

Taken, bound and led away.

Our reading for this evening is taken from the gospel of John, chapter 18, commencing at verse 1.

When Jesus had spoken these words, 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.

Then Judas, having received a detachment 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 out and said to them, 'Who 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', that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom you gave me I have lost none'.

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus.

Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?'

Then the detachment of troops and the captain and the officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound Him. And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.¹

I wish to consider *three* things which *men* did to the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane; namely that, according to the last two verses we read, (1) they **took** Him, (2) they **bound** Him and (3) they **led** Him.

(1) First, **they took Him**. The Jews had sought to 'take Him' for some time. John uses that exact expression 'take Him' twice in chapter 7 and once at the end of chapter 11.

In John 7, we read, 'Therefore *they sought to take Him*; but no man laid hands on Him, because His hour had not yet come'. Then that the Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring, 'When the Christ comes, will He do more miraculous signs than these which this man has done?', and 'the Pharisees and the chief priests *sent officers* (the temple guard) *to take Him*'.² They '*sought*' and they '*sent*'. But the officers failed to 'take Him', failed to arrest Him. Indeed, in one sense, *He* arrested *them* – by His words.

For on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles, as these men jostled and elbowed their way through the crowd, Jesus stood and cried, 'If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink'.³ The temple guard stood riveted to the spot. Later they returned empty-handed, soon to find themselves on the carpet (called to account). 'Why', the Jewish leaders wanted to know, 'have you not brought Him?' ... to which the officers could only respond, '*Never man spoke like this man!*'⁴

It is hardly surprising therefore that *now* the chief priests and Pharisees had requested and obtained a 'detachment' of Roman soldiers,⁵ together with their captain (their commander or tribune), to accompany their own officers.⁶ I suspect that, in spite of his intense personal dislike for them, Pilate agreed to their application for troops because of the volatile nature of Jewish pilgrims (particularly those from Galilee) at their annual festivals.⁷ From the Governor's standpoint, it was best not to take any risks.

More recently than chapter 7, having then *sought* in vain and *sent* in vain, they had *schemed* to take Him. According to the end of chapter 11, following the raising of Lazarus, the supreme Jewish council had exercised their authority to throw their net wide. We read that 'both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where He (the Lord Jesus) was, that man should inform them, that *they* might **take Him**'.⁸

Yet they had *sought*, *sent* and *schemed* to take Him to no avail. But now, due in part to the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, they 'took Him'.

I say 'in part' because the Holy Spirit makes it clear that they could *not* have taken Him – then or ever – unless He had first chosen to submit Himself to them.⁹

When they had sought to take Him and kill Him at *the beginning* of chapter 7, He had withdrawn to Galilee. Verse 1 simply says, 'He would not (He did not wish to) walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him'. When the Jews sought to do the same at *the end* of chapter 11, He had withdrawn to the town of Ephraim, in the mountainous region north east of Jerusalem: 'Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews'.¹⁰

The apostle John also reports in chapter 12 how, while in Jerusalem during Passion Week itself, 'when Jesus had said this, He departed and hid Himself from them (the Jews)'.¹¹ And even now, when, with understandable trepidation, they had ventured into the garden of Gethsemane, and our Lord had stood forward to confront them, they had fallen to the ground, awed, helpless and powerless before Him. No, they certainly couldn't have 'taken' Him unless He permitted them to.

Indeed, I note that John had used twice before the expression which he now uses ('*went out*') when describing how the Lord Jesus had evaded His foes on previous occasions. In chapter 8, He had said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day', and in response to their challenge, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' He, had declared, 'before Abraham was, I am'. This to them (correctly) was an unmistakable and transparent claim to deity – to be none other than the God of Israel Himself, to be the 'I am' who had revealed Himself to Moses.¹² Small wonder that they not only *took* umbrage, but '*took up* stones to cast at Him'. 'But', John reports, 'Jesus hid Himself and *went out* of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by'.¹³

I said that John used *twice* before the expression '*went out*' when describing how the Lord Jesus had evaded His foes. The second occasion was in chapter 10, where, as they sought again to seize (to arrest) Him, 'He escaped (*went out*, literally) out of their hand'.¹⁴ And He went away again', the apostle adds, 'beyond the Jordan to the place where John was baptizing at first'.¹⁵

But, if in chapters 8 and 10 John had twice used the expression '*went out*' when describing how the Lord Jesus evaded His foes, here, in chapter 18, John again tells us twice that Jesus '*went out*'; first, in verse 1, that 'Jesus *went out* with His disciples over the brook Kidron', and now, in verse 4, that He '*went out* and said to them, "Who are you seeking?"' That is, He now '*went out*', *not* to escape *out of their hands*, but to meet them and to submit Himself *into their hands*.

