

Our Bible Journey Begins with John
The Gospel of John Sermon Series
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
September 27, 2020

TEXT: John 18:1-14



We continue this morning in our journey through the Bible. Together with *Bible Journey* we're tracing the Gospel of John as a place to begin this journey this year. We have reached that point in the Gospel of John of Jesus' final week, the passion of Jesus. We begin in John 18:1 with: "When Jesus had spoken these words. . ." The words that John is referring to is the speech that Jesus gave His disciples in John chapters 13-17. In John 13, Jesus, in the midst of the meal together in the context of the Passover, had taken off His outer garment, wrapped Himself in a towel, and had begun to wash the feet of the disciples. They were astonished that their Lord would take such a posture of humility and service. Jesus said to them: "I have set for you a lordly example." It is a striking embodiment of what's about to happen.

In John 14, Jesus told the disciples: "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" And He said: "*I am going to prepare a place for you.*" Jesus, the master Carpenter, was going to prepare a place. He would build a room for the disciples in the Father's house, and He would build it with wood and nails. In John 15, Jesus said: "*I am the true vine.*" We looked at this passage last week where Jesus called us to abide in Him. He told us the Father would prune every branch that it might bear much fruit. In John 16, Jesus told the disciples: "*You will not see Me for a little while, and then you will see Me again.*" They were perplexed. At the end of John 16, Jesus told the disciples: "You will have trouble in this world," and to this, as followers of Jesus, we heartedly

say, "Amen." Then Jesus said: *"Be encouraged. I have overcome the world."* Jesus overcomes the world. He embodies His humility and sacrificial love in John 13. He tells them He's about to prepare a place for them. He urges them to abide in Him. He promises that He is about to overcome the world. And then we are given access to Jesus in prayer to the Father. The opening line of Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17 is to say: *"Father, the hour has come,"* and this, as attentive readers of the Gospel of John, is thrilling to hear because the hour has been building. Remember a few weeks ago when Jesus turned the water into wine, He had told Mary: *"My hour is not yet come."* We've been waiting, and now John allows us to overhear Jesus praying to the Father: *"Father, the hour has come."* This is the moment for which Jesus has been sent. This is the hour. And Jesus says: *"Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You."*

Jesus' actions, that we will look at in this text, are signaled to us as the reason for which He came: the glory of the Son exerted to glorify and honor the Father and the Father to reciprocate and honor the Son. The events of these days, these hours, will be the central subject of our faith. They will be the subject of the vast majority of space in the Gospel accounts. We listen more closely to Jesus praying. Isn't it remarkable to actually be allowed to overhear Jesus praying to the Father? He says in John 17:2:

"You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him."

Jesus has authority over all, and it is Jesus who gives eternal life to all whom the Father gives. This eternal life, bestowed by the Royal Son, has echoes of Eden. The opening chapters of the Bible are set in the context of the Garden where humanity has unbroken fellowship with God. This is what we're really made for. We long for the experience and reciprocation of God's steadfast love, and when the love of God does not fill our hearts, we will crave and seek that love from other places, and those loves will disappoint. We were made for this; we were made for this fellowship with God and intimacy with Him, and it's to be enjoyed and savored. In the Garden of Eden, we have unbroken fellowship. We partake of eternal life with God. And yet that relationship is severed through disobedience and sin, and God places guarding creatures to guard the way to the Tree of Life. God graciously guards the way to the Tree of Life, lest we partake of the Tree of Life in a fallen state. No, God is guarding the way until the last Adam would come and give us eternal life, access to that place of eternal presence with God. How He will secure that access will become clear in our passage. Jesus prays and defines for us what eternal life is in John 17:3:

"And this is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."

