

October 10/11, 2020

Only Jesus

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 18:1-27

Pastor Bryan Clark

Jesus would willingly *choose* to travel this terrible journey to the cross. Which does raise an interesting question. “Why would He do that?” At any moment He could have wiped everybody out and just gone back to the Father. The answer to that question? “It’s simple, but it’s almost unbelievable!” Why would Jesus do that? Because 2000 years ago, He had *you* in mind. And He knew that you would be without hope forever, unless He went to the cross. So that’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 18. If you’re new with us, we’re working our way through the Gospel of John. We find ourselves in chapter 18, verse 1:

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the *Roman* cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (*NASB, John 18:1-3)

So, Jesus has left the Upper Room. I have suggested that chapters 15, 16, and 17 were somewhere en route to the garden. My best guess is somewhere around the outside of the temple area, then descending about two hundred feet to the bottom of the Kidron Valley. This is just outside the walls of Jerusalem, which then begins to go up the slope of the Mount of Olives, where there is a garden. It’s not a flower garden; it’s actually an olive tree orchard. Parts of that garden are still there to this day. The text tells us it’s a place that Jesus often went with His disciples when He was in Jerusalem, so Judas knew, likely, where to find Him. Judas is now traveling with Roman soldiers, Jewish temple police, the priests and the Pharisees, and probably a considerable mob that has joined. It’s hard to imagine this scene, as now it’s night. It’s dark; they’re in the garden, and you would have clearly seen the lanterns and torches and people exiting the walls of the city, back and forth to the bottom of the valley, and coming up to the garden. None of the four Gospel writers include all of the details of this march to the cross. John has not included the agony of Jesus in the garden, where He wrestles with the Father about drinking this cup, which is a reference to the wrath of the Father that will be poured on Him for the sins of the world. But what we find is Jesus has now wrestled through that, and He has set His mind to go to the cross. Verse 4:

So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered Him, “Jesus, the Nazarene.” And He said to them, “I am *He*.” And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, “I am *He*,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Therefore He again asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus, the Nazarene.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am *He*; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,” to fulfill the word which He spoke, “Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one.” (Vs. 4-9)

So Jesus knows the hour has come. He's got His game face on, and He's ready to go. They arrive, I'm sure, expecting that the disciples and Jesus would have fled and scattered. That's why they had their torches and lanterns, to find them. But Jesus actually steps forth and meets them. He asked, **“Whom do you seek?”** They say, *“Jesus of Nazareth,”* and His response is actually *not* **“I am He.”** If you look in your English translations, the word *He* should be in italics. That tells you it's not actually part of the original Greek text. The actual answer was, **“I AM.”**

We are familiar with Jesus throughout the Gospel of John, saying, “I am the bread;” “I am the light;” “I am the water;” “I am the good shepherd;” “I am the gate.” But there have also been a handful of times where He has simply said, “I AM.” It is a reference to the most sacred holy name of God that these Jews would have referenced all the way back to Moses and the burning bush. When Moses asked God in the burning bush His name, He responded by saying, “I AM.” There's no question, that's who Jesus has identified Himself to be.

When He does that, there are two things that happen; the Greek construction would say two separate things. They **drew back**, and they **fell to the ground**. Now, there are some rather silly explanations for this, like it's dark and they're just kind of stumbling over themselves. But at the front of the line would have been Roman soldiers, would have been officers. These were not people unfamiliar with conflict. What the text is actually saying is a consistent picture through the Old Testament—that on those occasions when God gave people just a glimpse of His Holiness—they fell on their faces before Him. So this is an amazing moment when Jesus steps up and identifies, “I AM. I AM the God of Moses; I AM the God that was in the burning bush. I AM the creator of the universe; I AM.” And in that moment, they pull back and they fall on their faces. It is a way for Jesus to say, “If I wanted to, I could take you all out. The only reason you're going to capture Me and take Me to the cross is because My Father made a promise thousands and thousands and thousands of years ago, and I'm here to fulfill that promise—which will be the greatest moment in human history. Once they regained their composure, Jesus asked again. He again identifies Himself, and essentially what He's doing is making a deal. Without question, this mob was shaken, and what Jesus basically said is, “Here's the deal. I will go with you, willingly, as long as you let these eleven men go,” a deal to which they agree. Verse 10:

Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, “Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”

(Vs. 10-22)

So one interesting detail is that John is the only Gospel writer that names the servant of the high priest by name, Malchus—as if he knows who he is. We'll come back to that detail in just a moment. One of the characteristics of John, throughout his Gospel, is he consistently includes names. If you were writing some sort of a fictitious account, to put forth some sort of a legend, the last thing you would list is historical names and places. Yet one of the consistent patterns of John is he names names, making it easily possible for first readers to go back and verify if it is true.

In this case, Peter pulls a sword. The Greek word for sword means a short sword or a long knife. It would have been relatively common, kept in a sheath on the belt. He pulls it out and he whacks off the right ear of Malchus. Now, on one hand, this is very brave; it's very courageous. He loves Jesus, and this is kind of his emotional reaction. But you do have to ask the question, “What exactly is he going to do?” What was most likely is *all of them* were going to get slaughtered. Think about

this. Jesus just had it settled down, “Take Me; let them go.” But now Peter fires it up again, putting everyone at great risk. And the reason was because he still did not understand that Jesus was choosing willingly to go to the cross to fulfill the mission.

Again, the idea of **cup** is Old Testament prophetic language, symbolic of the wrath of God. The real suffering of the cross was not physical. The ultimate suffering was that a holy God would take sin upon Himself and experience the wrath of the Father to make payment for sin. Jesus has already wrestled with that in the garden, and now He's ready to take this journey to the cross. Most scholars believe the reason that Peter wasn't arrested in this moment is because Luke tells us that Jesus picked up the ear of Malchus, put it back on his head, and healed him. Try to imagine the charges against Peter. “What exactly did he do?” “Well, he cut off Malchus' ear.” “Well, which ear was that? It seems like he still has both ears.” “It's just going to create a more difficult conversation; let it go; take Jesus.” And thus begins the march—the journey to the cross. Verse 12:

So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. (Vs. 12-14)

This was stated in chapter 11. Caiaphas made that statement—**that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people**—not really realizing how prophetic his words actually were. So John is the only Gospel writer that tells us Jesus was **bound**. A lot of scholars think that it is a reference back to when Abraham bound Isaac to sacrifice his son, which was a foreshadowing of the Messiah to come. Literally, right across the valley, to the very place where they were about to go, is where Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac. Jesus is bound and they take him away.

John, again, is the only Gospel writer that tells us about this encounter with Annas. This was an unofficial hearing. It's probably about one o'clock or two o'clock in the morning, as closely as we can figure. It is likely that Caiaphas needed some time to wake up the rulers, get them in and form the Sanhedrin, and have an official hearing. One question would be, “What's the big hurry? Why not just throw Jesus in jail and deal with it in the morning?” The answer is because this is now early Friday morning. By six o'clock Friday evening, it would officially start the Passover Sabbath. Jesus would not be allowed to hang on the cross into the Sabbath. So they had to try Him, execute Him, and get Him off the cross by six o'clock that evening. After the Passover Sabbath began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was another eight sacred days during which they could not have a trial or crucify Jesus. The last thing they wanted was Jesus in their possession for a week and a half or two weeks. So they are now scrambling in the middle of the night, doing what was illegal by Jewish law, to get Jesus tried and on a cross as quickly as possible.

