

# They Arrested God!

John 18:1-12

**Call:** Isa 43:1-3a (NLT)

**Scripture:** John 10:11-18 (ESV)

## I. Introduction

Good morning! My name is Shawn Reese. I'm one of the pastors here at PBCC. And, it's great to be with you this morning, as we enter back into the Gospel of John, a study I have entitled *Come and See*. We've been working our way through John since April of 2020. If you weren't here at that time, we began this study just as everything shut down for the pandemic. And, I preached those first few weeks in my living room! And, now, 3.5 years later, we are finally nearing the end of the Gospel.

### A. Review

Let's review a bit of where we've been. The Gospel of John is split into two halves. The first half, chapters 1-11, is called the Book of Signs. In these chapters, John invites us to *come and see* a Jesus who performs remarkable deeds, what John calls signs. For John, signs are miracles which point beyond the miracle to an underlying spiritual truth. There were six of these signs, and there's one more to come. So, we're waiting for one more final, climactic sign.

In the book of signs, John also invited us to *come and see* a Jesus who makes extraordinary claims about himself. It was in chapter seven where some policemen were sent to arrest Jesus, but they come back without him. And, why? Because in their words, "*No one every spoke like this man!*" (John 7:46). Indeed no one ever has, and no one ever will! Jesus' claims about himself describe his identity as the great I am who makes the living God known.

That was all in the first half of the Gospel. The second half of the Gospel, chapters 12-21, is called the Book of Glory. It is in these chapters where we see the ultimate glory of Jesus. It is here where Jesus washes the disciple's feet, where he teaches his disciples in the upper room discourse, where he prays for his disciples and where the climax of the Gospel is, the passion and resurrection narratives.

### B. Preparation for Chapter 18

Today, we begin in chapter 18. Last spring, if you remember, we explored Jesus' prayer in John 17. That dense prayer, spoken on the Thursday night of Holy Week, prepared us for the passion narrative. It is in this prayer where Jesus prays, "*Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...*" (John 17:1). Now is the time for glory. For John, glory means the revelation of the nature and character of someone. It means the revelation of what someone is really like. This fall, we will see the supreme revelation of what the living God is really like. We will behold his glory.

So, we begin today with the first twelve verses in chapter 18. These verses introduce the passion narrative, but also, they'll provide a lens for reading the rest of the narrative. So, what I

want to do this morning is walk through these verses, making a few comments along the way. And, at the end, I'll share four key points that I think John wants us to know so we can understand the rest of the Passion correctly.

So, I invite you into our text this morning, John 18, beginning in verse 1.

## **II. The Context (1-3)**

*1 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. (ESV)*

### **A. Introduction**

Even though John doesn't record the kiss of Judas, I picked this painting by Giotto, because I think it captures well the chaos that John describes in these verses.

So, it's Thursday night or early Friday morning and, according to John, Jesus has just finished praying for his disciples. He then goes forward with his disciples across the Kidron valley into an unnamed garden.

### **B. The Garden**

Surprisingly, John is the only Gospel that mentions Jesus' arrest in a "garden." John will also mention that Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection both happen in gardens as well. So, John frames his entire passion/resurrection narrative with a garden theme, which I think he does on purpose to evoke Genesis. Remember, John began his Gospel evoking Genesis. *"In the beginning ... was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God"* (John 1:1).

Here, John returns us again to Genesis, this time to a garden. In the beginning, the whole human race began in a garden (Gen 2:8-16). And, in that first garden of Eden, the first Adam failed because he went his own way in disobedience. He failed because he tried to be his own god. The first Adam failed because he tried to live independent of God. In that first garden, life brought about death because of the failure of the first Adam.

And, now, after the first verse of chapter 18, we enter another garden, and the future of humanity hangs in the balance again. Will Jesus follow the first Adam and go his own way, or will he obey his Father? Will he be about his own will or will he be about his Father's will? This is the question John is posing for us as we begin these chapters.

