

**John:  
Wanted: Dead or Alive!**

**John 18:1-27**

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

*May 25, 2003*

Turn with me to John 18 where we come to, if I may say such a thing, some of the most sacred sections, not just of the Scriptures or the gospels, but of John's gospel in particular. We'll be walking in the shadow of the Lord Jesus as He now inexorably makes His way to the cross and to crucifixion. And in the passage that's before us this evening, His betrayal comes to the surface. Let's read verses 1-27 of John chapter 18; hear the word of God.

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Annas first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people. 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, 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. 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." 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. The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. "Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said." When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?" So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. 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." 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?" Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.

Amen. May God bless the reading of His word. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, we ask now again that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart might be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

John's gospel emphasizes things from a different perspective from the other gospels. The roll of Judas, for example, is played down a little in the interest of another truth, that Jesus is in full control. Indeed, even the way the story weaves its way; first of all to Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas who was high priest that year, it's still the control, the sovereignty of Jesus, that John wants to emphasize. And Peter's denials, it's still the sovereignty of Jesus who had predicted these denials that John wants to emphasize. So I want to take these three elements of the story that's before us in John 18:1-27, and I want us to see the way that John, the gospel writer, portrays Jesus answering the question, "Who is Jesus? Why did He come? To what end did Jesus come into the world? What is His significance for me?" And I want us to pick out three of the statements that are made in this section to try and enable us to understand what it is that John is saying to us here.

## **I. Who is Jesus?**

The first is in verse 11, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given to Me? The cup which the Father has given to Me, shall I not drink it," Jesus says. Judas has

left sometime ago. We read about it at the close of the thirteen chapter of John's gospel, when Jesus had washed the disciple's feet, and just before He began those eloquent discourses of chapters 14-16, and that high priestly prayer of chapter 17, and he had gone to the authorities. A sinister collusion of state and church, of soldiers and officials of the high priest and Pharisees, we see in that in verse three, and they come armed to the teeth to arrest Jesus. They come with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus, who never so much as lifted His finger against any many. The only occasion in the gospels where He had even come close to that was in turning over the tables in the temple. They're intimidated by Him. Isn't it interesting? The world is intimidated by Jesus, by His holiness. Soldiers had come. Now the word cohort, there's some ambiguity about it. It may possibly mean up to 600 soldiers, though it's doubtful there were that many, but it could mean that. There were lots of them. And though John doesn't record it, the kiss by which Judas identifies Jesus in the relative darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane. They've got lanterns and torches, but they would still need some signal. Probably this takes place at the end of verse five when John records that Judas was standing there with the soldiers.

But what John wants us to see is that nothing lies outside of the jurisdiction of Jesus. There is no evidence here of even the struggle that the other gospel writers record in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done." John knew that. John was there. John heard that. John knows that's in the other gospels, but John has a different focus. Yes, that's true, but he wants us see that despite that Jesus is in full control. Nothing takes Him by surprise. Not His arrest, not Judas' betrayal, not Peter's denial, but everything works out according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Do you notice how John wants to emphasize that point. When the mob says they are looking for Jesus, Jesus the Nazarene, Jesus says in verse 5, and in the English the pronoun is in italics, but in the Greek it's just, "I am." And that seems to me to be deeply significant. I have to disagree with one magnificent commentator of John's gospel, Don Carson. Jesus seems to be making a reference to the divine name in the book of Exodus. Several times in John's gospel John has pointed out the number of times that Jesus had begun a sentence of personal identification and declaration of identity with the words, "I am." "I am that I am." "The Lord of Lords and King of Kings." And notice how John records the response to Jesus when He says, "I am." They fall backwards to the ground, as if they had come close to some kind of divine revelation that had thrown them physically off their guard.

Do you see what John is saying as he describes this incident. In the most vulnerable place in the earthly life and ministry of Jesus, perhaps only the temptation in the wilderness comes close to this, the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus is arrested by soldiers with swords and clubs, and John is saying, "Do you see, this is God here. This is the Lord of Glory here. This is the divine I

AM here. This is God incarnate here.” Nothing takes Him by surprise. There seems to be an illusion here to some words in Psalm 27, when evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.”

