

## John 18 Arresting God

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro  
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The Bible opens with a garden – the Garden of Eden – the first chapters of the Bible show a perfect and beautiful world with God saying that everything is “good.” He then made Adam and Eve to look after and enjoy it all. Almost everything was a “yes” for them – anything they needed or wanted they were free to explore and enjoy and build. There was only one rule – out of all they could do, there was only one thing they were told not to do – eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But you know the story, they had a run-in with the serpent who suggested they go ahead and eat the forbidden fruit, it couldn't be that bad, could it? They caved, gave in to their own reasoning and broke God's one rule. Unfortunately, it was like dropping a precious crystal vase – even if you feel bad about it afterwards, there's no way you can ever put it together again. Sin had entered the world and there was no going back.

But, instead of just scrapping the planet – dropping the whole globe into some kind of cosmic recycling bin and starting over, God had a plan to redeem it. To do something for us that we could have never done for ourselves – He had a plan for how to forgive us of our sins and it would involve passing through another garden – the Garden of Gethsemane where we pick up our study of the life of Jesus this morning.

We've spent the past year or so reading through the first 17 chapters of John. We've seen Jesus' miracles, heard His teaching, and reviewed His final words to the disciples in the Upper Room at the Last Supper. And now they have finished with dinner and are headed out for the night to find a place to stay.

**1 When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.**

You have to think of this more like a park – this wasn't what we think of when we use the word garden today – they weren't trampling on anyone's tomatoes. In fact the place was full of trees - olive trees, and if go to the same spot today there are still olive trees growing.

**2 And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. 3 Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.**

Have you ever seen one of those cop shows where they're going to serve someone a warrant or arrest some guy they've been looking for? They've got the SWAT team - they're all suited up and ready to go, everyone is tense – that's what these guys were like. They've been looking for a chance to arrest Jesus for quite some time, and now they've got it, so

they show up loaded for bear including a bunch of torches and lanterns to make sure He doesn't sneak off into the darkness and shadows.

But, as it turns out, they needn't worry about Jesus running to hide. He hears them coming and walks right out to them. He seizes the initiative.

4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?"

5 They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said to them, "I am *He*." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. 6 Now when He said to them, "I am *He*," they drew back and fell to the ground.

The guys in front start back pedaling and they knock over the guys behind them and you can imagine the whole group trying to get back up quickly. They're probably feeling a little spooked – after all, they know they've been sent out to bring in some religious guy – maybe they've heard stories of the miracles He's worked, about the people He has raised from the dead, the demons He has cast out – and now here they are to...to what? Try and take Him by force? Doesn't that seem a little sketchy to you? You know some of the guys who drew this mission were grumbling about the staff guys who planned this mission... Well, they get back up and Jesus takes the initiative again.

7 Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

8 Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am *He*. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," 9 that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

Jesus is trying to negotiate a withdrawal for the apostles, but before that can play out:

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.

Peter's sword most likely wasn't a full sword, the word used in the original Greek was typically used to describe anything from a tiny dagger up to a small sword – a different word was used for a large battle sword.

But why did Peter have one? Well, what did Peter do for a living? He was a fisherman – ever gone fishing or hung around someone who is? They usually have a pretty decent knife as part of their kit for cutting bait and slicing up the catch. Maybe Peter would have even used it for working on his woven nets and cutting things out of them – things like seaweed and other junk that he could have hauled in.

So, it wasn't a proper weapon, but it was something, and Peter, full of zeal lunged at the guy closest to him and took off an ear. But Jesus wasn't interested in starting a fight, He knew where all of this needed to go, and Luke tells us in his gospel (22:51) that Jesus reached out and healed the man's ear immediately

Now that it is interesting to me – this was Jesus’ *last miracle before the cross* – the final miracle He work before His death and resurrection, and it was performed for a man who didn’t believe in Him and was actively seeking His harm. Do you see the grace and mercy, the gentleness of our God? The whole world is turning against Him and He’s turning the other cheek.

