

# They Arrested God?!

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[ 0 : 00 ] On this Sunday, when millions of people around the world will watch the stars gather together to learn the winners of the Oscar awards, I invite you to come with me into what the Swiss theologian John Calvin called the theater of glory.

On this first Sunday of Lent and on subsequent Sundays of this sacred season, I invite you to come with me into chapters 18 and 19 of the Gospel according to John, where the apostle takes us through the final events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

Why call this part of the story of Jesus? Why call the last few hours ending in his cruel death the theater of glory?

Because of the way John tells the whole story of Jesus. John sets up the story in the opening section of his Gospel in what is called the prologue or what we call the overture.

John 1, 1 to 18. This great poem, this great hymn about the eternal creative word. In the beginning was the word.

[ 1 : 27 ] The word was with God and the word was God. All things came into being by him. Leading to the fundamental affirmation of the Gospel. John 1, 1 to 18.

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us or in us. God the word became flesh. God the word became what we are.

Dwelt among us, in us. And we beheld his glory. And we beheld his glory. Glory. The whole of the story of Jesus, according to the Apostle John, is one sustained manifestation of glory.

Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. It means luminosity. Glory. Glory. It means weightiness. It means essence. Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. Glory. The essence of the luminous, weighty God.

In the word made flesh, in Jesus of Nazareth, we are beholding the essence of the luminous, weighty God. In everything Jesus says and does, we are beholding glory.

[ 2 : 35 ] So in the first half of his Gospel, in chapters 2 through 11, John narrates what he calls signs. Deeds of Jesus, which point beyond themselves to glory.

John tells us of seven signs. Chapter 2, turning water into wine. Chapter 4, healing a nobleman's son of a life-threatening illness.

Chapter 5, curing a man who has been lame for 38 years. Chapter 6, multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish to feed over 5,000 people.

Chapter 6, again, walking on water. Chapter 9, giving sight to a man born blind. And chapter 11, raising a man named Lazarus from the dead. Wonderfully glorious acts of potent creativity.

Then in the second half of his Gospel, in chapters 12 through 21, John narrates the events of Holy Week. The week that changed the world, as many people have rightly described, that brief period of time.

[ 3 : 40 ] On Palm Sunday, after riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, deliberately fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, and signaling that he is the king for whom Israel has been waiting, Jesus says, The hour has come.

John 12, 23. The hour has come. For the Son of Man to be glorified. And then he says, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone by itself.

But if it dies, it bears much fruit. And then he says, Now my soul has become troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose I came to the hour.

Father, glorify your name. Now is the time for glory. Holy Week. Now is the time to fully and decisively manifest glory.

To once and for all show forth the essence of the luminous, weighty God. And whereas the other three gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, then tell us about the things Jesus said and did on

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, John immediately jumps from Palm Sunday to what Jesus says and does on Thursday, setting up what he does on Friday, Good Friday.

[ 5 : 03 ] On Thursday night, after sharing a meal with the first band of disciples, during which he washes their feet, and we beheld his glory, Jesus then prays to the Father.

Father, the hour has come. John 17, 1. Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you.

And then we come to John 18 and 19. To the events that take place within less than 24 hours. When Jesus had spoken these things, says John, that is, when Jesus had finished praying, Jesus went forth.

The implication being that in what now happens, we are going to behold glory as never before. The implication being that in what John now narrates, the essence of the luminous, weighty God is going to be displayed once and for all.

In what John now narrates, we find ourselves in the theater of glory. Our text today is John 18, 1 to 12.

[ 6 : 16 ] Without this text, without this text, we do not really understand the death of Jesus. Think of this text as a set of 3D glasses.

Enabling us to see what is going on in the events that change everything forever.

If you are able, would you please stand for the reading of God's Word? When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden into which He Himself entered and His disciples.

Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon Him, went forth. And He said to them, Whom do you seek? They answered, Jesus the Nazarene.

