

Explore the Bible: I Am He

April 17, 2023

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 30 focuses on John 18:1-11.*

John assures his readers of Jesus' utter power and control, even in the moments leading up to his arrest. Rather than being surprised by the soldiers and chief priests coming to arrest him, Jesus had foreknowledge of their coming. Not only did he know they were coming, but he "went out" to them, without waiting for them to arrive (John 18:4).

Jesus also demonstrated power and control over the situation in his identification with God, his protection of the disciples from harm, and his obedience to the mission of the Father. These three notions are important for the reader in understanding how Jesus maintains divine sovereignty even in these dire circumstances: (1) identity, (2) protection and (3) obedience to the mission.

I Am (John 18:5)

Nazareth was a small town with little significance to the surrounding regions. In fact, it was most significant for its insignificance. There was a stereotype that people from Nazareth were backwoods-like people—uneducated and destined for mediocrity. It certainly is remarkable that God would choose such a place for Jesus to call "home," yet Jesus fully identified with those whom some might stereotype as hicks or hillbillies in modern vernacular.

However, in the same statement whereby Jesus identifies as a Nazarene, he also identifies with God.

Jesus stating "I am he" says more than what it appears at face value in

English translations. The response of others to this statement makes this obvious (“the drew back and fell to the ground;” John 18:6). What we see here is another occurrence in John’s Gospel of Jesus identifying with the God of Israel, the “I Am” of Exodus 3:14.

Moreover, beyond the linguistic connection, we can also gather that something supernatural is probably taking place, for the supposed Gentile soldiers present would likely not have understood the allusion to the Exodus story. Given the response of those present, this passage looks something like a theophanic encounter.

Jesus is just as much *of Nazareth* as he is *of God*—a perplexing paradox by ancient Israelite standards and a beautiful promise for us today. God identifies with the lowly and the oppressive forces that have no power over him.

Let These Men Go (John 18:8)

Jesus willingly gave himself over to the religious and governing authorities. But with a simple imperative to let his disciples go, he protects them from arrest. Even here, his power and control are evident.

His desire, as shown in his prayer from the previous chapter, was for his disciples to remain in the world and to be protected (see John 17:11-12). In this passage, he is exercising his own will for the disciples to be protected by commanding them to be let go. He could have exercised his power in letting himself go and by avoiding arrest, but this would not fulfill the mission of him going to the cross and ascending to the Father. Instead, the impression we get from John’s Gospel is that Jesus himself is willing all of this to unfold as it is.

Jesus as protector is clear evidence of his power and control. He is the “good shepherd [who] lays down his life for the sheep,” but “on [his] own

accord” with “authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again” (John 10:11; 18).

The Cup (John 18:11)

As mentioned, Jesus is keen to the mission of his death and resurrection. While he exercises divine authority to protect his disciples, his disciple Peter attempts to protect Jesus as by drawing the sword and attacking the high priest. Jesus rebukes this attack because it would prevent his purpose: “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:11). Again, an imperative from Jesus to the effect that Jesus’ will is fulfilled.

Jesus’ power and control are perhaps most remarkably displayed in his obedience to the mission of the cross. If there is any situation that one would expect Jesus to practice his power and authority, the natural assumption would be that he would protect himself from the suffering of the cross. However, this is the worldly way of viewing the cross—a view the disciples assumed up to this point.

Jesus, on the other hand, had a bigger view. He understood the mission that included his death on the cross with the promise of resurrection and victory over that death.

As followers of Jesus, we delight in Jesus’ power and control, and we recognize the glory of his death on the cross with the promise of eternal life in his resurrection. However, perhaps there are other areas in our life where we struggle to trust in Jesus’ power and even fail to relinquish control to him because the outcome seems difficult, severe or impossible.

May we cling to the hope offered in the good news of Jesus, that despite all the odds and even in our limited perspective, Jesus has ultimate power and control as revealed in his identity, protection and obedience to the mission.

If we belong to him, his victory belongs to us, as well.

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