

A Question of Identity (Evening Service)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 March 2017

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Oh, good evening again. Here we are. So we are jumping back into John's Gospel, which we started in 2015. And this will take us through to Easter. And it's a bit of a shock to kind of jump into the last bit of a book, I know.

So let's do a very quick overview of John's Gospel. Very, very quick. So the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus according to John, sort of snaps in half at chapter 13.

And the first half of John's Gospel, some scholars call it the book of signs, right? It's Jesus in action. It's thematically kind of organized around seven specific miracles or signs, as John calls it, that Christ did.

Like the feeding of the 5,000, the walking of water, raising of Lazarus, etc. It's his years in ministry. That's the first half of John. And then chapter 13 until the end, that covers just the last week of Christ's life.

That's how important the cross is to John. He gives half the Gospel to just this last week leading up to it. And scholars call the second half of John the book of glory.

[1 : 08] And within this section, there are two subsections. The first subsection is mostly Jesus with his disciples. So he's preparing them for what's going to go down shortly.

So they're hanging out together. He's teaching them. He's praying for them. The second subsection is Christ's arrest, crucifixion, resurrection. And that second subsection starts at chapter 18, which is where we are today.

So we're jumping in sort of at a fairly logical point. So again, two halves. First half, Jesus with the people. Second half, the last week of Jesus' life.

Jesus praying with his disciples. Jesus arrests, crucifixion, resurrection. So this is where we are right here. So we pick up a story at the arrest.

And as I've studied this passage this week, which was lovely, actually. So lovely. Like I'm reading it. I'm going, hey, it's like a story. For those of you who have been with us, Revelation, you read it and you go, I've got nothing.

[2 : 09] I have no idea what's happening here. But this is just so wonderful to read like a story with people's names and you can understand a secret event. It was fantastic. Anyway, look, there are two major themes.

For those of you who think I can only preach a three-point sermon, there are two major themes. Nikki Ross. One, Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is Lord. That's the first major theme of the passage. Two, Jesus is Savior. That has two sections to it. No, no, no. Just Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Savior.

That's it. That's all this is about. And if you're going to ever talk about Jesus, those are probably the things to say, right? Jesus is Lord. Jesus is sovereign.

Jesus is King. He is in control of everything. And not only that, Jesus is Savior. This King, Lord, God, man, God, being wants to save you.

[3 : 08] Wants to make your life beautiful. Isn't that wonderful? So let's jump into it. Okay, let's start with the Lordship of Jesus. That's the first point. Now, where do you see the Lordship of Jesus?

Well, we'll look at the arrest here. So Jesus has just finished praying with his disciples. He goes down to this garden, which was likely some place that a wealthy benefactor made available to him. He'd been there many times. The passage says it was a place to relax, get away. I guess it's like his happy place with him as disciples. And Judas knew that Jesus liked to take his disciples there. And that's where Judas brings his mob.

Now, if Jesus was trying to avoid arrest, if this was all a great shock to him that this was happening, he probably would have changed up his routine, but he doesn't. Because this is Christ's plan.

This is Christ's plan what's about to happen. Verse 4 says he knew exactly what was going to happen. So Jesus makes sure that he's in the place that they would guess he'd be, because he deliberately wants to be arrested.

[4 : 10] So Judas comes with his people. Verse 3, there's some officials. It's made up of a motley crew. So there are some officials from the chief priests.

They're kind of like the synagogue mall cops, I guess. But the biggest contingent would have been the band of Roman soldiers. Now, these Roman soldiers, that word band, I'm told, the scholars tell me, that can be anything from 200 to 600 Roman soldiers, which seems a little bit over the top, doesn't it?

Why would they send so many people to arrest Jesus? Was it just sort of like, were they just posturing? You know, let's show how powerful we are. We'll send a huge... A reminder that this whole thing, this last week of Jesus' life, this is all going on during the feast of the Passover. Now, if you remember, what does the Passover celebrate? It celebrates deliverance from foreign overlords, right? So when the Egyptians were enslaved, when the Jewish people were enslaved by the Egyptians in the Passover, it's a feast that celebrates that time.

So the Israelites' current situation is they have these Roman overlords. And so Passover, nationalistic feelings running high.

