

John 86 – Jesus Is Arrested

05/03/2026

Scripture 1: (Jn. 18:1-12 ESV)

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?"

And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one."

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 its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.

Sermon:

After celebrating the Passover meal and Jesus teaching one final time in the *kataluma* or “Upper Room”, the Gospel of John shifts gears as events begin to rapidly move. But first, before we rush into the narrative, let us pause to reflect on all that John has so far recorded. I especially want to note how much written space is given to cover how much time.

The first half of this Gospel, chapter's 1 through 11, cover three years of Jesus' active, earthly ministry and also a prologue concerned with His pre-temporal, divine state. During this first half, John emphasized Jesus's divinity claim through seven “I AM” (Greek: *ego eimi*) statements (6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1):

- the bread of life;
- the light of the world;
- the door;
- the good shepherd;
- the resurrection and the life;
- the way, the truth, and the life;
- the true vine;

Through these claims, Jesus associated and applied unique, divine attributes, that only rightly belong to the LORD, to Himself. John also highlights how seven distinct miracles performed by Jesus, were “signs” and evidence proving that He actually is the LORD (2:11, 4:54, 5:9, 6:14, 6:16-21, 9:3, 11:42):

- turning water to wine in Cana;
- healing the official's son in Capernaum;
- healing the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, in Jerusalem;
- feeding the multitude near Bethsaida;
- walking across the waters of the Galilean sea;
- healing the man born blind;
- raising Lazarus from the dead;

These spontaneous miracles performed by Jesus, could only have happened by the power and will of the one, true God.

The second half of John's Gospel, chapter's 12-21, cover the last seven to ten days of Jesus' earthly life, death, and resurrection, along with a post-resurrection epilogue mostly concerned with Peter's restoration and the composition of the New Testament Scriptures. Meanwhile, within this second half, John devotes five whole chapters, chapter's 13-17, to record just part of one evening. This focus leads us to conclude that John thought it to be exceptionally important and deserving of close attention. That is why we so closely examined what Jesus said and what it means for us and our lives, our present and future life. Studying Jesus's final night of teaching, we found that it most concerned with our union in Christ and our relationship as Christians.

Next, John will pick up the pace of his narrative, providing additional facts and details about these final events which were overlooked by the other Gospel writers; whether through personal ignorance or because they were

not as pertinent to the particular emphasis of their message (Matthew - Jesus as the Jewish [Davidic] Messiah; Mark – Jesus of the Son of God and “true Caesar”; Luke – Jesus as a savior for both Jews and Gentiles).

After the Passover meal and following Jesus' great intercessory prayer, “...*he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.*”. Now, this garden is a familiar place for us today, although not for the reason that John provides “...*for Jesus often met there with his disciples.*”. We know it by the name of Gethsemane, remembering it as the site of another one of Jesus' recorded prayers and where He was betrayed and arrested; elements that the Synoptic Gospels heavily emphasize (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). However, we should not be bothered by John's differences with them because they are not contradictions (because they do not deny or refute anything that the others record). Remember, John and the three Synoptics work together as complements, not in competition or opposition. Instead, these differences are recognized as narrative additions or subtractions, based on the writer's perspective or emphasis.

“*Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.*” Note that, unlike the Synoptics, John does not record Judas' betraying Jesus with a kiss. But, that omission is not a contradiction, it is an absence. It is simply a non-supplied detail. Furthermore, Jesus being identified in this manner was also reasonable considering the immediate circumstances of the situation: sometime during the late evening to the middle of the night, and it being dark because it was night time.

Even if that detail were “added in”, the figure whom Judas identified with a kiss as “Jesus” would still have only been a shadowy figure to most people, making His positive identification difficult especially by person's not intimately familiar with Him. It would also have been reasonable for the officer in charge to confirm His identity, to ensure they were arresting the correct person. They would not want to return to the high priest bringing the “wrong man”. They were probably also suspicious of Judas' true loyalty, since he was already identified as a “turn coat”. There may have been a reasonable concern that Judas may have been leading them to a “false Jesus” so as to allow the “real Jesus” to escape Jerusalem. Meanwhile, a person identified by a third party (Judas) and who identified themselves in the first person by admitting “*I am he.*”, would justly deserve whatever might follow, whether they were truly guilty or substituting themselves by claiming to be someone they are not. This way the officer would be blameless, if there were an error, because of the testimony of these two witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6): Judas and Jesus, Himself.