For all was now changed. 'Jesus', we read at the beginning of chapter 13, 'knowing that *His hour was come* that He should depart ('should cross the frontier') from this world to the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end'. 'Father', He prayed at the beginning of chapter 17, '*the hour is come*'. That is, He knew the big '**when**'.

But not only so. We have been aware since the end of chapter 6 that He 'knew from the beginning who it was would betray him'.¹⁶ That is, He also knew the big '**who**'.

But our passage makes it clear that Jesus knew, not only **when** and **who**, but **what**, for, according to verse 4, 'knowing all things that would come upon Him, (He) went out'. Oh, yes, *He knew* all – all that the cross would mean for Him – all that it would cost Him to drink the cup which His Father gave Him.¹⁷

But there were things which *those who came* to take Him *didn't know*. They didn't know, for instance, who it was they had come to take. Yes, of course they knew it was 'Jesus of Nazareth', but they did not know who He really was. As He once told Peter, that knowledge came only by revelation from the Father.¹⁸ As John tells us in his first chapter, 'He (the Lord Jesus, the world's Creator) was in the world ... and the world *knew Him not*'.¹⁹

Nor did they know just *how different things could easily have proved for them* that night when they presumed to reach out their hands to take Him.

According to Matthew 26, when rebuking Peter's violent response to the actions of these men, the Lord Jesus had calmly insisted that, *had* He wished to escape from their clutches, He would have asked, not *him* (Peter) to unsheathe and let fly with his rather pathetic short

sword (being little more than a dagger²⁰) but asked *His Father* to despatch to Him in excess of 12 legions of angels.

'Put your sword into its place (its proper home, that is)', He said, 'for all who take the sword will perish by the sword'. 'Look around you, Peter. You are surrounded by some 200 men, each of whom carries a sword far bigger than yours! Do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He will provide me with more than 12 legions of angels?'²¹ Yes, Peter, a whole legion for each of us ... and more to spare'.

You may recall that Old Testament incident when (following the siege mounted by Sennacherib the King of Assyria and his loudmouthed Rabshakeh) 'the Lord sent an angel',²² who 'smote 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians'.²³ It had indeed been true, as the Rabshakeh had claimed, that 'the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah'²⁴ had utterly failed to deliver *their* peoples out of the hand of the king of Assyria. But then *these* so-called 'gods' were just lifeless idols, the products of men's minds and hands.

The Lord, the God of Israel, who Hezekiah addressed at the time as having 'made heaven and earth'²⁵ had but to 'send an angel' – just one!

Exit Sennacherib's army. And exit Sennacherib, who, the passage says, 'departed and went and returned'²⁶ to Nineveh, where, sometime after, he was murdered by two of his own offspring. Just one angel. Small wonder that David had once written, 'Bless the Lord, you His angels, who *excel in strength*'²⁷.

But if 'just one angel' could despatch 185,000 Assyrian troops in one night, it isn't difficult to calculate that 12 legions of angels (anything up to 72,000 angels) could have taken care of over 13 *billion*. And there certainly *weren't* 13 billion Roman soldiers or Jewish guards in Gethsemane! Nor, please note, did our Lord speak of *only* '12 legions of angels', but of '*more than 12 legions of angels*'.

But, leaving aside the possibility of large-scale angelic intervention, we have only to think of what happened to the first two companies of 50 men which Ahaziah sent to 'take' (to capture) the prophet Elijah in 2 Kings 1.

(Ahaziah was the king of Israel who managed to fall through the lattice-work shutter of a window in the upper room of his palace, and who had commissioned his servants to obtain a prognosis from Ba'al-zebub, a Philistine god.²⁸)

Both of these companies were led by captains who strutted up the hill on which Elijah dwelt, to deliver the apostate king's demand, 'O man of God ... *come down*', the second captain adding (insolently, not to say foolishly), '*come down quickly*'.²⁹

'If I am a man of God', Elijah responded in both cases, 'let fire *come down* out of heaven and consume you and your fifty'.³⁰ And down the fire came, as surely as it had some time before on an altar at Mount Carmel.³¹

Separately, consider what happened when the king of Syria (probably Benhadad II) sent his 'great army' to Dothan in 2 Kings 6, to 'take' the prophet Elisha, surrounding the city with Syrian horses and chariots.³² The reason for this was that, on several occasions, Elisha had alerted the King of Israel to Syrian troop movements; 'more than once or twice', the Bible says, enabling the king of Israel to avoid defeat on each occasion.

