

Gospel of John - episode 37

Chapter 18 part 1

Welcome to our sharing on chapter 18 of St. John's Gospel. I did some preparation for the events of the Passion so that we will understand the drama that John presents. I've already told you that the world power is represented Pilate, and the religious power represented by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, and they will go into battle with each other. Both of them represent the cosmos (the unbelieving world). Both are under the influence of the prince of this world in this event. Between them stands Jesus an innocent victim, a **Holy Lamb of God**. He will pay the price for their hatred; for their manipulation of each other; for their destruction of each other, and everybody else. Jesus is in the centre of this power struggle, both on the political and religious levels. Both groups are the most perfect instruments that Satan could use to cause Jesus maximum pain and suffering. In fact, Jesus will experience hell on earth for us.

John approaches the Passion narrative in his own unique way. He deals with the main events that are in the Synoptics, but omits some things. You expect that by now because he chooses certain things to bring out the spiritual, theological and deeper meanings of the events that we contemplate. As we proceed through the events of the Passion and Death of Jesus, we will get a revision of the Gospel, very particularly the final discourse of Jesus. We will see this in action.

We need to look at the Gospel as a whole because John's way of writing is that he presents the foundations at the beginning, then he builds up the text, and completes the revelation in the final events. He does the same thing in the Book of Revelation. Therefore, it is in the events of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, that we will finally recognise who Jesus really is. John wants us to read these events from several angles so that the shock will hit us, and that we will understand that if we don't read them from the above level, we don't get what's going on at all.

If we join the protagonists at the lower level, we're not going to understand. We will come to it with unseeing eyes. I want to show you John's way of presenting the Passion – which is not reflected in the Synoptics. He uses very dramatic stage effects to get a message across. First, when Jesus is on trial before the Sanhedrin, John gives us a two-stage effect to bring out the importance of what's going on. For example, he has Peter front stage, surrounded by the servants and various people who are present in the house of Caiaphas. He puts Jesus backstage with the chief priests and the people who are interrogating him. Just at the point when Jesus is being interrogated about his disciples and his teaching, you have Peter in the foreground denying him, cursing and swearing he never knew him! It's when you see this in context that it hits you in a way it couldn't possibly strike you in the Synoptic Gospels, where you

are told one event after another. When you come to the trial with Pilate, John has a three-stage effect, which is very powerful. This would come across marvellously if it was acted out on a stage. In the foreground, you have Pilate and the chief priests, and eventually the crowds. Everything is noisy, raucous, chaotic, frenzied, and terrible. Then Pilate goes backstage where he and Jesus meet privately where all is silent and quiet. When Pilate goes back into Jesus's presence, he begins to see a little and to understand a little. But when he comes out to the front stage and meets the unbelieving world in all its terribleness he gets totally confused. Then we have a middle stage in which you see Jesus being scourged and crowned with thorns by the Roman soldiers. What John wants you to see is that while Jesus is silent backstage and middle stage, we can see clearly that it is Pilate's going from one to the other that causes his confusion. Jesus would not have been scourged and crowned with thorns if Pilate wasn't so disturbed going from one to the other.

Now, that illustrates something from the final discourse of Jesus, where the disciples were warned that their mission will be out in that raucous, chaotic world. If they should go back and forth between levels they would get confused also. So, they have to be living in the community of love and unity in order to maintain their balance and be able to see things as God sees them. John emphasises Jesus's silence throughout the whole event, so much so that when we come to the cross John has silence over the whole place, which I will explain when we come to it. What he is saying is that the only way we will ever understand this mystery is by contemplating it in the silence of our hearts. We won't get it any other way. It doesn't matter who gives you lectures on this or explains the details. That's not it. It's by contemplating Jesus in this extraordinary mystery that understanding comes to us.

