

Spend time with someone who is suffering and you might hear them say something like this: “It’s not dying I’m afraid of, its getting there.” The fear of what one will have to endure before death can be quite frightening. The prospects of suffering have lead many in our day to seek ways to be in control of death.

Recent medical developments have meant that death can now be controlled by us. Our government has permitted medical aid in dying and presented it as a more ‘compassionate’ means to die. But with M.A.I.D., control is now called compassion and suffering is replaced with being the commander of our own destiny.

Christians have always believed that the value of life is precious. Knowing that life is not ours to control, Christians have advocated for life from the moment of conception to natural death. Life is a gift, given to us by a gracious God, and it is his to determine and control, not ours. For this reason, Jesus’ death appears as one that stands in complete contrast to the control of our day. He commands his own destiny, and he shows us that when we are trusting fully in the Father, there is a redemption that awaits us. Death is not something to fear or avoid or plan or control. Rather, by his death, Jesus shows us that we can trust him in the hardships because he is the one who will bring about the greatest good in our lives and in our deaths.

How does Jesus bring about the greatest good through our sufferings and in being sovereign even in our death? We see how Jesus’ Father orchestrated all for good in John 18:1-12 (READ passage).

Trust His Sovereign Control Over History

You might wonder, what in this passage would help me to trust his sovereign control over history? Because we have the other gospel accounts, we often fill in details from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We might wonder why John doesn’t mention other details such as Jesus going alone to pray or his disciples falling asleep. But John intends us to read his account knowing the other gospel accounts yet giving us something to meditate on.

While John is very detailed about the travel, he suddenly becomes vague. They crossed the Kidron Valley and came to “a garden.” We know that this was the Garden of Gethsemane, as mentioned in the other gospels. But why does John leave this vague?

Interestingly, John mentions that Jesus is betrayed in a garden (18:1), that he is crucified and buried in a garden (19:41), and that he rises and is mistaken as the gardener (20:15). John has already made us think about the first week of creation, beginning his gospel with a comparison between the first week of creation and the first week of Jesus’ ministry. So it is no surprise that this gospel will now end comparing Jesus’ betrayal, death, and resurrection with the first betrayal and death. Just like the first garden in Genesis 2:8-16, we are now brought back to a second garden.

Jesus' Abiding Power – John 18:1-11

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And now we are to compare the two gardens:

In the first garden, Adam betrayed the Lord
In the second garden, Judas betrayed the Lord

The first garden was the place where death was born out of life
The second garden was the place where life was born out of death.

The first garden was the place where Adam was overcome by temptation
The second garden was the place where Christ overcame temptation

In the first garden Adam fell to sin.
In the second garden, the soldiers fell to Christ.

In the first garden, Adam hid himself
In the second garden, Christ presented himself

In the first garden, a sword was drawn
In the second garden, the sword was sheathed

“Garden” has become more than a place of betrayal. Now it becomes the place where the original betrayal is now overcome (19:41, 20:15) – it is the beginning of the new creation (Rev. 21-22).

Jesus has complete authority here. Creation bows to his command. He speaks to wind and waves. He has authority over disease and death. And now he shows that he commands humanity and history. In his arrest, death, burial, and resurrection, the Lord Jesus sovereignly commands the scope of history. Nothing is outside of his control.

And this news is intended to comfort us. We don't know why things happen the way we do. And not everything that happens is nice or pretty. Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, and death are horrible evils. Yet this fact does not change the truth that he is in control of his final hour. Jesus commands history so that the good of the Father might be accomplished – and that good is your salvation and mine. For the better Day to come, for the new creation to be revealed in all of its glory, Jesus shows his sovereign control of history is bringing about the new creation where there will be no more tears, sorrow, pain, or death. The trials of our lives are preparing us for the glorious new creation that he has prepared for us. So in the mean time, trust him – he's working out the scope of history and your story to bring you to the Father.

Trust His Plan of Redemption

Knowing that he was directing all of human history for this moment reminds us that he was doing all these things for us and for our salvation. While the other gospel accounts tell us that he was overcome with sorrow, sweating drops of blood as he prayed, John

tells us that Judas knew this place. Working together, the Jews and Romans had planned this moment, and Judas leads the way. Arresting Jesus by night, they would keep this situation away from the crowds and not create a riot.

But verse four tells us that Jesus knew all that was about to happen to him. Nothing would catch him by surprise. The plan of God to redeem humanity from the curse that was pronounced in the first garden would begin to be unwoven in this second garden. In coming for Jesus, he steps into the situation (v. 4 – “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward...”). Judas may be leading the soldiers, but Jesus is in command of the situation. “Whom do you seek?” They answer, “Jesus of Nazareth.” And Jesus answers with two words that would echo all of redemptive history: “I AM.” In English, we supply the word “he,” but the Greek here is the same as the Greek OT where Moses comes to the burning bush and meets the LORD who reveals himself as “I AM” (Exod. 3:14). The God who revealed himself to Moses as the great I AM now reveals himself to the soldiers as the same God. The I AM who brought his people out of bondage and slavery from Egypt is now revealing himself as the I AM who will bring his people out of sin and death. The I AM who struck down Pharaoh by plagues is the I AM who makes soldiers fall. The I AM who called Moses to bow and worship is the I AM who shows that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear allegiance.