11 So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”

12 Then the detachment *of troops* and the captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him. 13 And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

So, this guy is interesting. He was the High Priest for nine years from 6-15 AD before he was removed from office by the Romans. You have to remember that Jesus lived in Israel, and Israel had it’s own religion and laws, but it was still a part of the Roman Empire and the Romans could tell them what to do and how to do stuff whenever they wanted.

But that didn’t always go over very well with the Jews, and the case of Annas is one specific example. He had been the high priest, and according to the Bible that was a hereditary position that was supposed to be held for life. But the Romans decided they wanted someone else to take the job so they told Annas to move over. He still continued to exercise a good deal of influence though because eventually five of his sons also served as high priest, and so did Caiaphas, who was his son-in-law. So, you see why he was involved here even though he didn’t have the actual title at the moment.

15 And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so *did* another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. 16 But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in.

Commentators have different opinions about who this other disciple was – the common consensus seems to be that it was John – if you remember his dad owned a fishing business and was wealthy enough to have a few hired hands working for them up in Galilee, it’s possible that the family may have had connections to the high priest’s family.

Others think it may have been someone like Joseph of Arimethea or Nicodemus who had come to Jesus by night back in chapter 3.

Whoever it is gets Peter through the door, and that’s where his problems really start.

17 Then the servant 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.”

Uh-oh. You may remember *just a few hours ago* they were sitting around the table and Jesus said they would all leave Him. (Remember – He was completely aware of what was going to happen – He wasn’t beaten by people who were better than Him.) Peter said, “No way! Even if everyone else denies you, I’ll be there for you!” And Jesus told him, “Actually, you’ll deny me three times before the rooster crows.”

So here at the door we see strike one. And this should have been the easy one – he was being asked about Jesus by a little servant girl, less than a teenager; a person with no real authority, and he folds.

So watch out – because this is the same way things happen for us – your first step away from God is always small. No one just suddenly goes out and commits this horrendous sin. It always starts small and then bit-by-bit, compromise-by-compromise, you drift until you find yourself sitting in a mess wondering – how did I ever get here? Things that *seem* like no big deal, often lead to things that *are* a big deal.

18 Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there, for it was cold, and they warmed themselves. And Peter stood with them and warmed himself.

It’s the middle of the night – so they’re all trying to keep warm and stay awake while the action unfolds.

19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

This is Annas – they call him the high priest, just like we continue to call former presidents and ambassadors by their old titles, but Caiaphas is the actual sitting high priest and Jesus will be brought before him later. This is a religious trial – one of four He’ll have over the coming hours – this one with Annas, one with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, one with Pilate the Roman ruler and one with Herod the local governor.

20 Jesus answered him, “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21 Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said.” 22 And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?”

OK, as a pastor, this is shocking to me. Do you need any more proof that these guys had lost touch with their identity as servants of God? And the high priest doesn’t do anything about it – you can’t just say, “oh, well, that was just Larry, and everyone knows how he is – he has a bit of a temper and can get carried away.” No. They all feel like this is their right – they’re just religious bullies – they care more about themselves, their titles, and their positions than they care about loving and serving people and representing God.

But now watch how Jesus responds, which also amazes me. He doesn't just torch him with a blast of fire from His fingertips – which I would be tempted to do, "he's the high priest huh? Well I'm GOD!!!" No, Jesus doesn't do that.

23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"

No answer.

24 Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

25 Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. Therefore they said to him, "You are not also *one* of His disciples, are you?"  
He denied *it* and said, "I am not!"

Strike two.

26 One of the servants of the high priest, a relative *of him* whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied again; and immediately a rooster crowed.

Strike three. Luke tells us that at this moment Jesus looked over at Peter and Peter instantly realized what had happened and he went away weeping. He's just denied the man who did everything for him. He's got to feel like the world's worst friend, right?

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.

So remember it was the Jews who had arrested Jesus, they had had their religious trial, and now they've brought him to the Praetorium – the loose translation would be "the General's tent" it's the headquarters for Pilate the Roman governor and his troops. And because it's where the Romans live, the Jews can't enter or they will be ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in the Passover feast. And that's a problem if you're supposed to be the priests leading the show.

