

Jesus Arrested, Denied, Tried

John 18:1-19:16

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A local funeral director calls me occasionally to make arrangements—sometimes for church members and sometimes for people from out of town or who have no pastor. Often he'll say, "Now, they don't want a Bible study." He means to keep the service to the point and not drag it out. Recently, I was doing a service at the chapel. When I got there, I told the director that I had my Bible study ready. He said, "You gonna cover Genesis to Maps?"

I tell you that to say that today's message is more Bible study than typical sermon. I want us to walk through this section of John's Gospel. As we do, I'll point out some highlights and give some commentary.

Each of the four Gospels spends more time on the last days and hours of Jesus' life than any other part. These are the largest sections of the Gospels. Sometimes it's good just to hear the story and enter into it.

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

² Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

⁴ Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

⁵ "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) ⁶ When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

⁷ Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go." ⁹ This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

Here we see Jesus' identity and authority. The mention of a garden may recall Genesis. John's Gospel opens with an echo of Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word...." Now the garden may reflect the original garden. Where Adam and Eve rebelled and fell, Jesus stands and fulfills God's purpose.

Jesus knows what's going on and what's going to happen. In John, Jesus is in charge. He said earlier, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (10:18). We see this through John's telling of Jesus' passion.

Jesus steps forward, protecting his disciples and facing those who've come to arrest him. He asks, "Who are you looking for?" They reply, "Jesus of Nazareth." He answers, "I am." Now, that could mean just I'm the one or I am he. But remember God's revelation to Moses at the burning bush: "I Am Who I Am." Recall the "I Am" statements of Jesus throughout this Gospel: I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth and the life, before Abraham was, I Am.

And the group that came to arrest Jesus felt the power of God's name and God's presence. When Jesus said, "I am," they fell to the ground.

Jesus protects the disciples. He says to let them go. This was to fulfill the words he had spoken. Jesus' words are fulfilling like the word of God is. This is another indication that Jesus is God in the flesh, with us.

¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

¹¹ Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

¹² Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him ¹³ and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest

that year.¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jewish leaders that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Simon Peter had made bold promises to stay with Jesus and even die for him. Maybe that's what he's trying to do here. He may not have been much of a swordsman, but he tries. Malchus ducks and Peter's sword catches his ear, cutting it off.

John is the only Gospel writer who tells us that Peter is the disciple swinging the sword. And John identifies the man whose ear is cut off: Malchus, a servant of the high priest. He may have had some influence. Luke tells us that Jesus healed Malchus' ear.

Years ago, I heard a sermon about Malchus. Imagine Malchus and the others going back to Caiaphas the high priest to report on the arrest of Jesus.

Caiaphas asks, "How did it go?"

"Fine. We got him."

"Did you have any problems?"

"Well, Malchus had some trouble."

"What happened?"

"One of the followers of that man you sent us to arrest started swinging a sword and cut off my ear."

"But you've got both your ears now!"

"That's the problem! That man you sent us to arrest healed my ear." Malchus may have been wondering, "Do you think we arrested the right man?"

Now think about this—every day after the crucifixion when Caiaphas saw his servants, he saw Malchus and he saw that right ear and was reminded of Jesus. That healed ear was an unexpected and inescapable witness.

Dennis Kinlaw says that in every person's life, somewhere, there is a "Malchus' ear." Somewhere in your life there are obvious and inescapable reminders of God. It's very difficult to escape the witness of God. If we never yield to Christ we'll have to face that witness in the last judgment.

This story is well-told. The action goes back and forth. The scenes alternate between Peter outside and Jesus in the high priest's house. Then the scene shifts to Jesus and Pontius Pilate.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, ¹⁶ but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

¹⁷ "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter.

He replied, "I am not."

¹⁸ It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a [charcoal] fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

We don't know who the other disciple was.

Peter, who had made bold and brash promises to be loyal to Jesus, denies that he's a disciple of Jesus. Earlier, some of the religious authorities had said they were not disciples of Jesus (9:28-29). Peter sides with Jesus' enemies here.

