The Unfair Gospel
(John 18:12-27)
(preached 9/8/19 @ Pine Grove BC Sun AM)
(preached 10/6/19 @ Whitmire FBC Homecoming)

Introduction

It has been said that there are 3 nearly impossible tasks in life.

The first one is to climb a fence that is leaning toward you..

The second is to kiss a girl that is leaning away from you.

And the third is preach a sermon in your hometown.

Now the reason for #3 is seen in the fact that Jesus preached returned to preach in his hometown of Nazareth and when he was done, they tried to throw him off a cliff…

Now in terms of those impossible tasks, I have never tired the first one..

The second one is none of your business.

And the third..

Well, I only agreed to come because Whitmire doesn't have any tall cliffs..

In all seriousness, what an honor to stand in this pulpit this morning.

This church has made such an imprint on my life.

I used to sit like all good Baptists in the next to last town back there with my grandma and chew on Beechnut gum that she would give me halfway through a message by Preacher Holland.

I once stood on the street in front of Dr. Lakes' office and watch the steeple be hoisted in place many years ago.

I have spent time on all levels of this church in Sunday School singing Deep and Wide while drinking Kool Aid and eating butter cookies.

I have played on the playground and walked down what I considered to be tunnel right outside that wall..

So when your pastor asked me to preach Homecoming, I considered quite privilege.

Whitmire will run through my veins the rest of my life, and certainly this church will be near and dear to my heart..

I look forward to catching up with folks over lunch, but you didn't show to her from me, you came to grow in your love and knowledge of the Lord..

So let's get to that..

Take your Bible and turn to the gospel of John, specifically John 18:12…

For the past year and a half, our church has been in John's gospel..

We began in John 1:1 in April of 2018 and we just made it to John 19 the past few weeks.

It has been a glorious time for our church as we spend each Sunday morning marveling at the glory of Christ..

So this morning, I want you take you a passage that we examined recently that is quite familiar to any of you who have been around the church..

It is a passage that you have read and heard preached on more than one occasion, but I want us to go here this morning and be reminded of what I will call the wonder of the UNFAIR GOSPEL..

So to get us started, let me catch you up to speed on what has just happened as we arrive at John 18:12..

The year is 30 AD, give or take a few years..

It is mostly 1 or 2 am on a Friday morning.

IT is the day that Jesus will be crucified as if He were a guilty criminal.

It is the day that He was born to face.

It is now less than 24 hours until he dies for the sins of all who will believe in Him..

As we arrive at the verses that we will read, Jesus is in the private garden on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

He has gone there so that Judas can lead the Roman and Jewish authorities to Him.

Jesus needs to be arrested, so that he can go through several phony trials and be sent to the cross to die on Friday afternoon as the ultimate Passover Lamb..

And everything is working according to plan as Judas arrives and points Jesus out the Jews and Romans…

So let's read what happens next..

John 18:12..

12 So the Roman [e]cohort and the [f]commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

*15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. 17 Then the slave-girl who kept the door *said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He *said, "I am not." 18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.*

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in [g]synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." 22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I

have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" 24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.
25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." 26 One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" 27 Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Let us pray.

Monkeys are often interesting animals to study.

They live in large families and often exhibit interesting habits and traits.

A few years back, researchers began doing experiments on monkey to see if they understood fairness.

So two monkeys were put in cages and given the same task to do.

One monkey was rewarded with a cucumber for doing the task and the other monkey was rewarded with a grape.

Clearly the grape was the sweeter and therefore better reward..

But on the first try, both monkeys accepted their reward and ate it without issue.

Moments later, the monkeys were called to do the same task, and the same rewards were given.

The first monkey that got the cucumber didn't eat it right away.

Instead he held it in his hand and watched to see what the second monkey was given.

Again, the second monkey was given a grape that he quickly ate, so the first monkey watched and then threw the cucumber back out of the cage without eating it.

To confirm their suspicions, the experiment was performed a 3rd time with the same results.

Even in the animal world, there is a concept of fairness.

Animals don't have souls.

They are not made in God's image.

But even their God-given instincts alert them to the idea of fairness.

Fairness is a big issue in the world.

Everyone wants to be treated fairly.

Arguments break out in families and schools and societies over the issue of fairness.

This morning in John 18:12-27, the issue of fairness will be before us..

