

John 18:1-21

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[0 : 00] Who's in charge around here? You ever ask that question? Maybe in a restaurant the service is slow and maybe the food wasn't very good and you sort of are dissatisfied and you look around and you say who's in charge around here?

Who's running this place? It's kind of a rude question. We ask it a lot in America because we're generally rude and impatient. But John actually wants us to ask this question as we look at the final hours of Jesus' life.

It's a critical question for us to consider because it actually reveals much about the person and work of Christ. Who's in charge here?

In our narrative this afternoon we really have three options, don't we? The first is the Jewish mob and the Jewish leaders. And it's most natural for us to assume that someone has to be responsible for the death of Jesus.

And we see this mob that comes and takes them away. We see them on trial in front of the Jewish leaders and we think they must be in control. Clearly they're the ones who are pushing the agenda.

[1 : 07] Clearly they're the ones who are running things here. But what we don't see with this mob and with these leaders is a total control.

In fact, we actually see some great constraints placed on their authority, don't we? We see it first and most dramatically in verse 6 when they come to Jesus and they say, and he asks, who are you seeking?

And they say, Jesus of Nazareth. And what's his response? It's simply, I am he. And he says it a couple of times. And what happens to this great mob? You can picture them there with their weapons and their torches, clearly outnumbered, surrounding Jesus.

And he simply identifies himself. And it forces this crowd of people to draw back. And John says even to fall down prostrate on the ground.

Something clearly is going on here that they don't fully understand. There's a power here that they haven't yet comprehended.

[2 : 15] We're going to see more of that in a moment. But the second way we see their control restrained is even just in the judicial process as it plays out broadly.

Can these people actually put Christ to death? And you'll see this more in a few weeks, but the answer is no. They're even subject to other authorities.

The Roman authorities are the ones who have to play a role in this. So who's in charge around here? Clearly it's not the Jews and the Jewish leaders. And so there's a second option.

And the second option is Peter, isn't it? Peter clearly wants to take control of the situation in verse 10. He wants to be the hero. He sees this mob coming after Jesus and he says, I will protect my master.

And he takes out a sword and he cuts off the ear of a man. You see, he still can't accept Christ's mission. Earlier in John, Jesus had predicted his death.

[3 : 16] He said he was going to have to die for his people. And Peter rebukes Jesus for saying that. See, what Peter wants is he wants a Savior, a Messiah, who's going to stand up to the Romans.

He wants a Messiah who's going to raise Israel up to its proper place among the nations. That's the kind of Messiah that he wants. And now faced with arrest, with trial, and with death, Peter wants to find a way out for Jesus.

And he's left disappointed. And he's left in denial of ever knowing Jesus. See, clearly Peter isn't in charge here.

So who's in charge around here? Who's running this thing? Well, John makes it abundantly clear that it is in fact Jesus. And we see this here in three ways.

First, we see it in his innocence. We see it in Christ's innocence. One of my favorite shows growing up in the States is a television program called Cops.

[4 : 23] I don't know if you have it here. I haven't seen it. I've seen similar shows. But Cops is where they took video cameras and they put these cameramen in police cars. And it's great because they just go around and you get to see these high-speed chases played out on telly.

And then what inevitably happens is the person that they're chasing will wreck their vehicle. And then they jump out and they start running. And so then you get to see these cops get out of their car.

And they're chasing these people through backyards, through countryside, all over the place. And the cameraman's trying to keep up with them. And they always inevitably catch the guy. And when they catch him, the first question they ask him is, Why did you run?

And the answer, every single time, without question, is, Because I didn't do anything. And they say, the response to the cops always is, If you didn't do anything, then why did you run?

And there's never an answer for that. See, innocent men don't need to run. So, where do we find Jesus at the very beginning of this passage?

[5 : 26] In verse 18, he's in a garden. And what's he doing in the garden? Well, he goes there to pray with his disciples, which, in verse 2, was his practice.