It's at this point in the narrative that Peter pulls out a sword, cuts off the right ear of the servant of the high priest, a man by the name of Malchus. What's Peter doing with a sword? He's come from the upper room and he's been listening to these wonderful words of Jesus, the high priestly prayer, they'd gone down across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. What's he doing with a sword? And Jesus immediately tells him—John doesn't record Jesus' healing of this man's ear—but Jesus tells him, “Put your sword away.” There's a place for the sword; it was in Iraq, but it's not in the aisles of First Presbyterian Church. Our pastor doesn't carry a sword or a gun. He doesn't. There's a place for it. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's; render to God what is God's. The Church isn't born and doesn't grow and flourish with a sword. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual—mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

And then He says in verse 11, “Look up.” He uses this occasion to say, “Peter, I understand your desire, your impulse to defend Me.” Maybe Peter had been got to by one of the zealots, Simon the zealot, an insurrectionist, a terrorist. You know, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter as they sometimes say. So Jesus takes this opportunity as Jesus always does, and in this most vulnerable position, He makes a lesson. He says, “The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” He's taking an Old Testament metaphor from many places but Isaiah 51 especially. The cup which was symbolic of the wrath of God; the cup which He is about to drink to its very last dregs; the cup which the other gospels record for us, He struggles with and says, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.”

But in John's gospel, John wants us to see another angle. He wants us to see that He took that cup and that He resolved to take His servant ministry to the very end. That He would take the unmitigated wrath of God against sin, not His sin, but our sin. He would go to the very end and He would drink the last dregs of that cup. It's a cup His Father had given to Him. It was a cup that had been involved in redemption. This was the negative side; this was the curse side. In all of the blessings come to us; He took the curse, and He took it to the full. And He's saying, “Look Peter, I understand why you're bring out a sword, but it's wrong because I'm determined to go to the very end of My resolution to be the covenant mediator.” And He doesn't flinch.

Oh Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head; our load was laid on Thee.  
Thou stoodest in the sinners stead; did bear all ill for me.  
A victim led, Thy blood was shed; now there's no load for me.  
Death and the curse were in the cup. Oh Christ, 'twas full for Thee.

But Thou hast drained the last dark drop; 'tis empty now for me.  
That bitter cup, love drank it up; now blessings draught for me.  
Jehovah lifted up His rod. Oh Christ, it fell on Thee.  
Thou wast sore stricken of my God, there's not one stroke for me.  
Thy tears, Thy blood beneath it flowed, Thy bruising healeth me.

Ann Cousin's beautiful, beautiful words.

## II. Why did Jesus come?

In the second place, I want us to see another verse. Jesus is now taken to Annas and in the course of the discourse, Jesus says, "If I spoke the truth, why did you strike Me.?" Let's unfold what has happened here. It's a rather complicated background and history and far too complicated to go into here, but when the Romans had taken over Jerusalem, they had deposed Annas who was the official high priest. And they had set up, in his place, Caiaphas. It's a little more complicated than that. And there were sons and relatives who had also in turn taken the high priestly role, but in the minds and hearts of the people, Annas was still the Jewish high priest. Caiaphas was the Roman high priest. This is not a civil arrest; it's primarily the religious authorities. Even though Peter has struck off an ear of a person, he's still not taken to the civil courts; he's taken to the religious courts. He's taken to Annas the high priest, and He's questioned about His teaching. And He tells them that He hasn't taught secretly. All they need to do is to go and ask those who had heard Him teach in the temple. "If you want to know what I said, go and ask those who heard Me." It was for that, that one of the officials struck Him on the face. And Jesus said, "If I said something wrong, tell Me what it is, but if I spoke the truth, why do you strike Me?"

