

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreek.church)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, March 5, 2017

John 18:1-12 “An Unusual Arrest with an Unexpected Impact”

Intro. John alone records most of the events recorded in my text. The other gospels focus on other aspects of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden.¹ Unlike John, they include the account of our Lord’s agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. While the other gospels focus on the suffering of our Lord, John focuses on the manifestations of His glory and deity, even in His arrest. You will see why I say that as I expound this Scripture. John’s account is simply consistent with the main purpose of his gospel, as stated in John 20:31, “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Before I get into the message, I want to give some background to vv. 1-3. After Jesus spent some time in the upper room for the Last Supper, He and His disciples left from there to go outside the city to the Mount of Olives. They probably passed nearby the temple, went out the Eastern Gate, then crossed over the Brook Kidron, which means “dark.” One reason is that at Passover the blood of thousands of slain lambs probably poured into that brook. From there Jesus went up the side of the Mount of Olives, to a garden called Gethsemane. There He engaged in agonizing prayer. Later that evening, Judas led a band of Roman soldiers² and temple-guards out to arrest Jesus (vv.2-3). John is the only gospel writer that includes the soldiers as part of the large group sent to arrest Jesus. The word translated “detachment” (*speira*) can refer to 1/10 of a legion, or as many as 500-600 men. I doubt if it was *that* many, but I do believe it was a rather large group, large enough to have a high ranking commander (*chiliarchos*³), as we see in v.12. In addition to the soldiers, there were probably 100-200 temple guards. After all, Matt. 26:47 says there was “a great multitude with...” Judas.⁴ And these men were armed with swords and clubs.⁵ Why so many? They knew Jesus had performed miracles and they thought that they needed that many to be able to take Him prisoner! Jesus took His disciples so that they could witness the fact that in His arrest, He was not a helpless, defeated victim, but that He voluntarily delivered Himself up into the hands of His foes. If He had not yielded Himself, all the weapons those men had would have been absolutely useless and worthless. Furthermore, they came with torches and lanterns. Since it was Passover, it was a full moon. They probably did not need the torches by which to travel. They probably thought they need them, and so many officers and soldiers, because they would have to search for Jesus hiding in the nooks and crannies of the hillside.

Now I believe John told of the arrest of Jesus, for what he witnessed gives us three truths about Jesus. Here we find a blending of His majesty and His meekness. I want you to see these

¹ It is interesting to note that the arrest took place in a garden. Christ, the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), met the enemy in a garden and triumphed, while the first Adam met the enemy in a garden and failed. Adam hid himself, but Christ openly revealed Himself [Wiersbe].

² Probably from the tower/fort of Antonio, which was butted right up against the Temple ground? In this castle the Roman government kept a number of soldiers. During the Jewish festivals, the garrison was enlarged, in order to be ready for all emergencies [Hendriksen and MacArthur].

³ Higher ranking than a centurian.

⁴ Luke 22:52 shows that the heads of the Nation themselves also swelled the mob. As Christ was to die for sinners both of the Jews and Gentiles, so God ordered it that both Gentiles (Roman soldiers) and Jews should have a hand alike in His arrest and in His crucifixion [Pink].

⁵ As best we can tell, the Temple police used the clubs and the soldiers of Rome used the swords [MacArthur].

truths about Jesus, for I believe the more you know about Jesus, the more you will love Jesus, believe in Jesus and glorify Jesus. So let's see these truths together. First of all, we see in the story of the arrest:

I. A MANIFESTATION OF THE LORD'S GLORY⁶

Yes, even in His arrest, we see manifestations of the Lord's glory as the Son of God. So let me share with you the different ways He manifested His glory:

A. By His Omniscience - In v. 4 we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward." John won't let an opportunity go by that shows us that Jesus is God. Here we see He is omniscient—He knows everything. His foreknowledge was perfect. Nothing took Him by surprise. That is why He went forth to meet this large group of soldiers and officers that came out to arrest Him. Six months prior to this He accurately predicted details of His coming suffering (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22).

B. By His Character and Demeanor –In v.4 we see that Jesus did not run from them, but knowing their purpose, He boldly and willingly went out to meet them! When He did so, there was a calmness and dignity about Him. There was a complete lack of fear in His voice and mannerisms. Furthermore, He manifested Divine authority. In the following verses we see that He was in charge! He is even telling them who to arrest and who not to arrest. The agony of Gethsemane was past. Now there is nothing but calm resolution, sublime majesty.

