
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.1-6. The Kidron Valley was just to the east of Jerusalem, running next to the Temple Mount and the city of David from north to south. It usually was dry, but runoff from rain would flow through it to a network of drainage ravines, eventually to the Dead Sea. On the east side of the Kidron Valley, opposite the city, was the Mount of Olives, on which there was an olive grove called Gethsemane [Matthew 26.36; Mark 14.32], which is from the Hebrew for “olive press.” Today, there are two proposed locations of this grove. Jewish religious laws required that Jewish men remain within extended boundaries of Jerusalem on the evening of the Passover meal, and those boundaries included the western face of the Mount of Olives. Jesus had used this garden before, and no doubt had made his plans known to his apostles, so Judas Iscariot knew to look for him there. Judas had left the supper [13.30] to go betray Jesus to the religious leaders. Here we see that when all was ready, Judas led both Roman soldiers and assistants from the religious leaders to Jesus. The soldiers probably came along at the request of the religious leaders, who had struggled to apprehend Jesus previously and might have anticipated some trouble from the crowds who loved Jesus [remember, just a few days earlier they had hailed him as their king; 12.13]. Most Roman troops were stationed at Caesarea, but during feast days there always were some garrisoned in the fortress of Antonia, attached to the Temple complex, for policing the crowds and dampening any impulses for rebellion. A cohort was about 600 men, but they likely dispatched a smaller group to go arrest Jesus. The “assistants” [or “officers” or “officials”] might have been those sent to arrest Jesus before [7.32-46]; in any case, they represented the religious leaders of both the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin [chief priests], and the Pharisees. John makes a point of reminding us that it was night, symbolic of the spiritual darkness that was at work in the arrest of Jesus.

Reflect: In 18.6, Jesus identified himself as “I am”! Those listening could have taken this to mean, “I am he,” in other words, “I am the one you seek”; or they could have taken this to mean “Yahweh,” the name God had given himself in the Old Testament [Exodus 3.14]. They reacted by drawing back and falling to the ground [including Judas Iscariot!], suggesting they took Jesus’ words to mean he was asserting his divine identity. Perhaps this bold proclamation of what they considered blasphemy shocked them; perhaps they perceived for a moment the true glory of Jesus and this rocked them. Why do you think Jesus made it easy for Judas to find him? Why was he not afraid? If Jesus was in control of events even at this dark hour, how can that encourage you in your hard times?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.1-9. Whatever shock was felt by those who came to arrest Jesus, they got over it quickly and proceeded with their plans. Jesus diverted their attention from his disciples by getting the soldiers and assistants of the religious leaders to admit twice that they were after him alone, and had no reason to detain anyone else. By handing himself over to his enemies, Jesus ensured that his disciples went free. This foreshadows the benefit of Jesus going to the cross for his disciples. The arrest of Jesus secured the physical lives of his disciples; the arrest of Jesus culminating in his crucifixion secured the spiritual lives of his disciples. Thus John says that the prayerful prophecy of Jesus [17.12] was fulfilled by his voluntary surrender.

Reflect: If you had been with Jesus at his arrest, how would you feel that he gave himself up to protect you so you could escape arrest and death? Would you feel the same, only magnified, when you found out Jesus died to protect you so you escape eternal spiritual death and condemnation to Hell? How do you personally feel about Jesus being willing to sacrifice his life and in that sacrifice take on the burden of your sin and your just punishment for sin? How should those feelings affect the way you live?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.1-11. Closely following word order, Jesus asked Peter, “The cup which the Father has given to me, should I not drink it?” This grammatical construction shows either emphasis on the cup or the emotion of the moment or maybe both. “The cup” in the Old Testament was an expression of destiny, good or bad; sometimes it represented a destiny of suffering or death. While in the garden, Jesus had prayed about “this cup” of suffering and death he had to accept [Matthew 26.39; Mark 14.36; Luke 22.42; remember, in that culture, exact

quotations were not the norm and they had no quotation marks, so the point was to convey the meaning accurately]. Peter acted courageously, but was misled and clumsy. Jesus did heal the slave's ear [Luke 22.51].