[ 7 : 38 ] He said to them, I am He. And Judas also was betraying Him, was standing there with them. When therefore He said to them, I am He, they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again, therefore, He asked them, Whom do you seek? They said, Jesus the Nazarene. He answered, I told you that I am He. If therefore you seek Me, let these go their way, that the word might be fulfilled which He spoke, of those whom thou hast given Me, I lost not one.

Simon Peter therefore, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear and the slave's name was Malchus. Jesus therefore said to Peter, Put the sword into the sheath.

The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it? So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound Him.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. You enabled John, who was present in this event, to remember what happened and what was said.

[ 9 : 09 ] And you have faithfully kept this text for us all of these centuries. Will you now help us enter into the reality of which these words speak as never before?

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. As he takes us into the theater of glory, John wants us to know five things.

five truths that help us understand what is going on. First, John wants us to know that Jesus knows what is happening and what is going to happen.

Verse 4, Jesus therefore, knowing all things that were coming upon Him, went forth. Jesus is fully aware of what is going on.

Jesus is not naive about what is coming upon Him. He knows that He is entering what He earlier referred to as the hour and power of darkness.

[ 10 : 21 ] And as He steps into the darkness, He is not in the dark. He knows He is moving into the darkest darkness of sin.

He knows He is moving into the darkest darkness of evil. He knows He is moving into the darkest darkness of death. And He knows that from within the depths of sin, He will bring about forgiveness and cleansing and freedom.

And He knows that from within the depths of evil, He will bring about justice and wholeness. And he knows that from within the depths of death, he will bring about life, resurrection life, eternal life.

Knowing all things that were coming upon him, Jesus went forth. Second, John wants us to know that Jesus is in charge.

Jesus is choosing to enter into what he knows is coming upon him. He went forth, not he was dragged kicking and screaming, nor he just let things unfold.

[11:34] He went forth like a king, like a king ready to do battle. Jesus is not a helpless victim.

That is, no one is taking his life from him. As he says in the sermon on the good shepherd in John 10, 17 to 18, For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one has taken it from me. I lay it down on my own initiative. This is very important for us to realize Jesus is not a helpless victim.

Yes, he suffers horribly, so much so that we can hardly stand even contemplating it. But he does not suffer helplessly.

He went forth. He is acting freely. He is moving forward on his own volition. He knows what he's doing. He is in charge. Oh, yes.

[12:37] Judas and the chief priests and the Roman soldiers and Pilate all think they are in charge. They are acting out of their own free will, but they are not in charge.

Jesus is in charge. He went forth. John says it twice to emphasize that. Verse 1, he went forth. Verse 4, he went forth. Third, John wants us to know that Jesus needs no help as he moves into the darkness.

Peter thinks Jesus needs help. So, verse 10, Peter draws his sword and strikes the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. His right ear.

This is typical of John, by the way, giving us such details. It's what makes me trust John. He was there and he remembers what happened. It was the right ear and the servant's name was Melchus. Peter, out of love for Jesus, I am sure, tries to do what does not need to be done.

He tries to protect Jesus from the darkness, using, however, weapons of darkness, only making things worse.

[13:55] Now, Jesus has to heal the servant's ear. How much are we like Peter? Thinking that Jesus needs help to save the world.

He needs no one's help. Put the sword into the sheath. Jesus does not need swords to save the world.

Fourth, as we enter into the theater of glory, John wants us to know that Jesus will not be diverted. Verse 10, the cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?

Peter was trying to divert Jesus. In trying to protect Jesus, he was trying to keep Jesus from the cross. If you know the big story, you know this is the second time Peter tries to do this.

The first time was when Jesus told the first group of disciples that he must go to Jerusalem. That he must suffer many things. That he must be rejected by the elders and the chief priests. That he must be killed and that he must rise on the third day.

[15:02] Peter takes Jesus aside on that occasion and he begins to rebuke Jesus. Imagine that. Peter rebuking Jesus. God forbid it, Lord. This shall never happen to you. God forbid it?

