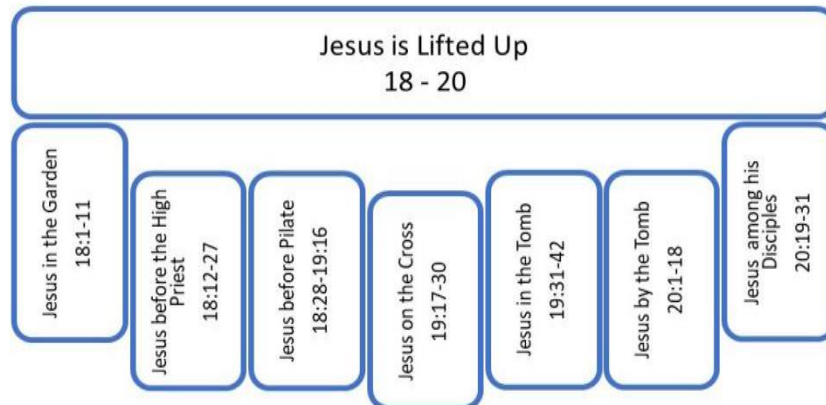


Lesson 32: John 18:1-27 The Arrest of Jesus

Introduction



With this lesson we begin the fourth and final section of John. The first part of the Gospel we titled, *The Word Among Us*. That was John 1:19 all the way through the end of chapter 12. It contained two sections. In the first section Jesus began to reveal himself publicly beginning at the wedding in Cana. We were introduced this problem that many were believing in him without truly believing in him. In the second section, chapters 5-10, opposition increased as Jesus continued to reveal his nature publicly. Opposition intensified. That section ended with an attempt to kill Jesus, and Jesus withdrew from public ministry. But then, in the transitional chapters 11 and 12, at the sickness and death of Lazarus, Jesus again enters into public ministry that leads into his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, before finally pulling away again to focus his final hours on private instruction for his disciples.

So, with chapter 13 we moved into the second half of the Gospel which we titled, *The Hour of His Glory*. His hour has come. In the first section of this part, Jesus was mostly speaking, and he was speaking to his disciples. He was preparing them for life and ministry without him physically present among them. This was going to be a huge change for them. Those chapters, chapters 13-17, have proven to be quite dense. As I said, it is almost 100% Jesus speaking. And in that speaking, as he teaches, he weaves together multiple significant themes that get repeated throughout. So we have to pay very close attention, and we have to slow down and take our time with those chapters. We focused on the idea of abiding in Christ as a heart reality, that we abide in our heart, but also as action. There are acts of abiding, and that all leads to fruit of abiding. Life without Jesus physically present is not going to be life without Jesus. But it's going to be a new and different way of walking with Jesus, who is not going to be walking physically present, but spiritually present through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Before we can get to that reality, Jesus must be lifted up. The Spirit is going to be sent after the cross. So now we enter into the final section of John, chapters 18-20. So far, each of our four sections, two in the first half of the Gospel, two in the second half of the Gospel, have divided nicely into 7 sub-sections with clear parallelism in the text. It is not hard to recognize a chiastic arrangement in these first three sections. This final section also divides nicely into 7 sub-sections, though the parallelism is less apparent. The outer scenes of this section both show Jesus with his disciples. At the beginning, Jesus is with his disciples in a garden and then, and then at the end he's with his disciples in a closed room. The two scenes that come right after the garden depict the trial of Jesus: first before the high priest and then before Pilate. The two scenes that come just before the closed room depict Jesus in the tomb. First, he is laid in the tomb, and then he's risen and he's beside the tomb. The middle section then is going to show us Jesus lifted up on the cross.

We're beginning this lesson with the first two sub-sections: Jesus in the garden and Jesus before the high priest; the arrest of Jesus and the Jewish interrogation, or Jewish trial of Jesus. From the start, right here in chapter 18, John introduces a theme that is particular to John, and it's going to carry through these chapters. This is something that makes his Gospel different from the three synoptic

Gospels. That theme coming through the Passion, through the arrest, through the trial, through the crucifixion this is that Jesus is in control. The synoptic Gospels faithfully describe for us the meekness of Jesus as he goes to the cross, fulfilling the imagery of Isaiah 53:7, "He did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth." That does not mean Jesus didn't speak at all; it means that he did not oppose his arrest. He did not argue for his release. He submits to the arrest, to the abuse, to the crucifixion without arguing his case. And the image of meekness is a correct image. Jesus goes meekly. But John would remind us not to confuse meekness with weakness. Jesus is not a helpless victim. His meekness comes from a willing restraint of power. He is a victim, but he allows that. There is abuse of power against him and he goes with it. And if we have misunderstood this by the images given to us by the synoptic Gospels, John's witness is helping us to focus our perspective more accurately. He's showing us that, yes, Jesus went meekly, but he has power and he has control over the entire situation as he's going.

