

Leader's Guide
Sports in Focus Guide Eleven

Below are some additional insights for
John 11:55-12:50
Source for answers: MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Context of John 18:1-19:37

The events of Jesus' arrest, trial, and execution receive attention in chapters 18-19. Because John's purpose was to present Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, he produced evidence to substantiate this purpose throughout his accounting of Jesus' passion. John's account is very orderly and follows the logical flow of events: His rejection, His four trials, and His crucifixion. As you read about Jesus' final hours, give thanks for his sacrificial love.

Keys to Text

Crucifixion: The method of torture and execution used by the Romans to put Christ to death. Crucifixion was used by many nations of the ancient world. Alexander the Great of Greece crucified 2,000 inhabitants of Tyre when he captured the city. The Romans later adopted this method and often used it throughout the empire. Crucifixion was normally reserved only for slaves and criminals.

Read John 18:1-19:37

1. How did Christ demonstrate His deity at the time of His arrest in the Garden? Why did these acts only intensify the guilt of Jesus' enemies?

Jesus, the intended victim, took charge of the situation and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They (most likely the leaders), probably stating their official orders, answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." The Lord said to them, "I am He." The word "He" is not in the original Greek, so that as He had done before on a number of occasions (e.g., 8:24, 28, 58), Jesus was claiming for Himself the name of God from Exodus 3:14—"I AM."

Before relating the crowd's startling response to Jesus' words, John inserts the parenthetical statement that Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. This seemingly insignificant detail stresses yet again Jesus' absolute mastery of the circumstances. John wants to make it clear that Judas was merely one of those who experienced what was about to happen. Judas had absolutely no power over Jesus (cf. 19:11); he was jolted to the ground with the rest of those present.

Christ demonstrated His divine dominance in a stunning manner. Immediately after He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. All Jesus had to do was speak His name—the name of God—and His enemies were rendered helpless. This amazing demonstration of His power clearly reveals that they did not seize Jesus. He went with them willingly, to carry out the divine plan of redemption that called for His sacrificial death.

2. Compare Peter's response in the Garden with his response at Jesus' trial. Why was there was such a change? (See 18:10-27)

Sensing what was about to happen, the disciples cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:49). Without waiting for the Lord's reply, Simon Peter, emboldened by the awesome display of Christ's divine power he had just seen, impulsively (and needlessly) charged to the Lord's defense. Having a sword (Gk. machaira, a short sword or dagger; one of the two the disciples had with them

according to Luke 22:38), Peter drew it. Rather than allow Jesus to be arrested, and feeling invincible in the wake of the Lord's display of "flattening" power, he intended to hack his way through the entire detachment. His first target was the high priest's slave, Malchus. (Although all four Gospels mention the incident, only John notes that it was Peter who attacked Malchus. Perhaps since Peter was already dead by the time John wrote, John did not need to protect him from reprisals.) Peter aimed for Malchus's head, but missed (or Malchus managed to duck) and cut off his right ear. Peter's reckless act threatened to start a battle that could wind up getting the disciples either killed or arrested—the very thing Jesus was trying to prevent.

The Lord moved immediately to defuse the situation. Sharply rebuking him, Jesus said to Peter, in effect, "Stop! No more of this" (Luke 22:51). "Put the sword into the sheath. For all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). He was not an earthly king, who needed His followers to fight to protect Him (John 18:36). Had He chosen to, Jesus could have called on far more powerful defenders than the disciples (Matt. 26:53).

Then the Lord "touched [Malchus's] ear and healed him" (Luke 22:51). This was a further display of Christ's divine power in the span of just a few minutes. Upon seeing Him create an ear, the crowd should have fallen at His feet again and worshiped Him. But blinded by and hardened in their sin, they arrested Him (v. 12), demonstrating again the truth of what John had written earlier in his gospel: "But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him" (12:37).

Peter's brave but impetuous act revealed his continued failure to understand the necessity of Jesus' death. After his ringing affirmation that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:16), the Lord immediately spoke to the disciples about His death (v. 21). Shocked, "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You'" (v. 22). Now that the moment had arrived, Peter still did not get it, so Jesus reminded him (and the rest of the disciples), "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" The cup of which the Lord spoke was the cup of divine judgment (cf. Pss. 11:6; 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 22; Jer. 25:15; Ezek. 23:31–34; Matt. 26:39; Rev. 14:10; 16:19), which He would drain completely on the cross when God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). It was to that saving sacrifice that Christ's supreme courage, power, love, and obedience would lead.

