

# THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD

## [ Part 2 – Confrontation ]

We are continuing with the greatest story ever told through the eyes of John.

Last time we dealt with concentrated teaching in the form of prayer > But as we move into chapter 18 we should note the change to gripping narrative, punctuated by dialogue and occasional comment by the evangelist.

This is the form of material that will now be with us to the end of this gospel.

### **John 18**

As we turn to this chapter, we get a sense of foreboding in that dark night in Jerusalem > It's like that stifling feeling just before an electric storm breaks.

And there's a certain inevitability about all this > Jesus has come from the Father into the world, now He must leave the world and return to the Father, and at a great and terrible cost.

This has to be if darkness is to be confronted, His own people liberated and the Father glorified.

First we see Jesus arrested:

### **V 1 – 2**

If the traditional sites in Jerusalem are correct, then Jesus with the disciples faced a journey of about a mile, moving northward and then past the great dark outline of the temple.

Emerging through the Lion's gate they would snake their way down the path across the shallow valley of the Kidron > Not far up would bring them to the garden area of Jerusalem, where the rich had their places of rest.

Some rich benefactor made his garden available to Jesus on a regular basis and critically it was a place where Judas could find them.

Having sprung the trap, sent Judas on his foul errand, Jesus now waits, offering Himself for capture > He kneels in what we know as the garden of Gethsemane, awaiting his arrest.

Now a profoundly touching truth is that Jesus knelt on the road to escape > The road of the Mount of Olives runs on to Bethany at the top.

Just a quick command to the disciples, a scramble, another 20 minutes up the slope and they would have been with friends > A few quickly saddled horses and they could have been off northward, through the night, to Galilee and to safety.

Yet on the very road to escape, Jesus knelt for us and awaited His arrest.

He prays through the night, and although John doesn't give us any of the detail, there is a hint of it in:

**V 11 ...Shall >**

At last Jesus sees what He anticipates:

**V 3**

It's an interesting group > There are 3 elements in it, all eerily familiar to us today:

**a. There are the soldiers**

An attachment would mean 1,000 foot soldiers if it were all of the attachment > Certainly there were several hundred.

This was the Roman force, normally garrisoned at the coast of Caesarea, who came up to Jerusalem at Feast times, because of the great potential for disturbance then.

Here was considerable force, fully armed > Jesus' powers were known and there was much sympathy among the people who would know the implications of arresting Him.

What we have here are the representatives of oppressive political and military rule.

**b. With them the officials from the chief priests and Pharisees.**

Here are the representatives of corrupt religion.

**c. Third we have Judas representing personal betrayal.**

This dark alliance of evil, come together and apparently darkness wins.

Verse 12 has Jesus bound and being taken away under arrest, strangely vulnerable, and submissive to the powers of darkness.

But that is only on the surface as John gives us hints of some other dimensions:

#### V 4

Here is Jesus' initiative > He went out to them > Our Lord is still in control, knowing all that was going to happen to Him.

Then there's Jesus' identity > As He goes out to them:

#### V 4 ... Who > V 5 > Said

Just two words in Greek > It's a great self-definition, a sense of God > It links right through this gospel with the '**I Am**' sayings.

In Exodus the Lord says '**I am that I am**' and in Isaiah through chapters 40 – 55 God says '**I am the Lord, there is no other; I am God alone**'.

The effect is dramatic:

#### V 6

Something of the deity of our Lord breaks through.

Remember what happened at Nazareth, how they took Him to the top of that hill to cast Him down and the Scripture says '**He passed through their midst**'.

His hour was not yet, and so He moves through them, the authority of His deity is there.

Then we come to Jesus' purpose:

#### V 8

Here are the terms for Jesus' arrest, He will give Himself up to them provided they guarantee safety and the freedom of His followers.

This happened in fulfilment of the Scripture '**I've not lost one of them**'. > But there is a profound insight here:

Here is the whole atoning act of God in Jesus Christ > As Jesus allows himself to be imprisoned His followers are set free > So it is with us, Jesus is taken captive so that we may go free.

Then we come to the second purpose:

## V 10 – 11

What is this cup?