So who is Annas? Annas was the high priest from AD 6 to AD 15. The high priest was supposed to be high priest for life, but the Romans—Pilot's predecessor, Gratus—removed Annas from office. The Jews did not like the Romans interfering in their affairs. Annas was removed, but five of his sons served as high priest, as well as his son-in-law, Caiaphas. Caiaphas was high priest from AD18 to AD36, so through the Jesus story. Most historians believe that Annas was still running the show. This was a powerful, wealthy family with Annas running the show through his sons and his son-in-law, so he's a major player. This unofficial hearing was an opportunity to give

Caiaphas time. But it was also an opportunity for Annas to get Jesus to say something that they could then use to charge Him, to execute Him. What we have right now is: they have arrested Him; they are determined to execute Him, but now they have to figure out some charge against Him. So, they bring him before Annas. Verse 15:

Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so *was* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also *one* of this man's disciples are you?” He said, “I am not.” (Vs. 15-17)

Whenever we're looking at a biblical narrative, one of the things we always look for is the structure of the text, meaning how it's organized, because often the writer will use that to give us a hint of what he wants us to understand from the text. In this case, the structure is quite interesting. John goes back and forth between what's happening with Jesus before Annas, and then what's happening with Peter out in the courtyard. So it's Jesus...and then it's Peter...and then it's Jesus...and it's Peter. And when they do that, it's an invitation to draw a comparison of what's happening.

So Peter and another disciple follow Jesus. The other disciple is not named but almost all scholars believe the other disciple is John himself. John writes as an eyewitness to this hearing, and one of the consistent patterns of John is that he names names all through his Gospel. The only one he doesn't name is himself, and he never names himself in his Gospel. So it seems highly likely the one with Peter is John. You remember John knew who Malchus was. He seems to have familiarity with the high priest and those around him. Really the only reason anyone questions that is they wonder how could John, a simple fisherman, know the family of the high priest? But that isn't exactly accurate.

Yes, John was a fisherman, but he came from a very wealthy, significant family. We know that his family had servants, so he wasn't a lowly fisherman. There are also a lot of historians that believe that John's mother and Mary were sisters, which is why, on the cross, Jesus commits His mother to John. If that's true, then they are both sisters to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, whose husband was a priest. So there are many ways that John could have been connected to the family. We're going to go with the assumption, that's who it is.

So John gets in. He even gets into the court of the high priest as an eyewitness, but Peter is left outside the courtyard gate. So John goes back in and talks to the slave girl; she lets Peter in. It's then this slave girl—the gatekeeper—who says to Peter, “**You are not also *one* of His disciples are you?**” The way this is written in the Greek expects a negative answer. “Surely you're not a follower of His,” which makes it easy for Peter to say, “**I am not.**” Of course not! Now, one of the interesting things about the language here is what she says. I think we often have this image that all the disciples have scattered, that only Peter is there, and all alone he denies Jesus. But what did she say? You are not, what? **Also!** She knows John is, and John's running in and out. He's known to her. She's just wondering if Peter is. And in that moment, Peter declares, “**I am not.**” The simple comparison is the comparison between the great, “**I AM,**” and the not-so-great, “**I am not.**” Verse 18:

Now the slaves in the officers were standing *there*, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

Verse 18 is just a reminder. This is great storytelling because we're left in verse 18 with this sense of dread. "Uh oh! Something bad is going to happen." But the writer leaves us hanging. Meanwhile, back inside... Verse 19.

The high priests then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I have said." (Vs. 19-21)

So a couple of background things here. According to the law, a false teacher was one who snuck around and quietly, in private, taught things that weren't true in order to build a movement. This is why Jesus is saying, "*I didn't do this in secret; I didn't do this quietly. I don't qualify as a false teacher. As a matter of fact, I spoke publicly in the synagogues and in the temple. I was speaking in places where everyone could listen—and they know what I said.*"

