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John 18:1 - 19:16a

Tried and True

One of my kids' favorite book series to read together as a family is the Little House series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. It's the series that "Little House on the Prairie" comes from. I had never read these books until Ashley introduced them to the family, and one of the things that's struck me about them is how *hard* life was for them back then and just how much we take for granted in our modern lives today. They had to work *extremely hard* just to survive. There was no false sense of entitlement; everyone knew that if you don't work, you don't eat, because that was the stark, painful reality. There were no handouts, no safety nets. And they were keenly aware of just how dangerous life was. Crops they worked hard on all year and depend on couldn't be gone *just like that* due to an unexpected frost in June, or pestilence, famine, drought, firestorm, or tornado. When they traveled across country, they could be attacked by wild animals, robbers, or Native Americans. And they didn't have roads or bridges most of the time, but had to cross rivers themselves. They would travel all the way to a new land for a better life, only to then lose everything in a fire, or have to pack up and move because they accidentally built their house and farm on the wrong land. There were no hospitals; death and infant mortality rates were extremely high. It's a good reminder for just how good we have it today; even with all our problems in our own day and age, we have *so much* to be thankful for: indoor plumbing and electricity, heat and air conditioning, modern medicine. Even with all the crime problems we've seen lately, our society is still *far safer and more peaceful* than the vast majority of peoples throughout time and throughout the world have lived through. These are good gifts and blessings to us from the Lord. And I know that I, for one, can far too easily just take it all for granted.

And if that's true of *physical* realities, ones that we can see with our eyes and touch every day, well then how much easier is it for us to take *spiritual blessings* for granted? We say and hear things all the time, like, "Jesus loves you," "Christ died to save us from our sins," "we are forgiven and saved by His grace." These are glorious, life changing realities and blessings! Yet we can hear them so much that we start to take them for granted. And when we take God's love, grace, and salvation for granted, that is incredibly dangerous for us spiritually. If we take God's love for granted, then we cheapen it, no longer value it, and start to see it as much smaller than it actually is. When you take God's love for granted, eventually, you'll start to *doubt* that He truly

loves you. We start to think, “Sure, God loves me... but doesn’t He love everyone? What’s the big deal?” When we take the gospel of Christ, and the glorious salvation by grace that He offers us for granted, when can start to get entitled in our hearts in a spiritual sense, and think that we *deserve* salvation, and that it’s unfair for Christ not to save someone else. We start to minimize the severity of our sin, take God’s holiness and righteousness less seriously. We start to lose sight of just how *costly* our salvation actually was, and just how much pain and injustice Christ suffered for our sake out of love and mercy for our sinful souls.

But our passage this morning, John 18 through 19:16, is a sobering reminder of just how costly our salvation was, of just how much Jesus loves us, by showing us to what great *lengths* He was willing to go in order to save us from our sins. This passage is a bridge between Jesus’s life and ministry, the farewell discourse, and the climactic moment of his death on the cross. Much of what Jesus has been talking about in this book, and especially in the farewell discourse, is now coming to fruition: He is willing allowing Himself to be handed over and unjustly tried before both Jews and Gentiles because He has come to do the will of the Father as the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world (ch.1), laying down His life for His sheep as the good shepherd (ch. 10) after praying for His sheep as the true great high priest (ch. 17), fulfilling His mission as the light of the world, the bread of life, the provider of the water of life, to be the way, the true, and the life for all who believe in Him.

Here in this passage, we see Jesus willingly give Himself up, allowing Himself to be betrayed by His friend, arrested and unjustly tried by corrupt Jewish authorities, and wrongly mocked, flogged, and condemned by the Roman Gentile authorities, condemned to be executed. And what we see all throughout this passage is that this is not a sign of weakness in Jesus, it’s not a failure or mistake, it’s not because of any kind of flaw within him: no, it is the picture of ultimate strength, of being so completely powerful and in control that He could stop it at any moment, yet He willingly gives Himself over because this is the very will of God, to show the vast glory and love of God by laying down His life for those whom He loves: desperate, hopeless sinners like you and me. So as we read and study this passage this morning, see the glory of Christ on display; see His power and majesty; see His faithfulness even in injustice and suffering; and in it all, see just how much He loves you. Let us see the deep, deep love of Jesus as He is tried and proven true and faithful, even to the point of giving Himself up for our sakes.

First, we see...