John alone, among the four Gospels, gives you a very particular twist to the story. If you are not alerted to this, you might miss it. It is that Pilate seems to be the judge – telling Jesus, 'I've got power to kill you, or I've got power to set you free'. Yet as Pilate said those words, he had no power at all because the Sanhedrin was taking it from him! Also, while he spoke Jesus judged Pilate and the Sanhedrin! He said, 'No, you're not the most guilty among here'. John wants you to look at the fact that things are not what they seem, and that if you begin to look at it from the above level, you become utterly amazed as to what's really going on. When Pilate eventually brings the tortured Jesus out to the people and says, **Ece Homo!** (I'll go deeper into that when we get there) he would have been terrified if he knew to **who it was** that he had scourged! He had no idea about the mystery of the Son of Man. He had no idea that he had just scourged the beloved Son of the Father. All of this is completely unknown to him. His ignorance is unbelievable.

With Caiaphas we are dealing with a very unworthy holder of the highest office in the Jewish religion. He was the high priest. As such he was in the highest position of authority between God and His people. This gives some idea of the seriousness of this man condemning **the True High Priest of the new religion**. One high priest, condemning another! So, there are things like that we will watch out for. As we go through the events of the Passion, John will proclaim that we are dealing with the true Messianic King of the Jews - the true High Priest of the New Covenant; that we are dealing with the **true and only Lamb of God** who can take away the sins of the world. This is the final and definitive Passover, the one that makes all the other Passovers have meaning.

John will try to get us to see that if you look at this mystery from the wrong level it will appear as if darkness has won, as if darkness has extinguished the light. It will seem as if this is Satan's hour, but John will make it very clear that this is not the reality. **This is Jesus's hour**, as he told us in chapters 2,7,8,12, and 13. This is Jesus's hour. **It is his Passover**. We are alerted to the fact that we must not take things on a superficial level. Things are not what they seem. If we have journeyed together through all of John's Gospel up to now, we are ready for Jesus to reveal himself. He will do that in a way that we don't expect, because the way the world does things is you have a big drama put on a stage with lights, music, sound and people making a big fuss. That's not it. We're going to **see Jesus as a true hero** in these events. We will also see that each one of the events fulfils the scriptures.

Not only does the Gospel of John come completely alive in chapters 18, 19, and 20, so do the scriptures. It is really fascinating. One of the things that John illustrates immediately in chapter 18 is that nobody can touch the Son of Man unless he surrenders. We got an inkling of that in Luke's Gospel when the people of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus over a hill to kill him, but he simply walked away. They had no power because it was not his time. I wonder what the people of Nazareth thought about their victim simply walking away? They had to realise who he was. So, until he surrenders into the hands of sinners, nobody can touch him. John has already revealed that he will do this, but he will do it out of obedience to the Father and out of love for the human race. Why will he do it out of obedience to the Father? Because the Father and Jesus are one. They have the one will and one love. So, **it is God who wants to redeem his children** and He will pay a terrible price for children who are not even grateful, who don't even care, who will not say thanks. It is really something amazing.

So, let's look at the text of John 18. "After he had said all of this (that is the final discourse) Jesus left with his disciples (that is the eleven faithful ones) and crossed the Kidron Valley (means the Blackwater Valley). There was a garden there (which John doesn't name but we know it's the Garden of Gethsemane named thus because there was an instrument in it called

the Gethsemane used for crushing the olives. Lazarus, who owned the property, allowed the poor to come in and use this instrument free of charge). There was a garden there, and he went into it with his disciples". Judas the traitor knew it well of course, because Jesus revealed to some of the mystics that it wasn't just on the Thursday night of what we call Holy Week that he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. He had prayed there every night, and that Judas knew that he was praying there every night, so he knew exactly where to go. Jesus knew the place well since he had often met with his disciples there.

It was not only during this particular week that Jesus prepared himself in prayer for this final trial of his life, but when they came to Jerusalem for the great feasts Lazarus would allow them to use this garden. Jesus preferred to pray at night because it would be silent; the noise, hassle and shouting of the people would have died down, so he could be alone with the Father in the silence of the night. It was his choice to pray at night. Jesus had often prayed there with his disciples. Judas came and brought a cohort to this place together with the detachment of guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, which means that the Roman and Jewish authorities cooperate in this event. They will be at loggerheads with each other as we go on.