So, there is plenty of space within the story for both elements: Judas' kiss and Jesus' self-identification; depending on the writer's emphasis. The Synoptics emphasized how personal the betrayal was, while John's focus is most concerned about identifying Jesus.

Next, let us consider the arresting mob. Who do you think they really were? What kind of people would have been in this mob?

John describes them as “...*a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees...*”. Now, the Greek term used by John (*speira*) ordinarily describes a “Roman Cohort”: one tenth of a Roman Legion (six hundred armed and trained soldiers). However, nothing within the context of the story implies that there were that many soldiers present. Besides, neither the priests nor Pharisees would have been granted the authority to command a group of Roman Legionnaires (except or unless they had crossed into the Temple precinct); even Herod Antipas would have only had a limited authority over them. Therefore, this “armed mob” was undoubtedly comprised of Levite temple guards, men who previously failed to arrest Jesus during the Feast of Booths (John 7:28-53) “...*because his hour had not yet come.*” (Jn. 7:30 ESV), while those serving as

“officers” were likely servants in the high priest's household (in either Ananias' or Caiaphas' household). Furthermore, the mob certainly would not have been six hundred men strong. When we think about it, six hundred, armed Jewish men would not have been allowed to move within or around Jerusalem, at night or during the day, under normal circumstances, much less during the Passover festival when the city's population was exponentially increased and on edge. The Roman authorities would not have allowed it because of concerns about a potential Jewish rebellion. I would expect that even a small mob of sixty would have been a dangerously large number; although, at sixty, they would have only enjoyed a five to one advantage over Jesus and His disciples.

Since none of the Gospels suggest that there was any Roman involvement in the plot against Jesus before His arrest and, since John describes them as coming “*from the chief priests and the Pharisees*”, we may be confident that this mob was comprised of orthodox and faithful Jews. They were men devoted to Torah, to keeping the Divine Law, to the Temple of the LORD, and to preserving their Jewish way of life. This fact is important for us to understand because it explains their reaction and response to Jesus during His arrest.

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

They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.” Once again, Jesus declared, “*Ego eimi.*” or “I AM”; speaking the Greek verbal construction representing the Divine Name, YHVH; although this occasion was less like Him saying, “*I am the light of the world*” and more emphatic, as when He said, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*” (Jn. 8:58 ESV), something which prompted the Jews to try to stone Him. The difference now, from the seven earlier “I AM's” was, Jesus was not claiming to be the LORD; now, He proclaimed it plainly.

Jesus stated an absolute fact which their compelled obeisance affirmed; just as He will proclaim it again when they/we are before His glorious throne and must confess “*...that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” (Phil. 2:11 ESV), because “*...every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess...*” (Phil. 2:10-11 ESV) it. This Jewish mob must surely have included Levitical men (educated and wise men) able to confirm the truth of this, as well as men inclined (by their inherent sinfulness) to want to deny it and to oppose it.

- Their response to Jesus's declaration was a demonstration of who had the true authority, in this situation.
- Jesus's declaration and display of His rightful, sovereign authority stands in contrast against His willing and humble submission to the lawful authority of the Jewish priesthood, although wickedly abused.

Additionally, I believe that the English translators of the Bible did us, their readers, a terrible disservice with this passage. Their translation minimizes the implicit force within Jesus's declaration of *ego eimi* by translating it simply as, “*I am he.*”. Jesus let slip the veil, in this moment, and gave them a glimpse behind the curtain of earthly reality and showed them His glory. Therefore, the Jewish mob reacted by collapsing and bowing because, in that brief moment, for just a split second, they saw Jesus for Who He truly is; God the Son. They beheld the LORD, King Jesus. Otherwise, their reaction makes no sense if Jesus only said, “*I am he.*”.

