

Listen: What did Jesus Say?

Pressurized Discipleship

John 17:18-8:27

Mark Vroegop

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." ^[a] Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus ^[b] 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 ^[c] 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?" (John 18:1-11, ESV).

Due to the coronavirus shutdown, we took a Sunday outside of John's Gospel last week to see how the book of Lamentations spoke to our hearts. I trust that you were encouraged as you considered the way "hope springs from truth rehearsed" and the three promises from Lamentations chapter three: (1) God's mercies never end, (2) waiting is not a waste, and (3) God is always good.

I'm sure that you are trying to figure out a new normal for your schedule, relationships, and even the care of your soul. It looks like we won't be together in the same room for a while. So, we'll need to establish some new norms. I want to encourage you as you listen to the Word today to have a ready heart, put your phone on airplane mode, have a physical Bible ready, and jot down some notes so that you can rehearse these truths this next week.

Providential Combination of John 17-18

Obviously, I planned on speaking on John 17 last week. And I know it seems like a lifetime ago, but this chapter is often called the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. It's a passage where we read the words of Jesus as he prays for his disciples and for those who would come after them—that's us.

When I sat down to study this week, I was wondering to myself, "How in the world are these texts going to fit together?" But, as I read them in sequence and considered our present circumstances, they actually

fit incredibly well! I found myself thankful for the way the Word can speak into any situation we find ourselves.

You've probably already witnessed how true this is in your own life. But I want to remind you to stay in the promises of the Bible.

Now, what I found when I looked at John 17:18-8:27 was beautiful and helpful—especially right now. These verses, which I would have never combined in a single message, connect Jesus's vision for discipleship with his own example and the failure of Peter.

And so, I'd like to examine this text through the lens of what I'm calling "pressurized discipleship."

Remember, Jesus knows what is coming. In front of him is the darkest hour of his life. The stakes, emotions, and pressures could not be higher. It's so instructive for us to look at this text.

Let's look at pressurized discipleship from three different angles.

The Vision

Let's start by getting a clear picture of what Jesus had in mind for his disciples and for all his followers, past, present, and future.

This section of the High Priestly Prayer is set in the context of Jesus sending his disciples out to live on mission. He is going to leave them. They have no idea what is about to happen. They don't have a clue how confused, scared, happy, and on fire they'll be over the course of their lives.

An internal and external mission (vv. 18-19)

But verse 18 is clear: Jesus is sending them out. They are going to spread the news about the gospel. And, according to verse 19, part of their mission is not just what they are going to do, but also what is going to be done to them. Jesus aims to reach the world, but he is going to do so through making the disciples righteous and holy.

An other-worldly unity (vv. 20-23)

The other part of Jesus's vision is a prayer for believers beyond the disciples in the upper room with him. That's us! Jesus knew that the gospel would spread through the ministry of these disciples – "those who will believe in me through their word" (v. 20). But as the gospel is spreading and expanding, Jesus prays—very specifically—for the unity of believers.

Jesus prays that they "may all be one" (v. 20). Jesus's vision is for the body of Christ to be marked by an inexplicable unity. While the world and its system are marked by self-centeredness and division, Jesus prays that believers would be radically different from the world by being radically similar to the unity of the Father, Son, and the Spirit.

Jesus connects this unity to his relationship with the Father (v. 21) and to the glory that Jesus has given to them (v. 22). The effect is a sovereign connection to the character of God – “I in them and you in me, that they may be perfectly one” (v. 23). In other words, there will be supernatural work in the heart of every believer that reflects the other-worldly unity of Father, Son, and Spirit.

Jesus prays for this because the disciples are going to be tested. The pressure of their circumstances is going to tempt them to turn on one another. And their hope will be the sovereign work of God. They’ve been changed and it will affect their relationships.

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him” (1 John 5:1).

And this uniqueness will make a powerful statement to the world – “so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me” (v. 23).

I think it’s helpful to be reminded that our unity of love, concern, and other-centeredness makes a powerful statement and is deeply rooted in the gospel. Jesus’s vision for the church involves a unity that causes the world to take notice.

An eternal relationship of love

Jesus ends this prayer with a heart-felt longing to be reunited with his disciples. He knows what is about to happen, and that is why he prays, “I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am ...” (v. 24). We understand the pain of separation better during these days. But we should also take note that one of the reasons Jesus desires to be reunited is so that they see his glory (v. 24).

