John 18:1-11 “The Last Man Standing”

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[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're returning this morning to our study of John's Gospel, the account of the most influential person in the history of the world, written by his most beloved friend.
It's been a while since we've been in John, longer break than usual. So let me remind you John's purpose. It's to focus our attention on Jesus, that we may see and come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised King, that we may find life in relationship with Him.
All of us who think we might find the meaning of life in our stuff, in our performances, in our performance, in our self-determination by being who it is that we want to be, are invited to find the meaning of life in Jesus.
For ourselves, for our friends and our neighbors who struggle like us and wonder which end is in this crazy world. What about Jesus? What about Jesus?
[1:23] What about Jesus? Some pretty amazing claims about His identity from His own lips, including that He is the only place that we will find our longings fully satisfied, our lives to be eternally purposeful, our hearts deeply fulfilled, only in Him.

And throughout the story of Jesus' life, as we've followed it for 17 chapters so far, has stood the specter of His death.
We've been told from the beginning that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, even as He will be lifted up to draw all men to Himself.
And so often through the Gospel of John, we've read that His hour has not yet come, even when people set out to kill Him, but it's not His hour.
But now His hour has come. The cross is in view within even 24 hours. Jesus has lived in an amazing way, certainly.
[2:31] Unheard of miracles, astonishing claims, unusual company, challenging teaching. But how will things go at the end?

John just spent five full chapters, our entire fall, on Thursday alone of Jesus' final week. And He's going to zero in now as we head towards Friday and the steps leading to the death of the one who promised to be life for all who believe in Him.
The crucified King and eventually the risen King. Let's ask God to help us see Him clearly. Father, You delight to show us Jesus.
We're so thankful. It's our first commitment as a church to be Christ-centered. And as simple as it sounds, it is so hard for us.
Fix our eyes even now upon Him. Holy Spirit, shine the spotlight on Jesus. Don't let us miss Him this morning or leave unchanged by Him.
[3:47] We ask it in His name. Amen. Amen. John chapter 18 at verse 1. The same night that Jesus has washed His disciples' feet, has taught them in the upper room, has shared the last supper with them, has then prayed to His Father for them and for us, He now moves toward the cross.

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples across the Kidron Valley, 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?

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They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them, I am He. Judas, who betrayed Him, was standing with them.
[5:05] When Jesus said to them, I am He, they drew back and they 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? Thus far God's holy word. Those are tense, powerful moments, aren't they?
right outside the crowded streets of Jerusalem, the weekend of the big Passover feast. I want you for a minute to imagine yourself as one of Jesus' followers that night.
[6:17] Perhaps John himself, peering out from behind a tree in the garden, getting his eyewitness view. Or maybe another disciple, perhaps further off, watching from a distance.

What you would see if you're looking out from there is a stark opposition and a total mismatch. You look up and in one corner is a group commentators agree number several hundred men.
More than perhaps you imagined when I read the story. You'd forgotten, hadn't you, how many soldiers the Romans sent to keep peace during the busy feast week.
Judas, you know him. He's there and he's surrounded by these armed and dangerous soldiers. Hundreds of them. As well as some key Jewish leaders.
You recognize even some of them from the temple. There they are, a band of several hundred stepping forward to meet them. is Jesus.
[7:23] A solitary figure who's been praying emotionally in the garden. Now with just a handful of followers behind him.

There you are looking. Who you got? Maybe better, how fast can you disappear? This is not going to end well, is it?
You know it's not. Now Jesus is pretty amazing. I mean you've seen him do lots of things. You've seen him escape the crowds before when they came to make him king by force and he disappeared.
On another occasion when they would have stoned him and he slipped through. But this feels different. Now you can tell the forces of darkness mean business.
Consider all of the opposition that Jesus is facing in this moment. He's facing personal betrayal from a friend like Judas.
[8:24] That can feel overwhelming, can't it? Overwhelming enough for any of us to be broken. Combine that with the religious leaders of his day.

Corrupt as some of them were. They were in charge and they were out to get him. How discouraging must that be for a man who himself is seeking to lead people to God but all of God's people are out to get him.
And lest any doubt be left as to the ability of the group to finish the job, the greatest political power on the planet comes with lanterns and torches and weapons to extinguish the so-called light of the world.
Emotional opposition, spiritual opposition, physical opposition. Jesus is way outmanned it seems. And yet what unfolds is utterly unbelievable. It's also eternally hopeful. I hope that it fills you with hope this morning because we've faced overwhelming opposition too, yes?
[9:41] Even as we hide behind the tree and look on, what's going to happen? In the face of overwhelming opposition, Jesus stands out and he shines bright.