This moment of power is a contrast against Jesus's arrest, trial, and execution. The evangelist plainly demonstrates that Jesus chose to suffer all that will follow willingly. Jesus is not under human compulsion. The Jews were only able to arrest Jesus because He chose to allow it; because He chose to go with them. John demonstrated that, even in His submission to their rule, Jesus held all of the power and was in control of the situation. John reminds us, in advance, that everything after this moment, happened according to Jesus' divine purpose and plan. Events did not spiral outside of God's control. Wicked men did not thwart or hinder God's

plan for our redemption. Everything that happened after His arrest, happened because Jesus allowed it. The brutality and horror of Him being “punished” by Pilate, the abuse and indignity He would suffer at the hands of Roman Legionnaires, the taunting and His rejection by the Jewish people, and the torment of the crucifixion were not things inflicted or imposed upon Him, but were ordained, allowed, and even welcomed as Jesus suffered all of it for us, in our place, because of His great love for us.

So, as the armed and angry mob of Jewish men lay prostrate on the ground before Him, Jesus “...asked them again, *“Whom do you seek?”*”

And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.””. The evangelist adds some “editorial commentary” to remind us of what Jesus said just a few short hours before, “*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.*” (Jn. 17:12 ESV), a statement that referred back to an earlier promise by Jesus, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*” (Jn. 10:27-30 ESV).

Now ordinarily, we interpret and understand this promise by Jesus in relation to our salvation; promising eternal security for God's adopted children (His chosen people; the Elect); promising that we shall be persevered through the end. Yet John's commentary applies this prophesy to the disciples' physical preservation during Jesus' arrest. However, this does not negate or invalidate the spiritual interpretation because prophesy often has multiple fulfillments and, as “types”, may have both physical and spiritual, or allegorical meanings.

- The abomination of desolation – prophesied by Daniel (11:31, 12:11), was first fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes IV in 167 BC when he sacrificed a pig in the Jerusalem Temple and, after Jesus recalled it as a sign of the end (Matt 24:15), it was later fulfilled again following the establishment of Aelia Capitolina upon the ruins of Jerusalem, by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 135 AD, and the establishment of a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount.
- The virgin birth – prophesied by Isaiah (7:14), was first fulfilled in the prophet's son born to Isaiah's young wife (Isaiah 8:1-4) and then later, by the birth of Jesus to His truly virgin mother, Mary.
- The “suffering servant” – prophesied by Isaiah (52:13-53:12), was first fulfilled in the national type of Israel and then later, in the Person of Jesus Christ, through His atoning death on the cross.
- The building of the LORD's “House” - as prophesied by Nathan to king David (2 Samuel 7:5-16), was fulfilled first by king Solomon when he built the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and then later, by Jesus and the Holy Spirit as they apply redemption and salvation to God's Elect people, uniting us into Christ, and building us into spiritually true “Third Temple” as the Church, with each of our individual bodies being its own “*temple of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor. 6:19 ESV).

So, Jesus' prophecy about not losing **any** that the Father has given to Him, is understood spiritually, as the security of our election by divine grace alone, and physically, in that none of Jesus' disciples were arrested, injured, or killed during His arrest and trial. Both interpretations are important, necessary, and helpful for us and our faith because of how they encourage us:

- to better believe and trust that the LORD actually is in control of all things; knowing that we cannot be harmed apart from His willed purpose or plan;

- to better believe and trust that, even though we are still guilty of committing sin after our regeneration, that *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 Jn. 1:9 ESV);
- to better believe and trust that a true Christian can not ever fully “fall away” from the faith; that we cannot “backslide” so far that there is no hope for our eventual repentance and restoration;
- to better believe and trust that a true Christian cannot apostatize or deny Christ, if God has called and chosen them for His own, while also understanding that those who ultimately leave the faith once confessed, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.”* (1 Jn. 2:19 ESV); understanding that they were simply “tares” hidden among the “wheat” (Matthew 13:25) and never truly belonging to Christ.

Lastly, John's narrative of Jesus' arrest has one more important element for us to consider: the incident with the high priest's servant. Continuing, John writes, *“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 its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”*” Now, there are several interesting things to note about this story.

