

Jesus Arrests and Protects

John 18:1-14

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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. 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."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?"

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. – John 18:1-14, ESV

Introduction: No Tragic Victim - The Work of a Priest.

Recently, more atheists have been making the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth was not a historical figure at all but was invented by the early church seeking to advance its influence in the world. In the online world, this theory seems to be gaining some traction among vocal atheists.

The reason for the attraction of this theory for atheists is not hard to figure out: If you grant that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure, a first century Jewish rabbi and Messianic figure who was crucified by the Romans outside Jerusalem, then beginning with these few basic historical facts, the historical and rational case for the resurrection of Jesus is so strong as to be irrefutable. The empty tomb, the number of eye-witnesses, the strength and consistency of their testimony and the irrationality of any alternate theories like the swoon theory or the wrong tomb theory all combine to make the resurrection of Jesus the most plausible explanation that fits the facts of history. But if Jesus was resurrected from the dead, then Christianity is true and God is real, and atheists don't want that to be true. What's the solution? Deny that Jesus existed at all. The church made the whole thing up. Never mind the fact that now you have to explain where such a thing as "the church" even came from if Jesus of Nazareth never lived!

If you take a minute to really think about it, this idea is absurd on so many levels. The most famous and most admired man in the history of the world never existed? Sure! One obvious counter-argument to this absurd claim is the most famous symbol of Christianity itself: the cross. Many scholars have observed that the Gospels read like passion narratives with long introductions. That is, the Gospels focus the lion's share of their time and attention on the last week of Jesus' life, leading up to the cross. In John's Gospel, we come to Passion Week and the final days of Jesus' earthly life in chapter 12. So, almost half of the Gospel is devoted to this final week. In

fact, we come to the final night in chapter 13, so the final 24 hours of Jesus before the cross gets intense focus. Why?

Think about it: You're spreading the good news of Jesus in the ancient Roman world. What are people most going to question or object to? You say the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews has come, and that He is, in fact, the Savior of the World. Yet you also say that He was crucified publicly in humiliation by the Romans under Pontius Pilate. You want people to believe in a crucified Messiah? That's absurd! But wait, you say, he rose again from the dead! Okay, so where is He? Well, He went back to heaven, back to His Father.

Really, if you're going to make up a Messianic figure to promote, why would you say He had been crucified? Why complicate matters with a bloody and shameful cross? Why have your make-believe hero betrayed, arrested condemned and crucified? That's not the kind of Messiah men make up! When Peter first heard Jesus speak of dying on a cross and rising again, he reacted with horror, "Never, Lord!"

The Gospels were written largely to explain to early audiences why Jesus had to die and rise again. One question that needed to be answered was this: How could a man who could calm storms with a word, feed 5,000, give sight to the blind, and even raise the dead get arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and killed by a conspiracy of Roman and Jewish leaders? Wouldn't He have seen it coming? Couldn't He have stopped it? How could the King of kings and Lord of glory be the victim of a cruel act of injustice?

In John's Gospel, one truth shines through very clearly: Jesus is no helpless victim of injustice. He is not caught off guard, surprised by betrayal, and trapped by His enemies. No, He is in full command and control!

Far from being a helpless victim, Jesus is here seen doing the work of a priest, a prophet, and a king. Specifically, the order of events in chapters 13-18 show Jesus doing the work of a priest. What did priests in the Temple do? They taught God's law, and then they prayed for the people, and then they went to the altar and offered up the sacrifice for the people. This is what Jesus is doing here: He has taught the truth, then He has prayed His High-priestly prayer for the people, and now He is offering up the sacrifice, Himself!

As He offers Himself, we see Jesus do two things in this scene: With the full authority of a prophet and king, Jesus arrests those who come to arrest Him, and then with the intercession of a caring mediator-priest, He protects His own from harm, by interceding for them.

I. Jesus Arrests, vv. 1-6

A. Jesus Heads Out

The first thing we see is that Jesus intentionally heads out for the confrontation in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"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."*

John tells us two details here that are not in the other Gospels, and they're important: Jesus and the disciples crossed the brook Kidron, and then they entered a garden.

The brook Kidron is at the bottom of the Kidron Valley, which is the valley between the Temple Mound and the Mount of Olives. It is a winter-brook, a wadi, filled only in the peak of the rainy season, which is the winter in Israel. However, as Jesus and His disciples crossed it, it would likely have been a flowing stream, but not filled with rain or melted snow. At Passover, historians estimate as many as 200,000 lambs were slaughtered in the Temple, and then the blood of those lambs was washed away by the Levites. A drain from the Temple came out of the wall and the blood and water flowed down the slope of the mountain and filled the Kidron Valley, making the brook Kidron run with blood and water. Later, in chapter 19, it will be John's Gospel that gives us this detail: *"one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water."* (v. 34, ESV) All the blood and water from the death of 200,000 lambs could not accomplish what the precious blood of the lamb of God alone could accomplish!

