

# JOHN 18-19

## JOHN AND THE OTHER GOSPELS

John's account of the events leading up to and including the crucifixion are similar and different from the other gospel accounts:

Similarities: Jesus was arrested on the Mount of Olives, taken to the Jewish high priest and subsequently delivered to Pilate. Peter denied him at the high priest's house and Jesus was ultimately sentenced to death by hanging on a cross.

Differences: In John, the 'Jews' have already met and formally 'convicted' Jesus in their council (11: 45-53). Jesus' final meal was before the day of Passover, not on the Passover itself. Jesus is fully aware of God's plan and is confident in fulfilling that plan.

### 18: 1-14 - THE ARREST OF JESUS

Knowledge of where Jesus frequently went with his disciples allows Judas to lead the arresting party to him in cover of darkness. In John's account, Jesus does not have as deeply agonized a prayer to his Father God. Moreover, God's voice is heard confirming the Son as fulfilling God's will. Even though there are Roman soldiers who come to support the Jewish police, the Romans are only passively involved in the death of Jesus. The fact that the trial is held privately and at night gives a stronger sense of the injustice of it.

### 18: 15-27 - PETER'S DENIAL

Peter is accompanied by another disciple who gains access for the two of them to the courtyard of the high priest's residence. This disciple clearly had connections. Peter moves from a place of defending Jesus with a sword, to denying him out of fear. Nonetheless, Peter doesn't deny Jesus as intensely as in the other gospels (he doesn't swear an oath that he doesn't know Jesus). Nonetheless, we will see how Peter must find his way back from his cowardice, shame and failure.

### 18:28 - 19:16 - PILATE'S TRIAL

In John's gospel, Pilate and the Romans are only passively and reluctantly involved in the crucifixion whereas the 'Jews' pursue it actively and aggressively. They want the death penalty, and they have neither the legal power to enact it nor the religious freedom to prosecute it (they would be rendered unclean during the Passover). The charge against Jesus is vague but it seems to be tied up with him claiming to be king of Israel. Pilate participates in the condemnation of Jesus by having him flogged and by dressing him mockingly as a king. He also thumbs his nose at the Jews by declaring him to be king against their wishes. In response, the Jews not only insist ever more fiercely that he be crucified, but they insist that a bandit be released instead, and they claim that their only king is the emperor. By bringing things to this climax, John also

indicates how the Jewish authorities have betrayed God (the emperor being their only king) proving that by denying Jesus as king they are indeed denying God as their king.

## 19: 17-37 - THE CRUCIFIXION

John's account of the crucifixion contains many unique elements all meant to fulfil different sayings of scripture. Jesus is not in the same kind of agony found in the other gospels, leading him to cry out his feeling forsaken. Throughout this account Jesus fulfils scripture, takes care of his mother and ends it all by saying: 'It is finished.' With the piercing of his side the account makes way for how Jesus will appear to the disciples after he is resurrected (they will witness the marks of his crucifixion still on him). Jesus is in control and finishes what he has started as the pre-existent son of God come down to earth to fulfil God's will before returning to heaven again. In his being 'lifted up' Jesus' glory is made manifest. Love is that much more powerful a witness when its opposition has done its worst to silence and crush it. In John's gospel, Jesus gives up his life for the world (forgiveness of the world's rejection rather than destructive, retaliatory condemnation), but also for his friends (who will return to him and find new resurrection life through his death influencing their own journey of dying to what has held them back from following Jesus more authentically and self-sacrificially).

## 19: 38-42 - THE BURIAL

Two significant people are introduced - Nicodemus (for the third time) and Joseph of Arimathea (for the first time). It is significant that both men sacrifice their ability to go to the temple by caring for the body of a dead man (and hence, rendering themselves ritually unclean). Disciples come in different forms and there are different acts of giving and sacrifice, some obvious and some hidden. Nicodemus and Joseph are disciples of a sort, but not the kind that will sacrifice life and limb for Jesus. Nonetheless, their actions at this point also fulfil God's plan and, therefore, are praiseworthy.

Question: Should Jesus have resisted his arrest more fiercely? Violent resistance was something Jesus clearly chose against because love is what his people needed to be transformed by. If they rejected such love (as manipulated by the authorities), the door would remain open through forgiveness from the cross rather than final condemnation by violent attack and destruction. Love is about forgiveness and love is Jesus and therefore Abba God in solidarity with all those who are crushed by unjust and exploitative systems controlled by the powerful under the reign of evil. Whenever hearts should open to such love, the door remains open because of the cross. Jesus did tell his disciples many more would walk through that door into his way, his truth and his life in time. There is always room in God's house and there is time to repent and open one's heart in faith leading to powerful birth from above through the Holy Spirit.