This is his moment of redemption. This is the time when he will free his people from the bondage of sin and slavery, from death and destruction. The I AM of Israel is the I AM who will save you and free you from your sin – you must trust that he can free you from sin and death. He rules over history because he brings about his redemption – a new creation, a new people, a promised land of abundance. In his Father's house are many rooms, and he goes to prepare a place FOR YOU (Jn 14:1-4). The way that he goes there is by the cross. He must die to bring you life. He must be cursed so that you are forgiven. He must be rejected so that you can be accepted. He must be despised so you become the Father's delight. And he must obey his Father so that you might trust and obey him and find that he is sufficient to bring you home. But as we wait for him to bring us home, we must also...

Trust His Power Over Evil

Evil can feel very overwhelming at times. The sufferings of this life can feel like they must be out of God's control. Even for Jesus, in this darkest hour, the evil looks so incredibly strong. Consider the forces of power that come to arrest him – John says that this is a detachment of soldiers or a band of soldiers – and this suggests an overwhelming show of force. The word that John uses here describes a partial legion of soldiers, suggesting that Judas and the religious leaders came with a couple hundred soldiers (200-600), armed and ready for battle, as v. 3 indicates.

But Jesus comes out in v. 4 and confronts them as the one commanding the situation. The light has shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (Jn 1:5). Judas may come with overwhelming force, yet they had no claim on his life. The hundreds were

outnumbered by the One great I AM. What they plan to do is evil, but God intends it for good (cf. Gen. 50:20).

And as the Great I AM confronts this overwhelming force, John tells us in v. 6 that the soldiers and religious leaders and Judas himself draw back and fall to the ground. While the overwhelming force of power comes to arrest Jesus, it is Jesus who arrests this force with his divine power. He does not have his life taken from him. He gives it up. He will dictate the terms of his crucifixion. What appears like human leadership quenching a revolt is actually the folly of humanity submitting to the all-powerful God, yet completely unaware of that they are not in charge.

So as Jesus asks them again – Whom do you seek? – Jesus serves his followers. The implication that John is hinting at is that this band of soldiers had come to arrest the whole lot of them – Jesus and disciples – but Jesus will not lose one of them. His prayer that the disciples be protected in 17:12 is now fulfilled.

Jesus will protect his own. He will go to the cross to die for his own. He will save his own. He will not lose one of them.

But we have a way of thinking we are serving Jesus when we are actually contributing to the problem. Peter, having a sword, swings and strikes the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. What Peter is thinking is unclear. The overwhelming force of soldiers, their torches and weapons at hand – does Peter think he can defend the cause in this moment? Is he thinking it is better to go down fighting than to be arrested?

But Jesus is in charge. Peter's actions could have derailed the entire plan of redemption. The soldiers could respond to Peter's action with brute force and strike them all dead. But what does Jesus do? He shows that he will make the evil actions of this mob serve the sovereign purposes of God. The other gospels tell us that Jesus healed the servant's ear, and he commands Peter to put away the sword. Why?

Here is Jesus' answer: "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (v. 11). The cup that Jesus was to drink was the cup of redemption, the cup of sin and judgment. This cup is not placed on him by the Jewish leaders nor the Roman soldiers. It is sovereignly given to him by his Father as a gift. Jesus will take all evil and drink it all up, swallowing it through his suffering and putting it in the grave. He will drink the cup so that all who trust in him may come to him and never have to drink the cup of sin and death.

All of us will have times of great trial, sorrow, and difficulty in our lives. The cup will appear too much for us to drink. We will, at times, feel the overwhelming force of evil and suffering and appear as those who are out of control.

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But Jesus commands our destiny. No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck us from his hand until he returns or calls us home – In Christ alone our future lies! Here in the power of Christ we live!

We may want to control the outcome of our lives. We may want a different plan for our lives. We may want to change the course of history. Life will have its dark moments, tragedy will come, and the world may feel like it is falling apart. We may feel pressed and crushed, persecuted and abandoned, struck down and destroyed. Yet behind it all is a God who is keeping you, never letting go of you, and making your life to look like the Saviour so that we carry in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. As Paul will say, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:8-12).

For the Christian, we do not have to be in control of our destiny. We can entrust ourselves to God. This life will be hard. But the life to come will be glorious. This life will have great sorrow. But the life to come will have great joy. We will feel out of control, but he is bringing us home. So Christian – look to Jesus, for he has history serving his purposes – to redeem you, and to make every sorrow and evil serve his purpose. And some day, you will see him face to face, and every tear and sorrow and pain and suffering will melt away in the light of the presence of the King of kings.