

The Sovereign Surrender – John 18:1-11

Main Idea: The arrest of Jesus reveals how He controls all things.

I. The Scheme | John 18:1-3

Chapter 18 begins the final section of John's narrative of Jesus' life and ministry. As we look back over this wonderful book, we have seen John's prologue in 1:1-18, a period of witness and revelation in chapters 1-4; growing conflict with the religious leaders of Israel in chapters 5-8; Jesus' ministry among believers in chapters 9-12; and our Lord's ministry to the disciples in chapters 13-17. Now, **as Jesus steps across the brook Kidron (Kidron Valley) to enter a garden (Gethsemane), He embraces and controls all that will happen, leading up to the cross.** There is no time between the completion of Jesus' prayer and His arrest. It is still Passover Friday morning (still dark)—the most important day in the Jewish Calendar. By now, over 250,000 lambs had been slaughtered as a sacrifice to God in preparation for Passover. The city of Jerusalem was filled with the blood of animal sacrifices that had no power to cover the sins of people fully and completely but pointed to the coming of the One who would deliver Himself to be slaughtered on behalf of His own! When John begins his account of the passion of Jesus, he intends for us to reflect on its significance. As the Savior enters the garden to redeem His people from sin, we are reminded that it was in the Garden of Eden that mankind fell into sin. **The contrast between the two—Christ and Adam in their gardens—is striking and instructive.** Adam lived in a delightful garden, while Christ entered a garden that was the garden of agony before His crucifixion. **Adam and Eve embraced sin that condemned all mankind. Christ embraced sacrificing Himself to save that which was lost.** In Adam, all were lost. In Christ, all who believe in Him, He saves, keeps, and guards and none of them is lost (John 17:12).

Jesus came to the Garden of Gethsemane not only to fulfill the covenant obligations that Adam had failed to keep but also to be betrayed by His false disciple Judas Iscariot. It is noteworthy that the garden of Gethsemane was a place where Judas might expect to find Jesus since "Jesus often met there with His disciples" (v.2). Having given Judas time to arrange the betrayal, Jesus went to the very place Judas would likely seek Him. **Jesus never avoided His arrest; He went with the eleven to Gethsemane to be found!** Judas came to the garden supported by an impressive force of highly trained and heavily armed men (v.3). The Greek word translated as "band of soldiers" is *staira* (cohort, division, military unit), which across the Greco-Roman world represented an overwhelming show of force assembled out of a concern for a disturbance among people. In most cases, a *staira* would represent 200-600 heavily armed soldiers ready for battle. But John also tells us that the soldiers were carrying lanterns and torches (v.3). Since the Passover always occurred at full moon, there would be plenty of evening light. The lanterns and torches were used as part of a military strategy to capture a fugitive. The lanterns and torches signal where every soldier was positioned so that they could keep pressing against the fugitive, making it impossible for him to break free. As the group found Jesus, Judas was proved to be not only a false disciple but also a blind guide (Matt. 15:14). Thinking he was in control of the situation, the Lord showed Him that all that happened on that day occurred under the directives and ultimate control of Christ, not of Judas.

To Ponder:

1. In what ways did Christ exhibit authority and control over His arrest?
2. What are areas in my life have I tried to exercise full control over? Is there an area or situation I need to surrender to Him right now?

II. The Authority | John 18:4-6

As the other Gospels tell the story, Judas led the way, identifying Jesus with a kiss (Matt.26:48). John tells us that Jesus, "knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?'" The soldiers answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am He" (v.4-5). At these words, Jesus' authority and power were revealed as the armed Roman cohort "drew back and fell to the ground" (v.6). Most English translations we have supply the pronoun (he) at the end, but that is not what the Greek text shows. The words used by Jesus to identify Himself were *Ego Eimi*—the same used in all of the seven "I Am" statements recorded by John. *Ego Eimi* refers to the great "I Am" declaration that reveals God's divine glory! **Standing in front of a battalion of armed soldiers, Jesus answers their query with divine authority "I Am"** (Exodus 3:14; John 8:56-58). All Jews on that day knew that those were not the credentials of a Galilean carpenter but of God Himself! Utterly daunted, a legion of armed soldiers reeled back and fell to the ground, helpless to even stand before Christ. **Without Christ, no one can stand before God! Without regeneration, man cannot stand God's glory** (Ezekiel 1:28; Acts 9:1-5). John clearly