For anyone who knows their OT, the cup has only one possible meaning > It's the cup of God's wrath.

But what does He fear, with what does He struggle?

Is it death? > No. Is it Satan? > No.

Is it the Holy One becoming sin? > That certainly is an unspeakable possibility > He is made sin for us.

And surely this is the heart of it.

The cup is the Father in His wrath.

We have to be very careful how we state this in terms of the Trinity so that we do not lose the unity of the Godhead.

But in some mysterious profound way, it is the Father whom Jesus starts back from, for He must bear the wrath of heaven.

Remember that flaming sword back in the Garden of Eden set to guard the road to the tree of life and the presence of God because of our sin?

That flaming sword, God must take in His grace and thrust it into His own heart > extinguishing it there for us.

An amazing, amazing love > That is what He fears.

Is that why He prays at the cross **'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'**

No 'Abba' here > The only prayer of Jesus without 'Abba' > This is deep indeed.

The gospel maybe free, but it is not cheap > It may be simple, but it is not superficial.

Jesus faces this and as He goes to His arrest and all that follows it > He is going to take that cup of wrath from the Father's hand so that He might drink it to the dregs for us.

From this point on the chapter has 5 sections:

- **Annas part 1**
- **Peter's first denial**
- **Annas part 2**

- **Peter's second and third denial**
- **The Gentile world, Pilate and the first part of the Roman trial.**

### **1. Annas part 1**

#### **V 12 – 14**

Annas' position is very significant > He actually was the high priest through Jesus' adolescence.

When Jesus went to the Temple for the first time in Luke 2 it was probably Annas who presided over the celebration > And now here he is.

But why? > Surely Jesus should go to Caiaphas?

Well Annas can't let the power go > He remains the power behind the throne, as one after another of his sons and finally his son-in-law are high priest.

He's a rather pathetic figure > An old man hanging on to power > And it's not easy in Christian ministry to relinquish power, yet it has to be done.

God gives grace for it.

We finish His work, and that glorifies Him, but there is a finishing point, a relinquishing and a passing on.

The tragedy of hanging on to power beyond the appropriate moment is well illustrated by Annas.

By hanging on to power, he becomes personally implicated in the darkest moment in the whole history of Israel > The rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah.

### **2. Peter's first denial**

Before we get any further with Annas we're switched back to Peter and another disciple, who was probably John:

#### **V 15 – 18**

Peter at this point is totally disorientated, can't understand what's happening, it's dark, and in the high priest's courtyard he's out of his familiar territory.

He's not in a comfortable environment and there's this lassie on the door asking a most awkward question and fatally he crosses the line > He denies Jesus.

We need to watch and pray > Peter is unguarded, he denies his Lord, and to make matters worse he fraternises with the enemy by standing around the fire to keep warm.

We must ensure that we are not caught off guard, deny our Lord or warm ourselves with the enemy.

### 3. Annas part 2

#### V 19 – 24

Now we're back with the high priest and his interrogation of Jesus > It is only a preliminary hearing as Annas is trying to get a basis for the charge they'll bring to the Sanhedrin when it meets a little later, for it is still early in the morning.

So Jesus is questioned about His teaching and His disciples > And the reason for this line of questioning comes from:

#### Deut 13 : 1 – 5 > God

Here's the prophet, Jesus, He has come and the signs are real, the miracles actually happened > But isn't He saying '**Come and follow another God? Isn't He taking people away from the worship of the true God**'.

That's what Annas is seeking to prove > But Jesus won't answer in detail about His teaching > He simply reminds Annas '**that all He has said was out in the open, so why question me now?**

**Ask those who heard**'.

Jewish jurisprudence was built upon the testimony of witnesses and so the witnesses should have been in the garden to accuse Jesus.

And certainly witnesses should have been the ones interrogated by Jewish law to establish their credibility and then their testimony would be accepted.

Jesus was asking for a fair trial.

He is exposing the falsehood of all this, the conniving, the suppression of law and due process > And for His pains He gets a slap around the face.

Jesus asks **'If I've done something wrong testify, but if not why did you strike me?'**

Incarnate grace always exposes evil.

