

# *The Gospel of John*



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JOHN 18:1-11 – I LAY DOWN MY LIFE . . . NO ONE TAKES IT FROM ME

- 1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.
- 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples.
- 3 So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.
- 4 Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?"
- 5 They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.
- 6 When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground.
- 7 Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."
- 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go."
- 9 This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me."
- 10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.
- 11 Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

**Arrest.** Like all good narratives, this one tells us all we need to know at the beginning of this part of the story. *Who?* Jesus and the inner circle of disciples. *Where?* A garden beyond the Kidron Valley. *When?* In the late evening. *How?* The place is already known to Judas because "Jesus and his disciples often gathered there." This is not the Gethsemane of the synoptics, where Jesus prayed in anguish as the disciples slept. Rather, the narrative focus highlights Jesus' control and power: Jesus "knows all that is to happen" (18:4), and he controls all of the action in the narrative, both in the question-answer exchange and in suppressing Peter's violent defense.

**Questions and Answers.** With few exceptions, those who ask questions of others do so to challenge them.<sup>458</sup> This happens regularly in the synoptic Gospels when Jesus' enemies put him or his disciples on the spot with questions. Here,

<sup>458</sup> J. H. Neyrey, "Questions," *CBQ* 60 (1998), 657-66, 670-78.

Jesus asks the questions; and by taking the lead in this confrontation, he exercises control over the situation: "Whom do you seek?" The soldiers might answer a question with a question, "Who are you?" but they follow the script, which emphasizes Jesus' authority: "Jesus of Nazareth!" His answer, "I AM," both identifies himself and communicates power, another aspect of control. "Drawing back and falling to the ground" is not the typical gesture of armed soldiers before an unarmed man. But if shoved back, then they have met a superior force; if overwhelmed, they are not in control. The pattern repeats, as Jesus again asks and they answer. Still in control, Jesus commands the soldiers to let his disciples go. He not only asks questions but commands the soldiers who have come to seize him. Thus he manifests complete control over the situation: He speaks the first and last words. He lays down his life; no one takes it from him (10:18).

**Swords and Stuff.** Peter, who protested that he would lay down his life for Jesus (13:37), seemingly acts that part now by drawing a sword and striking the slave of the high priest. Swords? Wherever would a peasant get a sword? Curiously, the only mention we have of Gospel characters having swords, much less using them, is in the arrest scene. Yet Jesus forswears swords for both an ethical reason ("Those who live by the sword perish by the sword," Matt 26:52) and a theological reason (Jesus' arrest is God's "cup" or "will"). Peter appears to manifest loyalty and even courage. But should he succeed, the will of God would be frustrated (see Mark 8:32-33). So, Jesus, in total control of his own fate (10:17-18), stops Peter from derailing the story: "Put your sword into its sheath."

**The Noble Shepherd.** From the investigation of this motif in 10:10-18, we retrieve certain elements that apply here as well. (1) Jesus *voluntarily accepts* his death: He knows what will befall him (18:4), comes forward and does not flee, and allows himself to be captured. (2) His arrest and death *benefit* his disciples in that he commands that they be let go. Thus, "This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me'" (18:9). (3) He is *unvanquished* in this: The soldiers fall to the ground (18:7); even as he is captured, he speaks commands. (4) *Virtue*, courage, and faithfulness in "drinking the cup which the Father has given" (18:11) motivate his actions – a noble beginning to a noble death.

**Judas, the Parody of Discipleship.** We saw in 1:36-50 a pattern of discipleship that occurs frequently in the narrative. A disciple speaks of Jesus to another, inviting him to "come and see"; when this person is in Jesus' presence, Jesus comments on him in a way that confirms the new relationship. This pattern is found in five stories: disciples to others (1:35-50); the Samaritan woman to her fellow villagers (4:27-30); Martha to Mary (11:28-33); Mary Magdalene to Simon and the Beloved Disciple (20:1-10); and finally the disciples to Thomas (20:24-25). But in 18:3-11 Judas is hardly catechizing the soldiers whom he leads to Jesus. They certainly do not acclaim Jesus by any title, nor does he have a confirming word for them. The process in 18:3-11 seems to be a parody of the

discipleship pattern, which accentuates how perverse Judas<sup>459</sup> and the soldiers are. Far from becoming disciples, they seek Jesus' destruction.

# JOHN 18:12-27 – BOLD PUBLIC SPEECH INSIDE THE HIGH PRIEST'S HOUSE

12 So the soldiers, their officers, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

13 First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.

14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest,

16 but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.

17 The woman 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 police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

19 Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.

20 Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.

21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said."

22 When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"

23 Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

24 Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked 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, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

<sup>459</sup> Charles C. Torrey, in his "The Name 'Iscairiot,'" *HTR* 36 (1943), 51-62, argues that "Iscairiot" derives from a word meaning "deceit," "fraud," or "falsehood." J. C. Van Unnik, "The Death of Judas in Saint Matthew," *ibid.* 44-57.