

“God in the Hands of Men”  
Pastor John Bronson

John 18:1-14 & 19-24

March 17, 2013

Order of Worship for March 17<sup>th</sup>, title, “God in the Hands of Men”, text, John 18:1-14 and 19-24

Opening Song  
Welcome

Invocation: Isaiah 50:4-10

Message Theme: The glory of God in us can be demonstrated through quiet trust in the Lord and the veiling or restraint of our strengths

Worship Theme: Praising God for His unfailing presence sustaining us through every trial

Sunday Evening in the Word  
Tonight we begin a study of 1 and 2 Peter with 1 Peter 1:1-25  
All are encouraged to come.  
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Church Library

**Opening Song:**

“How Great is Our God” Overhead

**Welcome**

**Invocation:** Isaiah 50:4-10

**Ministry Moment** Dennis Hurt

**Youth Mexico Missions Dedication**

**Preparing the Heart in Song:**

“Mighty to Save” Overhead  
“’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” Song # 581  
“How Great Thou Art” Song # 147

**Offering and Offertory** “His Eye is On the Sparrow”  
by Zachary Coon

**Message:** “God in the Hands of Men”  
John 18:1-14 & 19-24 Pastor John Bronson

**Closing Song:**

“You Are My All in All” Song # 583

**Parting Word of Grace and Invitation to Prayer**

**Special Congregational Business Meeting—4 pm**

**Sunday Evening in the Word:**

None tonight due to Congregational Meeting  
“The Prayer Closet”  
March 17, 2012

*“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”*  
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

**Lois McMartin and EFCA ReachGlobal Ministries:** the Lord will protect Lois in her travels and strengthen her for the demands of travel and serving others; the ministry will have wisdom through the Spirit for establishing service ministries and churches especially in closed or hostile countries; the Lord will raise up both personnel and finances to meet the purposes of the Lord

**President Obama:** the Lord delights in those who have a humble and contrite heart so pray that the Lord will give Obama such a heart and with it wisdom for governance; the Lord will keep his family from all evil

**The Purity Ball:** the Lord will prompt all the needed support personnel for the event to step forward; the spirit will ensure that all those who should be in attendance will get the message and come, even if they are short on money; give thanks that we so generous a scholarship fund!

**Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week:** SMSgt. Tye Turner, Air Force, @ Beale AFB (husband of Cathy): A group from his unit, the 940th Security Forces, is deploying overseas for 6 months. Please pray for their safety during their mission why they support the Air Force. Please pray for a safe return.

**Young Adult of the Week:** Alysia Ballantyne, William Jessup (daughter of John and Cheryl): building good relationships with housemates & fellow students; trusting God in stressful classroom demands; provision for summer work

**Please pray for our homebound family members:** Hilda Chapman , Carol Koehler, Gary & Ruth Lentz, Fred & Jean Pauly

(please call the office to request updates)

I.

Today we are continuing in the study of John’s Gospel. We are at the eighteenth chapter. The title for the message today is “God in the Hands of Men.” At this chapter John shifts from the record of Jesus’ teaching – that is what we have been looking at all the way from [chapter] 12 through [chapter] 17 – all of that section of John is really a focus on Jesus’ teaching primarily to His disciples. Now we have a shift to a narrative of the ending of His life. The teaching was intense; the drama that unfolds in front of us is not less intense in what it has to say to us. What is on display when we look at these opening sections of chapters eighteen and nineteen is the dynamic of evil. This is part of our preparation for coming into the celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is a very sober message today reflecting on the nature of evil; how evil acts.

It is an often repeated story for this is the way godless men act. What they will do is they will act to silence and if necessary eliminate whatever opposes them or threatens them. That is what we are going to see unfolding as we look at these [verses]. The next statement is probably the most important you can take from the first slide. Evil people do not necessarily see themselves as evil, indeed often they see themselves as good people forced by circumstances to do unfortunate things. Let that record in your thoughts.

Let us read together the opening passage, John 18:1-11. This is the first instance: John gives three instances or examples of Jesus in the hands of evil men. The first one is Judas.

*“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. 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. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek...’”*

This is the narrative of an event. What you and I should do at this point is attempt to create that scene in our minds. We want to see what is happening. That is why it has been laid out as a narrative before us. John says that Jesus had left Jerusalem and went to a place where He had often gone. Jesus knew that Judas knew where He was going. Judas arrives. He is accompanied by armed guards. Judas knew there was no need for an armed guard. Jesus had never been violent in any way. The only time He had ever taken any kind of forceful action was against those who were polluting the temple. He was a man of peace. He had never even remotely taught any of His men how to fight. But evil minds project their fears on others and seek to arm themselves against what they [themselves] might be inclined to do. Judas fears what his own heart projects.