### **C. Judas**

We are then introduced to Judas. Ever since Judas' first appearance in this Gospel, John has labeled him the betrayer. So, the reader knows what's coming. Just a few hours ago, if you remember, after Jesus had washed Judas' feet and offered him bread at the last supper, Judas

alone left the upper room to make arrangements for the betrayal, and John says, *“it was night”* (John 13:30). That was love’s last appeal for Judas.

And, here, Judas returns to the story, later in the night, in a garden, ready to betray God. Like that first garden, an evil one is working behind the scenes.

#### **D. The Groups With Judas**

But Judas is not alone. He arrives on the scene with two groups of people.

- The first group was a cohort of Roman soldiers, which could be as large as 600 men (18:3)! It’s a little bit of an overkill isn’t it?
- The second group was a group of officers from the religious leaders. These were essentially assistants or servants of those leaders. In this Gospel, this group was known as the Temple policemen. In other words, this group probably contained some of the same men who went to arrest Jesus back in chapter 7, and came back without him saying, *“No one ever spoke like this man!”* (John 7:46).

Many scholars see in this mob a representation of the entire world, a representation of all those who organize themselves without God: Gentile Rome, unbelieving Jews and the unfaithful church. So, in this text, Jesus is confronting the world.

#### **E. The Lights and Weapons**

Now also notice what these groups carry: lanterns and torches and weapons. John’s details are very precise: two instruments of light, along with weapons. Throughout this Gospel, John has been consistently returning to the themes of light and darkness. So, here, John seems to contrast this evil group with artificial light, with the one who says, *“I am the light of the world”* (John 8:12). In other words, “fake lights of the world” are marching toward *“the” light of the world*.

So also, the weapons. Is John also contrasting these instruments of darkness, with Jesus, the light. Weapons are designed to kill and destroy while Jesus has come to give life, life to the full.

Verse 4.

### **III. The I AM (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.” (ESV)*

#### **A. Introduction**

Jesus, who knows all that is coming, now goes forward and confronts the mob directly. And, he confronts them with a question, a question he asks twice, as if for emphasis. “Whom do you seek?”

This is actually the first words Jesus speaks in this Gospel. In chapter 1, he asks this question of the first disciples. He will also end this Gospel speaking this question. So, this question is the fundamental question of this Gospel. Whom or what do you seek?

And, as we have walked through this Gospel, we’ve met people seeking all kinds of things: seeking their own glory, seeking to hide from their past, seeking protection, and some seeking to destroy Jesus, as here.

You and I walk through our days seeking all kinds of things too. Indeed, “we’re intentional beings; just about everything we do is for some purpose, for the sake of something we’re seeking. Day in and day out, we chase after all kinds of things” (Croasman, 125). And, who or what we chase after will determine much of our actions each day. This is why how we start the day is so critical. George MacDonald once said that the first task of the day is to “break the shell of self.” How do we break the shell? We “*seek first him, his kingdom and his righteousness*” (Matt 6:33).

So, whom or what are you seeking?

## **B. I AM**

After Jesus confronts the crowd with that question, they answer, “Jesus of Nazareth,” to which Jesus says literally, “*I AM,*” “*Ego eimi*” in the Greek.

And, notice how the mob responds! This mob, over 600 men, fall to the ground. I love Tissot’s painting of this. This weaponized mob representing the greatest army the world had ever seen, was made powerless by two words: *I AM*. Why? Because these words are the same words God uses of himself in the Old Testament, and the mob can’t help but to fall down in the presence of God. This is simply the automatic response when God shows up. Can you see the irony in this? They fall to the ground and then will get up and arrest him.

Now, if you know John, you’ll know this isn’t the first time Jesus has identified himself with these majestic words. There are seven famous I AM sayings with predicates spread throughout the Gospel, such as “I am the bread of life,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the resurrection and the life” and so forth. But, Jesus also, like here, uses the majestic words without a predicate in a few other places in John. Probably the most dramatic time is during the Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 8. In an intense debate with the Jewish authorities, three times he says I AM:

- V 24: “*Unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins.*”
- V 28: “*When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I AM...*”
- V 58: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.*”

No one ever spoke like this man.