- First, the incident is recorded in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:50-56; Mark 14:47-49; Luke 22:49-53). However, each Gospel record provides different complementary details which, when considered together, create a unified whole.
 - Only John provides the name of the aggressor (Simon Peter) and the injured servant (Malchus).
 - Only Luke records Jesus' healing of the injured servant (Luke 22:51).
 - Only Matthew records Jesus' remark suggesting that He could summon *“more than twelve legions of angels”* (Matt. 26:53 ESV) to defend Him.
 - Only Mark mentions a “young man”, one of Jesus' followers, fleeing the scene naked (Mark 14:51-52).
- Second, Jesus submitting Himself to the armed mob without putting up any fight, was an intentional act of obedience to the Father and a loving act of submission to His over-arching will, purpose, and plan.
- Third, Jesus' command to Peter, of *“Put your sword into its sheath...”* was not a rejection of Peter's right to self defense or his right to defend others against injustice, even through the application of force or the use of violence. Just prior to the version of this story in Luke's Gospel, Jesus told the disciples, *““But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” And they said, “Look, Lord, here are two swords.” And he said to them, “It is enough.”*” (Lk. 22:36-38 ESV). Instead, this incident is an exception which proves a rule concerning the appropriate need of a willingness to commit violence in order to prevent or limit greater violence. Jesus' command to Peter, although his motive was to defend his Master, was an act to preserve Peter's life. If Jesus had allowed Peter to fight, Peter surely would have been arrested and eventually executed, if not killed outright.
 - This was a case where utilitarian philosophy may intersect with Christian practice. The good of the many, or in this case the preservation of His disciples' lives, outweighed the good of the one (the few); the good of Jesus' friends outweighed His need to be defended and the spiritual good of the Elect, their redemption and salvation, outweighed the “good” of Jesus being justified before men.

- Fourth and finally, we have the person of Malchus, a servant of the high priest, to consider.

There are a lot of things we do not know about Malchus {What was his role in the high priest's household? Which high priest did he serve, Ananias or Caiaphas? What ultimately happened to him after his encounter with Jesus?} and there is nothing to be gained from idle speculation. Yet there are several beneficial things that we do know and can understand about him.

John presents Peter and Malchus as a contrast of one another. Malchus was the servant of a Jewish high priest {a man appointed by and approved of by the Roman authorities, rather than by Aaronic/Zadokite descent}, a man working (whether knowingly or unwittingly) on behalf of the “*ruler of this world*” (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Simon Peter was the servant of God's appointed Great High Priest, Jesus. Therefore, these two men were “natural enemies”, with each man standing on the opposite side of the cosmic, moral conflict of Evil's wicked opposition to Good. Although this seemed like a reasonable moment to resist evil's ascendance, Jesus commanded Peter to “stand down” and allow the devil his “short-term”, temporary victory. But, Jesus' command and His repudiation of Peter's violence also exemplifies and conveys a deeper meaning.

Violence against the LORD, against His good creation, and against His chosen Elect has been Satan's device and His *modus operandi* since the beginning of time. Violence was what the serpent intended against Adam and Eve in the Garden and violence was what Satan intended against Jesus here, in this garden.

- Jesus' rejection of violence in that moment proved Him to be a different kind of Messiah from what both the Jews and His disciples were expecting Him to be; He is not a conquering hero like David.
- Jesus's rejection of violence in that moment was a victory over Satan, through His refusal to use the Devil's tools against his enemy; He would not become like the enemy in order to defeat Him.
- Jesus's rejection of violence in that moment proved Him to be better than Satan, because He did not stoop down to the Devil's level.

Jesus's rejection of violence in that moment reminds us today that our faith in Christ will never conquer the world through the sword of violence but instead, through “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph. 6:17 ESV) working in our hearts, to sanctify God's chosen. Forced conversion, coerced conversion, does not lead a person to the narrow path of Christ. Likewise, neither does working to “baptize” the different spheres of our contemporary culture or civil society. We cannot **force** the world, or our nation, or our State, or our city to become a Christian world/nation/State/city even though we should believe that that would make them a far better place for everyone to live. Instead, through prayer and the obedience of our faithful witness to Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, we hope that hearts and minds will be changed. Instead, we pray and hope that they will be supernaturally transformed and begin to become conformed to the perfect image of Christ (Romans 12:2) so that, over time all of these different spheres will become more fully populated by Christians and thereby transform them.