But at the beginning of this event, they act together. I'll read it first just with a gentle comment, and then go deeper into it. The detachment of guards sent by the chief priests were the temple police who were a private police force allowed by the Roman because the temple was so busy. The numbers of people coming to the temple to pray, particularly at feast times required a temple police to ensure that everything ran smoothly. So, both groups came together! John says something very interesting. "They came to this place all with lanterns, torches and weapons. Jesus will ask them, "who are you looking for?" They come armed with torches and weapons **to find a lamb**, to find **a beloved son**, to find **the gentlest person on earth**. They have no idea who they are looking for. So, the first question Jesus will ask is, 'who are you looking for?'

It is at this point that the Synoptics relate the agony of Jesus in the garden. John omits it. He considers that it has been dealt with sufficiently by them so he moves on to show Jesus' surrender. Judas' task was to identify Jesus in the dark, which only somebody who knew him very well could do. So, the Romans and the Jews arrive together, the two protagonists to arrest the Lamb of God. They come with lanterns to arrest **the light of the world** to arrest a Beloved Son who will only do what the Father wants anyway. Here is the blindness, darkness, the ignorance of the cosmos. They do not see what they're looking at. They do not understand anything.

This is vintage John! He wants you to recognise that if you go **looking for light with a lantern** there is something radically wrong! Jesus is the light of the world. The little lantern only shows

you were to put your next step in the darkness of the night. Go back to John 1:5: they are coming with their little lanterns to extinguish the light of the world. They think they can do it. This is the night Jesus warned us about in chapters 9,11, and 12, a night where the prince of this world will take over. Jesus said, “if people are walking in the dark, they will stumble”. You can stumble physically but John wants to warn us that you will stumble spiritually, you will fall spiritually. These men fall. They stumble in the darkness because they have no light to guide them. So, we enter into this great mystery and you see already that the darkness cannot comprehend the light. it cannot even see the light! The unbelieving world only sees a human being there. They don't even recognise him in the physical sense. They need somebody else to point him out. Nevertheless, the unbelieving world is prepared to kill **even if they don't know who they are killing** or even why they're doing it.

We will continue with this great, deep, and wonderful mystery in the following episodes.
Thank you for listening. God bless you.

INTERVAL

Welcome to our sharing on St. John's Gospel. The great drama of the Passion of Jesus begins in chapter 18. Let us get into the wonder and amazement of the events John describes. “After Jesus had said all this he left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. There was a garden there, and he went into it with his disciples. Judas, the traitor, knew the place well, since Jesus had often met his disciples there. He brought a cohort to this place, together with a detachment of guards sent by the chief priests and the Pharisees, all with lanterns, torches and weapons. Knowing everything that was going to happen to him...” Here we have the same emphasis as in chapter 13 that Jesus knew everything. “Knowing everything that was going to happen to him, Jesus came forward and he said, Who are you looking for? They answered, Jesus the Nazorean.

He said, I am he.” What he actually said was, **EGO EIMI: I AM**. Now, Judas the Traitor was standing among them, and when Jesus said, ‘I am he’. They moved back and fell to the ground. He asked them a second time, Who are you looking for? They said, Jesus the Nazorean. I've told you I am he, said Jesus. If I am the one you are looking for, let these others go. This was to fulfil the words that he had spoken, not one of those you gave me Have I lost”. Here is the beginning of a very great drama. There is an armed body of men representing both the Roman Empire and also the Sanhedrin coming with lanterns, weapons and torches **to arrest the Lamb of God, the beloved Son of the Father** and **the light of the world!**

I want to pick up where I left off in the last episode: if you need a lamp in order to see light, then it means that you are in darkness. You don't recognise light. This is the night Jesus had warned them about when people would stumble; we will see that everybody stumbles except Jesus. There is a faraway future from this moment - at the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelation when the redemption of Jesus will have worked its way through. Jesus will have a vibrant living community, living the trinitarian life 'on earth as it is in heaven' - doing God's will as it is in heaven. John will tell us in chapter 22 of Revelation that those people will not need either lamplight or sunlight because the Lord God will be their light. The sadness at the very beginning of the Passion is that the Lord God, who is our light, cannot be recognised at all. The people are in complete darkness.

