JOHN

Chapter 18

*Jesus Arrested*

**When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. 4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” 5 “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. 7 Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”8 “I told you that I am he,” Jesus answered. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” 9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.” 10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) 11 Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”**

**18:1** *crossed the Kidron Valley.* East of Jerusalem and dry except during the rainy season. (CSB)

Kidron means “murky” or “turgid.” The brook is a wadi or watercourse, dry except in the rainy season; it adjoins Jerusalem on the east and empties into the Dead Sea. The valley is mentioned only here and in 2 Chron. 30:14.

OLIVE GROVE - Though unnamed here, Gethsemane. Perhaps John does name it because the place was unfamiliar to his readers. (TLSB)

**18:2** *Judas.* See note on 6:71. (CSB)

Jesus was not trying to keep His movements secret, thus He returned to a place He frequented. (TLSB)

OFTEN MET THERE - Only John supplies this detail. Jesus and His disciples may have camped in this place for the Passover festival and at other times when they visited Jerusalem. Augustine: “There accordingly, the wolf, clad in sheep’s skin, and tolerated among the sheep by the profound counsel of the Father of the family, leaned where he might opportunely scatter the slender flock, and lay his coveted snares for the Shepherd” (NPNF1 7:416). (TLSB)

**18:3** DETACHMENT - ESV has “Band.” Cohort of Roman soldiers, or a 10th legion. Not likely a whole cohort (normally 500-600, though the numbers varied), though concern that rioting among the Galileans at the feast would be sparked by the arrest of Jesus might have motivated the authorities to send a large detachment. (TLSB)

*officials from the chief priests and Pharisees.* Equivalent to the temple guard sent by the Sanhedrin. (CSB)

Reinforcement of these police by Roman soldiers was necessary because the temple police failed to arrest Jesus previously and because of the concern about the resistance from the Galileans (cf. 7:44-46). (TLSB)

*torches.* Resinous pieces of wood fastened together. (CSB)

*lanterns.* Terra-cotta holders into which household lamps could be inserted. (CSB)

Perhaps thought necessary to prevent Jesus from hiding in the garden, despite a full moon that night (Passover was calculated by the phases of the moon. (TLSB)

WEAPONS - Ironically used to arrest the One who came to bring peace (14:27; 16:33; 20:19). Augustine: “God lay hid in that human flesh; and eternal day was so obscured in those human limbs, that with lanterns and torches He was sought for to be slain by the darkness” (NPNF1 7:417). (TLSB)

**18:4** *knowing all that was going to happen to him.* Jesus was not taken by surprise. (CSB)

More evidence that Jesus willingly submitted to His Father’s will (10:18). (TLSB)

**18:5** *I am.* See 6:35; 8:58 and notes. (CSB)

Note the threefold repetition of the “I am” in vv. 5, 6, 8. An expression of self-identification. (TLSB)

*with them.* John does not let us forget where Judas belonged. (CSB)

Judas is mentioned often in John (eight times), usually with specific reference to his betrayal. This is the last reference in John. (TLSB)

**18:6** *fell to the ground.* They came to arrest a meek peasant and instead were met in the dim light by a majestic person. (CSB)

The Son of God confronted the power of darkness that came out against Him and caused its agents to recoil before His very presence (cf. 12:31; 14:30). Cf. 2 Kings 1 for the humbling of Ahaziah’s troops. (TLSB)

**18:8** *I am.* The threefold repetition (vv. 5, 6, 8) emphasizes the solemn words. (CSB)

*let these men go.* Jesus cared for the disciples even as he was going to his death. Twice he had made the arresting party say plainly that he was the one they wanted (vv. 4–5, 7). (CSB)

**18:9** *would be fulfilled.* Words normally used in quoting Scripture, and Jesus’ words are on the same level. See 6:39; 17:12. (CSB)

**18:10** *Simon Peter.* It is to John that we owe the information that the man with the sword (the Greek for this word refers to a short sword) was Peter, and that the man he wounded was named Malchus. (CSB)

Relatively short sword (like a dagger) that could be concealed under a coat. Some Jewish sources indicate that it was illegal to carry such a weapon during Passover. The servant perhaps sought to avoid Peter’s wild blow, but when he flinched, his ear was severed. (TLSB)

MALCHUS - Similar to Hebrew “king”; mentioned by name only in John. Perhaps a Syrian or Nabataean servant attached to the high priest’s household. (TLSB)

**18:11** *the cup.* Often points to suffering (Ps 75:8; Eze 23:31–34) and the wrath of God (Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15; Rev 14:10; 16:19). (CSB)

*the Father has given me.* The Synoptic Gospels also speak of the cup at the time of Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane (Mt 26:39; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42), and John says it came from the Father. God was in control. (CSB)

Cup of wrath and suffering, which God - not His enemies - had prepared for Him (cf. Ps,75:8; Is 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Eze. 23:31-34; Hab 2:16). (CSB)