And it was a place that was known by Judas, his betrayer. See, Jesus didn't need to run. He didn't need to hide. Why? Because he was acting as an innocent man.

He was doing what any innocent man would do. He was going about his business. The second way we see his innocence here is in the questioning of verses 19-24.

They ask Jesus about the things that he's said and the things that he's done. And he said, If I've said or done something wrong, then bring witnesses to testify against me. I've done everything publicly.

I've done everything openly. I've done everything within the order of our society, the way that you would expect it to be done. If I've spoken, I've spoken in the temple. I've spoken in the synagogues.

[6 : 26] I've spoken to loads of people. So if I've said something that's blasphemous, if I've said something that's wrong, bring people here to testify against me.

And what's the response to that? The result is they resort to, I guess the politically correct term is enhanced interrogation techniques, isn't it? They start smacking them around.

See, Jesus is an innocent man. What we have here is a setup. The trial of a man who has done nothing wrong. John is exposing that.

But he also reveals that this isn't the result of simply a corrupt judicial system. This isn't the result of an elaborate conspiracy. But it's part of a bigger plan.

It's part of a divine plan. And that's the second thing we see about Jesus here, is his divine nature being drawn out by John and being placed before us very, very clearly.

[7 : 27] In verse 4, we see it reflected in his knowledge. Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward. See, Jesus already knows before this scene plays out what's going to happen to him.

And he moves forward with it. Why? Because it's part of the divine plan. We see that continuing in verses 5-8. When he asks, who is it that you're seeking?

They respond, Jesus of Nazareth, this mob. And how does Jesus respond to that? He responds by identifying himself with a divine name. He says, I am he.

Now, if you're not as very familiar with the Bible, I am is a way that God identified himself several times in the Old Testament. In Exodus chapter 6, at the burning bush, when Moses came and he said, who do I say sent me when he's sent to the Egyptians, God's response is, tell them that I am has sent you.

We even see Jesus identify himself this way earlier in John in chapter 8, when he says, before Abraham was, I am. And what was the result of that?

[8 : 48] Well, he was saying this to a group of religious Jewish people who understood the Old Testament. They understood what he was trying to say about himself, that he was claiming divinity for himself. And they wanted to pick up stones.

They picked up stones to stone him. But what happened in that moment? Jesus simply walked through the crowd and walked to safety.

He left them behind. What happens here? When he identifies himself as I am, well, the crowd has to draw back, don't they? And they fall prostrate. And once again, Jesus could simply leave in that moment, couldn't he?

The crowd was constrained by the power of God that Jesus reveals in himself. But he doesn't leave, does he? He stays. Why? Because Jesus came with a divine purpose.

And that's the third thing we see about Jesus here, the purpose of his coming. And the purpose of his coming is very simple. It was to serve as our substitute.

[9 : 54] To take our punishment for us. And we see this in verse 9. What's Jesus' purpose? He says, To not lose any that his Father has given to him. And we see it again in verse 11.

His purpose is what? To drink the cup that the Father has given to him to drink. See, what we can rightly say about Jesus' purpose in coming was that it was to not lose any that had been entrusted to him.

And the way he would do that is by drinking the cup that his Father had given him. Now, what is the cup? What's Jesus talking about when he says he has to drink this cup?

Well, again, it's Old Testament imagery being pulled out by John. The cup in the Old Testament was used for two purposes. One was for celebration.

It was an image of, you know, the psalmist talks about how his cup overflows. It was such a joyful and celebratory moment that his cup is overflowing.

[11 : 02] But we also see it used in the sense of wrath and judgment. To drink the cup of God's wrath. That's what we're talking about here.

Jesus is going to drink not the celebratory cup, but the wrath cup. The cup of divine wrath. The cup of wrath is actually the cup that we deserve for our sin.

