

This week, we will look at a pivotal night in our Savior's life—the night of His betrayal, arrest, and denial by Peter—recorded in John 18:1-27. This passage reveals Jesus' divine sovereignty, His complete submission to the Father's will, and His deep compassion even in the face of betrayal and injustice. It also highlights the weakness of human nature, as seen especially in Peter's denial, which is contrasted with Jesus' unwavering commitment to fulfilling God's redemptive plan.

As I've been preparing for this talk, we as a church have been looking at Colossians during Sunday's sermon series. A couple weeks ago, Anthony preached on the opening verses from Colossians 3, which read: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." The contrast between "things that are above" and "things that are on earth" emerges as an important thread throughout this passage in John.

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of some context. In John chapters 14 through 17, Jesus lovingly teaches his disciples to prepare them for the events that were about to happen. He teaches them that he is the way, the truth, the life. Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit and how with the Spirit's help they will do even greater works than he. Jesus calls his disciples to abide in him, warning them that the world will hate them. He speaks about the sorrows they will endure and teaches them where their source of true joy can be found. Over and over he promises a helper, the Holy Spirit, and he promises that he will see them again. He promises that he will overcome the world. The disciples listen, and they ask questions revealing both their concerns and their confusion. There are

times when John adds a note of commentary that these teachings would be understood later. This section of John's gospel ends with Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer," recorded in chapter 17, when he prays to the Father on behalf of his children.

So this week's chapter begins, "When Jesus had spoken these words..." The teaching time is over, and now it is time for all that he has been preparing them for to unfold.

John does not present the events in chronological order, which makes it a little difficult to keep track of everything. But, we will look at three different settings (the garden, Annas' house, and the courtyard), and in doing so we will also consider some key characters: Judas, the soldiers, Peter, Annas, Caiaphas, and, of course, Jesus himself.

Let's start in the garden, where we'll spend the most time...

Though not named here in John's account, we know from the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) that Jesus and his disciples are gathered in the Garden of Gethsemane. This wasn't a new place for Jesus to go; we read in verse 2 that Jesus and his disciples frequented this garden. In other words, it wasn't a great place to hide when your traitorous friend is about to lead temple officials and the Roman army to unlawfully arrest you. But Jesus wasn't trying to hide. In fact, Jesus was ready to step forth in sacrificial love and complete the mission he had come to earth to accomplish.

The hour had arrived for Jesus to do just what he told his disciples he was here to do in John 10:17-18, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

In my Bible, verses 1 through 11 are captioned “Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus,” and numerous commentators refer to this section as Jesus’ arrest. It’s pretty clear that the officials who arrived at the garden on the night of Passover were prepared to arrest Jesus. But did they actually have the authority to do so? In our day, we are familiar with “the authorities” and how it is possible to have a “run in” with the law. Anyone who has watched a police procedural drama can describe how this typically plays out: “In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate, yet equally important, groups: the police, who investigate crime; and the district attorneys, who prosecute the offenders. These are their stories.”

But the events here in chapter 18 don’t follow the standard “ripped from the headlines” storyline. As these events unfold, on the night before the Crucifixion, we see that the ultimate authority does not belong to the police and district attorneys, or in this case the band of soldiers, officers, and chief priests. They have their plans—in fact, they had been scheming to arrest and kill Jesus for a while—but this chapter is *not* a record of how they successfully carry out their evil intentions. Instead, here we see Jesus, with all divine authority, willingly step forward as the Good Shepherd protecting his sheep. He emerges as the sacrificial Passover Lamb, our true High Priest who stands in stark contrast to corrupt human systems and confused human allegiances.

Under the cover of night, Judas, the one who betrayed him, arrives with a large cohort: the arresting officers of High Priests and Pharisees, along with a band of Roman soldiers. The term “band” could signify anywhere between 200 and 600 soldiers. I would like to note here that though the temple guard had the legal authority to arrest Jesus, some commentators point out that the Pharisees brought along the Roman

guard because the ultimate intention was to execute Jesus, and *that* authority would have to come from Roman officials. Another explanation is that the Jewish leaders had already accused Jesus of being a rabble-rouser. It was common during the feasts in Jerusalem to see individuals claim they were the Messiah and incite riots. Extra Roman guards were stationed in Jerusalem in order to keep the crowds in line during the busy Passover feast, and it would be in their purview to detain anyone who may start trouble. Judas leads all these officials to the garden, and they arrive with a show of authority and force. They have torches and lanterns, they are armed with weapons, they are ready to overpower any resistance in their effort to arrest Jesus of Nazareth.

And here is where Jesus, in his sovereignty, deviates from the typical arrest scene and, instead, submits to his Father's will. He doesn't try to resist or run away—this isn't a fight or flight stress reaction to threat. No, Jesus remains in complete control. In fact, he moves toward the arresting officials and *he* begins the questioning. In verse 4 we read, "Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them 'Whom do you seek?'"