In the text, we are going to switch back and forth between two scenes.

In one scene, Jesus will be arrested and put through a short trial before the high priest.

In the other scene, Peter will go through a trial of his own.

In the end, Jesus will be condemned though he is innocent of all charges..

And in the end, Peter will be acquitted even though he is guilty of all charges..

But when you put both of these scenes together, they add up to glorious gospel that we love so much..

We will get there but let's first examine the verses..

We will call verses 12-14…

I. Arresting the Innocent (12-14)

Verse 12..

12 So the Roman [e]cohort and the [f]commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, 13 and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Here in John 18 and in the first part of John 19, the Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government leaders are going to be part of the plan that sends Jesus to the cross.

Now you must understand the relationship between the Jews and Romans in order to understand a number of the verses that will follow..

The Jews were an independent people yet they lived under Roman rule, and Rome had a vast empire in 30 AD.

Here is map to show you the size of the lands under their rule..

And the way to keep a vast empire is to keep the peace.

Some Rome ran a very tight ship.

And though they allowed the Jews to practice their religion, they kept a close eye on them.

So close that Rome pretty much ran the Jewish government and religion by appointing those supportive of Rome into positions of authority in Israel.

One of those positions of authority was the Jewish high priest position.

The high priest was the final say in Judaism.

There was a ruling body called the sanhedrin, but the high priest presided over that body.

So Rome made sure that no high priest stayed in power too long and gained too much support..

At the time of Christ, there was a new high priest appointment each year.

In fact, if you look at verse 13, it says that Caiaphas was the high priest that year.

But Annas was a former high priest and the father-in-law of Caiaphas..

We know that the Romans liked Annas' family.

Anna was the high priest for a time, then each of his sons were high priests for a time, and now his son in law is the high priest..

And the reason is simple, this family was friendly to Rome.

In fact, Annas and his sons were getting rich through their friendly relationship with Rome.

For instance, Jews would bring their own animals from home to sacrifice at the temple, but Annas and his sons instituted animal inspectors who determined if the animal was fit for sacrifice.

Needless to say, most if not all animals were rejected, but “temple approved animals” were available for purchase for incredible prices..

In the end, Annas’ family was making money and they did whatever they could to please the Romans in order to keep their corrupt business booming.

Now Jesus had become a fly in the ointment for them.

He had come into the temple and overturned their tables and cursed their greediness.

He had called Annas' temple a den of robbers, and he was exactly right..

So when Judas offered to betray Jesus and hand him over to the authorities, Annas was all on board..

Therefore, Judas brings the Roman cohort to arrest Jesus but out of respect for Jews, the Romans take him to Annas.

He is the patriarch of the whole corrupt system..

But take note of verse 14..

Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

Though Annas was the head of it all, Caiaphas was a pretty shrewd manager of it all..

Back in John 11, we read this..

47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many [l]signs. 48 If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know

nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."

For Caiaphas, the solution to the problem of Jesus was easy to solve.

Kill Jesus and it will be back to business as usual for the Jews..

For Caiaphas, there was no need for a council to meet and discuss options.

They either had to kill Jesus or the whole system was going to collapse..

So when the opportunity to arrest Jesus came, they took it.

But to add to their excitement, they were able to do all this under the cover of darkness, which kept them out of the sight of the crowds who were fast asleep.

And so they arrest an innocent man simply because the truth He tells exposes their lies and greed.

But as the innocent are arrested, the guilty are being exposed..

II. Denying the Christ (15-18)

Look at verse 15..

15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple.

John doesn't tell us but the other gospel writers let us that when Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled..

Mark 14:46-50

46 They laid hands on Him and seized Him. 47 But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and [u]cut off his ear. 48 And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? 49 Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." 50 And they all left Him and fled.

Jesus was arrested and bound and the disciples took off, but the darkness allowed them to stop and Peter and another disciple simply followed at a distance.

The other disciples is likely John.

HE never mentions himself by name in his gospel, option to simply remain anonymous.

But it seems clear that John is the disciple with Peter following a distance…

Now remember, just an hour or so earlier, Peter had pledged an allegiance to Christ even if it meant death for him.

And we all forget, but the Bible says that all the other disciples agreed with Peter.

Matthew 26:33-35..

