

## John 18:1-27 - I am he / not he<sup>1</sup>

**Before the Lesson:** There are no handouts or other items needed for this lesson.

**Fellowship question:** (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

What was your experience with Lent as a child?

When your team loses a game, who can you count on to rib you about it? What is your response to the ribbing?

### Information

Let's review some passages that lead us to chapter 18, which includes the betrayal and denial of Jesus as well as Jesus' completion of his identity and task.

Let's begin with Jesus, who gave us a series of "I am" images and interpretations:

- Have a class member read John 10: 14, 17-18.

Jesus knew that there would be betrayals and that there would be death - his death. He also knew his role as protector and savior.

- Have a class member read John 10:24-30.

Jesus's friend, Lazarus, died.

- Have a class member read John 11:32-26, 43--44.

This miracle "sealed the deal" for the religious leaders.

- Have a class member read John 11:47-53.

One key word in John's Gospel is translated "remain" or "abide" Judas left the "abode" of discipleship and joined the "abode" of evil.

- Have a class member read John 13:21-30.

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Now, Jesus sees that his work is coming to completion.

- Have a class member read John 17:1-4.

This brings us to chapter 18.

- Have a class member read John 18:1-9
- Was Jesus a victim or a volunteer?

“The feature of the betrayal which John made most important was the voluntary surrender of Jesus. A hint of this emphasis was foreshadowed in chapter 10: ‘No man taketh it [my life] away from me, but I lay it down of myself.’”<sup>2</sup>

“In this attempt of darkness to extinguish the light of the world, the ministers of darkness need lamps. Omitting the incident of Judas’ kiss, John has Jesus taking the initiative, ever the master of his destiny.”<sup>3</sup>

- Was Judas a villain?
- What do you think caused this conversion from being “in with” Jesus to being the one who betrayed Jesus?

“Judas follows the orders of the chief priests and Pharisees to have Jesus arrested (11:57) rather than abiding in (remaining embedded in and loyal to Jesus and his group) Jesus.”<sup>4</sup>

“The Gospel does make it clear that Judas’ defection from the ranks of Jesus’ disciples and his handing over Jesus are two sides of one coin: what Judas does, he does not as a disciple, but as one who has ceased to follow Jesus and has been lured away from faithful discipleship (6:66-71; 8:44-50).”<sup>5</sup>

“John may be more interested in the symbolic value of Judas’ presence. In 13:27, 30, when we last saw Judas, he had become the tool of Satan and had gone off into the night. This was the evil night of which Jesus had warned in 11:10 and 12:35, the night in which men stumble because

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<sup>2</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 254.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988), 87.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 250.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 363.

they have no light. Perhaps that is why Judas and his companions come bearing lanterns and torches. They have not accepted the light of the world, and so they must have artificial light. This moment of darkness may be contrasted with the final triumph of Jesus in the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 22:5) where the blessed will need no lamps for the Lord God will be their light.”<sup>6</sup>

- Who is in charge of these events - Jesus or Judas?

“Between the dismissal of Judas from the upper room and the actual arrest in the garden, at least two hours must have elapsed. In that time Jesus could have left Jerusalem and been well on His way across the river to Perea, or to some hiding place where the Jewish leaders could not have found him. Judas’ betrayal would have recoiled on himself, since he would have failed to produce Jesus, and undoubtedly the priests would have wreaked the vengeance of their disappointment on him. At one stroke Jesus could have saved Himself and could have disposed of the traitor. Why should He have gone deliberately to the place where Judas would surely look for Him, and wait until the traitor came to capture Him?”<sup>7</sup>

“His capture was not effected by their superior astuteness or power, but by His ready consent.”<sup>8</sup>

- Have a class member read John 18:10-14.

“Peter, in a fit of loyal zeal, drew a sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. The probability is that in nervous haste he struck three inches wide of his original aim. Certainly it was not Peter’s intention to damage only an ear.”<sup>9</sup>

“The contrast of Peter and Judas in the paragraph heightens the difference in the characters of the two men. Judas arrived with armed men to capture Jesus; Peter drew arms to defend Him. Judas apprehended Him by stealth; Peter defended Him openly. Judas betrayed Him in cold blood; Peter attacked Jesus’ enemies. In this account, Jesus treated Judas with silence; He rebuked Peter sternly. Judas’ crime was deliberate throughout; Peter’s blunder in drawing the sword was prompted by a loyal though mistaken impulsiveness. The chilly indifference of unbelief and the erratic action of a belief which had not reached stability were alike destructive.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 817.

<sup>7</sup> Tenney, 254f.

<sup>8</sup> Tenney, 255.

<sup>9</sup> Tenney, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Tenney, 256.

