



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

**LIFE GROUPS
LARGE PRINT
STUDY GUIDE
SEPTEMBER 2021**

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of John

SEPTEMBER 5

21

JESUS ARRESTED AND DENIED

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 18:1-27

SEPTEMBER 5, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS WILLINGLY WENT TO THE CROSS, EVEN AS HE WAS ABANDONED BY HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: EVEN IN THE MIDST OF A HORRIBLE BETRAYAL AND ARREST, JESUS BROUGHT HOPE AND HEALING.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: WE HAVE ALL DENIED JESUS LIKE PETER AND YET HE STILL WILLINGLY PAID THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 When you were in high school, where did you and your friends go to get away from the “harassment” of parents and other adult authority figures? Who were the friends you went there with?
- 2 What was the situation the last time someone came looking for you (i.e. you did something wrong at work, someone needed help, someone was angry, etc.)?
- 3 When was the last time you lashed out at someone but regretted it later? What happened?

After Jesus prayed for the protection and unity of His disciples, they faced a serious threat to both. Jesus had taught out in the open in Jerusalem, but He was never arrested because the authorities were afraid of the reaction of the crowds around Him. So Judas led them to the Garden of Gethsemane, where they could arrest Him at night without the crowds around. In today’s lesson, we’ll examine the events surrounding Jesus’ arrest that eventually led to His suffering and death for our salvation.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ JOHN 18:1-11.

- What do you think you would have been feeling had you been one of the disciples with Jesus at the time of His arrest (i.e. fear, anger, disappointment, etc.)?
- Why did John point out that Jesus knew what would happen to Him (v. 4)? How does this change the impact of what happened to Jesus?

- Why do you think the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground when Jesus identified Himself (i.e. reverence, fear, expectation of attack, other)?
- What does it say to you that Jesus spoke up to protect His disciples? When were the words spoken that are quoted in verse 9?

This petition on the disciples' behalf is unique to John. It shows that even in his hour of need, Jesus was thinking of the welfare of His followers. It also shows that the disciples were in danger of arrest because of their association with Jesus. This is evident from other stories in John, such as Peter's denial (see 18:15-27) and the disciples' hiding behind locked doors after the crucifixion (see 20:19). Verse 9 refers to John 6:39 and 17:12.

- What is the "cup" that Jesus referred to? Why was it necessary that He take it?
- What enemy have you been tempted to strike violently against, as Peter struck against the high priest's servant? What do you think Jesus would say to you if you were to do so?

Jesus used the refusal to meet force with force as a sign of the true nature of His kingdom. In Matthew's account, Jesus said, "Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Luke added that Jesus healed the servant's ear (see 22:51).

In the Old Testament, drinking "the cup" was sometimes a symbol of experiencing God's judgment and wrath against sin. (See Ezek. 23:32-34; Hab. 2:16.) This use of the metaphor reminds us Jesus Himself would bear God's judgment against the sins of the people.

> READ JOHN 18:15-27.

- With whom do you identify most strongly in this story: Peter, the “other disciple”, Jesus, or one of Peter’s accusers? Why?
- Why did Peter and the other disciple follow Jesus after He was arrested? What were they hoping to accomplish?
- Why did Peter deny that he was one of the disciples? What was he afraid of? Why do you think the “other disciple” wasn’t similarly questioned?

Peter was one of the first men Jesus called to be His disciple, along with Peter’s brother Andrew. (See Matt. 4.) During Jesus’ three years of earthly ministry, Peter was present for some of the most miraculous moments, like the transfiguration. (See Luke 9:28-36.) Peter exhibited great faith—like the time he stepped out of the boat to walk on water (see Matt. 14:22-33)—and was one of Jesus’ best friends.