I. Jesus betrayed and arrested: Jesus willingly gives himself up to those whom he knocked down with but a word (18:1-11)

In the first section of chapter 18, in verses 1-11, Jesus leads his disciples out of the Upper Room, where they had the Passover, to a garden across the river. The other Gospel books, like Matthew and Mark, tell us this is the Garden of Gethsemane. While Jesus is praying there, Judas, meanwhile, has just sold Jesus out to the Priests and Pharisees for some silver. And he leads a group into the garden, at night, to arrest Jesus in an act of betrayal by one of the twelve disciples, one who professed to be not only Jesus' friend but a faithful follower. If you've ever felt betrayed by a friend, lied to, used, or let down by someone you thought you can trust, then you know how painful and heartbreaking it is. Imagine being sold out by your friend to be wrongfully arrested and killed? And Judas pulls out all the stops in this betrayal: he leads three groups into the garden who were often at odds with each other: the servants of the chief priests, which probably included some temple guards; plus the Pharisees; and also a band of Roman soldiers. The word used here means a Roman cohort, and this could have been anywhere from 200 to 600 soldiers! This is a large, armed group. They are determined not to let Jesus slip away this time.

Yet even being betrayed by a friend, in the middle of the night, by a large, armed, powerful group, it's very clear that Jesus is the one who is actually in control and the most powerful one present. When they come up and ask for "Jesus of Nazareth," He simply speaks the words, "I am he." Actually, these are literally the words, "I am." If you're familiar with your Old Testament, this will remind you of Moses and the burning bush, when God revealed His name as Yahweh, saying, "I am that I am." The title "I Am" is a title for God. And we've already seen Jesus apply this title to himself a couple of other times throughout the book of John; the Jews recognized this as a claim to be God, and tried to kill him; it's part of why they're arresting him now! So Jesus calmly, boldly makes it clear yet again: He's not only the one they're looking for, He is God Himself in the flesh. And what happens when Jesus speaks? Read v.6: "When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground." Jesus but speaks and they fall to the ground! You have this large, armed group of soldiers, Jesus and his band are vastly outnumbered, and yet the soldiers are afraid of Him! He can overpower them with but a word! Yet He doesn't. He willingly gives Himself up to them. His arrest isn't failure or out of fear or weakness; it's the biggest power move, the greatest flex, the world has ever seen: He's showing just how powerful and in control He is by *allowing them* to arrest Him.

He asks them again who they're looking for, they tell him again, Jesus of Nazareth; He basically says, look, I already told you that's who I am; so take me, but "let these men go" - that is, the 11 disciples. As v.9 says, "This was to fulfill the word that head had spoken: Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." In other words, He's making it clear here that He is willingly, sacrificially giving Himself up for arrest, laying down His life *for His disciples, for His people*. He's saying, "my life for them." And that's exactly the point. As He physically protects and saves His disciples here, it's a symbol of the large picture of what's going on here: that Jesus is giving Himself up in order to go to the cross and die in order to save *all His people from our sins*: in order to secure our salvation, to lay down His life so that anyone who trusts in Him can live; to secure our forgiveness from sins and eternal life in paradise with God. The guards and Pharisees and soldiers come armed for physical battle but Jesus came to conquer *spiritually*.

But then Peter steps up to the plate. And Peter still doesn't quite get it. He's still thinking it's about a physical fight and kingdom, too. So he draws his sword, ready to fight, and slices off a guy's ear, a temple servant named Malchus. Now, just think about the mechanics of only chopping off a guy's ear: either Peter has incredibly good aim, or, as is far more likely, he was going for a kill shot, trying to take off the whole head, but barely missed. Peter's not playing around here. There's a lot that's commendable about Peter, here: he's not willing to go down without a fight, he's willing to fight for Jesus, even against impossible, overwhelming odds, staring down potentially a few hundred Roman soldiers! But that's not what Christ came to do. He could have blown them all down with a word if He wanted. But He came to fight sin and bring salvation not from Roman oppression and worldly powers but from the even greater enemies of Sin, Satan, and Death, even from the wrath of God we all deserve. So He intervenes. As we see elsewhere, he picked up the guy's ear and re-attached it miraculously. He says to Peter in v.11, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Those words are profoundly important. It shows that Jesus is willing to do the will of His Father, to faithfully carry out the purposes of God as the obedient Son *even to the point of death*. But that's not all: drinking the cup of wine from God is often a metaphor in the Bible for drinking the judgment and wrath of God against sin and rebellion. What Jesus is saying here is clear: He's giving Himself up willingly to drink down the cup of God's wrath, not against His own sin, for He has none, but against *our sin*: the judgment you and I deserve. He gave Himself up *for us, so that you and I can be saved, purely by His grace and sacrificial death in our place!*

Oh, the Deep, Deep love of Jesus! Brothers and Sisters, See how much Jesus loves you, that He willingly gave himself up to be betrayed, arrested, and unjustly tried and condemned!