C. By Speaking His Divine Name – Jesus asked them in the last of v.4, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Notice how Jesus answered them in v.5. He said, "I am *He*." Notice the word "he" is in italics in most translations, for it is not in the original Greek. Jesus simply said, "I am." What does that remind you of? In Ex. 3:14 God said to Moses, "...say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God is the great "I AM," who always was and always will be, the ever present One. Likewise, Jesus said in John 8:58, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Ah, He was far more than just "Jesus of Nazareth."

The reaction of the arresting officers and soldiers confirms the manifestation of the divine glory of Jesus. Notice what John says in v.6, "Now when He said to them, 'I am *He*,' they drew back and fell to the ground." V.6 literally says that they drew back from Jesus, and went behind *things* and fell to the ground.⁷ Some hid behind trees. Some fell behind rocks. They didn't fall *forward* to worship Him. They fell backward in fear. Yet it may have been the kind of fear one would have when he realizes that he is in the presence of God. That's the kind of reaction the three disciples had on the Mount of Transfiguration.⁸ So instead of advancing to lay hands on Jesus when He identified Himself, they retreated! They were so fearful and hesitant to arrest Jesus that He had to ask them a second time, "Whom are you seeking?" (v.7).

Yet even what I have shared may not be enough to explain the reaction of the soldiers and officers. There He was, an unarmed man with only a few disciples behind Him, and they were an army, equipped and armed for war. They served under the authority and power of both the Roman and Jewish governments. And yet, they were afraid of Jesus, and hesitant to arrest Him. The only

⁶ The main points of the outline follow Maclaren.

⁷ However, that phrase in 20:14 does not have the literal meaning.

⁸ Mt. 17:6 says "when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid." See also Rev. 1:17

explanation I can think of is that they knew that they were standing before no ordinary man. They all had heard of Jesus. They had heard of His miracle-working power, including the recent resurrection of Lazarus. I believe that on the way to arrest Jesus, many were saying, "I don't have a good feeling about this." Furthermore, upon meeting Jesus, I believe they sensed that they were in the presence of Deity. Perhaps when He said "I Am," the Lord Jesus even gave some visible manifestation of His deity at that moment. Did His eyes momentarily become as flames of fire? (Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 19:12). Was there some other brief manifestation of His inner Divine nature?

What is amazing is the fact that in spite of this revelation of the Lord's glory, they went ahead and arrested Jesus, as we see in v.12, yet only because He so willingly yielded!

I wonder how many are here today who have heard the evidence concerning who Jesus really is, and yet you continue to reject Him? If so, reject Him no longer. Trust in Him today. Submit your life to Him today.

Now the fact that they ultimately arrested Jesus was not due to their overwhelming force, but rather, it was:

II. A MANIFESTATION OF THE LORD'S VOLUNTARY SACRIFICE

In v. 4 we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward." Jesus was not arrested because He was trapped or surprised. He was not arrested because He faced an overwhelming force. He was arrested because He *allowed* it to happen. There is one reason why. He was determined to go to the cross. He said in John 10:17-18, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself...." Now the truth of that statement is seen in the arrest of Jesus. As Jesus sets His face to go to the cross, without hesitation He moves directly in that direction. All happens according to His plan.

Notice with me how everything happened according to His plan to going to the cross:

A. He Went to the Very Place Where He Could Be Arrested! – Previously His enemies wanted to lay hands on Him but, because they were afraid of the people, they wouldn't dare lay hands on Him in the temple or in the streets of Jerusalem. So it was far better to arrest Jesus in a secluded place, away from the crowds. Not only was it a secluded place, but it was a familiar place. In vv. 1-2 it says, "He went...where there was a garden.... And Judas... knew the place...." Why, then, should Jesus have gone deliberately to the place where Judas would surely look for Him? Surely, He came to this place to yield Himself up voluntarily to death. The Good Shepherd is going to "lay down His life" as a willing sacrifice. On previous occasions He avoided His enemies (8:59, 12:36), and He certainly could have done so on this occasion. But the time had come for Him to offer Himself up as a sacrifice for sin.

