

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 8TH-9TH, 2023 // GOSPEL OF JOHN

BETRAYED IN THE GARDEN (JOHN 18:1-11)

It's the night before Jesus will go to the cross, and He's in Jerusalem with His disciples.

- This is the week of Passover—as Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley on the way to the Garden, He would've had to step over a stream that drained blood from the altar at the Temple where thousands of Passover lambs were to be killed (vs. 1).

In 2 Samuel 15:23, King David had crossed this same valley after he was betrayed by his son Absalom—no doubt Jesus was thinking of this on the night of His own betrayal.

- Jesus' betrayer, Judas, knew the place Jesus would be with the rest of His disciples because apparently, they would often visit this garden (Gethsemane, "oil press"). Judas the betrayer shows up with a company of soldiers and the temple police armed with lanterns, torches, and weapons (vs. 3).

- Based on the word John uses for "company," scholars estimate this could've been a force of up to 200–400 armed men.
- They've come expecting a fight as well as an extended search.

Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen, and so He approached the group and asked who they seek: they replied that they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth (vs. 4–5).

- Jesus responds in a remarkable way: "I am" (*ego eimi*; the English pronoun "he" was added by the translators).
- This was the divine, unspeakable name of God.

This is how God revealed His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14 when Moses asked who was sending him as a deliverer to Egypt.

- As Jesus declares His divine identity, Judas and the soldiers "stepped back and fell."
- There was such power in Jesus' divine majesty in those words that these men couldn't even physically stand before Him.

Jesus calmly asked this group again, who were cowering on the ground, who they were seeking, to which they again replied: "Jesus of Nazareth" (vs. 8).

- Jesus repeats that He's the person they're looking for and asks that His men be let go.
- This is the fulfillment of Jesus' words in that none of His disciples would be lost (vs. 9).

After Jesus willingly surrenders, Simon Peter pulls out his sword and tries to fight the group that's there to arrest Jesus (vs. 10).

- Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman: he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, but he certainly wasn't aiming for the guy's ear.
- Peter was shocked and scared and simply acted on a foolish impulse to try to defend Jesus.

Jesus didn't need Peter's help; He wasn't a victim or a martyr.

- Jesus was, is, and always be the great "I AM," and He drank the cup of suffering the Father gave Him as a willing volunteer (vs. 11).
- The betrayal and arrest of Jesus were all according to God's plan for Jesus to willingly die so our sins could be atoned.

QUESTIONING (JOHN 18:12-27)

Annas was not the official high priest, but as the father-in-law to Caiaphas he would've been the one who put Caiaphas in office (vs. 12–14).

- Some scholars speculate that Annas still very much controlled the "business" side of all that happened on the temple mount.
- Jesus is brought in presumed guilty before the religious and financial power brokers of the day.

Simon Peter and "another disciple" (who is probably John) are allowed entrance into the high priest's courtyard because of a personal connection with the doorkeeper (vs. 15–16).

- As the two disciples stood warming themselves by the fire, the servant girl who was the doorkeeper recognized them and asked if they were Jesus' disciples (vs. 17).

Peter is caught off guard and denies that he's a disciple of Jesus (vs. 18).

WHY DOES PETER DENY JESUS?

- Human weakness. Even though Jesus had warned Peter of this moment (John 13), in the frailty of his own weakness, he gave in.
- Fear. If Jesus is arrested and about to be condemned to death, Peter might be next.

Jesus stands before Annas (the former high priest), who wants to know about Jesus' disciples and doctrine (vs. 19).

- Jesus' response is that He didn't have a secret doctrine or a hidden agenda amongst His disciples: He'd taught everything openly in the Temple, so why was he being questioned? Everyone who heard Him knew what He taught.

Jesus wasn't being uncooperative; He was exposing their hypocrisy by asserting His legal rights: there wasn't supposed to be any formal charge brought against the accused until witnesses had been heard.

- For this exposure of their wicked hypocrisy, Jesus is slapped and sent away, bound to Caiaphas for more questioning (vs. 22–24).

Meanwhile, someone standing near the fire with Peter asks him once again if he is a disciple of Jesus, to which he again denies (vs. 25).

- A third person related to Malchus recognizes Peter and asks him again, to which he again denies (vs. 26).
- Immediately, Peter hears a rooster crow in the distance: he's done the very thing he swore to Jesus he wouldn't do.