Even though Peter denied knowing Jesus, it is clear that he loved Jesus. Peter loved Jesus enough to go to Caiaphas’ house, just not enough to stand with Him. Peter’s answer to his questioners was a sharp “I am not!” Since John focused repeatedly on the affirmations of Jesus as “I am,” the contrast is very striking. The denial was especially significant in light of Peter’s earlier forceful statement that he would be willing to die for Jesus (see Luke 22:33) and his acknowledgment of Jesus as the Messiah (see Luke 9:20). When Jesus was present, Peter was filled with boldness. But when he was alone and challenged, Peter lost his courage and betrayed his Messiah.

- What point was Jesus making to the high priest in verses 20-21? Why might the high priest not want to question those who heard Jesus teach in the temple?

- What is the significance of the fact that Peter was asked about his association with Jesus at the same time that Jesus himself was being interrogated? How do the two compare in how they dealt with their interrogators?
- Why is it significant that the last interrogator of Peter was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off? How would that affect Peter's motivation to tell the truth?
- How would you respond if someone were to ask, "What good would it have done at this point for Peter to admit he was a follower of Christ?"

Betraying Jesus goes beyond saying we don't know Him. We betray Jesus when we have an opportunity to speak up for Him but fail to do so. We betray Jesus through ungodly speech, unethical actions, and when we compromise godly standards to go along with the crowd. When Peter heard the rooster crow, he realized what he had done and responded by weeping bitterly. He was truly grieved over his sin, as we should be too.

At the same time Peter denied Jesus because of his fear, Jesus was holding true to His message in spite of violence and threats. What Jesus proclaimed as true, He stood by. He did not waver when one of the most politically powerful men of his society accused, struck, and threatened him. That Jesus showed this kind of courage reveals that the one we proclaim as Lord was not intimidated by pain and death. He was not intimidated because He knew God would give Him the victory over these forces. And the good news is that we can have the same victory if we put our faith in Him.

APPLICATION

- What season are you experiencing in your spiritual life right now: the warmth of summer, the dead of winter, the new life of spring, or the changes of fall? Explain.
- What are some situations where you're tempted to handle conflicts by "striking with the sword"? How does today's passage speak to you about that?
- What "enemies" seem to be "coming for you"? How can this group help you in prayer concerning them?

PRAY

Praise Jesus this week for His commitment to the will of God. Thank Him for remaining strong, despite the temptations He faced. Ask God to continue to open your heart to appreciate the greatness of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of John

SEPTEMBER 12

21

JESUS BEFORE PILATE

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 18:28-40

SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THE LEADERS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE BROUGHT JESUS TO PILATE FOR TRIAL, THOUGH JESUS HAD DONE NOTHING WRONG. PILATE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEFEND TRUTH, BUT HE FAILED, CAVING IN TO THE SCREAMING CROWDS STIRRED UP BY AGENTS OF THE HIGH PRIESTS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WHILE PILATE HID BEHIND INDECISION, JESUS STOOD FOR TRUTH AND DECISIVE ACTION.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. (SEE JOHN 14:6.)

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Would you describe yourself as a decisive person? Why or why not? In what situations or circumstances are you most prone to indecision?
- 2 Ask those who are comfortable to share the most difficult decision they have ever made. What made that decision so difficult?
- 3 How might the situation have turned out differently if you had remained indecisive?

We all struggle with indecision at times. Indecision seems harmless when trying to determine where to go out to eat or what show to watch on television. However, when facing some of life's biggest questions, indecision can be crippling. Whether it's where to go to college, what job to take, whom to marry, or where to live, life's most difficult decisions require action. When Pilate encountered Jesus, he was presented with an opportunity to take decisive action and to do the right thing. Pilate should have immediately released Jesus, as he had full knowledge that Christ was innocent. However, Pilate hesitated to do what he knew to be right. He listened to the lies of the religious leaders, ignored warning signs, procrastinated, and eventually caved into the demands of the crowd.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ JOHN 18:28-32.