This is not the God of our imagination, not the God of the culture, not the God who is the one who obeys everything we command, but the God of Scripture who is alive and speaks and

commands and wills the universe into being and calls you by name, who knows the number of hairs on your head. To know this is true God, who is holy and righteous in all of His ways, and to know Jesus Christ whom He has sent, that's what eternal life is. It is not just an intellectual assent or knowledge of facts, but it is to know in the Hebrew idiom "to be in relationship with." To know someone is not just another name, but it is to know them, to walk with them, to live with them. This is eternal life: to know God and Jesus Christ, "whom You have sent." These eternal truths, this eternal life which is at stake in our passage, then, is realized in the specificity of place and time. After Jesus had said all of these things in John chapters 13-17, we read that Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley, and we are brought right into the very specific location where eternal life is at stake and won for us.



Jesus, after He speaks to the disciples – remember they are celebrating the Passover in the Upper Room in Jerusalem and Jesus had taught them – and now they leave the city walls and descend across the Kidron Ravine, or the Valley. John tells us that it is the river-torrent Kidron. This is the word he uses for a *wadi*, which becomes filled with water during heavy rain periods. It's a steep valley that comes from the city walls of Jerusalem and descends rapidly and then comes up the other side of the Mount of Olives. Jesus crossed the Kidron Valley and came to a garden. Just as eternal life was lost in the



Garden, John focuses our attention on the regaining of it in this garden. The other Gospel writers tell us this garden was called Gethsemane, the garden of the oil press. There are olive trees to this day in the Garden of Gethsemane that date from the time of Jesus. If these olive trees had had the ability to speak, as in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, some of them could have whispered to us about this, the most significant night that ever happened in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus would gather with His disciples regularly in this place, and there, the scene is set. Judas, one of the 12, arrives, having procured; the ESV translates it, a band of soldiers. But John describes this group of soldiers as a *speira* in Greek, which is the Greek translation of the Latin *cohort*. When you think of this group of soldiers coming, John says it was a *cohort* of soldiers which is about 600. So this group that is coming to the garden is not a small band of soldiers just looking for extra duty. It's a *cohort*. Sometimes the *cohort* can be used to describe the Latin *maniple* which is 200 men. Whether it's 200 or 600, it is a large group that is arriving to the garden. It's not only Roman soldiers, but it is also the temple guard under the command of the chief priests and Pharisees. Not only do we have representation from the nations, we have

representation from religious leaders. At the head of this band of several hundred, comes the false believer Judas, the one who is betraying Jesus. They arrive with lanterns, torches, and weapons – a nighttime betrayal in the garden with hired soldiers, temple police, and abundant weapons. As we consider this scene, we ask ourselves: “Who has the power and authority in this scene?” If you and I had been able to be there and had looked on from a distance and we had seen this small band gathered together in the garden and we had seen several hundred coming with weapons and torches, the official temple police, the *cohort* of Roman soldiers, we would certainly have said they are the ones with the power. We would certainly have felt to be on our heels and fearful and think: “Oh, no, something terrible is about to happen.” And yet John in his narration of this holy event communicates to us with tremendous clarity that the real power and authority in this text actually belongs to Jesus Christ. This is so life-giving for you and for me right now, because you will find yourselves in this life in moments that feel chaotic and uncertain, and you will wonder who has the power and authority. Sometimes people rush against you and circumstances will change and the thoughts that you had thought would come to pass don't, and you wonder who has the power and authority in this moment. I want to tell you upfront from this text that Jesus Christ has all authority and power.

Rudolph Bultmann, the German theologian, said the first scene of the passion narrative does not come upon Jesus as His fate. Rather, He is the one who acts; He is in control of the situation. So, this band of several hundred comes, and we read in John 18:4:

“Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’”

I just love this. Jesus, seeing the crowd of soldiers, temple police, and Judas at the head, stepped forward to meet them. He stepped into the hour willingly. He had told the disciples in John 10:18:

“No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down of My own accord.”

He said further in John 15:13:

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay his life down for his friends.”