This isn’t Jesus showing off. Rather, he desires for them to see what all of this is about. Jesus talks about a glory connected to God’s love before the foundation of the world (v. 24b). The disciples know the Father because of Jesus. They believe in Jesus (v. 25).

According to verse 26, Jesus is going to fulfill his mission “that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.” The plan of God was birthed in love. God is still at work in love. And Jesus will go to the cross so that God’s love may be extended to the disciples and live in them.

This sounds similar to Paul’s comforting words in Romans 8:

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:31–33).

This was the vision of Jesus as he considered the painful road ahead of him and the uncertain road for the disciples. He prayed for both an internal and external mission, for an other-worldly unity, through an eternal relationship of love.

Moments of pressure tend to bring us back to what is most important. And I think Jesus's vision is helpful for us to rehearse. Let's be reminded this week that the sovereign love of God and the sacrifice of Jesus set in motion a vision for how we are to live.

The Example

At the conclusion of the High Priestly Prayer, John turns our attention to the events leading up to Jesus's arrest in chapter 18.

The chapter begins with Jesus taking his disciples out of the upper room and to the Garden of Gethsemane—an olive grove where Jesus liked to pray (see Luke 22:39). According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matt. 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53), this is place where Jesus prayed alone and agonized over the coming cross. It's where he prayed, "... not as I will but as you will" (Matt. 26:36).

Judas knew Jesus's pattern, and he led a group of soldiers to the garden. John is very specific in 18:3 that they were carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons. This group was probably a combination of Roman soldiers, palace guards, and temple officials. Judas was among them – "Judas who betrayed him, was standing with them" (v. 5). What a moment this must have been as Jesus and Judas locked eyes.

When Jesus identifies himself to them, "I am he," they fell to the ground. This is a display of Jesus's power in the mere use of words. Human authorities have no idea who he really is. After another exchange between Jesus and the posse, Jesus says, "I told you that I am he, so if you seek me, let these men go" (v. 8).

In Jesus's first sermon in the Gospel of Matthew he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Meekness is power under control. And we see this exemplified by Jesus. In Matthew's account, Jesus even says that he could call twelve legions of angels (72,000) to defend him (Mt. 26:53). But he refuses to use that power outside of God's mission and will. What power under control!

Jesus loves the glory of God and the mission of God in the world more than settling scores, getting even with Judas, or delivering himself. What's more, he shows deep concern for the disciples. The guards can take him, but Jesus asks for the disciples to be let go. John says that Jesus said this to fulfill the promise that none of them would be lost. Some commentators suggest that Jesus knows that the disciples cannot yet handle being arrested. Regardless, the point here is Jesus's concern for them.

Skip ahead to verse 12. We read that Jesus was arrested. However, “The King was not being captured; he was giving himself over to his enemies.”¹ And then he is led to political elites. First, to Annas. He had been the High Priest for almost 10 years until he was deposed by a Roman official prior to Pilate’s appointment. His son-in-law, Caiaphas, was now the High Priest. But Annas was the patriarch of the ruling class.

When Jesus is taken to Caiaphas, John reminds us (v. 14) what the High Priest said earlier about one man dying for the people (11:49-52). John wants us to see the sovereign control of God amid this chaos.

Now skip to verses 19-24. We have here the record of how Jesus was interrogated by Annas. Verse 19 tells us that they questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. They were obviously trying to trap him and implicate the disciples. Jesus seeks to protect his disciples and not be unwise. Look at Jesus’s response in verses 21.

He appeals to what is publicly known and the people who’ve heard him. Some scholars believe that this kind of inquiry by Annas was illegal since witnesses were required to establish the truthfulness of a charge. Jesus may have been pointing out the illegal nature of this questioning. If that’s correct, it may explain why an officer slapped him.

But Jesus responds with wisdom and grace. The officer accuses him of being disrespectful. Never mind the fact that his arrest and interrogation are not proper. That’s why Jesus responds again in verse 23, “If what I said was wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said was right, why do you strike me?”

Jesus’s concern for others, meekness in the face of unfair treatment, but also his strength amid injustice are remarkable.

The Failure

The final aspect regarding pressurized discipleship is the candid record of Peter’s failures. One of the reasons that I love the Bible is because of its honesty in dealing with the disciples. The Bible doesn’t make them out to be Marvel superheroes or people without flaws.

