

“The Great I Am” John 18:1-12 Shane Hatfield 5/9/21

We’re going to call this sermon series “The Glorious Truth,” because in His farewell sermon, Jesus prays that His Father would glorify Him, and we talked about how that glory comes through His death and resurrection. Then, Jesus in John 18 tells Pilate that He is bearing witness to the truth. He’s showing the truth about God and man and sin and salvation. So, we’re going to bring those two things together and discuss this glorious truth that has been revealed about us and God and sin and salvation. And so, each week we are going to look at that. Young listeners, this week, here are three things for you to listen for: one, there’s a story about a chimpanzee, two, I want you to count the number of times I say the word truth, and then three, what is the cup? So, chimpanzee, truth, and the cup. Those are the three things you’re looking for. Alright? Let’s read God’s word. This is John 18:1-12, hear the word of the Lord.

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ 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. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” ⁵ They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.” ¹⁰ 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.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.”

John said that he wrote these words so that we would believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing in Him we might have fine life. So, let’s give our attention to these words.

During the summertime, we love to take our kids to the zoo. At least we took them to the zoo a lot when we lived here previously, and now, we’re really excited about taking them back to the zoo now that we live here again! One of our favorite spots to go at the zoo is the chimpanzees. It’s really easy to hit, because it’s right there coming in the gate, but I love the chimpanzees because they have all this playful energy. When I think about the chimpanzees, I think about them swinging from tree to tree, just loving life. Well one day, we went in there to see the chimpanzees, and we showed up to the area in the inside, and they were getting ready to feed them. So, we watched the docents put all the food strategically around their area, and then the docents left, and we watched as they opened the door. I had never seen the chimpanzees come in and eat before, and this time, man, as soon as they opened the door this gigantic chimpanzee just raced out of that tunnel and jumped and grabbed one of the vines with his hand and swung to another vine and dropped down on a platform and then bared his teeth and you could just see this ferocious power. And then he took this crate and he ripped it open and he started grabbing all the food out of the crate, and just shoveling food into his mouth as fast as he

could. I was so shocked by the speed and the energy and the ferocity of this chimpanzee that my heart started racing and I backed up and I almost tripped over this mom that had a stroller behind me. I had never seen just the energy and the power of these animals before, and I was shocked by it! And then, what was even more shocking was, we watched them as they calmed down and then later on that chimpanzee went back outside after it was done eating and I walked outside and then like five minutes later I see this chimpanzee holding another chimpanzee and caring for it and licking it and grooming it like a tender mother. It was just this amazing juxtaposition of this animal with extreme power and energy and ferocity, but also, gentle and loving, nurturing and caring. It totally changed the way I thought about chimpanzees that day.

Well, as we look at this passage, what I think is incredible in this passage, is that this passage reveals to us two sides of Jesus that are very similar to what I saw in the chimpanzee that day. In this passage, we see the awesome power of Jesus, this man that can stop soldiers with a word. And we see Him transform into this humble and submissive and sacrificial Savior, like a lamb. It's like we see Him as the lion of the tribe of Judah and the sacrificial lamb of God, all in the same passage at the same time we see our own sinfulness and brokenness. What I hope tonight is that as we see Jesus' power and His tenderness, as we see our brokenness, that we'd be transformed by His love and His grace, that we would see in this transformation that takes place in Jesus a power that transforms us. It transforms us from rebels and people who deny Him and reject Him and betray Him into His humble and submissive servants. So, what we're going to see tonight, we're going to look at three things. We're going to see the Great I AM, the fall of man, and the submissive lamb.

So, the first thing we see is this Great I AM. Now, what's interesting about Jesus' arrest is that from the beginning, you see that Jesus is the one who is in control. It says, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered." So, Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples and at some point in that conversation, that teaching time, they transitioned out and they went to this garden. He is not hiding from Judas. He knows what's about to happen. He knows what Judas is going to do. He told Judas to do it. But yet, He goes out to the garden, and this garden is a place that they'd been to before. It was probably owned by a wealthy man who supported Jesus, and so, he let Jesus and His disciples use it. So, Jesus was coming to a spot where He knew that Judas would know about, so Judas would bring these soldiers to Him.