Don't take your eyes off Jesus as we follow this story, okay? Don't miss him. It's really amazing. First, we're going to notice his sovereign control. there may be nothing more striking in this whole interaction than the fact that Jesus, outnumbered as he appears to be, is in charge of the whole encounter with hundreds of Jewish and Roman leaders.
Just as he said, no one takes his life from him. Right? John wants us to realize that. Whatever the outcome here, whatever happens to Jesus, he is calling the shots, isn't he?
I mean, notice, wouldn't you expect him to make pretty quick work of him, numbers-wise? He's certainly not in a strong position for negotiation, is he? And yet, he initiates the conversation.

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I can't say for sure, but even the fact that he's asking the questions here makes it sound to me a little bit like it must have been, whom do you seek?
[11:04] And the response, well, well, sir, I mean, Jesus of Nazareth? Maybe? In just a moment, he will give them directions, demanding, if you can imagine it, that they let his followers go.

And he remains so in control of this whole scene that somehow, can you imagine this? When Peter cuts off the ear of one in their party, they seem frozen.
They seem to look on calmly while Jesus handles it. He handles the instigator, Peter, and the injury.
There is something about this Jesus, isn't there? Something very unusual. In the moment that he appears to be least in control, most powerless, he absolutely is in control.
Maybe you can trust him too, when you face opposition. Maybe he's still in control in your life when it feels like he's not.
[12:21] God. But then if his first question didn't rattle their helmets, his next words clearly did. Ego a me, I am.

And John says, as Jesus others those words, Judas was standing, the several hundred men were standing, standing, and suddenly Jesus alone was standing.
They drew back, and they fell to the ground, all of them together. That's a sure sign of defeat, isn't it, in any encounter that you would have.
The lone object of their focus just uttered two words, but there's power in this name, isn't there?
Jesus has repeatedly in John finished the sentence, I am the bread of life, the good shepherd, the light of the world, and so on, all of which may be in view here, but when he says merely ego a me, Jewish minds are running much further back than Jesus life.
As he said just a few chapters ago, before Abraham was, I am. And on that occasion, when they heard those words, they picked up stones to kill this blasphemer, the one who would claim equality with Yahweh, the one true God.
[14:07] This, as you know, is the name, the powerful name by which God identified himself to Moses, first in a burning bush, and then to his people in Egypt.

You can even go back to creation because John 1 tells us this, Jesus was in the beginning with God. Now, please understand, we have to understand, this is different from every other religion, okay?
Christianity, Christianity, this Jesus standing before overwhelming opposition cannot be one among many, an option on the buffet.
Every other leader, teacher, guru, influencer says, let me show you the way. Jesus says, I am the way.
every other prophet says, let me tell you the truth. Jesus says, I am the truth. Every other religion says, let me point you to life.
[15:16] Jesus says, I am the life, the one true God himself. Did he really mean this? Some would ask.

Oh, absolutely. just ask one of his few followers who could have easily saved their own skins, but instead one after another give their lives to spread this claim.
Just ask one of his opponents if you prefer, like Malchus for example, whose otherwise not noteworthy name is almost certainly included here because this is how you write ancient history.
Ancient history is written with eyewitnesses, likely as servant a younger man in the group, likely then still alive when John circulates his account and likely if you talk to Malchus he's got quite a story.
He can even hear you. But as much as Christianity is different from every other religion, we have to understand this is also different from irreligion and naturalism and humanism of our day.
[16:30] This Jesus is unlike any other man. He doesn't bow to power dynamics. He doesn't yield to normal human limitations.

He stands out as an otherworldly presence in this world. Something most in our culture would have no room to account for.
We can't explain him. This is no man to be taken lightly. When he speaks his name, I am. No one else is standing. Have you encountered Jesus like that?
And been knocked off your feet? We need to. That's what it means to be Christ-centered, by the way. God-man is standing in your own strength, but rather from the ground each day to see Jesus as the strong one.