*Jesus Taken to Annas*

**12 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him 13 and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.**

**18:12** *bound him.* The reason for the bonds is not clear. Perhaps their use was standard procedure, much like the modern use of handcuffs. (CSB)

Standard procedure for Roman soldiers, who took no chances lest an escape lead to serious trouble. (TLSB)

**18:13** *Annas.* Had been deposed from the high priesthood by the Romans in a.d. 15 but was probably still regarded by many as the true high priest. In Jewish law a man could not be sentenced on the day his trial was held. The two examinations—this one (mentioned only by John) and that before Caiaphas—may have been conducted to give some form of legitimacy to what was done. (CSB)

He was the high priest AD 6-15, when he was deposed by the Roman governor. At this time, Annas was not in office but continued to bear the honorary title. His five sons and his son-in-law Caiaphas succeeded him. (TLSB)

*high priest that year.* See note on 11:49. (CSB)

**18:14** *Caiaphas … had advised the Jews.* A reference to 11:49–50. For John it was this unconscious prophecy that mattered most about Caiaphas. John may also have been hinting that a fair trial could not be expected from a man who had already said that putting Jesus to death was expedient.

*Peter’s First Denial*

**15 Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest’s courtyard, 16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 17 “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, “I am not.” 18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.**

**18:15** *another disciple.* Perhaps John himself. (CSB)

*known to the high priest.* Refers to more than casual acquaintance; he had entrée into the high priest’s house and could bring Peter in. (CSB)

For reasons unspecified, John had access to the high priest’s house and was familiar with some servants there. (TLSB)

COURTYARD - Atrium or open area, probably in the Hasmonean Palace, which stood opposite the west wall of the temple, across the Tyropeon Valley. Annas and his son-in-law Caiaphas would have occupied separate apartments surrounding the court mentioned here. (TLSB)

**18:17** *the girl at the door.* All four Gospels tell us that Peter’s first challenge came from a slave girl, the most unimportant person imaginable. Her question expected the answer “No.” Peter took the easy way out. The other Gospels seem to indicate that the other denials followed immediately, but it is likely that there were intervals during which other things happened (see Lk 22:58–59). (CSB)

Peter took the way out that her question provided. (TLSB)

**18:18** IT WAS COLD - Night temperatures in Jerusalem (elevation 2400 feet) could be cold in the spring, but only occasionally freezing. (TLSB)

*Peter also was standing with them.* On a cold night he would have been conspicuous if he had stayed away from the fire. (CSB)

*The High Priest Questions Jesus*

**19 Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. 20 “I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.” 22 When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?” he demanded. 23 “If I said something wrong,” Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” 24 Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest.**

**18:19** *questioned.* Not legal, since witnesses were supposed to be brought in first to establish guilt. The accused was not required to prove his innocence. Perhaps Annas regarded this as a preliminary inquiry, not a trial. (CSB)

**18:20** *I have spoken openly.* It should not have been difficult to find witnesses (v. 21). (CSB)

*nothing in secret.* Not a denial that he taught the disciples privately, but a denial that he had secretly taught them subversive teaching different from his public message. (CSB)

**18:22** *struck.* Another illegality. The word apparently means a blow with the open hand—a slap. (CSB)

**18:23** *testify.* A legal term, indicating an invitation to act in proper legal form. John stresses the importance of testimony throughout his Gospel (see note on 1:7). (CSB)

Furnish proof. Jesus asserted that the proceedings show disrespect for proper authority and for real evidence. To insult proper authority is to insult God (Ex. 22:28). Ironically, the officer’s mistreatment of Jesus was blasphemous toward God. (TLSB)

**18:24** SENT…STILL BOUND - Now the trial would start in earnest. Jesus demanded to hear the evidence against Him, and Caiaphas would attempt to oblige. (TLSB)

*Peter’s Second and Third Denials*

**25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it, saying, “I am not.” 26 One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the olive grove?” 27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.**

**18:25** *he was asked.* Lit. “they asked him.” Some find a difficulty in that Mt 26:71 says another girl asked this question, whereas Mk 14:69 says it was the same girl, and Lk 22:58 that it was a man. But with a group of servants talking around a fire, several would doubtless take up and repeat such a question, which could be the meaning of John’s “they.” As on the first occasion (v. 17) the question anticipated the answer “No.” The servants probably did not really expect to find a follower of Jesus in the high priest’s courtyard, but the question seemed worth asking. (CSB)

**18:26** *a relative.* Another piece of information we owe to John. A relative would have a deeper interest in the swordsman than other people had. But the light in the garden would have been dim, as in the courtyard (a charcoal fire glows, but does not have flames). (CSB)

*Didn’t I see you … ?* Expected the answer “Yes.” (CSB)