B. He Even Came Out to Them! – Again, in v. 4 we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward." He knew that He needed to go to the cross to die for our sins. He knew that He needed first to be arrested. Therefore, He came forth to them from its inner recesses of the Garden, where He had prayed alone! He probably met them at the gate or entrance of the garden. He initiated the confrontation. Such a large band of soldiers (v.3) was not really necessary.

He did the opposite of what was possible. The Garden of Gethsemane was the side of the Mount of Olives that was facing Jerusalem. He could have easily seen the hoard approaching with

torches. He could have easily escaped to the other side of the Mount of Olives and beyond, but He did not.

C. He Even Identifies Himself Voluntarily – Judas had plotted with the leaders of Israel, giving them a signal by which they would know whom to arrest (Matt. 26:48; Mark 14:44; Luke 22:47-48). He would kiss Jesus to identify Him.⁹ But we see in John’s gospel that this was not really necessary. Having come out to them, Jesus asked in the last of v.4, “Whom are you seeking?” They answered Him in v.5, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus identified Himself twice! (vv. 5, 8).¹⁰

Now if Jesus were like some people, when they said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, He would not have voluntarily identified Himself. He could have pointed to Peter and said, “There he is. Arrest him!” But He didn’t do that.

D. He Does Not Resist Arrest – In fact, He rebukes Peter¹¹ for trying to resist arrest. Look at vv.10-11, “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into the sheath....’” You have to commend Peter for his zeal, courage, and heroic attempt here. I’m sure Peter learned his Bible stories about Samson facing dozens, and even hundreds of men, and gaining victory through the power of the Lord. He knew about Gideon, who with just 300 men, overcame thousands of Midianites. And when Peter sees the soldiers manifesting fear, he thinks that he can take on this much larger band of soldiers. He feels invincible. He wants to be like one of the heroes of the Old Testament. Well, he wasn’t much of a swordsman.¹² When he cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest,¹³ I can assure you he wasn’t aiming for his ear. He was aiming for his neck! So Jesus rebuked Peter, and told him to put away his sword. Jesus didn’t need Peter’s help. He could have called legions of angels instead (Matt. 26:53). Instead, Jesus voluntarily submitted to the arrest.¹⁴ The last of v.12 says they “arrested Jesus and bound Him.” I’m sure He held out His hands and let them bind Him. Isa. 53:7 says, “...He was led as a lamb to the slaughter....” He who surrendered so willingly did not really need to be bound. It was not their chains or cords that bound Him, but His own cords of love. It was not their power that bound Him, but His own pity for sinners.

⁹ It seems likely that since Judas led the way, he walked up to Jesus and kissed Him before Jesus asked whom they were seeking. Based on v.5 it seems that Judas would have stepped back with the soldiers [Judas stood with the enemy. “And being let go, they went to their own company” (Acts 4:23). People will always go where their hearts are]. Yet Pink says, “If the reader will compare Luke’s account he will see that the kiss was given by Judas at a point between what we read of in John 18:9-10.”

¹⁰ We do not know for sure when Judas greeted Him with a kiss. It could have been right before Jesus asked, “Whom do you seek?”, or right after.

¹¹ The other gospels do not reveal who did this. Perhaps John did, for it was no longer possible to punish the assailant. He was deceased.

¹² Actually, he was using a short sword (*machaira*), a kind of dagger.

¹³ Malchus, whose name means “My King,” was probably the first to lay hands on the Savior. Was he named because he later became a Christian and was known to the Christian community? The sequel to this is supplied by Luke: “and he touched his ear, and healed him” (22:51), the last miracle of the Savior before He laid down His life. How gracious of Jesus to heal Malchus and thus protect Peter from harm. Otherwise there might have been another cross on Calvary, and Peter would have been crucified before God’s time had come (John 21:18-19). Malchus is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures.

¹⁴ Later He told Pilate in v.36, “...If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews....”

E. He Affirms the Voluntary Nature of His Sacrifice – In the last of v.11 He explained to Peter why he should put away his sword, and stop resisting, “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” What is this cup that He speaks of? He had just prayed in the garden that night, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me” (Matt. 26:39). Clearly, He had in mind the cross that was before Him. But it wasn’t just the physical torture of the cross. It was the wrath of God against sin that He must bear. Jeremiah talks about the “wine cup of fury” (Jer. 25:15). In Rev. 14:10 we read of the “the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.” What love we see in His willingness to drink this cup of judgment against sin! So Jesus is telling Peter that He must drink the cup of God’s wrath, by going to the cross, for that is the only way that he and others could be saved.