The issue is truth. Jesus spoke the truth. Every word He ever uttered was true. What we have here is the innocent being accused here by the authorities. That in a way, even though the authorities were responsible for their actions, they are actually fulfilling something greater than they ever realized. John records something that Caiaphas had said, "that it was expedient for one man to die for the people." Now, Caiaphas meant that in an entirely different way. You know, if you get rid of this man, then peace will come into the land, but John sees in those words of Caiaphas something far more significant. John sees the doctrine of substitution. John sees the very heart of the gospel itself; that it is expedient for one man to die in the place of you and me. In a way that they could never comprehend. "In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood. Hallelujah! What a Savior."

John Stott was a teenager in Rugby School, Rugby the city—not Rugby the game, and he'd come from a respectable medical home in London. It was not a religious home. His mother was religious and went to all sorts of things, but was uncertain about her understanding of the grace of God and of the gospel. And there was a

clergyman by the name of Nash, who had a very particular gift of ministering to upper class boys who went to private schools. In Britain private schools are called public schools. And Nash came up to John Stott, then a teenager, and said to him the words that are actually in John 19, the words of Pilate. "What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?" And John Stott says he'd never thought that you had to do anything with Jesus. It was an entirely new thought to him. It was like asking: "What are you going to do with the rain? What are you going to do with Napoleon?" He'd never thought that you had to *do* something with Jesus. It was the beginning of a seed that would flourish and he would become one of the leading evangelical leaders and gospel preachers of the twentieth century.

What are you *doing* with Jesus? That's John's question. What are you doing with Jesus? There's this man and he speaks and the winds and waves obey Him. What are you going to do with a man like that? These authorities have no idea what to do with Him. "If I speak the truth," Jesus says, "why do you treat Me this way?" What are you going to do with a sinless man? What are you going to do with a blameless man? What are you going to do with somebody who claims to be the Lord of glory? What are you going to do with the Word who was with God and is God? What are you going to do with the One who was God from the very beginning? What are you going to do with Him? What are you going to do with one who says, "I come in order that they might have life and have it more abundantly." "What wrong have I done to you?" Jesus is saying. It's interesting that John wants us to understand, you see, that even in this mayhem, even when somebody strikes Him across the face, do you notice how Jesus is in full control? He's in full control.

### **III. Peter's fall**

Now, there's a third feature of this story that I want us to see and that is the words of verse 27. At that moment a rooster began to crow. This is the third element of the story; it's about Peter. These are words that Jesus had already prophesied in chapter 13, that Peter would deny Him three times before the rooster crows the next morning. If this had happened to a young believer, we might be able to understand it. Peter had been a disciple of Jesus for three years and he had heard all the words that Jesus had preached and taught and words that aren't even recorded in the Scriptures. He'd sat and listened to the Sermon on the Mount. Can you imagine what it would be like to sit on a mountainside and listen to Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount? Peter had seen Jesus perform mighty miracles—healing the sick, the lame, and the halt. He sees, on one occasion, where they break through the roof of the house and lower someone down and Jesus heals him. He'd seen a dead man come to life again after he'd been dead for three days. He'd been taken up to a mountain with two other disciples, including John, and there he had seen things that you and I have never seen. These are Peter's own words, "We were eye witnesses of His majesty."

He'd seen Jesus' glory.