This passage shows us Christ's love, and also reminds us that we can have assurance of salvation because of the great lengths Jesus went to to save us: just as He willingly gave Himself up in place of His disciples, so that not one was lost physically, so He willingly gave Himself up on the cross to drink the cup of God's wrath for our sins, the sins of all His people, so that not one of His sheep will be lost. We can rest assured: as we trust in Christ, we can trust in His faithfulness to save us to the very uttermost, trusting that His grace is far greater than all our sin and His sacrificial love is fully sufficient and will never let us go. Even in our moments of sin, weakness, fear, and failure. Which brings us to point number two...

II. Jesus tried and denied: Jesus gave himself up to die for His people, even those who denied him (18:12-27)

In the next section, chapter, verses 12-27, Jesus is arrested and taken to be put on trial before the Chief Priests and Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. Now, this was an illegal way to hold these trials according to their laws, and the trials themselves were unjust, rigged, and corrupt. They're putting him on trial to accuse and convict him of blasphemy and treason, to get him executed. Not only are they making up false accusations and presenting false and lying witnesses, they're also holding the trial at night at a time and in such a manner that was unlawful. But they still put up a pretense of formality. So he's brought him to Annas, who *was* the high priest before the Romans removed him from power, and also to Caiaphas, his son-in-law and the current high priest. And we're reminded that it was Caiaphas who unwittingly prophesied that Jesus would die for the sake of the people. *He* meant that Jesus would be their scapegoat, that they would put him to death to save the Jews from a war with Rome and a bloody rebellion. But being High priest, God allowed him to speak words far truer than he knew: Jesus was indeed to do, one man for the people, as the Lamb of God, laying down His life for His sheep to take away the sins of the world, for all who repent from sin, believe, and trust in Christ alone.

And John drives this home for us in the next few verses with a gripping narrative and a powerful contrast between two figures: Jesus and Peter. As Jesus is standing on trial, unjustly accused and mocked, proving faithful and true, obedient to the Father even to the point of death in order to save His people, we're given a snapshot of Peter, who is tried and proves faithless. The camera keeps switching back and forth between the two scenes: Jesus on trial, and Peter

following behind, then out in the courtyard. Jesus is being persecuting for simply speaking the truth; meanwhile, Peter denies Christ and lies out of fear for his own life. Out in the courtyard, warming himself by the fire, three times Peter is asked if he is a disciple and follower of Jesus, betrayed by his accent and recognized by a relative of Malchus, the guy whose ear Peter sliced off just moments ago. Yet three times Peter denies Christ before the rooster crows - just like Jesus said would happen. It's a striking contrast. Peter denies Christ, abandons him, and lies in order to save his own skin. Meanwhile, at the exact same time, Jesus keeps speaking the truth even though he's hit, mocked, yelled at, and condemned for it. Peter is faithless, yet Jesus remains faithful, enduring unjust suffering and persecution, tried and true to the end, to save faithless sinners, to save Peter - and to save you and me.

I don't know about you, but I find it really easy to relate to Peter. Gungho and ready to fight for what we believe in one moment, thinking we're doing the right thing yet end up doing the wrong thing in the wrong way; and then the next moment crashing and burning out of selfish fear and doubts, caving to pressures that we boastfully declared we would never succumb to. How many times have we, like Peter, caved under pressure? Flip-flopped between arrogant bravado and cowardly fear? How many times have we given into temptation and functionally denied Christ, whether with our lips, our actions, our inaction, or our hearts? I think every single one of us can find this story relatable. We've all been there. We know all too well how easy it is to mess up, to fall flat on our face, to shamefully embarrass ourselves by loudly proclaiming that we would obey Christ when we're gathered with other Christians on Sunday only to go out and do the exact *opposite* once we're out in the world, surrounded by unbelievers, threatened by suffering, or faced with temptation. All of us can relate to being faithless.

And that's precisely why this story is so incredibly encouraging. As we put ourselves in Peter's shoes, it shows us our need for Christ, the one who is perfectly faithful, tried and true to the very end. Just as Jesus was faithfully giving Himself up to save Peter in the *exact same moments* that Peter was faithlessly denying Him, so Christ is pouring out His sacrificial love and grace and mercy, faithfully upholding and saving and redeeming us, *even in the midst* of our worst moments of failure and faithlessness. Even when we are faithless, Christ is faithful.