It was also against Jewish law for the ruler, the judge—in this case Annas—to interrogate the accused. You weren't allowed to do that. The way Jewish law worked was, if someone is brought up on an accusation, you bring forth witnesses—at least two or three witnesses—and *they* were to be interrogated. You work *them* over and, based on that, determine whether or not the charges are valid. That's why Jesus is saying, "*Why are you questioning me?*" In other words, "That's illegal; you can't do that; you're breaking your own law." What He's asking is for Annas to follow the law. "I spoke in these public places. Bring in the witnesses; they'll tell you exactly what I told them." That's what Jesus is saying. Verse 22:

When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (Vs. 22-24)

So one of the officers, I think recognizing that Jesus had called out Annas, slaps Jesus in the face. That's essentially what the word means. Jesus responds by saying, "*Why did you do that? If I have spoken incorrectly, testify.*" It's a legal term. "*If I'm wrong, bring the witness. Read the statute, and testify, where am I wrong. Otherwise, why have you struck me?*" It was illegal to strike someone in a hearing. So essentially Annas had hoped to trick Jesus into saying something that could be used as a charge against Him, and so in the official hearing, he would be called as a witness, "I heard Him say it myself." Rather, what's happened is Jesus has called out Annas for his hypocrisy and his breaking of the law. So the way John records this is, Annas just then quietly sends Jesus on His way, still bound, to Caiaphas, who is likely in the same compound somewhere. Meanwhile, Verse 25:

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, “You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?” He denied *it*, and said, “I am not.” One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?” Peter then denied *it* again, and immediately, a rooster crowed. (Vs. 25-27)

So Peter is out at the charcoal fire. A charcoal fire is not a wood fire. It doesn't have flames or a lot of light: it's a little bit of light. So it's pretty dim and they figure out, “Wait a minute, aren't you also one of his disciples?” Again, the question is asked with the expectation of a negative answer, “No, of course not.” But then there is a relative there of the servant of the high priest, whose ear was cut off by Peter. Again, John is the one that tells us this relationship, as if he knows who all those people are. The relative who was with the mob, would be highly likely to remember it. “Wait a minute; I know you; you're the guy that cut off Malchus' ear!” Peter denies, and the cock crows!

Historians would tell us this time would be roughly three o'clock in the morning. The other Gospel writers tell us that while Jesus is being moved, bound to Caiaphas, probably through this courtyard, that he actually hears Peter deny Him. And Jesus looks at Peter, and Peter looks at Jesus—and the cock crows! It is hard to imagine how horrible that moment would have been for Peter. Not long before this, he had said, “All others will forsake You, but I will never forsake you!” Not only did he deny Jesus, but he knew Jesus knew that he had denied Him. I've often said that ultimately, what defines the trajectory of your life is not whether or not you fail. It's not whether or not you blow it. Everybody will fail; everybody will blow it. What ultimately defines the trajectory of your life is *what you do in that moment when you've totally blown it*. That's what's ultimately is going to define your story. So, what's going to happen to Peter? Is Peter off the team? I guess we'll have to wait and see.

I want to close by thinking a little bit about the way John has structured this story, inviting us to draw this comparison. At the end of the day, one of Jesus' disciples betrayed Him. His closest friends abandoned Him. One of His closest friends denied he even knew Him, and the religious establishment that was put there by God, to foreshadow the coming of the Messiah, was so corrupt, they would abuse Him and execute Him. Essentially, everything is stripped away—and it's only Jesus. It's only Jesus all the way on this journey to the cross. It's not His friends. It's not the disciples. It's not the religious system. It's only Jesus. It's always been only Jesus. He is the only possibility for hope that we can stand right before a holy God. It's only Jesus.

This does kind of raise an interesting question. What are we placing our hope in these days? I think we all know the right answer. That's not really what I'm asking. I'm asking what are we *actually* placing our hope in? Our family? “Our family is going to let us down.” Our closest friends? “Our friends are going to let us down.” Your job? Your business? Your career? Your bank account? Your government? Your political party? An election? A politician? Where is your hope? In a judicial system? In a health worker? In a mask? In a vaccine? In a country? It feels to me like a lot of Christians think if America, as we've known it, is completely deconstructed, all hope is lost. To which I would say, “I'm sorry...what...what?” That's not where my hope is. Where are we placing our hope? Isn't it only Jesus? Hasn't it always been only Jesus? Now we agree with this.