- What specific charges did the Jews levy against Jesus before Pilate? Was Pilate eager to get involved? Why or why not?
- Why were the Jews insistent that Roman authorities deal with Jesus by means of Roman law? Why did John say this happened?

Pilate would have expected the Jewish authorities to provide a charge specific to Roman law, yet he was also of the opinion that the Jewish legal system was sufficient for handling Jesus' case. The Jews were not interested in legal justice: They wished for Jesus' execution and expected the Romans to provide this for them.

- What does verse 32 communicate to us about the reason behind all that was happening to Jesus? Why is it important to realize this truth?
- What changes about our outlook when the truth of verse 32 rests in our hearts?

Jesus' trial was a great injustice, but John wanted to make sure His audience understood none of what happened was outside of God's sovereignty, as verse 32 explains. Jesus' trial and execution were not unfortunate events that could have been avoided, but necessary steps toward the redemption of God's people. God's providence and control can seem like distant theological doctrines but they are necessary for our faith. God's providence means that He is able to do all that He purposes. When things seem at their darkest, God is still in control and guides all of human history in such a way that it glorifies Him.

- What was the law designed to do for the Jews?
- What did this group of Jews use it for? How did they miss the whole point?

The law of God is meant to point people to God so they can have a relationship with Him. If they had been paying closer attention, they would've realized the fulfillment of the law stood before them in Jesus. Yet, Jesus threatened their ability to rule, so they rejected a relationship with the living God in favor of a law that does not and cannot save.

> READ JOHN 28:33-39.

The direct examination of Jesus by the Roman governor highlights one of the major themes of Jesus' trial and crucifixion in John: Jesus is the King of the Jews. John's rendition of Jesus' final hours demonstrates how the King of the Jews willingly died as the Lamb of God.

- How did Jesus answer Pilate's question (v. 34)? What did Jesus' question reveal about Pilate's heart?
- What does Jesus' response to Pilate teach us about His kingdom and His role as King?
- What does it mean that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world (v. 36)? What implications does this have for the nature and impact of His kingdom on this world?

Jesus' question in response to Pilate's question revealed that the governor had been influenced by the Jewish religious leaders' unjust accusations. Pilate's response indicates that as a governor who was responsible for the "just" conduct of trials, he recognized the defendant's challenge, and he also found it ironic that Jesus' own people turned Him over to the Romans. What kind of king is rejected by His own people? The fundamental attribute of Jesus' kingdom is that it is not derived from this world. Jesus' kingdom came in a form people did not expect—He established His kingdom not through military conquest but through humble self-sacrifice.

- What are the implications today of Jesus' words, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me"? What kept Pilate from listening to Jesus? What keeps people today from listening to Jesus?

- Why do you think Pilate responded the way he did in verse 38?
- How do we avoid truth in our own lives?

For politically motivated people, truth can be inconvenient. Therefore, it is frequently sacrificed on the altar of expediency. Many politically oriented people pretend they are interested in truth. But Pilate summarized his politically oriented life pattern with the haunting question: “What is truth?” The implications of that question are far-reaching for any person. For Pilate, that question was an attempt to resist taking Jesus’ statement seriously in his own life.

- Why did Pilate introduce Barabbas into the situation?
- How did Pilate’s indecision stand against Jesus’ decisive actions?

Pilate found Jesus innocent. Instead of simply dismissing the case as a good judge interested in integrity, Pilate devised a scheme using Barabbas to deal with any potential fallout that might result. Pilate’s scheme involved giving the people a predetermined choice he thought they could not refuse. He was clearly wrong.

APPLICATION

- What did Jesus accomplish for us through His decision to die on the cross?
- What can we learn from His example in terms of taking action in our own lives?
- What are some ways our culture tries to obscure truth to appease the crowd? What are a few ways we can help one another live in light of God's truth?