And then, whenever the soldiers get there, what happens? Do they start questioning Jesus? No! Jesus starts questioning them! He says, "Who do you seek?" And they say, 'Well we want Jesus of Nazareth!' And they're kind of belittling Him because Nazareth isn't a very popular town, it isn't very well known, and Jesus says this to them. He says, "I am He." Now, the English translators have to put the 'he' in there to sort of make sense in the context, but literally in the Greek it just says, "I am." Jesus answered, "I am." What was He saying when He said, "I am"? He was pointing them, and us, and everybody who would read this, back to the Old Testament. Back to the story in Exodus 3 when Moses met God in the burning bush. You see, Moses was watching his father-in-law Jethro's sheep, and when he was watching his sheep, he saw a bush that was burning on fire, and out of that bush a voice called to him and said, 'Moses! Moses! Don't come near the fire. Take off your sandals for this is holy ground. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and I have seen the affliction on my people in Egypt and I have heard their cry, and I have come down to deliver them and give them a good land, and I'm going to send you to Pharaoh and he is going to let my people go.' And Moses is scared to death, not just because there's a bush that's burning, but because God is

speaking to him, and God is sending him on a job, and Moses is saying, 'Who am I to do this task? And what if these people don't listen to me? What do I tell them? Who do I tell them sent me?' And He said, "I AM who I AM... Tell them I AM has sent you." So, God identifies Himself as "I AM." The God who made this covenant relationship with Israel, the God who sent Israel to Egypt, and the God who delivered Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

So, when Jesus says, "I am." He's saying, 'I'm that God. I'm the God who existed before all eternity. I'm the God who created the heavens and the earth with the power of my word, and I'm the God who delivered you out of Egypt.' He is giving the most powerful self-revelation that He could have given to them and to us. And the entirety of John's gospel just reveals Jesus, this truth about Jesus, from beginning to end, that He is the Great I AM. Remember, we saw earlier that there are seven 'I am' statements in the book of John? All of those seven 'I am' statements reveal more and more truth about Jesus, and they're all connected back to the Old Testament. Jesus said, I am the good shepherd, the resurrection, the vine. I am the I AM before Abraham, I am the light, I am the bread of life, and I am the way, the truth, and the life. What Jesus is doing, is He is taking all of these concepts from the Old Testament to give the most comprehensive, exhaustive, powerful, glorious revelation of who He is. He is the one and only living and true God.

Now, I think this is important for us for two reasons. The first one is this: if you're on the fence about Jesus, and you're skeptical, I want you to see that Jesus is not just claiming He is one God among many, He is not just claiming that He is a good man or a good teacher, He is claiming that He is the Lord of the universe, the one living and true God. And if you're going to come to Jesus, you've got to take Him at His word that that is who He is. We will explore what that means more and more as we go. But for most of us here tonight, we have probably heard this story a lot. We have probably heard all these stories a lot. Most of us here have grown up in church, we've been around church for a long time, and we've honestly just gotten a little bit numb to who Jesus is. I think sometimes in the church we talk so much about Jesus' humanity, which is vitally important, that we forget about Jesus' deity and His transcendence, the fact that He is this all-powerful Lord of the universe who came down from heaven to be with us. And because we've watered down His power, we've actually watered down the power of the gospel, and we have this growing sense of apathy and laziness and lukewarmness in our lives because we have missed a huge portion of who Jesus is.

I will confess that even me. as a pastor, this is something that I struggle with. As I was walking and praying this week, I was just telling Jesus, 'Lord, I don't feel near to you, I don't feel excited about you. I don't feel passionate about you. I feel lazy.' And I'm a pastor! That's scary! And Ricky just said, last week at my installation, that I've got to be an imitator! People have got to follow me worshipping the Lord! How can they do that if I'm lazy? And so, the Holy Spirit has a way of doing this, the Holy Spirit said, 'Pray for God to show you your sin.' And I cringed, because I hate it when the Holy Spirit says that, because I know what's going to happen. He's going to answer that prayer, and He's going to show me my sin... but He's also going to show me the gospel. So, I prayed that prayer and sure enough, later on that week, the Lord opened up my eyes to see my sin, and to see my sinfulness, but also to see the truth of the gospel. I'll tell you more about that later, but that's what happens in this passage! There's this Great I AM who comes in and speaks these powerful words, and then all these men see their sin, and they fall down.