[5 : 28] And the Romans always made sure that they had a whole lot of soldiers in the area in case there were riots and, you know, the Jewish people started, you know, thinking crazy thoughts, right?

So they knew that Jesus was very popular. And they thought, goodness, this could be, you know, like a flame to dry wood.

Like, we need to make sure we've got this thing completely under control. So let's send a whole lot of soldiers. Not intimidated at all, the army arrives, and what does Jesus do?

Well, there's no hiding in dark corners. There's no escape. There's no stuttering. There's no hiding in dark corners. Oh, you know, I'm not the guy. And the passage says that he goes forward to meet them.

So they are probably feeling fairly good about themselves heading towards Jesus to capture him. And I imagine are very surprised when Jesus sort of walks out the gate of his garden towards them.

[6 : 34] Jesus just takes charge of the situation. He says to them, whom do you seek? And from their perspective, there's no like, shut up, we ask the questions around here.

There's none of that. There's this kind of like, they just sort of fall into line. Jesus of Nazareth, they say. I am he. Jesus responds. Now, in the original Greek there, there is no he.

Jesus just says, I am. Which is the name God gave himself. In Exodus. And the passage says that the army and the mall cops and the officials, they all fell down when he said this.

Now, why is that? I think this is a miraculous event. And I think this happens to show that even though from the outside, it kind of looks like, well, the Roman soldiers are in control.

It's this massive battalion. And you've got the chief priests. You've got all the power players there. Even from the outside, it looks like Judas team, team Judas, hold all the power.

[7 : 43] They're actually powerless. They're powerless when they try and confront God. And when you say it like that, it's ludicrous. They try and confront God. They try and arrest God. When they do that, they've got nothing, Jesus reminds them.

They have nothing. Jesus speaks his name, his true name, his real identity, and they fall over. Now, you can imagine what was going through Judas' mind.

Well, we can't really. Who knows what was going through Judas' mind as he struggles back to his feet here. But we can imagine that there was probably a lot of confusion and a lot of fear in that situation.

They didn't really know what was going on. They didn't really realize who they were dealing with.

Now, before moving on, I wanted to spend two minutes digging into this I am statement.

Like, why is it so important? Why is that self-identification so powerful? Now, remember, we're talking about the lordship of Jesus here, the authority of Jesus. I am, he says.

[8 : 41] I am. That is probably the greatest claim you can make. You can make a lot of great claims about yourself. I am very fast. I am very attractive. I am very rich.

But just to say, I am, that's the greatest thing you can say about yourself. As I said, it comes from Exodus. So God appeared to Moses and tells him, go to Pharaoh and say, let my people go.

You know that story. And Moses says, well, God, what shall I call you? And God says, call me, I am.

I am. It's the verb to be, isn't it? And it sounds weird to our ear is just calling ourselves sort of, you know, I am. Because that phrase, I am, that verb is normally, you normally, there's normally something else on the end of that sentence, isn't there?

I am the son of somebody. I am attractive. I am very important. I am human. I am because of this or that. But for God, there is no object.

[9 : 44] There is no, there's no because. God is not dependent on anything else. He just is, I am. There's no beginning. There's no end. It's not I was, I'm going to be. It's just I am.

It's a pretty staggering thing to say. It's a pretty astonishing thing that Jesus takes on this name for himself. And what it does is it creates a little bit of a problem, I think, for people who are spiritual. Because what do you do with a faith where the main person claims to be God? And that's a problem for people. It's a problem for people who want to think that all religions are basically the same.

See, the thing is is no other religious founder has made this kind of claim. No other major religious founder has made this kind of claim. They will say, do this or do that and I will show you how to find God.

I will show you the steps to find God. But Jesus says, I am God and I've come to find you. I mean, it's astonishing and it's offensive because as I said, our modern paradigm is this.

[10 : 59] It's you want to think well all religions are sort of okay and they're pretty good and they're all about the same and it's really about you choosing one that works for you. You decide what's the best faith for you.

What's going to meet your needs? When Jesus says, I am, he destroys that paradigm. He destroys that way of thinking. He says, you can't think like that because Jesus was either right about who he said he was or it's just a big monstrous lie.