Let's pause here for a moment. He knew ALL THAT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM. The entirety of it. What lay on the other side of the garden wall was more horrific than anything Judas, the soldiers, or even the Temple officials had in mind. So horrific that shortly before their arrival we read (in Luke) that Jesus prayed, "'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.'" And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

The cup in Jesus' prayer, which is referenced in verse 11, signifies more than being put on trial and execution. The cup here is the full wrath of God. The cup is a symbol often associated with God's wrath and judgment in the Old Testament. We read in Psalm 75:8: "In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs." The "dregs" are the bitter remnants of the cup, every last drop, the full measure of suffering and judgment. Jesus knew what He would face as He took on the weight of sin and God's wrath for humanity.

Jesus, "knowing all that would happen to him," and yet in complete sovereign control, went out and turned himself over. It couldn't have happened any other way. "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down on my own accord."

The fact that these earthly authorities thought they had any real authority in this situation is laughable! Did they really think they stood a chance to overpower and arrest Jesus, who had escaped their multiple previous attempts to have him stoned, who made the lame walk and the blind see, who controlled the wind and the waves with a word, who raised Lazarus from the tomb? The thought that they would be able to subdue him with brute force was either just a bit naive or completely arrogant. If everything they had heard and witnessed about Jesus up to this point didn't give them pause, what happens next in the narrative should have.

They reply to Jesus' question, "Whom do you seek?" with "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus responds, "I am he." In the Greek, the phrase "I am he" is ***ego eimi*** (ἐγώ εἰμι), "I AM" — the divine name of God, which he used to identify himself to Moses in the

burning bush: "I am who I AM...say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). By identifying himself with God's Old Testament covenant name, Yahweh, Jesus reveals to the soldiers and officers that the one they came to arrest is not merely a man but is God incarnate—the same God from whom Moses, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah hid their faces when in Yahweh's presence.

Something similar happens here, in fact. Jesus identifying himself as I AM reveals his divinity, authority, glory, and power. With a word, the enemies who stand before him are knocked off their feet. Then, the soldiers regain their composure and confirm once again they are seeking "Jesus of Nazareth." But how presumptuous they were to think, after what had just happened, that they had any authority and control over the situation.

"Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.' "

John explains why Jesus said this. The last few verses alone demonstrate that Jesus did not need the cooperation of the officers to keep his disciples safe.

However, Jesus takes this moment to reveal once again—to the people in the garden, the officers, the disciples, and to us—that he is who he says he is, and he is doing what he said he was going to do. John tells us this was to fulfill the word he had spoken, a word from Jesus' earlier prayer in John 17:12, where He prays that none of His disciples would be lost.

This is the very heart of the gospel: Jesus steps forward to protect his disciples, the Good Shepherd laying down his life for the sheep. Just as He stood between His disciples and their would-be captors, He would soon stand between humanity and the full wrath of God. His enemies are unable to stand before him unless He

allows it for his purposes. They could not have arrested him were it not for the fact that his arrest was written into God's redemption plan all along.

Then we have Peter, who in Matthew 16 professed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," whom Jesus calls the Rock on which he will build his church. Unlike Judas and the officers, Peter's motives were certainly not to arrest and murder Jesus. He wanted to promote Jesus. He was ready for Jesus to sit on David's throne forever, with the government on his shoulders and everything else the Old Testament promised about the Messiah. With his limited earthly perspective, Peter wanted that to begin A.S.A.P. So, leaning on his own understanding, he lashed out and cut off the ear of Malchus, the high priest's servant. One commentator describes this as "human zeal without divine understanding." Peter's impulsive act could have easily thrown the entire night into chaos, which may well have been his intent—create a diversion so Jesus could escape.

Have you ever done that? Not cut off someone's ear. But when you look around at your circumstances and don't understand God's plan, do you decide to "help" or take matters into your own hands? Do you lash out at what you perceive to be the problem instead of listening to the Savior and trusting he is in control? I do, and maybe that is why I find comfort in what happens next. Jesus doesn't let this impulsive grasp for control be the catalyst for complete chaos and bloodshed. In his rebuke, Jesus poses the question, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given?", pointing Peter again to the purpose, the mission that Jesus was on. He reminds Peter of who he is and who is in control.

Then Jesus willingly submits to arrest, trial, and eventual crucifixion, fulfilling God's redemptive plan with calm resolve, standing in stark contrast to Peter's anxious fears. Jesus' mind is set on "things that are above," rather than "things that are on earth."

That was the garden, and we have two more settings to look at, both of which will take much less time: Annas' house and the courtyard. In each, we will continue to see Jesus acting with integrity while others respond with evasion and denial.

In Annas' house, Jesus, the light of the world, stands bound before the darkness of corrupt religious leaders. The high priest's job was to mediate between God and the people, offering sacrifices on their behalf. Annas was the *former* high priest, but he still held considerable influence. According to Jewish tradition, the high priesthood was a lifetime appointment. However, the Romans had imposed Caiaphas as high priest. In verse 14, John references Caiaphas' previous counsel, which reminds us of the calculated and political nature of Jesus' arrest. Caiaphas had suggested that it was expedient for Jesus to die to preserve the nation, his motives being purely political. These earthly high priests, whose responsibility was to represent God to His people, whose role of intercession and the offering of sacrifices had pointed God's people to the promised Messiah since the days of Aaron, didn't recognize the Son of God, the true High Priest, standing before them in the flesh, because they were more concerned with their own authority and political power. Their minds were set on "things that are on earth." Think for a moment about that in your own life. When have you mistakenly placed your trust in "earthly priests" (whether religious traditions, political leaders, or something else), rather than relying only on Jesus? Every human mediator will ultimately fail, but Jesus always stands ready to intercede for us.