God? This is God's will for Jesus. In a taxi ride from the airport in Calgary to Ambrose University last Tuesday to speak at a pastor's conference, I had a wonderful conversation with a Muslim from India.

He said what many people would like to be the truth. He said that God did not want Jesus to die on a cross. He said that God so loved Jesus that he would not want Jesus to suffer.

So, the taxi driver said, God intervened and whisked Jesus away before he could die. Peter, God forbid it, Lord. This shall never happen to you. Jesus turns to Peter and says, get behind me, Satan. You're a stumbling block to me. Because you're setting your mind on the things of humans and not the mind of God. Must go to Jerusalem and be crucified. Must. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?

[16:14] Nothing will divert Jesus from moving forward. Nothing. And fifth, and most importantly, John wants us to know the mystery of what is happening.

Better, John wants us to be stunned by the mystery. Listen carefully to how John describes the scene when Jesus is being arrested.

Listen very carefully. Too many people miss the mystery. They come into the garden where Jesus often went to pray. Judas the betrayer, the chief priest and leading Pharisees, and a Roman cohort.

A cohort is 600 soldiers. 600. They come with lanterns and torches and weapons.  
Verse 4, Jesus steps forward. Remember, he's not the helpless victim. He's in charge. He asks Judas and the religious leaders and the soldiers, whom do you seek?  
[17:19] They respond, Jesus the Nazarene. Then verse 4, Jesus responds. Verse 5, Jesus responds. I am he.

Literally, it is simply I am. The Greek is ego, a me. More literally, I, I am.  
Emi is the first person singular form of the verb to be. I am. A me would be sufficient. I am. But Jesus adds this pronoun ego. Ego means I.  
Ego, a me. I, I am. Whom do you seek? Jesus the Nazarene. I, I am.  
Then the observation. Too many people just read past. The observation which reveals the mystery of the moment. John says, verse 6, that when Jesus said, I am.  
[18:19] Listen, verse 6. When Jesus therefore said, I am, they drew back and they fell to the ground. Get the scene clear.

Hundreds of men. Hundreds. Armed to the teeth. Come to arrest a man.  
A mere man, they think. And when they hear the words, I am, they draw back and fall to the ground. Why? I am.

A second time, Jesus asked them, whom do you seek? And again, they respond, presumably now from kneeling on the ground. Jesus the Nazarene.

Again, Jesus responds, I told you that I am he. Again, literally, I told you that I am. I am. What are those heavily armed men doing on the ground before Jesus?

[19:21] In light of the rest of the Gospel of John, we know why. We know what Jesus is saying. And why those who come to arrest Jesus drew back and fell to the ground.

At least 14 times in the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus use this phrase, I am, in reference to himself. Seven times with a predicate.

That is, seven times I am something. I'm the bread of life. I'm the light of the world. I'm the door. I'm the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

I'm the resurrection and the life. I'm the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine. Hugely audacious claims coming from a mere man. If he's a mere man.

Then, seven times, Jesus speaks the I am without a predicate. Just I am. And it's often rendered, as in our text today, I am he.

[20:15] That's because the Hebrew behind the Greek is ani, hu. Ani, I, hu, he. Ani, hu, I, he. Or I am he. But when the Bible was translated from Hebrew into Greek, ani, hu was rendered ego, a me.

And the simplest way to render Jesus' words is simply I am. Seven times in John's Gospel, Jesus uses this word of himself. John 4, 26.

When Jesus is speaking to the woman at the well who is seeking God, he says, I am the one who is speaking to you. John 6, 20.

When two fearful disciples caught on a storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus comes walking on the water and says, do not be afraid. I am. John 8, 24.

When speaking to the religious leaders, unless you believe I am, you will die in your sins. John 8, 28. In the same conversation, when you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I am.

[21:14] And then John 8. At the end of the then, by then, very intense conversation. Before Abraham was, I am. And John tells us the leaders took up stones to throw at Jesus.