PRAY

Thank Jesus for taking action to save us. Confess your desire to hold onto the truth of His Word and live it out. Pray that you would be able to decisively cling to truth even against the tides of popular opinion.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of John

SEPTEMBER 19

21

SENTENCED TO DEATH

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 19:1-16

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS FACED INJUSTICE AND PERSECUTION ON HIS PATH TO THE CROSS, MODELING THE PROPER RESPONSE TO SUCH EXPERIENCES FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN STANDING UP FOR OUR PERSONAL RIGHTS.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: BECAUSE JESUS WAS SILENT WHEN UNJUSTLY ACCUSED, WE HAVE BEEN MADE RIGHT WITH GOD.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Have you ever been summoned to court for a moving violation or other similar misdemeanor? Were you innocent or guilty? Were you given the opportunity to defend your case? What was the end result of your hearing?

- 2 What lessons did you learn from your experience? How did it affect the way you lived in the days, weeks, and months that followed?

Hearings or trials before governing authorities for even the most minor offenses can still be nerve-racking, if not life-altering. The experience of being held accountable for our actions by those who have power over us serves as a test of our character. Similarly, Jesus' character and commitment to God's will was tested through His intense trials before the high priest and Pilate. Through injustice and persecution, Jesus remained humble and steadfast in His obedience to the will of the Father.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ JOHN 19:1-16.

- Why would the Father allow Jesus to go through so much humiliation and pain even before the cross, as described in verses 1-5?

- What new charge did the Jews levy against Jesus at this point?

- What effect did this have on Pilate?

- What crime did Pilate eventually convict Jesus of?

Though Pilate found no guilt in Jesus, the Jews would not have such a verdict. Therefore, they revealed their true concern regarding Jesus: They refused to accept the fact that Jesus claimed to have a direct relationship with God, and therefore they interpreted His statements as though He “made” Himself the Son of God. This was an idea that deeply disturbed Pilate and led him to further review the case. Pilate’s verdict was obviously “treason,” namely here the treasonous rising of a king in opposition to Caesar. Moreover, the sentence must have been death by crucifixion.

- How is the Jews’ argument that Pilate would be disloyal to Caesar if he let Jesus go a powerful one?
- Why do you think Jesus was silent regarding where He was from but vocal regarding who had authority over Him?
- What does that tell us about Jesus’ mission? About His love?

Listening to the crowds rather than to truth, evidence, or reason, Pilate convicted Jesus of “treason.” The claim was that Jesus had set Himself up as king of the Jews in opposition to Caesar. Jesus would have been within His rights to boldly and forcefully debate the Jews’ bogus claims and Pilate’s gross indecision, but He didn’t, He remained silent and accepted the injustice Pilate and the Jews leveled at Him. Whereas Pilate was indecisive and allowed the crowds to sway him from doing right, Jesus was resolutely fixed on going to the cross so that He might pay the penalty for our sins. Pilate’s indecision kept Him from seeing the truth and trusting Christ. In contrast, Jesus’ decisiveness demonstrates His love.

Jesus' trial ended with Pilate granting the religious leaders' request to sentence Jesus and let Him be crucified. With that verdict, innocent Jesus was delivered over to death as God had planned.

> READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8.

- How was the truth of this passage displayed in Jesus' mockery and trial in John 18 and 19?
- What does this passage reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about how we are to reflect Him to a dark and hurting world, filled with pride?

Paul challenged the Philippian believers to have the mindset of Christ in their relationships with others, then went on to describe exactly what he meant by that. Paul pointed to Christ's love for others and His obedient service to God as examples for his Philippian friends. In the incarnation, Jesus—the Son of God and one with God Himself—left His heavenly throne and became human in an act of humble, selfless love that resulted in His death on the cross.

- How do we make Jesus' attitude our own in natural ways that apply at work, home, and church? In what areas of life might you need to make changes to demonstrate a more Christlike attitude?
- What about in times when you face unjust opposition?

To understand God's nature and see who He is transforming us to become, we should look to Jesus Christ. From Him, we learn that we are not to be impressed with status or position, but should seek to have a humble attitude and unselfish love for others.