Now Peter faced a real crisis. A relative of Malchus, who certainly remembered Peter, uncovered his identity. (TLSB)

**18:27** *a rooster began to crow.* The fulfillment of the prophecy in 13:38. (CSB)

John does not mention Peter’s flight and sorrowful tears (Mt. 26:75; Mk. 14:72; Lk. 22:62). Chickens are never mentioned in the OT but were apparently common in NT times. (TLSB)

*Jesus Before Pilate*

**28 Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. 29 So Pilate came out to them and asked, “What charges are you bringing against this man?” 30 “If he were not a criminal,” they replied, “we would not have handed him over to you.” 31 Pilate said, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” “But we have no right to execute anyone,” the Jews objected. 32 This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled. 33 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” 34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?” 35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?” 36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” 37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” 38 “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. 39 But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?” 40 They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.**

**18:28** *the Roman governor.* John says little about the Jewish phase of Jesus’ trial but much about the Roman trial (see note on Mk 14:53–15:15). It is possible that John was in the Praetorium, the governor’s official residence, for this trial. (CSB)

*early morning.* The chief priests evidently held a second session of the Sanhedrin after daybreak to give some appearance of legality to what they did (Mk 15:1). This occasion would have been immediately after that, perhaps between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. (CSB)

*ceremonial uncleanness.* A result of entering a Gentile residence. (CSB)

Jews did not want to become ceremonially unclean by entering the home of Pilate, a Gentile. Yet they wanted to condemn an innocent man. Such care for the Law contrasted unfavorably with the glaring illegalities of Jesus’ trial. (TLSB)

*to eat the Passover.* Does not mean that the time of the Passover meal had not yet come, for this would contradict the Synoptic Gospels, which have Jesus eating the Passover meal the night before. The term “Passover” was used to refer to the whole festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days and included a number of meals. (CSB)

**18:29** *Pilate.* The Roman governor (see note on Mk 15:1). He showed himself tolerant of Jewish ways. (CSB)

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea (AD 26-36) appointed by Emperor Tiberius on the recommendation of Sejanus, commander of the Roman Praetorian guard. Pilate’s political situation was greatly complicated after AD, 31 when Tiberius executed Sejanus for insurrection. An inscription mentioning Pilate’s service was found at the Roman theater in Caesarea Maritima, where Pilate had his home. (TLSB)

*What charges … ?* A normal question at the beginning of a trial, but it was difficult to answer, because the Jews had no charge that would stand up in a Roman court of law. (CSB)

**18:30** Jesus’ accusers implicitly admitted the weakness of their case by not providing a specific charge against Him. (TLSB)

**18:31** *Take him yourselves.* In other words, no Roman charge, no Roman trial. (CSB)

Pilate gruffly suggests that the Council deal with Jesus itself. He already that he knows Jesus is being mistreated. The Romans gave local governments freedom to rule their own people by local law, but capital cases were to be judged by the Roman authorities alone. (TLSB)

*no right to execute anyone.* They were looking for an execution, not a fair trial. The restriction was important, for otherwise Rome’s supporters could be quietly removed by local legal executions. Sometimes the Romans seem to have condoned local executions (e.g., of Stephen, Ac 7), but normally they retained the right to inflict the death penalty. (CSB)

**18:32** *the kind of death he was going to die.* Cf. 12:32–33 and “must” in 12:34. Jewish execution was by stoning, but Jesus’ death was to be by crucifixion, whereby he would bear the curse (Dt 21:22–23). The Romans, not the Jews, had to put Jesus to death. God was overruling in the whole process. (CSB)

**18:33-37** In John 18, Jesus is betrayed by Judas (vv 2, 5). Jesus accepts the Father’s will, rebuking Peter’s protection by the sword (v 11). Later, Peter denies his Lord. Annas and Caiaphas falsely accuse Jesus, handing him to Pilate and demanding crucifixion (vv 19–32). Pilate questions Jesus (vv 33–38), finding no earthly crime. Pilate recognizes that Jesus is rejected for claiming to be the Messiah (cf. Jn 1:49; 12:15; 19:7). The Sanhedrin considers his kingship blasphemous (TDNT 1:577). Despite political innocence, Pilate commands crucifixion. He fears accusations of disloyalty to the earthly king (see 19:12, 14–15, 19–22). Thus Jesus is betrayed by his disciples, religious leaders, the nation itself, and civil government. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

**18:33-35** After the Jews demanded the death penalty, Pilate summons Jesus to answer the criminal charge: “Are *you* [*su ei*,emphatic] the king of the Jews?” (emphasis added). In a legal pretense filled with irony, the heavenly King does not look kingly and his subjects deny his Kingship. Jesus asks Pilate if this charge is his or hearsay. Pilate distances himself, saying that because the nation, *your* ethnos (*to ethnos to son*), and the chief priests delivered you, there must be a reason. (The word *delivered*, *paredōkan*, often refers to betrayal. Judas delivered Jesus to the Sanhedrin [Mk 14:10], the Sanhedrin delivered Jesus to Pilate [Mk 15:1], Pilate delivered Jesus to the will of the people [Lk 23:25], and soldiers delivered Jesus to execution [Mk 15:15]. The Gospels present a comprehensive abandonment of Christ by all.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