What happens next is one of the most dramatic events recorded in the scriptures but you do not find it often spoken of. John 18:4-7, *“Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am he.’ Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, ‘Whom do you seek?’”* When Jesus said, “I am he,” he used words that were used by God when giving His name to Moses in Exodus chapter 4. What Jesus actually said there was, “I am the self-existing One.” He said, “I am God.” They responded appropriately; they collapsed. Confronted by incalculable power – they could sense that – they fell back, these armed men collapsed on the ground. We ought to think about that. Now they are on the ground and Jesus says, “Who do you want?” What do they do?

They get up and they continue with what they intended to do in the first place! Beloved, how profound is the grip of evil purpose in a man’s heart when he has given himself to do evil! You would think, having just been knocked

to the ground by the manifested divinity of the One they came to arrest, they would have the good sense to change their mind. But their hearts are held, gripped by an evil purpose.

Let us look at this a little more: Judas brings them to the Garden, the place where he has met with Jesus and the disciples many times, many times he has met with the disciples in that garden hiding from the very men he is now leading. Do we understand that? They come with torches and lanterns. Those lanterns and torches light up Judas. What do we think the disciple thought when they see Judas in the light? He was their friend. He was their brother. What does Judas think? Now the circle of light includes us all, you and me, me with the soldiers, you on the ground. Did Judas fall to the ground when Jesus spoke? Did Judas love those men? Wasn't he their friend? Had he ever been their friend? Evil desire destroys relationships and separates families and shatters friends. Evil desire active in Judas' heart has now smashed the relationships woven together around a common devotion to Jesus Christ. All that was precious has now been cast aside. Was it only after Jesus had spoken twice that Judas came forward to kiss the Lord with the kiss of death? How could he do that? How could he do that, brushing off the olive leaves as he got up off the ground?

I want us to think about Judas. Did Judas, as he stands and moves forward, push against the hammering cries of the Spirit of God seeking to penetrate his hardened heart: “No, no, no!” [says the Spirit], and Judas answers, “No, no, no!” Was his soul in a torment of denial, a fury of evil desire: “I will, I want, I will, I want!” [Was he gripped by a] proud determination to do the deed: “I have begun; I will finish!” Or, perhaps, Judas at this moment moved in total silence because the Spirit was no longer talking to him. So he acts in the utter void, the absence of the Holy Spirit and feels no weight of resistance at all, but moves forward as if there were no difficulties and he is free to do as he will. How sad to be at a place where you have no savior, no friend to hold you back.

That is the first instance of Jesus in the hands of men. Earlier Jesus had made the comment that if He wished He could call on twelve legions of angels, but it was the Father's wish that He would be crushed for our iniquities. We wonder, don't we, when we think about Judas, was Judas really acting in freedom, or was Judas acting under constraint, forced in some sense by God to do what he did? Here are the facts. Every man in that scene but one acted according to their desires. They chose freely without any constraint. Who were they: Judas who betrayed, Peter who denied, the disciples who all ran away, and the guards and officers, the soldiers who just did what they were told. But one person in that group under constraint. Who was that one? It was Jesus. What sort of constraint did He act under? It was the constraint that we are told of in the Word of God. He worked under the constraint of the Father's love, His love for the Father and for all whom the Father loves. Jesus acted under constraint. He was the One who would say in the Garden, not my will, not what I want, not my desire, not that I would freely run; rather I will remain under the constraint of Your love. So He remains obedient to death. This is important for us to remember.

Now we will move on to the second instance of Jesus in the hands of men [which] we find in verses 12-14 and again in 19-24. I am skipping over the business about Peter's denials. Here is what we read:

*“So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.”*

*“The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, ‘I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.’ When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, ‘Is that how you answer the high priest?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?’ Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.”*

John tells us earlier on in the eighteenth chapter that he was personally known by the high priest: John 18:15, *“Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door.”* John was an eye witness of everything that we are here reading. That is a very important fact. It is fair to assume that John knew many if not all the members of the Sanhedrin, personally. So we ask this question: Were the members of the Sanhedrin utterly wicked? Were they heartlessly cruel? Is that how John saw them? Probably not. Evil men often see themselves as good people who are forced by circumstances to do unfortunate things. As the members of the Sanhedrin saw it, Jesus had forced their hands. They surely had no choice. They had to get rid of Him. He was too disruptive, too much trouble, too much danger. *“We can’t let this go on!”* That is what they said in John 11:48, *“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”* When forced by circumstances to act in unfortunate ways, we are allowed to see who they are. Who are they? Oh, they are proud, fearful, faithless, ruthless: did you ever hear them say, *“Let us ask God?”* Did you ever hear them say, *“Let us trust God!”* No; they act. And why do they act? They tell us: it was to preserve their position and their privileges. As pragmatic men they could no let someone like Jesus destroy everything.