- Of what did Christ empty Himself when He came to earth (v. 7)? Why was this necessary?

- What might have happened if Jesus had not emptied Himself and assumed the form of a slave?

Rather than holding on tightly to the prerogatives of deity, Jesus emptied Himself. This does not mean He left His deity behind when He came to earth as a man. Jesus Christ was the God-Man, fully divine and fully human. At no point did He cease to be God. His miraculous conception and birth took nothing away from His deity; rather it added humanity.

- What does Christ becoming a man reveal to us about His humility?
- Why do we resist serving others with the same humble love as Jesus served us?
- What are some ways we might be emptied to produce an attitude of humility? How might others see Jesus in us as a result?

Christ gave us an example we should follow. From Jesus' example of humility, we learn that as Christ-followers, we are to model Jesus' humble, selfless, sacrificial love to the world. By imitating Jesus, we ensure that our love is not boastful, proud, or self-seeking. (See 1 Cor. 13:4-5.) Evidence of obedience includes personal sacrifice as Philippians 2 shows but it also leads to ultimate joy.

APPLICATION

- Based on today's study, how are we called to respond when others unfairly accuse us, especially in the name of Jesus?
- How can you actively remind yourself this week of the great price Jesus paid?
- Who can you share the message of the cross with this week?

PRAY

Praise God for His reconciling work through Christ that brought you to Him at the right time, when you were hostile and helpless. Pray that the people in your group would understand their need for a Savior and trust fully in Christ because of the price He paid for them.

LIFE GROUPS

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

FW

Study of John

SEPTEMBER 26

21

THE CRUCIFIXION

STUDY GUIDE

JOHN 19:17-42

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JOHN 19 GIVES US JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF JESUS' BEATING AND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE, HIS CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH, AND HIS BURIAL.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: IT IS THROUGH JESUS' DEATH THAT WE ARE SAVED.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS PAID THE PRICE FOR OUR SINS ON THE CROSS.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 In our culture, what crimes would one have to be convicted of to receive a death sentence?
- 2 What is the execution of a criminal meant to communicate to the general public? What other things can it communicate instead?

Only the most heinous of crimes, usually those that involve taking the life of another, lead one to face execution. Proponents of capital punishment emphasize that it serves as a formidable crime deterrent to the rest of the public. In effect, it is said to communicate, "If you commit these crimes, we will use our power to do this to you." Roman crucifixions held similar purposes, but something other than a display of Rome's power was taking place in Jesus' crucifixion. In Jesus' execution, God the Father powerfully demonstrated His righteous judgment and gracious love.

UNDERSTANDING

> READ JOHN 19:17-27.

- What did the soldiers who crucified Jesus do with His clothes? Why did they do that?
- Read Psalm 22:18 and Isaiah 53:12. What did these fulfilled prophecies confirm about who Jesus really was?
- How can these fulfilled prophecies move believers into deeper devotion to Jesus Christ?

The soldiers who crucified Jesus stripped Him of His clothes and divided them among themselves. All four soldiers likely wanted the seamless tunic; therefore, they decided to cast lots for it. John saw a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the dual actions of dividing Jesus' clothing and casting lots for the tunic. (See Ps. 22:18.) John wanted to demonstrate to His readers that what happened to Jesus occurred according to God's plan. The evil people who crucified Jesus appeared to be in charge of these events. In reality, however, God was superintending the events to provide the way of forgiveness for sinners.

- While hanging on the cross, Jesus instructed one of His disciples to care for His mother after His death. Read John 19:25-27 again. What does this scene reveal about Jesus' greater mission, the mission for which He died?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus displayed such love for family and followers while on the cross?