Three dramatic times in chapter 8, and three more times here in chapter 18. And the first time sends the mob to the ground. As Augustine said,

“With no other weapon than his own solitary voice uttering the words “I AM,” he knocked down, repelled and rendered helpless that great crowd, even with all their ferocious hatred and terror of arms... What will his power be like when he comes to reign, who had this kind of power when he [had come] to die?” (Bruner, 1030).

This majestic I AM slayed the enemy. Presumably even Judas fell down before Jesus.

### C. The Word Fulfilled

After the scene is repeated in verses 8 and 9, I suppose with the mob sitting on the ground, Jesus instructs them to let his disciples go.

And notice John’s comment in verse 9: *“This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken...”* We read right by that, but this is an extraordinary statement by John. Why? Well, we’ve seen this fulfillment formula throughout John, and we’ll see it more in the coming chapters. But, previously, when this formula was used, the fulfilled words referred to Old Testament Scripture. But, here, *This was to fulfill the word... that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.”* The quote here is something Jesus just said in his prayer of chapter 17. These are not Old Testament words, they are Jesus’ words. And so, what John is showing us is that the words spoken by Jesus, The Word, are now on the same level as Old Testament Scripture.

Verse 10.

## IV. The Cup (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?” (ESV)*

### A. Peter

Oh. Peter. Peter. Peter. He still doesn’t get it does he? Obviously he is not on board with where everything is going, so he draws his sword and cuts off a servant’s ear. Not only was it reckless, but he appears to be a bad aim too!

Only a few hours ago in the upper room, Peter had passionately assured Jesus that he would lay down his life for Jesus. And, Jesus at that time had rebuked him saying that Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crows. So, now, it’s almost as if Peter pulls out his sword with the words, “I’ll show you Jesus that I was serious! I’m gonna lay my life down for you!”

### B. Violence

And Jesus rebukes him again. “Peter put your sword away.” Violence for the sake of Jesus is never the right answer. As one writer says, “Violence only cuts off the ears, physically *and*

*spiritually*, of Jesus' opponents. Violence has never served Jesus' person or cause" (Bruner, 1032). This fall, we're going to follow Jesus walk the path of suffering according to the Father's will. And, if we're going to follow him, this is our path too. The church's mission will go forward not by fighting, but by suffering. Those are difficult words to hear in our culture, in any culture. But, that's the Jesus way.

*"Peter, put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

### **C. The Cup**

The cup. Jesus will reject Peter and the sword for the Father and the cup. That could not have been an easy choice for him. Jesus knows what the cup entails. He knows *"all that would happen to him."* The cup is the cup of wrath. It's the cup of suffering. It's the cup of judgment that we all deserve to drink because of our sin and wrongdoing. But, Jesus will take our place. This is the Father's will. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. Leslie Newbigin reminds us, "In the mercy of God, the cup of God's righteous wrath against the sin of the world is given into the hands, not of his enemies, but of his beloved Son. And the Son will drink this cup down to its dregs" (Newbigin, 240). This is the Gospel! Jesus takes our place, entrusting himself into the hands of his loving Father.

It reminds me of a story about Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of my heroes. At one point, when he was in America as a young man, he met another young French pastor. And, they were discussing what each one wanted to become. The other pastor said, "I want to become a saint." And, Bonhoeffer thought about that for a moment and said, "No, I don't want that." He then went to this scene in the garden and said, "I want to learn to have faith. What I want is to learn to throw myself completely into the arms of God like Jesus does in the garden." He goes on, "I don't want to become arrogant over successes or shaken by my failures. I want to completely renounce making something of myself" (Bonhoeffer, 471). I want to learn to entrust myself to God because this is genuine faith. And, of course, we all know that Bonhoeffer became a martyr because of his genuine faith.