No one is snatching Jesus' life. He is laying it down. He goes forth to meet them. He steps into the hour willingly, and He is the one who initiates the conversation: “Whom do you seek?” It is as God says: “The shepherd went to meet the wolf to save his flock.” The quality of Christ gives eternal life to men. This quality of who Jesus is, the attractiveness of Jesus, is so evident even in this. It is Jesus who gives eternal life to all who believe, and it is Jesus who steps forward in this moment, in His self-surrender in the garden. Jesus asked the question: “Whom do you seek?” and they replied: “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus was a common name. There are over 20 people named Jesus in Josephus' writing. They say: “We are looking for the Jesus, the one from

Nazareth.” Nazareth was a very small place. Jesus said to them, I Jesus says to them: “*I AM.*” Jesus says to them: *Ego eimi: I AM.* English syntax can hardly bear this lack of an object or predication, and so most English translations will add a word here. They add the word “He,” but that word is not in the text. Jesus asks: “Whom are you seeking?” and they say: “Jesus of Nazareth,” and Jesus answers and says: “*I AM.*” This is nothing less than the divine name that we considered last week. This is the reason why in John 18:6, that when Jesus said to them: “*I AM,*” the English translations do a great disservice here by adding that word “He” again. When Jesus said: “*I AM,*” they drew back and fell to the ground. Jesus spoke His name, and they withdrew. Who has the power and the authority to say? Jesus declares: “*I AM.*”

Augustine, the great North African theologian, master of language, says it like this. He says:

“With no other weapon than his own solitary voice, uttering the words ‘I AM,’ he knocked down, repelled, and rendered helpless the great crowd. Even with all the ferocious hatred and terror of arms, for God lay hidden in that human flesh, and eternal day was so obscured in those human limbs that he was looked for with lanterns and torches to be slain in the darkness. ‘I AM,’ he says and throws the wicked to the ground. What will he do when he comes as Judge who did this while giving Himself up to be judged? What will be his power when he comes to reign? Who had this kind of power when he came to die? and now even at the present time Jesus Christ continues to speak through the gospel: ‘I AM.’”

We looked at these I AM statements last week, these seven declarations of Jesus: I am the Bread of Life; I am the Light of the World; I am the Gate; I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and I am the True Vine; I am the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus’ great declarations of His identity as the divine Son are set before us. John also signals seven times in the Gospel where Jesus just declares His name “I AM,” and this is the climactic seventh one of those.

With divine authority and power, Jesus asks them again, “Whom you seek?” and they say: “Jesus of Nazareth.” He says for the third time: “*I AM,*” and then He draws forth the implication in John 18:8:

“I told you that I am He. So, if you seek Me, let these men go.”

This is striking, isn’t it? “If you’re seeking Me, then let these who are following Me go,” and John tells us that this was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken. In the Bible, fulfilling the words is the signal that God is speaking, and Jesus’ words now come to fulfillment. The word that John references is the word that he had heard Jesus say. Jesus had said in John 18:9:

“This was to fulfill the word that He had spoken: ‘Of those whom You gave Me I have lost not one.’”

I hope right now, by God's grace, to dig a trench in your soul. I hope by God's grace to clear out the rubble underneath your house, and I hope to set in divine footers that will anchor your dwelling place forever. This is one of the most profound and encouraging truths of the New Testament. Jesus, in John 6, after He fed the multitude, interpreted Himself as the Bread of Life and said in John 6:38-19:

"I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day."

That means that the Father entrusts lives to the Son, and that in the conversation between Father and Son, the Son says: "I will lose none that You placed in My hands." Jesus will hold onto us, even as we sing: "He will hold me fast."