At his council of war, Benhadad learned from one of his own officials that it was not a mole, a traitor, but Elisha who was supplying key military intelligence to the king of Israel; indeed, that the prophet was relaying to his king, not only what Benhadad said in his *war-chamber*, but, as the official bluntly put it, in his *bedchamber*!³³

Discovering that Elisha was then at Dothan, the king of Syria 'sent ... a great army' to take and 'fetch' him.³⁴ I should have thought that, given his recent experiences of Elisha's prophetic gift, Benhadad would have realised that God's prophet would have known in advance that his troops were to be deployed against Dothan!

Once the city had been besieged, Elisha had occasion to pray twice.³⁵ First, he prayed for his terror-struck servant, 'O Lord, open his eyes', that he might 'see' the angelic forces ranged in Elisha's defence – might see that 'the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha'.³⁶ And, second, Elisha prayed for the Syrian army, 'Strike this people with

blindness'.³⁷ Both of which prayers the Lord immediately answered, and Elisha, his servant and Dothan were delivered.

What do I learn from these stories of Elijah and Elisha? At the very least that it didn't pay to mess about with one of God's prophets!

But, here in Gethsemane, *this was not* one of God's prophets; this was God's one and only Son! And yet – most wonderfully – the men who came to take *Him* were *neither* barbecued nor blinded.

In summary then. (i) No, He didn't call for over 12 legions of angels to smite His foes. (ii) No, He didn't call for fire from heaven to consume them. (iii) No, He didn't even afflict them with blindness.

And so they '**took Him**'.

And (2) then **they bound Him**.

Here I must transport you back a further two hundred years, from the days of Elijah and Elisha to the days of the Judges ... and to the days of Samson in particular, who was, the scriptures tell us, *twice 'bound'* with new ropes.

First, you may remember that, when Samson's Philistine wife was given to one of his former companions by her father in Judges 15, Samson was far from amused, and, with the help of 300 foxes, burned the Philistine's all-important crops, starting with their standing corn.³⁸ They (the Philistines) responded violently, fighting 'fire with fire' (quite literally!), burning both Samson's wife and her father to death.³⁹ In response, Samson avenged himself in the famous 'hip and thigh' slaughter,⁴⁰ which expression probably means that he smote them 'very severely', although I suppose it is just possible that he did leave their corpses a tangle of legs and thighs.⁴¹

In retaliation, the Philistines came out in force against the men of Judah, 'three thousand' of whom approached Samson to say, 'Don't you know that the Philistines rule over us? What is this you have done to us?'⁴²

Personally, I find it sad to hear the men of Judah, of all people, speak in such a way. It is hard to believe that this was the same Israelite tribe which, according to the opening chapter of Judges, had distinguished itself formerly by wading into battle after battle against the Canaanites.⁴³

In response to Samson's pre-condition, 'Swear to me that you will not kill me yourselves', the delegation solemnly promised, 'We will bind you securely and deliver you into the hand of the Philistines; but we will surely not kill you'. Now, wasn't that nice of them! 'We won't kill you; we'll only bind you and hand you over to the Philistines so that *they* can kill you'. 'And they *bound him with two new ropes* and brought him up from the rock'.

But then, when the Philistines *came against him* shouting their war-cries, 'the Spirit of the Lord *came on him* mightily, and the ropes on his arms became like flax which had been burnt with fire'.⁴⁴ At which point, things weren't looking too good for the Philistines!

Exit 1,000 Philistines, slaughtered by Samson with 'a new jawbone of an ass' for his only weapon, the word 'new' (or 'fresh') indicating that the jawbone still had its teeth intact. And I can tell you that, in Samson's hand, these donkey-dentures made a very nasty and lethal weapon! In commemoration of his God-given victory there, Samson named the scene of the battle most fittingly as 'Jawbone Hill' ('*Ramath-Lehi*').⁴⁵

The second occasion that Samson was bound was when, in the following chapter, '*Delilah* took *new ropes and bound him with them*, and said to him, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he broke them off his arms', it says, this time, 'like thread'.⁴⁶

The word 'bound' used in the Greek Old Testament on both of these occasions is the same as that used by John in our reading this evening, where the 'officers of the Jews took Jesus, and *bound Him*'.

But, in Gethsemane, *this was* no super-strong, Philistine-battering Israelite hero from the days of the Judges. This was the Lord Himself. This was the One who, in the language of the Lord in the book of Job, 'binds the cluster of the Pleiades', a star cluster comprising hundreds of

stars in the constellation of Taurus the Bull.⁴⁷ And yet *He* permitted these men to bind Him, and, what is more, unlike Samson, He left their ropes intact.