And that's the second thing we see is the fall of man. Now, I'm not talking about the fall of man from Genesis 3, I'm talking about these men who literally fall down here in front of

Jesus. If you look at verse 6, it says, “6 When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.” Jesus’ self-revelation was so powerful that hundreds and hundreds of Roman and Jewish soldiers fell to the ground. Now, we don’t know if that was like some supernatural force that knocked them over, or we don’t know if it was just sheer fear of who Jesus was. But whatever the case, when Jesus said, “I am He.” These soldiers drew back and fell to the ground. Maybe it was just the men in front that fell on everybody else, maybe it was everybody, we don’t know. But what we do know is that all through Scripture you continually see people, when they come into the presence of God, and when they see Him for who He is, what do they do? They fall down.

The prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, when they see the glory of the Lord, the Scriptures said they fell on their faces. When the prophet Isaiah comes into the temple, it’s described in Isaiah 6, and he sees that the Lord is holy, holy, holy and the whole temple is filled with His glory, Isaiah says, “Woe is me, I am undone.” He is unraveled by the presence of God. When Peter meets Jesus, really sees Jesus for the first time in the boat, remember, Jesus takes His disciples fishing. They had been fishing all night, they don’t catch anything, Jesus says, ‘Throw your nets over here,’ they throw the nets in the water, they pull all these fish into the boat, and Peter looks at Jesus and says, “Depart from me, I am a sinful man.” He fell in the boat. And then you have Paul, Paul on the Damascus road. What happened when Paul met Jesus on the road? He was knocked down on the ground. In the book of Revelation, John, also wrote the gospel of John, He also wrote the book of Revelation, when he gets this vision of the Son of Man Jesus, do you know what it says He did? He fell to the ground. This means that when we come face to face with Jesus, when we grasp the glorious truth about who He is and all of His awesomeness and power, we at the same time see our sinfulness, and our weakness. We realize we’re in the presence of someone much more powerful and much greater than us, and it knocks us to the floor.

This happened to me when I was in the seventh grade. Not in a spiritual sense, but in a literal, physical sense. In my junior high they had seventh through ninth grade and in the mornings before school we would go in there and we would all gather around, and we would talk. When I started seventh grade, I was skinny and cocky, which is a really bad combination. I’m still skinny, but hopefully I’m not as cocky. I went up to this guy named Beau Bradshaw. Beau Bradshaw was a ninth grader. He was a linebacker. He was a heavy weight wrestler, and I knew him because I was a friend of his sister, and I walked up and started hanging out with the ninth graders, and I thought I was really cool hanging out with him. Beau said something and I popped off to Beau and I said something cocky. And Beau literally did this, he took his hand like this, he put it on my chest, and he extended his arm and he pushed me, and I fell onto my back and I slid all the way across the student union in Tiger town in the junior high. On my back. And I got up and just sat down with my other seventh grade buddies and never talked to Beau again. Actually, I did talk to him, but not for a long time. I was scared to death of him. I came into the presence of someone much more powerful and greater than I was, and it knocked me to the ground. That’s what happens spiritually when we come into the presence of God. We see our sinfulness and our weakness.

Has Jesus ever knocked you to the ground? Has He ever knocked you off your feet? Has He ever shown you His greatness and His glory and at the same time showed you your sinfulness and your weakness? Didn’t the pandemic knock us all to the ground? Wasn’t it one just year of God saying, “I’m in control. I’m in charge. You’re not.” If the pandemic didn’t knock you to the

ground, well look at this passage. Here's something that I think will knock you to the ground. This knocked me to the ground as I was praying through it this week. Who are you?

There are really three other groups of people in this passage. Who are you in this passage? You're not Jesus. Neither am I. There are the soldiers who want to deny Jesus. They are sort of doubters; they're skeptics. They don't really believe in Jesus. They came to arrest Him. Are you a doubter? Are you someone that really just denies that Jesus is really the true God? You deny Him. You don't accept Him. You don't believe Him. You don't follow Him. Maybe you aren't a skeptic outwardly, but you are inwardly. You've been coming to church, but you really don't believe. Jesus says, 'I'm here. I'm real. What are you going to do about your sin?' When skeptics come to me and they want to talk about all the evidence of the Bible, whether or not it's true, I try to answer them as well as I can, but I've just got to be honest with you. The question that I want to come back to is, what will you do about your sin? We can talk about whether Jonah actually lived in the belly of a whale for three days. That's a fun conversation to have! But we're not going to just skip talking about your sin. Maybe you're the soldiers.