When Jesus talks to the disciples in John 10 and describes Himself as the Good Shepherd, He says: "My sheep will hear My voice, and I know them, and they will follow Me." Jesus says in John 10:28:

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

Do you know that? Do you know that no power, no authority, no person, no circumstance, has the potential possibility of taking you out of Jesus' hand. Nothing is that strong. "My sheep hear My voice, and they follow Me, and I've got them, and I will lead them to eternal life, and nothing – no person, no power, earthly or demonic – can snatch them out of My hand." Oh, hallelujah! In John 17:12, while Jesus was praying, He said:

"While I was with them, I kept them in Your name, which You have given Me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

I went through a turbulent time at the beginning of my graduate study years. I'd come back to United States after living in China for a couple of years. God worked powerfully to guide me and I ended up at Gordon-Conwell Seminary graduate school. A few weeks into that journey, I lost my father suddenly in a plane crash, and I was deeply shaken. I was hundreds of miles from my family, and it was an immense and overwhelming loss. I had the privilege of being around a group of mature pastors and Christian leaders, and one of those pastors was in his late 60s. He had ministry miles. He had life with Christ lived. He had some battle scars from ministry and a deep, resonant voice. He just looked at me and: "David, you can lose your grip on God, but God will never lose His grip on you." Maybe some of you right now, for circumstances that are different, feel like you're losing your grip. The days are running together; all the plans you had are changed. I want to tell you that God will never lose His grip on you. "My sheep hear My

voice," Jesus said, "and they follow Me." Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows you by name, and He will not lose one of you. This Shepherd goes forth to meet the wolf to save His flock. Jesus is that Good Shepherd, and He will never lose His grip on you.

"Let them go," Jesus says, and in that moment, we struggle to really absorb that. We do struggle to believe that because we see the circumstances, we see the opposition, we see the trial or the temptation that's right in front of us. We panic. We fear. We think the boat is tipping, so maybe I should step forward and help. And the scene shifts for just a moment away from Jesus to Peter. Peter sees the 600 soldiers and the temple police and Judas, the false friend, and he sees the moment where Jesus is facing this great threat, and he panics. He's afraid; he's rash, impatient, and mistaken. So he, the fisherman, draws his sword. He evaluates the circumstances, and he is unclear about what's supposed to happen next. He misjudges the situation. He presumes, he assumes, he asserts his will in the moment, and he strikes. It's a glancing blow, not a fatal strike. It just glances off the ear of the high priest's servant whom John knows. His name was Malchus. The other Gospel writers tell us of this scene, and they tell us that Jesus healed this man.

But John is concerned to calm our fears by reporting His words to Peter: "Peter, put your sword away. I just told you that I'm not losing any that belong to Me." And now, Jesus says: "Let Me show you how." He says to Peter in John 18:11:

"Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given Me?"

This cup will be the cup that procures eternal life for you and for me. This cup will be the victory, and just as the Father has entrusted an innumerable multitude of men and women and children from every nation to His beloved Son, that the glad obedience of all peoples would belong to Him: like in Daniel 7, to the Son of Man; like in Psalm 2, the Father says, "Ask of Me and I will give you the nations as Your inheritance." All of those lives, all those people, given eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. How? Through the cup. It's through the cup and not the sword. "Put your sword away," Jesus says. "That's not where the victory comes." This cup is the cup that is filled with God's wrath against the sin of the world. This cup is a prophetic image in Jeremiah and other places of the cup of God's wrath. You see, we need salvation. We need forgiveness, and the only One who can forgive sins is God alone. The danger that we face is not from 600 Roman soldiers and the temple police and a false friend. The danger that we face is the wrath of God against sin – God in His holiness.

What will happen to the sin of the world? God will not just declare it gone for we would forever consider Him unjust, and if God could just change His holiness like that, we would not be inclined to trust Him. But a holy God facing unholy people makes provision for forgiveness. The

