who have been given to Him by the Father. He will not lose you either. Your salvation will not rest upon the good things that you have done; neither is it prevented by the greatness of the sins which you have committed. It is not based even on the consistency of your obedience after conversion; although you will by His grace make progress in holiness. It is based upon Jesus saying, "Take me; and let these go their way." How often we forget that our being saved rests entirely upon the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. He went and stood in your place of Judgment in His trial, in His conviction, in His sentence, and in His crucifixion, if you are trusting in Him. This is faith in exercise; when you see Jesus as your substitute at the cross. God cannot punish twice. If Christ bore your sins in His body on the tree, then God cannot, and He will not punish you for them either now, or at the Day of Judgment.

I like the verses in John Chapter 8, where they brought a woman to Jesus who was caught in the very act of adultery. They wanted to know whether Jesus thought that they ought to stone her in accordance with what Moses had said in the law. They were trying to test Him, it says there, in order that they might find something of which to accuse Him. "But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear." Many people have wondered what the writing was that He wrote. When He got done writing He looked up and said, "He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." And then He stooped down and

wrote on the ground again. Some have said that He was writing out the sins which these men who accused the woman had committed. I don't know. That is certainly possible. That may have indeed been what He was writing in the first writing on the ground. Jesus will most certainly be the righteous judge at the last Day when He returns. We need to note that when He was done writing, all the men who were her accusers began to leave, beginning with the oldest, even to the last. But let us also notice that there were two times of Jesus' writing on the ground. Jesus had continued writing a second time after He said what He did to the woman's accusers. What was Jesus saying in this second writing? Well, I wonder if perhaps He was writing, "Father, I will die for this woman's sins." Jesus and the woman were left, and He said to her, "Woman where are your accusers?" "Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one, Lord." Notice that she owns Him as her Lord, even thought she was so very sinful. "And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go your way and sin no more. It is the same kind of language in this incident as we found Jesus speaking in the text that we are looking at this afternoon; when Judas and the mob were coming to take Jesus. Whom do you seek? Let these go their way. It was Jesus' love for fallen sinners, being willing to take their place, being willing to die for all of God's Elect, that made Him speak in this way. May each of us see the greatness of the love of Christ for sinners, even as we are; that we might love Him and serve Him all the more.