We might make the mistake of seeing Jesus as weak and helpless. We might also make the mistake of seeing Jesus as a helpless victim unwillingly or unknowingly given up by his father to a horrible death. Like Jesus is some child and God allows his child to die in order that we might be saved. He doesn't rush in to save his child. And that might create a powerfully moving illustration, but it also gives the wrong image. Jesus is not a little child who is given over by his Father. Jesus is God the Son. He's not unwilling. He is acting in full harmony, in full agreement with his Father. He goes to the cross by an act of his own will. He declared in John 10:17-18, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from the Father." Even as Jesus allowed himself to be taken to the cross, the behavior and the speech of Jesus as he goes to the cross reveals that he is actually in control throughout.

Jesus in the Garden (18:1-11)

We start in the garden. The first 3 verses set the scene. This is John 18:1-3,

¹ When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. ² Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. ³ Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Jesus had gotten up to leave the room of the last supper at the end of chapter 14. Presumably, he was walking through the city. He was moving to the outer gates of Jerusalem. Here we see him now exiting the city with his disciples and entering into a garden. From the other Gospels we know this as the Garden of Gethsemane. And we know that Jesus' purpose for coming to this garden was to pray. He will pray deep into the night as his disciples fall asleep. He will express his wish to not drink this cup of suffering and shame that is coming upon him with the cross, while at the same time affirming his commitment to do exactly that. He doesn't look forward to it, he doesn't relish the suffering, but it is the plan, and it is his full commitment. John does not repeat this prayer but he's already reported the same message in the words Jesus spoke earlier in 12:27,

²⁷ "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. ²⁸ "Father, glorify Your name."

So, instead of telling us about the prayer, which we already know from the other Gospels, John takes us into the garden, and he moves straight to the betrayal. Judah knew the garden. He knew Jesus planned to go there or maybe had someone watching and easily was able to figure out where Jesus was headed. The time and the place make an ideal spot for an arrest. The garden is outside of the city. It's a secluded place. There are no crowds about. Jesus is alone with his disciples. It is night. Judas comes with armed temple officers and Roman soldiers. If at full strength, the reference here to a cohort of soldiers would indicate 1000 men. A Roman battalion, however, was rarely at full strength. And even if the battalion was at full strength, the reference most likely refers only to a

representation of that battalion. It's not the full cohort. But considering other writings we have from Pilate regarding unruly mobs at the main Jewish feast, Roman caution in providing soldiers fits the times. The arrest of a popular, public figure like Jesus would warrant significant back-up.

But though they come in strength, John describes Jesus as the one who takes the initiative. Here is the complete account of the arrest. This is John 18:4-11,

⁴ So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. ⁶ So when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am *He*; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," ⁹ to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." ¹⁰ Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

John begins by asserting, "Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon him, went forth." Now, I have no idea of the exact feelings of Jesus when he saw Judas coming towards him with a band of Jewish and Roman soldiers, except that I'm sure surprise was not one of the feelings. None of this is a surprise to Jesus. Jesus, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth. He knows. He is in control.

And so, he takes initiative with the soldiers. They're coming to get him. He moves forward to them and he asked the first question, "Whom do you seek?" It's a question that is strikingly similar to the very first words of Jesus in this Gospel, way back in chapter 1, when two disciples were following John the Baptist and then they started following Jesus. Then Jesus turns around and he sees them. He says, "What do you seek?" The irony of John is in full play when Jesus, speaking to this group: to Judas and the soldiers and the high priest, "Whom do you seek?" That's the question we're supposed to be asking when we're reading this. Who really is Jesus? Who is he? But the soldiers, they name him without really knowing his name. They only know Jesus from Nazareth. They call him "Jesus the Nazarene."

Jesus responds by revealing a more telling name. Like my Bible, your Bible probably has Jesus responding, "I am he." What Jesus literally says in the Greek is, "I am." He speaks his name to them, the name he's been using through his ministry. It is the name of God revealed in Exodus 3 to Moses. "I am." Speaking this name, Jesus allows - he hasn't allowed this up to that point - but at this moment he allows the power of his glory to momentarily overwhelm the soldiers. "When therefore he said to them, 'I am,' they drew back, and fell to the ground." Jesus is in control.