And (3) then **they led Him**.

The Gospels lay great emphasis on the fact that, in the period immediately prior to His death, the Lord Jesus was repeatedly 'led'. Indeed, between the moment He was arrested here in the garden of Gethsemane and the time He was crucified, they record no less than *seven* stages.

First, as we read, (i) He was **led** to Annas, for a preliminary examination.⁴⁸ Although it had in fact been some 15 years since Annas had actually held the office of High Priest,⁴⁹ he was still known (and spoken of in the New Testament) as 'high priest',⁵⁰ and remained the dominant and ruling spirit of the Jewish council.

Then, (ii) 'they ... **led** him away to Caiaphas the (then) high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled', for a full, albeit unofficial, investigation held by the council *at night*.⁵¹

Then, (iii), 'As soon as it was *day*, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and **led** him into their council', for the formal session of the council, convened to confirm the death sentence passed on Jesus during the night.⁵²

Then, (iv) 'they **led** Jesus ... to the hall of judgement',⁵³ and

(v) '**led** him to Pilate' personally,⁵⁴ for His civil trial before the Roman governor.

Then, (vi) 'The soldiers **led** him into the hall, called Praetorium',⁵⁵ the courtyard where His supposed kingly claims were ridiculed and derided, both by Pilate's own soldiers and by others of the garrison stationed in Jerusalem.

And finally, (vii), 'After that they had mocked him, they ... **led** him away to crucify him'.⁵⁶

Through these seven stages, the Lord was 'led' from Gethsemane to Golgotha ... to the Cross and suffering and death.

Over 700 years before, the prophet Isaiah had spoken of the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord, as 'oppressed and afflicted, yet', Isaiah added, 'He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth'.⁵⁷

And it was there on the Cross ('on the tree', as the apostle Peter described it) that He bore our sins in His own body.⁵⁸ It was there, in that fearful darkness, that He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. For His *physical* sufferings (the murderous scourge, the crown of thorns, the nails) were as it were but the door which He passed through to that awful place where He endured, not at man's hand but at God's hand, the penalty due to my sins.

I quoted the words of Isaiah, 'He was led as a lamb to the slaughter'. In the verse immediately before that, the prophet wrote, not of Jesus 'as a lamb', but of us 'like sheep': 'All we like sheep have gone astray', he said, 'we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord (note that, 'the Lord') has laid on Him the iniquity of us all'.

And there, on the Cross, the Saviour accomplished all that was necessary for everyone of us to have his or her sins forgiven and have peace with God.

But for us to experience that forgiveness and peace, we must both confess and turn from our sins ... and trust in Jesus alone to save us.

The Bible speaks of *two ways* in which our sins can be covered; either by ourselves or by God.

King Solomon made it clear that *the man whose sins are covered by himself* will not prosper.⁵⁹ But Solomon's father, King David, made it clear that *the man whose sins are covered by God* is blessed indeed.⁶⁰

I have read that C. H. Spurgeon 'used to tell the story of a Duke who boarded a galley ship and went below to talk with the criminals manning the oars. He asked several of them what

their offences were. Almost every man claimed he was innocent, blaming someone else or accusing the judge of taking a bribe.

'One young fellow, however, replied, "Sir, I deserve to be here. I stole some money. No one is at fault but me. I'm guilty". Upon hearing this, the Duke shouted, "You scoundrel, you! What are you doing here with all these honest men? Get out of their company at once!" And the Duke ordered that this prisoner be released. He was set free, while the rest were left to tug at the oars'.⁶¹

The door to this prisoner's freedom was his admission of his guilt. And that is also the door to God's appointed way of salvation for all men. Unless, and until, I am willing to confess, 'Lord, I am a sinner in need of salvation', I am not going to experience freedom from guilt and condemnation.

Let us be thankful, then, that, in His boundless love, the Lord Jesus permitted Himself to be **taken, bound and led away**, that we might each have the opportunity of receiving Him, and, by so doing, of getting right with God, and of knowing God for ourselves.

[This message was preached in a Gospel Meeting in 2010.]

Notes

¹ John 18. 1-13.

² John 7. 30-32.

³ John 7. 37.

⁴ John 7. 46.

⁵ The word John uses, translated 'detachment', suggesting a 'maniple' of 200 men.