3. Based on John's account, how would you describe Pilate? What kind of man was he? What was his opinion of Christ?

Pontius Pilate had been appointed the fifth governor of Judea by Emperor Tiberius in a.d. 26 and held that position for about ten years. Both the Gospels and extrabiblical sources portray him as proud, arrogant, and cynical (cf. 18:38), but also as weak and vacillating. His tenure as governor was marked by insensitivity and brutality (cf. Luke 13:1). Reversing the policy of his predecessors, Pilate had sent troops into Jerusalem carrying standards bearing images that the Jews viewed as idolatrous. When many of them vehemently protested against what they saw as a sacrilege, Pilate ordered them to stop bothering him on pain of death. But they called his bluff, and dared him to carry out his threat. Unwilling to massacre so many people, Pilate gave in and removed the offending standards. The story highlights his poor judgment, stubborn arrogance, and vacillating weakness. Pilate further angered the Jews when he took money from the temple treasury to build an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem. His soldiers beat and slaughtered many Jews in the riots that followed.

But the incident that led to Pilate's downfall involved not the Jews, but their hated rivals the Samaritans. A group of them planned to climb Mt. Gerizim in search of golden objects allegedly hidden on its summit by Moses. Viewing the Samaritans as insurrectionists, Pilate ordered his troops to attack, and many of the pilgrims were killed. The Samaritans complained about Pilate's brutality to his immediate superior, the governor of Syria. He removed Pilate from office and ordered him to Rome to be judged by Emperor Tiberius. But Tiberius died while Pilate was en route to Rome. Nothing is known for certain about Pilate after he reached Rome. Some accounts claim he was banished; others that he was executed; still others that he committed suicide.

Pilate's question, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" formally opened the legal proceedings. The Jewish leaders had undoubtedly already communicated with him about this case, since Roman troops took part in Jesus' arrest. They evidently expected him to rubber-stamp their judgment and sentence Jesus to death. Instead, exercising his prerogative as governor, he ordered a fresh hearing over which he would preside. But the last thing the Jewish leaders wanted was a trial. They wanted a death sentence; they wanted Pilate to be an executioner, not a judge. They knew that their charge against Jesus, that He was guilty of blasphemy because He claimed to be God incarnate, would not stand up in a Roman court.

4. What statements and facts in John's account of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion point to God's sovereignty?

Of all the false views of our Lord's earthly life and ministry, one of the most pernicious is the portrayal of His death as that of an unwitting, unwilling victim. Pseudoscholars who advocate this view see Jesus merely as a Jewish sage or philosopher, a teacher of morality and ethics. Others imagine that He was a revolutionary seeking to overthrow Rome's rule. In either case, so the story goes, things went horribly wrong. Jesus ran afoul of the Jewish and Roman authorities, and quite unintentionally managed to get Himself executed. (Incredibly some, who either have not read the gospel accounts or refuse to believe them, even argue that the Jewish authorities tried to save Jesus from the Romans.)

But in truth Jesus was no victim. In John 10:17–18 He declared, "I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." On the contrary, His death was according to the plan and will of God. Isaiah wrote concerning Messiah's sacrificial death, "The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.... the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief" (Isa. 53:6, 10). In His sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter said that Jesus was "delivered over [to death] by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23; cf. 3:18; 4:27–28; 13:27; Matt. 26:24; Luke 22:22; 24:44–46).

As God incarnate, Jesus was always in absolute control of all the events of His life. That control extended even to the circumstances surrounding His death. Far from being an accident, Jesus' sacrificial death was the primary reason that He took on human life in the first place; it is the pinnacle of redemptive history. Earlier in John's gospel He had said, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour" (12:27). Instead of being taken by surprise by His execution, the Lord had repeatedly predicted it (e.g., Matt. 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; Luke 24:6–7, 26). Underscoring the crucial importance of Christ's death, the Gospels devote about one-fifth of their material to the last few days of His life. John devotes nine chapters (12–20)—nearly half of his account of Christ's life—to the events of Passion Week.

5. How do you feel when you stop to ponder the fact that Jesus Christ suffered and died on a cruel cross for your sins? When have you been most affected by this truth?

6. What friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc. need to know that Jesus died for their sins? How can you most effectively share the gospel with each of them?

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the climax of redemptive history, the focal point of God's plan of salvation. God's redeeming work culminated in the cross where the Lord Jesus bore the sins of the world. Discuss the statement by J.I. Packer on the Gospel in three words.

Were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation, and I do not expect ever to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that."

—J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Propitiation: Covering; atoning sacrifice.