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Yes, he will pick you up in love, but it starts with hearing him say, I am, and falling on your face before him. He is the last man standing, the unparalleled God-man before whom no one can stand. [17:53] He stands out among the most powerful of the powerful. No one is his equal. No one else stands. Except, instead of them all just disappearing as they've fallen back, Jesus instead, invites them back into conversation.

It's a bit comedic, honestly. It's as though he's saying, sorry, could you tell me again who it was you were looking for? Did you forget why you came?
Just notice briefly the power of his word. Something more than intellectual recognition was going on when he said, ego, a me, because many of those Roman soldiers wouldn't have been familiar with Yahweh, and yet they fall down when he speaks.
That's inexplicable power. It wouldn't make sense. And when Jesus responds to them this time, we're told in verse 9 that his order to let these other men go was why?
To fulfill the word that he had spoken. In case you don't recognize it, that's language being applied to the words of Jesus that was used for all the sacred scriptures, all the holy prophets when they spoke.
[19:19] When John quotes them, that's what he says, and now he does it with Jesus' words. Jesus' word is utterly trustworthy. Jesus here is in sovereign control.

His very presence, his name, his word, are worth trusting. They can flip any power dynamic you've ever encountered, any opposition you've ever faced.
I wonder what he'll use that amazing power for as he turns the tables on them. Can you start to see yourself getting a little bit fired up at this point if you're watching Jesus and you're one of his followers?
I mean, certainly, clearly he's going to use it to get away, right? But also he's probably going to humiliate this band of soldiers. This is going to be great except not exactly. Verse 7, 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.
[20:28] This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one. Jesus has said this as recently as earlier tonight in his prayer in John 17, Father, 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. I mean, as his followers, you've got to know, their lives were certainly on the line, right?
When you come and the leader's going to be taken out, they would be rounded up with the leader typically. But this leader, this good shepherd, is looking out for his sheep.
Don't miss the wonder of this shepherding protection. Dear ones, please don't miss this. When the pressure rises for Jesus, he doesn't forget us in a race to save his own skin, to rescue himself.
He hasn't forgotten you, no matter the level of opposition that you are feeling, he hasn't. Other than Judas the betrayer and the fulfillment of the scripture, he doesn't lose a one of his twelve disciples, does he?
[21:58] And perhaps more to the point for you and me, Jesus doesn't lose a one of us who have believed in him. When Jesus tells us back in chapter 6 that he is the bread of life, and he speaks not merely of the twelve, but of whoever comes to me, whoever believes in me, Jesus ensures us, it is his father's will that he lose none of those, none of those who come and believe, that he will raise us up on the last day.

Do you hear his words speaking that not just to the twelve in the garden that night, but to you and me, as you've come to believe in him, he's got you. What a comfort that should be to the ears of those facing all sorts of opposition, from the mouth of the one who has overcome the forces of darkness, and in the darkest hour, has not forgotten us.
In fact, he has so stood for us that we don't have to fight for ourselves. Maybe you're like Peter, I am, and it takes you a while to learn that lesson.
As the other disciples presumably begin to slip away, let's imagine we're with them, right? Slipping away, Peter slips out his sword. Aha, a great idea at a great time. He decides to take his last stand beside his Messiah King until the king stops him.

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We learn elsewhere, heals the ear. Again, somehow, staves off a response from the armed soldiers. I don't know how Peter's not killed here. Jesus is in control, and he allows Peter to exit stage left, if you will, except graciously.
[23:56] not shamefully. If, like me, you have ever forgotten that your king is in control, I don't know, maybe there's somebody in here who's had that experience.

If you've forgotten that you can trust him and you've started flailing, if you will, with your sword to maintain control, to protect yourself, to advance his cause your own way, if that's ever been you like it has me, I want you to treasure this calm but clear gospel reminder, gospel truth from Jesus.
Not a shaming of you for that. Out of love for Peter, what does he say? Not giving up on him. Not, as you might imagine, oh, second thought, take that crazy guy.
Go ahead and take him. I could lose one. No. put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?
The cup Jesus is referring to is the cup of God's wrath. The death due to sinful men. We know from the other gospel accounts that Jesus has just been wrestling in this very garden moments before with the wretched poison of that cup.
[25:27] The longing to avoid it as he submits his spirit to his Father's will and he turns to meet the oncoming opposition. But listen, friends, don't miss this.