We may find ourselves tempted to run away from the costs of following Christ, even denying Him in moments of fear and temptation like Peter did - yet even so, Christ never forsakes us, never fails us. He suffered far more than we can imagine *for our sakes*, so that we

can be saved and forgiven in Him, even as Peter was. Even in our moments of faithfulness, Christ remains ever faithful. Though we're tried and tempted and fall short, Jesus is tried and true. Praise and thank the Lord that our salvation and standing before Him is based on Jesus's faithfulness, not ours! Let us draw near in confidence to the mercy seat of God by trusting in Christ, our faithful High Priest who has secured for us an unshakeable salvation. This love of Christ on display here in securing our salvation is shown all the more in the final section of our passage and our third and final point this morning....

III. Jesus mocked, beaten, and condemned: He gave Himself up because He is the true King, Son of God, and sacrificial Savior of the world (18:28 - 19:16a)

In the last section of our passage, ch.18:28 through ch.19:16, we see Christ standing on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea at that time. He had been tried by the Jews, wrongfully and unjustly convicted as a blasphemer and false Messiah. Pilate tells them this is a Jewish religious matter, not a matter of Roman civil disobedience, so he tells them to handle it themselves. But the Jews were not allowed to carry out capital punishment under Roman rules, as v.31 tells us. So they try to convince Pilate that Jesus is evil, not just a blasphemer but a treasonous rebel against Rome who wants to set himself up as King of the Jews. And even though this was part of the Jewish leaders' political scheming and wicked plot to unjustly kill Jesus, we're also reminded that this was all part of God's plan and part of fulfilling scripture. As v.32 tells us: "This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die." It was part of God's plan for Jesus to be handed over by the Jews to the Romans, because it was Romans who killed by crucifixion, hanging on a cross. And this was to fulfill even Old Testament prophecies and the very words, fo Christ, that as He is raised up on the cross, cursed under the law by being hung on a tree, He is simultaneously raised up in glory.

So they bring him before Pilate, and Pilate interrogates Jesus, in vv.33-38. He asks, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (v.33). Jesus asks him if he's asking this on behalf of others, or because he sincerely wants to know. Pilate scoffs at this, replying that he's not a Jew; he's asking because Jesus's own nation and Jewish priests have delivered up. So he interrogates, as both prosecutor and judge: "What have you done?" And Jesus replies with a classic, profound line, in v.36: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this world." The Jews expected the Messiah to lead a rebellion against Rome and restore the physical

kingdom of David. Jesus's own disciples expected this, a worldly fight and victory and kingdom. That's why Peter drew his sword earlier. But Jesus stopped him because He's bringing about not a kingdom of this world but the Kingdom of God. It's a profound answer: Yes, He is King, but not just the King of the Jews, and not in the way they mean. Pilate picks up on some of the implications here, replying, "So you are a king?" (v.37). Jesus replies, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (v.38). Jesus is the true King: Jesus brings about the Kingdom of God, as the true and rightful King over all the earth, and all who listen to His word and believe in Him come to know truth. Christ is the true King, and His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God and Heaven, is the true Kingdom and rule that matters, for He reigns even now over all the earth, and He alone is the standard of truth and the Judge that *all* will one day stand before and have to answer to: even Pilate, even every earthly king and ruler.

Pilate answers with a cynical response: "What is truth?" He doubts and doesn't believe in Christ's claims of objective, universal truth. And yet, at the exact same time, he also realizes that Jesus is innocent and has committed no crimes. So he tells the Jews Jesus is innocent, in vv.38-40, but the people refuse to accept this. Pilate is supposed to be in charge, but he's afraid that the Jews will turn violent and revolt. He tries to convince them with an ultimatum: he'll let one prisoner go: do they want Jesus released from custody, the guiltless and innocent man, or Barabbas, a convicted robber, a violent insurrection and murderer? The choice should be clear. Yet remarkably, the Jews were so blinded by sin and unbelief they chose Barabbas and cried out for the murder of the God, Creator, King, and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.

What follows are some of the hardest verses to read, the greatest tragedy and injustice ever committed in the history of the world. Pilate thinks that if he has Jesus severely punished, even though he knows he's innocent, it'll satisfy the Jews and they'll be fine with him going free. So, Pilate has Jesus unjustly flogged and beaten. He's mocked and publicly shamed; the soldiers put a crown of thorns on his head and a purple robe, mocking him as the king of the Jews. They hit and spit. Pilate brings him out, flogged and beaten, mocked and shamed, and pronounces him innocent, yet the streets still cry for murder; they cry out, "Crucify him!" Pilate doesn't want to; he knows Jesus is innocent. He tells the Jews to do it themselves, which is wrong; he's ok with them killing an innocent man, he just doesn't want the blood on his own head. But they're not legally allowed to. Then he hears that Jesus claims to be not just the king, but the Son of God.