Christianity is either the one true faith or it's just an abomination built on a huge lie. And this is not being intolerant.

This is just taking Jesus at his word here. I had a friend of mine recently on Facebook who has at this point lost their faith it would seem and they personal messaged me.

I said, what are you doing? What's going on with your faith? And they said, I just don't believe Jesus is the son of God but I really like Christianity still. I like the values and I like the kind of the things you do and I like the self-giving stuff and I like the teaching.

[12 : 04] I like his teaching but I just don't think Jesus is the son of God. That tells me that so anyone who says that I don't think Jesus is God but I like the teaching tells me you haven't actually studied what Jesus says about himself.

Three times in the passage Jesus takes on this divine name he says, I am, I am, I am. Christianity can't be one of many true faiths.

It's true or it's not true. Okay, now where are we? Where are we? That was my little excuses there. Right, so the mob, the group that Judas brought to arrest Jesus, they're staggering to their feet in the story and it's very interesting, it's almost like Jesus has to bring them back on task like I do with my kids sometimes.

He said, come on guys, what are you supposed to be doing right now? Getting on your shoes. I've been asking you for half an hour. Get your shoes. No, I don't want, no I don't care that Fluffy wants to go potty or something.

Get your shoes on. It's almost like Jesus has to do that in verse 7. He asks them again, whom do you seek? Let's get this thing going.

[13 : 14] Come on guys. And again, they say we're seeking Jesus and Jesus says, I am. I am. And folks, we believe him or it's all nonsense.

You reject the whole Christian project. There's no middle ground here. Right. So we're talking about the Lordship of Christ in this arrest sequence. He's clearly in charge.

They go to arrest him. He identifies himself. They fall down. He gets them back on task again. And he's clearly running the show here. Now let's quickly look at his Lordship in the interrogation.

That's verses 19 to 24. So 19 to 24, he's been questioned by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court there. And it's a bit of a kangaroo court. The whole thing is so dodgy. And let me tell you why.

As I've sort of studied this week, here's what I found out. So Annas wasn't actually the high priest. He was deposed in 15 AD and replaced by a son-in-law.

[14:11] There's pretty good records on this stuff. And so Caiaphas was the real high priest. But Annas was kind of like the power behind the power. So that's a bit dodgy that Annas is having a crack at sort of interrogating him for a start.

It's also a bit dodgy that they're doing this at night time. You're never supposed to do trials at night. You're always doing the break of day and you always have several judges there. They're always supposed to be public.

You never question the accused. You only ever question witnesses. Obviously you don't hit people in court. So everything about this was dodgy. This sort of trial, this supposed trial.

They were going against all the normal protocols. And Jesus shows his lordship in this situation by he's just not having a bar of it. He's not having a bar of any of this.

He just says, I'm just not going to play this game. And he knew these rules, which is why he kept saying, don't talk to me. Talk to the witnesses. They're the people you're supposed to be talking to when you do this kind of thing.

[15:10] So I'm not going to do this. Let me speak to the next guy. It's basically what he's doing here. So my big point, look, Jesus is in charge. He's in charge of everything that is going on in this situation.

As we mentioned last week, this phrase, crushed by the wheel of history, that was a phrase used by Albert Schweitzer in 1906 in a book he wrote where he tried to discover the historical Jesus.

What did Jesus, what was he really about? He basically says, Jesus kind of got this thing rolling, this kind of like religion thing rolling, but basically he got in over his head and it all went sideways and they killed him.

This is clearly not what's happening here. He's the boss. Well, he's the boss or he's the crazy person, isn't he? And if he is Lord, that calls for a total commitment, doesn't it?

We can't half-pie this. If he really is Lord, as demonstrated in this passage in all these small ways, that requires a total commitment of our life.

[16:14] That's the first point. Jesus is Lord. Second point and quicker, Jesus is Savior. Now if we read over the passage quickly, we don't see it. We might just sort of see an arrest and an interrogation, but you read it closely, you see these pointers to the great exchange that takes place on the cross.

Here it is. Verse 8, Jesus says, So if you seek me, let these men go. He's talking about his disciples. If you seek me, let these men go. So it's easy to miss.