Jesus, the innocent, divine Son of God, drinks the cup for you and me. This is what theologians call penal substitution. Jesus acts as a substitute in our place to take away the wrath of God that we deserve.

So we see Jesus' innocence. We see His divinity. We see His purpose. What does all that mean for us? Well, first of all, it means that Jesus actively gave Himself up for you.

Jesus actively gave Himself up for you. He was in control of the action the entire time. He could have walked away at any moment. But He gave Himself freely to suffer humiliation and punishment that He didn't deserve.

[12 : 16] because you are the one He came not to lose. See, this is where an abstract idea has to become very concrete for you.

He didn't die just simply for the disciples that were around Him. He didn't die simply because He was caught up in some great conspiracy. He gave Himself up for you.

You are the one He came not to lose. But, and there's a big but here, we can only ever have Jesus on His terms.

That's the second thing that this means. Jesus actively gave Himself up for you, but we can only ever have Him on His terms. We must accept His control.

And we see this reflected so clearly in Peter. See, Peter had an idea of the kind of Messiah he wanted. But Jesus wasn't that kind of Savior. Jesus didn't come for the geopolitical revolution that Peter was hoping for.

[13 : 21] And people in our world make the same mistake about Jesus that Peter made, don't we? I think Jesus is great. Jesus was a great moral teacher. He says a lot of great things that I like.

Or, Jesus really inspires me to do good things for the poor like He did. Or, Jesus is a great guy. I like Jesus.

And these are nice thoughts. But if that's all you think Jesus is, then like Peter, you've completely missed the true Jesus. You've completely missed the point of His coming.

See, Jesus' life, Jesus' teachings, His miracles, and His death and resurrection, all served to announce the coming of the kingdom of God.

A kingdom that is wholly different from the kingdom that we've been living in on this earth. It's a kingdom that you can be a part of because Jesus' blood and sacrifice opened the way.

[14 : 23] It's a kingdom that we've been separated from for so long by our sin. And because we were under God's wrath. But what Jesus does in His death and resurrection is He drinks the cup of

God's wrath to open the way into this kingdom.

But we must turn from our sin and we must trust in Him and we must give up control. John really shows this brilliantly in Peter's denial.

Sandwiched between the first section, you see Peter's denial in two sections and sandwiched in between Peter's first denial and his second and third denials. John shows Jesus actively moving towards the cross.

You see his act of humiliation at the questioning of the Jewish leaders. We see Jesus working to save Peter from himself.

And that's the point that John is making. It's a brilliant literary turn, isn't it? because you see Peter denying Jesus. You see Jesus working for his salvation and then you see Peter once again denying Jesus.

[15 : 32] And he concludes, John concludes this section with the sound of a cock crowing. And it's a poignant moment in the narrative because Jesus had told Peter that before the cock crowed, he would deny himself, he would deny him three times.

So imagine the devastation for Peter in hearing the sound of that cock immediately after denying Jesus for the third time.

I want to suggest to you that this was actually an act of Jesus' grace in the life of Peter. Peter immediately was convicted of what he had done.

He was later restored by Jesus. It's interesting, there's actually two betrayers in this passage, aren't there? There's Judas at the very beginning.

And do you know Judas' fate? Well, he would later hang himself. Whereas Peter was later restored. So you have on the one hand Judas, a man who really couldn't accept responsibility for what he had done.

[16 : 46] And there was no repentance or conviction in his heart. There was no cock crowing for Judas. But then you have on the other hand Peter who denies his master three times.

And yet he hears the cry of God's grace in the cock. It's hard to hear. It creates brokenness in Peter. But it ultimately drives him back to Jesus.

Jesus. And what we all need in our hearts is to hear the crow of the cock. Do you hear the crow in your life?

The crow of the cock. Because it's the sound of conviction of sin. It sounds like Jesus calling us, calling you to repentance.

It's the sound of Christ, of God's marvelous and wondrous grace. Listen for the crow of the cock. Please pray with me.