⁹ Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

²⁰ "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

²² When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded.

²³ "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

While Peter is failing, Jesus remains steadfast. Annas had been high priest and still had a lot of influence in the priestly family. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, is the current high priest. It's questionable whether holding this hearing and trial the way they did was legal. They're breaking their own laws and regulations in their eagerness to get rid of Jesus.

²⁵ Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not."

²⁶ One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

How do we deny Jesus? Sometimes by action and word. Most of us, though, wouldn't say outright that we're not his followers. Sometime we deny him by our silence.

There's a great scene in the last chapter of John. After Jesus' resurrection, some of the disciples are in Galilee and have gone fishing. They didn't catch anything all night. Then they see a stranger on the shore who calls out to them, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat." They do, and they catch a huge number of fish. The beloved disciple, likely John, says, "It's the Lord!" When Peter hears this, he dives in and swims to shore. There he stands in front of Jesus. What can he say? He denied his Lord. Jesus is cooking breakfast for them over a *charcoal fire*. The only other time that word is used is in chapter 18. Peter stood by a charcoal fire warming himself. Jesus is recreating the scene of Peter's denials and giving Peter a chance to reaffirm his love for Jesus.

That jumps ahead in the story, but it's worth looking at. We can come back from denial and failure. Jesus wants to forgive and restore us.

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they

wanted to be able to eat the Passover. *Notice the hypocrisy here. They violated their own rules to try and sentence Jesus during the night. Now they're concerned about not becoming ritually unclean by entering a Gentile house.* ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What

charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death he was going to die. *Crucifixion was a Roman method of capital punishment for slaves, rebels and others of low standing. Jesus had said he would be "lifted up," that is, on the cross.*

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not [from] this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

Remember that Jesus is full of grace and truth and that grace and truth come through him (1:14, 17). He said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (8:32) and "I am the way, the truth and the life" (14:6). The truth is standing in front of Pilate and he doesn't realize it.

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against

him.³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

We wonder if Pilate was sincerely asking what truth is or if he was cynically asking, "What's truth got to do with it?" But he tries to get Jesus released. Still he mocks Jesus and the religious leaders. All through this story, people think they're being ironic or sarcastic, mocking Jesus as "King of the Jews." But the real irony is that what they intended as mockery is the truth. He really is the King of the Jews.

Jesus died in Barabbas' place. That's a picture of what he did for each of us.

19 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged.² The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe³ and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they slapped him in the face.

⁴ Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him."⁵ When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

The mockery and violence against Jesus increase.

"Behold the man!" Jesus is God in the flesh. He is truly human. He's the representative human.

⁶ As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

⁷ The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, ⁹ and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Romans were superstitious and believed in many different gods. The emperor was sometimes called "the son of god." No wonder Pilate became more fearful.

¹² From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

¹³ When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). ¹⁴ It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

"Friend of Caesar" was a title that someone like Pilate would aspire to—in order to get promoted and possibly move back to Rome.

Each of the Gospels associates Jesus' death with Passover. That was the Jewish festival that commemorated God's delivering them from slavery in Egypt. The lamb was slaughtered and its blood put on the doorposts. Then the angel of death passed over them, judgment passed over them and they were spared. Then they ate the lamb as they were dressed and ready to travel. The first three Gospels tie Passover in with the last supper more. John emphasizes that Jesus is the Passover Lamb who gives his life to deliver us from sin and death.

Pilate says, "Behold your king!" Jesus was acclaimed as Lamb of God by John the Baptist. Now he's acclaimed as the human and the king by Pilate.

¹⁵ But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"
"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

¹⁶ Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

How could they say they had no king but Caesar? What about the LORD? All through their Scriptures, the LORD is their king.

We need to enter these stories and walk around in them. Who do we identify with? Are we more like Peter or Judas or one of the other disciples? Are we like the religious leaders or Pilate? Wherever we are, we need to see Jesus who is the center of it all. We need to see him and know him for who he is.