

JOHN 18

What is Power?

The countdown to Jesus's death has commenced. First comes his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane. Unlike the Synoptics, John bypasses his agonizing prayer, the constant napping of the disciples, or Judas's infamous kiss. Instead, John emphasizes that even amid his own betrayal, Jesus is moving the chess pieces. As Logos, he knew *all that would happen to him* (vs. 4) and approached the assembled mob. On three occasions (vs. 5, 6, 8) Jesus announced himself as the great I AM which sends the crowd *back and fell to the ground* (vs. 6)

Peter, on the other hand, takes matters into his own hands. Trying to be the hero, he grabs a dagger (commonly carried by men at this time) and started swinging. Though aiming for much more, the fisherman managed to sever the right ear of Malchus who was there to help arrest Jesus. It is worth noting the unnecessary detail John provides the reader. The Synoptics leave out the man's name and yet we are given his identity and precise location of his wound. The reason is likely for verification. John, an eyewitness, shares with the reader other eyewitnesses. Nevertheless, Jesus goes into custody after exhorting Peter.

The scene then shifts to Annas and Caiaphas, each had served as High Priest and were influential men. John's comment in verse 14, "It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people" directs us back to the resurrection of Lazarus and reminds the reader of the real purpose of Jesus's death. He dies as the sacrificial Lamb for all of humanity.

What follows is the unjust monkey court that results in Jesus's execution. The Gospels are clear that Jesus suffered as an innocent man due to injustice. Christian was born amid suffering and corruption. This injustice begins with false accusations and even abuse (see vs. 23).

The Jews quickly transfer Jesus to Pilate in the middle of the night (or *early morning* in vs. 28). Pilate normally would not have been in Jerusalem, but due to the Passover celebration, his presence was a necessity. Pilate was unpopular with the Jews and hated their religion. He made multiple efforts to insert Roman worship in Jerusalem.

Regardless, the Jewish leadership want Jesus to be executed. They lacked the authority to carry out capital punishment (vs. 31) and handing him over to the Romans liberated them from any guilt. Jesus's encounter with Pilate is significantly different than his "trial" with the Jewish leaders. Pilate only cares about the answer to one question, "Are you the King of the Jews" (vs. 33)? The Romans could tolerate much, but not messianic rumors and claims of monarchy. That was a capital offence.

Jesus's answer to Pilate is instructive. He is concerned with an earthly kingdom that might rival Rome. Jesus proclaims a heavenly Kingdom that was already rivaling Rome. "My kingdom is not of this world." Jesus answered. "If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (vs. 36) Remember that Peter had just tried to fight and was rebuked for it. Rome was a kingdom of blood. Jesus's Kingdom is one of love. Rome took lives for power. Christ gave his life and takes it up again. That is real power!

In the end, Pilate, at best, find Jesus to be a harmless, misguide (if not foolish) Jewish Rabbi. What threat to Rome is a man who is raising no army? Thus, he proclaims, "I find no guilt in him" (vs. 38). That is unsatisfactory to the Jews and thus they choose Barabbas "a robber" and, according to the Synoptics, an insurrectionists and murder over Christ. Thus, it is worth remembering, Jesus suffers on the cross of a guilty man (Barabbas) as an innocent victim. This lies at the heart of the cross: Christ paid the price he did not owe because we owe a price we cannot pay.

The stage is set. Jesus marches toward his death.