wrath of God laid on a substitute. This week is the week for our Jewish friends where they are fasting and repenting and preparing for confession for the Day of Atonement, which starts tonight. It is a day of seeking God for forgiveness for the sin of the nation for the past year, and here Jesus is interpreting this moment to the disciples. He says to Peter: "Shall I not drink the cup? The Father has given Me this cup." The other Gospel writers give us access to this moment. Matthew tells us that Jesus fell on His face and prayed: "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.*" The Father's plan to save the world is to pour out His wrath, the sky to become dark in the middle of the day for the sin of the world. "Put your sword away," Jesus says. He asked the Father three times: "If this cup could pass from Me," and the answer was "no," because this is the way that the world would be saved, that sin and darkness would be defeated. And so the band of soldiers and their commander arrest Jesus and bind Him. They take him first to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year, and John echoes back to an earlier scene that is unique to John's Gospel. He says it was Caiaphas who had advised the religious leaders that it would be profitable or expedient or advantageous that one man should die for the people – an unexpected interpreter. Caiaphas, the corrupt high priest, because he is in his office, actually prophesies. John says that one man should die for the nation. In John 11:47-48, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together saying:

"What are we to do? For this Man performs many signs. If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

Hallelujah! Amen. Caiaphas steps forward in this discussion with the Sanhedrin and says in John 11:49-50:

"You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

John says he did not say this of his own, but that God honored the very fact that he was high priest that year and caused him to prophesy: that the one would die for the many. But John adds something that Caiaphas did not prophesy. John says "that Jesus would die, not only for the nation, but He would also in His death gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad and that Jesus, the Seed who would fall into the ground and die, would bear much fruit." John says also that the Seed would die, that Jesus, who told His disciples for little while you will not see Me and then you will see Me again, the Son of Man would give His life as a ransom for many, and then He would be raised from the dead, and He would stand as a banner and a signal for all peoples, and that Jesus, who gives His life willingly in this scene, who takes initiative with authority and power, is the One who then stands as a great magnet for all peoples, and He will gather the children of God scattered abroad. Jesus goes out. The Shepherd went out to defeat the wolf and save His flock. Jesus declares His name, *I AM*, the divine name

and then willingly gives His life to gain ours.

He is at work in the world and drawing people to Himself. I know this year has been difficult. It's been challenging, but there have been some aspects of this year that have been wonderful. We've had more time with some key relationships, for example, than we had planned. As a pastor, one of the most exciting aspects of this year for me, that I've seen over and over, is that 2020 has taken down the façades for many people and there is a much greater openness to God because the things that we trusted in have been proven to be folly. I had a great moment on Friday. The weather was beautiful. I went for a long run in the morning just thanking God for the beauty of His creation. It was so nice outside that I thought I would go swimming, so I went to the pool. It was towards the end of the day and the crowd had thinned out. There was a grand total of two people in this large pool. I wanted to read a little bit, and so I brought the book that I was reading as my summer reading. It was like an extra day of summer. I was in the medium depth area of the pool just walking around. I had never done this before and had never been able to do this because so many people are usually there. As I was walking around in the pool, I was reading the final chapter of Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity*. It was compelling. There was one other person left in the pool, and I overheard some fragments of a conversation between this woman and the lifeguard. They were talking about Christ. I thought: "She's doing a great job." At one point, she talked about the Day of Prayer that Franklin Graham organized, and she mentioned to this teenage lifeguard, a sincere young man, that Franklin Graham is the son of Billy Graham. The young man said: "Who is Billy Graham?" I was so proud of my sister in Christ because she didn't flinch. He didn't know who Billy Graham was. She could have easily put him down or made him feel bad about that. But God was working, and He was wooing the heart of this young man. She gave a couple of sentences about who Billy Graham was, and at that point I felt like I could get involved. I took a couple steps over and I looked up and I said: "Billy Graham spoke at my graduation." I got to share a few things about Billy Graham, and we had this amazing conversation in this triangle with two Christians standing in the water and a young lifeguard asking question after question about Jesus Christ. It was beautiful, and I left the pool thinking: "Lord. I wish that all my days could just be spent like this, just wandering around and finding people that You are seeking."

You see, it was not only expedient for One to die for the nation, but that this One then would gather the children of God who are scattered everywhere. The Jesus who gives His life willingly for yours and for mine will never lose His grip on you. The cup of wrath that He drinks allows Him to offer to us now the cup of the New Covenant in His blood.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.