Jesus steps forward. Now, we know from the Synoptic Gospels that Jesus has endured desperate agony for three hours, but he steps forward like a hero who will face down the dragon of darkness.

He will face it down, and he will switch on the light of God for the whole of humanity at a terrible cost to himself. The drama truly begins with Jesus's question, "who are you looking for?" This is not the first time that Jesus asked the question 'who are you looking for?' In John chapter one Jesus saw a couple of men following him. He turned around and he said, "who are you looking for?" It was John and Andrew looking for the Messiah. Jesus said, 'you can join me'. Jesus will ask the same question of Mary of Magdalen on Easter Day, "who are you looking for?" She said, 'I'm looking for my Lord'. That's okay. When Jesus asks that question in the Garden of Gethsemane the men say, 'Jesus of Nazareth'. They are looking for a man in order to kill him. That's all. This is just the point of arrest but they have already planned what they're going to do.

They are not looking for the Lord or for truth or understanding. We will see this in Pilate also. They just want to kill this man, and that's all. It doesn't seem to matter whether he is guilty or not. Their job is to kill him. Jesus won't allow them to arrest him until he shows them **WHO HE IS**. John is the only one who picks up the importance of the arrest of Jesus. In the Synoptics St. Luke emphasises the agony, while the others simply tell you that he agonised and was arrested, and what happened afterwards. John knows that if you don't grasp this moment, you've missed everything. He is writing at the end of the first century when the testimony about Jesus from the Synoptics has spread all over the church and the known world.

John wants to give them insight into things they have not yet grasped. When Jesus said, 'Ego, Eimi', he was saying to this group of people locked in darkness, hatred and murderous intent what God had said to Moses on Mount Sinai! Before the Exodus began Moses had an encounter with God at the Burning Bush in which he was appointed as deliverer of God's people in Egypt. He needed to know who God was because of the multiplicity of false gods worshipped

in Egypt. Moses said, 'I have to know who you are. Tell me who you are. God said, **I AM (EGO EIMI)**. John says that as soon as Jesus revealed himself, this crowd of people fell back to the ground. Is John saying that just to impress us - that Jesus truly is the Lord? No. One of the things John brings out in the Gospel is that whoever is involved in the Passion and Death of Jesus must take full responsibility for their actions as intelligent beings with free will. So, if these men have come out to arrest him, they have to take responsibility for what they're doing. Jesus insists on them knowing who he is and who they are arresting.

After they arrest him and begin to abuse him, they must take responsibility before God for it. When John says that they fell back to the ground, it means that **they felt the Presence of God in Jesus**. They wouldn't fall to the ground unless there was a power in front of them. **That power they felt in Jesus** warns us all to realise the enormity of the events that are taking place. Yet, they recover soon because Satan is very active that night also. Jesus asks them a second time, but merely for identification because he was the one they wanted. When they replied that they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth he just said that he was that person. Here Psalm 27:2 is fulfilled. It says that "when the wicked advance against me to eat me up (which is what these men are doing to Jesus) they, my opponents, my enemies, are the ones who will stumble and fall". Here you see them fall physically, but throughout the rest of the Passion you'll see them involved in torturing and killing Jesus stumble and fall spiritually.

The next thing John wants you to look at is that Jesus holds the ground. It is only Jesus's power that is at work at this moment. He said, "if I am the one you are looking for, let these others go". John said that he did this to fulfil his promise to them; the shepherd is protecting the sheep. So, it was actually Jesus, John says, who got the disciples to scatter because in the darkness, nobody would know who was who in that crowd of soldiers, temple police, Judas, and the Apostles. In the dark, with all of these men having mantles on nobody would recognise anyone. Jesus insists on the lambs of his flock getting away free. Their shepherd protects them as he promised in 17:12. John shows that the Apostles escaping at this point is not necessarily failure. We normally presume that they are denying him in some way. John says No! it's not like that. Why would Jesus want to keep control until these men run away, including John? Because as we have seen from chapter 13 they are the men who will continue his ministry in the world. They have to survive. If they don't get out of the clutches of these soldiers and temple police they could be arrested. Therefore, the very thing that Jesus has organised with such trouble and spent so much time trying to build up could be destroyed.