intends for us to reflect on the implications of this situation. What could have hindered Him from escaping the cross if Jesus could drive a cohort of Roman soldiers to the ground by the mere projection of His deity? **Jesus was never caught; He delivered Himself voluntarily to take the punishment of those whom the Father has given Him!** The example of the Garden (Gethsemane) should encourage every believer that the spiritual war in which we are now enlisted was decided once and for all in Jesus' voluntary death. What a comfort this scene is to those who rely on Christ for salvation!

To Ponder:

1. How do Jesus' actions show that he voluntarily laid His life down for "His sheep"?
2. What does Jesus' voluntary surrender teach us as His followers? How are we to emulate this in our daily lives?

III. The Demand | John 18:7-11

With the band of soldiers fallen abashed on the ground, Jesus spoke again, recalling them to their mission, "Whom do you seek?" (v.7). **As He prepares to surrender Himself, Jesus astoundingly protects His eleven disciples,** "If you seek me, let these men go" (v.8). John Calvin comments: "Here we see how the Son of God not only submits to death of His own accord, that by His obedience He may blot out our transgressions but also how He discharges the office of a good Shepherd in protecting His flock."¹ John sees Jesus' action not only as the fulfillment of His statements in John 6:39 and 17:12 that "those whom you gave me I have lost not one" but also as proof and example of His greater protection over the eternal destiny of all who belong to Him! John does not speak merely of bodily protection but also of spiritual protection. The New Testament speaks clearly about Christ's promise to preserve the salvation of all who come to Him in genuine faith (Heb.7:25; 2 Tim.1:12; 1 Pet.1:5; Phil.1:6). **By delivering Himself to pay the price for our souls, Jesus shows His effective, preserving grace to us by lifting us from the darkness of this world into His own marvelous light, by interceding for us in heaven, by guarding our spiritual deposits, and by bringing us at last and without blemish to the Father!**

The final episode in Jesus' arrest highlights His sovereign submission to the Father's will and shows His compassion and grace even for His enemies. As the soldiers stepped forward to take Jesus into custody, "Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear" (v.10). What Peter could not see at the time was the fact that Jesus fully intended to be arrested. Thus, there was no reason to harm one of the servants of the high priest. Verse 11 ends with Jesus' teaching Peter another lesson: that the problem at hand could not be solved by anyone other than Christ Himself! **No other than Christ could handle the full cup of God's divine wrath without being consumed forever.** There was nothing Peter or any other disciples could have done on that day, and that is what salvation is like. We bring nothing to the table; Christ accomplishes and offers us everything! The cup to which Jesus refers is the cup of divine judgment described throughout the OT (Isa.51:17; Jer.25:15-28; Zech.12:2). **While Peter depicts the natural sense of self-sufficiency (representing all mankind), Christ humbled Himself to the point of taking our place so that we could become the righteousness of God** (2 Cor.5:21). This passage ends with a great reminder. Every person who has ever lived will drink from one of the two cups that God has poured. Those who look at Jesus for salvation, bringing their sins to His cross, will enjoy the cup of grace and eternal fellowship with God forever. But to spurn Jesus as Savior and Lord is to be left to drink the cup of God's wrathful judgment on their sins (Ps.75:8).

To Ponder:

1. What is the difference between a battle that belongs to God and battles that belong to man?
2. In what ways does this passage show Jesus is neither victim nor martyr?
3. What does it mean that Jesus took the place of those whom He saves on the cross? How do you understand Jesus' Substitutionary Atonement?

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1974), 190.