

“John: The Arrest”

Isaiah 48:12-19 • John 18:1-14

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We are starting to get close to the end of our study of the Gospel of John and this morning we come to another of the major turning points in this book. The first twelve chapters are sometimes called the “book of signs,” because they are all about Jesus’ public ministry. In those chapters John tells us about many of the things Jesus did and said during his three years of ministry. Of course there’s no way to fit everything Jesus did. But John chooses those things that most clearly accomplish his purpose of showing us who Jesus is.

In Chapter 20 he writes, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” That’s why John tells us about Jesus turning water into wine and knowing what people are thinking. That’s why he tells us about Jesus healing a lame man and a man born blind. And it’s why Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. All of those are meant to help us know that Jesus really is God in person.

If Chapters 1-12 tell us about Jesus’ public ministry, chapters 13-17, which we finished last week, are all about Jesus’ private ministry with his disciples. These five chapters, along with chapter 18 that we’re studying today, take place on the last night of Jesus’ life. They begin in the upper room where they are celebrating the Passover meal together. Jesus demonstrates that love is sacrificial by washing their feet. He tells them to serve others the same way. He spends the rest of the evening giving them his final teaching.

A few weeks ago we heard probably the greatest promise from God when Jesus said, “I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come and take you there myself so that where I am you may be also.” He makes that promise to everyone who believes in him. Jesus also

explains to his disciples that when he returns to heaven that he will send the Holy Spirit to be with his followers. We now have direct access to God.

So now we come to the third major section in John’s gospel. This section, chapters 18 and 19, is about Jesus’ arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial. After dinner Jesus and his disciples went out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives on the East side of the city. Jesus had paused where they could see the Temple with its carved grape vine over the massive doors. He told them that he was the vine and they are the branches. He promised that as long as we stay connected to him we will bear fruit, meaning we will experience God working in our life.

Verse 18 begins, “When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden. The first thing you need to know is that John is not just setting the scene for us. This is very symbolic. The mention of a garden is intended to remind us of the Garden of Eden. Kent Hughes explains that “The first Adam began life in a garden. Christ, the second Adam, came at the end of his life to a garden. In Eden Adam sinned. In Gethsemane the Savior overcame sin. In Eden Adam fell. In Gethsemane Jesus conquered. In Eden Adam hid himself. In Gethsemane our Lord boldly presented himself.”

The “brook Kidron” is also significant. Not only is it an important place in a number of Old Testament stories, but it has a symbolic meaning here as well. When you and I think of a brook we usually think of a flowing stream. This was actually more like an arroyo, a dry stream bed that flowed during the rainy season. They could simply walk across it. But the reason it’s important is that there was a drain from the altar in the Temple that carried away the blood from the sacrifices. This drain emptied into the brook Kidron. Scholars tell us that during Passover, over two hundred

thousand lambs were sacrificed. There was so much blood that it had to be rinsed with fresh water. The brook Kidron would have been stained with the blood of the sacrifices. Jesus was coming to this place as the perfect sacrificial lamb to save his people from sin once for all. His blood would accomplish what the blood of lambs only pointed to.

Verse 3 says, "Now Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons." This was no small crowd. The Greek says he brought a Cohort of soldiers, which would have been somewhere around 600 Roman soldiers in full battle gear with torches and swords. It seems obvious that they were expecting trouble. They were probably thinking that it would take a massive manhunt to find Jesus and his followers. They may have even expected a riot from all the people who were trying to make Jesus the king.

But instead of hiding, Jesus goes to the place where he knows Judas will bring them and he plainly presents himself to the authorities. Verse 4 is critically important. "Then Jesus, *knowing all that would happen to him*, came forward and said to the, 'Whom do you seek?'" Many people, when they get to this point in the story see it similar to a Greek tragedy, a play that culminates in the downfall of the hero. That's not at all what we have here. Instead, Jesus is in control the entire time. Back in John 10 Jesus said, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 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."

I find this very comforting. When things are going terribly, when it seems that God is nowhere to be found, you and I can trust that God is in control. He uses everything that he allows to happen to us for our own good. As Romans 8:28 says, "we know that for those who love God all things work together for

good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Jesus asks the soldiers, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus says, "I am he." Actually, this is another place where our English translation doesn't capture the drama. What Jesus actually says is "I AM." He claims the divine name of God. This is the same name that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. When Jesus says, "I AM," the soldiers draw back and fall to the ground. These are battle-trained soldiers. They are not Jewish. They don't know anything about Jesus. Yet when Jesus speaks they cannot help but fall to the ground. Philippians 2 tells us, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Six hundred heavily armed soldiers are no match for God.

Jesus asks a second time who they are looking for and they say again, "Jesus of Nazareth." This time Jesus says, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." Jesus is the one being arrested and yet he shows us that he is in control of the whole situation. As Kent Hughes put it, "In a very real sense the cohort did not arrest Jesus—he arrested them! His words were a gracious warning that they were in way over their heads."

The soldiers had intended to arrest the entire group. But Jesus protects his followers. He still protects his followers. When you put your trust in Christ he promises to protect you for all eternity. That doesn't mean that bad things won't happen to you. Jesus clearly said, "In this world you will have trouble." But he also said, "I have overcome the world." Jesus promises that all of his own will make it safely to heaven and eternity with him. Knowing that can help us through whatever difficulty we encounter in life. Whatever you are facing today, know that Jesus has experienced it. He has experienced pain and suffering and rejection and ultimately death. He has also experienced the punishment for your sin and

my sin so that we don't have to. He drank the "cup of wrath" that the Father gave him, the cup that each of us deserved. In return, "if we look to Jesus for salvation, bringing our sins to the cross, we will enjoy the cup of blessing forever."

Amen.