33 But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may [j]fall away because of You, I will never fall away." 34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." 35 Peter *said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." All the disciples said the same thing too.

So here and John and Peter hours removed from pledging their loyalty and now they are hiding in the shadows as Jesus is led to Annas.

Back to the end of verse 15..

Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the

other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

Simply put, John was able to get into the court of the high priest.

Many suggestions have been put forth about how John was able to get into the court.

Some say that his fishing business was well known and provided John access..

Some say that John's relation to Zechariah the priest got him in.

It doesn't really matter.

All we know is that John got in.

Now Annas would have lived in a large complex.

Families simply built on the existing structures when kids got married.

It would have also been large simply because Annas had profited greatly from his position as the former high priest of Israel.

So John gets in and then is able to use his influence to get Peter in as well..

But then Peter begins his worst night ever..

Verse 17..

17 Then the slave-girl who kept the door *said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He *said, "I am not."

Back in John 13:36-38, Jesus said this to Peter..

36 Simon Peter *said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." 37 Peter *said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." 38 Jesus *answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

At this point, one denial down and two to go.

Now why the denial here?

Simple.

Jesus is arrested and bound and Peter fears that he is next.

Peter denies being associated with Jesus to save his own life.

Now it seems odd to me that his denial doesn't register with him.

In my mind, Jesus predicted that Peter would deny him 3 times, so you think the first one would have brought him to his senses and he wouldn't follow through with 2 more.

But this is how sin works.

It doesn't present itself as sin.

It presents itself in other ways, and before we know it, we are deep into it before we ever realize it..

Sin crouches at the door, so don't even crack the door open to take a peek or you be flattened by sin as it rushes in..

Peter denied Christ.

Sadly, he wasn't even fazed by it..

Verse 18..

18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

Though it is spring in Jerusalem, nights can still be cold as we know well in our region.

So Peter denies being a disciple and then goes to hang out with other in the outer courtyard of the high priest..

But then John takes us back from the ugliness of sin to the beauty of Christ.

Verse 19…

III. Striking the Innocent (19-24)

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in [g]synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. 21 Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said."

While Peter exposes his guilt, Jesus maintains his innocence before Annas.

Now the Jewish legal system became the model for most legal systems that have existed in history.

And one essential element of their system was the principle that an accused person could not incriminate himself or herself.

In other word, confessions could not be the only basis for guilt.

Witnesses were needed to confirm guilt.

However, Annas is not concerned about their way of doing things.

So he questions Jesus about his disciples and his teaching which breaks all protocol.

However, protocol is out the window when you are trying railroad someone to the death penalty..

All they want is a quick confession, a quick trial, and a quick execution..

But Jesus won't allow them to have it their way, so HE tells them in verses 20-21 to go get some witnesses to what He had done.

To go get some testimony about his supposed crimes..

But the reality is that none exists.

No one denied Jesus' miracles.

No one accused Him of being a con man or even a liar.

His life was spotless and therefore the accusations were without any merit.

Jesus was completely innocent as he stood before Annas..

But innocence doesn't matter to the wickedness so they try to get Jesus to commit a crime in their presence..

Verse 22.

22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" 24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

The first strike to Jesus comes from a Jewish guard.

The Greek for struck here literally mean a hit to the face.

So Jesus is struck in the face by either a fist or a weapon.

But there will many more hits and stripes coming.

We know how Jesus responded.

No anger.

No resentment.

No bitterness.

He simply received the hit and kept his cool while pleading his innocence.

But those pleas fall on deaf ears, so the patriarch of the family sends him to his ruthless son-in-law.

We will have to see how the trial before Caiaphas goes next week, but we let's go back to Peter before we go home..

Verse 25.

And we can call this "denying the Christ's parts 2 and 3..

IV. Denying the Christ (25-27)

Verse 25..

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself.

Peter has found some new friends on this night as they gather around a charcoal fire to stay warm, but suddenly one of them recognizes him..

Middle of verse 25..

So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not."

This is our second denial, followed quickly by a 3rd denial..

Verse 26..

26 One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, *said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

Now, we look at this as the 3rd denial of Peter, but this could also be called the 3rd opportunity to identify with Jesus.

But sadly, Peter fails again.

Verse 27..

27 Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Now Matthew and Mark add that Peter cursed and swore on this denial…

Clearly, Peter had fulfilled the words of Jesus spoken just hours earlier.