But I'd ask a follow up question. If that's really what we believe, what's with the anger? What's with the fear? What's with the anxiety? What's with *the sky is falling* mentality among so many Christians? Where is that coming from? If our only hope is in Jesus, it's always been only Jesus. What is there to be angry about? What's supposed to define us is our love. What is there to be so fearful of? What is there to be so anxious about? If it's Jesus, isn't Jesus enough? **Jesus is enough! It's only Jesus!** I am confident that no matter what happens, Jesus will take me by the hand and He'll get me through it and deliver me to the paradise that He's always wanted for me, no matter what happens. Come on, friends, it's going to be okay. Because it's only Jesus—and Jesus is enough—because He is the great **I AM!**

Our Father, we're so thankful this morning that the message of Jesus is true. But, God, we confess that our emotions give us away. There's no reason to be so fearful and to be so anxious and to be so angry if our hope is in Jesus. Remind us again today that Jesus is enough. It's always been only Jesus, and He is enough because He is the great I AM. In His name we pray, Amen.

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Fall 2020 // WEEK 5

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // October 10/11, 2020
Only Jesus // John 18:1-27

Introduction

In this week’s study, we learned about the arrest of Jesus. As the scene unfolds, both Peter and Jesus face intense questioning. As you think about this week’s questions, reflect on the unity Bryan has talked about this session.

Warm Up *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

1. Books, movies, and shows often tell stories with turns we do not expect. What’s your favorite plot twist or surprise ending?

2. Out of all your life experiences, which memories can you recall the most vividly?

Getting Started

Transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group discussion with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you’re learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow

 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 18:1-27 to the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) Was there anything from this weekend's message that stood out to you?

- 2) Throughout John, tensions have slowly built, and the plotlines have been on a collision course from the beginning. Now that the story is reaching its climax, we see all the stories intersect during this fateful night. **What are the motivations, feelings, and belief systems held by the following people:**
 - a. Jesus?

 - b. Judas and the Roman officers?

 - c. Peter?

 - d. The High Priest and the Official that struck Jesus?

- 3) In this passage, Peter and Jesus are both asked who they are—and they are each asked twice. Jesus answers, "I am *He*." However, when Peter is asked about his discipleship, he replies, "I am not."
 - a. After being warned and yet still denying Jesus, how do you think Peter felt when he heard the rooster crow?

 - b. In what ways do you publicly identify yourself as a follower of Jesus?

 - c. In what ways do you deny him?

- 4) This night was likely going to haunt Peter for the rest of his life. Every time he warmed himself by a charcoal fire or heard a rooster crow, Peter would have remembered the night he betrayed his friend.
- a. In this passage, we see Peter go from being a defender (v20) to a denier (v27). **What do you think happened to him in the days following this moment? What did he become?**
 - b. **When you fail, what do you become? What are the thoughts, actions, emotions, and feelings you believe define you?**
- 5) Jesus has spoken of this hour since the beginning of John. Now that His hour is at hand, we find only Jesus remains. The adoring crowds have fled or turned to angry mobs, His closest friends have betrayed or denied Him, and the religious leaders have put Him on trial.
- a. We all put our hope and trust in something. **While you may know who you should turn to, where are you tempted to turn in moments of crisis (your own abilities, bank accounts, friends, family, possessions, government, etc.)?**
 - b. In our hour of need or desperation, only Jesus can save us. **When you feel yourself turning to someone or something else, how can you build habits and disciplines to turn to Him instead?**

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request, considering how others might pray for you specifically this week.

A significant part of creating unity with God and one another is being open and honest with our lives. Praying with a group of people may be a new experience for you, or it may be familiar. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone participates in sharing this time before God together.