Peter had been so sure of himself and his loyalty to Jesus, but he failed to recognize the weakness of his flesh (John 13:36–38).

- He didn't lean into God's strength and wisdom; instead, he relied on his own.
- Growing less confident in ourselves and more desperately dependent on God is one of the greatest spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

WHAT IS TRUTH? (JOHN 18:28-38A)

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of the province of Judea from 26–36 A.D.

- Jesus is brought to Pilate's headquarters in the early morning hours by the temple guards.
- Interestingly, the Jewish leaders wouldn't enter the building themselves because that would defile them, and they wouldn't be able to eat the Passover (vs. 28).

Pilate asks the religious leaders what charge they bring against Jesus, to which they respond by side-stepping his question (vs. 29–30).

- Pilate is sitting atop a powder keg in Jerusalem—one more uprising from the Jews and his job (or life) could be on the line.
- Pilate isn't interested in interfering with matters of Jewish law (vs. 31).

In verse 31, the religious leaders play their hand: they intend to have Jesus executed, and they want the Romans to do it for them.

- Even this is according to divine plan! Jesus had prophesied that He would be "lifted up" (John 12:32; John 3:14): because if the Romans carried Jesus' death sentence, they would use crucifixion to do so.

Faced with a dilemma, Pilate decides to interrogate Jesus himself (vs. 33).

- Jesus had a question for Pilate: Did he really want to know if Jesus was a king or was he just asking on behalf of the Jewish leaders?
- Pilate said, "I'm not a Jew, but your own people want you dead. What have you done?"

"MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD..." (VS. 36)

Jesus clearly told Pilate He was a king, but His Kingdom was not a rival political kingdom; it was and still is not of this world.

- Jesus' Kingdom is bigger than Rome, and if He wanted to, His servants could stop this whole thing.
- Jesus is ruling sovereignly over everything.

Jesus came as a king who testified of truth—those who listen to His voice are of the truth and will see His Kingdom (vs. 37).

- It's an invisible Kingdom now, but it's a Kingdom that will shatter every other kingdom on earth someday (Revelation 11:15).
- To this, Pilate coldly retorts, "What is truth?" (vs. 38a).

In our generation, people ask this question every day, some expecting an answer, and some believing there can be no answer.

- In a day and age where we bend and change what is right or wrong to fit what we want to believe and how we want to live, Jesus tells us how to discover genuine truth: listening to the voice of Jesus (vs. 37).

BARABBAS (JOHN 18:38B-40)

Pilate finds no cause for capital punishment in this case (vs. 38b).

- So now Pilate tries another approach to get Jesus released—he will offer the crowd the release of another prisoner named Barabbas in the place of Jesus (vs. 39–40).
- Barabbas was a robber (vs. 40), murderer, and insurrectionist (Mark 15:7).

The choice of prisoners to release seemed so clear between Jesus, the miracle-working Rabbi and Barabbas, the stealing, killing, insurrectionist.

- But the crowd shouted to release Barabbas.
- Even though they couldn't see it then, this was a picture of the gospel—the guilty man went free while the sinless One was condemned.

Because of our sin, we stand on death row guilty before God and are condemned to die as punishment for our sin (Romans 1–2).

- You are Barabbas—Jesus the innocent willingly gave His life for you the guilty so you could be set free.
- Your salvation was free to you, but it wasn't cheap.

But Jesus' death satisfied the demands of God's perfect justice and shed His blood in our place.

- This gospel invites you to trust the reality that Jesus got what you deserved, so you can have freedom, forgiveness, and eternal life.
- Jesus didn't die as a victim or a martyr; He went as the only innocent, sinless one willingly to the cross for you the guilty.

GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN CAN'T BE STOPPED.

- God is still in control despite injustice.
- God is still good despite suffering.
- God can still use you despite your failures.
- God doesn't need your weapons to fight His battles (or yours)—you can put away your sword and take up your cross (2 Corinthians 10:4).

JESUS IS A SOVEREIGN SAVIOR.

- Jesus died for sinners: so you can stop pretending and admit your sin and your need for Him.
- Jesus specializes in restoring deniers: you are strongest spiritually when you stop denying that you're weak and broken and when you grow increasingly dependent on Him.