John knew Peter well. Both were part of Jesus’s inner circle. And John includes this material here for our instruction and help. When we read about Peter’s mistakes, we are not only warned but we are also encouraged. Pressurized discipleship will bring moments that you will later regret. And yet, as we’ll see, Peter is restored to Jesus.

We’ve skipped over a few texts, so let’s go back to them.

¹ Gerald L. Borchert, [John 12–21](#), vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 220.

At the arrest of Jesus, Peter took physical action to protect Jesus. He pulled out a small sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. In Luke's account, Jesus healed the servant. But Jesus rebukes Peter, telling him, "Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Once again, Peter and Jesus are looking at a situation very differently. Peter wants to protect Jesus. But he's not considering the bigger plan of God. Peter wanted to take decisive action. No doubt, his love and loyalty for Jesus combined to create this moment of passion. But it was misguided.

There's an internal pressure – some feel this more strongly than others—to do something! Peter can't imagine standing by and allowing Jesus to be arrested and tried. He wants to stop it. So, he does something rash. I wonder how many of us have been guilty of rash actions and conduct when pressure is applied? The heat of the moment can lead us to say and do regrettable things.

Peter's failure here was to take matters into his own hands. And in so doing, he was attempting to short-circuit the plan of God.

But there's more. Verse 15 tells us that Peter, along with another disciple, followed Jesus as he was led away. John doesn't provide the name of the other disciple. Some scholars think it was John. Others think it may have been an unnamed disciple. Regardless, somehow that disciple was known by the family of Annas. Not only was he allowed inside the compound, but he was able to get Peter inside, too.

But as Peter enters the compound, the servant girl asks if Peter is a disciple of Jesus. And Peter flippantly denies that he is follower of Jesus (v. 17).

As Peter warms himself near a fire with the high priest's servants and the officers, he is asked again if he is a follower of Jesus. Again, he denies it (v. 25). And he is pressed a third time. This time it was a relative of the man whose ear had been cut off by Peter: "Did I not see you in garden with him?" For a third time, Peter denies Jesus.

And then the rooster crows. Jesus predicted this failure in Peter's life. According to Matthew's account, Jesus predicted these events just a few hours earlier, after they left the upper room, and after Peter said, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away" (Matt. 26:33). How quickly he was proven wrong. And yet, John records that, after the Resurrection, Jesus restores and recommissions Peter (John 21:15-19).

Peter would prove to be one of the bravest disciples. He preached at Pentecost where thousands of people came to faith in Christ.

This text helps us to understand pressurized discipleship—the vision, an example, and a failure.

Providential Timing

Do you feel the pressure—low grade or intense—of this virus? It’s hard to believe that only eleven days ago, the NBA suspended its games and Tom Hanks announced that he was infected. I’m sure you shake your head at the losses in the stock market. I’m sure that you’ve worried that a dry throat is a sore throat. And, I’m also sure that this pressure has created unique opportunities for godliness and ungodliness.

In light of this text, let me give you a few truths to remember:

- 1. Consider Jesus.** I’m taking this from the twelfth chapter of Hebrews where we are told to consider him, “...so that you don’t grow weary or fainthearted.” Rehearse his teaching. Remember his example. Rejoice in the fact that he died and rose again to put an end to everything that’s wrong in the world!
- 2. Embrace Dependency.** Peter’s primary issue was his overconfidence. In John 15, we heard Jesus say, “... apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). That was true when I preached it on January 26. But we feel it now as well, don’t we? No wonder Peter later wrote:

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:6–10).

- 3. Rest in God’s Grace.** John 17 tells me that Jesus prayed for us. He not only prayed for the disciples, but for those who would believe. He prayed that we’d be one. That we wouldn’t allow the pressure of a broken world to drive us apart. The devil wants to destroy us. He wanted to destroy Peter. Jesus told him as much in Luke 22. But Jesus prayed for Peter. No wonder Peter wrote:

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:10–11).

We live in a pressurized climate right now. I know you feel it. And we’ll surely feel it even more. Through the vision and example of Jesus and, yes, even the failure of Peter, we see God’s grace. We can stake our claim in the truth that the Savior who called us to his eternal glory in Christ will **himself** restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us.

To him be the dominion forever and ever.

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