The man who was the rock had become the coward.

The man who vowed to die to save Jesus' life is now the man who sins to save his own life.

Such a tragic picture of the ugliness of sin and self.

Conclusion

Let's end with a couple thoughts…

#1 - Evil is not reasonable.

Jesus was right.

There were no witnesses to incriminate Him, and the absence of witnesses results in the freedom of the accused.

Yet, evil people do not care about who is right and who is wrong.

Evil people don't care about justice.

Evil don't listen to reason.

Evil people have one driving purpose, and that is to satisfy their sinful lusts.

You can be absolutely right and still find yourself in deep trouble.

Evil is real and evil people are real in a fallen world, so don't be surprised when you encounter them.

#2 - Sin is not resting.

The Bible says that devil prowls, and in same way, sin lurks around every corner.

Always be aware of your weak and fallen flesh.

Yes, we are redeemed.

Yes, we are being made new.

But yes, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

Peter may have felt strong, but he wasn't strong.

Stay humble and stay away from situations that lead you to be tempted.

Even the best of people are still people at best.

#3 - The gospel is not fair.

Before you think I am crazy, hear me out.

As we look at this passage, let me ask you a couple questions?

Is it fair that an innocent Jesus is arrested and bound and about to be put on trial for crimes he didn't commit?

And the answer from our perspective is absolutely not.

If you were on trial for something you didn't do, you would scream to the media that you weren't being greatly fairly.

But let add to the unfairness of this scene.

Is it fair that a 3 time denier of Jesus eventually becomes the world's greatest preacher and writes two books of the NT?

And the answer is also a very strong NO from our perspective.

Why didn't God just turn his back and never look back?

How can Peter the great DENIER become Peter the great TESTIFIER?

The answer to those accusations of unfairness come down to two words, -the gospel.

The gospel says that the innocent suffer while the guilt go free.

The gospel says that Jesus is arrested and beaten and nailed to a cross while Peter is forgiven and restored and awarded a great ministry..

Nothing about then gospel seems fair from our perspective, but that is what makes it glorious.

In the gospel, the guilty are set free by the death of the innocent.

Think about it this way.

Jesus told the truth and got hit in the face.

Peter told a lie and got to stand and warm his hands by the fire.

Jesus gave true testimony and died.

Peter gave false testimony and lived.

How incredible to know the mercy of God in the gospel.

How incredible to see the grace of God in the gospel.

How incredible to experience the unfairness of God in the gospel.

I should have been arrested, struck in the face, put on trial, sent the cross and died with shame.

Yet, Christ did that for me while I even now deny him by my sin.

I can't begin to explain the unfairness of that.

All I know is that I am grateful for the unfairness of it.

Let me this passage with a verse that ties the innocence of Jesus and the guilt of Peter right together..

Luke 22:60-61a

60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter.

As Peter uttered his final denial, Jesus was leaving Annas and headed to Caiaphas.

They must have walked through the inner courtyard because Jesus was there as Peter's final denial rolled off his lips.

I think we can all identify with Peter here.

We have all failed the Lord and the aftermath of that failure is never good.

WE grieve.

We mourn.

We repent.

And Peter does just that.

The next verse speaks of his weeping over his sin.

But I want to ask you.

What is going through Jesus' mind here?

What is He feeling at the sight of his close friend denying Him?

Is there disappointment? I am sure.

But ultimately, as Jesus gazes on Peter, He is reminded of the mission that he is on.

He came to die for His people.

He knew that they would never make it to heaven on their own.

Even Peter, the first one to confess Him as Messiah is now the one cussing and claiming he never knew Jesus.

Jesus simply sees in this quick glance what He already knows.

Though innocent of all charges, He must die for the guilty or else they stand zero chance of ever making it to heaven.

As the innocent marches to his death and the guilty one lies to save his life, the glance of Jesus is glance of pity on how fallen we are.

But the glance of Jesus is also a reminder that He must continue to cross so that His people can be freed from their helpless and hopeless condition.

The gospel is not a gospel of fairness.

It is a gospel where the innocent die so that the guilty can live.

It is a gospel that could only come from the heart of a kind and compassionate God.

And it the gospel that we preach and live and cling to with all our might.

If you don't know this gospel, please speak to me before you leave.

Let us pray.