18:10-11: They didn't all run away, though. It would have been better if they had! Simon Peter, who carried a sword wounded the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. The servant's name was Malkus. Jesus said to Peter, "put your sword back in its scabbard. (Nonviolence

belongs to Jesus's Kingdom). Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given to me?" Now, if you want greater detail about this incident go to the Synoptics, but John has to mention it. It's very important because at the Last Supper (chapter 13) Peter wanted to defend Jesus, to fight for him. In the Synoptics Peter tells Jesus that they have a few swords. He still thinks that stopping Jesus from being arrested, and dying on the cross is something good. He still doesn't understand the mystery that he is involved in. Who does he lash out at? Only the high priest servant! Up to this moment, the chief priests have absolutely no accusation against Jesus that will stick.

The only evidence they have now is the violence of one of his disciples. The Synoptics will tell you that Jesus healed Malkus and told Peter to go, so, Peter has a lot to regret, and we're not finished yet! He will stumble even more. Luke 22:51 relates the healing of Malkus. I want you to notice that Malkus was healed but did not go to the high priest to put in a good word for Jesus! He took the healing and went off, as many others did. Thousands received healings from Jesus and were not grateful. Peter, as you can see here, is still on the level of below, still thinking that you can fight a spiritual battle with physical weapons, and of course, that's not true. Jesus **wants to take the sword out of the hands and out of the hearts of all his disciples**, because in the Kingdom he is inaugurating, as we have seen in chapter 13-17, is a Kingdom of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness, where we live in communion with the Triune God and with each other.

Swords have nothing to do with this. Violence has nothing to do with this. They belongs to a different Kingdom altogether. Our weapons are forgiveness, love, self-sacrifice, but these weapons pull down the enemy as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (meaning belonging to the worldly level) but they are mighty for the pulling down of strongholds" (of evil). Jesus turns to his number one disciple who has already stumbled and said, "am I not to drink this cup?" Now, 'the cup' in scripture is usually a cup of suffering, but you can have the cup also representing evil. Abraham was told in Genesis 15 that his descendants would be 400 years in Egypt "because the cup of the Amorites is not yet full". That was the cup of evil. God allowed those people every possible opportunity to repent before judgement would move in. Judgement for them was going to be that a new people would displace them. But here in John 18, if Jesus doesn't drink the cup of suffering, **then the cup of evil in the world cannot be cancelled**. Forgiveness only comes through the Messiah, through Jesus. Therefore, it is clear that Peter has not got the message yet.

We now move on to the next stage where Jesus is brought before the Sanhedrin for interrogation. There is no trial before the Sanhedrin in John. I'll talk about that in a little while. Here is 18:12, "the cohort and its captain, and the Jewish guards, seized Jesus and bound him.

They took him first to Annas, because Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest of that year. It was Caiaphas who had suggested in chapter 11 that "It was better for one man to die for the people". With the arrest of Jesus, some VIP texts from the Old Testament need to be looked at. 1 Chronicles 21:13 is a case where David sinned and the prophet Nathan came and gave him two choices. 'You are going to be punished by God, but you can choose either from human beings or you can be punished directly by God'. David said: "let me fall into the power of the Lord since his mercy is great. Let me not fall into the power of men". Ecclesiasticus chapter 2 tells us that all of us who want to serve the Lord will have to suffer, and that we must cling to the Lord. At the end, it says, "let us not fall into the hands of men. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord because his mercy is great and not into the hands of sinners". In the next episode we will see what it means for Jesus to fall into the hands of sinners.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.