And this really terrifies Pilate. The other Gospel accounts tell us Pilate's wife even had a dream the night before, warning him not to kill this innocent, divinely sanctioned man. He goes back and questions Jesus some more: "Where are you from?" (v.9). Jesus remains silent. Pilate threatens, yet Jesus calmly replies that the only authority Pilate has is that given to Him from above, by Jesus's Father, God Himself. Even in his humbled, beaten, condemned state, Jesus is still in control, willingly carrying out the purpose of God, laying down His life to save sinners.

Pilate tries even harder now to release Jesus, not wanting to condemn an innocent man, and definitely not wanting to anger a deity. But the Jews threaten to tell on him to his superiors and accuse him of going light on a treasonous rebel if he doesn't kill Jesus. They cry out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar" (ch.19:12). That's too much for Pilate. He doesn't want to risk his own life by being accused of treason, knowing good and well how paranoid and ruthless the Emperor can be. So he does what he knows is wrong. He condemns the innocent Son of God and King of Kings to death on a cross. The Jews reject God as their King, claiming Caesar as their only King, yet as Christ is lifted up wearing a crown of thorns, pronounced as King of the Jews, his identity as King is made known. On the Passover day, Jesus, the true lamb of God, was condemned to be crucified, a sacrifice for sins for all who repent and believe in Him.

Jesus proves faithful in enduring the unjust trials and suffering before the Priests and Pilate; all of the injustice, mocking, flogging, and condemnation actually just reveal the truth of who Jesus is: the glorious Son of God, King of Kings, and Savior of the World. Jesus proves tried and true. As we see Jesus willingly give Himself up and suffer for our sakes, we should be moved to worship and love Him all the more, by realizing just how much He loves us, just what lengths He went to to save us. This should move us to not take our salvation or His love for us for granted, but to value and cherish it all the more!

This should also move us to want to *be like Jesus*, to want to follow in His footsteps, to prove faithful and true under our own trials, and to be willing to lay down our own lives out of obedience to the Father's Will for our lives, just like Christ did for us. As we see what great lengths Christ went to to save us from our sin, it just makes us realize just how heinous our sin is and makes us hate it all the more, to mortify our flesh daily and resist temptation. It should make us see just how radiantly beautiful Christ's holiness and righteousness is, to make us want to be like that ourselves. The example of Christ's self-sacrificial love and obedience should captivate

our hearts and compel us to follow His example in our own lives, in the way we love Christ and the people around us. And above all, as we see the example of Christ willingly suffering in our place, we should recognize the truth of God's glory on display in Christ here - the Son of God, the suffering servant, the King of Kings, our Lord and Savior! - and it just make us yearn to worship and glorify Him all the more, every day, in every area of our lives, and in all that we do.

To the unbeliever: as you read these verses, how can you *not* love Jesus and be grateful for Him? Why would you *not* want to trust and believe in Jesus, the God who came down, the king who laid down His own life for the common man, the hopeless and destitute and broken, sinners like you and me? As you see the humility, the self-sacrificial love, quiet dignity, the unwavering purpose and faithfulness of Christ, and see *just how much* He went through and suffered to accomplish our salvation - friend, how can you see this and not want to love and worship such an amazing God and King? What is keeping you from running to Christ today? Maybe your own doubts are keeping you from coming; maybe your sin, your guilt, your shame, your desire to chase after worldliness. Friend, look again at this passage: look to what great lengths Christ has gone to to save you from your sin, from Satan, from the world, even from death! Whatever is holding you back, let it go, lay it down at Jesus's feet, believe He is who He says He is, that He has done what He has promised to do, and trust that He gave Himself up *to save you* - and you, too, will be saved. No matter what you've done, even if you've betrayed Christ, mocked Him, or denied Him, you, too, can be saved by the blood, sacrificial love, and grace of Christ. So turn to Christ and call out upon Him in faith, trust and believe that He died to save you from your sins, and believe in Him, and you, too, will be saved.

If that's you, then the next step afterwards is to make your faith known, to publicly follow Christ, by being baptized, and then joining a church where you can be discipled and equipped to follow Christ and become like Him. If you have any questions about this, or about becoming a Christian and being saved, we would love to speak with you after the service.

If you've already done this, and are already a Christian, then we get a chance to come and proclaim our faith by taking the Lord's Supper together, where we proclaim that our faith is in Jesus, who gave His life up for us, and that we aren't taking it for granted, but are clinging to His gospel in faith and joyful, grateful worship. So if you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to join us at the table in just a moment. But until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.