But Christ makes a deal with the Romans. He says, Just take me, leave the others alone.

Remember he asks twice, whom do you seek? He's trying to keep the focus on himself.

He's trying to get them focused on him because he's the guy they want. Just take me, just take me, just take me. It's an exchange. Him for them. And I'm just reading into this to try and find some meaning that's not there.

Caiaphas, ironically, explains this very succinctly. He doesn't realize what he's saying, but John reminds us what he says in verse 14. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

[17:27] People call this Caiaphas' prophecy. So Caiaphas is, in his mind, he's thinking practical politics. He's thinking, okay, we'll get rid of Jesus, we'll kill Jesus, and then any ideas of a revolution or a riot or a takeover, those will just die because we've got rid of the main leader.

And that way, we don't have to kill a whole lot of people, we'll just kill this one guy. He's just thinking practically, practical politics. But John reminds us of this unintentional prophecy so we understand what's happening on the cross.

Jesus dies for his people instead of his people as a substitute for his people. So the passage points to that as Jesus is taken by the soldiers instead of the disciples.

So, the people Jesus is dying for, who are they? Who's Jesus actually dying for?

And why does he need to die for them? Well, that's wonderfully betrayed in Peter, who I just love. Peter is just fantastic.

[18:36] He's got so much depth and he's just such a disaster, Peter. I love him. You would have noticed in the reading that there's this interweaving of Peter's troubles and Jesus' triumphs.

You know, they're both being interrogated. Jesus by this fairly high up kind of official person and Peter by a slave girl. And he goes back and forth between them.

And why? Why are they interweaving those stories like that? Because Peter's supposed to represent us. And the message is this. Jesus saves because we need saving.

We need saving like Peter. Like cutting off the ear of Malchus. Which, by the way, why do they mention his name? There's lots of very important people in the Bible that don't get names.

They mention his name because this was a really oral culture. And if this didn't happen, you wouldn't write down somebody's name. Because John could have written this and the person, so the person's like reading this and going, Malchus.

[19 : 42] Oh, Malchus. Yeah, I know Malchus. That's right. I can go and ask Malchus. It tells us that these were eyewitnesses here. But anyway, Peter cutting off Malchus' ear. Like, come on, Peter.

I guess the only thing I can imagine here that was going on is that Jesus had just felled the people. It would have fallen over. And if anyone was going to do anything stupid, it was probably going to be then. So cue Peter, pulls out a sword.

He's like, right. I've got you guys. Right, I'll show you. Gets out a sword, attacks. And Peter was obviously really incompetent or really scarily accurate with the sword.

Either way, like it's a total mess, isn't it? Verse 11, Put your sword into its sheath, says Jesus. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me? The other gospel says that Jesus heals this man's ear.

Jesus is saying, he's saying, listen, my kingdom is going to go forth, but it's not going to go forth through violence, and it's not going to go forth through power. It's going to advance through sacrifice.

[20 : 54] Peter's helpfulness, I mean, the church has got a bad, the church has been Peter for a long time in many ways. Peter was as helpful as the Crusades were as helpful for the gospel, you know?

Thinking we could advance it through violence. So that's the ear cutting. Brave, brave Peter. Brave in front of the Roman soldiers and then denies Christ three times.

For every I am statement of Christ, Peter denies Christ three times in front of a servant girl. I mean, he is just all over the show, isn't he?

He is all over the show. He's a mess, a hot mess. And yet, he is the object of Christ's immense love. love.

An immense concern. He is who Christ dies for as he does us. I find this just a really encouraging and humbling passage.

[21 : 53] I'll sort of finish up here. Jesus, who is the Lord of all, who is the Lord of all circumstances, allows himself to be taken by the soldiers. Bound.

God allows himself to be bound by soldiers beaten, allows himself to be the victim of a completely unjust criminal system and is crucified and he did it for us.

As messy as we are, he did it for us. I'll finish with a quote from Tim Keller from a few years ago that I think summarizes what we've said tonight and what's in this passage.

This passage tells us this. It says, We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, yet more loved and accepted in Jesus than we ever dared hoped.

That's true. Amen. Amen. So, you You You You