

Bible Study on John 18:1-18 – The Arrest and Denial

For seventeen chapters, John has been building toward this moment. We have watched Jesus perform miracles, heard Him make the great "I am" declarations, and sat with Him in the Upper Room as He washed feet, warned of what was coming, promised the Holy Spirit, and prayed the most intimate prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. And then He stood up, walked out into the night, crossed the Kidron Valley, and entered a garden. The arrest of Jesus in John 18 is not something that happens to Him. It is something He walks into deliberately, on His own terms, for purposes the arresting soldiers could not begin to comprehend. John's account of the events in chapter 18 differs in several notable ways from the Synoptic Gospels. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus more on Jesus' suffering and rejection, John emphasizes His sovereignty and deliberate control throughout the arrest and trials.

What makes this passage so interesting is that John is telling two stories at the same time. The first is the story of Jesus. He steps forward to meet His captors, speaks the divine name, watches soldiers fall back, protects His disciples in His moment of greatest danger, and embraces the cup the Father gave Him. Through every moment of it, He is the most composed, the most authoritative, and the most in control person in the scene. The second is the story of Peter, who follows with genuine courage, talks his way into the courtyard, and then denies Jesus to a servant girl. Where Jesus speaks the divine "I am" boldly under armed pressure, Peter says "I am not" under the pressure of a simple question. John places these two responses side by side so we cannot miss the contrast, and so we cannot avoid asking which one looks more like us.

Now as Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley, we are watching that promise reach its appointed hour. The One being arrested is the One in control of the arrest. And that truth is not just historical. It is the anchor for every moment in our own lives when it all seems overwhelming and God seems silent.

John 18:1-3

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So 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.

We now see a natural segway after Jesus' prayer, to 18:1, but this is probably not just speaking about what Jesus prayed in the previous chapter, it is more likely including everything Jesus has said from chapter 13 until now.

The brook Kidron is referencing the Kidron Valley, which was east of Jerusalem, it is the same brook that David crosses when he runs from Absalom.

The garden, here is speaking of the Garden of Gethsemane, but John does not reference it by name.

Who leads the arresting party? Why is this detail significant?

What is ironic is that those who were in the darkness came to arrest the “Light of the World” bringing weapons against a peaceful Jesus. It is possible they thought that a violent crowd may be stirred up upon the arrest. It is also clear that the Roman soldiers and temple guards were both present, so there was a collaboration for his arrest.

John 18:4-9

⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵ They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.”

What does Jesus do in verse 4 and what does it tell us about Him?

What does this detail show about the events about to occur?

Jesus uses in the Greek, ego eimi (ἐγώ εἰμι), meaning “I am”. This isn’t just an answer to who they are seeking. Imagine what might be going through their minds as the disciples hear this.

Why does John repeat the words, “I am he”?

We don’t know exactly why the men who came to arrest Jesus drew back and fell to the ground after He said, ‘I am.’ Some scholars believe it was the presence of God, but we have to question why the others didn’t fall. Other scholars believe that Jesus speaks the name YHWH and that the audience fell due to reverence due to the holy name of God. We don’t know exactly how it happened, but what we do know is that John records that they did fall to the ground and that Jesus had the power and ability to do as He pleased.

What does this scene represent about Judas’ heart?

John 18:10-11

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

What significance does the mention of the servant's name have?

The sword pictured here is not one used for battle, but rather something like a dagger used for personal protection.

John's Gospel is the only one to name Peter, why do you think this is?

We see Jesus commanding Peter that his method of action is not correct. Again, we come back to the whole theme of John reinforcing that Jesus was in total control and He would voluntarily go to the cross.

Something we should be reminded of is that although we teach something, not everyone will properly understand it. We need to show grace and love as we continue to teach spiritual truths.

What do you think Jesus means by speaking of the cup in verse 11?

The cup, linked to the OT carries this enormous theological weight, because it symbolizes the wrath of God poured out in judgment. When we remember the death of Christ, we must remember that the wrath we should receive for sin is put upon Him.

What can we say about the love that we see in Jesus' voluntary death?

John 18:12-14

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Whom do they take Jesus to after his arrest? Why might this detail be important?

Annas served as high priest from approximately 6 - 15AD. Although, his son-in-law Caiaphas was serving as the high priest, many people still viewed him as the one in control and had tremendous influence. Five of Annas' sons served in addition to the Caiaphas as the high priest after Annas.

Jesus' trial was illegal in three ways: 1) Jewish law stated that capital cases could not be tried at night. 2) They could not be concluded on the same day they began and required two to three witnesses to agree. 3) Could not take place during a feast.

John 18:15-18

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high

priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

We see in verse 15 that John, who is believed to be “another disciple” had some sort of relationship with Annas and was able to enter into the courtyard. And through this relationship, he gets Peter in as well. Many scholars believe that this “other disciple” is the same as the “beloved disciple”, which we know to be John.

In first century Jerusalem, the residence of the high priests were typically large compounds, which contained an outer gate, a courtyard and inner rooms.

The focus here is the interaction with a lowly servant girl and Peter. If we conclude that “another disciple” is referring to John, how might we interpret the question she asks Peter?

This is no surprise to us that Peter denies Jesus, but what needs to be mentioned is that the way John records Peter’s response. Jesus replied, “I am” and Peter replied “I am not.” Jesus proclaims His identity in front of many, while Peter can’t even proclaim association to Jesus in front of the servant, who is also a female.

The charcoal fire mentioned by John is an important detail that helps us to understand that the courtyard was most likely a private courtyard and also the servant girl at the door. If it was in the temple, it wouldn’t have been a female and they would have no business being there at night.