**18:33** *Are you the king of the Jews?* Pilate’s first words to Jesus, identical in all four Gospels. One glance was enough to show him that a dangerous rebel existed only in the imaginations of Jesus’ enemies. (CSB)

Pilate’s question revealed that he was aware of the Jewish leader’s real complaint - Jesus’ messianic claims. Politically speaking, Pilate saw no threat posed to Rome by the pitiable, but not criminal, man before him. (TLSB)

**18:34** *Is that your own idea … ?* If so, Pilate’s question (v. 33) had meant, “Are you a rebel?” If the question had originated with the Jews, it meant, “Are you the Messianic King?” (CSB)

**18:35** Pilate displays irritation for being drawn into what he perceived as a Jewish squabble motivated by jealousy of Jesus’ public ministry. (TLSB)

**18:36** *My kingdom.* Jesus agrees that he has a kingdom, but asserts that it is not the kind of kingdom that has soldiers to fight for it. It was not built, nor is it maintained, by military might. (CSB)

Jesus does not defend himself against accusation, but emphatically declares he has a kingdom (*hē basileia hē emē*) whose origin is not of this world. Jesus is not a political threat, proven because his servants would have fought (*ēgōnizonto*, imperfect middle indicative) to prevent Jesus from being delivered (and none did, except Peter, 18:10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

Jesus was rejecting any worldly political aspirations or rebellious intent. Although a King, His kingdom did not threaten he external rule of the Roman Empire (cf. Lk. 20:25). (TLSB)

MY SERVANTS WOULD FIGHT - If Jesus had been establishing a political kingdom, He would have encouraged His disciples to fight to establish it (cf. vv. 10-11). “Legitimate public ordinances re good creations of God and divine ordinances, which a Christian can safely use. This entire topic about the distinction between the spiritual kingdom of Christ and a political kingdom has been explained in the literature of our writers… Christ’s kingdom allows us outwardly to use legitimate political ordinances of every nation in which we live, just as it allows us to use medicine or the art of building, or food, drink, and air. Neither does the Gospel offer new laws about the public state, but commands that we obey present laws, whether they have been framed by heathens or by others. It commands that in this obedience we should exercise love” (Ap XVI 53-55). (TLSB)

**18:37** *to testify to the truth.* Two of this Gospel’s important ideas (see 1:7 and note; 1:14 and note; 14:6). (CSB)

This is a challenge to Pilate to assess the truth of the claim that Jesus presented. The person of Jesus and His revelation of divine truth are inseparable (14:6). (TLSB)

Pilate infers from Jesus’ testimony he is a King (*oukoun*, “Interrogative, when the question has inferential force,” W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, W. Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979], 592; used by permission). Jesus replies that Pilate claims he is a King, thereby maintaining Pilate’s responsibility to decide the case. Pilate later admits that Jesus committed no crime, yet he commands execution (v 38; 19:16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

Jesus declares that he left his kingdom to witness to the truth. For this purpose he was born (*egō eis touto gegennēmai*, perfect passive indicative) and comes (*kai eis touto elēlutha*, present active indicative). In this expression, Jesus affirms his preexistence, an intentional incarnation, and that he is the manifestation of truth (see Ps 31:5; Jn 1:14, 17; 14:6; 17:3, 17). All who are of the truth (*pas ho ōn ek tēs alētheias*) hear and continue to hear his voice. Those who receive this witness belong to the truth as Jesus’ loyal subjects. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 4)

**18:38** *What is truth?* Pilate may have been jesting, and meant, “What does truth matter?” Or he may have been serious, and meant, “It is not easy to find truth. What is it?” Either way, it was clear to him that Jesus was no rebel. (CSB)

This is a cynical dismissive response intended to end the discussion. (TLSB)

*no basis for a charge against him.* Teaching the truth was not a criminal offense. (CSB)

**18:39** *it is your custom.* Prisoners are known to have been released on special occasions in other places. (CSB)

Only the Gospels record this custom, which seems to be a local arrangement. (TLSB)

*the king of the Jews.* John keeps his emphasis on the note of royalty. Pilate may have hoped that the use of the title would influence the people toward the way he wanted them to decide. (CSB)

This title is mocking the absurdity of accusations against Jesus. (TLSB)

**18:40** *Barabbas.* A rebel and a murderer (Lk 23:19). The name is Aramaic and means “son of Abba,” i.e., “son of the father”; in place of this man, the “Son of the Father” died. (CSB)