⁶ John 18. 12. I understand that the governors of Judaea had only auxiliary troops at their disposal. These amounted to five infantry cohorts and one cavalry regiment scattered throughout the province. One infantry cohort - or just possibly two infantry cohorts - had their barracks in Jerusalem (at the old palace and at the fortress Antonia); one cohort guarded the Judaeian capital, Caesarea; and the remainder, together with the cavalry regiment, were on duty throughout the province.

⁷ See the article 'Pilate' in *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*. Also I. Howard Marshall, '*The Gospel of Luke*', page 553.

⁸ John 11. 57.

⁹ Indeed, the Holy Spirit draws our attention to the fact that 'Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples'; that is, that Jesus was not trying to avoid arrest, but instead deliberately went to the place where He knew Judas would assume He would go.

¹⁰ John 11. 54.

¹¹ John 12. 36.

¹² Exod. 3. 14.

¹³ John 8. 59.

¹⁴ Note the double 'out' (ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ) in John 10. 39.

¹⁵ John 10. 38-40.

¹⁶ John 6. 64.

¹⁷ John 18. 11.

¹⁸ Matt. 16. 17.

¹⁹ John 1. 10.

²⁰ *Μαχαίραν*.

²¹ Matt. 26. 52-53.

²² 2 Chron. 32. 21.

²³ 2 Kings 19. 35.

²⁴ 2 Kings 18. 34.

²⁵ 2 Kings 19. 15.

²⁶ 2 Kings 19. 36.

²⁷ Psa. 103. 20; cf. 2 Pet. 2. 11.

²⁸ 2 Kings 1. 2. It is not really surprising that he send to a false god, the Philistine 'Lord of flies'. Ahaziah was the son of Athaliah (the daughter of Jezebel), 2 Chron. 22. 2. 'He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother counselled him to do wickedly', 2 Chron. 22. 3.

²⁹ 2 Kings 1. 9, 11.

³⁰ 2 Kings 1. 10, 12.

³¹ 1 Kings 18. 38. And both bands of 50 came, we are told, from Samaria (2 Kings 1. 2), which I suggest adds force to the reaction of the sons of Zebedee to the insult offered our Lord by a village of *the 'Samaritans'* ... 'when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, as Elijah did?"' (Luke 9. 54.) No, He did not! Turning around to face them, He rebuked them, and then 'went to another village'.

³² 2 Kings 6. 13-14.

³³ 2 Kings 6. 12.

³⁴ 2 Kings 6. 13a.

³⁵ 2 Kings 6 verses 15 to 18.

³⁶ 2 Kings 6. 17.

³⁷ The word 'blindness' is found only in Gen. 19. 11 and in 2 Kings 6. It is at least possible that it denotes not actual loss of sight but some kind of visual confusion; hence Elisha being able to lead them to Samaria. It may well be that 'blindness' is not the best translation; that something like 'confusion of sight' might be better. The Syrians didn't recognize either the city nor Elisha, and so when Elisha told them that they were in the wrong place and that he would take them to the city where Elisha was, they believed him.

³⁸ Judg. 15. 1-5.

³⁹ Judg. 15. 6.

⁴⁰ Judg. 15. 8.

⁴¹ See Dale Ralph Davis, '*Judges: Such a Great Salvation*', page 181, footnote 4. Several of the more lively expressions in my notes at this point have been culled from Professor Davis's commentary.

⁴² Judg. 15. 11.

⁴³ Judg. 1. 1-20.

⁴⁴ Judg. 15. 11-14.

⁴⁵ Judg. 15. 17.

⁴⁶ Judg. 16. 12.

⁴⁷ Job 38. 31. The Pleiades consist of many, many more stars than the handful of hot blue stars visible to the naked eye.

⁴⁸ John 18. 12-13.

⁴⁹ After having been High Priest for nine years, Annas was deposed by the Roman Governor Valerius Gratus.

⁵⁰ Acts 4. 6.

⁵¹ Matt. 26. 57; cf. John 18. 24.

⁵² Luke 22. 66

⁵³ John 18. 28.

⁵⁴ Luke 23. 1.

⁵⁵ Mark 15. 16.

⁵⁶ Matt. 27. 31.

⁵⁷ Isa. 53. 7 NKJV.

⁵⁸ 1 Pet. 2. 24.

⁵⁹ Prov. 28. 13.

⁶⁰ Psa. 32. 1; cf. Psa. 85. 2.

⁶¹ Richard DeHaan, '*Guilty!*', *Our Daily Bread* for 16 March 1995 (which happened to be our 27th wedding anniversary!) Accessed at <https://odb.org/1995/03/16/guilty/>.