Maybe you're Judas! Judas betrayed Jesus. It says it twice. It wants to be very explicit that he betrayed Jesus. Now, why did Judas betray Jesus? Here's what I think, I don't know. I don't know Judas, but I know people. I think Judas was a pragmatist. I think he thought Jesus was useful. If he hung out with Jesus, he could get access to the money, he could get some social power, some social standing, maybe he could get acceptance. He wanted to use Jesus. He didn't really love Jesus. And when the opportunity came for him to get more money, or more power, or more status by betraying Jesus, that's what he did. And I think we've all got to be honest, sometimes in our heart of hearts, we have that same sin there. We want to use Jesus for money or power or status or approval. He is a means to an end. He is not the end in and of Himself. Now there's hope for us, and we're going to get to that, but we've got to be honest about that. I think one of the things that the pandemic did is it disrupted our whole lives and it really revealed our true priorities. For some of us, Jesus wasn't really the priority. He was just a means to an end.

So, we may be like the soldiers and we may be like Judas, but probably a lot of us are like Peter. You've just kind of got to laugh at Peter. Jesus told Peter at least three times that this was going to happen, that He was going to go to Jerusalem, He was going to get arrested, He was going to die, He was going to rise from the grave, and Peter still didn't get it. He just didn't. He was confused and then he misuses that sword. I don't know why Jesus gave him that sword. I'd love to talk to you about that sometime, I don't really know! But I know this: He didn't want Peter to hit the servant's ear with the sword. Peter misused the truth. I think a lot of us misuse the truth. We beat up ourselves and we beat up other people with the truth of the gospel and we hurt people. I know in my conversations with young people that are really skeptical about Christianity, they're disregarding the truth, but not because it's illogical, and not because they don't like it, but just because they've seen it misused. They've seen the gospel hurt people. They've seen Christianity hurt people inside the church and outside the church. So, maybe we've misused Jesus and maybe we've misused and confused the truth.

So, I think this passage knocks us all down. I don't think there's any of us, me included, who can look at this and go, 'Yeah. I'm Jesus.' Because we're not. And the good news is that Jesus knew that. Jesus knew it. And that's why He continues on. He doesn't stop there. We see this passage about the cup. He starts talking about the cup. Let's look at verse 7. We see Him transform here from the great I AM into the submissive lamb. ⁷ So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those

whom you gave me I have lost not one.”¹⁰ 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.)¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?” And then Jesus goes and is bound and arrested.

What is this cup? The cup in the Old Testament symbolized God's wrath. It was the cup of judgement. And there's this other section in the Bible that talks about the Great I AM. Remember when we talked about Exodus 3 that talked about the Great I AM? Well in Isaiah 40-55 the prophet Isaiah starts talking about this Great I AM. And it's interesting, in chapter 40 it starts out talking about this Great I AM, who is the Lord of the universe who rescued them from Egypt and delivered them, but with each chapter it begins to transition into a servant, and that servant becomes a suffering servant. It sort of climaxes in Isaiah 53 where it says He is going to suffer, He is going to be rejected, He is going to be beaten, oppressed, mocked, scorned, and it calls that servant a lamb. Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

So, what's happening is our sin, the sins of us who are like Judas and betrayed Jesus, and who are like the soldiers and deny Jesus, and who are like Peter and misunderstand Jesus, God took all of our sin and placed it on Jesus, so that Jesus could take those sins to the cross and drink the cup of judgement that God had given Him to pay for our sins. So, in this passage, we are literally seeing Jesus transition from this glorious, powerful lion, this Great I AM, into this submissive, suffering, sacrificial lamb. He is literally confronted with the entire cosmos. The Greeks and the Romans here in this passage symbolize the whole cosmos, the whole world is coming at Jesus, and Jesus does what? He can knock them down with the power of His word, and defeat them all, but He doesn't do it. He lets them arrest Him. Why? He's arrested so that we could be forgiven, and so that we could go free. He was arrested for us. And when you see that power, it transforms you from people who fall down at Jesus, to people who bow down to Jesus. See, the step of faith is bowing the knee, submitting to Jesus, and letting Him be your high and holy King, and your sacrificial lamb. When you see the beauty of that, it transforms you.

