

Good Friday

WHOM DO YOU SEEK?

John 18

Good Friday

Analysis by Paul Jaster

DIAGNOSIS: Arrested & Crucified

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Silencing the Good Shepherd with the Overwhelming Power of God's Own Law*

Three awesome forces ally to arrest Jesus: (1) a "cohort" of Roman soldiers (a tenth of a legion, 600 soldiers!), (2) a temple security force from the chief priests and Pharisees, and (3) Satan via Judas (John 13:27). This mighty trio acts for leaders (shepherds) who get fat feeding on the sheep (people) by using God's own law against them as opposed to the Good Shepherd who feeds the people with the good news of God's love. So says Jesus (John 10) echoing and amplifying Ezekiel 34. Jesus is such a threat to their God-given, law-based authority that they must stop, arrest, and silence him with the strongest force at their disposal: raw, coercive power—such as, death by crucifixion. This is our instinct whenever we are threatened. Strike back with every means at our disposal to preserve our posturing of power. Weapon of choice? God's own condemnation and righteous indignation. Thus the Judeans say to Pilate, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Clever, isn't it. Who has a bigger club than God?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Thugs Who Think They're in Control*

These people think they are in control, when it is God who is pulling all the strings. Note the arresting party's lanterns and torches. Jesus and his disciples made it to the Garden fine without any artificial lighting. But, without Jesus, the Light of the World, the arresting party is "in the dark" despite their artificial lights and arms. In fact, it is not they who find Jesus, but Jesus who finds them. Jesus "knowing all that would happen to him" steps forward, reveals himself and takes charge. He asks the questions. A similar thing happens before Pilate. It is not so much Jesus on trial before Pilate, but Pilate on trial before Jesus. As Jesus says to Pilate, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above." Even Satan is not the least bit in control. Satan is only a two-bit player in a cameo role. John's Judas/Satan does not get to "kiss" or "identify" Jesus. He is just a silent, motionless extra in the back row totally upstaged by Jesus. Satan thinks he's using Judas, when in fact it is God who is using both of them. Neither Judas nor Satan can take a step until Jesus says, "Do quickly what you are going to do." Jesus is directing all the action following a script carefully prepared by God.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Thrown to the Ground, Floored & Silenced*

An arresting party of overwhelming force comes looking for Jesus of Nazareth in order to stop, arrest, and silence him. Yet, they end up floored, paralyzed, and speechless when he merely utters two words, ego eimi, "I AM," the divine name offered to Moses from the burning bush. The truth is that Jesus IS who Jesus claims to be: the Son of God sent to save the world by the Father. And just the mere utterance of the divine name by its true owner, Jesus, is enough to throw all opposing forces (including us) to the ground paralyzed in subservient obeisance. Just think what Jesus could do if he wanted to push it all the way and said, "I AM your worst nightmare!" On Ash Wednesday we

echoed God's curse on Adam, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." Just for kicks, Jesus gives the opposing troops a little taste of that dust before using them to move on to God's larger plan and purpose. Fortunately for them and for us, Jesus' weapon of choice is not the sword but a cross and the naked, sacrificial and saving power of God. His way of ruling and operating (shepherding) is not coercive power, but uplifting love.

PROGNOSIS: Exalted and Freed

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Lifted up on a Cross; Crucified, Yet Exalted*

There is no "Jewish" trial or hearing in the gospel of John. It is pre-programmed from the start. The decision of the Judean leaders was made back in chapter 11 when Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied, "That it is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed." Little did he know it, but Caiaphas didn't just say that sound bite "on his own" out of political expediency; he "prophesied" it on behalf of God. This is God's decision and solution to the human problem. Jesus is able so willingly and voluntarily to lay down his life and take it up again because unlike all other authorities and powers his will coincides with the Father's. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him, much like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3). It isn't, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Rather it is, "We have a gospel, and according to that gospel Jesus chooses to die because he IS the Son of God and God loves the world that much." Jesus is innocent of all charges (even Pilate can see that!) and still Jesus willingly drinks the cup the Father gives him to drink, and surrenders to being lifted up on the cross. His death upon the cross is a God-given gift and sacrifice of love that is

uplifting rather than a power-play that ends and silences this Son of God. It accomplishes everything that is necessary on God's part to accomplish our salvation. In the wondrous working of God, the crucifixion is simultaneously a coronation and exaltation. It verifies (truth-ifies) this is the way God really wants to rule. God would rather rule through redeeming love than righteous indignation. And so, Jesus can say at the end of it, "It is finished!" He delivers his last word from the cross. All of this is "the truth" that Pilate found to be so elusive. Or, as Jesus said, "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me." The truth is not a set of political expediciencies or philosophical ideas. Truth is Jesus Christ himself, standing in the flesh right before Pilate.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : A Faithful Flock Following the Good Shepherd

The first words off the lips of Jesus in this story is "Whom are you looking for?" which is very close to the first words of Jesus to would be disciples "What are you looking for?" Just as there are two kinds of shepherding (coercive force versus uplifting love) there are two kinds of seeking for Jesus. And both kinds of this seeking are in any one individual who dares to ponder the cross of Jesus on Good Friday. There is a part of me that (A) seeks to put Jesus to death because he threatens the life I already have—the status quo. And there is a part of me that (B) seeks Jesus because I faithfully believe he is God's gift of Life and I wish to follow him. When we act like the former, we become the real thieves and bandits, the Bar-Abbas-es (the errant "sons and daughters of the Father"), the ones who should be caught and prosecuted. When we act like the latter we become part of that faithful flock (Christ-ians) who follow the Good Shepherd (Christ, the true Son of the Father) because we know his voice. Christ's flock are the ones who feed on Jesus' every word and action as the "Bread of Life" and who, when times

get tough, say, "Lord, to whom else can we go? You have the words of eternal life." This flock does not fall down in abase obeisance, paralyzed and silent, when Jesus says "I AM...the way, the truth, the life, etc." Rather, it faithfully and vocally follows on the path where he leads.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Proclaiming the Good Shepherd with the Overwhelming Power of God's Own Gospel*

The opposite of an arresting party is a freeing party. Before he voluntarily surrenders to arrest, Jesus insists first upon the release of his disciples. In all the other passion accounts, the eleven desert Jesus and flee away. But, in John's telling, they do not "flee" rather they are "freed." Ultimately, they are free to tell the truth about Jesus that Pilate only began to hint at in his own anemic ways: "I find no case against him." "Here is your King!" "The King of the Judeans" (and we would add, our king, too!). Although they protest, Pilate silences the objections of the Judeans with the title that he posts above the cross, for the kingship of Jesus is the last word. As Raymond Brown notes in his magisterial *The Death of the Messiah* this final truth (the titlos) is spoken in Hebrew (the sacred language), Latin (the political language) and in Greek (the language of gospel proclamation). Those who follow Jesus become a people of the cross who tell the story of the cross in every language imaginable—art, poetry, liturgy, music, dance, song, silence, the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine. And they take freeing "party" to mean not only "a group of people," but also a joyful "paschal celebration." (Even the rabble-rouser Barabbas benefits from this liberating moment. He probably ate pretty well on the Passover night that first Good Friday evening.) Not only are the followers of Jesus "freed" and liberated but they become active agents of this liberation, too. They become agents of a king whose kingdom is not "of" this world but which is certainly "for" this world. Later on Easter

night Jesus will pierce the locked doors of their faithless fears and say, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any they are retained." Those who follow Jesus are armed not with lanterns, torches and weapons, but Jesus' word of law and gospel, the Office of the Keys, and the "fire" of God's new day. And what you get...well, that depends. Whom are you looking for? What do you seek?