When our circumstances are desperate or fear-inducing or seem to lack anything of God, can we genuinely trust in our good Father, like Jesus does in the Garden? Can we reject violence and choose to surrender to the Father's will?

Verse 12.

### **V. The Arrest (12)**

*12 So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.*

This mob of people, representing the world and led by Judas, arrested God and bound him and led him away to his trials which we will look at next week.

## VI. Key Takeaways

That's our text for today. As I said at the beginning, this text really is giving us a lens for how to read and understand the rest of the passion narrative. And, in particular, I think John gives us four key takeaways to keep in mind so we read the rest of the story well:

- 1. We know who is in charge of the unfolding events.** Answer: Jesus. Jesus is in charge of everything that will happen, not the powers of evil, not the religious leaders and not the political leaders. Jesus is in charge of what is happening. How do we know that? Well, because John uses a very specific word in verses 1 and 4 to describe Jesus' actions. Jesus "went out" or "went forward." In verse 1, Jesus "went forward" across the Kidron brook. In verse 4, Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, "went forward" and said, "Whom do you seek?" The word for "going forward" is the same word used in other places in John for Jesus "*going forth*" from the Father (8:42; 13:3; 16:27; 17:8). The point is that this word has the meaning of "going forward to fulfill a mission" (BDAG). Jesus "goes forward" across the brook Kidron, and when he sees the arresting mob with their lanterns, torches and weapons, he "*goes forward*" to fulfill a mission.

What John wants us to understand is that Jesus is not a victim. It would be a wrong reading of the Passion if we walk through this narrative and read it as though Jesus were a victim. He's not a victim. He's not a helpless victim. He will become utterly helpless on the cross, but he is no victim.

What is happening here is a fulfillment of what he said in the Good Shepherd discourse. Back in chapter 10, Jesus says, "*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me... I lay down my life for the sheep that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, I lay it down of my own accord*" (10:14-18). Jesus is "going forward" to fulfill a mission. He is a man on a mission. He is in charge of all that is happening.

- 2. We know He watches out for those He loves.** Verse 8: "*I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.*" Jesus, the good shepherd, is looking out for his sheep. The wolves have come, and he is still protecting his sheep. He knows them by name, and they know him by name. Peter doesn't need a sword, because Peter has the great I AM as his protector. And, the I AM will not lose anyone.
- 3. We know this is the will of Jesus' Father.** What will happen in the next few hours is not a horrible mistake. It is horrible, and it is horrifying. But, Jesus' words in verse 11: "*... [S]hall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?*" So we know that even though what will happen will be horrifying, it's not an accident. This is the will of the Father. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16).
- 4. We know who it is who is going to the cross.** Answer: The great I AM.



John wants to make sure we know that this is the incarnate God who is going forward.  
*“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”*  
(John 1:1). This is the creator God going forward!

This is the great I AM whom the entire mob falls before.

This is God who they are arresting.

This is God they are binding with ropes.

This is God who they will put on trial before Annas and Caiaphas.

This is God who will stand in the dock before Pilate.

This is God before whom Pilate will ask, “What is truth?”

This is God who they will condemn to death.

This is God who they will scourge.

This is God on whom they will put a crown of thorns.

This is God who they will nail to a cross.

This is God who will die on that cross.

As we go through this narrative, John wants us to know, here at the beginning, that this is the living God going forward on his mission, his mission of bringing salvation to the world, *“that those who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). To our great God be praise, glory, honor and power forever and ever.  
Amen.

## **Benediction**

If you would like prayer this morning, there will be friends up here who would love to pray with you.

Now receive this benediction:

As you go, may our great and glorious God, the one who so loved you, he sent his Son to a cross for you, may He bless you and keep you; may He make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, and give you peace. Amen.

## **Resources**

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Letters and Papers from Prison*

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*

Burge, Gary, *John (NIV Application Commentary)*

Croasman, Matthew, *Let Me Ask You A Question: Conversations With Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching John (Regent College Course)*

Keener, Craig, *The Gospel of John, Volume Two*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*