There's a great picture of this in a Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens. Spoiler alert: I'm going to spoil the whole book, but it's like two hundred years old so you had plenty of time, okay? It's a great book. It's hard to read. There are four main characters, but there's three I want to tell you about. There's Charles Darnay, Charles Darnay is the debonaire, suave, successful man who's in love with Lucy and Lucy loves him, and then there's Sydney Carton, and Sydney Carton is an addict. He's self-absorbed. He's selfish at the beginning of the book, but as the book goes on, you see Sydney Carton begin to transform, and he goes from being this self-absorbed, addicted man into somebody who loves Lucy and is willing to do anything for her. At the end of the book, Lucy and her family are going to escape from France, they're going to escape the guillotine, but Charles Darnay, Lucy's love, is in prison. Sydney Carton loves Lucy. He is willing to do anything for Lucy. So, he goes in the middle of the night, and he takes off Charles Darnay's clothes, and he puts on Charles' clothes, and he gives Charles his clothes and he sends Charles out, so that Charles can get in the buggy and he can go free with Lucy, and Sydney Carton takes Charles' place to go to the guillotine.

There's a woman in the cell that sees this happen, and they get in the cart and this woman and Sydney are going to the guillotine, and they're about to die, and this woman realizes what's happening, and she looks at Sydney and she says, “Are you going to take his place? Are you going to die for him?” He says, “Yeah.” And she says, “Can I hold your hand?” He says,

“Yeah.” And they hold each other’s hands all the way to the guillotine. She was touched by Sydney’s sacrificial death on behalf of Charles.

That’s what’s happening in this passage. Jesus is dying a substitutionary, sacrificial death for you and I, so that deniers, betrayers, and users of Jesus can be saved and can be transformed. So, if you’re here tonight and you’re like the soldiers and you’re a denier, you just deny Jesus, let me encourage you with this: there’s a name here, Malchus. It’s interesting that it says the servant’s name is Malchus. Why is Malchus’ name in there? Malchus was a soldier coming to arrest Jesus! Well, Richard Buckham, who wrote a book called “Jesus and the Eyewitnesses,” says that all of the secondary characters, these sort of secondary names that are just thrown in here, they’re there for a purpose. They’re there because those people witnessed these events and they became a part of the early church, and so, early church readers could go back and they could read this and see Malchus, and they could actually go to Malchus and he could testify that this story actually happened. You know what that means? More than likely, that means that Malchus got converted. He went from being a soldier who wanted to arrest Jesus, to being a servant who wanted to follow Jesus. Jesus healed his ear after this, after Peter tried to cut it off. If you’re on the fence about Jesus, listen to Malchus! He wanted to arrest Jesus, and then he gave his life for Jesus.

But most of us, again, are probably like Peter and Judas, and we’re going to talk more about Peter next week. I need to land this plane. Let me just tell you what this looks like for me. What did it look like for me this week? So, I said, I was lazy, I prayed, I said “God, show me my sin.” That was on Monday morning. Well, that night Shari gets sick, and Shari’s got a stomach bug and so she literally feels like death. This happens about once a year and she just thinks she’s going to die. So, she was so sick she thinks she’s going to die, and instead of being this loving, caring, tender husband that just serves his wife, what did I do? I pouted because my needs weren’t being met. I pouted because she wouldn’t listen to me and serve me and tend me, when she’s sick! And as I laid in bed that night, the Lord reminded me of my prayer, like, woops! Here it is, buddy. You asked for it. Now you see it. And then He reminded me of this Scripture: Philippians 2:4-11. It says, “⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” And I just thought, ‘Jesus. I’m looking to my own interests, and I’m not looking to Shari’s interests. Please, forgive me.’ The rest of the passage says, “⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” I was comforted by knowing that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. My misunderstanding, my confusing, my misuse of the gospel, my selfishness, He died for me! He said: “⁹Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” So, I bowed and I asked God to forgive me and I asked Shari to forgive me, and in the end I felt closer to Shari and I felt closer to God.

If you’re lukewarm in your faith, if you’re not experiencing the love and the affection of Jesus and God and others that you want, it’s time to fall on your knees, confess your sin, let God speak to you and then hear these comforting words of the gospel, that Jesus took the cup for you, that He was your sacrificial lamb. So, let’s take a moment to pray, to confess our sin, and ask God to forgive us and transform us. Let’s pray together.