I don't know about you but I've been thinking about the tabernacle that we been studying in Exodus. What was it like to go near that tent? Peek inside the flap of the tent and know that inside that tent was the Shekina glory of God. God was there; Peter had seen it in Jesus. John brings him in to the courtyard. John knows the high priest. There's a young girl there at the door of the courtyard and from the courtyard, he could probably see Jesus and Annas and overhear this interrogation. He saw the slap that Jesus got across His face. And this young girl, perhaps recognizing his northern Galilean accent says, "Aren't you one of the disciples?" And he says, "No." He says it a second time. A relative of Malchus, the one whose ear had been cut off, recognized him as he is warming his hands by a charcoal fire because it was a cold night. He says, "Didn't I see you in the garden?" And again he says, "No." Three times. And a rooster begins to crow and Peter's heart sinks to the floor. Right then and there Peter lost his joy and fellowship with the Lord. He wasn't cast out nor did he cease to be a child of God, but he lost the victory of discipleship. I think there was more than that. I think Peter thought that his Christian life was over. You don't hear anymore of Peter for awhile. The next time you see Peter he's back up in Galilee. And what is he doing? He's fishing. All night he's fishing and catches nothing. As though Peter is saying, "I've miserably failed as a disciple, and I'm going back to do something I know something about." And God doesn't even give him one solitary fish, because He's not done with teaching Peter this lesson—because there's no way back.

I want us to see a couple of things here. Peter fell even though he had been warned beforehand. It is one thing to fall, but it's another to fall when you've been told beforehand that it is going to happen. And, not that it's going to happen three years from now and you've forgotten about it; it's going to happen *that* night. In 1969, many of you will remember it, in Pass Christian, Mississippi, down on the coast, Hurricane Camille. There was a hurricane party in a home right on the coastline, would you believe? The chief of police pulled up after dark and there's a man leaning over the balcony with a drink in his hand, and the policeman tells them to get out and to get out quickly. And the owner says, "This is *my* land, and if you want me to leave, you're going to have to arrest me." AT 10:15 that night, Hurricane Camille hit that house with wind speeds of 250 miles an hour, and apart from a small boy, all twenty occupants of that party perished, despite being warned. Jesus had said to Peter, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." Even though he had been warned, he still fell. That's the wickedness of our hearts; that's the measure of our unbelief.

Secondly, and I think it's important for us to see how far Christians can fall. Christians are capable of committing the most heinous of sins. I'm not trying to make light of Christian profession. I'm not advocating an easy-believism, but Noah can be drunk and David can commit adultery, and Peter can deny his Lord three times within Jesus' hearing, and, according to Luke, within Jesus' sight.

And there go I, but for the grace of God.

And thirdly, and this is important and sensitive and crucial, and in a way, it's what John is doing here; he's forcing us to ask a really difficult question. What's the difference between Judas and Peter? What's the difference? That's a really sensitive question tonight. And you see, what John is saying here in the eighteenth chapter, that there is no difference. There will come a difference, but it's not in the eighteenth chapter. At this point, there is no difference between what Judas did and what Peter did. Do you see what John is saying to us? He's saying that the assurance of our salvation does not lie in our sin; it lies in our repentance. It began, I think, when Jesus met with Simon Peter in a resurrection appearance that is veiled for us; we don't know the details. It must have been traumatic. And it is underlined for us in what we see Peter become some weeks later as one of the most radical, staunch defenders of the gospel on the pages of the New Testament. Oh, I think that is so important. I know it raises all kinds of questions, but for us tonight, it is important for us to know that truth. Although we are capable of committing the most heinous of sins—and we are, and God may allow us to fall into those sins—the assurance of our salvation lies on the other side of repentance. I doubt that Peter ever forgot that night for as long as he lived even though he lived in the warmth and embrace of Christian assurance for the rest of his life. I doubt that he ever forgot what he did that night. Every morning when Peter awoke and heard the rooster crow, it would remind him of the grace of God and the love of Jesus and the unrelenting determination of God not to lose any of His own.

Drop, drop slow tears and bathe these beauteous feet,  
which brought from heaven the news “The Prince of Peace.”  
Cease not, wet tears, His mercies to entreat,  
to cry for vengeance; sin doth never cease.  
In your deep floods, drown all my faults and fears  
nor let His eyes see sin, but through my tears.

And may God give us that grace to sin for all of its ugliness and hideousness and yet, pages on from here, we shall see the mighty grace of Jesus Christ, but it is on the other side of Peter's repentance. Let's pray together.