29 Pilate then went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"  
30 They answered and said to him, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you."

Nice, huh? So, here's what's going on. The Romans had conquered the entire region, but they didn't want to go through the hassle of running all the local governments, so they pretty much let people go on with normal lives, but with certain limits. For example, local courts could not impose the death penalty without Roman approval. So, these men want to see Jesus put to death, but they have to go and ask, "Mommy may I?" So, they bring Jesus to Pilate.

31 Then Pilate said to them, "You take Him and judge Him according to your law." Therefore the Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," 32 that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.

Jesus had told his disciples He would die on a cross, and that was a Roman form of execution.

33 Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

35 Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

Now, it could have all stopped there. Pilate could have stood up and said, "Get out of here – you're wasting my time, leave this man alone and go away."

But he didn't. He had a difficult job to do – he had to keep the locals happy and he also had to keep the Roman Empire happy or else he could lose his job. And these guys were obviously fired up about this man they had just brought to him. If they didn't get their way, they could cause additional problems for him. Look at how hard it has been for us to rebuild Iraq and Afghanistan. It's hard to keep the peace locally as an outsider without resorting to overwhelming force and that's not always the best option – keeping the peace is a delicate balance.

So, Pilate tries to find a diplomatic way out.

39 "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

40 Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

And we'll see in two weeks when we come back together, that Pilate went ahead and had Jesus beaten, whipped, and then crucified – even though he thought Jesus was innocent – in order to keep the peace and keep his position.

In the span of less than 12 hours Jesus has been arrested and assaulted by the religious authorities, betrayed and denied by His closest friends, and abandoned by the law of the land.

And each of them did it to protect themselves while He was suffering to save them.

The religious leaders grabbed Him because they saw Him as a threat to their teaching and their positions – people were starting to follow Him instead of them.

The disciples fled or denied Him so they wouldn't be arrested as well. Peter was trying to save his own skin.

Pilate denied Him justice because it was easier than taking a stand for what was right and dealing with the repercussions.

Everyone was acting in their own self-interests except Jesus. You know, things like this help me to see - maybe I don't always know what's best for myself. Because I don't know how this is all going to turn out. And I realize it would be much better to accept what God has for me than to try and make things happen on my own.

It also helps me see that I need Jesus more than I need anyone else. Religious leaders still fail – pastors are still men, flesh and blood and susceptible to temptation. I want with all of my heart and soul to avoid ever doing anything that will cause a smear on the reputation of my Lord, my wife, or this church. And so I know, I need to keep close to the cross. I need to decrease and have Jesus increase – to let you see more and more of Him through me. But it's Him you need to see – not me. As much as you may love a pastor or his ministry, always remember that it's really Jesus you are loving *through* him, because although the man may let you down, Jesus never will.

The same thing is true with friends – even best friends – best friends of the same sex, or the best friend that is your spouse – they will eventually let you down in some way as well. Friendship is good – it is essential to getting through the pitfalls of this life – but every friend will have an off day – a day when they seek their own good over yours. So, be thankful for what you see of Jesus in them, and let them see more of Him in you too.

And with government. Work on the government – work hard. Make laws, enforce laws, serve and protect. But don't look to the government to be perfect – it's full of men and women who are sinners like all of us. That's an especially important reminder for us here in this city at this time – some people think government jobs are the sturdiest, best, most reliable employment you can have and we've been seeing that myth shattered before our eyes over the past 12 months. Don't look to the government to be God for you. Don't expect the government to create Heaven on earth for you. Respect it, serve it, esteem it, but don't expect it to save you.

The only one who can save us, the only one who will never let us down, the only one who can give to us things which can never be taken away, is Jesus - the One who was working for everyone else when they were working for themselves.

We've going to celebrate communion this morning to remember what He did – what He gave to us, and I encourage you to think about all He has given to you, or all He is offering to you if you have never accepted Him before. If you're feeling let down, or abused, or disappointed, or abandoned, ask yourself – have you been looking to men or looking to Jesus? And ask Him how He wants to use you to show Himself to others.