Jesus looked down from the cross and saw His mother and John, the disciple He loved, standing nearby. In an extraordinary act of love, Jesus commended His mother to the care of this disciple. This statement demonstrates His selfless love for others. At a time of great pain, Jesus focused not on His needs, but on the interests of others. (See Phil. 2:4.) In one sense, this was an illustration of Jesus' larger mission. Jesus was dying on the cross for the sins of others. He came to focus on our need for a Savior and was willing to give His life so that we might have eternal life. When we fully appreciate Jesus' provision of care for His earthly mother even as He hung on the cross, we are motivated to be devoted all the more to Jesus as our Savior.

> READ JOHN 19:28-42.

These verses give us the description of Jesus' final moments on the cross, including His last two statements on earth. The first statement in these verses was His admission of thirst. Jesus' admission of thirst not only reminds us of His humanity, but is also a fulfillment of Scripture.

- Read Psalm 69:21. How does this prophetic verse from the Book of Psalms help us understand the intent behind the Roman soldiers' action in verse 29?

Jesus' cry for something to drink is likely a reference to Psalm 69:21, "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst." There was nothing compassionate about this action, as this bitter liquid was intended to prolong pain by unnecessarily extending life. Indeed, some scholars believe such sponges would have been used to disinfect public toilets.

- When Jesus said, "It is finished," to what was He referring? In what sense was it "finished"?
- How does Jesus' statement show that He was in control to the very end of His life? What does this statement suggest to believers today about reliance on God?

Jesus' cry is one of accomplishment, not defeat. It is grammatically and thematically linked to His statement in John 17:4, "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do." Through His death, Jesus loved His disciples to the end and completed all that the Father had charged. Furthermore, these verses reveal that Jesus chose the exact moment of His death. The control was always His.

- Read Colossians 2:13-15. How does this passage help you better understand Jesus' declaration, "It is finished"? What did Jesus' death accomplish for us and for our world?
- What did John mean in stating that Jesus "gave up His spirit" (v. 30)? How does this phrase compare to simply saying, "Jesus died"?

John described Jesus' death as bowing His head and giving up His spirit. Even in His death Jesus remained in control, and the yielding of His spirit demonstrated a willingness to die for our sins. The facts of Jesus' death on the cross do not alone provide salvation. The facts are true for all people for all time. However, Jesus' death becomes effectual as an atoning sacrifice when a sinner is convicted and drawn by the Holy Spirit to repentance and faith. Jesus' provision for salvation is complete and requires no addition. Yet salvation is a gift of God that can only be received by faith apart from works. (See Eph. 2:8-9.)

- Given that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were Pharisees, does it surprise you to see them playing integral roles in Jesus' burial? (See Matthew 23:25-28 for more on Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees.)

- What does their involvement teach us about God's sovereignty? About His saving power?

No group of people gave Jesus more trouble throughout His earthly ministry than the Pharisees—a group of religious leaders whose hypocrisy and works-based theology Jesus harshly criticized. And yet, after His death, two Pharisees played an important role in making sure Jesus was properly buried. God orchestrated events such that the very person to whom Jesus said, “You must be born again” (John 3:7), paved the way for generations to know with certainty that Jesus died and rose again. What an example of God's sovereignty. This speaks also to God's saving power in that He changed the hearts of two men from a group of people who hated Jesus and actively opposed His ministry.

APPLICATION

- Read 2 Corinthians 5:21, Colossians 3:14-15, Hebrews 9:22, and other verses related to the cross. How much did the cross really cost Christ?
- What difference does Christ's death and resurrection make in your daily life? What difference should it make?
- How can you use the story of Jesus' death and resurrection as a tool when you share your faith with others? How can it show others God's plan?
- How can you live out your role in God's story and invite others to do the same? How should that role affect the way you see and plan for your life?

PRAY

Close your time in prayer, praising God for who Christ is. Praise Christ for being God made flesh, who died and rose again. Thank God for the resurrection, which is the power of salvation. Pray that your group would reflect on and think about who Jesus is and all that He has done for you.