Aren’t you glad that Jesus was willing to be arrested, and go to the cross for you and for me? We all have sinned against a holy God. Jesus drank that cup of God’s wrath for you. But if you do not trust in Jesus, there is no one else who can drink it for you. The only option left is for you to drink that cup yourself. God cannot allow sin to go unpunished.

If Christ so willingly died for us, we should respond with willing service and sacrifice to Christ.

III. A MANIFESTATION OF THE LORD’S CARE FOR US

The way Jesus handled the arrest shows that He was determined to protect His disciples. When most men would be thinking only about themselves, He is thinking of others. This is a powerful scene. It is as if the wolves were coming in to the attack. The enemy is on one side, the disciples are on the other side, and Christ is in the middle. Here we see that the Good Shepherd protects the sheep. I like what Jesus says in the last of v.8, “If you seek Me, let these go their way.” He says here, “Take Me instead!”

So how was Jesus able to prevent the arrest of His disciples? One way He did so was by clarifying the arrest order. Twice in vv. 4 & 7, He asked them to clarify who they were after. And on each occasion they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” He could then say to them, “You said yourself that you are after Me, and not these men, so let them go.”

This shows us that Jesus loves us. And if Jesus protected His disciples then, we can believe that He will continue to protect His people today. He has several ways of doing so. For example, I believe He protects at times through guardian angels. Secondly, His Spirit can restrain sinners from doing the harm they would otherwise have done. This world would be far worse were it not for the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit (Gen. 6:3; 2 Thess. 2:6-7). I think He especially restrains those who would otherwise do His people harm. Finally, He can control circumstances in our favor by His providence and by His sovereign will.

Let me illustrate how God can control circumstances to protect us. Late one night, a man in Slim Cornett’s church was showing Slim around a county airport in rural Mississippi. It was late at night and the airport wasn’t even open. He flipped a switch and said, “This switch lights up the runway. Then, let’s say there is a plane in distress up there. I would throw this switch and turn on the search lights.” As the night skies lit up, a small plane materialized out of the darkness and landed. Slim and his friend watched in amazement as Franklin Graham, son of the famous evangelist, stepped off the plane. The pilot had been flying Franklin back to school in Texas when the electrical system shut down, leaving them stranded in the Mississippi night without lights or

radio or any means of guidance. Yet from out of nowhere, the search beam and runway lights had come on and guided them to the landing strip.

God used circumstances to protect one of His own. The rest of the story is that earlier that evening before they left home, Billy Graham had prayed for the Father to protect and guide his son and the pilot.¹⁵ I am so glad that my God and Savior can work circumstances for my protection in this evil world.

Well, did Jesus accomplish His protective purpose? Indeed He did. Even Peter was allowed to leave. As a result Jesus said in v.9, “Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”¹⁶ Can you trust Jesus to protect you, and watch over you? You can trust in Jesus. He will never fail you.

Conclusion: This story of what happened at the arrest of Jesus truly reveals what a wonderful Savior Jesus is. It also reveals His deity. Will you believe in the Son of God? Will you believe in the One who voluntarily died for you? Will you trust in Him who will be a Good Shepherd to you, and protect you? Don’t be like those in the crowd that night who did not really comprehend the majesty of Jesus. Believe in Jesus today!

Sources: Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2017; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955); John MacArthur, Jr., *Crucifixion & Resurrection: Study Notes on John 18-20* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1986); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); Warren W. Wiersbe, “Be” Series: *New Testament Volumes 1 & 2, John* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

© Dr. Stephen Felker. These notes may be used and even shared for personal study or ministry, but not for commercial purposes. The author credits the sources listed above and footnotes for much of the content. The “live” recording of this sermon will be more completely in the author’s own words. A video of this sermon may be available at <http://swiftcreek.church/>. Dr. Felker’s email address is S+Felker&2@aol.com (remove signs).

¹⁵ Joe McKeever, “God Winks,” *Leadership Weekly* (12-18-02), C-529.

¹⁶ This saying was spoken by Jesus in John 17:12, only in a spiritual context. But this verse is in a physical context—He doesn’t want the disciples captured.