Beloved, there is a question that sits right inside of what we have just looked at. You should write on your paper: How do I react when threatened or attacked? When all of a sudden, against expectation, or perhaps after long endeavor seeking to protect oneself you suddenly realize you are under attack, you are threatened, who you are, where you are, you position, your standing: suddenly it is not secure! What do we do? Is this a vague mere possibility, a theoretical situation? Or is there some place in the New Testament where we are told, the day will come when you will be persecuted for your faith and in that day I advise you, don’t plan ahead for what you will say, but trust the Holy Spirit to give you what you need to say in that day. Who said that? Jesus said that. Jesus said the day will come; and in that day suddenly we will have to face what remains of the flesh within us. When we are attacked, will we lash out, or will we remember: *“I am a child of God. God is my defender. I am called to be a man of peace and to let the Spirit of God control my tongue and my actions, because He fills my heart.”* When we come down to this point in the Gospel, we ought to be beyond fiddling around and asking ourselves merely moral questions about how to do this and how to do that, because where the gospel takes us is to the death of our Savior, and Jesus said to us, *“Follow me.”* Paul clarifies that; he said we must put ourselves to death. Very few of us will be nailed to a cross; but all of us will be nailed. So we have to consider how we will respond when they come and attack.

From the house of Caiaphas the high priest Jesus is taken to the Roman governor. This is the conclusion of the second instance [of Jesus in the hands of men]. In verse 19 the high priest questions Jesus. Jesus knows that they already know the answers to their questions. In verses 20-21 what Jesus is actually saying to Annas is this: *“Listen,*

everything I have taught I have taught openly. You don't need to ask me any questions. You know the answer already. You know what I have said and you know what I have done.” The high priest is not looking for information; he is not trying to understand Jesus or His teaching. What he is looking for is something to use in order to condemn Him. It is a dishonest inquiry. The dishonesty of these men runs very deep. I learned when I was at the Shepherds Conference something I did not know before. John MacArthur said that when a verdict of death was passed by the Jewish courts they were required to have a thirty day waiting period during which time other witnesses could come forward in order to speak on behalf of the condemned. Thirty days: how long did these men wait? [It was] not even a day! Their intent is not to find out the facts; their intent is to kill Jesus. That is their intent. Those men that night had no intention of waiting thirty days or even one. They are driven by an urgency that will tolerate no further delays. Jesus will not enter into the verbal dance that will allow them to catch out some particular phrase. From their point of view too many times already Jesus has managed to slip their fingers. Not this time!

We can be sure at v. 22 that the officer did not strike Jesus without at least the tacit permission [of the high priest]. Did you notice that? Jesus gives an answer and the officer says, “Is that the way you talk to the high priest?” And what does he do? [He slaps Jesus.] There is something very, very important for us to recognize and that is why it is recorded for us. That first physical assault begins the process of degrading and dehumanizing Jesus. It demonstrates that He can be “thrown away”. He can be ignored. He is a person with no standing He can have no credible complaint against them. So now we see the Sanhedrin have come to the place where they are so blinded by their sin, they are incapable of seeing Jesus for who He is. When we harden our hearts against others, we blind our souls to the truth. These men have hardened their hearts, degrading and dehumanizing this person so that finally they can look at Jesus and see nothing at all. Do we do that? Do we harden our hearts against people, judge them, condemn them, consider them unworthy of our notice, unworthy of our time, unworthy of our listening, as throwaway people? I think that is a little bit of what [was mentioned earlier in reference to the people served at the Rescue Mission]. They are the throwaway people who get in our way on the sidewalk, who clutter up the entrance to the grocery store, [the] “no” people, the non-people, the throwaway people. And don't we do it here [in the congregation]? We should never assume that because our sins are not of the same dramatic character or dimension of those portrayed on these pages leading to the death of Jesus that our sins are not of the same sort, for they are.

Now from the house of Caiaphas Jesus is taken to Pilate. This is the third instance [of Jesus in the hands of men]. Pilate is the Roman governor. The record in John is given in chapter 18:28-40 and 19:1-11.

*“Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them and said, ‘What accusation do you bring against this man?’ They answered him, ‘If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you.’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.’ The Jews said to him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death’ This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.*

*“So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered, ‘Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?’ Pilate answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?’*

*Jesus answered, ‘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 from the world.’ Then Pilate said to him, ‘So you are a king?’ Jesus answered, ‘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.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’*

*“After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, ‘I find no guilt in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?’ they cried out again, ‘Not this man, but Barabbas!’ Now Barabbas was a robber.”*

*“Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, ‘See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him.’ So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold the man!’ When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him.’ The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God.’ When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave him no answer. So Pilate said to him, ‘You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?’ Jesus answered him, ‘You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.’”*

We will look at much of this passage again next week. For now, a few comments. I will say nothing about the Sanhedrin and the incredible hypocrisy of thinking that by keeping themselves ceremonially pure [by not entering the Gentile precincts of Pilate’s palace], they could still enter into the presence of God [by celebrating the Passover Feast] having committed murder. After all, in their opinion they were good men who were just forced by circumstances to do something unfortunate.