While Matthew and Mark both tell us the name of the place where Jesus goes is Gethsemane, John tells us it is a garden. John then adds, *"Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples."* The garden would have likely been private property, a walled enclosure. The name Gethsemane means "olive press," so this was likely an olive grove of trees with an oil press in it. Today, Gethsemane is a walled olive orchard, and the oldest olive trees in Gethsemane are over 900 years old, making them among the oldest olive trees in the world. We can see three significant things in this detail:

1. Jesus intentionally chose to go to the place where Judas could find Him. He wasn't hiding.
2. Jesus goes to a Garden to do the work that would undo the curse that came upon the world in another Garden. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned against God and hid from Him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus offered Himself to God and stepped forward to be arrested, unashamed to offer Himself for the sin of His people.
3. As olives were crushed and pressed in this place to bring forth their benefits from within, so Jesus was crushed and pressed in this place by the agony of the coming curse of the cross, willing to be further crushed by the wrath of God in our place as our substitute sacrifice, that in His crushing we might receive life.

B. Jesus Comes Forward

After Jesus goes forward to the Garden, He steps forward in the Garden, willingly meeting the men who come to arrest Him: *"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. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"*

John doesn't tell us about Christ's agonizing prayer in the Garden nor about Judas' identifying kiss. The other three Gospels have already been written and probably in wide circulation for some years before John writes His Gospel. He doesn't repeat many of the details from the other Gospels, assuming his audience already knows them. Instead, he's filling in other details.

John tells us that Judas was able to procure a band of soldiers, probably a cohort of Roman soldiers, as that's the word John uses, along with the Temple guard officers. Estimates are that this Roman cohort, along with the Temple guard, could have numbered between 500 and 1,000 armed men. They are carrying weapons, probably both swords and cudgels, ready for a fight. They also carry torches, even though it is a full moon (Passover

always falls on a full moon) and they would not have needed them unless they were expecting to have to search the trees and the hillside for Jesus. These details show these men were expecting to have to search for Jesus, who would run and hide, and then fight to capture Him.

None of this happens. Instead, Jesus steps forward willingly, not because He doesn't know why they're there, but explicitly because He does know why they're there.

C. Jesus Identifies Himself

Jesus steps forward and He's the first one to speak, to question the soldiers: Whom do you seek? *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.*

With two words, "I AM," Jesus makes it clear that, while this group of professional soldiers did not need either their torches or their weapons, they were useless if Jesus had, in fact, decided not to go peacefully with them.

While the ESV says, "I am he," Jesus says simply and powerfully, "I am." This is the last time Jesus identifies Himself as "I am" in John's Gospel. Seven times, He has said "I am" followed by an identifier –

1. *I am the bread of life, 6:35, 48, 51*
2. *I am the light of the world, 8:12; 9:5*
3. *I am the door of the sheep, 10:7, 9*
4. *I am the good shepherd, 10:11, 14*
5. *I am the resurrection and the life, 11:25*
6. *I am the way, the truth, and the life, 14:6*
7. *I am the true vine, 15:1*

But on three separate occasions, He speaks "I am" as an absolute with no following identifier:

1. In chapter 6, when He walked on the water in the storm to the disciples, who were struggling in the boat, He said, *"I am. Do not be afraid."*
2. In chapter 8, in His confrontation with the Jewish leaders in the Temple at the Feast of Tabernacles, He three times identifies Himself as "I am" –
 - a. *V. 24 "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins."*
 - b. *V. 28 So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.*
 - c. *V. 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*

The third of these was so clear that the Jewish leadership picked up stones to kill Jesus for blasphemy, but He slipped away from them, for His hour had not yet come.

3. Now, here in chapter 18, He identifies Himself to the arresting soldiers as, "I AM." And we know He means so much more than "I am Jesus of Nazareth," because these tough, trained, ready soldiers are knocked to the ground by the power of His word of revelation!

The soldiers had come to arrest Jesus, but He instead arrests them with the power of His person and His word.

2. Jesus Protects, vv. 7-14

What amazes me is that these soldiers get up off the ground, recover their senses, and then they proceed to arrest Jesus anyway. Six months earlier, in chapter 7, when it was just the Temple guard, the Levites, they were so spellbound by Jesus' teaching that they couldn't arrest him. They came back and reported to the chief priests and the Pharisees, "*No one ever spoke like this man!*" Perhaps this is why Judas brought Roman soldiers along this time. It shows the hardness of their hearts and also the clear purposes of God.