The soldiers were knocked to the ground by the power of Jesus which he unleashed with the declaration of his name. He is the "I am." He is Creator God. Every knee will bow and every knee will confess that Jesus is Lord, whether willingly or unwillingly. And they fall to the ground. They are blind. They do not see him. They do not know who he is. But just for this brief moment they get a taste of the reality of Jesus. But then, in meekness, he veils his power.

He cannot be forced to submit but he can choose to submit. So he asks again, "Whom do you seek?" And they repeat again, "Jesus the Nazarene." Then Jesus commands, "I told you that I am; so if you seek Me, let these go their way." And if we don't catch the idea of control and power here, we could read this as a request: Jesus is asking, "Please, just take me and let them go. They don't have anything to do with it. Just take me." But in light of the power that has just been expressed, and the knocking of the soldiers to the ground, when Jesus says, "I told you I am; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," that's not really a request. That is a calmly spoken command.

And the soldiers obey. They don't take the disciples, they just take Jesus. John adds that this was to fulfill Jesus' earlier words, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." And you might

remember that it sounds like what was said in chapter 6, which had a more spiritual meaning. Jesus would lose not one but raise all the Father had given him to eternal life. So, that losing not one doesn't mean arrest or death; it means he's going to get us to heaven. So this reference perhaps is better connected to what he just prayed in 17:12, "While I was with them, I was keeping them in your name which you have given me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished." That's similar but that's a little different. That could apply to the physical realm. Jesus has guarded the disciples. The plan was for him to go to his death, but the plan was for these disciples to give birth to the new Christian movement. They are the foundation of that movement. And Jesus, showing his control, protects the disciples. They do not get arrested. And there is a connection between physical protection and spiritual protection. It may be God's will to not physically protect us in this life: to bring us home to Heaven after violence. It is possible. But in this sense Jesus' sovereign power to protect these unarmed disciples in the face of a Roman cohort, it reminds us, it reassures us that Jesus, he really does have the power to safely bring us home to heaven, just as he promised in chapter 6. He will lose not one.

Now, in contrast to the control of Jesus, who acts in harmony with the will of God, Peter impulsively strikes out. He shows his desire to prove Jesus wrong about the denial. Jesus says, "You will deny me." Peter says, "I'd go to the death for you." Jesus says, "No, you won't." "Well, yes I will!" He is willing to go to the death, and he shows it by pulling out a sword and striking off the ear of a servant. But at the same time, he's showing that he lacks insight and he lacks trust in the plan of God. So this is coming out of his flesh. And Jesus rebukes him. "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

Peter's disoriented in the midst of this crisis contrasts, in his impulsiveness, in his acting out the flesh. He's a strong contrast to Jesus' calm control. Jesus knows what he is about. He understands the will of God. He is going willingly as a lamb led to the slaughter.

Jesus before the High Priest (18:12-27)

We move from the arrest of Jesus to the trial of Jesus depicted in John 18:12-27. Again, we see Jesus in control. Let's read that whole passage.

¹² So the *Roman* cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, ¹³ and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. ¹⁵ Simon Peter was following Jesus, and *so was* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself. ¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. ²¹ "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." ²² When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" ²⁴ So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

The soldiers take Jesus to the father-in-law of the high priest. Apparently, the Roman soldiers had just been tagging along as backup to the temple officers. The arrest is a Jewish arrest, leading to a Jewish trial. The language of high priest here can be confusing. Is Annas high priest or is Caiaphas high priest? Annas is no longer the current high priest. His son-in-law is. But just as a former president retains the right to be addressed as Mr. President, a former high priest retains the right to be addressed as high priest. They are at his home. That's not unusual. It is not unusual that a large household of a prominent citizen served both as his dwelling and as his place of official business.

Now, Jewish trials were not legally held at night. So this seems to be an off-the-books interrogation. And perhaps this is why Jesus is taken first not to the high priest but to the house of the former high priest, and then only officially later turned over to Caiaphas.

Before getting into the interrogation, John's attention turns briefly to Peter. One of the disciples, we do not know which one, is connected and is able to get Peter into the courtyard. Peter is confronted by a slave-girl, the girl at the door, "You are not also *one* of this man's disciples, are you?" And I doubt Peter was afraid of the slave-girl. Peter is afraid to be found out by the soldiers. They're all standing right inside with a bunch of other servants, gathered around a charcoal fire to warm themselves. And Peter, as he enters the door, he sees that he's in enemy territory.

He's just struck the high priest's slave. It's an impulsive moment of the flesh and there was adrenaline pumping at that time, and it seems to have kept Peter going. He's compelled to stay with Jesus and he courageously follows him and finds his way into the courtyard. He's standing outside till the other disciple comes in and gets him and brings him in, but now finally his courage has left him as he stands in the darkness, surrounded by the enemy. He does not want to be found out. He is afraid. And so he answers the girl, "I am not." And you notice the irony, the contrast.

