

Gospel of John Chapter 18 - John Karmelich

For those of you who've been following this study for a good while, we're at the point where Jesus isn't teaching His disciples how to live as a witness for Him. We are at the famous story told in each gospel that I call "Showtime" for a lack of a better word. I assume my readers know the story well. So let me explain it in a way that hopefully each of us can relate to:

You know those moments in time when everything is going wrong? Even in those horrid moments we must remember God is in charge, knows all things and is still working things out for His glory. Yes it's one of those moments here. It's the moment when Jesus gets arrested for being the Messiah. The scene cuts back and forth between Jesus being arrested and tried, versus Peter going through his three denials of Jesus. It reads like one of those moments in life when things we want to go well are falling apart. I realize none of our tragedies compares to what Jesus dealt with. Still a lesson for us veteran Christians is to notice how Jesus reacts to all of that. It's a great lesson on how much He cares for the disciples as well as us, despite of our faults.

As I go through this story, if it's new to you, pay attention to the details because they're accurate with a great number of facts to validate it. All four Gospels give us details of this story, and combining them, gives us a great picture to understand what Jesus went through and why. As I always state, I write this for believers and I assume most of my readers know this story well. Therefore I'd like everyone to pay attention of how Jesus is in charge even through some of the most horrid moments anyone could want to face in life. Often we ask the question, "why me" when everything is falling apart. I can't explain all human suffering. I just know all things work for God's glory through the trials of life. With that said, it is time to go through the chapter to see how we can relate to the details of Jesus arrest and suffering.

Chapter 18 opens with a transition point. To me, this chapter is like an "overture". Chapters 2 through 12 describe His ministry to prove Jesus is God in human form. Chapters 13-17 then in effect, teach us how to minister to others with Chapter 17 ending with Him praying for believers. Chapters 18 through the end of the book are all about his arrest, resurrection (in Chapter 20) and the aftermath of that event! The chapter opens with Jesus entering a garden across a valley from the walled city of Jerusalem. That place was well known to the disciples so we know Jesus went there regularly. Therefore Judas knew of the spot and went there to have Jesus arrested. Let me discuss Judas's motivation first. He wanted Him arrested as Judas thought he wasted three years of his life following someone who he figured would set up an eternal kingdom then and there, to make Judas rich and famous. Then there's the Jewish religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead because they were corrupt. The official Jewish commentary (called The Talmud) speaks negatively of that High Priest and his family. They grew rich by charging high fees for those who came to Jerusalem for the Jewish holidays. They saw Jesus as a threat to what's their way of getting rich so they wanted Him dead. Jesus knew all this. God's plan for Jesus was to be crucified on the Passover holiday, just as the original lamb's blood from the Exodus protected believers from death, so His blood protects us.

With that said, back to the text. Judas led a large group (probably over 400 men): A mixture of Roman soldiers with the Temple police to arrest Jesus. Why the large number? They probably thought they'd have to search nooks and crannies to drag Him out of there. Jesus said "I am" as in He is God and that caused the army to fall backwards. (Hey, don't mess with God!). Because Jesus was in charge, He did say to the army to let the other disciples go since He was the one they wanted to arrest. Notice that the soldiers obeyed Jesus and the others left! Before they left, Peter wanted to show his boldness, and then he cut off one of the soldier's ears. The soldier was named. I suspect that was because the trial coming

up, the Jewish leaders were desperate to find charges against Jesus, so by Jesus healing him, "that ruled out that possibility"!

As I explained the High Priest was a corrupt family. The leader Annas was a former high priest, but the Romans wanted to "change the guards" every few years. He had four sons and a son in law (Caiaphas) who all took turns being high priest to keep the "corrupt family business" going!

An unnamed disciple got to watch the proceedings (most likely the Gospel writer John himself since he knew the details of what happened). John was in the fishing business, so he was probably let in as "the family" knew him. Anyway John (or whoever it was) let Peter come into a patio area just outside of the area where Jesus was being questioned. That's where Peter would do his famous denials of Jesus while His trial occurred. So why did Peter deny that he knew Jesus after trying to defend Him in the garden? Fear! The opposite of faith is always fear and Peter thought about Jesus being killed and feared for his own life. One reason the text is jumping back and forth between Peter and Jesus is to show how Peter is failing under pressure while Jesus does God's will even though Jesus understood it wasn't a fair trial.

In Verse 19 the high priest asked Jesus about His teaching and His disciples. (In other words, the High Priest wanted Jesus to "rat Himself out" and rat out His friends). Jesus rose above that and said, He did always preach publicly so if you want to know what He taught, ask around (in effect)! Jesus then got a slap in the face for "not playing ball" the way the priests wanted Him to rat Himself out! Bottom line is they couldn't get Jesus to incriminate Himself so there was another trial in front of the son in law of the original high priest (and that son in law had the current title!) Three trials in total took place before the Jewish leaders. The final one was a hastily organized meeting of Jewish "high court". That group gave Jesus a guilty verdict before sending Jesus off to crucifixion in the Roman system.

Then we get the "Roman" trials. Short version is Pontius Pilate was a bureaucrat who knew he was on "thin ice" with Rome and had to govern honestly and fairly or he'd lose his job. He questioned Jesus to find out He didn't lead an army. Pilate figured Jesus was a philosopher so he couldn't charge Jesus with a crime that was against Roman law. Roman's had two key laws, pay your taxes and don't rebel against Rome! I'm sure Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of a crime. When he asked the Jewish priests to name the crime Jesus was guilty of, all they could say was, "If He's not a bad guy we wouldn't be here!" That is why Pilate wanted the Jewish people to punish Jesus themselves, but the leaders feared a revolt since Jesus had a great reputation among the people, so they told Pilate "we're not allowed to kill anyone" as to make the Romans the "bad guys" for killing Jesus. In the meantime, all this was predicted in the Old Testament, so Jesus "put up with it" knowing it was the price He had to pay!

Pilate asked if Jesus was the king of Jews. Remember that all Pilate cared about was his job and didn't want to get in trouble with his superiors. Jesus responded by stating "His kingdom isn't of this world". It implies that if Jesus wanted Pilate and everyone dead, Jesus could snap His fingers and that's that! It is obvious at this point that Pilate knew Jesus was innocent and He was being framed. Pilate's last line of this section is in effect his own philosophy that "power is truth, so I don't care who You claim to be" and at that Pilate was ready to release Him. Obviously that's not the end of the story, just the part John wanted to share about Jesus' trail. The final line was about a man named Barabbas who was convicted of being a robber and murderer who's place Jesus took. I'll discuss Barabbas more in the next lesson.

OK, most of us have known this story since childhood. We're saved, so what? Besides the obvious fact that Jesus took our place as well as Barabbas, it's the reminder that even in the darkest hour of our lives Jesus is still in control and is guiding the world for His glory! Jesus didn't come to earth to give each of us a comfortable and easy life. He came to pay the price for sin. Our job in response is to use our lives

as a witness for Him in gratitude for that, through both the high and low points of our lives. Jesus never promised our lives would be easy. He promised He'd glorify us if we live for Him! If you get that, you get the main point of this message!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John