Yet, there is another important, exemplary reminder for us in Jesus's rejection of violence.

- Considering Luke's addition to the story, Malchus was someone “hurt by Christians” but also, he was healed by Jesus Christ.
- Malchus was made to become an example of restoration, reconciliation, and healing (physically, relationally and hopefully, spiritually). He was an enemy of Christ, yet he was not Jesus's enemy. He was an enemy against Christ, loved by Jesus. He was an enemy opposed to Christ who received from Jesus, a blessing of unmerited grace when his injury was healed.
- Malchus being healed had the other benefit of creating a “no harm, no foul” situation and thereby protecting Peter against reprisal or any repercussion for his act of violence because, since Malchus was

restored “good as new”, even were there witnesses against Peter (who would have been unreliable due to implicit bias and the dim lighting), without any evidence of injury there would have been nothing to charge against Peter.

Malchus is an typological example of us: of every human person; reminding us about who we are, what God has done for us, and our need to respond. Malchus's example is a demonstration of God's providential grace: common grace and potentially, His saving grace.

- By healing Malchus, Jesus reminds us that God shows His favor to both the just and the unjust: to the righteous and to the wicked (Matthew 5:45); so that they have no excuse except to know that God is (Psalm 19:1; Romans 2:1), and so that they may be afforded the opportunity to respond to His sovereign mercy. Despite being an example specific to Malchus (Jesus healing his ear), this was still an example of common grace because we all experience the miraculous wonder of our body physically healing; just not as an instantaneous experience.
- By healing Malchus, Jesus reminds us that after his encounter with Christ, Malchus was obligated to respond to Christ and His mercy. Was he earnestly thankful? Did he praise the LORD and/or thank Jesus? Was he amazed at the wonder of his spontaneous healing or at Jesus's act of kindness against one of His oppressors? Did Malchus begin to doubt the righteous right-ness of what he was doing and of whom he was serving? Did Malchus begin to wonder about Jesus and perhaps begin to believe that what was said about Christ might be true? Did Malchus remember this incident and eventually come to believe in Jesus as His Messiah, Savior, and LORD after the resurrection? We do not know, Scripture does not say, and we may not know, until we are raised in glory with Jesus.

Like Malchus, we are all responsible and obligated to respond to the work of Jesus Christ in our own lives, one way or the other; for or against Him. Like Malchus, we all benefit from common grace and therefore, we are all without excuse. But also, Malchus and we, all also need the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit to change our hearts so that we want to respond to Him positively and receive Him as our Savior and LORD. Like Malchus, all of us were enemies of Christ until the Holy Spirit regenerated us; until He applied the new spiritual, eternal life to us.

This whole story, as presented by John, effectively reminds us that everyone is like Malchus. We all need to have an encounter with Christ: to experience Him; to learn, understand, and know Who He Is; before we can positively respond to Him because of all the evidence that has been provided by His common grace. But also, remembering that just as we were once enemies of Christ (Romans 5:8), we know and believe that no one is beyond the saving power of Christ, if He calls them to Himself; even those who were intimately involved in the plot against and death of our LORD; even the worst of those whom we know.

This is one of our most joyful hopes, as Christians in this life, that while there's life, there is hope. This is joyful for us because we can remember when we were what we once were, but no longer are; remembering how bad we once were and how much better we have been made to become, by God's grace. That should be a driving force for our life of prayer: praying for the salvation of others; and that should be a driving force for our lived Christian witness, our desire to share the good news of Christ with others around us. We believe that this news is so good for us, that we want others to also receive and benefit from it.

So, know and believe that Jesus is the LORD and is your Lord and Savior. Know the grace that He has given to you and then believe in Him; trust in Him for the forgiveness of your sin and for eternal life.

So, respond to Christ with faith and place your trust in our crucified and resurrected Savior King.

AMEN