A. Jesus Clarifies

When they get back on their feet, it's Jesus again who speaks and questions them: *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."*

Jesus says the same exact thing that He said the first time, but He chooses this time not to accompany His word with the demonstration of power, which is always His choice. By the fact that their response is exactly the same both times to Jesus' question – "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus the Nazarene" – it's evident that this is the name given them on their arrest warrant. It's most likely the Roman commander who answers this question. The Roman garrison and their commander would have been in Jerusalem only temporarily, for the Passover festival, being normally stationed at Caesarea on the coast. They likely didn't know who Jesus was (thus the fact that Judas thought he needed to identify Him with a kiss), and Jesus clarifies a second time that it is His name and His name alone on the arrest warrant.

B. Jesus Guards & Keeps His Own

Immediately after Jesus says, "I told you that I am he," He says, "*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."*

It's obvious that these soldiers were going to take anyone into custody who had anything to do with Jesus, whether they were named in the arrest warrant or not. The most obvious practical purpose for Jesus speaking "I AM" with such authority and knocking them to the ground with His word was not to prevent His own arrest, but to establish His own power and authority, so that when He tells these soldiers to let His disciples go, they obey His words and let the disciples get away.

John tells us Jesus does this to fulfill His word, but the word He had spoken about keeping His own and not losing any of them doesn't really mean protecting His disciples from physical harm or persecution. He told them they would be hated and persecuted. In fact, almost all of these 11 disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus would be killed for their testimony. Jesus was promising to never lose them spiritually, that they would be saved and not lost forever. So, how is keeping them from getting arrested here a fulfillment of His promise?

The real danger to the disciples here in the Garden was not to their bodies but to their souls. They weren't ready to be arrested to suffer for Christ yet. If they had been arrested and beaten, they would have abandoned their faith and their Savior and died in unbelief. So Jesus intervenes to keep them from losing their salvation. Can

we really lose our salvation? Yes, absolutely, if Jesus doesn't keep and guard us! Jesus sometimes keeps us by strengthening our faith for the time of trial, and sometimes He keeps us by preventing us from entering a trial that would prove too strong for our faith to hold. Jesus has promised that He will keep us, and He does!

C. Jesus Corrects & Heals

What Peter does next shows how much he needed Jesus' protection –

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?"

Nicknames can be wonderful or terrible things. In sports, it used to be a terrible thing to be called a goat; it meant you choked under pressure and made your team lose. Now, the GOAT is the Greatest of All Time. In English history, Alfred the Great united the English people in the late 800's. But by the year 1000, the king of England was Ethelred the Unready. How would you like to be remembered for 1,000 years as "the Unready"? Peter shows how unready he was this night by two foolish actions – striking Malchus and then later denying Jesus three times.

Peter had earlier boldly proclaimed how ready he was! In Luke 22:33, *Peter said to [Jesus], "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."* Now he wants to show how ready he is by striking the first blow for Jesus. But in his eagerness to show how ready he is, Peter only shows how unready he is. He needs to be corrected by Jesus.

Jesus is ready, ready to drink the cup of God's wrath for us, ready to take Peter's place on the cross, ready to secure eternal salvation for all of His people. John doesn't tell us what Jesus does for Malchus, but we know His final miracle before the cross is the heal Malchus' ear. This makes it even more stunning that the soldiers continue with the arrest of Jesus – not only after the power of "I AM" but also the power of healing on full display before them!

D. Jesus Submits to the Priests

Jesus then submits Himself to be arrested and taken away, and the place He is taken first is into the custody of the High Priests:

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.

If Caiaphas was the high priest that year, why go to Annas' house first? Because the high priesthood was a family business. Rome had decreed that no one could serve as high priest for more than a year, lest someone rise to challenge the authority of the Romans. So, Annas the patriarch made sure the members of his family could take turns being high priest.

Jesus turned Himself over to the custody of the high priests because, while the Romans would be the ones to actually crucify Him, it is the high priests who offer up sacrifices on behalf of the whole people, and Jesus made sure it was the high priests who offered Him up to the Romans.

Conclusion: The Lord of the Details Keeps His Own

I don't know about you, but I know I entered my studies this week unprepared for the level of detail and rich wonderful truth contained in every word of this passage. I knew Jesus' proclamation of "I AM" was of powerful and central importance, but this passage blew me away with the importance of every detail: From the Kidron to the garden, from the torches and weapons to the precise words and the actions of everyone involved, everything is important.

This was an important reminder to me: Every detail matters to God, and God is at work in every detail. He is the Lord of the details. Nothing slips by Him. And what is the Lord of the details doing in this richly detailed passage? He is saving and keeping His own! And that is exactly what he is doing today in all the details of our lives. He is actively at work, saving and keeping His own. May He strengthen our faith so we can continue to trust Him in all the details, big and small!