Reflect: What did Jesus mean in his question to Peter? Why did Jesus have to “drink the cup”? How was Peter's brave act actually a denial of the work Jesus had consecrated himself to do?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.12-24. According to the other gospels, the disciples fled when the arrest was made. Probably the Romans stepped in because of the violence. The rest of the passage implies they let the Jewish religious leaders take charge of Jesus once they got back into the city. You will notice there are two men to whom John refers as “High Priest” in this passage. Annas was the official High Priest from AD 6 to AD15, when Pilate's predecessor as the Roman Prefect in charge of this area replaced him. When Jesus was arrested, Annas' son-in-law was officially the High Priest. But Annas retained a lot of influence. Many Jews were upset that the Romans had deposed him, which was a political and foreign intervention into what was supposed to be a strictly Jewish religious matter, and which went against scripture which declared this position was for life [Numbers 25.13]. In the almost two decades since, the Romans had put into the office and then taken out of the office five of Annas' sons, and now they had installed Caiaphas, his son-in-law. So while Caiaphas had official status as High Priest, Annas also had a lot of influence – was still considered the High Priest by some – and so it was to him that Jesus was brought first after the arrest. John reminds us that Caiaphas was the one who advised his fellow religious leaders that it would be better for Jesus to die for the people of Israel [11.49-52]; then and now, Caiaphas and his fellow conspirators were ignorant of how God would use their spiritual rebellion for his own purposes.

Reflect: Annas questioned Jesus about his followers and the content of his teaching. Jesus again protected his followers by focusing his answer on his teaching, and he pointed out that none of his teachings were secret, rather he had publically proclaimed all the main ideas he taught. How would you like to be known as the person who slapped Jesus while his hands were bound? At least you haven't committed *that* sin! Jesus' responses hint that this procedure of interrogation and beating was improper; they should have been gathering witnesses, proving rightness or wrongness, and treating him fairly. If the unbelieving and corrupted world did not treat the Son of God fairly, can you reasonably expect it to treat you fairly? Over the next few centuries, several cults would arise purporting to have secret knowledge that was the key to salvation. Why is it better that Jesus and the authors of the New Testament made all their teachings public?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read John 18.12-27. From the other gospels, it seems Annas and Caiaphas met Jesus in Caiaphas' house. Nobody is sure who was the other disciple with Peter. Because we assumed “the disciple Jesus loved” [13.25] was John himself and John seems to name everyone else involved in the gospel, it seems most likely John is the other disciple in this scene. The question is how would John, a fisherman from Galilee, know the high priest well enough to gain entrance to the courtyard of his house and instruct his slave girl? We know John's father was wealthy enough to have hired staff for the fishing business [Mark 1.20], and there were not the same class distinctions as today between those who labored and those who were more “white collar.” Early church historian Eusebius quoted an earlier source who said John hereditarily was a priest [so his family might have known Caiaphas as a relative and through religious connections]. It is not clear where this other disciple is in these scenes, but Peter was standing in the courtyard with the slaves and the assistants to the religious leaders [the soldiers apparently had not remained]. This gave Peter the opportunity to deny knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed, fulfilling the prophecy by Jesus that he would do so [13.38]. Peter had declared that he would follow Jesus anywhere. He did follow into the courtyard, but he was afraid to be arrested and killed, so he denied knowing Jesus three times. Once Jesus had died for Peter, Peter would truly be ready to follow him anywhere, even into suffering and death. John presented this material in a way to make a dramatic contrast: Jesus stood up to his questioners and denied nothing; Peter cowered before his questioners and denied Jesus.

Reflect: Are you ever embarrassed to admit that you have faith or that you follow Jesus? Are you ever tempted to hide your affiliation with Christ to blend in? Are the motives of your discomfort the same as Peter's? Why is it important even now, after Jesus has long been killed and resurrected, to admit your association with him?