

CHRIST ... and His tantalizing inconsistency

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(JOHN 18: 4-8)

It was not always easy to understand the actions and teachings of the Lord Jesus, and there were many occasions when the disciples were nonplussed. Extreme weariness was evident when He lay asleep in the storm-tossed boat, yet within minutes, omnipotence hushed the raging seas. At one moment the disciples felt they had a very human brother and leader ; the next they gasped with astonishment and cried, " What manner of man is this?" The strangest contrast of this kind is found in John's Gospel.

An Unexpected Collapse

The silence of the garden had been rudely shattered by the excited clamoring of a fanatical mob. Led by the traitor Judas, the people had come to arrest the Nazarene. There was to be no mistake this time! Feelings of antagonism had been roused to intensity ; the meddlesome Carpenter was to be removed before Passover. Like hunting dogs eager for the kill, the rabble pressed forward as their lanterns turned the garden into a bewitched fairyland. " Jesus therefore, knowing all things which should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am, they went backward and fell to the ground." And amid all the astounding events of that dread week, this surely must rank as the greatest. It was distractingly humiliating to have one's face pressed into the dust before Him whom they desired to capture. How easy it is to believe that when Christ shall be manifested in glory, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

A Unique Challenge

What was the cause of this amazing collapse? There can only be one answer. Invisible power ; irresistible dynamic swept them off their feet when Jesus said, I am. It will be seen that the word " he " has been printed in italics. It was placed there by the translators in order-as they thought-to make the passage readable. They erred, for the Scripture would have been its own interpreter. I AM is God's name. When Moses asked the Lord, saying when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you ; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" God answered him, saying, " i AM THAT I Am: and be said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3: 13, 14). God is the eternally present; and this was the name given by Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. It represented His claim to deity ; and the power which overcame the crowd more than endorsed the words of His great challenge.

An Unopposed Coup

When His question was repeated, the dazed men slowly regained their feet, and hesitantly answered that they sought the Nazarene. Within a few minutes they were binding the Lord Jesus with ropes brought specially for the job ; but the arrogance of some of those men had been severely jolted. It was unnatural for omnipotence to be overcome by men who only minutes before had been paralysed by two of His words.

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The confused scene needs an explanation. If the disciples ran for their lives, at least we can appreciate their stupefaction when they saw their glorious leader submitting in such a perplexing manner. We sympathize with Simon Peter, whose impetuosity severed the ear of Malchus. The Master's quiet rebuke demoralized His followers, and feeling the cause was lost, they turned to flee. The mob took Jesus away, and even the angels wept-or did they? Perhaps they were too amazed.

An Undisguised Concern

Some things stand out in bold relief. It is quite obvious that had Christ desired to resist aggression, He could easily have done so. That He permitted the enemies to lead Him away suggests that He preferred to go with them. Yet before He finally capitulated, the Lord made a request which was instantly granted. " If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." In that grim hour of danger, He sacrificed Himself that His followers might be protected. " Having loved His own ... He loved them unto the end." It is not too much to say that Christ's intercession saved the men who thought He had failed them. What would the savage crowd have done to Simon Peter when one of their comrades stood disfigured and bleeding? " He ever liveth to make intercession for us." It was true then-it is true now. What a wonderful Savior!

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