Annas gets nowhere > The implacable integrity of Jesus is impregnable and so he sends Him on to Caiaphas > That in turn will lead to a meeting of the Sanhedrin, which John doesn't report as the other gospels have it.

But you remember the detail:

- **Jesus is arraigned**
- **Witnesses are brought, but they can't agree**
- **Finally Jesus is put under oath to reply when He refuses to make an answer**

**'Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed?'**

**'I am. And you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven'**

That great figure from Daniel, the instrument of God's eternal judgements and destiny.

**'You have heard the blasphemy'** They all cry and condemn Him as worthy of death for the blasphemy of claiming to be the Son of God.

#### **4. Peter's second and third denial**

##### **John 18 : 25 – 27**

Peter had denied Jesus once, and it became easier the second and third time, and he does so with oaths and curses > Then suddenly Peter remembered and Luke tells us that he went out and wept bitterly.

There is a great lesson being taught us in this section as we move back and forth between the interrogation of Annas and Peter's denials >

Jesus stands up to His questioners and denies nothing, Peter cowers before his questioners and denies everything.

And yet it is Jesus who takes our place and stands in for us.

In His blessed integrity and faithfulness He is held captive for us, so that our unfaithfulness and denials are laid on Him, and we go free.

This is hugely important because as we come to the cross, and see Jesus dying there, spread-eagled, writhing in agony, and finally as our sin is laid upon Him, crying out in the darkness **'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'** > Then there we see what we need.

What we need every moment > The blessed substitutionary work of Jesus, in our stead, for our standing before God.

Our sin is placed on Jesus and in exchange His righteousness is placed on us.

While we were sinners, while we were denying Him, Christ died for us > And as we see Him die for us we must say: **'I am that person, that denier, curser and coward, who every moment needs that atoning sacrifice, that person of the Son of God, in my place for me'**.

Now if you think this is a terribly pessimistic view of humanity > That we are all sinners like Peter > Notice the other side that is there:

The same cross that slays me because of my sin, is the cross that revives me.

It puts me down as a sinner, and lifts me up because it tells me how valuable I am to God > How much He loves me.

On the one hand we are utterly slain, on the other we are marvellously affirmed.

We learn who we are at the cross > Every moment we live by grace, we live by Christ, we stand before God in Him.

Utterly sinners, utterly lost, utterly damned > And yet marvellously saved, affirmed, held and sanctified.

But the cross is not just for **our** identity > It's hugely important for our ministry to others.

Our western society is several generations into post-Christianity and its value systems are a long way from the value systems of the gospel.

It's total secularisation, and the result is, if we're going to reach the world for Christ, we have got to learn to handle people who come to us with a lifestyle that is very different to the one taught in the Scriptures.

We have to learn to relate to people in a way that, while the gospel calls them to repentance, it does not set us apart from them as superior.

**Paul Tournier**, a Christian therapist, says this:

**'How many times have I thought about when a man has been sobbing in my consulting room as he has given expression to his disappointment with himself, his faults and failures, his despair, his feelings of inferiority, that he is nearer to the kingdom of God than I who listen to him.**

**And I come nearer to the kingdom as well as to the man only insofar as I recognise that I am as guilty, as powerless, as inferior, and as desperate as he is.**

**Only then can I help him for I am delivered from all spirit of judgement, I am his companion in repentance and in waiting for grace'.**

But how do we come to people in such a way that we don't pass judgement, and cause them to run a mile because of a superior, self-righteous spirit.

There is only one way > By seeing ourselves in the light of the cross.

We are called to love this lost generation, to help them to repentance and new life > And that can only be done if we recognise that we are as:

- **Guilty**
- **As powerless**
- **And as desperate**

As they are.

You only learn that at the cross.

Living at the cross, being identified by the death of Jesus, accepting His wonderful exchange, means that we are freed to reach this broken needy world for Jesus and in His name.

In the light of grace we see sin and having seen it we can point sinners to the light of grace.

## 5. The Gentile world, Pilate and the first part of the Roman trial.

### V 28

The verdict at the Jewish level is one of blasphemy and Jesus must die.

But there are two tiers of authority in Palestine in the first century, and that verdict needs to be confirmed by Pilate, the Roman governor.