*Our Father in heaven, we thank You, knowing how capable we are of committing the most awful, awful sins that lie just beneath the surface of our hearts. And apart from Your grace, and Your mercy, and Your sovereign control, and that's what we see in Peter's life; You prayed for him. Pray for us, Lord Jesus. Intercede, great High Priest on God's throne, and that will bring us such great joy. Amen.*

**A Guide to the Evening Service**

## **Thoughts on Worship**

“Worship . . . is not part of the Christian life; it is the Christian life.” (Gerald Vann)  
“Our whole life . . . should be so angled towards God that whatever strikes upon us, whether sorrow or joy, should be deflected upwards at once into his presence.” (Alec Motyer)

## ***The Psalm, Hymns and Spiritual Songs***

### **Abide with Me: Fast Falls the Eventide**

Lyte was moved to write this hymn as he was dying of tuberculosis; he finished it the Sunday he gave his farewell sermon in the church he served so many years. The next day, he left for Italy to regain his health. He didn't make it, though – he died in Nice, France, three weeks after writing these words. Here is an excerpt from his farewell sermon:

O brethren, I stand here among you today, as alive from the dead, if I may hope to impress it upon you, and induce you to prepare for that solemn hour which must come to all, by a timely acquaintance with the death of Christ.

For more than a century, the bells of his church at All Saints in Lower Brixham, Devonshire, have rung out “Abide with Me” daily. The hymn was sung at the wedding of King George VI of Britain and at the wedding of his daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth II.

### **From Depths of Woe I Raise to Thee (Psalm 130) (RUF Tune)**

Another of Luther's psalm paraphrases. This one gives us a window into his soul and into the tremendous peace of heart he derived from God's gracious justification in Jesus Christ. Master this hymn and you're on the way to understanding justification by faith and its benefits. We sing it tonight to the popular RUF tune.

### **Jesus Loves Me, This I Know**

This classic children's song was written by Anna B. Warner (1820-1915). William Bradbury (1816-1868) wrote the famous tune. We'll sing the first stanza tonight before the children come for their devotional. This gives even the youngest children the opportunity to sing praise to God, using the same song, along with their families in church.

### **Just As I Am, without One Plea**

Though many will associate this hymn with the Baptist church and “altar calls,” it was written by an Anglican (Episcopalian) after a French Reformed minister had

been instrumental in leading her to Christ. “Miss Charlotte Elliott was visiting some friends in the West End of London, and there met the eminent minister, Cesar Malan. While seated at supper, the minister said he hoped that she was a Christian. She took offense at this, and replied that she would rather not discuss that question. Dr. Malan said that he was sorry if had offended her, that he always liked to speak a word for his Master, and that he hoped that the young lady would some day become a worker for Christ. When they met again at the home of a mutual friend, three weeks later, Miss Elliott told the minister that ever since he had spoken to her she had been trying to find her Saviour, and that she now wished him to tell her how to come to Christ. ‘Just come to him as you are,’ Dr. Malan said. This she did, and went away rejoicing. Shortly afterward she wrote this hymn.”

### **I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus**

The author wrote the words of this hymn at Ormont Dessons, and it was published in Loyal Responses in 1878. This is said to have been Havergal's favorite hymn; it was found in her pocket Bible after her death.

### **The Sermon**

The passage in John's Gospel, which is before us this evening, deals with the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, followed by the interrogation by the High Priest Annas, interspersed as it is by the denial of Peter.

In the midst of Jesus' trial, there is this denial by one of His own disciples, Peter! If this had happened to a new believer, it would be more understandable. But Peter was a three-year veteran, who had spent time *with* Jesus, and had been given access to Jesus' inner circle. He had witnessed the Transfiguration. He had had the best Bible education imaginable. He had seen countless miracles. And he had been very sure of his maturity: “If everyone else denies you, I will not!” But it was to no avail. Deny Jesus he did. When you let the Savior down as catastrophically as Peter did, can there be any hope of restoration and usefulness? We need only turn to the Acts of Apostles to discover the answer to that question. There is mercy with God that He may be feared.

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