John, we obviously recognize, does not give us everything that was said, only what was necessary to carry the narrative forward. What the Jews want is the death penalty, which only the Romans could execute. Further we know that they must have told Pilate that Jesus was presenting himself as a presumptive king, that would be the messiah. That was a claim which would make Jesus into a political criminal, a rebel against Roman rule. That was a lie of course and they knew it was a lie. They knew that he did not present himself in any way as a challenge to Roman rule. So in verse 36 if you look at it you see that Jesus established the obvious: his followers are not an army and neither He nor they have engaged in any rebellious or seditious acts. No contrary reports have come to Pilate and he drops the matter, although it does come up again. Look to chapter 19:12, *“The Jews cried out, ‘If you, Pilate, release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.’ So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement. . .”* By then Pilate is also driven by fear and the pretense of Jesus as a danger is necessary as an adequate reason to have him killed.

In John 18:37 however Jesus is still talking with Pilate. Notice that He shifts the conversation. He is a king, but not of a worldly kingdom. He is a witness to the truth, and all who are of the truth listen to Him. That is a conversation stopper, at least it stops Pilate for the moment. A witness to the truth: Pilate, like the Sanhedrin, is a practical man. The bottom line for a practical person is power, the ability to get things done. Philosophical or theoretical discussions in the early morning hours were not Pilate's thing. The truth might be a leisure time occupation, but it was not something for business hours. During business you get things done. Notice Pilate's judgment is that Jesus is innocent. What we need to appreciate what he actually means. What he actually means is that Jesus is powerless; Jesus offers no threat, He can be ignored because He is no danger. That is what [Pilate] means. How does he treat this innocent man? He has him flogged. How many know what flogging is? You take a whip with multiple ends and you proceed to lash a man over his back. They stopped at forty because to go beyond forty would threaten the continuance of their life because of the amount of blood. Why do you do that to an innocent man? [You do it] to degrade him, to dehumanize him. So after having done that, and the soldiers having jammed a crown of thorns upon Jesus' head, and Jesus has been spat upon, [Pilate brings [Jesus] out and he says – we like to sing, “Behold the man” with majestic wonder, but what he actually says is, “Look at this piece of junk!” That is what he says. Pilate doesn't think it is worth his time to kill him.

But of course something else is going on, isn't it. “...*his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.*” And, “...*he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*” That is Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2-3 talking about Jesus seven hundred years before this happened. God has done this for us. What is revealed is what the evil hearts of men will do and the way in which our God counters that evil and brings to us the gift of forgiveness and life. My prayer is that there is no one in this room who entertains the illusion that your heart could not become that evil, and that there is no one in this room that will not eagerly receive the gift of life through Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: Father in heaven, not for nothing Your Spirit caused John to write out this brief history of the terrible things that these men did to our Lord. Help us, our Father, not to do to them what they did to Jesus, that is, to silence the message, to distance ourselves and say, O that could never be us; that could never be me. For Father, it is not true: but for the grace of God. We thank you for Your providential goodness to us. We thank you for making known to us the gospel of salvation in Jesus, the One Who let Himself be so ill-treated and then continued to the cross to die for our sins. O Father, thank you. In Jesus' name, thank you.

#### Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Do you know anyone who is self-consciously and deliberately evil? Have you or anyone you know felt that circumstances forced you to do what you knew was wrong?
2. Which do you think would be worse, to act against the clearly expressed will of God's Spirit to experience complete silence from God?

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3. Who seems to you to have acted most freely, Judas, Peter, the other disciples, the soldiers and guards or Jesus? (See 2 Corinthians 5:14)
  
4. Have you ever been surprised (perhaps dismayed) by what the pressure of circumstance revealed about you? Do you consider yourself to be a pragmatist? What does that mean to you?
  
5. Both the Jews and Pilate degraded and dehumanized Jesus so they could ignore him and get rid of him. Do you think in our own way we do the same thing to those who challenge us? What are some ways we might do this?
  
6. When Jesus spoke of the truth He was not concerned about factual accuracy but moral and spiritual reality and integrity. How often do moral and spiritual matters come up as we pursue practical goals in life?
  
7. Why is the source of one's power so critical in questions of law and governance?
  
8. Is justice a practical matter? If it is, why did the Jews and Pilate ignore it? What are the consequences of ignoring justice over the long term?
  
9. “We cling to freedom, but what we need is grace; we cry out for respect, but what we need is forgiveness.” Do you agree? What are the implications of these statements for our daily lives and our walk of faith?