

Let Them Go

Scripture Reading — John 18:1-9

“If you are looking for me, then let these men go.”
John 18:8 —

Judas had led an armed squad of soldiers and religious leaders to capture Jesus in Gethsemane. When Jesus demanded that they state their purpose, they said they had come for “Jesus of Nazareth.” Then he replied, “I am he”—and they all fell to the ground.

Jesus had no lack of power, but he willingly allowed himself to be taken prisoner, knowing that these people would crucify him. John Calvin writes, “How dreadful and alarming to the wicked the voice of Christ will be when he shall ascend his throne to judge the world. When he shall come not to be judged by man, but to be the judge of the living and the dead ...”

Then Jesus said something amazing: “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” That’s the basic meaning of the cross. Theologians call it substitutionary atonement. It means simply that Jesus takes our place: “Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood... Hallelujah, what a Savior!”

I hear Jesus say while being nailed to the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). There is no life so flawed or failed that Jesus cannot set it free. There is no sin so great that God’s grace cannot cover it. Jesus can set you free from whatever enslaves you. And his words are still true today: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for your great love for me. You have atoned for all my sins. May my thankfulness show in the way I live in obedience for you. In your name, Amen.

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