They don't want to go to see the governor in his house because it's a pagan house and they would become ceremonially unclean.

The Passover is already under way and they don't want to be spoiled for celebrating the rest of the Passover > To be clean, as they plot the death of the Son of God, they will not enter the Gentile house.

### V 29 – 30

I think it is almost certain that the Jews thought that Pilate would simply confirm their decision and deliver Jesus immediately up for crucifixion.

But Pilate not would be twisted, he will not bow to their will, and he will conduct his own enquiry, thank you very much.

### V 31

Pilate was pushing their noses into the dirt, reminding them they don't have the right to decide > Rome is the Master.

### V 32

That's the Jews purpose too, because the Law had said '**cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree**'.

A messiah who died on a cross at the hands of the Gentiles was about as possible as a square circle.

That would end all this fuss, all this Jesus stuff, right there > That was their goal.

They pressed for crucifixion > But Pilate will conduct his examination:

**V 33**

How do you plead – Guilt or Not guilty?

**V 34**

Jesus is reaching for the man behind the proconsul, and Pilate replied:

**V 35**

Then Jesus talks about His Kingdom:

**V 36**

Jesus says, Rome need not fear from Me at a political level, or at a military level > That's not how My Kingdom is established, My Kingdom is from another place.

**V 37**

Jesus is a king of truth > And that helps us not to misinterpret V 36 as though it means that we should have nothing to do with the political sphere in this political world.

It's a Kingdom of truth and truth is universal.

Every area of life is infected by the issue of truth and we should be concerned for truth everywhere > The essence of this kingdom is not established by political power or maintained by military force.

**V 38**

Cynical perhaps, but maybe just something there of a longing, and Pilate's done his examination > He's reached his conclusion > No basis for a charge.

That should have ended the trial > It would have left Pilate unpopular, but just.

Then he thinks of a card he can play and so he suggests:

**V 39**

Maybe, he thinks, I should release Jesus as my amnesty prisoner > That would show that Jesus was guilty, so would please these leaders and it would show Him as a man clemency, for the people, he was pretty sure, didn't share their view of Jesus.

That's his offer > And he is surprised by the result.

**V 40**

The text goes on in the other gospels **‘What then will I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?’**

And they answered **‘Crucify Him’**.

Now what we witnessing in this chapter is that the trial of Jesus is the trial of humanity.

Jesus is accused of blasphemy by the Jews, accused of treason, and rivalling Caesar, by the Roman authority.

But it is us, not Jesus, who stands guilty.

All of us have sinned as God has spoken to us in conscience, in creation, in scripture and in Christ > All of us – None of us stands not guilty.

What this sin consists of is revealed to us in Genesis > The very first sin:

- **First it consisted of blasphemy**

**‘You shall be as gods’** was the height of blasphemy > That humans should be God in place of God. Independent of Him, having no need of Him.

- **Second it was treason**

**‘You shall not eat of this tree’** and Adam and Eve ate, they rebelled against God’s command and authority.

Blasphemy and treason are actually at the heart of all our sinning > The very charges that Jesus faced are the charges that we face > Suddenly we see the whole trial of Jesus in a new light.

Pilate, Caiaphas, and Annas fall into the background > And Jesus stands at the judgement seat of God, on our behalf.

The charges we face, He faces for us.

Isn’t that part of the reason why He is silent at His trial and will not defend Himself?

He was standing there for us > The judgement that is passed on Him becomes the judgement that ought to be passed on us.

At Calvary He becomes the condemned for us > The blasphemy and treason which is our guilt is borne by Him and He dies for us.

That application is caught perfectly in the man whose name appears in the last verse of the chapter > Barabbas.

He was justly tried and found guilty, and yet he goes free while Jesus is condemned.

It's only imagination, but did Barabbas stagger out into that barrack courtyard and see Jesus have the cross thrust cruelly upon His bleeding back?

Perhaps Barabbas finds himself that afternoon in the region of Calvary > And looking up at that central cross he says – As we all must look upon the cross and say –

**'I should be there > He is there in my place, He's dying for me'.**

And thank God He did.