“Commanding Peter to put his sword away, Jesus contrasts his disciple’s sword with his Father’s cup that Jesus must drink. Both sword and cup represent death, but the sword brings about death to others; the cup entails Jesus’ death, which brings life to others.”<sup>11</sup>

- From the time of his arrest, Jesus gives up his “in-charge-ness.”

“The word ‘passion’ is derived from the Latin verb *patior*, which means ‘to undergo.’ It is related to the word ‘passive.’ Jesus’ passion came after much action...But at [the garden] all this action came to a sudden end...From that moment on he could no longer do anything: everything was done to him.”<sup>12</sup>

- Have a class member read John 18:15-27.

“Since a formal session of the Sanhedrin at night would have been irregular, these differing [Gospel] accounts may represent an oversimplification of a complex of actions: (a) an unofficial night inquiry by the high priest Annas (of whose part only John knows) where Jesus was ill-treated and during which Peter denied him; (b) in the morning a Sanhedrin hearing before Caiaphas with the definitive resolve to have Jesus executed by the Romans. John gives only the outline, the Synoptics give the details.”<sup>13</sup>

“The exact identity of the three persons who ask the questions of Peter varies among the Gospels (as we would expect in oral tradition), but the basic import of the story remains the same – an uncomplimentary tribute to Peter’s importance.”<sup>14</sup>

“This is the first use of the term ‘the other disciple’; John 20:2 identifies him with ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ Perhaps ‘the other disciple’ was the disciples’ own self-description, and the second, more laudatory title was used of him by his own disciples... We do not know in what capacity he ‘was known to the high priest,’ but this information probably gave rise to the second-century tradition that John (thought to be the disciple) was a priest.”<sup>15</sup>

“Peter is ‘standing with’ the servants and assistants of the high priest, warming themselves together around a charcoal fire, even as Judas had earlier been described as ‘standing with’ the same officers in the garden (8:5, 18).”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Thompson, 365.

<sup>12</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Jesus: A Gospel* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Brown, *Concise*, 88.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, *Concise*, 89.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Concise*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Thompson, 368.

“Peter now evades the opportunity to identify himself as Jesus’ disciple precisely in order to avoid sharing his master’s destiny. Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus, which spares his own life, stands in stark counterpoint to Jesus’ forthright public witness, which leads to his death.”<sup>17</sup>

“Peter’s disloyalty, hence, his dishonor is complete...Note that those who challenge Peter – a maid, a crowd, and a slave – are persons of very low honor status.”<sup>18</sup>

“The triple ‘I am’ of Jesus at his arrest is further emphasized by way of contrast of the ‘I am not’ in Peter’s threefold denial of being a disciple of Jesus (vv. 17, 25, 27). For the rereader, this in turn is contrasted with the later threefold exchange between the risen Jesus and Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me?’ (21:15-19).”<sup>19</sup>

John’s “theological message about Jesus [is] summed up in the double meaning of the *ego eimi*: the human Jesus of Nazareth, at one with the I am of God...The emphasis on the ‘who’ question is underlined by recalling the opening words of Jesus to his first disciples in the Gospel in 1:38, ‘What are you looking for?’ The same question using the same verb is now being repeated, but with ‘whom’ instead of ‘what’: ‘Whom are you looking for?’ The resurrected Jesus later asks the same question of Mary Magdalene, ‘Whom are you looking for?’ (20:15). John’s repetition of it suggests that it is the core question of his Gospel.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Transformational Exercise**

We may be quick to judge Peter, and to condemn Judas. However, any of us could have done the same as they did. When we are at risk of losing public favor - or even our life - we may turn against what we previously held as unshakeable. Then, the shaking begins. But until the shaking begins, do we know for certain how things will fall out?

Likewise, when we have a large emotional stake in our political ideals, we may allow relationships that were once dear to become despised. Our nationalistic fervor trumps “love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Our hope is to remain faithful to Jesus and his teachings. We want to “remain” in Jesus. But, we must confess to ourselves and to God that we can be turned by so little - an insult, a missed meal, an illness, an unkind look.

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<sup>17</sup> Thompson, 367.

<sup>18</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh, 254.

<sup>19</sup> David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 359.

<sup>20</sup> Ford, 358.

“Peter is a complex and ambivalent character...He and other complex characters (perhaps especially Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, and Thomas) can help inspire the development of a mature faith that recognizes the complexity of discipleship and the need for continual searching reflection on its many forms, pitfalls, and challenges...By offering a diverse set of stories and characters in interaction with Jesus, John resists any simplistic ‘one size fits all’ practice of faith but also any idealization of it.”<sup>21</sup>

Close in a prayer something like this: *You are always faithful to us, God. Help us to be faithful to you. Forgive us for times we have denied your Lordship over our lives by things we have done or left undone. May we continue to grow in our faith as your grace grows in us. Amen.*

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<sup>21</sup> Ford, 361.