And then twice in the garden when they'd had enough and they'd come to move forward to crucify him. Whom do you seek? Jesus the Nazarene.

I am. And they drew back and fell to the ground. But of course, what else can you do when the great I am is standing right in front of you?

Do you see? And do you see why I use the word mystery? I am. I am. It's the same words the living God says to Moses at the burning bush.

I am. I am who I am. Take off your shoes, Moses. You're standing on holy ground. In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God, toward God.

[22:15] And the word was God. God. The word was God. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory.

Do you see? This is the maker of all things in the garden. This is the creator they are arresting. The great I am.

And for a moment they implicitly know it. That's why they draw back and fall to the ground. That's the automatic response when God shows up. And the irony of it.

They fall to the ground and then get up and arrest Jesus. William Temple observed. We are the world to whom our God comes forth in the person of Jesus the Nazarene saying, Who is it that you want?

The world is groping for its true leader. He offers himself and the world, after yielding for a moment to the impact of his divinity, arrests and crucifies him.

[ 23 : 16 ] As we enter into the very heart of the theater of glory, John wants us to be clear about who it is who stands at center stage. It is God they are arresting.

It is God they are binding with ropes. It is God they take to Annas and Caiaphas, the high priest. It is I am who I am who stands before the high priest.

Imagine that. High priests live for that one day of the year when they go into the Holy of Holies and they encounter the Holy One. And there on that Thursday night, the Holy One stands before the high priest.

God stands before them. It is about God that they hear and speak lies. It is God they take to Pontius Pilate, governor of the most powerful empire in the world.

It is God who stands before the representative of Rome. It is God who stands in the dock. It is God whom Pilate asks, Are you the king of the Jews? It is God whom Pilate asks, What have you done?

[ 24 : 20 ] It is God whom Pilate asks, What is truth? It is God about whom Pilate says, I find no guilt in him. It is God whom Pilate wants to release.

Bless Pilate. He wants to release God. It's about God whom Pilate says, Behold the man. It's about God whom Pilate asks, Where are you from?

It's about God whom Pilate says, Behold your king. It is God whom Pilate then has scourged. It is God on whom they are spitting. It is God upon whom they thrust the crown of thorns.

It is God about whom the chief priests say, Crucify him, crucify him. It is God they are nailing to the wooden beams. It is God they lift upon the cross. It is I am who hangs there naked, exposed, suffering, shame.

It is God who says, I am thirsty. It is God who cries out, It is finished. It is God who bows his head and gives up his spirit. Whom do you seek? Jesus the Nazarene.

[ 25 : 24 ] I am. It is the great I am who is crucified on the Roman cross. It is the great I am who then says it is finished. And if he says it is finished, then it is finished.

What is finished? Everything that needs to be done for us to live with and be alive in the great I am is finished.

Everything. Everything. For all the time. Everything that needs to be done for us to be in relationship with the great I am has been done by the great I am.

The cup that needs to be drunk has been drunk by God. The cup of wrath against human sin has been drunk by the God against whom we have sinned.

Everything that needs to be done for us to enjoy all God wants to give humanity has been done by God. When Jesus had finished saying these words, when Jesus had finished praying, the last line of his prayer is this, that the love wherewith you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

[ 26 : 46 ] I in them. The great I am in them, in us. Everything that needs to be done for the great I am to take up residence with us and in us has been done by the great I am.

Oh, what glory. Tis mystery all. The immortal dies. Who can explore his strange design? In vain the firstborn seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine.

Tis mercy all. Let earth adore. Let angel minds inquire no more. He left his father's throne above. So free. So infinite his grace.

Emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race. Tis mercy all. Immense and free. For oh my God, it found out me. Amazing love.

How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me? Famous and free. Go to waters. Peace. Peace. I stay in pain for you.

[ 27 : 56 ] Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Come to see you in the cave. Peace. Thank you. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.