Jesus is "I am." Peter says, "I am not." It is a rejection of his true identity. We can only become who we were truly created to be in relationship with our Creator God. This is eternal life, that we know him and the one he sent: Jesus Christ. So, with devastating negation of the truth that he has accepted Peter refuses to be identified by his right relationship with Jesus Christ. "I am not."

This night Peter has swung from one extreme to the other. First, he denies the plan of God through mislaid courage. Now, he denies the plan of God through overwhelming fear. Again, he is a contrast to calmness, to the control of Jesus. Jesus continues the straight and true path of God towards the cross.

¹⁹ The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." ²² When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

Jesus is in control. He is faithful to Jewish law and he's correctly challenging his accusers to produce witnesses to confirm what they're saying. "I have had a public ministry. I've spoken in synagogues, I've spoken in the Temple." So, this very well might be a challenge to the illegality of the proceedings that are taking place during this night time interrogation. Jewish law demands a trial with witnesses. And the striking of Jesus just affirms the dishonor of this interrogation of the Jewish officers. Jesus is the one in the right. He says, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike me?" They strike him because they're not in pursuit of justice. They are the darkness that seeks to overcome Jesus; the darkness of the human heart. They want to shut him out. He's come to his own, and they have rejected him.

Failing to get anywhere with Jesus, Annas sends him to Caiaphas. John then in the story returns to Peter.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?" He denied *it*, and said, "I am not."

Again, that negation of his identity.

²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

We expect the Judases and the Caiaphases of the world to reject Jesus. But Peter? If we did not know the story so well, we would be shocked. Peter is as close to Jesus as anyone. Peter is a true believer. Before we are too hard on Peter, we have to step by and recognize that nobody is with Jesus. There's just one disciple who got in, and Peter. Everybody else has scattered and run away. Peter is there, but he's denying him. He's come this far, but he's failed.

Peter is not just Peter here. Peter is you. You are Peter. Peter is me. I am Peter. In our best days, in our best moments we stand up and give witness to Jesus. "Where else would we go? You're the one with the words of eternal life." And we would say with Peter, "Lord, I would not deny you. Don't think such a thing. I might sin and mess up in a lot of ways, but I'll never deny you. I know who you are. You are the holy one from God. I am holding on to you till the end." And that's the heart we want to have for Jesus, and sometimes that is the heart we do believe we have for Jesus, and sometimes it's shown. Sometimes we're pushed and we stand up for Jesus.

But where the spirit might be strong the flesh is often weak. And as we grow with Jesus as believers we're going to pass through a lot of darkness, a lot of stumbling, a lot of disorientation. And when things go dark, we stumble. We need to accept the reality that any one of us, we're not even likely to have made it into the courtyard with Peter. He got that far, and then he failed.

Peter continues his denial of Jesus. And he says, "I am not" again, and then he denies again. Three times. Just as Jesus said.

That is the flesh we still carry with us as a believer. And if our salvation depended on our own constancy, we would be lost. If the promise depended on our own faithfulness, we would stand condemned. The promise would be broken. Grace would be emptied of power. If grace depended on my ability to remain true through the disorientation of darkness and fear and suffering, I would have no hope. The promise would be rendered null and invalid if it depends on me.

This is truly a dark night of the soul moment for Peter. He has failed. And he's left alone in the darkness. He's been tested and he appears to come up empty. And for the moment John just leaves it there. Peter fails to stay true. So, Judas and Caiaphas, men like that, they're giving this contrast to Jesus as the darkness contrasts the light. Peter is giving us a different contrast in this story. He does not show us the rebelliousness of flesh as a non-believer. He shows us the weakness of flesh as a believer. Even when we want to believe, we want to do right, we can't. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Human flesh fails this night. Jesus is going to have to go to the cross alone.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 18:1-11. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. How do you perceive Peter at this moment? How do his actions relate to his declaration in 13:37?
3. Read John 18:12-27. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
4. How do you perceive Peter at this moment? How do his actions relate to his declaration in 13:37?
5. How does John's witness to these events affect your perception of Jesus as the meek lamb willing to go the slaughter?
6. Compare Jesus and Peter. What stands out to you in this contrast, particularly in regard to their understanding of who they are and how that affects their emotions or actions?
7. How do you understand your own identity? In what ways are you striving to create your own identity and in what ways are you receiving the identity that Jesus would give you? And how does your sense of identity affect your emotions and behavior when you are under stress or in need?