Jesus' answers, and lack thereof, reveal even more of who he is and why he will never fail us. Annas asks about Jesus' disciples and his ministry. Jesus does not answer the question about his disciples. He protects them, just as he promised he would—both as their Good Shepherd, laying down his life, and as their High Priest, offering himself as the sacrifice in their place.

Concerning his ministry, Jesus reminds Annas that His teachings were never secret; he always spoke openly in the synagogues and the temple courts where Jews gathered. Jesus had no hidden agenda, his ministry wasn't subversive. There was nothing to conceal, because he always spoke the truth. In his answer, Jesus is subtly pointing out that there are plenty of witnesses to be found who could testify and answer these questions. Then Jesus reveals the corrupt illegitimacy of the entire scene by asking Annas, "Why question me?" Jewish law, as recorded in Deuteronomy, required that all charges be supported by credible witnesses and the accused could not incriminate himself without evidence from others. Jesus' simple question reveals that the guilty party was not he who was bound and accused; no, the guilty parties were the accusers themselves.

The message was not lost on the room. In fact, it elicited a visceral response.

When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, asking sharply, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

To strike a man whose hands are bound is a cowardly act. Though Jesus could have retaliated with all the power of heaven, he remained calm, composed, and blameless.

In her devotional, Yana Conner writes, "When the high priest's official slapped Him,

Jesus didn't take back his breath from his lungs. He let him live. [Jesus] understood the assignment wasn't to flex His identity, but instead to ready His human body to be rendered breathless on the cross." Jesus' response does more than offer a legal defense to the officials questioning him. It reveals to us again his divine authority, his perfect obedience, his unwavering love, his willingness to stand in condemnation for his followers. It reveals that he is the true Passover Lamb without blemish, the perfect sacrifice.

We've looked at the garden and Annas' house. Just one setting remains: the courtyard.

Contrast Jesus' bold, transparent witness inside the house to Peter's fearful, dishonest testimony in the courtyard. This is the same Peter who boastfully claimed, "I will lay down my life for you" in John 13, to which Jesus replied: "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times." And just as Jesus foretold, Peter is asked three times in the high priest's courtyard if he is a disciple of Jesus: first from a servant girl, then the officers around the fire, and finally from the high priest's servant, who was in the garden earlier. Each time, he denies their accusations. Peter, full of zeal and self-confidence, is the picture of how weak and insufficient human strength and resolve turn out to be. When this rugged fisherman is questioned by a lowly servant girl, Peter's strength fails him and he crumbles. With his identity called into question, he reveals that in his own strength he possessed no authority or control, he was unable to obey, and his love and commitment were conditional.

But here's the good news: Jesus never expected Peter—or us—to succeed in our own strength. Jesus was not surprised when Peter denied him. Was he hurt and upset? He must have been. Perhaps the words of Psalm 88 were close to Jesus' heart in that moment: "my beloved and my friend...shun[s] me...[the] darkness has become my only companion." Yet, still, Jesus' mind was set on things above, and it was his love for Peter and you and me that propelled him forward to the Cross, where he experienced utter darkness, the dregs of God's wrath, and cried out, "My God, my God, why have *YOU* forsaken me?"

What can we learn from Peter, who has had quite a night, from the garden ("human zeal without divine understanding") to the courtyard (repeatedly disavowing his relationship with Jesus)? How often are we like Peter? We make commitments to trust God.

Maybe we are moved by the sermon on Sunday, or our women's Bible study lessons, and we come away making bold resolutions of how we are going to serve, obey, or trust God better. I am going to read my Bible and pray every day, first thing. I am going to stop complaining. I am going to... "fill in the blank." I try to handle everything on my own, only to find myself discouraged, falling back into sinful patterns and feeling like a failure. My strength, my resolve, will always fail when I am not fully resting in my Savior who never fails—when my heart moves not toward things above, but to the perplexities of life in this fallen world.

John 18:1-27 presents a striking contrast between Jesus and all others in the passage. In the garden, the soldiers and temple officials act with authority, but they fall before the great I AM who alone possesses all authority over heaven and earth. In Annas' house, two High Priests who are motivated by their own selfish ambition fail to see that the true

High Priest stands before them in humble obedience to the Father. And, in the courtyard, Peter's strength and resolve fail him while Jesus, the final Passover Lamb, demonstrates unconditional love for his children.

As we close, let us consider: Are we trusting in our own strength, or are we resting in the perfect obedience of Christ? Are we looking to earthly authorities to mediate for us, or are we fully trusting in Jesus, our true Mediator? "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."