With literally hundreds standing before him to take him to his death, what enemy is most prominent in Jesus' mind?
Political power? Seems scary. Religious corruption? Personal betrayal? The cup of God's wrath. That's what he's facing. That cup compared to which we all should think, what can man do to me? This is what should really make sinners like us tremble and shrink back and fall to the ground.
We can't meet our own standards, much less stand before God's judgment seat. Can you imagine? But see, this, Jesus, it's different from moralistic Christianity.
[26:40] This is very different. Where I stand before God on my own merits and I hope to measure up and I hope to appease his wrath. No, no.

See, Jesus stands and says to all of us, don't dare face that enemy, that opposition without me. He sends all his followers away. away. So that he, the last man standing, can drain the cup to its dregs.
This Jesus, who has on more than one occasion before a crowd, humbly refused the crown, now willingly receives the cross.
cross. He goes willingly. He knows, we're told, all that is coming crashing down upon him and he steps forward to embrace it.
[27:57] Do you see that suffering substitution? the king who's in total control takes on to protect his sheep once and for all.

He's not merely in powerful control of the whole situation. He is so completely humbly self-sacrificing. The last man standing does what?
Lays himself down so that we can stand in him so that we don't face the death we certainly deserve. Do you see him in this passage? Can you see him tonight standing out as the one above all the others in that garden? Shining bright as the light of the world, the light of life.
Won't you run to him? Won't you marvel at him? Won't you, as you gaze at him, praise him for his greatness? Trust to fight your enemies?
[28:59] Won't you spend your life with him wherever it is he calls you to follow him, to praise his name, to advance his kingdom? Won't you see yourself with Jesus? As you wander out of the garden, can you even take your eyes off Jesus standing there?

As he exits with the crowd that came for you, are you starting to connect some of the dots from this overwhelming otherworldly night you've been experiencing?
In a sacrifice, an act of suffering, substitution that has been retold in countless stories, movies, tales of heroes and heroines throughout the ages, you can think of one right now, Jesus says, let them go.
Take me. centuries before, Moses told Pharaoh that Yahweh, the true God, the I Am, says, let my people go.
And for that to happen, the first Passover came, where the lives of all of the firstborn sons were on the line until a Passover lamb was taken.

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[30:25] And killed instead. And its blood placed on the doorposts of the home so that the firstborn would live and be let go to be with God.

That's the story that was echoing that night through the streets of Jerusalem. That very night, it did in the upper room, right? Jesus told it over again with his disciples. Jesus had just explained that the broken bread would be his body and that the blood that would cover the sins of those deserving to die and facing certain death would be his own blood.
Now what he said is making more sense. Horribly, yet wonderfully, you see it. The very I am in the flesh doesn't get taken as a helpless victim, but as a powerful shepherd, yet willing lamb, he steps forward to lay down his life, saying, let them go.
Take me. Take me. It was that very night that he was betrayed, that Jesus had taken bread and broke it, gave it to his disciples as I'm ministering in his name.
Give this bread to you. And he said, take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.
[32:06] And in the same way, after the supper, he took the cup and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it all of you.

See, the Father gave Jesus the cup of his wrath, which Jesus willingly drank so that God could put in your hands this morning the other cup the Bible talks about.
The cup of blessing, the cup of redemption, the cup of salvation that you will taste here in a moment. If you trust that Jesus drank that cup of God's wrath for you, paid for your sin, made you one of his own that he will never lose, then you come and eat and drink and trust him again and wonder at that again and thank him again and praise him and live with him even right now.
If that's not your hope, if you've come to church for years perhaps but you've never trusted Jesus to die in your place, to defeat all your enemies, maybe you're still fighting them to be good enough, trusted him to bring you home forever, if that's not something you've done, would you consider trusting him today?
In his name I offer you not bread and wine, they're signs like the baptism to point you to Jesus. I offer you life today, life with eternal purpose, life eternal with Jesus who is the life.
[33:49] Feel free to come forward and ask us to pray with you, ask to talk with us, we'd love to talk with you about him, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Let's pray and we'll eat together. Father, thank you for this great gift.
Another sign to point us to the one who meets our needs. Guilty, vile, and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was he.
Full atonement, can it be, hallelujah, what a Savior. Might we meet him here. We ask in his name, amen.
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